SECRET STATES:
MODERNISM, ESPIONAGE, AND THE OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT

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Abstract

This dissertation interrogates the way modernism both informs and informs *against* the national security state by examining the recruitment of writers into the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), the resulting infringements of the UK Official Secrets Act, and the appropriation of espionage tropes by the leftist "adversary culture." I contend that the practice of recruiting authors as spies works to reify an aesthetic ideology that privileges writerly sensibility; that is to say, the writer's presumed expertise in "human nature" and ability to convert raw observation into readable intelligence. Consequently, these recruitments compel us to rethink Friedrich Schiller's notion of the "aesthetic state," a hypothetical political system based on humanistic principles. Instead, this project theorizes a *militant aesthetic state*, a phantom regime in which literary acts (reading and writing) are weaponized in the interests of national defense—with unforeseen political, legal, and aesthetic ramifications. Drawing upon a range of *spyographies*, fictional and nonfictional narratives by former agents and others who elect to "play spy," I locate these texts' "violations" not in the revelation of specific secrets, but in their modernist unveiling of the authoritarian kernel within democracy itself.

Arguing that the "literary agent" is more a liability than a boon, I read W. Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden* (1928) as foregrounding the paradoxical recruitment of cosmopolitanism into the service of nationalism; Compton Mackenzie's *Greek Memories* (1932) and *Water on the Brain* (1933) as disclosing the manner in which government bureaucracy projects an aura of sacred secrecy that ultimately founders on its own "formalism"; W. H. Auden's *The Orators* (1932) as a "mock-spyography," an imaginative infiltration of democratic totalitarianism that inevitably demands its own destruction; and Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) as representative of a larger "spy function" informing both her politics and aesthetics, a conception

of feminism as a secret society, a clandestine conspiracy against the patriarchal "procession." By following Woolf's own advice that "bad writing" be regarded as an act of revenge on authority, I uncover the double agency of modernism itself, which both witnesses the rise of the secret state and becomes a leak that must be retroactively contained.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION:

Spyography and the Militant Aesthetic State

> In the first place, writing is opposed to all secrecy.
> —Georg Simmel, "The Secret and the Secret Society" (1906)[1]

> Writers are a subversive crowd, nothing if not traitors. The better the writer, the greater the betrayal tends to appear, a thing the secret community has learned the hard way, for I hear it is no longer quite so keen to have us on board.
> —John le Carré, *Sunday Times* interview (1986)[2]

At the conclusion of Ian Fleming's novel *You Only Live Twice* (1964), James Bond is missing in action and presumed dead, leaving the unflappable M. to pen a sober obituary for the *Times*. After briefly describing the fallen hero's cosmopolitan upbringing (Scottish father, Swiss mother) and his regrettable adventures at Eton ("some alleged trouble with one of the boys' maids"), the chief spy offers a circumspect account of Bond's clandestine work for the wartime Special Branch of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and the postwar Ministry of Defence (179). At this point, however, M.'s businesslike elegy takes an intriguing turn; after declaring that Bond's work "must remain confidential, nay secret" (179), M. passive-aggressively observes that the agent's activities have already received unwelcome media attention:

> The inevitable publicity, particularly in the foreign Press, accorded some of these adventures, made him, much against his will, something of a public figure, with the inevitable result that a series of popular books came to be written about him by a personal friend and former colleague of James Bond. If the quality of these books, or their degree of veracity, had been any higher, the author would certainly have been prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act. It is a measure of the disdain in which these fictions are held at the Ministry, that action has not yet—I emphasize the qualification—been taken against the author and publisher of these high-flown and romanticized caricatures of episodes in the career of an outstanding public servant. (179-80)

For Fleming, who himself trained as a spy and served in the Naval Intelligence division during the Second World War, this moment of playful metafiction may be a more complex gesture than it at first seems. Alluding to the problematic and precarious position of the *literary agent*, the intelligencer whose "popular books" negotiate the border between secrecy and publicity, fantasy

and reality, Fleming reminds us that the act of writing becomes a matter of national security when the world of literature intersects with the world of espionage.

On the one hand, Fleming's narratives repeatedly suggest that literary activity is indistinguishable from intelligence tradecraft. Unlike his big-screen counterpart, the 007 of print culture emerges as an oddly literary agent in his own right. In the first place, the spy is, by virtue of his profession, a *reader*. *Casino Royale* (1953), for example, pits the agent against the calculating gambler Le Chiffre, whose name suggests "figure," "letter," or "cipher," a not-so-subtle hint that the hero must *de*cipher the villain in order to achieve victory. More dramatically, a book literally saves the agent's life when it blocks a bullet in *From Russia with Love* (1957). In the second place, the spy is a *writer*. In the short story "Risico" (1960), 007 poses as an author of "adventure stories" (120). More than a mere cover, the writerly spy not only invents a variety of useful "characters," he also dabbles in belles-lettres. The title of *You Only Live Twice* is itself a line from a poem; in Fleming's novel, James Bond writes haiku.

On the other hand, M.'s warning against literary leakage vilifies the spy-writer who has essentially gone rogue. While a certain amount of official disclosure is necessary for boosting the image of the British secret service at a time of imperial decline—M., who refers to himself as "the writer" (179), clearly sees the necessity of publically extolling Bond's "valorous efforts" to maintain "the Safety of the Realm" (180)—such revelations must be formally, aesthetically, and legally *guarded*. As he castigates the anonymous author who serves as a rhetorical analogue for Fleming himself, M. implies that the improbable Bond novels may contain a compromising kernel of truth. In effect, Fleming obliquely reaffirms the realism of "romanticized" spy yarns through the device of the "former colleague" whose unauthorized disclosures are only pardonable by virtue of their being middlebrow.

In *Secret States*, I argue that the phenomenon of the literary agent, along with its attendant discontents, constitutes a peculiar manifestation of what Friedrich Schiller calls the "aesthetic state," a hypothetical regime in which fact and fiction enter into a zone of indistinction, and art—more specifically, literature—serves a dynamic function in the constitution of both individuals and governments. Admittedly, Schiller and Fleming would seem to make strange bedfellows. Nevertheless, the spy novelist's documented interest in German literature and thought aside,[3] the bibliophilic Fleming, like many writers of espionage fiction, evinces a similarly idealistic investment in the agency of the Book and the heroism of the Artist. Responding to the failed promise and violent aftermath of the French Revolution, Schiller's letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794-5) privilege aesthetic awareness as the foundation for morality and the necessary means of achieving true "freedom." Observing that the human psyche is divided between a *Sinnestrieb* or "sensuous drive" that seeks material gratification and a *Formtrieb* or "formal drive" that attempts to impose reason, Schiller asserts that these two drives can only be reconciled through the agency of a third, a *Spieltrieb* or "play drive" (103). For Schiller, the aesthetic is the key to "play," since it is only "in contemplation of the beautiful [that] the psyche finds itself in a happy medium between the realm of law and the sphere of physical exigency" (105). Suggesting that the cultivation of the "play drive" requires a system of education, and therefore an infrastructure to support such a system, Schiller moves seamlessly from the notion of the *ästhetische Zustand* (144), an abstract "state" of being or contemplation, to the concept of the *ästhetische Staat* (218), the nation-state or collective body in which political conflicts are resolved through the application of aesthetic and humanistic principles. While Schiller grants that such a state does not yet exist "as a realized fact" (219), he suggests that its effects are felt through the agency of "finely attuned" individuals and through

the work of a "few chosen circles" (219). Adopting his own tone of secrecy and intrigue, Schiller writes that "[in] the midst of the fearful kingdom of forces, and in the midst of the sacred kingdom of laws, the aesthetic impulse to form is at work, unnoticed, on the building of a third joyous kingdom of play […]" (215).

In spite of James Bond's casual dismissal of his own humanistic upbringing—lessons in "Latin and Greek," he remarks, are not much help in "ordering a cup of coffee in Rome or Athens" (*You* 101)—the agent is nevertheless a more professionalized version of the public-school educated gentleman-heroes who populate late-Victorian and Edwardian adventure fiction, those plucky, playful, Shakespeare-quoting amateur sleuths whose victories over evil seem so often to hinge upon their investment in an aesthetic tradition that is not so much classical as hyperbolically English. Ironically, given that most of these battles are waged against a German menace, this allegorical mobilization of national art may itself derive from Schillerian principles. In "Kant and Schiller" (1983), Paul de Man points out that the playwright-philosopher's influential concept of aesthetic education remains, in both Britain and the United States, "the basis of our liberal system of humanistic education" (*Aesthetic* 150). In addition to the general category of the "human," which Schiller posits as a "principle of closure" or synthesis of *Sinnestrieb* and *Formtrieb*, his conceptualization of collective *Bildung*, according to de Man, is irrevocably bound up with

> concepts such as "culture," and the thought that it is possible to move from individual works of art to a collective, massive notion of art, which would be, for example, one of national characteristics, and which would be like the culture of a nation, of a general, social dimension called "cultural." And hence, as a logical conclusion of that, the concept in Schiller of an aesthetic state, which is the political order that would follow, as a result of that education, and which would be the political institution resulting from such a conception. (150)

In the British tradition, the adoption and institutionalization of the aesthetic state may be traced to Victorian theorists of art and culture, who take up the mantle of German romanticism in a decidedly English fashion. In his 1840 lecture on "The Hero as Man of Letters," Thomas Carlyle contends that "Literature is our Parliament" and therefore "equivalent to Democracy" (141). Anticipating the more aggressive agencies of literature that we find in spy narratives, Matthew Arnold, whose hypothetical "State-authority" has much in common with Schiller's aesthetic state, licenses a more dramatic—even martial—role for art in a time of crisis. When Arnold suggests in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) that "[t]hrough culture seems to lie our way, not only to perfection, but even to safety" (180), he touches upon a crucial dimension of the aesthetic state's instantiation; in assuming a direct correlation between aesthetics and politics, the State-authority implicates culture in national security. As Morris Dickstein suggests, Arnold "looked for a radically humanizing role for culture as a *response*" to social and political instability (192). Quite tellingly, when Dickstein turns to the way this "role" played out in the writer's own life, he resorts to an espionage metaphor; Arnold, according to Dickstein, was "by day a mild-mannered school inspector, on weekends the scourge of barbarians and philistines—the engaged critic as double agent trying to balance art and social concern" (192).

Ultimately, the strange, *sub rosa* complicity between spies, writers, and critics compels us to rethink Schiller's notion of the aesthetic state through the prism of Arnold's appeal for cultural "security"; instead, *Secret States* theorizes what I term a *militant aesthetic state*, a phantom regime in which literary acts (reading and writing) are weaponized in the interests of national defense. Perhaps the most obvious indication of this spectral state is the manner in which books themselves occupy a privileged position in the secret agent's arsenal. In popular spy yarns, books provide cover and facilitate communication. "Book codes" based on shared

texts allow agents to communicate covertly, as in John Buchan's *Mr. Standfast* (1919), in which Richard Hannay relies on a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* for both encryption and moral guidance. Bookstores, like the one operated by Adolf Verloc in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), provide false fronts for clandestine gatherings. Alternatively, the bookshop may serve as a useful "dead letter drop," a veritable spy's post office, like that in Helen MacInnes's *Above Suspicion* (1941)—in the film version, a scene of intrigue revolves around a copy of Schiller's plays. More importantly, some books can literally kill. In *Goldfinger* (1959), Bond hides his Walther PPK in a volume titled *The Bible Designed to Be Read as Literature*, and in *From Russia with Love*, the agent must defend himself against a KGB assassin armed with a gun disguised as a copy of *War and Peace*. In the world of the spy, books can bomb, pens may poison, and ink—when visible—may be fatal. At the same time, in figuring the book-as-weapon, espionage narratives reaffirm a robust *national* literature; James Bond's triumph over a Tolstoy-wielding assassin and Richard Hannay's creative conscription of John Bunyan both attest to the spy novel's investment in "arming the canon."

If the militant aesthetic state constitutes a regime in which fact and fiction, history and literature, become intertwined, we should hardly be surprised if these fantasy weaponizations correspond to a real-life "political order" in which writers and texts play an authentic role. In spite of M.'s remark about the "measure of disdain" with which his Ministry of Defence views popular spy novels, evidence suggests that the historical British intelligence community took them quite seriously indeed. Just as the Schillerian aesthetic state takes shape, as de Man contends, in the cloisters of the academy, the militant aesthetic state achieves a crucial realization in the uniquely literary character of the "secret state." Both Christopher Andrew's *Defend the Realm* (2009), the only "authorized" history of the Security Service (MI5), and Keith Jeffery's

The Secret History of MI6 (2010), the first government-approved history of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6/SIS),[4] begin by emphasizing the influence of popular culture on the decision to create the first modern British spy agency, the 1909 Secret Service Bureau (SSB). Ironically confirming the contention of writer and former SIS agent, Malcolm Muggeridge, that historians who attempt to "reconstruct the past out of [intelligence service] records are, for the most part, dealing in fantasy" (*Infernal* 149), these histories suggest that fantasy itself played a key role in the parent organization of MI5 and SIS, arguing that turn-of-the-century "invasion novels" like Robert Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) and William Le Queux's *Invasion of 1910* (1906) fueled paranoia by offering plausible scenarios for German belligerency and advocated for a security and intelligence network to counter the growing threat (Andrew 4-14; Jeffery 4-5).

In essence, the secret establishment of the SSB, which resulted in part from the "spymania" inspired by espionage fiction, brought into being an organization that had hitherto existed only in the popular imagination. As Andrew points out, most people believed—and, perhaps, continue to believe—that a powerful intelligence network had been in place since the Renaissance: "There was a widespread myth that, ever since the days when a secret service run by Queen Elizabeth I's Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, had successfully uncovered a number of Catholic plots, British intelligence, like the British Empire, had grown steadily in size and influence, spreading its tentacles across the globe" (4). Victorian detective stories and Edwardian spy novels worked to bolster this romantic pseudo-history. Predated by its own simulacra, the newly reified intelligence community was not, moreover, any less phantasmatic for being, in a sense, material. The unusual extralegal status of the British secret service—during the first eighty years of their existence, neither SIS nor MI5 had any statutory basis[5]—ensured

that the secret state would remain an official "myth" throughout the twentieth century. While the general public were aware of their existence, these organizations entered the public sphere almost exclusively in the form of unauthorized texts—memoirs, novels, and films. To put it another way, in light of its textual or "spectral" constitution, one could argue that the British intelligence community is—in both its origin and institutionalization—a literary effect.

While, as we have seen, the spy novel has a way of (metafictionally) reflecting the intelligence community's "literariness" through the figure of the mobilized text, the secret state's incursion into the world or arts and letters is bound up with an even more curious strategy: the historical recruitment of writers as agents. In his 1971 memoir, *A Sort of Life*, Graham Greene observes "that every novelist has something in common with a spy: he watches, he overhears, he seeks motives and analyzes character, and in his attempt to serve literature he is unscrupulous" (143). Greene's remark is more than a chance observation based on his own individual experiences in SIS during the Second World War; in *Secret States*, I contend that such thinking—the line of reasoning that conflates espionage with literary activity and vice versa—informed, to some extent, the recruitment policy of the early British secret service. While the writer-as-spy is hardly an exclusively modern phenomenon—Christopher Marlowe, Aphra Behn, and Daniel Defoe are well-known examples of writers who dabbled in espionage—the unprecedented crises and political instabilities of the twentieth century appear to have brought about an even greater desire to ally imagination with "intelligence." During the First World War, in particular, SIS made a practice of recruiting authors based on an *aesthetic ideology* that privileges writerly sensibility; that is to say, the writer's presumed expertise in "human nature," cosmopolitanism, and ability to convert raw observation into readable intelligence. W. Somerset Maugham, Compton Mackenzie, John Buchan, Basil Thomson, Edward Knoblock, Hugh

Walpole, and Arthur Ransome are but a few of the writers who worked for the British secret service in various capacities during the war. Unlike the enlistment of writers into the Ministry of Information, this sort of recruitment differs from propaganda in that it seeks to reify or weaponize literariness *in action*, in the field of operations itself.

This weaponization, however, is risky. Agents, like guns, are liabilities. They may be *turned*. They may misfire or explode without warning. The concept of play, the disinterested free play of faculties negotiating what Schiller calls "the fearful kingdom of forces" and the "sacred kingdom of laws," introduces an element of instability into the security of the militant aesthetic state. In short, what SIS did not expect was that the very literary qualities they sought in their agents would also prove dangerous. Greene's remark that the novelist-as-spy is "unscrupulous" in "his attempt to serve literature" tells us much about the divided loyalties of the literary agent, whose first duty is (ideally) to serve the secret state, but whose trade consists in the revelation of the hidden. As the German sociologist Georg Simmel asserts in "The Secret and the Secret Society" (1906), "writing is [fundamentally] opposed to all secrecy" (352). The exposure of the secret, he argues, is assured by the "tension" that characterizes secrecy itself:

> The secret […] is full of the consciousness that it *can* be betrayed; that one holds the power of surprises, turns of fate, joy, destruction—if only, perhaps, of self-destruction. For this reason, the secret is surrounded by the possibility and temptation of betrayal; and the external danger of being discovered is interwoven with the internal danger, which is like the fascination of an abyss, of giving oneself away. (Simmel 333-4)

The secret state functions as a nexus of contradictory forces that are not only subject to "uncovering" through investigation, but also compromised and destabilized at the source by an uncanny duplicity, a kind of double agency that "turns" the subject-state's security into a threat. In other words, we might say that the psychopathology of the secret involves not so much a death drive as a "disclosure drive," a temptation toward the "breach."

As Fleming's M. so ominously points out, the writerly spy walks a fine line between acceptable disclosure and criminal prosecution. The collusive bond between secrecy and revelation is evidenced by the number of ex-spies who turn to writing and by the fact that the most high-profile literary agents tend to run afoul of the UK Official Secrets Act.[6] Like the foundation of the 1909 Secret Service Bureau, the 1911 Official Secrets Act responded in part to the "spymania" encouraged by popular espionage yarns, but it was likewise an attempt to codify a previously unwritten "rule" of British reserve. Traditionally, secrecy had been a matter of gentlemanly honor. In the wake of the nineteenth-century Reform Acts, however, secrecy legislation was regarded as necessary to guarantee that the newly enfranchised middle-class, those professionals who were then swelling the ranks of the civil service, would not become a threat to the security of the state. In short, official secrecy arose in response to democratization and worked as a kind of corrective. The "code of the Victorian gentleman," according to David Vincent, "had been developed as a means of encasing the disruptive potential of liberalism in a structure of self-discipline" (130). In this sense, secrecy is normative, a means of transposing the ethos of a predominantly white, heterosexual, Oxbridge-educated elite to what Ford Madox Ford terms "the English public official class" (*Parade's End* 3). Rushed through parliament in a single Friday afternoon in August 1911—while most of the MPs were out grouse-hunting—the draconian Bill received almost no debate, prompting one MP to point out that its passage effectively suspended Magna Carta (Hooper 30). While section 1 concerns "Penalties for spying," section 2 criminalizes "Wrongful communication, &c. of information"; that is to say, the unauthorized disclosure and reception of classified material. In addition to conflating espionage and disclosure, the Act neither offers nor requires any criteria for what is labeled "secret," thereby affording its wielder carte blanche in accusing and prosecuting not only spies,

but journalists, politicians, and civil servants, as well as members of the military, intelligence, and security services. As David Hooper observes, "[the] Act altered the burden of proof […] in that the prosecution no longer had to prove that the accused's purpose was prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state" (31). With no possible defense, all violators are essentially guilty until proven guilty. Furthermore, as it makes no distinction between fictional and nonfictional "documents," the Act may extend itself into intellectual and artistic spheres that have little, if anything, to do with national security. If, in its application to the literary spy, the Official Secrets Act constitutes one way in which the militant aesthetic state polices itself, it also admits a scandal: "culture" may be treasonous.

Drawing upon a range of what I call *spyographies*, fictional and nonfictional narratives of espionage regarded as infringements of the Official Secrets Act, I locate these texts' "violations" not in the revelation of specific secrets, but in their challenge to conventional and "official" accounts of espionage that unproblematically conflate literary and historical experience. While literary critics tend to regard spy novels as unabashedly ideological—for example, as narratives that inure readers to capitalism and corporate bureaucracy while simultaneously compensating them with fantasies of individual agency[7]—*Secret States* investigates the spyography's potentially subversive "betrayal" of the militant aesthetic state. More specifically, I read these texts as critiques of the aesthetic ideology that seeks to establish the "truth" of literature and to assign writers and books a productive role in defending the realm. Foregrounding failure and *un*productivity, the spyography demonstrates that the most desirable qualities of the literary agent—cosmopolitanism, creativity, and cultural sensitivity—ultimately exceed the conditions of recruitment and work to short-circuit the weaponization of aesthetics, even becoming a means by

which literary "hostiles" may infiltrate and critique the establishment. In effect, the spyography's most scandalous disclosure is that literariness is itself a liability.

Secret States, however, is not only concerned with the trials and tribulations of popular novelists, but with the more inclusive and wide-ranging culture of intrigue that blurs the borders between literary genres and qualitative hierarchies. While the spy novel is typically considered (at best) a second-rate genre, we have already seen the manner in which these narratives implicate "high culture" within their nationalist ideology, through their allegorical investment in the most canonical works of English literature. In a similar, albeit converse, way, spyographies allow us to trace the tropes of espionage beyond the domain of the recognizable "thriller." Working to deconstruct the distinction between what Greene characterizes as serious novels and mere "entertainments," this project attends to those spyographic texts that fall, often uneasily, within the bounds of literary modernism. As it witnesses the rise of the historical intelligence community in response to global conflicts, modernism enters the fray through the agencies of both literal spies and figural "secret agents" who refuse to corroborate the romanticized image of the secret service. Put simply, while the militant aesthetic state attempts to mobilize the literary community as a line of defense, there is ultimately no way of guaranteeing the loyalty of the *avant-garde*.

It is certainly no secret that modernism is, in general, concerned with "secret states." In their critical mode, modernists themselves often stress the revelatory nature of their own writing. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), D. H. Lawrence describes "the vast importance of the novel" in terms of its ability to "reveal the most secret places of life" (117). Similarly, E. M. Forster observes in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) that fictional characters

> are people whose secret lives are visible or might be visible: we are people whose secret lives are invisible. And that is why novels, even when they are about wicked people, can

> solace us; they suggest a more comprehensible and thus a more manageable human race, they give us the illusion of perspicacity and power. (99)

While this particular "power" of surveillance may be, as Forster suggests, illusory, modernism is likewise invested in the representation of "hidden" realities that transcend the fictional realm. The thinkers who exerted the most influence on early twentieth-century art and literature, from Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud to Henri Bergson and Helena Blavatsky, devote themselves in different ways to the uncovering of secret states: the unconscious, the reality of capitalism, the faculty of intuition, and the esoteric tradition. Indeed, the stylistic innovation we most associate with "high modernism"—stream-of-consciousness—is itself an aesthetic of disclosure, an attempt to represent the covert operations of the mind.

Modernism's attentiveness to clandestinity—along with its figuration, in Raymond Williams's words, of "the lonely writer gazing down on the unknowable city from his shabby apartment" (72)—helps to explain why so many historians of espionage make recourse to modernist metaphors when attempting to describe the experience of spying. In fact, it has become almost axiomatic for commentators to associate the field operative's tradecraft with the Joycean mantra of "silence, exile, and cunning" (*Portrait* 247) and to characterize the underworld of espionage as an Eliotic "wilderness of mirrors" (*Selected Poems* 33). The complexity and opacity of modernist texts contribute to the image of the artist as a figure in isolation, a mysterious exile whose *modus operandi* is, according to D. H. Lawrence, nothing short of "subterfuge" (*Selected* 297). Nevertheless, while commentators have pointed out that many modernists were (in part, as a result of this image) accused of treasonous conspiracies—E. E. Cummings, James Joyce, Henry Miller, and Lawrence himself were all implicated in espionage in one form or another—literary critics have failed to notice that modernism also constitutes what we might call a desirable, if problematic, "skill set" for intelligence work. In

Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War (1987), Robin Winks writes that the analytical branches of the Anglo-American intelligence community during the Second World War

> called for men and women who were patient, methodical, curious, able almost as if by instinct to see relationships between the parts and a whole, people who at once understood what E. M. Forster meant by his dictum, "only connect." Those who worked in [intelligence analysis] had a sense of place, for some largely from books, for others from knowing Italy, or England, or Istanbul as James Joyce knew Dublin […]. (323)

Although it is easy to understand how the modernist's cosmopolitanism and metonymical mode of perception could—in theory, at least—be put to use in the interests of national security, Winks's choices inadvertently reveal the paradoxical nature of modernist recruitment; to be sure, one could hardly think of a more inauspicious model for a government agent than a disillusioned Irishman who adopts Satan's *non serviam* as his credo, or an English pacifist who declares: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (qtd. in Hepburn 107).

In *Secret States*, I begin my investigation by focusing on the manner in which spyographies work to "betray" the nationalist and aesthetic ideologies that seek to *activate* writerly sensibility in the wartime field of operations. Chapter One, "'Loose Ends': Recruiting Cosmopolitanism in W. Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden*," problematizes the cultivation of literary agents by characterizing literariness itself as an excess that overflows, or leaks through, the recruitment transaction. Winston Churchill's warning that Maugham's *Ashenden* (1928) constituted a violation of the Official Secrets Act seems to trouble rather than confirm the politician's famous assertion that the reality of spying is consistent with the codes of "romance and melodrama." Indeterminate and disconnected, Ashenden's experiences suggest that the literary paradigm for espionage is not so much melodrama as modernism, which often appropriates—without privileging—generic codes. Even when events happen to play out in a

melodramatic fashion, they do so in such a way as to confound the highly cultured Ashenden, whose literary sophistication renders him oddly overqualified for the job. The agent's failure, I contend, occasions a "critical cosmopolitanism" that is also a critique *of* cosmopolitanism, an exposure of the *breach* inherent in the paradoxical recruitment of "worldliness" into the service of nationalism.

While Maugham, like James Bond's "former colleague," managed to avoid an actual prosecution, not all ex-spies were so lucky. Chapter Two, "'A Gross Breach': Secrecy and Farce in Compton Mackenzie's *Greek Memories* and *Water on the Brain*," takes a closer look at security legislation and its enforcement through the case of the Scottish novelist Compton Mackenzie, who was tried for contravening the Official Secrets Act in his 1932 war memoir. Given the legal circus that erupted in response to *Greek Memories*, it is useful to consider Mackenzie's prosecution within the larger context of modernism's *trials*. Just as historians often take modernism as a governing metaphor for the experience of espionage, critics of national security legislation likewise refer to modernist writers and texts when describing the implications of official secrecy. Christopher Hitchens, for instance, observes that "[the] Official Secrets Act is the only piece of Western democratic legislation that stands comparison with the much-cited fictions of Franz Kafka […]. Its operative, central function is totalitarian. If charged, you must be guilty of *something*" (208).[8] What Hitchens draws our attention to is the manner in which national security legislation is, in some sense, modernist, and modernism constitutes, in another sense, an exposure of authoritarian bureaucracy. Addressing the decidedly Kafkaesque aspects of Mackenzie's own trial, I argue that the former agent's most infamous disclosure—his revelation of the mysterious letter "C" used as a cipher for the late Sir Mansfield Cumming, the first chief of SIS—reveals the manner in which bureaucracy works to project an aura of sacred

secrecy that ultimately founders on its own "formalism." Taking revenge on officialdom in his comical spy novel, *Water on the Brain* (1933), Mackenzie transposes the conventions of farce to the level of the signifier as a means of foregrounding the security state's investment in "radical secrecy," or secrecy without content. Emphasizing the farcical overcrowding of cryptonymic space, Mackenzie exposes the materiality of the law itself, the "dead letter" that underwrites and undermines the intelligence community's ability to intelligently defend the realm.

Interrogating the way modernism both informs and informs a*gainst* the national security state, this dissertation thus reconsiders the topic of "modernism and law" through the condition of literature as leakage.[9] By rendering suspect the agency of art and, by implication, art's subjection to secrecy legislation, Maugham and Mackenzie reveal how the canons of literature and law *misfire* or founder on the materiality of both language and lived experience. Not surprisingly, such high-profile disclosures had an effect on subsequent recruitment policies. By the beginning of the Second World War, the general proliferation of spyographies seems to have led the secret service to reevaluate its cultivation of writers as spies. Regardless of whether "foreign agents" corroborated the fears of the government by reading British spy novels and memoirs in an effort to gleam inside information, one thing was certain: the belle-lettrist was a blown cover in the field of operations. While the various branches of the secret service did take on a number of authors during the war years—Graham Greene, Malcolm Muggeridge, Elizabeth Bowen, Dennis Wheatley, Basil Bunting, Geoffrey Household, and Anthony Powell, among others—these agents tended to lie low. Of course, this did not stop those writers of a more romantic disposition from continuing to present themselves at the door of SIS. As Muggeridge observes in his own spyography, "[w]riters of thrillers tend to gravitate to the Secret Service as

surely as the mentally unstable become psychiatrists, or the impotent pornographers" (*Infernal* 117).

Even so, despite this more guarded enlistment of writers during the Second World War, the rise of the spyography had already aided and abetted the "enemy" at home. Throughout the 1930s, we find an increasing interest in the spy *trope* within what Lionel Trilling terms the leftist "adversary culture." In *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (1955), Trilling writes of the adversarial, anti-bourgeois posture of modern writing, characterized by "[the] belief that it is possible to stand beyond […] culture in some decisive way":

> Any historian of the literature of the modern age will take virtually for granted the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention, that characterizes modern writing—he will perceive its clear purpose of detaching the reader from the habits of thought and feeling that the larger culture imposes, of giving him a ground and a vantage point from which to judge and condemn, and perhaps revise, the culture that produced him. (xii-xiii)

As Trilling suggests, the adversary culture, while attempting to distance itself, is ultimately not so much *apart from* as it is a *product of* the "larger culture." For Stephen Koch, the Bloomsbury group embodies this contradictory bond between the "establishment" and the cultural "elite": "The adversary culture is a branch of the middle class; usually its most vigorous and intellectual artistic wing. It is drawn, albeit ambivalently, to radicalism; radicalism is part of its vision of freedom and truth" (154). If we extend Koch's characterization to include the so-called "Auden generation," for whom Bloomsbury constitutes a kind of parent counterculture, we may better understand the manner in which the "secret agent"—or, more properly, *double agent*—becomes a useful figure or master metaphor for the radical who critiques and rhetorically sabotages his or her culture from within. In *Lions and Shadows* (1938), Christopher Isherwood describes the elaborate spy fantasies that characterized his own antagonistic campaign against the "Poshocracy" during his student years at Cambridge. Anticipating the weaponized books of

writers like Ian Fleming, Isherwood records that he and Edward Upward (codenamed "Chalmers" in the text) imagined a rather thrilling "edition-de-luxe" of their collaborative *Mortmere* stories: "Our friends would find, attached to the last page, a pocket containing banknotes and jewels; our enemies, on reaching the end of the book, would be shot dead by a revolver concealed in the binding" (114). Hyperbolically occupying the codes of the spy yarn, such fantasies of agency provide cover for a very real critique of the authoritarian kernel at the heart of liberal democracy; just as the Official Secrets Act extends its policing of the "enemy" to include not only foreign agents, but British citizens themselves, the adversary culture operates from within this hazy zone of hostility, identifying itself—politically and aesthetically—with the "enemy of the state."

While the first two chapters examine the conditions and consequences of literal recruitment, the next two chapters explore this domestication of the figure of the spy in both late-modernist and postmodern literature. In Chapter Three, "'Better Burn This': Playing Spy in W. H. Auden's *The Orators*," I read the poet's 1932 prose-poem as a "mock-spyography," a covert attack on English liberalism and an infiltration of democratic totalitarianism. Contesting the received critical interpretation that reduces the Auden generation's espionage fantasies to a post-WWI inferiority complex, I argue that "playing spy" is not only constitutive of modernity, but that it likewise offers a means of articulating opposition to disciplinary regimes. Alluding to organizations such as the Boy Scouts, which conflates scouting with spying and thereby locates in play a means of maintaining national and imperial security,[10] Auden's text suggests that play itself may be a way of exposing the complicities between liberalism and fascism. For the poet, the Scouting Movement's concern with purity "in thought, word, and deed"[11] occasions a neurotic state in which the always already "guilty" subject engages in forms of "unauthorized"

sexual behavior that are also *discursive*. In *The Orators*, leaky sexualities correlate with leaky documents, disclosures, and diaries. As a result, Auden's mock-spyography becomes, metapoetically, a compromising text that demands its own destruction.

Turning from the Auden generation to "high modernism" itself, my last chapter uses the contemporary genre of speculative historical fiction as a point-of-entry into Bloomsbury's own attempt to "play spy." While Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso's *The Shadow of the Moth* (1983) and Stephanie Barron's *The White Garden* (2009), both of which implicate Virginia Woolf in wartime conspiracies, may seem to represent unlikely scenarios, Chapter Four, "True Lies: Virginia Woolf, Fictional Spyography, and Feminist Agency," treats these pulp fictions as counterfactual biographical enquiries and critical investigations into Woolf's life and political thought. "Subjunctive" histories, these texts explore the relations between art and action, artist and agent, by imagining Woolf *as if* she were involved in historical intrigues. In doing so, they draw out and allegorize a "spy function" already present in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. Throughout her work, and in *Three Guineas* (1938) in particular, the author figures feminism as a kind of secret agency, an "Outsiders' Society" whose opposition to the patriarchal "procession" emerges through forms of popular discourse—sometimes openly and sometimes clandestinely "between the lines."

By following Woolf's advice that "bad writing" be regarded as an act of revenge, *Secret States* uncovers the manner in which modernism appropriates the codes of the popular "thriller" in response to the intelligence community's own commandeering of art and literature. In doing so, this project also recognizes that the spyography's critical valence is subject to a larger dialectic of revelation and containment. Like the apotheosis of the Official Secrets Act itself to the condition of a literary trope in Fleming's novel—a symptom of the strange alchemy of

factual fictions and fictional facts that characterizes the militant aesthetic state—the converse adoption of Maugham's and Mackenzie's violative texts as unofficial "handbooks" for SIS trainees has the effect of simultaneously defusing their subversion and reconfirming the effectiveness of the literary agent. Similarly, the older Auden's expurgation and disavowal of his early prose-poem reveals that "playing spy" likewise involves a certain amount of "playing censor," and the Woolfian spy novels' method of turning the writer *against* her own Bloomsbury circle—and, by association, modernism itself—works to subordinate the author's potential radicalism to a Cold War-inflected affirmation of established order. Ultimately, these acts of containment show us that the totalitarian dimension of democracy is not only manifested in national security legislation, but internalized on the level of both cultures and individuals, whose secret agencies, however adversarial, are always susceptible to "re-education."

NOTES

[1] Simmel 352.

[2] Quoted in Lathrop 151.

[3] In *Thrilling Cities* (1963), Fleming recalls his early interest, as a student, in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century German literature: "I remember in those days before the war reading […] the works of Kafka, Musil, the Zweigs, Arthur Schnitzler, Werfel, Rilke, Von Hofmannsthal, and those bizarre psychologists Weininger and Groddeck—let alone the writings of Adler and Freud—and buying first editions (I used to collect them) illustrated by Kokoschka and Kubin" (qtd. in Pearson, *Life* 25).

[4] In order to avoid confusion with the Security Service (MI5), I will use "SIS" throughout this dissertation to designate the foreign intelligence-gathering branch of the British secret service.

[5] Prior to the Security Service Act of 1989 and the Intelligence Services Act of 1994, which confirmed the existence of MI5 and SIS, respectively, and gave the organizations statutory bases for the first time, the extralegal status of the secret service placed the writerly spy in the rather absurd position of being held legally accountable for revealing the official secrets of an organization that did not *officially* exist.

[6] To date, there have been five versions of the Official Secrets Act passed and amended in the United Kingdom—in 1889, 1911, 1920, 1939, and 1989. Generally considered the founding document of the modern secret state, the 1911 Act criminalizes both espionage (section 1) and disclosure (section 2). In 1920, the Act incorporated provisions of the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act—for example, the power to try violators *in camera*. In essence, the 1920 Act indefinitely maintained (and still maintains) a wartime state of emergency. While the 1939 amendment limited certain powers granted under section 6 of the 1920 Act, the section forcing members of the press to reveal their sources of non-espionage-related information to the civilian police on demand, the Second World War put any further reform on hold. In the 1970s, reformers turned their attention to section 2 of the 1911 Act, which many felt to be a barrier against free speech. In 1971, a committee was appointed under Lord Franks to examine the section and make recommendations. The multivolume Franks Report (1972) found the Act unsatisfactory and recommended that section 2 be revised to protect only information of real importance. These debates would eventually culminate in the reformed 1989 Official Secrets Act, which replaces the original section 2 with a more limited and criteria-based regulation of truly "damaging" disclosures; i.e. revelations *demonstrably* harmful to national security. Though amended, the basic 1911 Act remains in force as the "principal act" to this day.

While Fleming seems to have avoided official censure, most likely because his novels ultimately reinforce the heroism of the British secret service, Greene's sardonic "entertainments" raised their share of eyebrows. *Our Man in Havana* (1958) attracted the attention of both MI5 and SIS, but although the powers that be considered prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, no action was taken—perhaps because establishing the truth of Greene's black comedy would amount to confirming the absurdities of the intelligence community. See Greene's "Introduction" to *The Tenth Man* (11).

[7] See, for example, John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg's *The Spy Story* (1987), Michael Denning's *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (1987), Allan Hepburn's *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005), and Brett F. Woods's *Neutral Ground: A Political History of Espionage Fiction* (2008).

[8] While discussing the case of Peter Wright's 1985 memoir, *Spycatcher*, David Hooper makes reference to a different sort of modernist trial. Because Wright had retired from MI5 and was then living on a farm in Tasmania, the British government was unable to extradite him for trial under the Official Secrets Act. Instead, they chose to file a lawsuit in New South Wales under the civil law of confidence (Hooper 305). In the end, however, the government's attempt to block publication was unsuccessful, and the book appeared on American and Commonwealth bookshelves in 1988. As Hooper points out, the government's decision to initiate legal proceedings led to "interest in the publication of a book unrivalled since the prosecution of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" (305).

[9] In recent years, literary critics have theorized the way modernism's other legal contexts—its role in the development of libel, obscenity, and property laws—present a challenge to the "myth" of modernist autonomy, the idea that modernism progressed in a sort of vacuum whose only governing tenet was that art existed "for art's sake." In *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (2009), Sean Latham argues that the "stubborn" genre of the roman à clef, the fiction whose "key" opens an extradiegetic frame of reference, troubles not only the history of the novel as an autonomous text, but also our own critical practices; that is, our "ability to police a firm boundary between fictional and historical worlds" (29). Modernism's investment in the roman à clef, Latham illustrates, "led […] not to aesthetic autonomization, but to a turbulent encounter between literature and law" (73), an encounter that persists in the tension between literature's "scandalous kernel of history or biography" (17) and the

critical "law" or injunction against biographical and intentional fallacies. While the spyography shares a certain affinity with the roman à clef, particularly its presumed kernel of compromising truth, the product of the government agent differs from its defamatory sibling in its subjection to an exclusively criminal law and its potentially treasonous threat to state security. Moreover, since the "state" in question is a militant aesthetic state that always already occupies, as we have seen, a zone of indistinction between history and fantasy, spyographies force us to examine not only the "truth" of fictions, but also the *fictionality* that lies hidden or coded within ostensibly nonfictional texts: laws, histories, and auto/biographies.

[10] In a similar way to the 1909 Secret Service Bureau, the coeval Scouting Movement drew upon literature in its efforts to bolster national and imperial security. Written at time when Britain was beginning to feel acutely both domestic and international threats, Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (1908) embodies the same paranoid fear of invasion and call to defense that we find in both early thrillers and contemporary histories of the intelligence community. Indeed, the SSB might easily have adopted the Scout's Motto as its own: "BE PREPARED." Baden-Powell repeatedly reminds his readers that "[the] surest way to keep peace is to be prepared for war" (*Scouting* 277) and that "scouting," which he explicitly associates with spying, may prove useful in a time of crisis. "Scouts," he insists, "have to be very clever at passing news secretly from one place to another, or signalling to each other; and if it should ever happen that an enemy got into England, the Boy Scouts would be of greatest value if they have practised this art" (173-4). For the Chief Scout, literature serves as an important resource for training scouts in the "art" of intrigue. Accordingly, *Scouting* itself is a remarkably literary text, a veritable compendium of characters from fiction and historical romance, which it offers as models for proper scouting and honorable conduct. Just as the intelligence community identifies with the myth of a powerful spy network dating back to the Elizabethans, Baden-Powell is at pains to situate his movement within a heroic tradition, tracing his code of behavior from the Knights of the Round Table to the sleuths and secret agents of Victorian and Edwardian adventure yarns. One particularly privileged example is Rudyard Kipling's spy novel *Kim* (1901), to which Baden-Powell devotes a detailed synopsis and discussion (*Scouting* 14-8). For Baden-Powell, Kim is "a good example of what a Boy Scout can do" (14); the orphaned son of an Irish soldier in India who comes to be recruited by the colonial secret service for his extraordinary powers of imitation and observation, Kim bravely intervenes in the "Great Game" by thwarting a Russian encroachment into British India. In his summary, when Baden-Powell mentions that Kim works for "the Government Intelligence Department," he inserts a brief parenthetical note to scoutmasters: "*Explain this*" (15). Intending to alert his scouts to the existence of such an agency—which at the time of the *Kim*'s composition did not yet exist—the Chief Scout implies that espionage is a possible, perhaps ideal, career path. In doing so, he reinscribes adventure fiction as a kind of training manual; included in the list of games that Baden-Powell recommends in *Scouting*, "Kim's Game" (48), a contest based on memorization and recognition of random objects, is taken directly from the spy's training regime in Kipling's novel.

[11] Like the foundation of the movement itself, the development of the Scout Law presents an intriguing parallel to the evolution of the secret state. In the original 1908 edition of *Scouting for Boys*, the Scout Law comprised nine imperatives focusing on honor, loyalty "to the King and to his officers," assistance to those in need, friendliness to all, courtesy, kindness to animals, obedience without question, cheerfulness, and thriftiness (45-6). With the publication of the 1911 edition, Baden-Powell introduced a tenth law that in many ways becomes the Golden Rule of the Scouting Movement: "A Scout is pure in thought, word, and deed" (361). Crucially, just as the establishment of the Boy Scouts parallels the founding of the British secret service, the adoption of the tenth law coincides with the hasty passage through parliament of the 1911 Official Secrets Act, which, in its own way, seeks to enforce "purity" of words and actions. Furthermore, both *Scouting* and the Official Secrets Act embody a similarly paradoxical set of rules and conditions. In its wide-ranging application, the Official Secrets Act may locate in fictional texts a disclosive kernel of truth and so assigns, as Elleke Boehmer observes of *Scouting*, "literature the same status of veracity as history […]" (xxvi). Encouraging fantasies of espionage, both texts likewise share the contradictory injunction that it is necessary to spy and report upon one's fellow citizens while acknowledging that spying and disclosure are reprehensible crimes subject to fines, imprisonment, or even death.

CHAPTER ONE

"Loose Ends": Recruiting Cosmopolitanism in W. Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden*

> To the acute observer no one can produce the most casual work without disclosing the innermost secrets of his soul.
> —W. Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919)
>
> It's very hard to be a gentleman and a writer.
> —W. Somerset Maugham, *Cakes and Ale* (1930)

At some point in the mid to late 1920s, Winston Churchill informed W. Somerset Maugham that his Ashenden stories—a collection based on the writer's brief career as a spy during the First World War[1]—were in violation of the 1911 Official Secrets Act (Morgan 206).[2] In spite or because of Maugham's choice to burn at least fourteen of these stories, the volume that was eventually published as *Ashenden; or, The British Agent* (1928) raises significant issues about the paradoxes and consequences of recruiting authors as agents. Put simply, the problem with hiring a writer to spy is that he or she will most likely want to write about it afterwards. From the reader's point of view, of course, the idea that one might be privy to confidential information, however "fictionalized," is alluring. But unlike the roman à clef—a form that continues, as Sean Latham has observed, to "[shadow] our fictions with the suspicion that they have concealed within their pages a scandalous kernel of history or biography to be either pleasurably extracted or haughtily dismissed" (16-7)—the *spyography* presents us with a case not of libel but of leakage, an ostensible threat to national security. Consequently, *Ashenden* helps us approach the topic of "literature and law" through the condition of literature as *crime,* perhaps as treason.

Initially, Maugham did not directly acknowledge that *Ashenden* was based on his own experiences in the secret service. Stalled for a number of years by—according to the publisher—Maugham's "mysterious bosses in the Foreign Office" (qtd. in Hastings 226), the first edition

offered itself, rather cryptically, as a "narrative of some experiences during the Great War of a very insignificant member of the Intelligence Department." Yet, while subsequent editions made it clear that the source of the stories was in fact Maugham himself, *Ashenden* could scarcely, at first glance, be considered revelatory. Like Maugham, the cosmopolitan Ashenden is a middle-aged "writer by profession" (*Ashenden* 7), recruited by the enigmatic R. to work as a British agent, first in Switzerland and later in Russia. The spy's activities range, for the most part, from the banal to the distasteful. Most of his missions fail outright or end ambiguously. Ashenden is thwarted in an attempt to retrieve a case with important documents from a train station in Zürich. He becomes the unwilling recipient of an ancient expatriate Englishwoman's last, inconclusive utterance. Traveling to Italy, he takes part in a botched assassination operation in which an innocent man is killed. He forces a Mata Hari-like courtesan to write melodramatic letters in an effort to lure her lover, an Indian insurgent, into a trap (the radical promptly swallows cyanide). Finally, like Maugham, Ashenden engages in a hopeless attempt to prevent a Bolshevik coup in revolutionary Russia. Although the spy accomplishes very little as an agent of the Crown, he treats himself to the local cuisine, takes an extraordinary number of baths, brushes up on his French and Russian literature, and gathers material for his plays. In *Ashenden*, espionage seems more like a cover for literary activity than vice versa.

Given its unorthodox and antiheroic characterization of espionage, *Ashenden* received its share of mixed reviews. Some, like the reviewer in the *New York Times* on 15 April 1928, express frustration that Maugham failed to reveal *more*: "Since Somerset Maugham is incapable of writing anything dull, *Ashenden* is an entertaining book. But since his material in this case is neither new nor important, it is quite forgettable" (qtd. in Curtis and Whitehead 178). By 1928, the First World War had been over for ten years, and *Ashenden* seemed to have little, if anything,

to add. The reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* for 12 April 1928—identified by MI6 historian Keith Jeffery as Orlo Williams, a clerk in the House of Commons with experience in the wartime intelligence service (Jeffery 237)—writes that *Ashenden* "is not a novel at all, but a series of disconnected episodes quite obviously concocted, with no very great enthusiasm, for serial publication. A good deal of space is spent in desultory description and conversation which is of no particular interest" (Williams 270). Like any good intelligence clerk, Williams expresses his disappointment that the collection of stories fails to reach a meaningful consensus: "If one winnows the whole of descriptions of landscape, train journeys, and personal appearances one is not left with a great deal" (270). Although hostile to *Ashenden*'s preoccupation with triviality, Williams does admit that Maugham "writes the truth" when he describes Ashenden's work as routinely dull and monotonous, "and nobody who read agents' reports during the War will be surprised that [Ashenden's] work was as dreary as these reports" (270).

Other reviewers, however, attempt to recuperate *Ashenden*'s seeming evasiveness as itself an affirmation of the effectiveness of the secret service and its security measures. In his review for the *London Mercury*, Edward Shanks suggests that the fictionality of the work is, paradoxically, an index of its truthfulness: "Much of [Maugham's] book would not be interesting if it had been invented. Much of it is inconclusively enigmatic, which is something no story should ever be. But there is about the whole surprising work an atmosphere of truth and it is not hard to see that it was necessary, as well as convenient, to present it in the guise of fiction" (qtd. in Curtis and Whitehead 175-6). Perhaps the most illuminating (or ironic) example of such thinking comes, appropriately enough, from the *Punch* review of 2 May 1928: "Considered as a class, the spy story is the most utterly unreal thing in fiction; it contrives to seem false even when

it happens to be true. In Mr. Maugham's hand the spy story becomes patently true even if it should happen to be invention" ("Our Booking-Office" 504).

Current historians of espionage continue to be perplexed by the government's reaction to Maugham's spy stories, especially in light of the relative freedom of disclosure granted to other ex-agents in the 1930s. Nigel West seems unsure of what violation, if any, *Ashenden* actually constitutes: "The treatment received by Maugham was certainly unusual, for his fiction could hardly be described as a work of disclosure, whereas Sir Paul Dukes (*The Story of ST-25*), Samuel Hoare (*The Fourth Seal*), William Gibson (*Wild Career*) and George Hill (*Go Spy the Land*) seem to have received a measure of official approval despite revealing a good deal about SIS's clandestine operations during the Great War" (124). Even more puzzling, given Maugham's apparent destruction of the most telling tales, is *Ashenden*'s subsequent adoption during the Second World War as, according to Maugham's 1941 preface, unofficial "required reading for persons entering the [Intelligence] Department" (6).

In what follows, I will account for these "unusual" reactions to *Ashenden* not by pinpointing the specific objections—for those, if they were ever committed to paper, have likely been destroyed or buried deep within the inaccessible archive of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)—but by locating in Maugham's work a critical resistance to official or approved accounts of espionage that seek to collapse fact into fiction, historical experience into literary representation, and vice versa. Churchill himself was invested, for obvious political reasons, in a more popular conception of the British intelligence community:

> In the higher ranges of Secret Service work the actual facts in many cases were in every respect equal to the most fantastic inventions of romance and melodrama. Tangle within tangle, plot and counter-plot, ruse and treachery, cross and double-cross, true agent, false agent, double agent, gold and steel, the bomb, the dagger and the firing party were interwoven in many a texture so intricate as to be incredible and yet true. (*Amid* 87-8)

In affirming the literariness of actual espionage work, Churchill's comment participates in what is essentially an aesthetic ideology that both maintains an unproblematic correlation between life and representation (a mimetic ideology) and, more importantly, privileges the literary as a basis for policy and action. Here, "melodrama" signals not only the conventions of "shilling shockers" and "thrillers" but the reductionism, sensationalism, and moral polarization characteristic of much nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British fiction. As a means of ordering and communicating experience, the trope of melodrama synchronizes with intelligence gathering and transmission, methods of distinguishing friend from foe, triviality from significance. In this light, Churchill's conception of espionage works to legitimize and rationalize the literal recruitment of literary agents; in a field of action characterized by such a "texture," the well-traveled, multilingual, cosmopolitan writer-spy, who is both a producer and consumer of texts, would have an ostensible advantage.

Not surprisingly, it was Maugham's literary and cosmopolitan character, his urbanity and knowledge of exotic locales, which made him an attractive candidate for wartime espionage work in the first place. Already a famous novelist and playwright by 1908—fittingly, Maugham published his first story in 1898 in the trilingual magazine *Cosmopolis* (Curtis 31)—he had developed a reputation as an international man of letters in the years leading up to the First World War. Maugham's recruiter, Sir John Wallinger, evidently believed that Maugham's fame and talent would, in addition to providing an ideal cover for espionage, invigorate the secret service. Jeffery suggests that Wallinger's "imaginative engagement" of the famous writer was a vain attempt to "revive his [ailing] organization" (91). If so, it was an "imaginative engagement" founded upon a biographical fallacy.[3] The secret service's interest in Maugham may have had much to do with the mask that Maugham projected through his semi-autobiographical

protagonists—what critics consistently refer to as the "Maugham persona," the wry observer who finds himself in the thick of domestic and international intrigues. Anthony Burgess contrasts the Maugham persona with the cloistered intellectual: "Here again was something that English fiction needed—the dispassionate commentator, the 'raisonneur', the man at home at Paris and Vienna but also in Seoul and Djakarta, convivial and clubbable, as ready for a game of poker as for a discussion on the Racine alexandrine, the antithesis of the slippered bookman" (Burgess 1033). For Joseph Epstein, this persona is more confessor than confessant, a natural recipient of secret information:

> He is the sympathetic gentleman in the beautifully made suit to whom, at the club over brandy and soda, you confess that you harbor murderous thoughts about your wife or have been the cause of your business partner's death or have been sleeping with your dearest friend's mistress. He is of the world yet slightly above it, detached yet not devoid of feeling, a man who holds out the prospect of understanding unaccompanied by harsh judgment. (4)

Ashenden is but one example of the Maugham persona, but a significant one. Throughout his life, Maugham encouraged the idea that this persona was more or less an accurate expression of his own character, effectively maintaining that *le style c'est l'homme même*.[4]

If Maugham was indeed recruited for the assumed benefits his persona would bring to the secret service, Maughamian detachment—which is to say, Maughamian irony—would also prove a liability. Churchill's warning that the author's fictional spy stories constituted a violation of the Official Secrets Act suggests that aesthetic ideology not only seeks out, but also seeks to *defuse* correspondences between literary and intelligence "tradecraft." In effect, Churchill's response to *Ashenden*, whose anti-hero is anything but romantic, implies that the statesman may have been less concerned with the "truth" of the text than with the potential threat it posed to the image of the secret service. In his preface to *Ashenden*, in which the writer admits

that his spy stories are based on his own experiences "but rearranged for the purposes of fiction," Maugham observes that real espionage work is exceedingly dull:

> Fact is a poor story-teller. It starts a story at haphazard, generally long before the beginning, rambles on inconsequently and tails off, leaving loose ends hanging about, without a conclusion. It works up to an interesting situation, and then leaves it in the air to follow an issue that has nothing to do with the point; it has no sense of climax and whittles away its dramatic effects in irrelevance. (1)

Unlike Churchill's characterization of espionage as every bit as rollicking as its fictional counterpart, Maugham's preface suggests that the experience of the spy must be *made* interesting by tying up "loose ends" in a suitably dramatic fashion. Significantly, the preface goes on to imply that, given the relative indeterminacy of secret service work, the writer and spy find themselves in a similar predicament of having to rearrange information into meaningful narratives for their readers: "The work of an agent in the Intelligence Department is on the whole extremely monotonous. A lot of it is uncommonly useless. The material it offers for stories is scrappy and pointless; the author has himself to make it coherent, dramatic and probable" (4). In conflating "agent" and "author," Maugham associates the product of espionage, that which serves as the basis for political and military decisions, with a "fiction" that need not "imitate life," but instead "use life merely as raw material which it arranges in ingenious patterns" (2-3). This process, Maugham indicates, is the true intervention of "intelligence" (3), which attempts to impose a fictional framework on real events rather than assuming a correlation between literary and historical experience.[5]

Maugham's remarks on literary tradecraft have led some critics to read *Ashenden* as an endorsement of generic codes—which could, in turn, be taken as an affirmation of the reductive ideology of melodrama. In *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005), Allan Hepburn argues that

Ashenden "as a playwright […] constantly resorts to his writerly knowledge to fend off the more dangerous aspects of his undercover work":

> The theater teaches useful lessons in character reading, bluffing, and restraint. The probability that Maugham endorses in his introduction is, then, the a priori probability of the theatrical world. Maugham's intention, clearly, is to uphold an Aristotelian conception of the logical linkage of events. He supplements the "law of necessity" with the law of representation. Genre establishes its own rules and those rules assert probability. Such predetermined probabilities serve as codes. (68)

Hepburn's reading, however, deserves some qualification. While Maugham's agent certainly attempts to play by the rules and thereby affirm the ideology underlying his initial recruitment, what *Ashenden* consistently reveals is the writer-spy's *in*ability to "read" character and act accordingly. Even when events happen to play out in a melodramatic fashion, they do so in such a way as to confound the highly-cultured and worldly-wise Ashenden, whose sophistication and cosmopolitanism render him oddly overqualified for the job. More often than not, Ashenden's adventures trail off into the sort of anticlimax that Maugham derides in his preface, leaving the reader to "divine [the] significance" (2). We discover—like Ashenden, for whom the experience of intrigue fails to conform to generic codes—the failure of the imposed pattern, the willful rearrangement of facts, data, and observations into meaningful intelligence. Given these ambivalences, *Ashenden* would seem to have less in common with the yarns of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and John Buchan than it would with James Joyce's *Dubliners*, studies of paralysis with indefinite resolutions, if indeed they are resolutions at all. To put it another way, if *Ashenden* is a yarn, it is a yarn with "loose ends."

Regardless of whether we choose to read Maugham's preface ironically or whether we ascribe such inconsistencies to Maugham's inability to follow his own advice, these failures in both form and content constitute an intriguing critique of what Hepburn calls "the law of representation" as well as the aesthetic ideology that assigns the writer a productive role in the

secret state. At one point, Ashenden recognizes the existential isolation of being a spy, as it were, out in the cold:

> Being no more than a tiny rivet in a vast and complicated machine, he never had the advantage of seeing a completed action. He was concerned with the beginning or the end of it, perhaps, or with some incident in the middle, but what his own doings led to he had seldom a chance of discovering. It was as unsatisfactory as those modern novels that give you a number of unrelated episodes and expect you by piecing them together to construct in your mind a connected narrative. (13)

What emerges, then, as the dominant literary paradigm for espionage is not so much melodrama as *modernism*, which often appropriates—without privileging—generic codes. In spite of Maugham's well-documented antipathy to aesthetic obscurantism—in *The Summing Up* (1938), he writes disparagingly of the modern artist whose "soul is a secret garden into which the elect may penetrate only after overcoming a number of perilous obstacles" (32)—*Ashenden* arguably evinces what Rebecca L. Walkowitz has described as a "critical cosmopolitanism" concomitant with modernism, "a type of international engagement that can be distinguished from 'planetary humanism' by two principal characteristics: an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the center that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is seen" (2). Critical cosmopolitanism, Walkowitz continues, is marked by the employment of "naturalness, triviality, evasion, mix-ups, treason, and vertigo to generate specific projects of democratic individualism, on the one hand, and of antifascism or anti-imperialism, on the other" (4). However, while Maugham's work shares many of the qualities Walkowitz associates with "cosmopolitan style," what we find in *Ashenden* is not so much an evasion as an attempt to figure, directly, the constitutive *breach* inherent in the paradoxical recruitment of cosmopolitanism into the service of nationalism. Crucially, Maugham's critical cosmopolitanism is itself a critique *of*

cosmopolitanism as a form of intervention, as well as a modernist challenge to literary conventions and narrative modes that privilege revelation and disclosure.

Recruited for his artistic and "worldly" sensibilities, Ashenden finds himself a pawn in a contest of cosmopolitanisms:[6] in the first place, a humanistic cosmopolitanism cultivated by the intelligence community's talent scouts; and, in the second place, a more unruly, decadent, and indeterminate cosmopolitanism marked by an excess that overflows, or leaks through, the recruitment transaction. Focusing first on the "Miss King" and "Giulia Lazzari" episodes, I will argue that *Ashenden*'s critique of aesthetic ideology correlates with the problem of deriving "intelligence" from what Maugham calls "raw material," the lived experience that both resists and exceeds generic coding. I will then turn to the ambivalences of "worldliness" in "The Hairless Mexican," an episode in which excessive culture and sophistication come to signify a queer agency at odds with normative productivity. Finally, I will characterize Maugham's literary and critical legacy as a series of recuperations or figural "recruitments" that work to contain *Ashenden*'s critical cosmopolitanism by reinserting both writer and text into a functional dialectic of literature and history. These Cold War recruitments make it clear that Maugham's destruction of the most volatile Ashenden stories to avoid prosecution did little to defuse the threat posed by his spyography. Indeed, such efforts to recuperate Maugham as both writer and agent may be interpreted as equally an attempt to reaffirm the Official Secrets Act itself and its veritable codification of melodrama as law.

"Raw Material"

For Maugham, all writing is an act of disclosure. The Moorish device that graced the binding of Maugham's first editions—a symbol to ward off the Evil Eye—seems an appropriate

Maughamian signifier, a kind of ineffectual "Confidential" or "Secret" stamp on a work meant for public consumption. "To the acute observer," he writes in *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), "no one can produce the most casual work without disclosing the innermost secrets of his soul" (147). Responding to a letter from a graduate student, Maugham maintained that "[the writer] sees character through his own personality and so must betray himself in every line he writes" (qtd. in Morgan 346). Yet, in spite of these admissions, Maugham was very sensitive to his image and he went to great lengths to conceal his private life, particularly his homosexuality. "Destroying adverse evidence," Ted Morgan observes, "was [Maugham's] way of influencing the opinion of posterity" (xiii). Maugham went so far as to instruct his literary executor to thwart any attempt at biography or publication of private papers[7]—in vain, it would seem. For a writer famous for his "bonfire nights"[8]—evenings of willful destruction of notes, drafts, letters, and family papers—the immolation of the most violative *Ashenden* stories seems less an exception than the norm. In this light, Maugham's choice of title may serve as a complex cryptonym for both disclosure and concealment. Let us begin then, as with so many violations of the Official Secrets Act, with the naming of names.

The name "Ashenden" was at least partly inspired by one Leonard Ashenden, a fellow student of Maugham's at the King's School in Canterbury—the school where another famous literary spy, Christopher Marlowe, also spent his formative years. Morgan suggests that Leonard may have been the focus of an early "romantic attachment" (21). If so, then "Ashenden" itself is a coded admission of a secret desire. But Maugham was also attracted to the name's paronomasic qualities. When Leonard Ashenden's daughter wrote to Maugham in 1954 to ask about his choice of the name for his persona, Maugham replied, "I chose the name Ashenden […] because like Gann and Driffield, it is a common surname in the neighborhood of

Canterbury, where I spent many years of my youth. The first syllable," Maugham cryptically added, "had to me a peculiar connotation which I found suggestive" (qtd. in Morgan 207).[9] For a writer like Maugham—who is, as H. E. Bates remarks, at his finest "a master of cultivated acidity" (qtd. in Archer 106)—the connotations inherent in "*Ash*enden" of burning and futility may indicate the world-weariness of the worldly writer, but they also seem to reflect upon the disclosive potential of art. As an aptronym implying destruction, "ash" signifies the problematic excess that deconstructs the disclosure/concealment binary; the remainder left over in the translation or transcription of *material*; or that which evades inscription and interpretation altogether. In the context of espionage, the name suggests not only the careful destruction of compromising documents, but the miscarriage of "intelligence" itself.[10]

While Ashenden, like his creator, is recruited for his literary reputation, this conscription founders on the gathering and conversion of "raw material" into useful and marketable narratives. In the first section of Maugham's novel, the mysterious R. asserts that Ashenden "[has] particular qualifications for the secret service" and that his fame as a writer will provide an "excellent cover" (8). To sweeten the deal, R. suggests that Ashenden may even find "material that would be very useful" for an author (8). Yet the example he gives—a melodramatic tale of a French minister seduced by a femme fatale who makes off with his dispatch-case—strikes the sophisticated Ashenden as hackneyed. "Do you mean to say that life has only just caught up with us?" Ashenden responds. "We really *can't* write that story much longer" (9). Here, as in the preface, the material available to the writer becomes conflated with intelligence gathering. But rather than affirming that life imitates art, this passage posits melodrama as a dead letter, ludicrous in its application to either art or life. In spite of this, Ashenden—like R., who "[finds] a fantastic pleasure in aping the style of the shilling shocker"

(101)—nevertheless attempts to fulfill the conditions of his recruitment by interpreting events melodramatically and then acting accordingly, but to no avail. Moreover, given that the clichés of the "thriller" typically work to reinforce the image of a virile Britain, Maugham's assault on melodrama has the effect of breaching the empire's literary line of defense. Two episodes in particular, "Miss King" and "Giulia Lazzari," reinscribe Ashenden's failure to bring his mission to a successful conclusion as the spy's inability to secure the cultural and ideological borders of the state.

The "Miss King" episode finds Ashenden staying at the French Savoy in Geneva, a veritable "hot-bed of intrigue": "There were Frenchman there, Italians and Russians, Turks, Rumanians, Greeks and Egyptians. Some had fled their country, some doubtless represented it" (31). In this cosmopolitan space, the inability to distinguish between *representation* and *evasion* suggests not only the duplicity of nationalism, which engenders and subsumes its own treasonous opposite, but also the problematic of literary representation and interpretation, a lack of hermeneutic closure that finds its own political valence in the simultaneously nationalist and subversive agencies of the novel. These ambiguities come to a head in the rather unlikely figure of Miss King, an elderly expatriate Englishwoman serving as a family governess for the notoriously anti-British Egyptian Prince Ali. Miss King apparently holds no love for her native land, and she treats Ashenden with nothing but coldness and contempt. Nevertheless, Ashenden, whose contacts have of late given him "nothing that signified" (36), recognizes the frail old woman as a potential source of intelligence:

> Ashenden was told that Miss King had not been to England since she was first engaged as governess of the prince's mother and he could not but be amazed to think of all she must have seen during those long years in the harems of Cairo. It was impossible to guess how old she was. How many of those short Eastern lives must have run their course under her eyes and what dark secrets must she have known! (34)

Ashenden's conceptualization of Egyptian harems and the "dark secrets" they shelter should remind us that what is at stake in Ashenden's work is not only victory over the Central Powers but also the security and preservation of the British empire, which relies both on the policing of geographical borders and on the maintenance of racial, cultural, and aesthetic boundaries delineating Britain and its Other. In effect, it is this ideological border that is at risk when the ailing Miss King unexpectedly summons the spy to her deathbed.

Ashenden, whose role as a British agent has become something of an open secret at the hotel, is unable to decide whether Miss King's request is an attempt to communicate vital information or a clever trap devised by Prince Ali and his sinister Pasha. In preparation for either contingency, Ashenden makes a conscious decision to interpret events through a melodramatic paradigm. Before leaving his room, the bookish agent slips a gun into his pocket:

> It was ridiculous to suppose that those two cordial stout Egyptian gentlemen were laying some sort of trap for him, but in the work upon which Ashenden was engaged the dullness of routine was apt now and again to slip quite shamelessly into the melodrama of the sixties. Just as passion will make use brazenly of the hackneyed phrase, so will chance show itself insensitive to the triteness of the literary convention. (39)

Attuned to the sensationalism of the moment—indeed, the "sensation novel" of the 1860s and 1870s is in many respects the progenitor of the modern spy novel—Ashenden assumes that he is about to witness a climactic deathbed revelation. As if to confirm his suspicions, Ashenden finds Miss King lying in bed like a figure from Victorian literature: "Nightcap and nightdress belonged to a past age and reminded you of Cruikshank's illustrations to the novels of Charles Dickens" (40). Though she has lost her power of speech, the old woman clearly wishes to tell Ashenden something. In the silence of his vigil, the agent's thoughts run the gamut of readerly anticipations:

> Perhaps at the moment of death a love for her country, a love that had been dead for half a century, awakened again in her—("I'm silly to fancy these idiotic things," thought

> Ashenden, "it's cheap and tawdry fiction.")—and she had been seized with a desire to do something for what was after all her own. No one was quite himself just then and patriotism (in peace-time an attitude best left to politicians, publicists and fools, but in the dark days of war an emotion that can wring the heart-strings), patriotism made one do odd things. [….] Ashenden, his common sense protesting, became strangely convinced that she had some secret that she wished to impart to him. She had sent for him knowing who he was because he could make use of it. She was dying and feared nothing. But was it really important? Ashenden leaned forward trying more eagerly to read what her eyes had to say. Perhaps it was only some trivial thing that was important only in her addled old brain. Ashenden was sick of the people who saw spies in every inoffensive passer-by and plots in the most innocent combination of circumstances. It was a hundred to one that if Miss King recovered her speech she would tell him something that could be of no use to anybody. (46)

As he attempts to "read" Miss King, he is reminded of the mindset, inspired by "cheap and tawdry fiction," that locates in trivialities and random occurrences the evidence of a "plot"—the mentality that characterized the spymania of the First World War and that legislation such as the Official Secrets Act perpetuates through an endorsement of paranoid reading. In spite of his reservations, Ashenden finally convinces himself that what the old woman has to say may indeed be crucial to the war effort, something she has overheard the Egyptians discussing in private: "It might be that some new plan was in question, it might be that the very greatest affairs were afoot, and perhaps what the old woman had to say might make all the difference in the world. It might mean defeat or victory. It might mean anything" (47). Suddenly, in "a final desperate effort of will," the old woman raises herself and pronounces one word: "England" (47).

While "England" offers neither patriotic consolation nor "dark secret" of international intrigue, the indeterminability of Miss King's final utterance has not stopped critics from trying to have the last word themselves. In his study of Maugham's short fiction, Forrest D. Burt interprets the ending of "Miss King" as an unambiguous instance of textual (dis)closure:

> Such an ending, in which the Maughamian character learns the answer to a question or problem that he has puzzled over, is a familiar pattern in Maugham's fiction […]. Despite the fact that Miss King does not take up a friendship with Ashenden the British agent and apparently has not in any way shown great affection for her native country

> during her years as a governess, in death she speaks the word *England*, as if thereby giving her a final sense of identity and affirming her significance. (114)

But in what sense does "England" answer a question? Indeed, what *is* the question? Burt's reading—which is, as I will argue, symptomatic of Maugham's Cold War commentators—makes the question of narratological closure one and the same with political orientation; it seeks to *melodramatize* Maugham's text by identifying Miss King's outburst as a positive affirmation of nationalism and then offers this affirmation as a resolution of plot. Hermeneutically, though, it is not at all clear what "England" is meant to signify. A revelation "that could be of no use to anybody" (46), that truly does "mean anything" (47) and nothing, "England" evades patriotic or ideological recuperation. Working against what Zdzisław Najder has called "the melodramatic principle of a final disclosure of facts and feelings" (161), Miss King's utterance, which neither informs nor disinforms, reveals itself as nothing so much as the "raw material" that denies intelligence, despite Ashenden's (and the critic's) desire to render it meaningful.

Deferred and spectral, "England" compounds the national fictions and imagined communities bound up in the concept of "national security." Essentially literary, "England" constitutes an *aesthetic state*, threatened at the site of inscription, and one that is specifically associated with, but not limited to, Victorian and Edwardian codes of conduct, secrecy, and heroism sustained by popular narratives. Unable to guarantee either the literal or figural border of "England," Ashenden's failure is also a failure of the aesthetic ideology that governs this phantasmatic state, an ideology that privileges, as Paul de Man has suggested, distinct notions of "nation," "culture," and "humanity" reinforced through allegorical investments in art and history (*Aesthetic* 150). Miss King, whose very name seems to crown her figurative valence, ironically offers no assertion of either the sovereignty or the stability of the state. In the end, the episode

stages the misfiring of melodrama as a resistance to allegorical affirmations of national *character*.

While "Miss King" presents a scenario in which the agent is disappointed by a lack of melodramatic resolution, other episodes in *Ashenden* suggest that he is just as likely to be frustrated in his endeavors to ensure security even (or especially) when events are at their most melodramatic. In "Giulia Lazzari," Ashenden is called upon to mastermind the capture of Chandra Lal, an Indian insurgent with ties to Germany. Lal's mistress, the famous exotic dancer Giulia Lazzari, has been detained by British authorities on trumped-up espionage charges and coerced into assisting the secret service in luring her lover across Lake Geneva—that is, from neutral Switzerland into allied France. R. chooses Ashenden for the job precisely because, as a successful novelist and playwright, he "[presumably knows] more about *human nature* than most people" (113, my emphasis). Moreover, since the snare will most likely involve using Giulia's love letters as bait, what better agent than an author to ensure that her letters have the right tone and "*tendresses*" (121)? Giulia's correspondence, "written in a queer mixture of French, German and English" (109), must be carefully dictated, and Ashenden resorts to his knowledge of dramatic probability:

> He thought he could put the letter more or less in the way she would naturally have put it, but he had to give it consideration. It must be neither fluent nor literary. He knew that in moments of emotion people are inclined to be melodramatic and stilted. In a book or on the stage this always rings false and the author has to make his people speak more simply and with less emphasis than in fact they do. It was a serious moment, but Ashenden felt that there were in it elements of the comic. (134)

Essentially, Ashenden chooses to adopt a melodramatic tone in a bizarre attempt to achieve a measure of naturalism. He concludes that, in affairs of the heart, writing badly is the only way to write seductively, and his employment of melodrama as a kind of subterfuge does indeed have the desired effect: Chandra Lal arrives in France and is seized by the local gendarmerie.

However, what begins as an attempt to appropriate the codes of melodrama in the service of national—or, given the politics of the episode, *imperial*—security culminates in an act of violence that calls into question Ashenden's understanding of "human nature" and, consequently, serves to undermine his effectiveness as a literary agent. Immediately upon capture, Chandra Lal kills himself with a concealed draught of cyanide. With a "thrill of horror" (137), Ashenden discovers that Giulia had known about Lal's hidden bottle all along, and he realizes that he has been thwarted by the very clichés he had attempted to utilize: "He supposed the possibility of such a thing [Lal's suicide] should have occurred to him. How was he to anticipate these melodramatic devices?" (139). Like "England," "human nature" proves a problematic category or principle on which to base the security of the state. But while in "Miss King" Ashenden comes up short in his pursuit of useful intelligence, in "Giulia Lazzari" the agent's intelligence ironically overshoots the mark. In other words, the Lal incident illustrates that although Ashenden is capable of temporarily suspending his better writerly judgment in order to think and act melodramatically, his cosmopolitanism and literary sophistication ultimately redound to occasion a more crippling—and more deadly—suspension of agency.

In both episodes, the experience of secret service work refuses to corroborate Ashenden's expectations; regardless of whether reality plays out in a melodramatic fashion, there remains a critical divide between aesthetic and historical experience, and, as a result, the cosmopolitan spy is unable to perform. Significantly, Ashenden's failure in this regard parallels Maugham's own apparent failure to follow the theory of composition laid out in his 1941 preface, in which he insists that the writer must rearrange his "raw material" into "ingenious patterns" and offer a "sense of climax" for the sake of marketability. However we choose to interpret this inconsistency, both failures advance an intriguing critique of the value of production and what

Tom Cohen has called "the consumerist logic of mimesis" (115). In the secret world where spy agencies take on the cryptonyms of "the company" and "the firm" and the receivers of intelligence assume the roles of "clients" and "customers,"[11] *Ashenden* foregrounds nonproductivity as a kind of disinscription, the resistance of "material" to constructive gathering, coding, and reporting. In this respect, the literary agent fails to deliver. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the operative's inability to operate constitutes not only a breach of the recruitment contract, but also its perverse fulfillment. For the attempt to recruit cosmopolitanism into the service of nationalism culminates in an *excess* of intelligence, culture, and consumption themselves.

Overkill

Initially recruited for his writerly insight into "human nature" and his presumed ability to reify and weaponize his mastery of literary codes, Ashenden founders on a surfeit of sophistication. When a fellow spy asks Ashenden why he never writes "shilling shockers," Ashenden replies, "I devised a murder story once, but the murder was so ingenious that I could never find a way of bringing it home to the murderer, and after all, one of the conventions of the detective story is that the mystery should in the end be solved and the criminal brought to justice" (77). If, as we have seen, melodramatic resolution correlates with the successful mission, Ashenden's denial of *dénouement* once again calls into question the British agent's capacity to effectively police the empire. In breaking the law of convention, the worldly operative permits the killer to escape, the innocent to be murdered, and no "justice" to prevail. Far from serving a productive "planetary humanism," the cosmopolitanism of the Maugham

persona achieves its critical force through excessive violence. Ironically, Ashenden is too sophisticated to be of much use; he is, incongruously, too good a plotter to be a spy.

Just as the "raw material" of espionage proves difficult for both agent and reader to swallow, cosmopolitan excess chokes up and impedes narratological and ideological progress. In *Ashenden*, this excess is figured as a suggestively *queer* investment in culture, refinement, and taste—an investment that not only reveals the ambivalences of "culture" and "worldliness" but also exposes the violence of the reductive worldview that seeks to mobilize cosmopolitanism. In one of the novel's central sections, "The Hairless Mexican," Ashenden is ordered to assist the episode's eponymous assassin in apprehending and eliminating a hostile Greek agent carrying top-secret papers from Constantinople to the German embassy in Rome, but Ashenden's detachment from the mission and "secret, shameful fascination" (93) with his foppish fellow agent result, albeit indirectly, in the mission's failure and the death of an innocent man. While this apparent correlation between queerness and failure would seem to reinforce a paranoiac association of same-sex desire with liability, there is an alternative reading of "The Hairless Mexican" that emphasizes not so much failure as opposition, a critique of aesthetic ideology embodied by the queer agent whose aloofness, excessiveness, and potential criminality—homosexuality remained a crime in Britain until 1967—register as the overloading and overkilling inherent in the reification of generic codes as official policy. Working to undermine what David Vincent has called "the ethos of gentlemanly reserve" (83), the conventions of professionalism and discretion codified in the Official Secrets Act, the queer spy becomes the limit-figure of cosmopolitan recruitment and, as such, one of Maugham's most indiscreet disclosures.

Because *taste*, in its literal and figurative senses, draws together the constellation of culture and consumption, restaurants and food play a key role in framing "The Hairless Mexican" and provide a tangible field of reference for the episode's deconstruction of cosmopolitanism. The episode begins in a chic Lyonnaise bistro, where R. gives Ashenden his orders, and ends in a shady Neapolitan tavern, where Ashenden and his partner spend a final, raucous evening together. While these two restaurants epitomize, respectively, the poles of elegance and earthiness, both are cosmopolitan spaces where a variety of types and nationalities interact. For this reason, restaurants constitute a scene of intrigue. When Ashenden and R. meet in the French restaurant to discuss Ashenden's upcoming mission to Italy, both understand that they must only speak of the mission indirectly: "[Since] in so crowded a resort (for the Lyonese like a good dinner) you never knew what inquisitive ears were pricked up to catch any useful piece of information that might fall from your lips, they […] contented themselves with talking of indifferent things" (50). Aware of their own susceptibility to leakage, officer and agent engage in a cryptic conversation about pasta:

> "Do you like macaroni?" said R.
>
> "What do you mean by macaroni?" answered Ashenden. "It is like asking me if I like poetry. I like Keats and Wordsworth and Verlaine and Goethe. When you say macaroni, do you mean *spaghetti*, *tagliatelli*, *rigatoni, vermicelli*, *fettucini*, *tufali*, *farfalli*, or just macaroni?"
>
> "Macaroni," replied R., a man of few words. (49)

Far from "indifferent," this coded exchange resonates on multiple levels, compounding the relations between culinary, social, linguistic, and literary indicators of taste that must, as Joseph Litvak reminds us, be kept "in play" when we theorize sophistication (*Strange* 8). For the gruff and pragmatic R., having risen from a "shabby and commonplace" prewar existence (113), macaroni seems an appropriate dish—the hearty, no-nonsense fare of the Italian peasant. Ashenden's preference for, as it were, posher pastas indicates not only a more refined palate but

a sympathetic attunement to difference in contrast with R.'s synthetic reductionism. To put it another way, we find in this short conversation a *politics of pasta*; R.'s plain, unitalicized "macaroni" reduces the foreign and the particular to a more general—and therefore manageable—bite, while Ashenden's attention to accuracy and variation, like his discriminating taste in poetry, suggests a cosmopolitan precision at odds with the reductive jargon and generic approach of the secret service.

However, while food and its signifiers work to position cosmopolitan sophistication against the bland, simplifying outlook of the War Department, the play of these signifiers renders them just as unstable—or unpalatable—as this dichotomy itself. If macaroni is a worldly dish, it also reveals the duplicities of cosmopolitanism and worldliness manifested in the juxtaposition of Ashenden and R., who are both "worldly" in different ways, and in the epithet "worldly-wise" that so often attaches itself to the Maugham persona.[12] As Litvak points out, "the word *worldly* […] tends in two different, even opposite, directions. On the one hand, insofar as it carries a certain taint of the 'inglorious,' of the guilty or dirty secret, it means something like 'vulgar.' On the other hand, insofar as the secret is an almost inherently sexy will to power, *worldly* more glamorously means something like 'sophisticated'" (82). "Worldliness," Litvak continues, thus "oscillates tellingly between 'sophistication' and 'vulgarity'" (82). Ashenden, whose very name may disclose the guilty secret of an early homosexual attachment, is, for all his cultured *de*tachment, a conspicuous consumer of worldly fare. Likewise, just as Ashenden admits to R. that he can, in spite of his catholic tastes, eat macaroni "not only without disgust but with the eagerness of an appetite unimpaired by excess" (49)—and macaroni will indeed come into play again at a crucial moment in the episode—the British agent is simultaneously repelled by and

drawn to the Hairless Mexican, a character whose concurrent coarseness and smoothness embody the problematic of worldliness.

Using "Somerville" as his *nom de guerre*—Maugham's own codename in confidential SIS documents and thus a key disclosure that Maugham's government censors either missed or inexplicably permitted to remain in place—Ashenden accompanies the Hairless Mexican to Naples, where the two plan to intercept Constantine Andreadi, an enemy agent usually referred to, in the reductive lingo of the service, as "the Greek." The Hairless Mexican, whose true name is General Manuel Carmona, is a man of contradictions, a manicured "peacock" (61) with an "iron grip" (67), a *bon vivant* who "never [drinks] anything but champagne and brandy" (60) and reads nothing but popular "detective stories" (77). Excessively brutal and reputedly "a bit too fond of the girls," Carmona nevertheless emerges as a sexually ambiguous figure.[13] R. notes with aversion his use of "scent" (52). He is, in the parlance of our time, something of a metrosexual, but one who exerts a deadly allure:

> His yellow skin had the smoothness of a woman's and he had no eyebrows nor eyelashes; he wore a pale brown wig, rather long, and the locks were arranged in artistic disorder. This and the unwrinkled sallow face, combined with his dandified dress, gave him an appearance that was at first glance a trifle horrifying. He was repulsive and ridiculous, but you could not take your eyes from him. There was a sinister fascination in his strangeness. (56)

Against his better judgment, Ashenden "[finds] the flamboyance of this strange creature, with his scented handkerchief and his gold bracelet, very much to his *taste*" (59, my emphasis). Brandishing his "long knife of murderous aspect" (66), Carmona clearly takes excessive pleasure in violence, and it is arguably this sexualized bloodlust—this guilty and deadly pleasure—that Ashenden attempts to deny himself by retreating into high culture.

In Naples, Ashenden disengages himself from the violent aspects of the mission, first by seeking urban distractions and later by attempting to intellectualize violence through a literary

paradigm. Content to let the impulsive Hairless Mexican carry out his dirty work unchecked, Ashenden occupies himself with a bit of *flânerie*:

> For three days Ashenden led the idle life that fitted so well the fantastical, untidy and genial city. He did nothing from morning till night but wander at random, looking, not with the eye of the tourist who seeks for what ought to be seen, nor with the eye of the writer who looks for his own (seeing in a sunset a melodious phrase or in a face the inkling of a character), but with that of the tramp to whom whatever happens is absolute. He went to the museum to look at the statue of Agrippina the Younger, which he had particular reasons for remembering with affection, and took the opportunity to see once more the Titian and the Brueghel in the picture gallery. (82)

Ashenden's idleness, which evades both professional responsibility and literary productivity, culminates in a comforting mantra: "[We] must make the best of things: *facciamo una piccola combinazione* [make a small combination]" in the face of human mortality (82). For a few days, Ashenden is able to forget the mission, but his leisurely reverie comes to halt when the Hairless Mexican returns, surprising Ashenden as he is coming out of the bath. Carmona reports that he has befriended the Greek, who is traveling "under a false name" (83), and installed him in Ashenden's own hotel, where he is now sprucing up for a night on the town with Carmona himself. The assassin is in good spirits, and after arranging to contact Ashenden later in the evening, he departs on his murderous errand. While Ashenden waits for the Hairless Mexican, he once again walks the streets of Naples, but he now finds them monotonous. He returns to his room, but unable to read, his thoughts gravitate to homicide:

> What a nuisance it was, he reflected irritably, to have an imagination that conjured up pictures of things that you didn't in the least want to see! From his standpoint as a writer he had often considered murder and his mind went to that fearful description of one in *Crime and Punishment*. He did not want to think of this topic, but it forced itself upon him […]. (86)

While the Hairless Mexican actively seeks to reify the experience of the popular "thriller" by stalking and killing an assumed enemy, Ashenden passively turns to a more complex literary model in an effort to deaden the deadly act. Just as his earlier wanderings through the museums

and churches of Naples have the effect of making death into an artistic abstraction, thinking murder through Dostoevsky neutralizes the real crime by rendering it rhetorical rather than material. When his thoughts do finally turn to the literal act, the image that forces itself upon him is not so much a murder scene as a scene of seduction: "[He] asked himself how, if one had to, one would commit a murder in Naples":

> You might suggest a row in the bay, but the boatman who hired the boat would see you; it was doubtful indeed if he would let you go on the water alone; there were disreputable hotels down by the harbour where no questions were asked of persons who arrived late at night without luggage; but here again the waiter who showed you your room had the chance of a good look at you […]. (86)

Emphasizing guilt and culpability rather than physical violence, Ashenden's mental image of the crime suggests a clandestine sexual tryst, a furtive attempt to penetrate "the Greek" in a seedy hotel where "no questions" are ever asked.

Ashenden's physical and intellectual detachment from the mission—his withdrawal into art, history and literature—constitutes not so much a dereliction of duty as an ironic fulfillment of cosmopolitan recruitment. Assuming a passive role, Ashenden permits the Hairless Mexican to pursue his sadistic pleasure and so licenses the very violence he seeks to evade. Indeed, in imagining the scene of seduction, Ashenden seems to take a vicarious pleasure of his own, implying that such criminalized behavior is also "much to his taste." Shortly before learning that Carmona has, in his bloodlust, inadvertently murdered the *wrong* Greek, Ashenden accompanies the general to a late-night Neapolitan dive, which, like the more fashionable French restaurant where Ashenden dines with R., caters to cosmopolitan appetites. Keen to celebrate his successful hunt, the multilingual Carmona wastes no time in chatting up the local *ragazzas* and dancing until the food arrives:

> [The] waiter brought two heaped platefuls of macaroni and when the Mexican saw them he stopped dancing without ceremony and allowing his partner to get back to her table as she chose hurried to his meal.
>
> "I'm ravenous," he said. "And yet I ate a good dinner. Where did you dine? You're going to eat some macaroni, aren't you?"
>
> "I have no appetite," said Ashenden.
>
> But he began to eat and to his surprise found that he was hungry. (92)

On the one hand, if "macaroni" signals, as I have suggested, the sort of linguistic simplification that characterizes intelligence work—the tendency to *over*simplify that reduces all Greeks to "the Greek" and all hostiles to "the enemy"—then Ashenden's conspicuous consumption indicates that he too is unable to escape this reductive violence. On the other hand, just as the "worldly" attracts both coarse and refined sensibilities, "macaroni" also curves both ways, turning upon the eclecticism of the *macaronic*.[14] While Maugham's cosmopolitan style does not, strictly speaking, participate in the sort of vulgarization or intensive multilingual play that we typically associate with macaronic writing, his subtle prose does evince, like Giulia Lazzari's letters, a "queer mixture" of foreign tongues (109)—a simultaneous "flatness" and continental *égalité* that prompted Gore Vidal to liken Maugham's style to Esperanto[15]—and thus exemplifies a worldliness that the British secret service desires to cultivate, but always at a distance.

In this sense, the full flavor of "macaroni" emerges as both a mode of writing and a mode of performance that underwrites and undermines nationalist normativity. As Peter McNeil illustrates, the "parodic and hyperbolic air" of macaronic prose likewise characterizes the foppish figure of the "macaroni" who emerged in the eighteenth century as an embodiment of sartorial and sodomitical excess ("Doubtful" 415). Reputedly named for their partiality to pasta over beefsteak—"the symbolic roast beef of England, which," McNeil suggests, "in discourse represented nationalism rather than internationalism" ("Macaroni" 374)—the macaronies signify a subculture of gamblers and aesthetes freshly back from a Grand Tour of the continent, the so-

called "Maccaroni [*sic*] club" that Horace Walpole described as "composed of all the travelled young men who wear long curls and spying-glasses" (qtd. in McNeil, "Macaroni" 375). The image of the sophisticated and bemonocled man-about-town, the isolated observer of (and occasional participant in) sociopolitical intrigues, seems a fitting portrait of the Maugham persona who, like Ashenden, prowls the borderland between culture and criminality. As Ashenden watches the dancing Carmona, himself a dangerous dandy of the macaroni mold, the agent takes a guilty pleasure in the spectacle: "Sinister and grotesque though [Carmona] was, there was in him now a feline elegance, even something of beauty, and you felt a secret, shameful fascination. To Ashenden he suggested one of those sculptures of the pre-Aztec hewers of stone, in which there is barbarism and vitality, something terrible and cruel, and yet withal a brooding and significant loveliness" (93). Both anthropological and erotic, the spy's gaze unearths a dirty secret: he too is susceptible to the cut of the killer, to the breach that implicates cosmopolitanism in violence and violation.

Just as "macaroni" comes to signify an individual who is unable to "keep a secret,"[16] *Ashenden* may be said to reinforce a long-standing homophobic paranoia and even to anticipate a Cold War ideology that conflates homosexual desire with what Allan Hepburn has called the queer spy's "alleged susceptibility to leaking" (188)—a belief bolstered by the revelation of the notorious Cambridge spy ring, and according to which Maugham's own infringement of the Official Secrets Act would seem oddly consistent. From this vantage point, the queer spy emerges as the quintessential "loose end." In a passing reference to *Ashenden*, Hepburn contends that Maugham's portrayal of homosexuals and women throughout his spy stories indicates his adherence to generic rules and codes that guarantee "[the] bisexual is a traitor," "[the] woman is a dupe," and so on (68). However, just as these generic codes ultimately misfire

or founder, as I have suggested, on the "raw material" of experience—after all, even Giulia Lazzari manages to dupe the British agent—the queer spy's excesses trouble any productive recruitment of cosmopolitanism as a means of ensuring safety and justice. If, as Hepburn himself avers, sexuality "amplifies instabilities already present within political commitments" (190), the queer spy's unproductivity in *Ashenden* marks the scandalous limit of recruitment; he refuses to affirm any "political commitment" whatsoever.

"Failure," R. rightly observes, "has a good many synonyms" (60). Among these synonyms, "stoppage" and "breakdown" gesture toward *désoeuvrement*, an inoperativeness that effectively short-circuits not only the dialectic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, but also that of literature and historiography—the relation between the literariness of historical experience, the authentication and reification of generic codes, and the "truth" of the fiction, the open secret that necessitates the Official Secrets Act. Consequently, Maugham's queer decision to figure failure through materiality and excess, his revelation of the operative's inability to operate, inspires a concerted effort on the part of historians, critics, and even his own literary inheritors to dialectically reactivate both Maugham and *Ashenden* by rendering cosmopolitanism itself as a leak that must be retroactively *contained*.

Tying Up Loose Ends

While Ashenden derives little "intelligence" from his tenure with the Secret Intelligence Service, he does come to a key realization: as a spy, he is also *spied upon*, not just by the enemy, but by his own controllers in the War Office. Attempting to keep himself entertained while leading the "orderly and monotonous" existence of a secret agent in Geneva (99), Ashenden cultivates dangerous relationships with other European expatriates—such the witty and flirtatious

Baroness de Higgins, who may or may not be an Austrian agent—resulting in "a sharp note from R.": "[Ashenden] was intrigued to discover, what he had not known before, that there was someone in Geneva part of whose duties at all events was to keep an eye on him" (100). Like his admiration for the "romantic and attractive" Chandra Lal (107), an insurgent who is simply "aiming at freedom for his country" (115), Ashenden's writerly interest in character occasions both a susceptibility to distraction and a threatening *sympathy* at odds with his work as a British agent. In short, his ability to identify with the "enemy" renders him suspect—a potential double agent—and it is this double agency that makes Maugham's own ostensibly harmless "entertainment" into a security liability that necessitates the writer's surveillance and rehabilitation, his secondary "recruitment" carried out through a revisionary conversion of passivity into action, failure into success, and cosmopolitanism into patriotism.

Nowhere are Maugham's sympathies more suspect than with respect to his Russian mission in 1917 and his subsequent treatment of those events in the final section of *Ashenden*. Traveling once again under the pretext of "literary purposes" (Maugham qtd. in Calder 276), Maugham's mission was to report on the revolution to both London and Washington and to do everything possible to keep Russia in the war and Lenin out of power. "The reader," Maugham dryly observes in his 1941 preface to *Ashenden*, "will know that my efforts did not meet with success" (4). Escaping the Bolshevik takeover by a matter of days, Maugham left Russia with Petrograd well on its way to becoming Leningrad. Not surprisingly, Ashenden's experiences in Petrograd culminate in a similarly abortive attempt to prevent the country from slipping into revolutionary chaos. While the agent does manage to meet with the interim government and to foster a small network of inside sources, his efforts are futile, and the novel ends with Ashenden fleeing for his life. Perhaps as an attempt to represent formally the contentual disappointment of

his mission, Maugham offers little action in the Russian section of his novel, focusing instead on a series of character studies with little bearing on the great events that serve as their background. Ashenden befriends an American businessman, Mr. Harrington, a self-styled "highbrow" (238) whose *naïveté* leads to tragedy. At the same time, the spy manages to renew his acquaintance with an old flame, Anastasia Alexandrovna Leonidov, with whom he shares a passion for Russian culture, realizing in doing so "that he had not loved her, but Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky and Bakst" (258). Together, these two characters represent an "intelligentsia" (248) who are as ill-prepared to intervene in world affairs as the intelligence agent himself. Ultimately, like the British agent's scandalous preference for Russian literature, Maugham's investment in character over event—art over history—reveals that "literary purposes" are a problematic cover indeed for a spy charged with securing an Allied victory.

While in Maugham's version of events the Russian mission is literally a mission impossible, Maugham scholars and espionage historians have taken issue with what they consider to be the writer's misleading representation of the operation as a total failure, and their correctives often work to reaffirm Maugham's nationalism and the aesthetic ideology of recruitment. Cold War commentators stress that Maugham's mission was actually less ambitious than he let on and, subsequently, less of a disaster. As Robert Lorin Calder reveals in *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* (1972), Sir William Wiseman, Maugham's controller for the Russian mission, set fairly realistic goals for his agents, emphasizing propaganda over direct intervention; in a confidential SIS report, Wiseman wrote that "[no] attempt was to be made to support any reactionary movement, but it was thought it might be possible, to some extent, to 'guide the storm', and to expose the German political intrigues in Russia" (qtd. in Calder 286). In a later article, "'Nothing So Becomes a Man': Maugham in

Peace and at War" (1985), Calder argues that, although critical of "jingoism and flag-waving," the writer's "attitude to patriotism was neither contradictory not confused" (30), and his writerly "ability to understand people's characters" made him an effectual propagandist in both world wars (27). More recently, Keith Jeffery's *The Secret History of MI6* (2010), the only "official" account of the Secret Intelligence Service, confirms Calder's earlier assessment. Unlike Ashenden, who arrives in Petrograd inauspiciously armed with "but a few words of Russian" (*Ashenden* 228), Maugham, Jeffery points out, "spoke Russian and could use his existing good cover as a writer and journalist" quite effectively (Jeffery 118). Charged with nothing so grand as "[preventing] the Bolshevik revolution" (*Ashenden* 4), Maugham successfully monitored Alexander Kerensky's provisional government and, using the codename "Somerville," sent reports on Russian morale and the potential for propaganda. Despite Maugham's characterization of events, Jeffery suggests that the information he supplied on the weakness of the provisional government and the growing strength of the Bolsheviks was vitally useful to both Britain and the United States (Jeffery 118).

If Maugham was generally successful in his mission, historians ask, why then would he choose to emphasize failure in *Ashenden*? In "W. Somerset Maugham: Anglo-American Agent in Revolutionary Russia" (1976), Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones argues that Maugham's simultaneous hyperbolization and condemnation of his official duties suggest bitterness over his role as a spy: "It is possible," Jeffreys-Jones writes, "that Maugham found the practical job of the secret agent to be distasteful compared with the artistic tasks of the dramatist and novelist, and that to explain his distaste and to highlight his associated sense of failure, he exaggerated the achievements which were expected of him as an agent" (96). However, it would seem an instance of the biographical fallacy to argue, like Jeffreys-Jones, that Maugham's representation is purposefully

deceptive, even "licentious" (96). Indeed, to interrogate the "accuracy" of *Ashenden* is to adopt the perspective of the security state whose ideology of official secrecy shelters literature *as* history and vice versa as a way of extending itself into cultural spheres that have little bearing on national defense. More likely, I would contend, is that Maugham's postwar disillusionment, so characteristic of the age, occasioned a reflective indictment of conscripting literary sensibility into the service of the state.

A keen student of the psychology of futility, Maugham found an ally in the writers of prerevolutionary Russia. In his *Writer's Notebook*, Maugham's entries for the period covering his 1917 mission to Russia begin, not with observations of Russian politics and morale, but with a meditation on the contrasts between English, French, and Russian literature:

> Russia. I have been led to an interest in Russia for pretty well the same reasons as most of my contemporaries. The obvious one was Russian fiction. Tolstoi and Turgenev, but chiefly Dostoievsky, offered an emotion that was different from any offered by the novels of other countries. They made the greatest novels of Western Europe look artificial. Their novelty made me unfair to Thackeray, Dickens and Trollope, with their conventional morality; and even the great writers of France, Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert, in comparison seemed formal and a little frigid. The life they portrayed, these English and French novelists, was familiar; and I, like others of my generation, was tired of it. They described a society that was policed. Its thoughts had been thought too often. Its emotions, even when extravagant, were extravagant within ordered limits. [*Sic*] (145-6)[17]

In *Ashenden*, Maugham's own strategy for evading these "policed" and "conventional" sensibilities is arguably to focus on the trivialities of individual character, the raw ambiguity of the mundane, rather than carrying out a direct politico-historical commentary. In doing so, Maugham invites an affective and potentially subversive response to the suspension of "agency" in its multiform senses. Maugham's remarks on Chekhov, an author with whom he felt a certain affinity, suggest a clandestine liaison between writer and reader: "There is no obvious cleverness in [Chekhov's stories] and you might think that anyone could write them, but for the fact that

nobody does. The author has had an emotion and he is able so to put it into words that you receive it in your turn. You become his *collaborator*" (151, my emphasis). Just as every recipient is, under the terms of the Official Secrets Act, a collaborator *de jure*,[18] the reader of *Ashenden* participates in a literary effect that encourages sympathy not just with the "enemy," but with the spy *manqué* who is powerless to prevent violence.

Ashenden ends on a note of carnage that oddly encapsulates Maugham's cosmopolitan style, which sustains a characteristically modernist interest in the mundane and trivial while refusing to elevate those elements to heroic proportions. Ashenden's writerly fascination with the figure of the "bore" leads him to foster an acquaintance with the tedious Mr. Harrington, an American businessman whose contacts in Petrograd may, the agent suspects, prove useful in keeping tabs on the provisional government. However, like his conventional and superficial admiration for Victorian novelists, Harrington's shallowness prevents him from being of any use to Ashenden. Indeed, Harrington seems blissfully unaware of the precarious situation in Petrograd, and he is far more invested in keeping up his natty appearance: "It amused Ashenden to see the unconcern with which Mr. Harrington wandered through this turmoil. History was in the making and Mr. Harrington minded his own business" (260). This obliviousness turns to tragedy on the eve of the Bolshevik takeover when Harrington insists on collecting his laundry from the cleaner's before fleeing the chaotic capital. When Harrington fails to return, Ashenden goes in search of him:

> A number of windows had been broken by the wild shooting. It was quite empty. You could see where the people had scattered, for strewn about were articles they had dropped in their haste, books, a man's hat, a lady's bag with a basket. [….] A little way on two men had fallen together. They were dead too. The wounded, one supposed, had managed to drag themselves away or their friends had carried them. Then they found Mr. Harrington. His derby had rolled in the gutter. He lay on his face, in a pool of blood, his bald head, with its prominent bones, very white; his neat black coat smeared and muddy.

> But his hand was clenched tight on the parcel that contained four shirts, two union suits, a pair of pyjamas and four collars. Mr. Harrington had not let his washing go. (274)

Harrington's demise, arising as it does from a deadly fixation on the quotidian, dramatizes the double agency of *worldliness* as both refined sophistication and mundane preoccupation. But Harrington's obsession with the trivial also finds a telling parallel in Maugham's own focus, throughout *Ashenden*, on the minor and the monotonous at the expense of "history." Anthony Curtis observes that "[for] Maugham the psychology of a bore was always more important than the rationale behind a revolution" (110). Like Maugham, Ashenden cultivates the dullard, who is often identical with the "highbrow," as an object of inquiry: "It may be that here he was but indulging the professional instinct that was seldom dormant in him; they, his raw material, did not bore him any more than fossils bore the geologist" (*Ashenden* 98). In the case of Harrington, the bore comes to represent that aspect of "raw material" that refuses involvement or conscription within an historically accurate and ideologically determinate narrative.

"There is a certain elegance in wasting time," Ashenden tells Harrington at one point. "Any fool can waste money, but when you waste time you waste what is priceless" (234-5). In some sense, this strikes us as an apt description of both Ashenden's espionage career and Maugham's cosmopolitan style. Like the Swiss and Italian episodes, the Russian section reveals very little about war, revolution, politics, or intrigue—an absence of historical insight, of inside information, that *Ashenden*'s first reviewers found disappointing. Other contemporary narratives written by former agents were, perhaps, more commercially successful because of their documentary effect. When R. H. Bruce Lockhart, Maugham's friend and fellow agent in Petrograd, published his bestselling *Memoirs of a British Agent* (1932), the press lauded his "striking vignettes of the Russian revolutionary leaders" and telling portrayals of "historic events

in the making" (qtd. in Lockhart xii). In contrast, *Ashenden* offers few images of "history from the inside."

All the same, Maugham's literary successors of the so-called "ironic" school of spy fiction tend to stress the groundbreaking "realism" of his spy stories, not as a measure of historical accuracy, but as an honest depiction of the secret agent's impotence. Eric Ambler avers that *Ashenden* is "the first fictional work on the subject [the life of a secret agent] by a writer of stature with first-hand knowledge of what he is writing about" (qtd. in Woods 55). Ambler's *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1939),[19] a novel in which a writer of detective fictions investigates the life of an international criminal in an ultimately futile attempt to come to terms with the darker side of human nature, owes much to Maugham's critique of the limitations of both popular fiction and literary sensibility in general. A more recent admirer, John le Carré, notes that "Maugham was the first person to write about espionage in a mood of disenchantment and almost prosaic reality" (qtd. in Hastings 228). For Ambler and le Carré, Maugham's disenchanted take on the shadowy world of espionage exposes the dirty laundry of the intelligence community, the chronic loose ends that threaten to unravel the romanticism of spying.

More politically-invested readers, however, have regarded *Ashenden* and its preoccupations as a telling reflection upon British culture in general—often in radically different ways. Maugham was fond of pointing out that Joseph Goebbels, misconstruing one of the Ashenden stories as "a literal statement of recent facts," had reportedly used it in a radio address "as an example of British cynicism and brutality" (*Ashenden* 6).[20] Conversely, while Maugham's Nazi readership took *Ashenden* to be an artifact of a corrupt and decadent culture, his Soviet critics[21] read his spy stories as a crypto-Marxist condemnation of that very decadence:

"In June [1962]," Ted Morgan writes, "Maugham was rehabilitated in the Soviet Union. An article in the *Soviet Review* said that far from being a bourgeois reactionary, his work showed hatred and contempt for the bourgeoisie" (Morgan 603). As Hastings points out, *Ashenden* even "[inspired] a study of British spy fiction on the part of Soviet military intelligence: as its author remarked, 'a strange outcome for a series of tales that were written *merely* to entertain'" (230).

Particularly in light of the potentially radical sympathies in *Ashenden*, many of Maugham's Cold War inheritors endeavored to contain the ambiguities of both text and writer through various strategies of critical and literary recuperation. Perhaps the most imaginative "re-recruitment" of Maugham, and one that works very much against any leftist rehabilitation, is that carried out by Maugham's friend and admirer, Ian Fleming. Ashenden is often credited as one of the inspirations for James Bond, just as Fleming's M. owes something to Maugham's R. But while Maugham, as we have seen, renders suspect the positive correlation between literary activity (reading and writing) and espionage work, Fleming privileges the Book as an essential weapon in the spy's arsenal. Famously, *From Russia with Love* (1957) places the hero in a position in which he must read to survive. Traveling under the name of "Somerset"—arguably an allusion to both Somerset Maugham and his codename "Somerville"[22]—Bond eventually finds himself at the mercy of Red Grant, a KGB assassin whose weapon of choice is a gun disguised as a copy of *War and Peace*. Luckily, Bond is a bibliophile, and he is able to slip a gunmetal cigarette case into his copy of none other than Eric Ambler's *The Mask of Dimitrios* and place it over his heart. Needless to say, the book blocks the bullet, and after the ensuing scuffle, Bond is able to execute Grant with his own weapon—death by Tolstoy.

Jeanne Bedell suggests that when spy novelists employ "literary references and allusions [to other espionage writers and spy stories]" they "reinforce the concept of a tradition in the

genre, offer a sometimes playfully ironic commentary on our assumptions about espionage fiction, and enable authors to juxtapose past and present within one work" (44). But in Fleming's novel there is clearly more at play than this "playfully ironic" self-awareness. The fact that "Mr. Somerset" owes his survival to Ambler's decidedly leftist spy novel reveals a complex intertextual relationship between the "heroic" and "ironic" schools of espionage fiction. In taking the ironic Maugham and Ambler into his novel and making them the instrument of a heroic victory over communism, Fleming attempts to incorporate that subversive irony, absorb it, and dialectically defuse it. Moreover, as the presence of Tolstoy suggests, Fleming's hyperbolic violence has the force of a nationalistic allegory. In *From Russia with Love*, the Cold War is literally fought out as a battle of books, with Britain successfully turning Russian literature—a "letter" from Russia, but not with love—against itself, the ultimate coup of literary counterintelligence. Such scenes have been characteristic of popular espionage fiction since its inception, and they suggest that the tradition being reinforced is not simply that of the British spy novel but the English literary tradition as a whole. When the hyper-masculine English agent Bond appropriates the name of the homosexual and Russophilic Maugham, he allegorizes the stabilization and normativization of a tradition that, for the author of *Ashenden*, lay as frail and voiceless as the emaciated Miss King.

While Fleming's fictional recruitment is unique, Maugham's critics arguably carry out a similar rehabilitation of Maugham, the British secret service, and the Official Secrets Act by making the question of their relative effectiveness one and the same. Noting Maugham's preoccupation with "bores" and minor characters, Anthony Curtis conjectures that "[maybe] among the fourteen unpublished Ashenden stories [that Maugham incinerated] there was a masterpiece of historical insight making use of this same material" (110). Curtis's hypothesis—

like Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones's contention that we should ignore Maugham's "self-imposed historical oblivion" (101) and recognize his contribution to the war effort (106)—exemplifies a trend in Maughamian criticism dominant throughout the Cold War and continuing into the twenty-first century, a line of reasoning in which the recuperation of Maugham as a writer and agent necessitates a recuperation of espionage and secrecy in general. To put it another way, what we find in recent Maughamian biography and criticism is that arguments in favor of Maugham's canonicity as a "great writer," a "major author," a "genius," and so forth, become rhetorically bound up with positive evaluations of his intelligence career and the need for censorship. In "How Good Was Maugham?" (2004), Anthony Daniels suggests that it was, in fact, Maugham's "need for personal concealment" that "gave him an uncanny ability to understand and sympathize with the hidden passions of the heart" (21) and that the writer's "spell as a British spy in Petrograd," far from being an exercise in futility, "taught him about politics at the very highest level of world significance" (19). Similarly, Maugham's most recent biographer, Selina Hastings, recasts Maugham's closeted homosexuality as the proper training for leading a successful double life: "Long a master of disguise, happiest when he could remain undercover, Maugham had no difficulty with the prospect of playing a part; a diffident man, he always preferred listening to talking, and his fascination with other people's lives had developed in him an unusual level of perception" (191). "His natural affinity for intelligence work," Hastings continues, "was revealed to a wider public" with the publication of *Ashenden*—a curious statement indeed about a text in which the cosmopolitan agent, recruited for the very qualities that Hastings emphasizes, consistently fails to perform. If *Ashenden*, as I have argued, problematizes the nature of "violation" under the terms of the Official Secrets Act, thereby calling into question the facticity and legitimacy of the secret, then any attempt to reassert

Ashenden's mimetic revelation would also serve as an affirmation of official secrecy and the law that enforces it. From this point of view, *Ashenden*'s adoption as unofficial "required reading" for SIS recruits seems slightly less odd. What better way to legitimize the Official Secrets Act—and simultaneously defuse *Ashenden*'s irony and critical force—than by appropriating the violating text as instructive in its disclosure?

The literal and figural recruitments, recuperations, and cover-ups surrounding Somerset Maugham and his spy novel indicate the spectral presence and very palpable influence of the militant aesthetic state. On the one hand, intelligence communities work to weaponize the literary act and assign writers and texts a role in defending the realm. On the other hand, this weaponization is hazardous. John le Carré's contention that writers are "nothing if not traitors" and that the intelligence community has learned this "the hard way" (qtd. in Lathrop 151) seems an apt history of spyography and its discontents. But this is only part of the story. For we discover in *Ashenden*'s critical legacy a repeated attempt to reinsert Maugham into a totalizing dialectic of literature and history, to rearm the book and re-turn the writer in an effort to police a phantom state.

NOTES

[1] When war was declared, Maugham was already middle-aged, but he felt obligated to do his bit for king and country. With *Of Human Bondage* (1915) in the final stages of publication, Maugham wrote to none other than Churchill himself, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty, requesting to be made useful (Morgan 186). Maugham rejected Churchill's offer of a Whitehall office job and opted instead for the Red Cross. In 1915, after a stint working in an ambulance unit in France and Belgium, the writer returned to England and, finding no other occupation, arranged to meet with Captain John Wallinger, the chief of military intelligence in France and Switzerland for what was then called MI1(C), later known as the Secret Intelligence Service or MI6. Aware that Maugham's creativity and knowledge of French and German could be useful in the field, Wallinger suggested that Maugham use his profession as a writer as a cover for carrying out intelligence operations on the continent (Morgan 199). Maugham traveled to Geneva in the autumn of 1915 to replace another agent who had suffered a nervous breakdown—a rather inauspicious beginning for a career in the secret service. Switzerland was, at that time, "a kind of intelligence clearing-house where spies from every belligerent power engaged in an espionage free-for-all" (Jeffery 90). In spite of this intriguing milieu, Maugham's work in Geneva seems to have been fairly routine—running agents and writing interminable reports—though he occasionally carried out minor operations himself. Maugham stayed in Switzerland for a year, and after traveling to America to oversee the production of two plays and undertaking a South Seas voyage that would provide him with material for *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), Maugham returned to the service as "chief agent" in a doomed Anglo-American operation in Petrograd in 1917 (Jeffreys-Jones 90). Escaping the Bolshevik takeover by a matter of days, Maugham spent the remainder of the war battling tuberculosis in a Scottish sanatorium.

[2] Under section 2 ("Wrongful communication, &c. of information") of the 1911 Act, anyone "who holds or has held office under His Majesty" may be held criminally liable for disclosing confidential information to anyone "other than a person to whom he is authorised to communicate it." The exact date of this conversation, reported by Maugham's personal secretary Alan Searle, is unknown. The lack of documentation is, however, strangely appropriate given the circumstances. As David Williams observes, "[experience] has shown that the enforcement of secrecy must often be achieved in secret" (98).

[3] The belief in a correspondence between Maugham and his narrators is not limited to intelligence agency "talent scouts." In what is arguably the first substantial critical assessment of Maugham, *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* (1972), Robert Calder reproduces a similar logic, arguing that "[the] cosmopolitanism of the Maugham narrator is an engaging quality, and in most respects it is a sincere reflection of the author's personality" (214).

[4] Maugham occasionally introduced himself as "Willie Ashenden" (Archer 10), a name that he would use again in his fiction, most notably in *Cakes and Ale* (1930), Maugham's most infamous roman à clef.

[5] This reading of Maugham's preface is reinforced by the "Gustav" episode, in which Ashenden travels to Basel to visit a Swiss spy working for Britain. The spy's reports are so well-written that they "[serve] as models to the other spies in this particular section of the secret service" (142). The only problem with them, as Ashenden discovers, is that they are not the product of espionage at all. Rather, they are the product of imagination and informed guesswork. Instead of making dangerous trips into enemy territory to gather material, Gustav stays in Switzerland and manufactures intelligence: "I had the chance of earning money without difficulty. [….] I learned what I could from the other travellers, I kept my ears open in restaurants and beer-cellars, and I read the German papers. I got a lot of amusement out of sending you reports and letters" (145). "The quality of Gustav's reports," Jeanne Bedell rightly observes, "based on beer-hall gossip and careful reading of German newspapers, was due to his skill as a *writer*, to his ability to construct a coherent narrative and to arrange his material in a predetermined pattern rather than allowing the facts to dictate it" (42). What Bedell fails to acknowledge is that this method of producing "intelligence" is strikingly similar to the method Maugham discusses in his preface. Insofar as these reports constitute "disinformation," they serve as a complex metaphor for *Ashenden* itself, the fictionalized report of a British agent.

[6] In using this term, I am indebted to Joseph Litvak's notion of a "contest of sophistications," signifying the cultural arena in which a plurality of sophistications vie with one another and often "derive their power precisely from their having adopted the unfashionable garb of *anti*sophistication" (*Strange* 5).

[7] See Spencer Curtis Brown's "Personal Note by the Literary Executor to the Late W. Somerset Maugham" in Morgan (vii-viii).

[8] The term comes from Maugham's secretary, Alan Searle, who assisted the elderly writer on some of these occasions. "Piles of letters were thrown in," according to Morgan, "as well as some of Maugham's manuscripts. Searle—horrified to see so much valuable material go up in smoke—tried to rescue choice items. Coming down to breakfast after a bonfire night, Maugham would rub his hands and tell Searle: 'That was a good night's work. Now we'll burn everything you've hidden under the sofa'" (xiv).

[9] Significantly, Maugham's working title for *Of Human Bondage* was "Beauty from Ashes," which Hastings suggests is a misquotation of Isaiah 6: "to give unto them beauty for ashes" (152). However, "beauty *from* ashes" seems appropriate to Philip Carey's turn from bitterness to an existential acceptance of the human condition.

[10] In Alfred Hitchcock's *Secret Agent* (1936), a film roughly based on Maugham's spy stories, an American businessman (played by Robert Young) mispronounces Ashenden's name as "Ash-in-can," implying not only waste but a residue peculiar to the cinema, that of highly inflammable celluloid in a film canister. The fact that Young's character turns out to be a German agent compounds both Ashenden's professional insecurity and the double agency of cinema, a medium whose formal and technical qualities have the potential to resist, or render suspect, mimetic ideology. Ashes themselves suggest what Tom Cohen, in his deconstructive analysis of Hitchcock's film, refers to as *Secret Agent's* "secret agency"—a material "mnemonic trace, neither living nor dead, void of semantic content yet that on which all switchboard relays or translation or even visibility (reading) seems to rest" ("Political" 116). Hitchcock's employment of "ash" as a reflection upon his medium arguably parallels Maugham's own concern with the problematic of reading and writing. Indeed, I would suggest that Maugham anticipates Hitchcock's (and Cohen's) attentiveness to materiality in the trope of "raw material"—the random, lived experience that both serves as the basis for representation and resists or overflows inscription into strategic patterns.

[11] These are common in-house monikers for spy agencies and their dependents in the Anglo-American intelligence community. While Maugham was working for SIS, nations were themselves coded as conglomerates in official reports: "Eyre & Co." (the British government), "Curtis Co." (the U.S. government), "Waring & Co." (the Russian government), and so on. See Calder, *Quest* 277.

[12] See, for example, Robert Calder's description of the Maughamian persona as "the worldly-wise cosmopolitan" in *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* (213). Maintaining the assumed correlation between Maugham and his narrator, Calder goes on to suggest that the cosmopolitan persona's "failing […] is also that of the author himself: that is, that frequently its worldliness and *savoir-faire* tend to be clever and glib, rather than deeply understood and fully experienced" (214).

[13] Ashenden suspects his amorous *braggadocio* might be a ruse: "Did the Hairless Mexican really believe that he was irresistible [to women]," Ashenden wonders, "or was he merely a blatant liar?" (72). As Calder observes, Maugham's autobiographical writings likewise contain a plethora of questionable "protestations of many healthy heterosexual relationships" (*Quest* 296). Always aware of his public—and posthumous—image, Maugham seems to have attempted, like his Hairless Mexican, to project a heterosexual persona to the point of absurdity.

[14] I am grateful to Joseph Litvak for pointing out the "macaronic" implications in "macaroni."

[15] See Gore Vidal's review, "Maugham's Half and Half" (n. pag.).

[16] Such is the consensus of *The Macaroni Jester, and Pantheon of Wit* (c.1773), quoted in McNeil, "Doubtful" 433.

[17] Little is said in *A Writer's Notebook* concerning Maugham's "secret mission." This may be due less to editorial omissions than to the fact that Maugham most likely kept any mention of his clandestine activities out of the notebook. He did, however, include a brief sketch of a "Secret Agent" just after this meditation on literature. The agent is grotesque and stocky; he walks with "a curious gait, somewhat like a gorilla's" (146). In spite or because of his monstrosity, his inhumanity, "[he] took an artist's delight in the tortuous ways of his service," "had an heroic disregard for human life," and "seemed to have but one passion in life, if you omit an extreme desire for good cigars, and that was his patriotism" (147). While this portrait may have been based on a real individual whom Maugham came across in his work, this sinister agent may also be a projection of Maugham's changing perceptions of espionage, heroism, and patriotism.

[18] Section 2(2) of the Official Secrets Act of 1911 criminalizes the receipt of controlled information and imposes a penalty unless the recipient "proves that the communication […] was contrary to his desire."

[19] Published in the United States as *A Coffin for Dimitrios*.

[20] While researching his biography of Maugham, Jeffrey Meyers ascertained that there was no such reference in any of the Nazi Propaganda Minister's wartime radio speeches. Nevertheless, Goebbels "was familiar with Maugham's work, mentioned him several times in his diaries, and concluded: 'Through Maugham you can get to know the profound depravity of English society'" ("In Search of Maugham" 70).

[21] For a survey of Soviet criticism of Maugham and his work, see Maryna Komolova's "Bridging the Abyss: William Somerset Maugham in the USSR."

[22] As John Pearson observes, Fleming was fond of using the names of friends and associates for characters in the Bond novels—a "little habit of amusing himself" that his victims did not always take kindly to (254). On one occasion, Fleming used the nickname of his wife's cousin, Lord Arran, for a dislikable character, and the writer was forced to change the name in later editions. Just as libel law shares certain affinities with the Official Secrets Act, the spy novel is never far from the roman à clef.

CHAPTER TWO

"A Gross Breach":

Secrecy and Farce in Compton Mackenzie's *Greek Memories* and *Water on the Brain*

> The general spirit of bureaucracy is the *official secret*, the mystery….
> —Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (1843)

> Secrecy is as essential to Intelligence as vestments and incense to a Mass, or darkness to a Spiritualist séance, and must at all costs be maintained, quite irrespective of whether or not it serves any purpose.
> —Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Infernal Grove* (1974)

On 12 January 1933, Edward Montague Compton Mackenzie (later Sir Compton Mackenzie)[1]—author, broadcaster, and recently-elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University—stepped into the infamous dock of the Old Bailey to stand trial for violations under the Official Secrets Act following the publication of his third volume of war memoirs, *Greek Memories* (1932).[2] The charges were as follows: Mackenzie, a former officer in the wartime Secret Intelligence Service, had quoted verbatim from official documents and telegrams; he had disclosed the names of sixteen agents who might still be employed (or could be employed again) by SIS; he had revealed SIS's use of passport control offices for the purposes of espionage; and, most scandalously, he had made public not only the name of the late Captain Sir Mansfield Cumming, the first chief of SIS, but also the secret initial "C" used as a cipher by Cumming and his successors to this day (Linklater 249). Given the ostensibly serious nature of Mackenzie's crimes, the attorney general himself, Sir Thomas Inskip, led the prosecution, and the gallery that day was full of what Mackenzie would later describe as "figures in long black overcoats" (*My Life and Times 7* 96),[3] the presidium of Britain's secret intelligence community, including the chief of MI5 himself, Major-General Sir Vernon Kell, known as "K." These officers constituted a privileged audience; under the provisions of the 1920 Official Secrets Act, the trial was held *in*

camera, barring both press and public from the proceedings. Nevertheless, because of the high-profile nature of the trial and the accused, London was ablaze with speculation. Many agreed with the *Times* that Mackenzie was being made an example of and that his trial was "a warning to those with more important secrets" (qtd. in Linklater 252). Pressured to plead guilty, Mackenzie escaped a prison sentence and was fined £100 plus costs. But the message to the public was clear: those responsible for the nation's security were also those most likely to compromise it—not out of any treasonous intent, but simply out of an impulse to *write*.

Less than a year later, Mackenzie would take his revenge on the lords of officialdom with the publication of *Water on the Brain* (1933), a farcical spy yarn exposing the petty rivalries and chronic misunderstandings that hamper the British intelligence community's ability to intelligently defend of the realm. While careful to avoid further prosecution—Mackenzie's strategy ensured that another trial would effectively constitute a public admission of the secret service's own incompetence—the former spy portrays the service as a sprawling bureaucracy in which secrecy becomes its own *raison d'être* and, paradoxically, the most effective barrier against preventing leaks. In doing so, Mackenzie discloses the inner workings of the militant aesthetic state, which collapses the divide between fact and fiction, history and literature, through its simultaneous cultivation and condemnation of "literary agents," and which sacrifices security in the interests of formalism. From this perspective, both *Greek Memories* and *Water on the Brain* may be said to collude in a distinctly modernist project, a critique of cultural and political impotencies occasioned by a rigid adherence to tradition.

To characterize Mackenzie as a modernist, however, is to go against the prevailing view of the writer as a modernist manqué whose career was radically interrupted by the First World War. Having been, in the words of his biographer, Andro Linklater, "successively poet,

preacher, novelist, and spy" (xii), Mackenzie was a man of parts and contradictions. Hailing from a well-known acting family of Scottish descent, Mackenzie was born in 1883 while the Compton Comedy Company was on tour in West Hartlepool in North East England, and he was christened with both his father's name, Edward Mackenzie, and the family stage name, Compton (6). With strong Jacobite ties on his father's side and an American heritage on his mother's side, Mackenzie's sense of cultural and geographical displacement was further exacerbated by a vagabond childhood in the company of itinerant thespians. Educated at St. Paul's School in London, Mackenzie took an early interest in Anglo Catholicism (he would later convert to Roman Catholicism in 1914) and toyed with the idea of becoming a clergyman before turning to writing verse. After deciding that neither poetry nor the priesthood were to be his vocation, Mackenzie briefly served in the 1st Hertfordshire Volunteer Battalion before matriculating into Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1901 to study modern history. Though he shunned the idea of becoming a scholar, Mackenzie was a popular student, bibliophile, aesthete, and Oxford "Idol." His eclectic childhood, adolescence, and student years—his initiation into the "secret world" of imagination (29)—would serve as the basis for his early novels, particularly the highly-successful *Sinister Street* (1913-14), upon whose publication Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) would group Mackenzie with D. H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound as one of the most talented young writers of the day (129), and Henry James would hail him as "by far the most promising novelist of his generation" (qtd. in Linklater xii).

With the coming of war in 1914, Mackenzie, like many young writers, felt impelled to prove that he was not only a man of letters but a man of action. And like Somerset Maugham—Mackenzie's acquaintance on the island of Capri, where both had been living the life of the "cosmopolitan expatriate" (220)—his creativity, worldliness, and savoir-faire made him a natural

candidate for intelligence work. In April 1915, Mackenzie received a letter from an old Oxford friend, Orlo Williams, who was then serving with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force under General Sir Ian Hamilton. Observing that Hamilton was an admirer of *Sinister Street*, Williams convinced the general that Mackenzie would prove useful in the upcoming Dardanelles Campaign, the imminent invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula, which—Williams assured Mackenzie—would no doubt prove "romantic to a degree" (qtd. in Linklater 142). Other friends, however, were less sanguine. Exemplifying an almost mystical belief in the national importance of writers, Bernard Walke warned him that "there won't be another Compton Mackenzie, and the world won't thank you if you break up your health and are unable to help reconstruct things after the war" (qtd. in Linklater 145). The literary community was equally concerned; Henry James himself wrote Mackenzie, advising him to "keep the Muse hovering" and to "go on making all the fine life you can against the all that's being unmade [*sic*]" (qtd. in Linklater 145). Nevertheless, after quickly securing a commission as a lieutenant in the Royal Marines, Mackenzie reported for duty in May 1915.

General Hamilton, who saw no problem in talking over the Gallipoli campaign with "a newly-arrived author disguised as a marine" (147), apparently had his own misgivings about jeopardizing the literary future of Britain. The poet Rupert Brooke had already succumbed to sunstroke en route to Gallipoli, and as the campaign turned to disaster, Hamilton decided that Britain could not afford to lose another author (150). Mackenzie, who had demonstrated an aptitude for counterintelligence work, was eventually transferred to Athens, where the unstable political environment of neutral Greece would prove fertile ground for his unusual talents. Codenamed "Z," Mackenzie worked in 1916 as Military Control Officer in charge of the counterintelligence section of SIS in Athens and, unlike Somerset Maugham, achieved a great

deal of success through unorthodox means. After relocating to the island of Syra, Mackenzie, by early 1917, had become the Director of Aegean Intelligence (168). For his services, Mackenzie would end the war decorated by both France and Serbia and awarded the Order of the Redeemer by Greece, and he would eventually be made OBE by the British government in March 1919 (172).

By that time, Captain Z had left behind his life of "letters" and returned to a life of letters. Though prolific, Mackenzie's later work seems a departure from his innovative prewar novels, leading his commentators to characterize him as an abortive modernist, one whose postwar writing, while commercially successful,[4] fails to live up to the promise of Henry James's "Younger Generation." Linklater, for instance, notes that Mackenzie's

> persistent criticism of social and sexual mores would have fallen into place between Samuel Butler and D. H. Lawrence, the steady progression of the author's voice from godlike observation to the point of displacing the character's thoughts would have put him as the source of stream-of-consciousness writing, and most of all the mixture of sensuous spirituality, of high living and the demimonde would have been taken as the exact reflection of the Edwardian era. (146)

Had he died at Gallipoli, this would likely be Mackenzie's legacy. But "[his] survival blurred this picture," Linklater contends, "and his protean character almost obliterated it, for as society changed so did he" (146). However, while Mackenzie's early lush prose and proto-stream-of-conscious style may not have survived the disastrous landing at Suvla Bay—to Mackenzie, this event had one meaning: "*We have lost our amateur status tonight*" (qtd. in Linklater 149)—his wartime experiences led, I would suggest, to a body of writing more in line with the modernism of Franz Kafka than that of Lawrence or Pound.

When Mackenzie sat down to start writing his highly literary—and decidedly novelistic—war memoirs in January 1929, he felt that sufficient time had elapsed to render harmless any potentially compromising information he might have had about the workings of the

Secret Intelligence Service. While Mackenzie clearly underestimated the longevity of official secrets, Anthony Masters's contention that, in *Greek Memories*, the former agent "quite naïvely disclosed secret information" (66) seems to me a misjudgment of the writer's postwar critique of the secret state, a critique that consistently and aggressively interrogated the culture of clandestinity. He may not have anticipated the full legal ramifications of his disclosures, but his depiction of the British secret service in *Greek Memories* tellingly focuses less on wartime heroics than on violations of bureaucratic hierarchy occasioned by the very security measures put in place to protect the power and integrity of the intelligence community. Like Kafka's Joseph K. in *The Trial* (1925) and K. in *The Castle* (1926), monoliteral protagonists whose attempts to make sense of officialdom continually run aground on the shoals of "official secrets" [*Amtsgeheimnisse*],[5] Mackenzie's own trial and his rejoinder in *Water on the Brain* center on the phenomenon of secrecy without substance. In his autobiography, Mackenzie refers to the proceedings as a "self-indulgent harlequinade" (*MLT7* 97), indicating the farcical self-reflexivity of bureaucratic formalism, which shelters no content—no secret—other than itself, but which nevertheless exercises its legal right to prosecute as a means of self-perpetuation. Consequently, *Water on the Brain* functions less as the imposition of farce upon bureaucracy than as a revelation of farce *within* bureaucracy and law. Together, these texts embody an important critical tendency in Mackenzie's postwar writings, which constitutes not only, as Linklater has suggested, a pessimistic turn (259), but a comic turn, in which Mackenzie revises the conventions of farce—a Compton family tradition—into a *politics of farce*, exposing and undermining the formalism of the militant aesthetic state.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Karl Marx begins his treatise with a now famous historical materialist dictum: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and

personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (15). Marx suggests that while "[men] make their own history, […] they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (15). Building upon Marx's model, Stephen Tifft suggests that farce itself may provide a means of critiquing that very "tradition." In "*Drôle de Guerre*: Renoir, Farce, and the Fall of France" (1992), Tifft argues that, in offering a subversive angle on past, present, and future conflicts, Jean Renoir's 1939 film *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*) "provokes us to conceive of history as farce and of farce as political argument" (131). In Renoir's film, a fête at a French country-house culminates in "a night of misrule," which, Tifft contends, functions as a commentary on the inability of the aristocracy to cope with "the disaster to come" (131)—the Second World War—as well as an uncanny anticipation of the *drôle de guerre*, the so-called "phoney war" in which France and Germany "dawdled behind their respective lines for eight months" (138), an event that in itself seems to replay, as burlesque, the paralysis of the First World War. For Tifft, Renoir's film "articulates [Marx's relation of farce and history] in a less reductive way: figuring farce as the overloading of space with conflicting motives and actions, it relocates the problems of the displacement of political intentions and the confusion of genres within farce itself, understood as a volatile field of representation marked by interpretive overload" (133).

While both *Greek Memories* and *Water on the Brain* evince a similar preoccupation with farcical repetition, overdetermination, and confliction, Tifft's application of Marx's theory tells us little about the role of secrecy and bureaucracy within this overburdened space. For that, we

must turn to Marx's earlier, posthumously published *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (c. 1843). Observing that Hegel discusses the function and organization of bureaucracy but "develops no content of the bureaucracy" (45), Marx suggests that bureaucracy maintains itself *as* content: "The state formalism, which the bureaucracy is, is the state as formalism […]. Because this state formalism constitutes itself as a real power and becomes itself its own material content, it is evident that the bureaucracy is a tissue of practical illusion, or the illusion of the state" (46). What makes "state formalism" essentially "practical" is its paradoxically impractical substitution of opacity for transparency, complexity for simplicity, as a way of securing itself; the "material" of the state—which signifies, among other things, the bewildering accumulation of paper (another manifestation of state "form") and the imposition of byzantine rules, regulations, and hierarchies of information—ensures that any efforts toward auditing and reform would be thorny, if not impossible. Marx goes on to characterize bureaucracy as a kind of phantom state, which maintains authority by establishing a metaphysics of secrecy:

> The bureaucracy is the imaginary state alongside the real state; it is the spiritualism of the state. As a result everything has a double meaning, one real and one bureaucratic, just as knowledge is double, one real and one bureaucratic (and the same with the will). A real thing, however, is treated according to its bureaucratic essence, according to its otherworldly, spiritual essence. The bureaucracy has the being of the state, the spiritual being of society, in its possession; it is its private property. The general spirit of the bureaucracy is the secret [*Geheimnis*], the mystery, preserved inwardly by means of the hierarchy and externally as a closed corporation. To make public the mind and the disposition of the state appears therefore to the bureaucracy as a betrayal [*ein Verrat*] of its mystery. Accordingly authority is the principle of its knowledge and being, and the deification of authority is its mentality. But at the very heart of the bureaucracy this spiritualism turns into a crass materialism, the materialism of passive obedience, of trust in authority, the mechanism of an ossified and formalistic behavior, of fixed principles, conceptions, and traditions. (47)

Like opacity, the "deification of authority" serves as a barrier against inquiry and insurrection, both from within and from without.[6] If we accept that the secret state, the closed community of intelligence and security agencies, constitutes the preeminent modern bureaucracy, then to

"make public" that community's secrets would amount to revealing the true "material" of its mystery, the formalism that masquerades as content and that is protected by a code of secrecy and an aura of sacredness. In *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (1968), Shlomo Avineri provides a crucial alternative translation of this passage's fifth and sixth sentences: "The general spirit of bureaucracy is the *official secret*, the mystery… Conducting the affairs of state in public, even political consciousness, thus appear to the bureaucracy as *high treason* against its mystery" (Marx qtd. in Avineri 23-4, my emphasis). While Marx writes only of *Geheimnis*, the "secret" in general, Avineri's Cold-War inflected translation is instructive: to reveal or publicize the "official secret" of the bureaucratic state constitutes not simply *ein Verrat* (a betrayal) but an act of "high treason" against a sovereign and sacred authority.

If one of the most crucial properties of the aesthetic state is its preoccupation with its own form, which also comprises the manner in which it represents itself and regulates its representation in both fictional and nonfictional texts, then it is likewise a *modernist state*, wherein the notion of "secrecy for secrecy's sake" correlates with the modernist doctrine of "art for art's sake." However, just as recent criticism has begun to question the supposed autonomy of modernism—by interrogating, for example, the relationship between modernist literature and laws governing obscenity and libel[7]—this chapter will approach the aesthetic state as jeopardized by the "art of secrecy," as an unstable and internally compromised negotiation between secrecy and publicity. In what follows, I will argue that the violative strain that links Mackenzie's suppressed memoir, his subsequent trial, and his vindictive farce—what we might call his counter-modernism—is the desacralization of the secret. Unlike other contemporary memoirs of the secret service, *Greek Memories* refuses to represent the intelligence community and its hierarchy as sacred entities, concentrating instead on the confusion brought about by the

imposition of codenames and cryptonyms. Mackenzie's most infamous breach of the Official Secrets Act, his disclosure of the existence and identity of "C," becomes, during his trial, a means of exposing and critiquing the complicity between law, secrecy, and power. If the intelligence community is, effectively, the "imaginary state" that haunts modern nation-state, then "the chief" constitutes the sovereign of the secret state, the hierarchical apex whose "mysterious consonant" (*MLT7* 97) embodies the secret and sacred letter of the law, which must be both guarded and enforced in the name of an inevitable, future war—in essence, a perpetual *drôle de guerre* waged by the secret state to justify its own existence. Mackenzie's response, in *Water on the Brain*, is to uncover this problematic appeal to futurity, but also to foreground the disruptive *materiality* that subverts bureaucratic materialism. His treatment of the secret state demonstrates that farce is not only, as Tifft suggests, "an antic overloading of space," but that farce likewise manifests itself on the level of the signifier, as an overcrowding of *cryptonymic* space, in which the formalism of state bureaucracy founders on the materiality of the "letter" itself.

A Life of Letters

In his 1941 **"**Preface" to *Ashenden*, Somerset Maugham assures his readers that his own collection of spy stories

> is a work of fiction, though from my own experience I should say not much more so than several of the books on the same subject that have appeared during the last few years and that purport to be truthful memoirs. The work of an agent in the Intelligence Department is on the whole extremely monotonous. A lot of it is uncommonly useless. The material it offers for stories is scrappy and pointless; the author has himself to make it coherent, dramatic and probable. (4)

Whether or not Maugham had Mackenzie's war memoirs in mind, *Greek Memories* arguably troubles the divide between fact and fiction, documentation and "entertainment." On the one

hand, Mackenzie's memoir sometimes reads like a popular thriller or "shilling shocker," an adventure yarn that follows the heroic "Captain Z" in his efforts to thwart the nefarious schemes of his supposed German counterpart, the wonderfully named Baron Schenk von Schweinburg. On the other hand, Mackenzie's obsessive attention to detail and documentation work to undermine this aura of fictionality, crowding the text with numbers, names, and cryptonyms. As it juggles these heroic and prosaic registers, what ultimately emerges as the central conflict in *Greek Memories* is not the clandestine battle between the Allied and Central Powers in Athens, but the struggle for authority within the spectral hierarchy of the British secret service. Mackenzie's bureaucratic conflict with Mansfield Cumming—the mythologized "C"—anticipates his subsequent trial in that both hinge upon what Cumming himself describes as "a gross breach of discipline" (qtd. in *Greek* 24).[8] Working in opposition to earlier accounts of wartime espionage that figure the secret service and its chief as hallowed and mysterious—in effect, too sacred to name—*Greek Memories* presents an overabundance of naming, a demythologization of the "letter." In doing so, Mackenzie's memoir reveals that the very security measures put in place to protect the sanctity of the secret service are also those most likely to cause a break-down of the system itself.

Tifft's conception of farce as a zone of discordant "motives and actions" (133) could also serve as an apt description of the still (tenuously) neutral Greece in the early years of the war. Athens from 1915 to 1916, which forms the backdrop for both *First Athenian Memories* and *Greek Memories*, was a political no-man's-land rent by conflicting spheres of sovereignty and influence.[9] The result, observes MI5 officer Eric Holt-Wilson, who visited the Mediterranean theater in 1916, was "a dense cloud of Intelligence Officers, mostly sleuthing each other, and owing allegiance to about a dozen different chiefs!" (qtd. in *MLT7* 29).[10] In the midst of this,

Mackenzie worked as best he could to keep tabs on suspected enemy agents and to provide his superiors with information regarding not only the situation in Greece, but also the arrival of German submarines into eastern Mediterranean waters, the entry of Bulgaria into the war on the side of the Central Powers, the Austro-Germano attack on Serbia, and other matters concerning the Balkan peninsula. But in an environment with such an overlapping of loyalties, it was only a matter of time before Mackenzie stepped on somebody's official toes.

As an officer of the militant aesthetic state—which, as I have argued, cultivates authors as agents based on the problematic assumption that writerly sensibility lends itself to intelligence work—Mackenzie's literariness was both a strength and a liability. Put off by what Mackenzie calls the "careless bohemianism" of his organization in Athens (*First* 135), British military officials in the Mediterranean "all agreed that [Mackenzie's] reports were compounded of hysteria and gossip, and argued the point expensively in long cables home" (Linklater 152). As historian Keith Jeffery points out, Mackenzie "brought a creative writer's sensibility to his duties in Cumming's Bureau" (126), even submitting intelligence reports in blank verse, prompting one perturbed SIS colonel to remark that "as a soldier" he was "perhaps prejudiced in favour of a simpler and less melodramatic literary style" (qtd. in Jeffery 126). Mackenzie's melodramatic inclinations also seem to have played a role in his choice of codename. It was common practice at the time for SIS officers to select a monoliteral designation to serve as their in-house moniker, and Mackenzie's immediate supervisor, Major Samson (referred to as "V"),[11] advised Mackenzie to adopt a suitably innocuous cryptonym. The most common and mundane letters were considered the best choices. Perhaps as an early indication of the writer's growing disdain for the artifice of secrecy, Mackenzie chose "Z"—a relatively uncommon letter and one that seems to play on his own surname—as his "mysterious letter in the alphabet of the Secret Service"

(*MLT*5 39). For the young officer, such religious observance of secrecy contrasted sharply with his writerly disposition:

> It was flattering to be told that the general opinion was that I had been sent here to counter the work of Baron Schenk. Nothing is easier for a novelist than to imagine himself a figure of considerably more importance than he actually is, and I fear my sense of the ridiculous was at this moment lying dormant beneath the gaudy trappings of romance. Moreover, my own personality was already feeling the effect of that subtle and sinister and perhaps not altogether unambitious initial Z. (*First* 77-8)

This was more than simply an egotistical response to empowerment; Mackenzie came to believe that a romantic temperament was strategic. In the streets of Athens, where newspapers reported daily on the machinations of the intelligence community, the open secret of wartime espionage seemed to require a more sensational—even theatrical—approach: that of *publically* performing a secret role:

> Indeed, by this time I had realized that in a city of the size of Athens it would be impossible to achieve secrecy by the usual means of keeping oneself hidden or pretending to be something one was not. Such methods in Athens would be the methods of the ostrich who thinks himself hidden when he buries his own head. I made up my mind to create a focus of publicity, and under cover of that publicity hope to achieve a measure of secrecy. (*First* 130)[12]

Mackenzie began traveling around Athens in an ostentatious convertible Sunbeam, accompanied by a debonair Greek bodyguard in traditional white kilt (Linklater 158). Ignoring Major Samson's instructions to "burn the blotting paper used to blot [his] sacred initial so that no one could trace it back to him," Mackenzie ordered his letter to be stamped on all his official stationery, and "[w]ithin twelve months, Z was the best-known pseudonym in the eastern Mediterranean" (152). Accordingly, SIS in Athens soon came to be known colloquially as "Z Bureau," raising a good many eyebrows and provoking the ire of intelligence officials from London to Cairo. But no one could deny Mackenzie's effectiveness. The Z Bureau cultivated a wide range of local informants, to whom Mackenzie gave creative codenames such as "Milton,"

"Byron," and "Tennyson"—perhaps "[to] remind himself," Linklater suggests, "how much imagination played in the compilation of their reports" (153). However questionable, the information Mackenzie received from his sources allowed him to create an extensive "Black List" of suspected spies and to perfect the use of Passport Control offices to keep tabs on enemy agents, an innovative cover that Mackenzie would later be accused of effectively blowing. By January 1916, when the narrative of *Greek Memories* begins, Mackenzie's operation was growing so rapidly that he found himself obliged to repeatedly pester London for increased funding and material support.

As if textually performing the increasing bureaucratization of Mackenzie's organization at this time, *Greek Memories*, which covers the majority of the writer's work as Military Control Officer in Athens in 1916, differs from *First Athenian Memories* in its overabundance of administrative detail and extensive use of official papers, letters, and telegrams.[13] Intended to provide objective proof that the account was not—as some might have supposed—the freewheeling fabrication of novelist, these records, in their excessiveness, render the text extremely dense, prompting T. E. Lawrence to remark that "all the documentation sometimes made [*Greek Memories*] a little dull" and that he hoped for a more "sporting" fourth and final installment of Mackenzie's war memoirs "to wind the history up with a bang" (qtd. in *MLT7* 135). Mackenzie begins his memoir by reproducing verbatim a sixteen-page report on the Z Bureau, which he had written at the request of Sir Francis Elliot, the British Minister in Athens. In the report, Mackenzie details his organization's constitution and activities and offers suggestions for "future development" (*Greek* 1).[14] Coming from a young officer who had been serving in SIS for less than a year, this report was decidedly ambitious, and it would prove not

only to be a catalyst for more departmental rivalries, but also for a chain of events that would culminate in Mackenzie's trial under the Official Secrets Act in 1933.

The question facing Mackenzie in January 1916 was *to whom* the report should be submitted. Given SIS's strict adherence to secrecy, Mackenzie at this time had no more an idea who the head of the secret service actually was than he had in 1915, when Major Samson had first uttered the cryptic letter: "The initial of C was invoked to justify everything," Mackenzie writes, "but who was C and where C was and what C was and why C was we were never told" (*First* 344). The adoption of monoliteral designations was meant not only to maintain secrecy and protect identities, but also to instill a sense of equality among officers—or, as Colonel Nutting ("N") explains in *Water on the Brain*, to "avoid any suggestion of rank" (40). Naturally, while intended to obscure the hierarchy within SIS, such self-deluding secrecy had repercussions:

> I should have taken advantage of that note of reverence in V's voice, when he alluded to the Chief of the secret-service, to find out just exactly who C was and the constitution of his organization. He might have had scruples about telling me, because by this time the work he was doing had begun to prey so much on V's nerves that a direct question like that might have shocked him into incoherence. Yet if he had told me then exactly what was the position of the C organization in regard to the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, and the War Office he and I might have been spared many misunderstandings later on and much departmental strife might have been avoided. However, the petty pride of etiquette kept me from asking any questions about C, and V's self-hypnotism by the abracadabra of the secret-service had reached such a point that he could no longer be simply frank about anything. (*First* 123)

At the suggestion of Commander William Sells, the Naval Attaché in Athens, who at that point also had no clue as to the identity of "the mysterious C" (*Greek* 22), Mackenzie decided to send his report (via Sells) to Admiral "Blinker" Hall, then director of the naval intelligence division in London. What neither Mackenzie nor Sells knew, of course, was that this was a breach of the chain of command. Although his report was well-received by the powers that be, Mackenzie

received a terse response—a veritable "corpse-reviver" (24)—from C himself: "I regard your behaviour in sending a report over the heads of your superior officer and over my head to my superior officer as a gross breach of discipline, and if it occurs again you will be immediately recalled" (qtd. in *Greek* 24). Alarmed, Mackenzie questioned Sells upon his return to Athens, but Sells knew little more about the chief than the fact that he was a naval officer and a "[f]unny old boy with a wooden leg" (27). "I felt like Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*," Mackenzie recalls, "when Billy Bones warned him so earnestly against the sea-faring man with one leg" (27).[15]

In the months following his "gross breach of discipline," Mackenzie learned that "C had evidently conceived an irremovable prejudice against" himself and the Z Bureau as a whole (*Greek* 90). Summoned to London in October 1916, Mackenzie hoped to unravel what he had earlier called the "cat's cradle of misapprehensions" that had been a direct result of the "mystification" encouraged by the code of secrecy (*First* 344). Prior to Mackenzie's account of his first face-to-face meeting with C, secret service memoirs, if they mentioned "the chief" at all, said very little about the head of British intelligence. Rather, they enforced the aura of sacred secrecy peculiar to the modern bureaucratic state, an impression of necessary mystery often figured in the topography of the office itself. One such memoir, Paul Dukes's *Red Dusk and the Morrow* (1922), which chronicles the author's recruitment into SIS and subsequent service in revolutionary Russia, focuses more on the London headquarters of SIS than on the character of its reigning officer. Summoned one August day in 1918 to an undisclosed location "in the vicinity of Trafalgar Square," Dukes's first impression is one of labyrinthine excess: "I had always associated rabbit-warrens with subterranean abodes, but here in this building I discovered a maze of rabbit-burrow-like passages, corridors, nooks and alcoves, piled higgledy-piggledy on

the roof" (5). After a series of delays, Dukes is informed by an underling that he will soon be taken "to see—er—the Chief" and is then led through a series of corridors that appear designed to disorientate:

> As we proceeded through the maze of stairways and unexpected passages which seemed to me like a miniature House of Usher, I caught glimpses of treetops, of the Embankment Gardens, the Thames, the Tower Bridge, and Westminster. From the suddenness with which the angle of view changed I concluded that in reality we were simply gyrating in one very limited space, and when suddenly we entered a spacious study—the sanctum of "—er—the Chief"—I had an irresistible sentiment that we had moved only a few yards and that this study was immediately above [the waiting room]. (9)

Upon entering the inner "sanctum," Dukes finds himself in a kind of office-laboratory, a cramped recess more appropriate to a mad scientist or hermetic alchemist than the head of foreign intelligence for the British Empire:

> From the threshold the room seemed bathed in semi-obscurity. The writing desk was so placed with the window behind it that on entering everything appeared only in silhouette. It was some seconds before I could clearly distinguish things. A row of half-a-dozen extending telephones stood at the left of a big desk littered with papers. On a side table were numerous maps and drawings, with models of aeroplanes, submarines, and mechanical devices, while a row of bottles of various colours and a distilling outfit with a rack of test tubes bore witness to chemical experiments and operations. These evidences of scientific investigation only served to intensify an already overpowering atmosphere of strangeness and mystery. (10)[16]

Perhaps both out of reverence for this mystery and out of the knowledge that he is bound by the Official Secrets Act, Dukes stops short of revealing the identity of the august personage at the desk:

> In the capacious swing desk-chair, his shoulders hunched, with his head supported on one hand, busily writing, there sat in his shirt sleeves—
>
> Alas, no! Pardon me, reader, I was forgetting! There are still things I may not divulge. There are things that must still remain shrouded in secrecy. [….] I may not describe him, nor mention even one of his twenty-odd names. Suffice it to say that, awe-inspired as I was at this first encounter, I soon learned to regard "the Chief" with feelings of the deepest personal regard and admiration. He was a British officer and an English gentleman of the finest stamp, absolutely fearless and gifted with limitless resources of subtle ingenuity, and I count it one of the greatest privileges of my life to have been brought within the circle of his acquaintanceship. (10-11)

After a brief conversation outlining Dukes's mission in Soviet Russia, the Chief sends the young man off to study ciphers and "learn the inks and all that" (qtd. in *Red* 11).[17]

Mackenzie's own matter-of-fact account in *Greek Memories* of his first meeting with C differs significantly from Dukes's mystical description. Unlike Dukes, Mackenzie gives the wartime address of SIS headquarters (2 Whitehall Court) and observes that the same address houses, appropriately enough, the Author's Club (*Greek* 393). Dutifully enquiring as to the whereabouts of "Captain Spencer's flat" (393)[18]—the codename for Cumming's office—Mackenzie is ushered into "C's private room, tucked away under the roof, crowded with filing cupboards and shelves, and with the rest of the space almost entirely filled by C's big table. [….] I saw on the other side of the table a pale clean-shaven man, the most striking features of whose face was a Punch-like chin, a small and beautifully fine bow of a mouth, and a pair of very bright eyes" (394). In spite of their troubled history, Cumming immediately takes to Mackenzie. After inviting Mackenzie to stay for dinner and proudly showing the writer his book collection, Cumming observes: "I thought this would happen. [….] I intended to make myself extremely unpleasant to you; but I said that when I saw you I should probably find you a man after my own heart and fall on your neck" (qtd. in *Greek* 396). While in London, Mackenzie has several more productive meetings with his superior, and on the eve of the young officer's departure for Greece, Cumming presents Mackenzie "with the sword-stick he himself had always carried on spying expeditions in time of peace" (411). "That's when this business was really interesting," Cumming tells him. "After the war is over we'll do some amusing secret service work together. It's capital sport" (411-2).

Although Mackenzie clearly respects the eccentric head of the Secret Intelligence Service, his account of Cumming in *Greek Memories* refuses to mythologize or sacralize "the chief," emphasizing instead a relationship between authority and "sport" or play. In likening Cumming to the carnivalesque Mr. Punch—that stick-wielding, anarchic puppet associated with the Feast of Fools—Mackenzie suggests that the sovereign of the secret state is himself a Lord of Misrule, a literal embodiment of the lawlessness that underlies the "rule" or code of law. Like "N" in *Water on the Brain*, whose enthusiasm for disguises makes it "lucky for Scotland Yard [he] went into the Secret Service instead of taking up crime" (49), Cumming, as the chief officer of a secret organization operating on a non-statutory basis and granted *carte blanche* to enforce secrecy and carry out espionage in the interests of the British Empire, epitomizes the suspension of law concomitant with a state of emergency. However, as the "Punch-like" master of a clandestine bureaucracy, C likewise tops a hierarchy that is simultaneously protected and threatened by a mechanical adherence to regulations. C's unveiling, his public exposure in *Greek Memories*, is a direct result of the confusion and misapprehension brought on by an overzealous devotion to the letter of the law and the code of gentlemanly conduct. Had Mackenzie known earlier the identity and function of C, both his "gross breach of discipline" and his key disclosure—not, as one might expect, the name of Mansfield Cumming, but the revelation that discipline itself occasions the most undisciplined breach—might have been avoided.

Perhaps the most telling indication of the zone of indistinction between rule and unruliness, discipline and violation, represented by Mackenzie's tenure in the secret service is the fact that Cumming not only forgave the young officer's infringements but even rewarded Mackenzie by granting him greater powers in the Mediterranean theater. Upon his return to

Athens in November 1916, Mackenzie set about expanding his counterespionage network with renewed vigor, this time with the blessing of C himself. At the end of 1916, with Athens increasingly unstable, Mackenzie relocated to the island of Syra, from whence he reigned as the undisputed Director of Aegean Intelligence until honorably recalled from the region in August 1917. Mackenzie returned to London a notorious figure in the secret intelligence community. "For all the hatred of officialdom and the insect state which suffused his later life," Linklater contends, "there was a period when the name of Compton Mackenzie carried as much weight in the underworld of bureaucracy as it ever did in literature" (162). In his autobiography, Mackenzie claims that Cumming even offered him the chance to be his Number Two and thus the next "C" after Cumming retired (*MLT5* 110). Mackenzie, eager to return to his writing career, declined—for the best, it would seem, for Cumming later informed the author that his staff had threatened to transfer if Mackenzie accepted.[19]

Nevertheless, "Captain Z," like Kafka's monoliteral "K," would soon find himself embroiled in a mystifying *Prozess* that would give new meaning to—or render meaningless—the letter of the law. For Mackenzie's experiences in the Secret Intelligence Service, experiences releasing his "sense of the ridiculous," which had hitherto "[lain] dormant beneath the gaudy trappings of romance" (*First* 78), would end in his prosecution for divulging the name of a dead man whose posthumous cover becomes miraculously bound up with the future security of Britain. Another "corpse-reviver," Mackenzie's trial serves as a further affirmation of the farce of "rule" and a catalyst for Mackenzie's risky decision, in *Water on the Brain*, to make the Official Secrets Act itself an object of ridicule.

"Harlequinade"

In his inaugural address as Rector of Glasgow University on 29 January 1932,[20] Compton Mackenzie attempted to describe, for an audience of students who had never known global conflict, what his own generation had sought to achieve in the Great War:

> We desired to delete Germany not because Germany was an Imperial rival, but because a prepotent Germany seemed to us the chief menace to what was left of individual freedom. To us the triumph of Germany meant the triumph of bureaucracy. Do not accept that current lie of pacifism which relates that the young men of Britain were deluded by the old into fighting. This disillusionment that succeeded was caused by the realization that war like everything else was at the mercy of the uncontrollable machinery of modern existence. (*MLT7* 296)

Indeed, Mackenzie would soon learn that officialdom could be just as menacing on the home-front and that the very "triumph of bureaucracy" he had fought to prevent was a *fait accompli* in Britain, a nation that proudly considered itself a bulwark against oppression and totalitarianism. Nine months later, on 27 October 1932, when Mackenzie was stepping up to the dais to address a group of students at the International Club, he observed a stuffed peacock in the lecture hall, which, after years spent in the Mediterranean, he regarded as an ill omen: "The sight of that stuffed peacock disquieted me and as I went to the platform I tried to avert the evil eye with the southern Italian gesture of the two out-thrust fingers" (*MLT7* 81). "The evil eye," Mackenzie would later recall, "was not averted," and after finishing his speech he was directed to a telephone and informed that *Greek Memories*, which had been published that very day, was to be immediately withdrawn. Moreover, he was told, the government was considering prosecution under section 2 of the 1911 Official Secrets Act. Over the next few months, Mackenzie would find himself at the mercy of "the uncontrollable machinery of modern existence," but his case would also throw a spanner in the works, serving as a means or critiquing the secret state from within. Consequently, the trial serves as an important context for understanding Mackenzie's

attentiveness, in *Water on the Brain*, to the surreptitious, authoritarian kernel within democracy itself.

On the day of publication, the *Daily Telegraph* was quick to proclaim what its reviewers considered Mackenzie's most sensational revelation: "Mystery Chief of the Secret Service," "Captain 'C's' Identity Disclosed" (qtd. in Jeffery 240). According to Jeffery, this headline led Cumming's successor and current "C," Hugh Sinclair, to take action against the memoir. Working in coordination with MI5, Sinclair pressured the publisher, Cassell and Company, to withdraw the volume from bookshops. In a letter to the Foreign Office, Sinclair asserted that certain disclosures in *Greek Memories* were "considered objectionable from the point of view of national interest," chief among which were the undisguised names of SIS officers and information regarding SIS's use of Passport Control (qtd. in Jeffery 240). Unchecked, Mackenzie's memoir would set, according to Sinclair, "a very dangerous precedent for present employees on leaving the Service and also for journalists, with whom the Service is of necessity in touch for various reasons" (qtd. in Jeffery 240). But Sinclair might have had more than former officers and journalists in mind. Mackenzie's lawyer, Sir Reginald Poole, suggested to his client that the case was meant to serve as a warning for those of even greater stature: "I understand the Government intend to make an example of you if they can, in order to warn Lloyd George and Winston Churchill that they can go too far in using information they could only have acquired in office" (qtd. in *MLT7* 84).

Mackenzie, for his part, suspected that security was less of an issue than image: "My own feeling was that [SIS and MI5] had been upset by the way I had brought out the comic side of their activities" (*MLT7* 85). Mackenzie's observation is noteworthy in that it implies a particular agency of comedy as critique. In attending to the comic—or, more properly, farcical—

adherence to the code of secrecy and its resulting confusions and conflicts, *Greek Memories* calls into question the content of the secret itself, which is revealed to be less important than the *enforcement* of secrecy as a means of maintaining hierarchy and authority. What emerges, then, is a kind of "radical secrecy"[21] that becomes, like Marx's bureaucratic formalism, "its own material content" (*Critique* 46). Ironically, or perhaps inevitably, Mackenzie's trial only reinforces this reflexiveness by dwelling *ad absurdum* on what is in actuality a trivial disclosure, his revelation of C, even when that disclosure is proved to be non-prejudicial to "national interests." But, as I will argue, C is also more than an exemplary secret; in the course of the trial, C emerges as a cryptonym not only for Mansfield Cumming but for the sovereign letter of the law that must survive the death of the "chief," even if it means suspending the conventions of common law itself. In effect, this zealous sheltering of C inadvertently unveils the intelligence community's investment in what Giorgio Agamben has theorized as the "state of exception," wherein extraordinary powers (the power to suspend law) are kept in place beyond the exigencies of a particular emergency. Arguably, both Mackenzie's account of the trial and his spy novel bear witness to what Agamben has termed "the zone of absolute indeterminacy between anomie and law," between lawlessness and *nomos* (convention or rule), which characterizes the modern state of exception (*State* 57).

"The general rule of common law," according to legal historian Rosamund M. Thomas, "is that justice must be administered in public […]" (64). However, under the amended 1920 Official Secrets Act—which served to augment the 1911 Act with provisions borrowed from the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act, effectively maintaining a wartime state of emergency beyond the armistice—formal hearings and trials involving state secrets could be held *in camera*. While the term itself does not appear in the 1920 Act, section 8 (4) grants the court the statutory power

"to order the exclusion of the public from any proceedings […] on the ground that the publication of any evidence to be given or of any statement to be made in the course of the proceedings would be prejudicial to the national safety […]." In such cases, according to the Act, only "the passing of sentence shall in any case take place in public." As a result, the very concept of official secrecy comes to be invested with an inflated aura of national significance. In her Foucauldian analysis of state security, *Secrecy and Power in the British State* (1997), Ann Rogers contends that, while all official secrets trials served as "stage-managed spectacles" (29), those held *in camera* were all the more effective and "spectacular" for being, in a sense, out of sight:

> The public naturally assumed that the matters being tried *in camera* must involve state secrets—for why else would public justice be waived?—while the state was saved having to attempt to justify its use of the [Official Secrets Act] to a potentially sceptical public. *In camera* trials enabled the state to display to the public a relationship between national security and official information which it did not have to justify or explain […]. (33)

"Seemingly trivial disclosures," Rogers points out, "could be implied to be threatening to the state" (32). In this way, "[the] state used the [Official Secrets Act] and other laws to create an overt, visible security culture designed to demonstrate to the population the political boundaries it must keep itself within" (29). Knowing that the greater part of Mackenzie's hearing and trial would be held *in camera*, Sir Reginald Poole understood that, regardless of what actually transpired in the courtroom, the secrecy surrounding the trial would be enough to condemn Mackenzie in the mind of the public:

> "[The] Judge might send you to Wormwood Scrubbs [prison] for nine months—not a pleasant experience—and the public would think that you must have done something dreadful to get such a sentence. And as the case will be heard *in camera* you won't be able to tell the public about it because it is contempt of court to say what happened *in camera*."
>
> "The Star Chamber all over again," [Mackenzie] observed. (*MLT*7 94)

In comparing his trial to the ancient Star Chamber, the secret tribunal of privy counsellors set up to try high-ranking subjects without the right of witness or appeal, Mackenzie draws our attention to the suspension of common law in cases involving official secrets, where secrecy prevents the accused from receiving a fair and public hearing. But his remark also has a bearing on the Official Secrets Act itself, which permits the government to decide what is "secret" without having to justify its decision.[22] As a result, anyone accused of violating the Act—of writing, speaking, or in any way communicating that which is labeled "secret"—is essentially guilty until proven guilty, and the trial itself becomes a mere formality.[23]

With no means of defending himself at the time, Mackenzie's only recourse was to plead guilty and accept martyrdom in the hope of one day exposing the manner in which the power of the secret state, whose sole purpose is to prevent catastrophe, is paradoxically predicated on the inevitability of disaster. In the seventh volume of his autobiography, *My Life and Times*, published over thirty years later, Mackenzie was fortunately able to shed some light on what transpired at his two hearings in November 1932 and his trial in January 1933, events that prompted one sympathetic chief-inspector to declare that Mackenzie's case was not "a prosecution but a malicious persecution" (qtd. in *MLT7* 87). Not surprisingly, Mackenzie's account attends to the same sense of ineptitude that characterizes both *Greek Memories* and *Water on the Brain*. The second hearing at the Guildhall on 24 November began, according to Mackenzie, "with a touch of farce" (*MLT7* 89). The prosecution called as witness an SIS officer whose real name was withheld, despite the proceedings that day being held *in camera*; he was introduced simply as "Major X." "The fatuity," Mackenzie writes, "of those responsible for this feeble attempt at melodrama may be gauged by the fact that at the next hearing when the court was *not* 'in camera' the full name and regiment of Major X could be read in the leaflets scattered

about the Court in which were recorded the names of those who had figured at the previous hearing" (*MLT7* 89). "Major X" was in fact Valentine Vivian (known in the secret service as "V.V."), who was then head of SIS's counterintelligence and counter-communist bureau (Jeffery 241). Vivian testified that Mackenzie's revelation of the names of former (and potential) agents constituted a breach not only of present but of *future* security. Under cross-examination by one of Mackenzie's barristers, Vivian was at pains to explain his reasoning:

> "Major X, you have told my learned friend [the prosecution] that by publishing in his book the names of these gentlemen who worked on Intelligence duties in the war Mr Mackenzie has jeopardized their future. Why?"
> "Because when war comes…"
> "When war comes? Are we to feel indebted to our Intelligence Service for knowing when war will come?"
> "I meant if another war comes."
> "Ah! Please go on, Major X."
> "If another war comes we may want to call upon their services again." (Qtd. in *MLT7* 90)

Vivian's response is illuminating, for it encapsulates a particular strategy and mindset of the secret state: the justification of draconian security measures in the name of a prospective war. To put it another way, the aura of sacred secrecy extends itself into "messianic time," not as a utopia-to-come but as a coming conflict that *will have affirmed* the necessity of secrecy. Under the Official Secrets Act and the 1920 Act in particular, which effectively keeps the wartime Defence of the Realm Act in force in a time of peace, the 1920s and 1930s were truly an "interwar" period *avant la lettre*, a proleptic rehearsal of the Second World War and, in a sense, an uncanny anticipation of the Cold War.

Mackenzie's account of his trial in the seventh octave of *My Life and Times* suggests that the secret service's investment in futurity is bound up with the signifier, the furtive language of codes and cryptonyms. But his narrative also discloses the manner in which the legal machinery of the law inadvertently deconstructs the language of secrecy and divests it of its sacred aura.

The proceedings, held at the Old Bailey on 12 January 1933, were attended by MI5 director, Sir Vernon Kell; his second-in-command, Eric Holt-Wilson;[24] and a gallery of black-clad officials. There was no jury. As the judge, the admirably named Mr. Justice Hawke, entered to take his seat at the bench, Mackenzie "wondered if what seemed an intelligent man could be really taken in by the self-indulgent harlequinade being performed by the people entrusted with the country's security" (97). As was tradition with cases involving official secrets, the prosecution was led by the attorney general, Sir Thomas Inskip. In spite of Mackenzie's plea of guilt, Inskip proceeded to make his case as if Mackenzie had pled innocent—fortunately, Mackenzie writes, for the judge "grew more and more exasperated as the morning wore away" (97). Crucially, Inskip chose to stress the fact that Mackenzie "had revealed the mysterious consonant by which the Chief of the Secret Service was known. This was dangerous," Inskip informed the court, "because in the Army List those officers who were connected with Secret Intelligence still had M.I.1 (C) [the wartime name of SIS/MI6] after their names to show what they were engaged upon" (97). When the judge asked why "such a dangerous consonant" was still in use fifteen years after the war, Inskip responded: "That I couldn't say, m'lud" (qtd. in *MLT7* 97). Only then did Inskip point out that Mackenzie had "not only revealed the mysterious consonant C" but that he had also revealed that it stood for the late Sir Mansfield Cumming (97). Inskip's privileging of Mackenzie's revelation of "C" over his disclosure of Cumming's identity implies that the letter has a life beyond the death of the chief. In this way, "C" emerges as the parodic double of the sovereign, in whose person the letter of the law is manifest.[25] Just as the veiled proceedings constitute, in Mackenzie's estimation, the modern correlative of the medieval Star Chamber, so too does "the chief" correlate with what Agamben characterizes as the historical "nexus" linking the sovereign ("living law") to the "inanimate" letter of the law (*gramma*):[26]

> If the sovereign is a living *nomos*, and if, for this reason, anomie and *nomos* perfectly coincide in his person, then anarchy (which threatens to loose itself in the city upon the sovereign's death, which is to say, when the nexus that joins it to the law is severed) must be ritualized and controlled, transforming the state of exception into public mourning and mourning into *iustitium*. [….] Because he is a living law, the sovereign is intimately *anomos*. Here too the state of exception is the—secret and truer—life of the law. (*State* 70)

"[Ritualized] and controlled," the potential for anarchy following the death of the sovereign is traditionally translated into a period of mourning, which permits the "inanimate" (written) law to remain in force until a new sovereign is crowned—or, in the context of SIS, until a new "C" is appointed. While there is, of course, no "public mourning" for the chief of the secret community, his *gramma* (letter) is nevertheless sheltered and validated in the ritual of secrecy, which compensates the public with an appropriately mysterious spectacle: the trial *in camera*.

Appropriately, Mackenzie figures sovereignty and secrecy less in relation to mourning than in relation to the "harlequinade" (*MLT7* 97), which Agamben associates with the licensed "'legal anarchy' of the anomic feasts" that "brings to light in a parodic form the anomie within the law, the state of emergency as the anomic drive contained in the very heart of *nomos*" (72). Like his earlier association of Cumming with the anarchic Mr. Punch in *Greek Memories*, Mackenzie's account draws our attention to the misrule, both the mismanagement of the secret state and the miscarriage of secrecy legislation (rule and ruling), occasioned in this instance by the very fact of C's death, which the letter is ultimately unable to conceal. After Inskip unleashed his second charge against the accused—that Mackenzie had disclosed the true name of C—Justice Hawke posed the obvious question: "But when did this officer die, Mr Attorney?" (98). Baffled, Inskip then looked enquiringly at both the prosecution and defense, but seeing that no one had any idea, he made the radical suggestion that the court should ask Sir Vernon Kell. "For a moment," Mackenzie would later recall, "I thought that the rooks in the gallery were

going to take flight, such a flapping of black overcoats did this suggestion of the Attorney-General set up. [….] K was a fanatical believer in secrecy for secrecy's sake and now to hear his name mentioned like this in a law court, even if it was *in camera* at the time, must have been a mental agony" (98). K, naturally, had no idea either. When Mackenzie himself then informed the judge that Cumming had died in 1922, the judge thanked the accused and, casting a "perishing look" at the gallery, announced, "I *accept* that" (qtd. in *MLT7* 98). In addition to proving that the prosecution and Security Service were decidedly ill-informed about the very secrets they sought to protect, this exchange reinforces that what is at stake in official secrecy is not the content of the secret but "secrecy for secrecy's sake," which must be enforced in the interests of an undefined futurity—not simply a "coming community," but a coming *intelligence* community self-tasked with waging a prospective war. However, in making it clear that the "dangerous consonant" was kept in place for no tangible reason, the trial narrative also demonstrates the manner in which the "living" and "inanimate" law are both rendered ineffectual, and the uncovering of the chief, now the lifeless puppet of a clandestine organization with no legal status in itself, oddly confirms the worst fears of the intelligence community: that the exposure of C would weaken its security, but only insofar as it disputes the effectiveness and necessity of the Official Secrets Act itself. In focusing on the overdetermination of the letter—the investment of C with what Marx calls "the objective aspect of the sovereignty" (*Critique* 43)—Mackenzie insinuates that there may be something yet to be mourned; for C and the law protecting his secret are ultimately "dead letters," whose anomic and anarchic *materiality* both underwrites and undermines the materialism of state formalism.[27]

In the end, Mackenzie was able to avoid a prison sentence and was fined £100 and an additional £100 in court costs. In what Mackenzie describes as a "sermon," Mr. Justice Hawke

stressed the importance "for people like myself to respect the law. But he said not a single word about the threat to the secrecy of the Secret Service which my book was supposed to have been" (*MLT7* 100). "It is clear from the Judge's observations," according to an article in the *Times*, "that in the present case the prosecution did not press too strongly their view of the harm which was actually caused. The purpose of the action was, perhaps, rather to warn those 'whose urge to write is greater than their discretion'" (qtd. in Dooley 98). The *Times* thus corroborates the opinion of Harold Nicolson, who had written to Mackenzie a week before the trial expressing his sympathy and his belief that the writer "had been made a scape-goat of to cover the potential crimes of others in the future" (qtd. in *MLT7* 102).

Confirming Foucault's contention that power does not censor or conceal so much as "produce reality" and engender discourse (*Discipline* 194), Mackenzie's memoir—indeed, the mere existence of spyographies in general—and the publicity surrounding his trial bear witness to the prolixity of official secrecy. At first, Mackenzie hoped that he could recover some of his losses[28] by publishing a further, revised edition of *Greek Memories*, which "after such an advertisement [might] sell quite well" (*MLT7* 95). With this aim, he contacted the Director of Public Prosecutions and requested that the War Department send him a list of material they found objectionable in the memoir so that it could be suitably edited for rerelease. "A reply came to say," Mackenzie records, "that inasmuch as several copies had got into circulation before the book was called in a foreign agent would only have to compare the two editions to know what the British authorities considered dangerous and that therefore the book could never be allowed to appear" (105)![29] In light of this final proof of the paranoia of the secret state, Mackenzie resolved to profit by his experiences and to exact revenge on the "comedians" (94) who had nearly ruined him by writing his own comical spy yarn, *Water on the Brain*, which

arguably circumvents the restrictions of official secrecy and contempt of court by providing a fictional frame for calling into question the intelligence of the intelligence community, a strategy that also succeeds in divulging the peculiarly anarchic materiality of bureaucracy.

"A Grotesque Fairy Tale"

Some years after the trial, a man who had been present at Mackenzie's sentencing approached the writer and related the following anecdote:

> I've been waiting to meet you for twenty years to tell you an amusing story about that case of yours at the Old Bailey. When you left the dock the next case called was a little runt not much more than five feet high who was charged with having a love affair with a cow somewhere near Windsor, and with repeating the offence on a subsequent date. 'Oh, my dear,' exclaimed one of your lady friends, turning to her neighbour, 'what an anti-climax!' (Qtd. in *MLT7* 102)

"Yes, yes," Mackenzie responded, "I remember a tiny little man going past on his way to the dock. I asked the young policeman what he was charged with and I recall now his embarrassed look as he muttered, 'Buglary'" (102).

This rather odd juxtaposition—the grave seriousness of an official secrets trial offset by the anticlimactic depravity of a case of bestiality—seems both a fitting conclusion to the day's legal circus and a strangely appropriate indication of what was to come. For in poking fun at the secret community in his next novel, *Water on the Brain*, Mackenzie not only exacts revenge by replaying his trial as an over-the-top farce, he also demonstrates the porousness of the secret state, whose susceptibility to leaking is, perversely, a result of its tightening of security, its mechanical adherence to the code of secrecy in lieu of common sense. Mackenzie traces this leakage, in part, to SIS's recruitment of writers, whose literary urges are indeed greater than their discretions. But his most significant insight into the problematic of disclosure consists in showing how the maintenance of official secrecy and national defense is predicated on the

delineation of masculinity and "gentlemanly" reserve. If the fear of penetration serves as one of the chief motivations behind excessive security—which, as I have argued, breaks down on its own material reflexivity—*in*security registers as the potential breaching of both individual and communal bodies. In the case of the British secret service, which in the decades following the publication of Mackenzie's novel indeed suffered a series of devastating incursions, we might revise Marx's dictum: history repeats itself, first as tragicomedy, the second time as "buglary."

While working on *Water*, Mackenzie was well aware of William Shakespeare's observation in "Sonnet 66" concerning "art made tongue-tied by authority" (line 9).[30] More specifically, he was, for obvious reasons, attuned to both the continuing restrictions placed on him under the Official Secrets Act and the potential dangers of revealing information he had received *in camera.* His solution was to overemphasize the fictionality of his novel, thereby decreasing the likelihood that SIS or MI5 would initiate further proceedings and in doing so confirm his detrimental portrayal. To that end, Mackenzie included as his "Preface" to the first edition (1933) a letter he wrote to Newman Flower, Principal of the University of Glasgow, where the writer was still serving as Lord Rector. Responding to Flower's concern over his choice to (once again) depict the secret service, Mackenzie insists that "this farcical interlude […] is the friendliest archery," an exercise in "improbability [over] probability, since the latter would have involved me in the odium of striking at men incapable of defending themselves except *in camera*":

> In brief: actual facts, real people, and existing organizations have been eliminated from the first page to the last. You may think after reading *Water on the Brain* that such a disclaimer was superfluous; but recently on one or two occasions the farcical has been mixed with the tragic in a way that might encourage even the sophisticated to accept farce as history. Hence my anxiety to insist that *Water on the Brain* is only a grotesque fairy tale. (Qtd. in *MLT7* 113)

With this ironic "disclaimer," Mackenzie quite cleverly forestalls any official objection to his farcical treatment while simultaneously asserting the truth of farce itself. In assuring Flower that *Water* "would be free from libel and official secrets" (*MLT7* 113), Mackenzie also draws an important correlation between the spyography and the roman à clef, forms of writing that threaten, like the disclosures leading to his trial, image as much as security—or, at least, demonstrate the conflation of the two. In framing his "grotesque fairy tale" in this way, Mackenzie enlists in the ranks of modernist writers who "experimented," as Sean Latham has argued, "with [the roman à clef], publishing books they consistently claimed were entirely imaginative but that aggressively exploited the roman à clef's illicit pleasures" (*Art* 11). Beginning with Mackenzie's inclusion of his private letter to Flower, *Water* invites penetration by continually positing the reader as voyeur, as an *insider* privy to state secrets.

Linklater observes that *Water* "is as complex as an opera plot" (254). If so, it is a comic opera, and one that defies easy summary. The novel concerns a series of misunderstandings and miscommunications between the two main branches of state security—the secret service or M.Q.99 (E), led by Colonel Henry Nutting, known as "N," and the Safety of the Realm Division (S.R.D.), led by an officer known only as "P"—which are themselves thinly-veiled representations of SIS and MI5, respectively. The novel's hero (or antihero) is Major Arthur Blenkinsop, recruited into the secret service by General Westmacott, the Director of Extraordinary Intelligence, in order to replace another agent, Hubert Chancellor, who has been sacked for writing a potentially compromising spy novel. Like Chancellor, Blenkinsop has intimate knowledge of Mendacia, an island nation that has become a focal-point for international intrigues, and N assigns Blenkinsop the unenviable task of coordinating the efforts of Mendacian nationalists who desire the reinstatement of their deposed monarch, now living in exile in

Scotland. Meanwhile, Blenkinsop's wife, misinterpreting her husband's secretive behavior as evidence of marital infidelity, hires a private investigation firm to keep tabs on his doings. Inevitably, chaos erupts when all three organizations dispatch their agents, each suspecting the others of being foreign spies or insurgents, to the same sanatorium in the Highlands. The result, as one character observes, is a "glorious muddle of cross purposes" (272).

In addition to exploiting what Tifft identifies as farce's standard "repertoire" (148)—most obviously, situations involving mistaken identities and poorly conceived disguises—Mackenzie saturates his novel with lessons derived from his trial experience. Chief among them is the imperative that extreme secrecy must be maintained in the name of futurity. Mackenzie's decision to set his novel in the 1930s[31] highlights the fact that wartime security measures are kept in place beyond the emergency, creating what is essentially a perpetual, interwar state of exception. As in *Greek Memories*, Mackenzie figures secrecy in the topography of the office itself while avoiding the sort of sacralization typical of other secret service memoirs, the aura of sacredness that works to justify draconian security measures in the interests of *raison d'État*. Instead, he focuses on the claustrophobic materiality of mystery. Like Blenkinsop's letter of recruitment, enclosed within multiple envelopes marked "SECRET" and "VERY SECRET" (5), the office of the head of intelligence in the outskirts of London occupies an excessively sequestered space: "The Chief's own room was in the very heart of Pomona Lodge and had been built inside another room, the space between the walls being filled with a special composition called Smotherite which deprived even walls of their notorious ears and was also fireproof and noxious to rats" (74). From this position, N, protected by "muscular deaf-mutes" (74), officially busies himself with "forearming his country for the next war with forewarnings" (75). As in the trial, the intelligence and security services operate on the assumption that a future conflict is

unavoidable. At one point, N's second-in-command, Major Hunter-Hunt ("H. H."),[32] assures Blenkinsop—who is now referred to as "B"—that although the service "[does] not *want* another war we all feel that if war is inevitable the sooner it comes the better. I tell you, B, that M.Q.99 (E) was never so fighting fit in all its history as it is now" (99). Hunt's comment suggests that the power of secrecy is licensed grammatically, in deference to the future anterior, to what *will have been* necessary—a rationale also corroborated by P, the director of S.R.D.: "It seems to me important that in times of peace we should get as much of our work as we can on to a sound war footing. You may be sure that when war *does* break out we shan't want to be wasting time thinking what measure we ought to have adopted long before the war came" (267).

"[The] whole point of the Secret Service," General Westmacott tells Blenkinsop, "is that it should be secret" (16). However, just as the inevitability of war also attests to the intelligence community's failure to forestall death and violence, the service's obsession with opacity results in linguistic chaos. This paranoid reflexivity—the secret state's preoccupation with its own mystery as a means of protecting itself not from foreign agents, but from the British public at large—manifests itself in N's attempt obfuscate the very name of his organization. If anyone tries to investigate M.Q.99 (E), N explains, "[that's] where the Safety of the Realm Division comes in. Old P who is the D.S.R.D. has a special set of sleuths who devote the whole of their time to preventing people from finding out what M.Q.99 (E) means" (39). As a result, M.Q.99 (E) remains, for both character and reader, essentially gibberish, an empty signifier, but likewise the overdetermined center of a conspiracy whose sole purpose is to prevent the letters from *meaning* anything.[33] As this convoluted passage suggests, the critical force of Mackenzie's farce resides not only on the dynamic level of plot-action, but in the farcical overcrowding of cryptonymic space, which has the effect of disclosing the potentially subversive materiality of

the signifier itself, the lifelessness of the letter and the vacancy of the secret. Often, passages in *Water* are so jargon-laden as to defy intelligibility—so much so that even the critic begins to reproduce the novel's vertiginous trajectory. Major Hunter-Hunt, for instance, describes the relationship between the various intelligence and security services by reference to a War Office "Conference which merged M.Q.44 (X) and all E.I. in M.Q.99 (E) under the D.E.I. for general direction" (79). Here, art is quite literally tongue-tied. Yet, through the device of its own obscurity, Mackenzie's parodic style works to render inanimate the bureaucratic *imaginaire*, effectively reversing what Marx posits as the illusion of bureaucracy, in which "[real] knowledge appears to be devoid of content just as real life appears to be dead, for this imaginary knowledge and life pass for what is real and essential" (*Critique* 47). In *Water*, it is the "imaginary knowledge and life," the content of bureaucracy itself, that is effectively "dead."

As head of the secret service, N's chief preoccupation consists in rooting out "leaks" within his own organization. The word itself seems a perverse by-product of the metaphorical coding N employs to mask the true nature of M.Q.99 (E); objecting to the word "spying," N refers to espionage as "plumbing" (43).[34] Consequently, the "leak" comes to signify an insider threat whose potency is directly proportional to the enforcement of secrecy. To have "water on the brain," then, is to suffer both a proliferation of cryptonyms and an accumulation of leaks, resulting in the tunnel vision and dementia that compromise "intelligence" at the source. An agency that trains its agents to seek out and expose information, the spy bureau is its own worst enemy.

Given that both the justification and method for enforcing secrecy subsist on the level of the signifier, in the simultaneously grammatical and lexical strategy of mystification in the name of futurity, it should hardly be surprising that the threat of *de*mystification falls to the literary

agent, the spy whose urge to write overrides the injunction that one should be "an officer of the Secret Service first and a human being second" (59). Itself the product of a former agent, *Water* utilizes various metafictional techniques designed to reinforce and comment upon its own status as spyography. On the one hand, Mackenzie employs the device of an unnamed narrator who is very much attuned to the risks of decryption and disclosure. While the narrator seems to have no qualms about divulging N's true identity—perhaps because everyone in the service already knows it—he assiduously avoids blowing P's cover. In a footnote, the narrator explains that "[although] Sir William Westmacott mentioned [to Blenkinsop] the name and rank of this officer it was decided to withhold it from the public in a work which will certainly be eagerly read by foreign agents" (12).[35] On the other hand, the narrator, eminently self-aware and sensitive to the precarious position occupied by the spyographer, serves as an ironic counterpart to the novel's spy-turned-novelist, Hubert Chancellor. This former officer, N tells Blenkinsop, "wrote a novel called *The Foreign Agent* which might have smashed up the whole of the Secret Service":

> "Surely he didn't give away any of the secrets?" Blenkinsop exclaimed in horror.
> "He did what was almost as bad," said Colonel Nutting. "He wrote what he honestly thought was a completely misleading picture of the Secret Service as it really is. The consequence is that any foreign agent who reads Chancellor's novel knows perfectly well now what the British Secret Service is not, and to know what it is not is half-way to knowing what it is." (38)

Like the warning Mackenzie himself received against publishing a revised edition of *Greek Memories* that an enemy could then compare with the original and so determine what SIS considered too secret to reveal, N's paranoid response to *The Foreign Agent* suggests that one may be a violator of official secrecy without divulging any confidential material whatsoever. Chancellor's crime is not to have revealed secrets but to have *not* revealed them, thereby endangering M.Q.99 (E) through an instructively fictional or "negative" portrayal. Emphasizing, in a roundabout way, the fundamentally arbitrary nature of security policies, Mackenzie's

novel—which, as we have seen, contains a disclaimer insisting on its own improbability—implies that the purpose of secrecy is not, in fact, the protection of national interests from a foreign threat, but the power to censor and control information in general, a power that must be maintained by continually and publically exercising the law. "I think people are beginning to realize," N later remarks, "that there is such a thing as the Official Secrets Act" (190).

Due to Chancellor's transgression, Westmacott informs Blenkinsop, the secret service "[has] had to make a rule that nobody who writes novels can be employed by M.Q.99 (E), and—er—vice versa, of course, if you follow me. [….] What these writing fellows don't realize is that we may be at war again next week" (11). Blenkinsop, whose military training has accustomed him to "[obeying] the letter of his instructions" (30), is recruited, in part, because the secret service feels that he is unlikely to write about his experiences. But as his soppy name suggests, *Water*'s antihero is not immune to leakage, and while attempting to follow his instructions to the "letter," Blenkinsop becomes involved in an intricate subplot that conflates professional indiscretion with sexual impropriety. Having decided to pose as a banana importer while carrying out his mission, Blenkinsop randomly meets a genuine banana man, William Hudson, who has also recently published a spy yarn under the pseudonym "Yorke Lankester" (24).[36] Hudson, who came up with the idea to write his novel after pretending to be a secret agent for the purpose of engaging in extramarital affairs, is unaware that Blenkinsop is a real spy and becomes increasingly annoyed that Blenkinsop would rather discuss bananas than espionage. Blenkinsop, seeing a way to strengthen his cover, begins to cultivate a friendship with Hudson and his wife, who has been led by her husband to believe that Blenkinsop is the head of the British secret service. As a result, Blenkinsop's wife, Enid, who also has no idea that her husband is a spy, but suspects that the banana business is a front for adultery, becomes convinced

that he is having an affair with Mrs. Hudson. Ultimately, these overlapping covers—amounting, in good slapstick, banana-peel fashion, to a slippery slope of misunderstandings—cue us in to the wider valences of the "indiscreet" in Mackenzie's novel. Figuring private relationships as marked by "shifts and subterfuges" (305) not unlike those employed by secret agents, *Water* recognizes that erotic desire, like espionage, generates a zone in which "[deceitfulness] soon becomes second nature" (111).

The sexual overtones of "plumbing" and "leakage" allow Mackenzie to interrogate the correlation between secrecy and indecency—Hudson's "guilty secret" (28)—as it pertains to the predominantly heterosexual relationships in the novel. But *Water* also gestures toward more subversive forms of homosexuality that simultaneously embody and threaten to expose the "trade" of intelligence. Both S.R.D. and M.Q.99 (E) are essentially manifestations of the Edwardian club, a closed, homosocial network of "old boys" whose behavior is governed by a gentlemanly code of conduct. Any "violation of that eccentric code of honour which governs the Secret Service" (57) constitutes an affront to masculinity itself. It is no mistake that Robert Baden-Powell, the former military intelligence officer and founder of the Boy Scouts, refers to spies as "gentry" in his equally eccentric 1915 memoir, *My Adventures as a Spy* (9); the code of the agent derives from a nineteenth-century ideal of secrecy and reserve, an ideal literally codified in the Official Secrets Act for the benefit of middle-class civil servants who, it was believed, lacked the breeding and integrity of their betters.[37] Like Baden-Powell, N objects to the word "spying" because it allows his agents to "forget they were once gentleman" (43). All the same, these semantic reservations inadvertently reveal the "guilty secret" of spying: that espionage is itself an "ungentlemanly" and illegal activity involving dissimulation and voyeurism. While passing the time in a hotel lounge, Blenkinsop engages in a bit of casual

eavesdropping and, in doing so, renders himself suspect. His observation of two lesbians at a nearby table—"He had never in his life heard one woman talk in such a way to another"—prompts one of the women to warn her partner that the "horrible satyr at the next table is gloating over you, darling" (30). "[Flushed] under the imputation of such ungentlemanly behaviour" (30), Blenkinsop turns to a different table, only to overhear the woman remark to her lover: "Dick, move your chair around. There's a nasty old homo at the next table trying to catch your eye" (33).

While this relatively minor incident touches upon *Water*'s larger concern with the spy as sexual transgressor or penetrator, the novel's Scottish climax foregrounds the association between security leaks and leaky bodies as a fear of being penetrat*ed*. In one respect, Scotland embodies a threat to state security, a zone of disputed sovereignty in which militant nationalism menaces the integrity of Britain as a political entity. Like the secret service's investment in restoring a stable monarchy to the island nation of Mendacia, the imperative to quell Scottish insurrection indicates that what is at stake in *Water* is likewise the safeguarding of borders and hegemonies. In another respect, Scotland provides Mackenzie with a means of transposing security anxieties to the level of the physical body. When N dispatches an agent, a certain Sergeant Flack, to assist Blenkinsop in the Highlands, the chief of M.Q.99 (E) suggests he travel as a kilted Scotsman. "[If] it's all the same to you, sir," Flack responds, "I'd feel more confidential, sir, in shorts" (191). Flack's malapropism neatly encapsulates the unsteady relationship between secrecy and containment in Mackenzie's "fairy tale"; the effeminizing kilt, a stereotypically revealing garment, materializes (so to speak) both the fear of exposing oneself and of being caught off guard—what Tifft, in the context of Renoir's film describes as the "degradation" inherent in farce, "[the] shame of egregiously leaving one's flank open to

penetration, of allowing oneself to be taken from behind" (145)—represented by the potentially compromising volatility of Scotland itself. Given the chronic misprision of the intelligence community, however, Scottish nationalism ultimately presents less of a threat than the service's preoccupation with its own confidentiality. Choosing, for the sake of secrecy, to rendezvous with the deposed King of Mendacia—who has been staying in Scotland incognito—in the Turkish bathhouse of the Glenmore Sanatorium, Blenkinsop fails to prevent the meeting from spiraling into sweaty discord; the toweled conspirators, exhausted by extreme heat and perspiration, retire to the massage table where an S.R.D. agent, sent on P's orders to spy on Blenkinsop, poses as a shampooer and proceeds to vigorously spank the King, whom he believes to be a Scottish insurgent. Aghast, the King's host, a genuine Scottish nationalist, nearly blows the King's cover before Blenkinsop pulls him into the plunge bath to silence him. Clearly, "exposure" is less an external threat than an internal, constitutive defect, the direct result of the very security measures put in place to plug leaks.

While Mackenzie stops short of directly figuring sodomy, the secret state's phobia of being "taken from behind" redounds to the rhetorical incursion of those who write "vulgar shockers" (281). Although Blenkinsop is careful to avoid revealing anything about his profession to Hudson, he is later shocked to discover that the banana importer's new novel is called *The Secret of Pomona Lodge* (277).[38] While Hudson's choice of title, which threatens to divulge the actual location of M.Q.99 (E) headquarters, is purely coincidental, Blenkinsop writes to Hudson asking him to halt publication and warning him against potentially "serious libels" (289). As in Mackenzie's trial, the conflation of libel with official secrecy—civil with criminal law—reflects on the secret state's privileging of image over security, its investment in policing its own (aesthetic) aura. But Hudson's random choice of signifier also attests to the slippery

materiality of the letter; the accidental correspondence between Hudson's fictitious headquarters and N's top-secret office evidences less the meaningfulness of the term than its meaninglessness, an effect of the inanimacy of language that intrudes upon, obstructs, and compromises "intelligence" and intelligibility. Unable or unwilling to face this most guilty secret, N and P become convinced that Blenkinsop acted in a "grossly indiscreet" manner (297) and resolve to treat Hudson's novel as a dangerous disclosure. They therefore decide that the only solution is to relocate the headquarters of M.Q.99 (E) to an undisclosed location. According to the narrator, Pomona Lodge now serves as "an asylum for the servants of bureaucracy who have been driven mad in the service of their country":

> Only the other day the chronicler was privileged to be shown over it by one of the most distinguished alienists of the day, and it will be long before he forgets the experience. There he saw distracted typists typing away feverishly at reports which would never be read even in eternity. There he saw worn-out servants of the Inland Revenue assessing their own nurses' incomes at fabulous amounts. There cheek by jowl sat the squander-maniac and the suicidal junior clerk—the one writing out cheques for trillions of pounds, the other collecting the odd bits of red tape of which he hoped one day to weave a rope to hang himself. (71)

For the secret service, this institution may be a blessing in disguise: "It is within the bounds of possibility," N hopes, "that the precautions which are taken to keep the unfortunate patients secluded from the public eye will lead foreign agents to suppose that Pomona Lodge is still the head-quarters of the Secret Service" (306).

In their own ways, both *Greek Memories* and Mackenzie's account of the trial had already revealed the "crass materialism" (Marx, *Critique* 47) of the secret state, but *Water* takes this critique a step further, not only in emphasizing the farcical sheltering and overburdening of the letter, but in making the Official Secrets Act itself an object of aesthetic play. When Westmacott suggests that Hudson's novel be forcibly withdrawn, N replies: "I do not think that suppression is feasible, General, unless we proceed against Blenkinsop under the Official Secrets

Act, and even then, in the lamentable state of public opinion at present, we might only end by giving the book an advertisement" (306). Secretly, however, N's decision to forgo prosecution is motivated by self-interest:

> He had had much too wide an experience of Intelligence work really to believe Blenkinsop's explanation; but that very experience made him realize that for the sake of the future of M.Q.99 (E) it was wiser to avoid a prosecution of Blenkinsop under the Official Secrets Act, which would only rebound to the credit of the S.R.D., and to use his knowledge of the Scottish rising as a lurking threat to the ambition of P to control all Intelligence. (305)

Here, the Act is quite literally a dead letter, whose only purpose is to serve as a gambit within interdepartmental conflicts. Leaving the intelligence and security services to quarrel amongst themselves, Blenkinsop retires from the secret service. In a final irony, Blenkinsop relocates to the island-nation of Mendacia, where he is well-received by the newly-restored sovereign, who grants him the lofty title "Commander of the Sacred Source" (308).

At the conclusion of *Water on the Brain*, Blenkinsop's fate moves into sync with that of his creator. Just as Mackenzie's wartime "gross breach of discipline" led, paradoxically, to his promotion to Director of Aegean Intelligence, multiple international decorations, and an OBE, his trial under the Official Secrets Act would initiate two decades of prolific literary work, culminating in a knighthood in 1952. During this time, he was not only allowed to publish his potentially troubling satire on the secret state, but also a revised edition of *Greek Memories*, complete with its revelation of the "mysterious letter"—but not, interestingly, the name of Mansfield Cumming. Nevertheless, one may very well wonder how Mackenzie could get away at all with a body of work that teetered, as the writer was acutely aware, on the edges of unlawful disclosure and libel.

Arguably, these seeming reversals of fortune, particularly the fact that Mackenzie was able to publish his spy farce so soon after his trial, may indicate what Jessica Milner Davis calls

"the essential conservatism of the farcical rebellion" (42). In her study of the genre, Davis writes that "[the] dangerous tendency towards personal satire is ever-present in the history of farce. Even where mimicry of that kind takes place as part of a licensed festival—during the Feast of Fools, for example, or Carnival, or Twelfth Night—the possibility of giving offence remains" (3). Consequently, so as not to exceed its license, farce typically aspires to balance "the eternal comic conflict between the forces of conventional authority and the forces of rebellion":

> The strictness of its rules is necessary to prevent farce from over-balancing into an outright attack upon social conventions of its time. If the farcical conflict is released from its traditional patterns of balance, farce becomes dangerous and liable to provoke the response of censorship. If the conflict is allowed to escape its stylized and care-free 'play-frame', farce becomes cynical, a piece of black, absurdist comedy. (24)

While Davis is primarily concerned with dramatic forms of farce, it is not difficult to see how *Water*, for all its direct and implied criticisms of the intelligence community and its secrecy legislation, achieves something of a balance in its "disclaimer" that the novel is nothing more than a "grotesque fairy tale."

All the same, in the history of the novel's reception, we discover that *Water* did, in fact, break out of its "play-frame." The Duke of Westminster praised Mackenzie for producing "the only realistic book about secret service he had read" (*MLT7* 114). This opinion appears to have been secretly shared by both British and American intelligence services during the Second World War, who considered the book a kind of espionage training manual. In his "New Preface" to the 1954 edition of *Water*, Mackenzie writes:

> *Water on the Brain* at one time looked like becoming a serious textbook for neophytes of the Secret Service, and indeed if it had not for a time been so difficult to get hold of, it probably would have become a standard work. [….] It has indeed become impossible for me to devise any ludicrous situation the absurdity of which will not be surpassed by officialdom. (N. pag.)

After the war, Mackenzie was surprised to learn that the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS; the forerunner of the CIA) "had found a copy of *Water on the Brain* in Cairo and had had a hundred photostat copies made to coach young American Intelligence officers in secret service work" (*MLT7* 114)—a fact confirmed by multiple sources.[39] On the one hand, the adoption of Mackenzie's novel by these intelligence services further supports Davis's Foucauldian contention that farce is ultimately licensed and recuperated by authority, as well as Agamben's claim that forms of "legal anarchy" celebrate and replicate "[the] secret solidarity between anomie and law" (*State* 71). Like Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden*, another darkly humorous account of secret service work that was partially suppressed and then taken up as an insider manual, *Water* was eventually embraced by the very community it had sought to attack. On the other hand, this recuperation oddly confirms the truth of the text. In his revised preface, Mackenzie goes on to note that the British film industry was still reticent, twenty years later, about making the novel into a movie for fear that "They" might be angered. In the public imagination, *Water* had eclipsed *Greek Memories* as the violative spyography. "Quite a number of people believe," Mackenzie observes in his preface, "that I was prosecuted for writing *Water on the Brain* and revealing the secrets of Pomona Lodge" (n. pag.).

Mackenzie's life and work bear witness to that particular form of farce marked by what Tifft describes as "upper-class investments that are decisively ill-attuned to the disaster to come, and that may invite disaster through the oblivion they foster" (131). To put it another way, what the modernist projects of *Greek Memories* and *Water on the Brain* convey most clearly is a misplaced faith in old-world hierarchies and gentlemanly codes of secrecy. Not long after the publication of Mackenzie's "grotesque fairy tale," a group of economically privileged and preeminently-educated young men would serve as Soviet moles within the British secret state,

remaining largely undetected by agencies more preoccupied with departmental rivalries than maintaining security, and protected by an almost religious faith in the integrity of the Oxbridge elite. Tellingly, in *My Silent War* (1968), the traitor Kim Philby quotes Mackenzie's Director of Extraordinary Intelligence, who declares that "the whole point of the Secret Service is that it should be secret" (qtd. in Philby 56). Whether or not we agree with D. J. Dooley that Philby's career proves the accuracy of Mackenzie's farce (99), Philby's penetration of the secret state was certainly an act of "buglary."

If the Official Secrets Act is, in some sense, an attempt to meet the security needs of the modern era by literally codifying a phantasmal (previously unwritten) code of secrecy, its ambiguity and radical openness, which permit its wielder both to apply and suspend the law at will, inadvertently work to undermine its very application. Attorney General Thomas Inskip himself maintained that "the Official Secrets Act must either be, as far as possible, enforced or it must be treated as a dead letter" (qtd. in Rogers 34).[40] Mackenzie's true violation is to demonstrate that the "solemn mumbo-jumbo of the law" (*MLT7* 101) is always already a "dead letter"—even, or especially, when enforced. Like "[the] tradition of all the dead generations [that] weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx, *Eighteenth* 15), "water on the brain" symptomizes the simultaneously farcical and nightmarish zone of indistinction between anomie and law, life and death, democracy and totalitarianism, which renders all citizens potential "leaks" and enemies of the state.

NOTES

[1] Mackenzie was knighted in May 1952.

[2] Ten years after the war had ended, the ever-prolific Mackenzie wrote two spy novels, *Extremes Meet* and *The Three Couriers* (both published in 1928), that drew, to a limited extent, upon his wartime espionage work. Annoyed that reviewers considered these novels to be purely fiction, Mackenzie resolved to record his experiences as a "true story": "Perhaps I felt I owed it to myself," he would later write, "to make it clear that my experience was the result of my own creative passion … I did not want it to be regarded as mere material for fiction" (qtd. in Linklater 230). The first two volumes of his war memoirs, *Gallipoli Memories* (1929) and *First Athenian Memories* (1931; republished as *Athenian Memories*), were well-received and served to bolster Mackenzie's growing reputation as a man of action and political substance, perhaps even playing a role in his ascension to the Glasgow University rectorship in 1931.

[3] Further references to Mackenzie's ten-volume autobiography, *My Life and Times* (1963-71), will be abbreviated as *MLT* followed by the octave number (*MLT1*, *MLT2*, etc.).

[4] Mackenzie is perhaps best known for his Scottish comedies, *The Monarch of the Glen* (1941) and *Whisky Galore* (1947).

[5] In *The Trial*, for example, Joseph K.'s state-appointed lawyer mentions that all of his previous cases—and perhaps even Joseph K.'s own case—"[deal] with official secrets" (125).

[6] In *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (1984), Sissela Bok locates the "esoteric rationale for control over government secrecy" in the transference of "the aura of sacredness from the *arcana ecclesiae* of church, ritual, and religious officials" to "the principle of *arcana imperii*: 'secrets of rule,' or 'mysteries of state'" (172). "Through the doctrine of the divine right of monarchs," Bok avers, "secret government was given a sanctity of its own" (172). This historical relationship may explain why the issue of secrecy is perpetually bound up with that of sovereignty and loyalty in Mackenzie's account of the trial and in *Water on the Brain*.

[7] See, for instance, Sean Latham's *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman á Clef* (2009) and Celia Marshik's *British Modernism and Censorship* (2006), which posits a "censorship dialectic" at work in modernist literature responding to concerns over obscenity and indecency.

[8] Page references to *Greek Memories* refer to the suppressed 1932 edition unless otherwise noted.

[9] In 1915, Greece had yet to enter the war, and the country was divided in support of King Constantine I, who had strong German sympathies, and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, who staunchly supported the Allied cause. To make matters worse, the SIS counterespionage bureau found itself at the crux of a bureaucratic nightmare:

> By a freak of circumstance, the eastern Mediterranean was a military wasteland commanded by three different headquarters at Alexandria, Cairo and Salonica, with the Royal Navy also attempting to impose its will from Malta. The intelligence community was no less confused. The Athens station was answerable to Mansfield Cumming, head of what was then MI1(C) and later MI6, who was in charge of all intelligence and counter-intelligence outside the empire. Colonel Vernon Kell ran MI5, which was concerned with counter-intelligence inside the empire. Grafted onto these peacetime organizations were MI2 or military intelligence under General George Macdonogh, to whom the military attachés reported, and naval intelligence under Admiral Reginald Hall, to whom the naval attachés reported. All of them jockeyed furiously to expand their spheres of influence, and 'Blinker' Hall, in particular, was known as a merciless poacher of other people's agents. (Linklater 153-4)

[10] Tellingly, Holt-Wilson was himself sent to sleuth Mackenzie's operation in Athens. See Jeffery 127.

[11] As Mackenzie clarifies in his autobiography, Samson's actual designation was "R" (*MLT5* 29).

[12] One wonders if Mackenzie took inspiration from G. K. Chesterton's metaphysical spy novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1907), in which an anarchist agent in London realizes that the best way to travel incognito would be to dress up *as* an anarchist. Reportedly, Michael Collins, while Director of Intelligence for the Irish Republican Army, attempted to put Chesterton's idea into practice.

[13] Mackenzie wrote his 1932 memoir with the assistance of three crates of documents, which he had shipped from his former headquarters on the Aegean island of Syra to his home on Capri (Linklater 241). In a 1939 "Postscript" appended to his revised edition of *Greek Memories*, Mackenzie notes that T. E. Lawrence felt "I had spoilt my book by including too many of the details of administrative work" (viii). While Mackenzie agreed that

Greek Memories was "over-documented" (*MLT7* 135), this new emphasis on documentation was the result of his desire to set the record straight following the publication in 1931 of Sir Basil Thomson's *The Allied Secret Service in Greece*, a book that Mackenzie believed gave a fallacious account of SIS in Athens (Linklater 242). Thomson, a former colonial officer and writer who became the wartime head of New Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and subsequently served as the (self-styled) "Director of Intelligence" for the Special Branch from 1919-1921, was apparently paid to write his account by the Greek royal family, still bitter over SIS's backing of Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos over the pro-German King Constantine during the war. As Mackenzie observes in his original "Preface" to *Greek Memories*, Thomson had "little more opportunity to know what was happening in Greece during 1915-1917 than the man in the street": "'Experienced Intelligence officers take steps to check the accuracy of the information that reaches them in this way.' Thus writes Sir Basil Thomson in the preface of his book, and with those words he condemns himself with his own pen more ruthlessly than I could condemn him with mine" (viii). What Mackenzie did not expect was that, in his obsession with accuracy, he was also condemning himself. In spite of his (aesthetic) reservations concerning Mackenzie's use of official documents, however, Lawrence believed that prosecution was unjustified. After the trial in 1933, he told Mackenzie that the "Secret People" had "behaved disgustingly" (qtd. in Linklater 253).

[14] Given that Athens had now become "a centre of intrigue" (10), Mackenzie asserts in his report, the Z Bureau required, in addition to more funding, office equipment, and clerical staff, a greater range of powers to carry out counterespionage. Accordingly, Mackenzie proposes more control over passports and visas (14), increased cooperation with the French secret service (15), the creation of a Press Bureau "to check the local activities of the hostile propaganda" (16), and the consolidation in Athens of all Black Lists in the Mediterranean theater (16). In addition, Mackenzie includes a list of grievances over conflicting spheres of influence—"petty annoyances" (7)—and stresses the need for unconditional autonomy, a "[complete] separation from any organization that has military information as its main object" (14). "I venture to urge," Mackenzie concludes, "that academic and sentimental considerations should be thrown aside" (17).

[15] Mackenzie's initial reaction was justified, it seems, for Captain Mansfield Cumming had indeed developed a swashbuckling reputation that would not have been out-of-place in a Stevensonian adventure-yarn or *The Boy's Own Paper.* In *The Second Oldest Profession* (1986), espionage historian Phillip Knightley describes the mythological valence of the chief, a man who, anticipating the spy fantasies of Ian Fleming, had a passion for fast cars, clever gadgets, and invisible inks, and who considered espionage to be "time spent largely in enjoyment, full of sporting value" (qtd. in Knightley 30). "All organizations," Knightley writes, "especially secret ones, need legends and one quickly grew up about Cumming":

> It is difficult to write seriously about Cumming […]. He wore a gold-rimmed monocle, wrote only in green ink, and, after he lost a leg in an accident, used to get around the corridors by putting his wooden one on a child's scooter and propelling himself vigorously with the other. Visitors were intimidated by his habit of stabbing this wooden leg with his paper knife in order to drive home the point of an argument. His journal, a battered naval log book, contains entries such as, 'To Clarkson's today to buy a new disguise'. (Knightley 30)

Appropriately, in *Greek Memories*, Mackenzie first reveals Cumming's full name in the context of one such legend, the apocryphal account of the chief's missing leg:

> Somebody had told Sells the story of how Captain Mansfield Cumming, R.N., had lost his leg. This was the first time I had heard C's real name. Apart from the initial he was usually known as Captain Spencer. In the autumn of 1914 his son, a subaltern in the Seaforths, had been driving him in a fast car on some urgent Intelligence mission in the area of operations. The car going at full speed had crashed into a tree and overturned, pinning Captain Cumming by the leg and flinging his son out on his head. The boy was fatally injured, and his father, hearing him moan something about the cold, tried to extricate himself from the wreck of the car to put a coat over him; but struggle as he might he could not free his smashed leg. Thereupon he had taken out a penknife and hacked away at his smashed leg until he had cut it off, after which he had crawled over to his son and spread a coat over him, being found later lying unconscious by the dead body.
>
> "That's the sort of old chap C is," said Sells. (*Greek* 90-1)

[16] Another former agent, Major Stephen Alley, later recalled that "[to] approach Cumming's office it was necessary for a visitor to climb a staircase and wait while the secretary pressed a bell, whereupon Cumming would operate a system of levers and pedals which moved a pile of bricks revealing more steps" (qtd. in Knightley 31). As in Dukes's account, Alley's description confirms that C's office was littered with papers, maps, and models. "This atmosphere of strangeness and mystery," however, "was rather destroyed by the fact that Cumming's secretary kept coming up through a hole in the floor" (qtd. in Knightley 31).

[17] In 1938, Paul Dukes published *The Story of "ST 25",* a revised and expanded version of his earlier memoir. Even six years after Mackenzie's disclosure of C's identity, Dukes refuses to name Cumming or even write the now infamous initial employed by "the Chief," noting only that "[to] his subordinates and associates he was invariably known and signed himself by a single letter of the alphabet in ink of a particular hue" (35). Dukes claims that the great man "read and approved of these pages and all I have here related about him and the roof-labyrinth, but I never received permission to mention his name, which probably would have been little known to the general public anyway" (35). It should serve as an indication of the tremendous power of the concept of official secrecy that Dukes and other writers continued to keep secret that which was already public knowledge.

[18] Like the poetic codenames Mackenzie gave to his spies in Athens, the pseudonym "Captain Spencer"—the Spenserian architect of a secret world, where military and political reality are reduced to an allegorical fairyland of heroes and villains—may indicate a willful identification between espionage and literature, but likewise appeals to a cultural sense of tradition and nobility that serves to enforce the essentially aristocratic code of secrecy itself.

[19] Mackenzie would dedicate one of his first postwar novels—and his first truly comic novel—*Poor Relations* (1919) to Cumming: "This theme in C Major with variations to the romantic and mysterious Captain C by one who was privileged to serve under him during more than two years of war" (qtd. in *MLT5* 150).

[20] In October 1931, in an unprecedented victory, Mackenzie was elected the first Lord Rector of Glasgow University from the Scottish National Party, notably defeating (among others) Sir Oswald Mosley of the New Party. He was also, he proudly admitted, the first Catholic Rector since the Reformation (Linklater 238). His fame was such that W. H. Auden felt obliged to pay an ironic tribute to him in *The Orators* (1932): "Scotland is stirring: in Scotland they say / That Compton Mackenzie will be king one day" (106).

[21] See Alex Segal, "Deconstruction, Radical Secrecy, and *The Secret Agent*," for more on the concept of "a secret without secret, a secret beyond the secret that displaces the secret with content" (189), which Segal locates in the work of Joseph Conrad and Jacques Derrida.

[22] In addition to replacing the notorious section 2 of the 1911 Official Secrets Act, the 1989 Act places much-needed restrictions on what can be declared a harmful "disclosure," forcing the government to prove that the disclosure in question truly "endangers the interests of the United Kingdom" (section 2 [2] [b]).

[23]Naturally, Mackenzie also had to contend with the fact that he had, by his own admission, quoted extensively from confidential papers. After the committal proceedings, Poole informed him that no happy ending would be possible at the trial: "[The] judge will tell the jury that it is not their business to say whether any harm was done by your book but merely to say whether or not you had used information in it which you could only have obtained in the position you occupied officially" (*MLT7* 94). However, Poole added, the attorney general had already arranged with the judge for Mackenzie to be fined rather than imprisoned. "In those days," Linklater writes, "Official Secrets cases were still sufficiently rare for Monty to be genuinely shocked by the revelation of collusion between the judiciary and the executive" (Linklater 251). Realizing that his fate had already been sealed and that his defense could not rest on proving the innocuousness of his disclosures, Mackenzie reluctantly chose to plead guilty.

This secret and essentially unlawful complicity between the executive and judicial spheres would seem to support the young Marx's interpretation of Hegel, who, in his *Philosophy of Right*, "coordinates executive, police, and judiciary, where as a rule the administrative and judiciary powers are treated as opposed" (*Critique* 41). "Because Hegel has already claimed the police and judiciary to be spheres of civil society," Marx continues, "the executive is nothing but the administration, which [Hegel] develops as the bureaucracy" (*Critique* 44). In the case of Mackenzie, this supposed coordination results in discord, a farcical overcrowding of conflicting interests converging in the space of the courtroom, which becomes the venue for a kind of closet-drama that Mackenzie would later equate with the nonsensical trial in *Alice in Wonderland* (*MLT7* 99).

[24] Observing Holt-Wilson in the gallery, Mackenzie "could not understand how so intelligent a man had allowed Intelligence to undermine his own intelligence" (*MLT7* 96).

[25] If there were any doubt that sovereignty was as much at stake as secrecy in Mackenzie's trial, the questions put to Mackenzie's character witnesses should erase any doubt. After lunch, when the court was no longer *in camera*, both General Sir Ian Hamilton, Mackenzie's former commander at Gallipoli and current Lord Rector of Edinburgh University, and Vice-Admiral William Sells, who had served as Naval Attaché in Athens, were called to

the witness stand to testify on Mackenzie's behalf. To Mackenzie's surprise, both men were asked to verify the loyalty of the accused to King George V (*MLT7* 99). Mackenzie would later learn, through powerful friends who offered to "sleuth" for him, that "[those] who moved in the matter of *Greek Memories* had secured the approval of King George before they took action" (*MLT7* 105). Moreover, it was believed that the king himself had been offended by Mackenzie's anti-royalist stance in *Greek Memories* and that his support of SIS's and MI5's motion to have the book withdrawn might have had little, if anything, to do with the disclosure of official secrets. If so, Linklater contends, "it meant that the motive for prosecution came, not from any threat [the memoir] posed to the security of the nation, but from the aspersions it cast upon the pro-German King Constantine" (253). It would seem, then, that the imperative to uphold sovereign authority transcended even political and ideological differences between nations, and that it justified the setting in motion of a legal and bureaucratic machine bent on sacrificing and vilifying a diligent officer and loyal subject.

[26] In *State of Exception*, Agamben traces the concept of the sovereign as "living law" to the treatise *On Law and Justice* by Pseudo-Archytas, who writes "that every community is composed of an *arkhōn* (the magistrate who commands), one who is commanded, and, thirdly, the laws. Of these last, the living one is the sovereign (*ho men empsukhos ho basileus*) and the inanimate one is the letter (*gramma*)" (qtd. in *State* 70).

[27] Perhaps the most poignant indication of the irrationality of the code of secrecy and its legal enforcement is the fact that, even after Mackenzie's secret but well-publicized trial, both MI5 and SIS continued to use the same monoliteral designations. In his memoir of the secret service during the Second World War, *The Infernal Grove*, Malcolm Muggeridge notes that "the Chief, at the time Sir Stuart Menzies, was still known as 'C' even in the internal telephone directory, and all other blown symbols and aliases were scrupulously maintained" (122). Indeed, the head of SIS is still known as C in the twenty-first century.

[28] In addition to the fine and over £1100 in legal fees, Mackenzie had to reimburse Cassell the £500 he had been paid for *Greek Memories* as well as £900 for the cost of publication (Linklater 252). These costs brought Mackenzie to the point of bankruptcy, and he was forced to auction off his extensive book collection to make ends meet.

[29] A new edition of *Greek Memories* would, in fact, be published by Chatto and Windus in 1939. In his "Postscript," Mackenzie asserts "that the present edition has *not* been censored, and I beg readers to accept my assurance that they have not been deprived of any secrets, nutritious or otherwise" (ix). However, Mackenzie's declaration is not altogether accurate; in addition to cutting some of the "administrative details" that T. E. Lawrence felt "dull and superfluous" (viii-ix), Mackenzie struck the name of Mansfield Cumming from his memoir, leaving only "C" to signify the (by then) open secret of the chief's true identity.

[30] Prior to the trial, when an acquaintance suggested that Mackenzie should go to prison in order to gather material for a novel, Mackenzie had his doubts: "Didn't Shakespeare say, 'Art is tongue-tied by authority'?" (*MLT7* 88).

[31] The narrator does not give the exact year, but he records that the events begin "on a foggy November morning in the year 193—" (1).

[32] Hunter-Hunt's initials may owe something to Valentine Vivian, the real-life "V.V." who testified as "Major X" at Mackenzie's hearing.

[33] In *The Secret History of MI6*, Jeffery notes that, during the interwar years, Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) employees were likewise uncertain about what "SIS" actually stood for. "From a security perspective," Jeffery admits, "this was not necessarily a bad thing for a deeply secret organization, though it had the potential to be unnecessarily confusing" (209).

[34] Such metaphors for espionage were apparently commonplace during the First World War. In his autobiography, Mackenzie reveals that intelligence work was sometimes referred to as "buying oranges" (*MLT7* 92). But "plumbing" also uncannily anticipates another leaky incident, the Watergate break-in carried out by Richard Nixon's White House "Plumbers."

[35] Nor will the narrator reveal the location of P's stronghold: "The Safety of the Realm Division," he informs us, "was housed in Z— Terrace, a row of three solid and dignified mid-Victorian dwelling-houses, the gardens of which at the back sloped down to the Y— Canal where it passed through the district of Q— in the great metropolis of X—" (178).

[36] In one of those remarkable instances of life imitating art, the thriller writer turned spy, Geoffrey Household, also worked for a time as a banana importer.

[37] In *The Culture of Secrecy*, David Vincent writes that "the honourable gentleman was expected to display courage, truthfulness, honesty, unselfishness, generosity, modesty, composure, thoughtfulness, and a self-denying lack of ambition for external recognition" (38). Nonetheless, Vincent argues, as "[new] social groups were

competing for power" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (14), the enforcement of secrecy through law was considered a necessary response to the widening of the civil service pool. In *Water*, N evinces similar fears concerning the encroachment of the middle class, observing that during the war the service "let in a lot of confounded amateurs, who had no traditions, no discipline, no anything" (43).

[38] The publisher's blurb on the book's jacket notes that York Lankester's "knowledge of the underworld of diplomacy recalls that of the late William le Queux" and that he "[combines] a meticulous inside knowledge of his subject with a rare distinction of style" (278). Significantly, Mackenzie has his fictional publisher associate Lankester with a real-life prolific spy novelist whose yarns are often cited as the inspiration for the British secret service itself.

[39] See, for example, Norman Holmes Pearson's foreword to J. C. Masterman's *The Double-Cross System*, in which Pearson confirms that *Water on the Brain* was "half desperately" given to American OSS trainees during the Second World War to prepare them for the reality of intelligence work (xi).

[40] Inskip made this remark while serving as prosecution in a similar case in 1934, that of George Lansbury, who was tried and convicted for violating the Official Secrets Act after publishing a biography of his father based in part on official documents (Rogers 34).

CHAPTER THREE

"Better Burn This": Playing Spy in W. H. Auden's *The Orators*

> The spirit naturally chooses the difficult rather than the easy. It is so much more interesting…. This also accounts for the success of repression. Half the mind enjoys the difficulty of censoring, the other half of circumventing the censor.
> —W. H. Auden, entry in the Berlin journal (1929)[1]

"When everything is classified, then nothing is classified." Such was the conclusion of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in his judgment on the "Pentagon Papers" case in 1971,[2] and his words have since become a refrain in current debates surrounding WikiLeaks and the possible prosecution of Julian Assange.[3] As I have argued, however, this revelation is nothing new; the interwar period in Britain witnessed its own scandalous leakages in the decades following the First World War. In spite (or because) of the radical tightening of security in the Official Secrets Acts of 1911 and 1920, the late 1920s and early 1930s saw an *increase* in the publication of supposedly classified material. Indeed, the proliferation of spyographies attests to the paradox that underlies even the most draconian national security legislation: secrecy generates discourse.

At the same time, we find that the disclosures of former agents like W. Somerset Maugham, Compton Mackenzie, Paul Dukes, and R. H. Bruce Lockhart—not to mention the mythologization of such figures as Mata Hari, Sidney Reilly, and T. E. Lawrence—inevitably led to the apotheosis of the spy as a cultural icon. The explosion of over-the-top espionage yarns in the form of films, novels, and boys' weeklies created an atmosphere in which the thriller served as both an individual and collective *imaginaire*, a fantasy of agency in response to political uncertainty and the threat of renewed conflict. Of course, such daydreaming could also be taken to the point of absurdity. By January 1939, Evelyn Waugh could posit the existence of what he termed "the Pseudo-Secret-Service" (*Essays* 243), a pretentious social set who lay claim to being

"well-informed" by projecting a false aura of danger and intrigue. "Those who seek admission to this honourable corps," Waugh explains, "must have travelled a little in the Near East and, if possible, beyond. They must exhibit an interest in languages—a different and vastly easier thing than a knowledge of them" (243). In order to be convincing, members of the Pseudo-Secret-Service are obliged to engage in an elaborate performance:

> In appearance, the Pseudo-Secret-Service are conventional. From time to time, they must be seen in public with very queer company and, when asked about it, reply, 'Well in a way it's more or less my job.' They must have a keen memory for diplomatic appointments; not only our own, but the whole boiling. '. . . Going to Warsaw? Let's see, who have the Siamese got there now? . . .' You can also flatter your friends and enhance your own prestige by giving them little commissions to execute for you: 'Going to Paris? I wonder if you could find out something for me. I should very much like to know who owns a little weekly called *Le Faux Bonhomme* . . .' Or '. . . I wonder if you'd mind posting a letter for me in Budapest. I'd rather prefer the government not to have it through their hands . . .' (243)

In Waugh's characterization, the pseudo-spy has information but little intelligence; his false front is, more generally, the *modus operandi* of an elite network of "good old boys," plucky fellows, and *bonhommes* who seem in-the-know while knowing little at all. "The strength of this school," Waugh concludes, "is that, as one of its prime objects is evasion, it is almost impossible to be shown up; the weakness is that it is very easy, in a confidential or convivial moment, to show oneself up" (243).

Clearly, by the time Waugh wrote his piece on the eve of the Second World War, the idea of living a clandestine, double life had become something of a running joke. For the young writers of the 1930s, however, *playing spy* was much more than a parlor game or an attempt to project a false persona. The identification between artist and spy constitutes an important dimension of the political aesthetic of the so-called "Auden generation" who came of age in the 1920s and published their first significant works in the 1930s. Too often, though, commentators account for this phenomenon as a manifestation of guilt over nonparticipation in the First World

War. To be fair, this response seems partly justified in light of the group's own admissions of inferiority. "[We] young writers of the middle 'twenties," Christopher Isherwood observes in *Lions and Shadows* (1938), "were all suffering, more or less subconsciously, from a feeling of shame that we hadn't been old enough to take part in the European war" (74). But the impetus to play spy arguably exceeds this complex and takes on a life of its own. On the one hand, espionage daydreams provide a means of expressing more illicit desires. For those writers who were homosexual, the spy who employs secret codes and operates *sub rosa* seemed an appropriate figure for a subversive—and, at the time, illegal—sexuality, an underground network characterized by the cultivation of (in Waugh's words) "queer company." On the other hand, unlike Waugh's Pseudo-Secret-Service, with its sense of doing one's bit for king and country, the young writers at Oxford and Cambridge in the mid-1920s imagined themselves to be *hostile* agents whose mission was to infiltrate the bourgeois world of "the English" (248). "Everywhere," Isherwood recalls, "we encountered enemy agents" (67), and "[the] most I shall ever achieve, I thought, will be to learn how to spy upon them, unnoticed" (248). By the early 1930s, this game of observation had developed into a covert attack on English liberalism as well as an imaginative campaign against the growth of fascism at home and abroad. To the young, left-leaning writers of the time, the high-modernist notion of "art for art's sake" seemed ill-prepared to meet the challenges of the decade; the political climate of the 1930s, along with the anticipation of a coming war, called for a new conception of art as *action*, and the figure of the spy provided a model for traversing the perilous border between public and private modes of expression and engagement.

For W. H. Auden, who, along with Isherwood, witnessed firsthand the rise of the German National Socialist Party while living in Berlin from October 1928 to July 1929, fascism was as

much a British disease as it was a continental one, and this menace called for the *domestication* of the spy trope as a means of checking and exposing the totalitarian tendencies within democracy itself. Edward Mendelson, the poet's literary executor, suggests that Auden returned to England "with a half-serious fantasy of himself as a secret agent behind enemy lines" (*Early* 85). Accordingly, Auden's first book, *Poems* (1930), is replete with images of spies, border crossings, and acts of sabotage. But unlike some of Auden's more radical contemporaries—such as the novelist Edward Upward, who would join the Communist Party in 1932—the writer's early efforts also evince doubts about the antifascist and revolutionary potential of art. The most famous of these spy-poems, later titled "The Secret Agent," records an ill-fated mission: "Control of the passes was, he saw, the key / To this new district, but who would get it? / He, the trained spy, had walked into a trap / For a bogus guide, seduced by the old tricks" (*CP* 32). Auden's agent, whom Richard Davenport-Hines describes as a "frustrated adolescent" in search of "fulfilled adulthood" (*Auden* 85), is prevented from crossing into this "new district," thwarted by "the old tricks" of the establishment, and he ends the poem in anticipation of his imminent death by firing squad. If Auden's work at this time may be said to participate in what Lionel Trilling calls an "adversary culture"—which, I would suggest, appropriates espionage as its governing metaphor—poems like "The Secret Agent" imply that such cultured antagonism is ultimately *executed* (simultaneously licensed and defused) by the very enemy it seeks to challenge.

While the imperative to avoid "the old tricks," to work against fascist interests at home and abroad, would take on paramount importance in the late 1930s, fascism in the first years of the decade still exerted a powerful allure, and Auden's early work precariously swings both ways. Nowhere is this double agency more evident than in Auden's second and most difficult

work, *The Orators* (1932). Written in both verse and prose, *The Orators* is a parodic pastiche of styles in three "books," each a complex meditation on the leadership principle. Following a verse "Prologue" in which a boy-hero sets out to deliver "good news" to "a world in danger" only to return home to cries of "Coward" and "Deceiver" (*Orators* 9),[4] Book I, "The Initiates," traces in four stages the organization of a group around a romantic leader (who remains absent throughout the section) and the impact on the group of the leader's death. Book II, "Journal of an Airman," offers itself as the private diary of an airman-spy, the hero himself, engaged in an offensive campaign against an ambiguously bourgeois "enemy." Finally, Book III, "Six Odes,"[5] comprises six individual poems and an "Epilogue" that explore various themes from the previous books through more overt biographical references. Auden labored over the text from the spring to the autumn of 1931, while working as a teacher at Larchfield School in Helensburgh, near Glasgow—an institution that Mendelson describes as "a small down-at-heels preparatory school" (*Early* 95). Not surprisingly, *The Orators* is set primarily in an adolescent world of classrooms, playing fields, and summer holidays. The title, John Fuller has suggested, reflects Auden's interest in Ciceronian rhetoric: "For Cicero the orator was a statesman, but Auden is looking to see how a writer/schoolmaster might be politically effective in a world where the existing orators are corrupt" (87). Subtitled "An English Study," the text carries out a study of English language and culture, particularly the educational system, which Auden would later characterize as "a Fascist state" (*Prose* 59).

As Mendelson points out, "[the] whole volume is organized […] as a dialectical triad: a thesis of variously purposeful rhetorics in 'The Initiates,' an antithesis of private noncommunicative notebook entries in the 'Journal,' and a synthesis in formal odes that are both personal statements and public acts" (*Early* 94-95). In suggesting this outline, however,

Mendelson offers a qualification: "To say this is to attribute a precise formal order to a volume whose surface disorder is its most obvious characteristic" (95). Upon publication in 1932, most reviewers recognized the significance of the work but were perplexed by its obscurity, which Auden himself denigrated as "mostly swank" (qtd. in Mendelson, *Early* 96). While some readers, like John Hayward, hailed *The Orators* as "the most valuable contribution to English poetry since *The Waste Land*" (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 88), others, like Alan Pryce-Jones, admitted frustration: "I find myself [...] vaguely aware that something is going on, vaguely catching a glimpse of light, and quite unable to decide in the end what it is all about" (Pryce-Jones 96). The most puzzling aspect of *The Orators* is its ambivalence toward the *Führerprinzip*. Graham Greene's review in the *Oxford Magazine* is typical: "The subject of the book is political, though it is hard to tell whether the author's sympathies are communist or fascist" (qtd. in Carpenter 136). Writing his foreword to the revised 1966 edition of *The Orators*, Auden himself appears to be as confused as his first readers. Observing that "[the] central theme of *The Orators* seems to be Hero-worship" (7), the poet is unsure of what conclusion, if any, the poem finally reaches: "My guess to-day is that my unconscious motive in writing it was therapeutic, to exorcise certain tendencies in myself by allowing them to run riot in fantasy" (8).

As the poet indicates, the spy fantasy performs a cathartic or psychoanalytic function. Among the many thinkers whose ideas "run riot" throughout *The Orators*—thinkers as diverse as Homer Lane, John Layard, and D. H. Lawrence[6]—Sigmund Freud provides a key context for gauging Auden's "study" of individual and communal motivation. As I mentioned in my introductory chapter, Freud himself may be read as a theorist of "secret states." In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud characterizes the ego as a "mental agency" (7) that negotiates the porous

boundary between conscious and unconscious forces, attempts to keep the id in check, and exercises censorship in response to the injunctions of the superego or "critical agency" (41), which effectively serves as an internal security service tasked with enforcing the "law." As a servant of many "masters" (46), the ego is locked in a double (even triple) bind, a neurotic state of tension between law and transgression, concealment and revelation. The role of the psychoanalyst, as Auden understood it, is to act as a kind of private detective who uncovers the intrigues of these various agencies. However, like the poet's complex politics at the time, his investment in Freud is equally conflicted. He agreed, for example, with the Freudian mantra that "[a] man should not strive to eliminate his complexes but to get into accord with them" (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 88), but he took issue with what he considered to be the Viennese doctor's overemphasis on individual subjectivity. "Freud's error," Auden writes in his 1929 Berlin journal, "is the limitation of the neurosis to the individual. The neurosis involves all society" (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 112). While this may strike us as unfair to Freud—in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), he credits the superego with carrying out a distinctly socializing and civilizing function at odds with individual "desire" (84)—*The Orators* can be interpreted as Auden's attempt to diagnose a social neurosis or to explore, through play, what we might call a *politics of neurosis*, the psychosexual dimensions of both liberalism and fascism.

This is not to say that *The Orators* is a Freudian allegory or that Auden's spies are simply metaphors for abstract psychological concepts. Indeed, most critical assessments of Auden's enigmatic book tend to privilege the metaphoricity of espionage over its historical and material contexts.[7] Consequently, my goal in this analysis is to reassert the specificity of espionage in order to demonstrate the ways in which *literal* spying is always already bound up with social, cultural, and psychosexual functions. Aside from the fact that Auden's circle would soon

include many real-life "secret agents,"[8] he was also interested in the memoirs and disclosures of former intelligence officers. Whether or not Auden's decision to present *The Orators* as series of first-person revelations of various spies and intriguers owes something to the recently published spyographies of Maugham and Mackenzie,[9] his choice of form, particularly in "Journal of an Airman," reflects the period's preoccupation with private (or secret) histories.[10] In addition to the "literary influences" that Auden lists in his 1966 foreword,[11] Auden's reading in the two years immediately following the publication of *The Orators* in 1932—during which time the poet was preparing his second (1934) edition—suggests that Auden was greatly concerned with modes of auto/biographical inquiry and the manner in which these disclosures both resist and reinforce the internalization of discipline and surveillance that he traces to adolescence. Along with reviews and critical essays focused on poetry, psychology, and education, Auden treats a number of biographical and autobiographical works, including Winston Churchill's *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932), in which the author reveals a rather anticlimactic "spy story";[12] B. H. Liddell Hart's life of T. E. Lawrence, *Colonel Lawrence: The Man Behind the Legend* (1934), which details the hero's work for the British intelligence service in Cairo and his decisive role in the Arab Revolt; and Robert Baden-Powell's *Lessons from the 'Varsity of Life* (1933), in which the founder of the Boy Scouts yarns about his contentious espionage experiences in the 1880s and 1890s and his later "double life" as both military officer and Chief Scout. Taken as a whole, Auden's essays and reviews reveal a marked interest in the ambivalences of heroism and hero-worship; the various codes of behavior instilled in children through public schools and organizations like the Scouting Movement; and the ways in which English liberalism, as Auden puts it in a 1932 review in *Scrutiny*, "unconsciously […] becomes the secret service of the ruling class, its most powerful weapon against social revolution" (*Prose* 26).

Adopting a parodic tone in relation to these contexts, *The Orators* may be read as a *mock-spyography* that responds not only to adventure yarns found in novels, memoirs, magazines, and films, but also, more importantly, to the institutionalization of "playing spy" in schools and youth groups. In particular, the Scouting Movement[13] serves as an important backdrop for Auden's diagnosis of social neuroses, and I would suggest that Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (1908) constitutes a key intertext for *The Orators*.[14] In the summer of 1930, Auden spent two weeks visiting a scout camp (Mendelson, *Early* 95), and it may have been this experience that initiated an interest in Baden-Powell that would continue throughout the decade. In the former intelligence officer's autobiography, which Auden reviewed in March 1934, the Chief Scout makes it clear that he considers scouting and spying one and the same, "[sciences] for gaining information" (22), and likewise crucial skill-sets for the cultivation of manliness, cleanliness, and loyalty, as well as for the maintenance of national and imperial security. Two key dimensions of the scout's training, as Baden-Powell emphasizes in both *Scouting* and his autobiography, are "play-acting" and the emulation or "hero-worship" (278) of literary and historical models. In effect, the Scouting Movement, like the intelligence community, reinforces the ideology of a militant aesthetic state—which, in addition to recruiting the artist as agent, collapses the division between literature and history and privileges the literary as a moral and ethical guide.

In what follows, I will argue that Auden's mock-spyography embodies these issues by representing a security state that encourages subjects to play spy in an effort to maintain an existing sociopolitical order. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault associates "secret agents" with what he terms "delinquency," a class of habitual criminals who, "motivated by fear of punishment or the prospect of reward," serve "as informers and *agents provocateurs*"

for law-enforcement organizations (*Discipline* 280-1). *The Orators*, however, suggests that the secret agent represents not merely a criminal underclass, but a paramilitarized citizenry whose codes of honor, secrecy, and purity—lessons learned from fictional and historical models of heroic behavior—permeate all strata of society through educational and recreational programs. From this perspective, *The Orators* troubles the received critical notion that espionage fantasies are a result of (or response to) nonparticipation in the First World War, a kind of guilty inferiority complex peculiar to the "Auden generation"; rather, Auden implies that playing spy, or engaging in what we might call "domestic espionage," is fundamental to "good citizenship" and English culture in general.[15]

In doing so, *The Orators* likewise foregrounds and in some sense performs the failure of this very regime through its emphasis on prohibited forms of *leaky* behavior, which are a corollary of play itself. If the development of the Scouting Movement parallels the establishment of the Secret Service Bureau, then we might also say that both institutional contexts embody a similar double bind: "freedom" must be achieved through "rule" and the strict maintenance of mental and bodily integrity. Auden's nonfiction writing in the early 1930s suggests that he was well aware that such codes of behavior not only foreclose the possibility of critical engagement,[16] encourage subjects to be informants rather than thinkers, and foster paranoia and acquiescence under the guise of enlightened "liberalism," but also inadvertently incite acts of transgression. In a 1934 essay titled "The Liberal Fascist," a piece commissioned by Graham Greene for his volume *The Old School*, Auden cites the preparatory school code as a prime example of discipline gone awry. A student must "promise on his honour":

> (1) Not to swear.
> (2) Not to smoke.
> (3) Not to say or do anything indecent.

Having done so, two consequences followed:

> (1) If you broke any of these promises you should report the breakage to your housemaster.
> (2) If you saw anyone else break them, you should endeavour to persuade him to report and if he refused, you should report him yourself. (*Prose* 59)

Auden goes on to observe that while "the system worked, in public at any rate," he "[feels] compelled to say that […] no more potent engine for turning [students] into neurotic innocents, for perpetuating those very faults of character it was intended to cure, was ever devised" (59). While Auden does not mention the Scout Law in this essay, his contemporary review of Baden-Powell's autobiography offers some striking parallels to his comments on the "Fascist state" of education. In particular, Auden interrogates the tenth law or "clause," which he states as "To be clean in Thought, Word, and Deed" (64).[17] Added in 1911, the same year as the Official Secrets Act, another "rule" that is very much concerned with purity of word and action, the tenth law subsumes mental and physical integrity under the all-encompassing Scout Promise: "To be loyal to God and the King" (*Scouting* 19).[18] For Auden, this imperative has one result: "Purity as an ideal merely places the adolescent at the mercy of his sense of guilt" (*Prose* 64). Just as the preparatory school code cultivates "neurotic innocents" by "perpetuating those very faults of character it was intended to cure," the Scout Law ensures not so much obedience as culpability and (symbolic) treason,[19] and it does so by setting out an idealized and heroic code of behavior that seems impossible to maintain. In short, what Auden puts forward in his early prose, and what is arguably one of the central paradoxes of *The Orators*, is the constitutive breach that both necessitates "rule" and guarantees its violation, a breach that occurs simultaneously on the level of "thought, word, and deed." For Auden, this conflation of mind, language, and body results in a neurotic state, wherein the subject, who is always already "guilty," engages in forms of

unauthorized sexual behavior that are also discursive. In *The Orators*, leaky sexualities correlate with leaky documents, disclosures, and diaries.

Nevertheless, if Auden may be said to anticipate Foucault by revising the Freudian concept of repression into a *productive* (rather than restrictive) power,[20] he also underestimates the ideological permeability of his own text. "Playing spy" is a dangerous game; in drawing our attention to the cultural training ground through an expressionistic hyperbole of the spy-game and its attendant neuroses, the poem plays a bit too well. On the one hand, if play serves as a means of recruitment, Auden suggests, play may also be turned against the establishment, which it then designates as an "enemy" in itself. On the other hand, it may only do so by adopting the rules of the game; if resistance is itself a function of power, there is no outside position from which to render the game merely a spectator sport. In its infiltration of the militant aesthetic state, Auden's poem reminds us that the concept of "art as action" also partakes of an aesthetic ideology, and that adversary culture often betrays itself, inadvertently aiding and abetting the enemy it seeks to sabotage. Like any proper spyography, *The Orators* thus becomes, in a unique way, a compromising document that demands its own destruction, its own burning.

School for Spies

Auden begins his 1933 review of Winston Churchill's *Thoughts and Adventures* by declaring that "[the] English are a feminine race, the perfect spies and intriguers, with an illimitable capacity for not letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing, and believing so genuinely in their self-created legend of themselves as the straight-forward no-nonsense, stupid male that at first others are taken in" (*Prose* 31). For Auden, the famous orator and statesman represents a quintessential contradiction in the English character: the conflict between

public duty and private desire, or between the heroic ideal of self-containment and the real-life "amateur" whose loyalties are suspect. In titling his review "Gentleman versus Player," the poet locates in play a propensity for (self-)betrayal, an ungentlemanly inclination toward gossip, scheming, and scandal. "Churchill has never really been trusted," the writer observes, "because he is always letting the cat out of the bag"—that is, publishing memoirs and abusing his official position, substituting "publicity" for security (31).

In the first "book" of *The Orators*, Auden arguably offers what amounts to an expressionistic critique of the negative *Bildung* that conditions the English to become "the perfect spies and intriguers" in the first place. In a 1931 letter to the Scottish novelist and poet Naomi Mitchison, the writer offers a brief schema for "The Initiates":

> In a sense the work is my memorial to Lawrence;[21] i.e. the theme is the failure of the romantic conception of personality; that what it inevitably leads to is part 4.
>
> Formally I am trying to write abstract drama—all the action implied. The four parts, corresponding if you like to the four seasons and the four ages of man (Boyhood, Sturm and Drang, Middleage, Oldage), are stages in the development of the influence of the Hero (who never appears at all).
>
> Thus Part 1. Introduction to influence.
> Part 2. Personally involved with hero. Crisis.
> Part 3. Intellectual reconstruction of Hero's teaching. The cerebral life.
> Part 4. The effect of Hero's failure on the emotional life.
>
> The litany is the chorus to the play. (Qtd. in Mendelson 97-8)

The four sections of "The Initiates"—respectively, "Address for a Prize-Day," "Argument" (which includes what Auden calls the "litany" or "chorus"), "Statement," and "Letter to a Wound"—trace various stages in the formation of a group of disciples around a charismatic (albeit absent) leader, the codification of his teachings, and the disillusionment following his disappearance or death. As it embraces secrecy as its rule, this group of amateur agents discovers that law and transgression are directly proportional. Encouraged to police and inform on one another in an effort to maintain a "self-created legend," Auden's scouts and schoolboys

internalize a disciplinary regime that persists into adulthood in the form of neurotic paranoia, a "wound" that is further exacerbated by the perceived failure of the heroic ideal and the revelation of the leader's own indiscretions.

If Auden's schema suggests something of the structure of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), this implicit identification is corroborated by the poet's emphasis, throughout the book, on the evolution of sexual prohibitions into more comprehensive codes of conduct and honor. The "taboo," Freud contends, while originally focused on preventing improper sexual contact between members of the same family or totemic clan, "grows into a force with a basis of its own […]. It develops into the rule of custom and tradition and finally of law" (24). Simultaneously "primitive" and modern, Auden's group of initiates—like Baden-Powell's scouts, who are taught, rather paradoxically, that "civilized" behavior and "good citizenship" depend on the emulation of native and "uncivilized" tribal customs (Boehmer xxvi)—takes part in a training regime that seeks to locate and expel the unclean. Accordingly, the first section of "The Initiates" lays out a series of taboos against forms of unauthorized behavior that threaten the integrity of the group.

More precisely, "Address for a Prize-Day" begins in the vein of a "condition-of-England" diagnostic, offering a catalogue of ailments plaguing "this country of ours where nobody is well" (*Orators* 14). As befits the kind of aesthetic education that informs the militant aesthetic state, a philosophy of education that privileges the literary as a moral and ethical guide, "Address" takes the form of a speech addressed to a group of boys on the subject of sin—more specifically, the Dantean categories of "excessive," "defective," and "perverted" love. But just as taboos, in Freud's estimation, transform into multiform restrictions, each form of "love" signifies a whole range of undesirable behavioral characteristics. "[Excessive] lovers of self," the speaker informs

the group, “are they who even in childhood played in their corner, shrank when addressed” (14). These “become bird watchers” and “famous readers” (15). “[Excessive] lovers of their neighbours,” on the other hand, are “Dare-devils of the soul” (15) and “heavy smokers” (15). “They need love” and are “immensely passionate”; “You call them selfish,” the speaker observes, “but no, they care immensely, far too much” (16). Then come the “defective lovers” for whom “[systems] run to a standstill” (16), “[each] hour bringing its little barrowful of unacted desires, mounting up day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year […]” (17). “Anaemic, muscularly underdeveloped and rather mean” (17), defective lovers are weak specimens, obsessive “collectors” of nothing in particular, who are much in need of “regular and easy tasks” and perhaps a bit of healthy provocation. “Hit them in the face if necessary,” the leader advises. “If they hit back you will know they are saved” (17). “Last and worst” are the “perverted lovers”: “Have a good look at the people you know; at the boy sitting next to you at this moment, at that chum of yours in the Lower School,” the speaker suggests, and you might discover one of them (17). “Their voice toneless, they stoop, their gait wooden like a galvanized doll so that one involuntarily exclaims on meeting, ‘You really oughtn’t to be out in weather like this’” (18). For these “skrimshankers,” there can be no rehabilitation, and the orator advises the boys to “[draw] up a list of rotters and slackers” and to cast them out of the group. “All these,” he insists, “have got to die without issue” (19).

While Auden’s descriptions are comically vague, the lovers clearly embody various forms of sexually deviant behavior: masturbation, promiscuity, and homosexuality. Adopting the tone of an old boy or scout leader, the orator reproduces the rhetoric of degeneration, making connections between sexual impropriety, physical weakness, mental deficiency, and social awkwardness. Having taken this lecture to heart, the boys, in “Argument,” engage in a series of

espionage exercises that effectively police the community at large. The "[meeting] of seven, each with a talent" (20)—seven members, the size of a typical scout patrol—roams town and countryside "under His eye" (20), the nameless leader for whom the boys compile endless "reports" (22). As in *Scouting*, their gaze is both zoological and sociological: "Rooks argue in the clump of elms to the left. Expect what dream above the indented heel, end-on to traffic, down the laurelled drive?" (21). Practicing the art of spooring (reading tracks), to which Baden-Powell devotes detailed instruction, the boys recognize the lame and the suspicious from the position and depth of heels, hooves, and boot-nails. While engaged in their war games, the group carries out a series of reconnaissance missions in which they locate signs of weakness:

> The young mother in the red kerchief suckling her child in the doorway, and the dog fleaing itself in the hot dust. Clatter of nails on the inn's flagged floor. The hair-lipped girl sent with as far as the second turning. Talk of generals in a panelled room translated into a bayonet thrust at a sunbrowned throat, wounds among wheat fields. Grit from the robbers' track on goggles, a present from aunts. Interrogation of villagers before a folding table, a verbal trap. Execution of a spy in the nettled patch at the back of the byre. (21)

Images of poverty and deformity, coupled with the rhetoric of boys' weeklies and adventure fiction, suggest that the group's mission has something to do with locating and containing various forms of degeneracy, a problem that greatly concerned Baden-Powell.[22]

Nevertheless, in spite of the group's imaginative campaign against mental, physical, and sexual undesirables, "Argument" suggests that they themselves are perpetrators of the very vices they seek to eliminate. As Freud indicates, one of the most threatening properties of the taboo is its "contagious power" (*Totem* 32), but this seems an inadequate explanation for the simultaneous forbidding and *licensing* of illicit behavior that characterizes Auden's initiates. More to the point, it would seem that secrecy itself embodies this contradictory impulse. Like play, secrecy permits duplicity. In fetishizing secrecy, the group of initiates leads a double life,

faithful only to the absent and idealized leader ("Him"): "Speak the name only with meaning only for us, meaning Him, a call to our clearing. Secret the meeting in time and place, the time of the off-shore wind, the place where the loyalty is divided" (*Orators* 20). The troop's furtive behavior implies that the initiates participate in ostensibly prohibited activities under the auspices of the leader himself. Despite the sermon against unauthorized acts of love in "Address"—as Mendelson suggests, forms of private love that prevent group cohesion (*Early* 98)—the description of the boys' activities in "Argument" reveals that the patrol is, in fact, "joined" by a homoerotic "bond":

> On the concrete banks of baths, in the grassy squares of exercise, we are joined, brave in the long body, under His eye. (Their annual games under the auspices of the dead.) Our bond, friend, is a third party.
>
> [….] Walking in the mountains we were persons unknown to our parents, awarded them little, had a word of our own for our better shadow. Crossing ourselves under the arch of a bridge we crucified fear. (20)

Gradually, the reader of "The Initiates" comes to realize that the boys practice nearly all of the forms of "excessive," "defective," and "perverted" love that the initial orator warns them against. "Excessive lovers of self" are, like the patrol, "[lovers] of long walks" and "bird watchers, crouching for hours among sunlit bushes like a fox" (15). "Defective lovers" are likewise collectors of "[old] tracts, brackets picked up on the road, powders, pieces of wood, uncatalogued, piled anyhow in corners of the room, or hidden under tea-stained saucers" (16-7). More seriously, "perverted lovers," as afraid to act on their desires as they are "afraid to die," internalize the espionage game as a kind of psychical security service: "These are they who when the saving thought came shot it for a spy" (18). In allowing the initial "Address" to outline a series of restrictions that are, as "Argument" demonstrates, made to be broken, Auden insinuates that hero-worship and idealized codes of conduct result in the formation of divided subjects, chronic double agents.

Just as these categories of improper "love" are taken from Dante, literature in Auden's text more generally comes to serve an authoritative and regulatory function consistent with the "ego ideal" (superego), or what Freud refers to as a "critical agency." In other words, literary codes develop into codes of conduct, a kind of religion. But therein lies another of text's inherent double binds; like *Scouting for Boys*, which denigrates book-learning while offering literary figures for emulation, *The Orators* depicts a militant aesthetic state in which children are simultaneously cautioned against reading (another private activity) and encouraged to revere romantic figures drawn from a variety of literary texts. "Excessive lovers of self" (14), the speaker informs us, are "[habituees] of the mirror, famous readers, they fall in love with historical characters, with the unfortunate queen, or the engaging young assistant of a great detective […]" (15). Paradoxically, as a means of expiation for these and other crimes of love, the group appeals to fictional characters for help and forgiveness. In the section of "Argument" that Auden refers to in his schema as the "chorus," the group begins by apostrophizing a pantheon of heroes from novels, short stories, and boys' adventure magazines: the Four Just Men, Dixon Hawke, Sexton Blake, Bulldog Drummond, Poirot, and—Baden-Powell's favorite—Sherlock Holmes.[23] These apostrophes take the form of prayers:

> Remember not what we thought during the frost, what we said in the small hours, what we did in the desert. Spare us, lest of our own volition we draw down the avalanche of your anger: lest we suffer the tragic fate of the insects.
>
> O Four Just Men, spare us.
>
> […]
>
> From all nervous excitement and follies of the will; from the postponed guilt and the deferred pain; from the oppression of noon and from the terror in the night,
>
> O Bulldog Drummond, deliver us. (24)

While *Scouting* repeatedly holds up literary models of heroism, purity, and loyalty, *The Orators* satirically presents these figures as saints of good citizenship, as angels of the law and its

enforcement. Auden apparently shared with the young Graham Greene a conception of the psychoanalyst as a "secret detective" (Greene qtd. in Davenport-Hines 23), but the poet also negates this correspondence, assigning his sleuths a more sinister function than therapy. Firchow rightly points out that these men of action, with the possible exception of Holmes and Poirot, "belong more to what we would today call the category of secret agents rather than detectives" (40). On the one hand, these figures offer a promise of security and containment. On the other hand, since the spy is a figure who trades in information, they also threaten the exposure and dissemination of secrets. Tellingly, the chorus suddenly switches from pleas for aid from heroes to pleas for witness from various pubs:

> For those who cannot go to bed; for those in dormitories; for those in pairs; for those who sleep alone,
> O Bull at the Gate, hear us.
>
> For the devoted; for the unfaithful; for those in whom the sexual crisis is delayed; for the two against one, and for the Seven against Thebes,
> O Goat with the Compasses, hear us. (25)

As Fuller observes, "*private* detectives and *public* houses" serves as a sort of "the thematic joke" (95). If so, these figures and sites of idealized masculinity also embody one of the central concerns of *The Orators*: the making public of private acts, the disclosure of both sexual and discursive "leaks."

Given the heightened sense of paranoia in the sections following the "chorus," one may only assume that these prayers provide little solace or redemption—like the worship of the leader, "a dream dirt-cheap for the man of action" (23). Following the litany, the hero himself becomes a figure of uncertainty:

> Suspicion of one of our number, away for weekends. Catching sight of Him on the lawn with the gardener, from the upper rooms of a house. His insane dislike of birds. His fondness for verbal puzzles. Friendly joking converting itself into counterplot, the spore of fear. (27-8)

Abhorring "birds" (girls?) and engaging in suspicious activities with the gardener, the hero apparently participates in forms of unauthorized or "perverted" love. This revelation has a devastating effect on the patrol: "Some taking refuge in thankful disillusion, others in frank disbelief, the youngest getting drunk" (28). As in Freud's discussion of Greek tragedy, the hero-figure inevitably "[bears] the burden" of "tragic guilt," the collective culpability of the group, whose original sin, redirected through "systematic distortion," is the betrayal (or execution) of the leader himself (*Totem* 156). Auden's "abstract drama" represents the hero as a similar sort of "primal father" who "[takes guilt] on himself in order to relieve the Chorus from theirs" (*Totem* 156). However, just as this guilt, for Freud, is never truly expunged, the fallen hero—like James Joyce's HCE, who leaves books, cultures, and religions in his wake—is resurrected in the form of laws and literatures.

In *The Orators*, the cohesion of the group is inversely proportional to the strength of the law, which, far from providing a bond, occasions disintegration. Upon the hero's death, the group at first seems to neglect their founder's monument: "On the steps of His stone the boys play prisoner's base, turning their backs on the inscription, unconscious of sorrow as the sea of drowning. Passage to music of an unchaste hero from a too-strict country" (29). But later, as they begin to construct a new legend around "Him," the void left by the hero is filled with a set of codes, reformulations of the leader's teachings: "Do not listen at doors" (31), "Always think of others" (32). In the midst of these commandments, we learn the fate of the followers: "One slips on crag, is buried by guides. One gets cramp in the bay, sinks like a stone near crowded tea-shops. One is destroyed in his bath, the geyser exploding. One is arrested for indecent exposure. [….] One is impotent from fear of the judgment," and so on (32). As the leader's lessons are rehashed and the old group gives way to a new movement—in Auden's mock-

Steinian language, "[an] old one is beginning to be two new ones" (33)—rule fossilizes into dogma:

> The leader shall be a fear; he shall protect from panic; the people shall reverence the carved stone under the oak-tree. The muscular shall lounge in bars; the puny shall keep diaries in classical Greek. [….] The glutton shall love with his mouth; to the burglar love shall mean 'Destroy when read'; to the rich and poor the sign for 'our money'; the sick shall say of love 'It's only a phase'; the psychologist, 'That's easy'; the ******, 'Be fair'. The censor shall dream of knickers, a nasty beast. (34)

The rhetoric of fear and censorship suggests a totalitarian regime, but one that is chronically rent by its failure to enforce its own ideology of purity. Significantly, the obliterated word, which Auden had originally intended to read "Bugger" (Davenport-Hines 108), serves as a graphic indication of the constitutive secret uniting the group, owing to the poet's decision to retain the textual gap, breach, or "wound."

In keeping with Auden's conception of "The Initiates" as tracing "the four ages of man," the first book ends with the initiate-as-adult, the neurotic subject who has internalized the espionage fantasies and insecurities of youth, and who now literally *embodies* the double bind of law and transgression, secrecy and revelation. Emphasizing isolation over kinship, "Letter to a Wound" takes the form of a first-person narrative in which the writer addresses an ambiguous injury that is both physical and psychological. This section constitutes, as Auden writes in his letter to Mitchison, "[the] effect of Hero's failure on the emotional life." In essence, the "wound" is the absence of the hero, which now becomes a totem in itself. "For a long time now," the speaker writes, "I have been aware that you are taking up more of my life every day, but I am always being surprised to find how far this has gone" (35). One symptom of the wound, it seems, is the accumulation of personal detritus, old photographs and papers, "memorials to my days of boasting": "As it is, I've still far too many letters. (Vow. To have a grand clearance this week—hotel bills—bus tickets from Damascus, presentation pocket-mirrors, foreign envelopes,

etc.)" (35).[24] Here, the initiate once again admits to sharing certain qualities of the illicit lovers in "Address"; defective lovers are hoarders of correspondence and other mementos ("The effort required for clearance will be immense," the orator observes [17]), and excessive lovers of others may be found in "the worst quarters of eastern cities" (16). Representing (or believing himself to be) a kind of spy manqué, a cosmopolitan collector of nothing in particular, the narrator recognizes that the wound signifies "insecurity" (38). Eventually, as part of his maturing—or castration, as the case may be—the writer learns to accept, even love, the wound: "I've lost everything, I've failed. I wish I was dead. And now, here we are, together, intimate, mature" (37). After confessing that the wound is now the only relationship he requires or desires, the writer concludes his letter:

> It's getting late and I have to be up betimes in the morning. You are so quiet these days that I get quite nervous, remove the dressing. No I am safe, you are still there. [….] The surgeon was dead right. Nothing will ever part us. Good-night and God bless you, my dear.
>
> Better burn this. (38)

In the end, although the subject appears to have gotten into "accord" with his complexes, his final gesture toward censorship would suggest that the internalized security service, the "critical agency," remains ever vigilant. As Rainer Emig has observed, *The Orators* "frequently asks for its own destruction" (77), yet what the critic does not acknowledge is that the burning text is itself a trope of the spy yarn, a device comparable to "This message will self-destruct." Auden employs this trope to reinforce his espionage theme, but also to reveal the problematic blurring of public and private discourse. "Letter to a Wound" is perhaps the most personal section of *The Orators*; in 1930, Auden was treated for "an anal fissure," and while the condition was apparently "not caused by sexual relations, the metaphorical drift is clear […]" (Fuller 99). Consequently, "Letter" may be Auden's address to his own "wound," a coded admission of the

(then) crime of homosexuality. More abstractly, as a love letter that demands its own immolation, the final section of "The Initiates" represents the contradictory impulse to make public the private act in as secret a way as possible. In his 1929 journal, Auden writes that "[the] spirit naturally chooses the difficult rather than the easy. It is so much more interesting. . . . This also accounts for the success of repression. Half the mind enjoys the difficulty of censoring, the other half of circumventing the censor" (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 106). Like "Letter," Auden's mock-spyography as a whole revels in the play of disclosure, the scandalous reinscription of bodily into discursive leakage.

The Enemy Within

If Auden's "English Study" charts the organization of a group around a charismatic leader, it also informs and reports upon that group's transgressions and inability to maintain its own code of secrecy and reserve, despite impassioned appeals to a heroic ideal. In doing so, *The Orators* dramatizes, through an expressionistic aesthetic, the position of the neurotic subject at the "crossing" of law and transgression, rule and misrule. One indication of this hazardous border is Auden's use, throughout the text, of codenames and monoliterals to represent members of the secret cell. In "Letter to a Wound," for example, the narrator reminds the addressee of its resistance to his playful fraternizing: "Over and over again in the early days when I was in the middle of writing a newsy letter to M, or doing tricks in the garden to startle R. and C., you showed your resentment by a sudden bout of pain" (35). For the narrator, who has by his own admission "too many letters," these designations represent both correspondence and correspondents, ciphers that simultaneously resist and invite decoding. As Sean Latham has argued, the "narrative convention" of substituting letters for names merges the discourses of

psychology and modernism in interesting and problematic ways; the employment of "pseudonymous names and initials in psychological case studies," like those of Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis, conversely results in an "excess of knowledge" that threatens to turn the "rhetorically disciplined" text "into a roman à clef that trades on the power and pleasure of secrecy" (*Art* 52). In a similar way, cryptic names in *The Orators* allow Auden to flirt with the readerly desire to dissolve the boundary between fact and fiction, but they also remind us that a third discourse is at play in this constellation of narrative techniques: the spyography. This is not to say that Auden is merely parodying the techniques of autobiographical spy narratives like Maugham's *Ashenden* and Mackenzie's *Greek Memories*; the poet actively unites espionage, psychological, and modernist discourses by suggesting that hermeneutic and epistemological excesses are bound up with political, sexual, and aesthetic "security." A key feature of Auden's mock-spyographic mode, ciphers retain the impression of obscuring a "dirty" or "guilty secret" that makes the case study or roman à clef so seductive while also implicating that secret in a broader ideology of containment.

Like the tenth Scout Law, which enforces purity "in thought, word, and deed," and so outlaws, as it were, acts of illicit behavior—namely, homosexuality and masturbation[25] —*The Orators* is concerned with the conflation of mental, discursive, and active transgressions. On the one hand, while cataloguing various forms of prohibited behavior, the orator's speech in "Address" echoes Baden-Powell in positing the body as the locus of moral and ethical purity. On the other hand, the poet implies that infringements of the code manifest themselves as eruptions of letters and words. Auden's key insight in "The Initiates" is the relationship between leaky sexuality and leaky documents. Just as "excessive lovers of self," the orator declares, "[leave] behind them diaries full of incomprehensible jottings" (15), the members of the patrol,

in addition to writing unending "reports for Him" (18), leave texts in their wake. "One," we are told, "is arrested for indecent exposure" (32); another "is famous after his death for his harrowing diary" (33). Violations of language and flesh are one; in the litany, a prayer to a public house is offered simultaneously on behalf of "those who discuss the problem of style and those aware of the body" (25). If, for Freud, repression corresponds to the ego's "censorship" of forbidden desires at the behest of its "critical agency" (*Ego* 7, 41), Auden prefigures Foucault in envisaging censorship itself as generative of discourse. What the poet suggests, though, is more precisely a censorship dialectic than a complete failure of the "repressive hypothesis." Rules produce violations, and those violations become negative sublimations, texts that demand their own burning.

Like "Letter to a Wound," a private text made public, "Journal of an Airman" offers itself as a compromising document, a masturbatory conflation of thoughts, words, and deeds. The centerpiece of *The* Orators, "Journal" comprises what Auden describes as "the situation seen from within the Hero" (qtd. in Mendelson 103), the hero's daily observations concerning the nature of the "enemy" and his attempts to battle the foe through propaganda and practical jokes. In choosing the airman-spy—the "eye in the air" (*Orators* 53)—as his hero, Auden appropriates and merges two of the most lionized figures of the day. By the 1930s, the figure of the airman, like that of the secret agent, had taken on mythic proportions in popular culture; George Orwell, in his 1940 study of boys' adventure magazines, notes that among "the favourite subjects" are stories of "the Great War" focusing almost exclusively on the "Air Force or Secret Service, not the infantry" ("Boys' Weeklies" 201). Whether or not the incidents recorded in "Journal" are real or an elaborate fantasy of an overgrown child, the episode transcribes the central conflict as an extended game. Like the competitive activities that Baden-Powell describes in *Scouting*—

didactic games with names like "Hostile Spy," "Siberian Man Hunt," "Stop the Thief," and "Smugglers Over the Border"—and the policing exercises of the initiates in "Argument," the airman's campaign against the enemy weaponizes play. But while the war games of "The Initiates" perform, as I have suggested, a normative function, the airman arguably takes a more subversive posture. If the disciplinary regime of the militant aesthetic state encourages citizens to play spy, Auden's "Journal" turns this game on its head by representing intrigues directed *against* the state. In adopting this adversarial position, the writer draws our attention to the fact that play swings both ways; it is both a means of recruitment and a means of opposition.[26] Even so, play is doubly treacherous; as the airman spirals into paranoia and persecution anxiety, and as he begins to see that he shares more in common with the enemy than he cares to admit, he comes to the realization that he is, so to speak, playing with himself.

In *The Orators*, Auden is concerned with systems that constitute both individual minds (the psychical level) and collective bodies (the political or national level). "A system organises itself," the airman begins his journal, "if interaction is undisturbed" (41). "The effect of the enemy," however, "is to introduce inert velocities into the system (called by him laws or habits) interfering with organisation" (39). As the airman implies, "system," in this sense, should not be confused with the establishment; the system is a natural order that the enemy displaces through the imposition of artificial constructs, which have the effect of obscuring and fragmenting reality. In terms of culture and class, the airman's descriptions of the enemy suggest the English bourgeoisie. Reserved yet materialistic, the enemy is a creature of habit who wears "Dickens' waistcoats" and "adhesive trousers"; enjoys "collecting" and "playing cards"; refuses "to undress in public" or "lean out of the carriage window"; owns a house with "old furniture" and "a room called the Den"; supports "national art" and "nursery schools"; and lives by catchphrases like

"insure now," "keep smiling," and "safety first" (55). More importantly, as one who introduces "laws," the enemy is likewise the government. These laws, the airman believes, substitute a false conflict for what is, from his perspective, the *real* struggle:

> One must draw the line somewhere. [….] Not to confuse the real line with that drawn for personal convenience, to remember the margin of safety. By denying the existence of the real line, the enemy offers relief, at a price, from their own imaginary one. Their exploitation of this fear—building societies—summer camps. (60)

In effect, by adopting his own rhetoric of enmity,[27] the airman uses the same strategy as the adversary, which holds out the threat of an indefinite "enemy" as a means of gathering support and building a security infrastructure. Alluding, perhaps, to the Scouting Movement, the Airman locates in "summer camps" a training ground for new recruits.

In response, the airman, who considers himself a kind of revolutionary, attempts to disrupt the enemy's power by restoring the system to its natural "organisation." Commentators have pointed out that Auden characterizes this conflict in terms of Gestalt psychology, which privileges the whole over what the airman calls "partial priority" (43), an enemy effect. Like the "philosopher" or "Oxford Don," who "[talks] of intellect-will-sensation as real and separate entities" (46), the enemy represents "learned" (fragmentary) as opposed to "naïve" (holistic) observation:

> THE ENEMY IS A LEARNED NOT A NAÏVE OBSERVER
> *Note*—Naïve observation—insight.
> Introspection —spying. (43)

Here, "introspection" indicates not only the enemy's structuralist interrogation of consciousness, but any method that reduces the psyche to its constituent elements or parts. John Fuller suggests that the airman "marks the enemy as a metaphorical behaviourist, a kind of blinkered spy with no access to the insight of the Gestalt" (102). If so, "introspection" is an umbrella term indicating the enemy's preference for discrete, quantifiable components (like the parts of a machine),

whereas "naïve observation" takes into account the (organic) totality of experience. Additionally, Auden locates intellectualism in the enemy's fondness for metaphorical language that maintains a strict, one-to-one correspondence, like a code: "The enemy's sense of humour—verbal symbolism. Private associations (rhyming slang), but note that he is serious, the associations are constant. He means what *he* says" (*Orators* 49). In spite of his learned "humour," the enemy's ultimate seriousness denotes an objective, positivistic, and scientific approach to understanding human behavior and communication.

For the airman, there is only one effective countermeasure: "Practical jokes consist in upsetting these associations. They are in every sense contradictory and public […]" (49). Just as naïve observation is capable of considering a wider range of psychic phenomena (illusions and fantasies), childish jokes, tricks, and games disrupt "laws" and "habits" through the agency of freedom and illogicality—as evidenced by the airman's covert operations:

> A preliminary bombardment by obscene telephone messages for not more than two hours destroys the *morale* already weakened by predictions of defeat made by wireless-controlled crows and card-packs. Shock troops equipped with wire-cutters, spanners and stink-bombs, penetrating the houses by infiltration, silence all alarm clocks, screw down the bathroom taps, and remove plugs and paper from the lavatories. The *Courier* Offices are the first objective. A leading article accusing prominent citizens of arson, barratry, coining, dozing in municipal offices, espionage, family skeletons, getting and bambling, heresy, issuing or causing to be issued false statements with intent to deceive, jingoism, keeping disorderly houses, mental cruelty, loitering, nepotism, onanism, piracy on the high seas, quixotry, romping at forbidden hours, sabotage, tea-drinking, unnatural offences against minors, vicious looks, will-burning, a yellow streak, is on the table of every householder in time for a late breakfast. (77)

Intended to undermine "Order-doctrinaires" (60) and other keepers of the peace, the airman's comic assaults are an exercise in *pleasure*. Pleasure, in its multiform senses, is that which binds the system or Gestalt. If the "Journal" offers a challenge to introspective and behaviorist psychology, it likewise constitutes a critique of Freud, who, like the Oxford Don, "[does not] feel quite happy about pleasure" (48) and subscribes to one of "the Enemy's Definitions by

Negation": "Pleasure is the *decrease* of pain" (71). For the young Auden, pleasure is positive, a crucial feature of play. As Davenport-Hines points out, the poet took from Georg Groddeck and Homer Lane "the belief that play is not trivial": "it is allusive in a way that implies trust and pleasure rather than coercion and guilt" (*Auden* 113). Freud, who takes jokes a bit too seriously and whose humor is, perhaps, more of the enemy variety, stands in for the intellectual who is more invested in "spying" (analyzing) than "insight" (living and learning).

Throughout *The Orators*, Auden's ambivalence toward Freudian psychology accounts for many of the contradictions and inconsistencies that continue to perplex his commentators. As we have seen, "The Initiates" arguably reinforces the models of individual and communal development that Freud lays out in *Totem* and *Ego*, while "Journal" seems to depart from Freud in significant ways. The question of the airman's homosexuality, a key manifestation of pleasure and, consequently, a vital dimension of his adversarial campaign against the enemy, further complicates matters. Davenport-Hines contends that Auden's "readings of Freudian and other psychological theorists had given him the sense that homosexuality was immature and indicative of arrested emotional development" (67). However, as part of its child-inflected war game, the airman's journal suggests that homosexual relationships may be cultivated as networks in opposition to authority. In his efforts to restore the system, the airman emphasizes "interdependence," "sympathy," and (most importantly) "love," which he designates the "CENTRAL AWARENESS" (44). Accordingly, among the monoliteral companions whom the airman mentions in his account—fellow conspirators like the mysterious "M," whose clandestine mission is to spike the punch "at the missionary whist-drive" (*Orators* 56)—the hero repeatedly refers to a certain "E," with whom he is apparently engaged in an affair. In the 1934 edition, Auden made the crucial decision to change E's sex from "she" to "he," thereby substantiating the

homosexual themes already present in "Journal." As Auden remarked to Naomi Mitchison, the "flying symbolism is I imagine fairly obvious" (qtd. in Mendelson 103). In the airman's "alphabet," the poet includes suggestive entries for such items as "COCKPIT"—"Soft seat / and support of soldier / and hold for hero" (51)—and "JOYSTICK"—"Pivot of power / and responder to pressure / and grip for the glove" (52). As in "The Initiates," homosexuality serves as the vital "secret" that unites the group, but in "Journal" this secret is open and requires no expiation in the form of earnest prayers to Sherlock Holmes or Bulldog Drummond. Instead of indicating, as Davenport-Hines suggests, "that homosexual acts can be the initiation into a privileged group *rather than* criminal transgressions" (109, my emphasis), *The Orators* hinges precisely on the illicit act as *both* initiation *and* transgression, which places the airman's flying tricksters in a position outside—or quite literally high above—the law.

Yet, while sexuality between individuals offers a means of subverting authority and restoring unity, introverted sexuality becomes a source of anxiety and instability. Just as the airman himself seems to represent the very qualities that he associates with the enemy—spying, scouting, introspection, and a poetic predilection for verbal symbolism—he also embodies the onanistic and leaky habits that characterize his black propaganda, or what we might appropriately term his "smear campaign." The hero has a peculiar obsession with his hands; in his letter to Mitchison, Auden writes that, in addition to "belief in a universal conspiracy (the secret society mind)," one of the "chief strands" in the airman's journal is "kleptomania (the worm in the root)" (qtd. in Mendelson 104). Well-versed in contemporary theories of psychology, Auden would have understood "stealing" in its larger sense as a form of displaced desire. As Fuller points out, Carl Jung drew a correlation between masturbation and kleptomania in *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1917): "When onanism confronts the physician it does so

frequently under the symbol of frequent pilfering, or crafty imposition, which always signifies the concealed fulfilment of a forbidden wish" (qtd. in Fuller 104). The correlation between kleptomania and masturbation is evidenced by the airman's fear that his lover will discover his secret:

> Again. Always the same weakness. No progress against this terrible thing. What would E say if [he] knew? Dare I tell [him]? [….] No; no one must ever know. If the enemy ever got to hear of it, my whole work would be nullified. [….] The signed confession in my pocket shall remain unread, always. (64)

While the Airman considers himself an agent of love, which he associates with "interaction" (41) and "awareness of difference" (44), he is likewise a lover of self, a loner, and consequently a producer of compromising papers. Like "The Initiates," in which excessive lovers of self "[leave] behind them diaries full of incomprehensible jottings" (15), the obscure and fragmented "Journal" posits a relationship between masturbation and self-reflective writing, "indecent exposure" and autobiographical discourse that trades on "private associations."

In general, *The Orators* reveals that sexuality—and masturbation in particular—is productive of discourse, and that transgressions of law and code result in writing, the accumulation of texts. Whether or not Auden had in mind Baden-Powell's repeated injunctions against "wasters" in *Scouting for Boys*, his representation of masturbation in *The Orators* likely owes something to D. H. Lawrence, whom the poet was reading at the time, and whose ideas concerning "self-abuse" are strikingly similar to the Chief Scout's.[28] In his pamphlet on *Pornography and Obscenity* (1929), Lawrence makes a more specific connection between the "dirty little secret" and the production of modern(ist) literature:

> The sentimentalism and the niggling analysis, often self-analysis, of most of our modern literature, is a sign of self-abuse. It is the manifestation of masturbation, the sort of conscious activity stimulated by masturbation, whether male or female. The outstanding feature of such consciousness is that there is no real object, there is only subject. This is just the same whether it be a novel or a work of science. The author never escapes from

> himself, he pads along within the vicious circle of himself. There is hardly a writer living who gets out of the vicious circle of himself—or a painter either. Hence the lack of creation, and the stupendous amount of production. It is a masturbation result, within the vicious circle of self. It is self-absorption made public. (*Late* 246)

In "Journal," Auden's airman couches his analysis of the enemy in similar terms, emphasizing the distinction between "self-care" (hygienic self-sufficiency) and "self-regard" (neurotic introversion) (42). While "self-care" is "care-free," "self-regard" is disruptive to the system because it egotistically occludes "interdependence" and "sympathy." In place of unity, it encourages selfishness, spying, and paranoia: "Self-regard is the treating of news as a private poem; it is the consequence of eavesdropping" (*Orators* 42). A "private poem" made public, "self-regard" is also an aesthetic mode, a kind of introverted poiesis, like the enemy's attachment to "verbal symbolism" or the hero's own secret "fondness for verbal puzzles" (27) in "The Initiates." In negating the sublimation of masturbatory tendencies, Auden arguably joins Lawrence and Baden-Powell in linking the health and security of the nation to mental and physical "continence." If, within the neurotic constellation of "thought, word, and deed," masturbatory play is bound up with secrecy and national security, then the leaky, obscure, or obscene text may be said to correlate with the spyography as a dissemination of "insider" material.[29]

Like the duplicitous "spies and intriguers" with whom Auden begins his review of Churchill's *Thoughts and Adventures*, those Britons who have "an illimitable capacity for not letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing" (*Prose* 31), the airman emerges as a compromised figure who is very much his own enemy. As the hero comes to realize this, his diary culminates in a kind of epiphany:

> My incredible blindness, with all the facts staring me in the face, not to have realised these elementary truths.
>
> 1. The power of the enemy is a function of our resistance, therefore

> 2. The only efficient way to destroy it—self-destruction, the sacrifice of all resistance, reducing him to the state of a man trying to walk on a frictionless surface.
> 3. Conquest can only proceed by absorption of, *i.e.* infection by, the conquered. The true significance of my hands. 'Do not imagine that you, no more than any other conqueror, escape the mark of grossness.' They stole to force a hearing. (80)

The airman's Foucauldian realization—that power and resistance are coextensive—leads him to conclude that only a radical "sacrifice" will result in victory. In other words, the airman decides that his solution requires an even more vigorous regime of purging and expurgation, a "self-destruction" that must be carried out both physically and discursively. More critical of himself than ever, the airman reads his own journal and asks: "What have I written? Thoughts suitable to a sanatorium" (81). Just as one sign of "an enemy letter" is "careful obliteration of cancelled expressions" (55), the hero carefully obliterates all evidence of his indiscretions:

> Destroy all letters, snapshots, lockets, etc., of E.
> Further purification.
> Deep breathing exercises instead of smoking.
> A clean shirt, collar and handkerchief each morning till the end. (81)

Having done so, the airman departs on his suicide mission, observing that his hands are, for once, "in perfect order" (82).

The airman's crisis at the end of "Journal" is, perhaps, best understood in the context of Auden's nonfiction writing at the time, particularly his discussion of what he and Isherwood call the "Truly Strong Man." "Like most of my generation," Isherwood writes in *Lions and Shadows*, "I was obsessed by a complex of terrors and longings connected with the idea 'War.' 'War,' in this purely neurotic sense, meant The Test. The test of your courage, of your maturity, of your sexual prowess: 'Are you really a Man?'" (75-6). To become a Truly Strong Man, as both Isherwood and Auden contend, is to *give up* the Test, which is little more than a fantasy of agency. The Truly Strong Man, Isherwood explains, "calm, balanced, aware of his strength, sits drinking quietly in the bar; it is not necessary for him to try to prove to himself that he is not

afraid, by joining the Foreign Legion, seeking out the most dangerous wild animals in the remotest tropical jungles, leaving his comfortable home in a snowstorm to climb the impossible glacier. In other words, the Test exists only for the Truly Weak Man," the "neurotic hero" (207-8). In *The Orators*, the airman's campaign against the enemy constitutes a similar Test, and the hero's "self-sacrifice" signifies his mature renunciation of the same. In a 1932 letter, Auden remarks that "[the] Airman's fate can be suicide or Rimbaud's declination"—which is to say, the French poet's decision to abandon the literary limelight and seek anonymity as a merchant (qtd. in Mendelson 112). As Mendelson points out, this comment anticipates Auden's 1934 review of Liddell Hart's biography of T. E. Lawrence, in which Auden argues that "Lawrence's enlistment in the Air Force and Rimbaud's adoption of a trading career are essentially similar" (Auden, *Prose* 62). For Auden, Lawrence in particular embodies the passage from the "neurotic hero" to the genuinely self-sufficient hero:

> To me Lawrence's life is an allegory of the transformation of the Truly Weak Man into the Truly Strong Man, an answer to the question "How shall the self-conscious man be saved": and the moral seems to be this. "Self-consciousness is an asset, in fact the only friend of our progress. We can't go back on it. But its demands on our little person and his appetites are so great that most of us, terrified, try to escape or make terms with it, which is fatal. As a pursuer it is deadly." Only the continuous annihilation of the self by the Identity, to use Blake's terminology, will bring us to the freedom we wish for, or in Lawrence's own phrase "Happiness comes in absorption." (61-2)

"Absorption," like "self-care," signifies the individual's harmony with the Gestalt. "Different as they appear on the surface," Auden continues, "both [T. E. Lawrence] and his namesake, D. H. Lawrence, imply the same, that the Western-romantic conception of personal love is a neurotic symptom, only inflaming our loneliness, a bad answer to our real wish to be united to and rooted in life" (62).

However, Auden cautions, "a misinterpretation of absorption is one of the great heresies of our generation":

> To interpret it as blind action without consideration of meaning or ends, as an escape from reason and consciousness, that is indeed to become the truly weak man, to enlist in the Great Fascist Retreat which will land us finally in the ditch of despair, to cry like Elijah: "Lord take away my life for I am not better than my fathers." (62)

If this 1934 review represents, as Mendelson suggests in his introduction to Auden's collected essays, the poet's "only prose statement of praise for the solitary leader-principle that had rioted through *The Orators* in 1931" (*Prose* xx), it seems fair to say that Auden also grew to suspect *The Orators* itself of complicity in the "Great Fascist Retreat." Just as the airman's self-critical interrogation of his own writing practices in "Journal" shares, as we have seen, a certain affinity with D. H. Lawrence's pseudo-fascist demand for physical and aesthetic purity, the poet himself attempts to purify the text by eliminating both "private associations" and politically suspicious passages in later editions. Extradiegetically performing the trope of censorship that we find throughout the text, the writer's efforts to distance himself from the work over the years and his bowdlerization of the work in the mid-1960s—his desire, in effect, to contain the leaky text—indicate that he felt *The Orators* was, itself, in need of "further purification."

"Death to Squealers"

In his brief foreword to his 1944 *Collected Poems*, Auden offers a justification for why he chose to include certain works and exclude others:

> In the eyes of every author, I fancy, his own past work falls into four classes. First, the pure rubbish which he regrets ever having conceived; second—for him the most painful—the good ideas which his incompetence or impatience prevented from coming to much (*The Orators* seems to me such a case of the fair notion fatally injured); third, the pieces he has nothing against except their lack of importance; these must inevitably form the bulk of any collection since, were he to limit it to the fourth class alone, to those poems for which he is honestly grateful, his volume would be too depressingly slim. (*CP* xxv)

The only work that Auden mentions by name, *The Orators* stands out in the poet's estimation as a grand failure, only present in the volume as a conspicuous and regrettable absence. But while the thirty-seven-year-old Auden seems at the very least confident in the "good ideas" that informed its composition, the fifty-nine-year-old Auden, preparing a third edition of *The Orators* in 1966, seems less certain: "As a rule, when I re-read something I wrote when I was younger, I can think myself back into the frame of mind in which I wrote it. *The Orators*, though, defeats me. My name on the title-page seems a pseudonym for someone else, someone talented but near the border of sanity, who might well, in a year or two, become a Nazi" (7). This Auden, having left behind the radicalism of the 1930s, having emigrated to the United States, having embraced Christianity, and having himself become the "enemy" (an Oxford Don), looks back on his days of hero-worship and finds in *The Orators* an endorsement of the fascist mindset he had sought to attack—"ugly emotions and ideas" that he had hoped to render ironic through "the schoolboy atmosphere and diction which act as a moral criticism" (8). Intriguingly, Auden's attempts to distance himself from the text actually work to perform what is already manifest in *The Orators*, a book that thematizes secrecy and censorship. In addition to the various orators' resolutions to carry out "a grand clearance" (35), the poem, as I have emphasized, repeatedly pleads for destruction—"Destroy when read" (34), "Better burn this" (38). To put it another way, as a text preeminently concerned with dressing and addressing wounds, *The Orators* is itself a wound, a fatal injury treated by a vain cauterization, a mock-spyography whose account of playing spy is likewise evidence of duplicity—in short, a compromising document that seems to confirm Auden's 1932 suspicion that "unconsciously the liberal becomes the secret service of the ruling class, its most powerful weapon against social revolution" (*Prose* 26).

In the early 1940s, it would seem that Auden's readers came to a similar conclusion about the poet and his circle. In "Inside the Whale" (1940), George Orwell famously associates the Auden generation with "a sort of Boy Scout atmosphere of bare knees and community singing" (30):

> [Nearly] all the younger writers fit easily into the public-school-university-Bloomsbury pattern. The few who are of proletarian origin are of the kind that is declassed early in life, first by means of scholarships and then by the bleaching-tub of London 'culture'. It is significant that several of the writers in this group have been not only boys but, subsequently, masters at public schools. Some years ago I described Auden as 'a sort of gutless Kipling'. As criticism this was quite unworthy, indeed it was merely a spiteful remark, but it is a fact that in Auden's work, especially his earlier work, an atmosphere of uplift—something rather like Kipling's *If* or Newbolt's *Play up, Play up, and Play the Game!*—never seems to be very far away. Take, for instance, a poem like 'You're leaving now, and it's up to you boys'. It is pure scoutmaster, the exact note of the ten-minutes' straight talk on the dangers of self-abuse. No doubt there is an element of parody that he intends, but there is also a deeper resemblance that he does not intend. (31)

Anticipating Mendelson's observation forty years later that the poet "believed part of what he was parodying" (99), Orwell's point is that Auden's ostensibly ironic "scoutmaster" tone strikes the reader as more reactionary than revolutionary. In spite of the group's "leaning towards Communism" (30), Orwell argues, their revolutionary sympathies are modish, naïve, and uninformed. Their idealized representations of revolution and warfare, informed by a kind of Kiplingesque romanticism, play fast and loose with the realities of violence: "Nearly all the dominant writers of the thirties belonged to the soft-boiled emancipated middle class and were too young to have effective memories of the Great War. To people of that kind such things as purges, secret police, summary executions, imprisonment without trial, etc., etc., are too remote to be terrifying" (36). Auden's and Isherwood's decision to immigrate to America in 1939 did little to change this impression. Evelyn Waugh bitterly observed that Auden fled "at the first squeak of an air-raid warning" (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 180). Auden's situation at this time

echoes his "Prologue" to *The Orators*, in which the brave boy, who once "[carried] the good news gladly to a world in danger," is suddenly and unjustly labeled a "Coward" and "Deceiver" (9).[30]

To be fair, Auden recognized and criticized some of these issues in his own revisionary work. Indeed, given the poet's complex personal, political, and spiritual transformation in the postwar decades, it is hardly surprising that he himself would become his most aggressive reader and censor. Nowhere is this more evident than in the odes that constitute the third book of *The Orators* and in Auden's changes and elisions in the 1966 edition, alterations suggesting that he was not only concerned with the problematic politics of the work, but also with privacy and disclosure. Reinforcing the themes of the text as a whole, the odes differ from the rest of the book in what Fuller calls their "[embarrassment] of personal reference" (113), or what Emig describes, in another context, as "the textual equivalent of masturbation" (73). In Auden's original version, the first ode begins with a reflection on the previous year (1930):

> Watching in three planes from a room overlooking the courtyard
> That year decaying,
> Stub-end of year that smoulders to ash of winter,
> The last day dropping;
> Lo, a dream met me in middle night, I saw in a vision
> Life pass as a gull, as a spy, as a dog-hated dustman:
> Heard a voice saying—'Wystan, Stephen, Christopher, all of you,
> Read of your losses.' (85)

In the 1966 version, Auden eradicates the proper names of Spender, Isherwood, and himself, using instead "Savers, payers, payees" (77). Later in the ode, Auden again substitutes ciphers for proper names: "Stephen" becomes "Pretzel" (78), and "Christopher" becomes "Maverick" (79).[31] While these changes may seem trivial, his cryptonymic turn is itself an act of playing spy, and one that reproduces the censorial and secreting gestures of the intelligence community and security culture in general.

Worried, perhaps, that too many suppressions would compromise his artistic integrity, Auden decided to retain what is arguably his most "fascist" ode. The fourth ode of the 1932 edition, which the poet dedicates to the infant son of his friend Rex Warner, satirically apotheosizes the Warner child as the future savior of Britain in a manner that suggests, as Auden remarks in his 1966 introduction, the mythologization of Adolf Hitler. The writer begins his hyperbole by condemning the "proletariat"—a move that may come as a surprise to those who think of Auden as a leftist poet—as spies and usurpers:

> Spying on athletes playing on a green,
> Spying on kisses shown on a screen,
> Their minds as pathetic as a boxer's face,
> Ashamed, uninteresting, and hopeless race. (98)

"As for the upper class," Auden continues, the aristocratic ideal of "youth" is equally impotent. "Youth's the solution of every good scout" (100), but "[they're] most of them dummies who want their mummies" (101). Given this predicament, the poet asks: "Who'll save John Bull? / From losing his wool" (101). The answer appears to be a middle-class messiah: "John, son of Warner, shall rescue you" (101). This hero is "hard / On smugging, smartness, and self-regard" (104)—dandyism and masturbatory narcissism. His birth "Restores, restore will, has restored / to England's story / The directed calm, the actual glory" (105).

While Auden chose to preserve the fourth ode, he decided to cut the poem's "Envoi," in which the poet reflects on the mood of Scotland, where he was then working. After evocatively describing "the Helensburgh streets" and "[bonfires] crackling behind back walls" (106), Auden declares: "Scotland is stirring: in Scotland they say / That Compton Mackenzie will be king one day" (106). In retrospect, this remark would prove ironic; Mackenzie, who had recently been elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University, was indeed a force to be reckoned with, but he would also, not long after the publication of *The Orators*, stand trial for violating the Official

Secrets Act in his war memoir, *Greek Memories* (1932). Whether or not this had anything to do with Auden's decision to cut the "Envoi," the reference to Mackenzie seems all the more poignant given the following ode's preoccupation with security. The fifth ode dedicated to "To My Pupils"—an ode that had originally been published separately under the rather appropriate title "Which Side am I Supposed to be On" (Fuller 120)—returns to the world of boyhood fantasies. "Watching with binoculars the movement of the grass for an ambush, / The pistol cocked, the code-word committed to memory" (107), the boys participate in a series of patrols around the countryside. This is a world governed by a code of secrecy: "Death to the squealer" (111). Questioning the security of their clandestine hideout, the speaker warns the group: "If you see any loiterers there you may shoot without warning, / We must stop that leakage" (112). Fuller reads this ode's depiction of a conflict between "We" and "They" in psychological terms, as a representation of "the divided psyche, the circumference and the centre, the repressive Censor and the rebellious Id" (120). But it seems to me that this ode is likewise a literal representation of play and the manner in which the need for containment becomes internalized through games—in short, the culture of secrecy that produces legislation such as the Official Secrets Act itself. Incidentally, the stanza ending with the imperative to prevent "leakage" (112) was, in fact, cut from the 1966 edition.

Auden's careful obliterations would seem to trouble commentators' assertions that the "flaws" of *The Orators* are actually "artistic devices" (Emig 52) and that Auden allows his poem to "embrace [contradiction]" unreservedly (Bozorth 89). Clearly, Auden became increasingly censorious of his early work. And yet, strangely enough, even as Auden took on the role of censor, he was becoming less and less interested in the relationship between poet and spy. By 1948, Auden could write:

> The ideal audience the poet imagines consists of the beautiful who go to bed with him, the powerful who invite him to dinner and tell him secrets of state, and his fellow poets. The actual audience he gets consists of myopic schoolteachers, pimply young men who eat in cafeterias, and his fellow-poets. (Qtd. in Davenport-Hines 242)

Moreover, just as his initial appropriation of the figure of the spy was arguably a way of exploring the relationship between art and action, his abandonment of the "secret agent" may indicate a final distrust of the political agency of art. To put it another way, Auden's postwar treatment of *The Orators* is simultaneously a cover-up and a revelation concerning the limitations of an adversary culture that identifies with the tropes of the thriller, only to find that it has been compromised by double agents.

NOTES

[1] Quoted in Davenport-Hines 106.

[2] In *New York Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971), the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of the *Washington Post*'s and the *New York Times*'s decision to publish classified materials relating to the country's involvement in Vietnam. In his concurring opinion, Justice Potter cited overclassification as the cause of leakage in the first place, and he stressed the need for "practical" criteria in determining what should or should not be classified. When secrecy is exercised "for its own sake," Justice Potter observed, "the system becomes one to be disregarded by the cynical or the careless, and to be manipulated by those intent on self-protection or self-promotion."

[3] See, for example, Abbe David Lowell's prepared statement for the House Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on the *Espionage Act and the Legal and Constitutional Issues Raised by WikiLeaks* (27).

[4] All references to *The Orators* refer to the original 1932 edition unless indicated otherwise.

[5] In the 1966 edition, Auden reduced the final section to "Five Odes" after cutting what was originally the second ode, a Hopkinsesque parody concerned with "public-school hero worship" that perhaps struck the older Auden as condoning "Fascist and Lawrence-influenced educational practice" (Fuller 116).

[6] Most critical assessments of *The Orators* tend to focus on Auden's growing interest in Gestalt psychology, educational theory, and anthropology in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In particular, these studies emphasize the influence of Homer Lane, whose "romantic anarchism" and anti-bourgeois educational philosophy appear to color the work as a whole (Spears 52), and John Layard, whose anthropological work on the figure of the tribal "flying trickster" provided a model for the airman (Mendelson, *Early* 104). According to Mendelson, "[Auden] writes as a domestic anthropologist, portraying his society as the product not of deliberate social choices but of unexamined mythical beliefs" (*Early* 95).

[7] What unites many interpretations of *The Orators* is the idea that spying serves a predominantly metaphorical function—in the words of John Fuller, "an odd sort of symbolic test" (88). For these commentators, the spy typically represents something *else*—the anthropologist, the psychologist, the homosexual revolutionary, and so on. In *W. H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry* (2002), the only critical work to treat fully and productively the espionage context of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Peter Edgerly Firchow provides a valuable commentary on the real-life agents and intriguers who made up a significant portion of the poet's circle. Nevertheless, when he turns to the text itself, Firchow reaffirms the psychological metaphoricity of the spy: "[Of] course, Auden's spies are not 'just spies.' Though they undoubtedly originate primarily in the formula spy stories published in the once vastly popular Boys' Weeklies, usually featuring villainous German spies, they tend to have more in common with conflicts inside than outside the self" (54). Firchow goes on to suggest that only *after* Auden wrote *The Orators*, "with the increasing threat of Hitlerism," did the poet "become convinced that the enemy was not only a psychological but also a social enemy, not just an enemy within, but a very real and threatening external force" (58).

[8] As Firchow points out, Auden in the 1930s and 1940s came into contact with—and knew personally—a great many spies: Tom Driberg, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, Erika Mann, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Norman Holmes Pearson, to name only a few. Of these, the most notorious are, of course, the members of the Cambridge spy ring. Auden met Anthony Blunt in 1936 through Louis MacNeice and briefly stayed at the spy's apartment (66). Guy Burgess paid a visit to Auden and Isherwood in Berlin, and Burgess attempted to contact Auden when he was defecting to the Soviet Union in May 1951. Firchow suggests that Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender may also have dabbled in amateur espionage (66).

[9] As I discuss in the preceding chapters, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the British reading public became aware of the role played by wartime "literary agents" through the fictional and nonfictional disclosures of W. Somerset Maugham and Compton Mackenzie. Maugham's *Ashenden* was published in 1928, and Mackenzie's first two war memoirs, *Gallipoli Memories* and *First Athenian Memories*, appeared in 1929 and 1931 respectively. For a writer like Auden, concerned with the question of what role, if any, the literary artist could play in an age of crisis, the experiences of these two men of letters would have served as intriguing examples. Unfortunately, however, we do not know whether Auden had read these spyographies prior to the composition of *The Orators* in 1931. His reference to Mackenzie in the "Envoi" to his fourth ode tells us that Auden, living in Scotland, was well aware of Mackenzie's growing popularity and political power (he would become Rector of Glasgow University in January 1932). But Auden could not have read Mackenzie's controversial *Greek Memories* (1932)—for which the author stood trial for violation of the Official Secrets Act—until after the first edition of *The Orators* was published. As for Maugham, we know that Auden was reading *Ashenden* by the mid-1930s; in *Letters from Iceland* (1936),

which Auden co-wrote with Louis MacNeice, the poet mentions Maugham in his verse "Letter to William Coldstream, Esq.": "[We] read the short stories of Somerset Maugham aloud to each other / And the best one was called *His Excellency*" (349). Auden was so taken with the *Ashenden* story that he soon wrote a poem, "His Excellency," based on the same theme, the "betraying smile" of officialdom (*CP* 145). It is also possible that Maugham's concern with the writer-as-spy had an influence on Auden's "Letter to Lord Byron," in which he writes that the artist, "like a secret agent, must keep hidden / His passion for his shop. However proud, / And rightly, of his trade, he's not allowed / To etch his face with professional creases, / Or die from occupational diseases" (102).

[10] Robert Scholes argues that the 1930s witnessed "the rise […] of certain monstrous narratives—forms of the diary, the journal, and the travelogue (or thinly fictionalized versions of these personal narratives)—to a position of preeminence with, if not domination over, the novel itself" (414). These spontaneous and unpolished narratives, Scholes continues, constitute "extended chronicles in which the personal was neither suppressed nor transcended in the approved modernist manner, but was kept in the foreground, sometimes flaunted, but always acknowledged, and […] this attention to the personal compensates for the modernist attention to form and structure that is so obviously lacking" (416). Just as Auden's *The Orators* shares certain similarities with the spyography, it also reflects (or lampoons) this contemporary infatuation with personal revelations in the form of diaries and journals.

[11] We know that Auden in the early 1930s was reading a variety of autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts. In his 1966 forward to *The Orators*, Auden provides a tantalizing list of probable "literary influences":

> The sections entitled *Argument* and *Statement* contain, as Eliot pointed out to me in a letter, 'undigested lumps of St-John Perse'. I had recently read his translation of *Anabase*. The stimulus to writing *Journal of an Airman* came from two sources, Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*, which had just been translated by Christopher Isherwood, and a very dotty semi-autobiographical book by General Ludendorff, the title of which I have forgotten. And over the whole work looms the shadow of that dangerous figure, D. H. Lawrence the Ideologue, author of *Phantasia on the Unconscious* [*sic*] and those sinister novels *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*. (7)

Surprisingly, Auden's critics have been rather dismissive of this list. In his commentary on the catalogue, Firchow suggests that "only two of these writers [Baudelaire and Lawrence] seem really relevant to *The Orators* and then only in a limited way, so that one wonders how well the Auden of 1966 remembered the Auden of 1931/32" (98). Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*, according to Firchow, "probably contributed to the erratic and obscure form of the Airman's journal, but there are no striking or detailed resemblances of any kind" (99). Likewise, while Firchow admits that D. H. Lawrence, "who liked strong men and loathed democracy," may have exerted a "more discernible influence," he provides only a brief discussion of Lawrence's work on the unconscious and—like Mendelson and Fuller—omits the novels altogether. "As for Field Marshall Erich von Ludendorff's 'dotty semi-autobiographical book,'" Firchow writes, "it does not exist" (99).

Yet, in spite of such dismissals, these writers do, it seems to me, provide a key to Auden's preoccupation with both fascism and the rhetoric of enmity. Firchow dismisses Ludendorff's *My War Memories* (1919) as a possible source, describing it as "a straightforward and rather dull account of Ludendorff's military activities" (99). Nevertheless, Ludendorff's subheadings for his chapters—"The Superiority of the Enemy in Man-power and War material," "Extension of the Enemy's Offensive in the West […]," and so on—employ a laconic rhetoric strikingly similar to that used by Auden's airman to describe his own "enemy." Firchow does, however, concede that Ludendorff's later work, *The Coming War* (1931), "contains enough muddled thinking" to have potentially influenced *The Orators* (100).

Similarly, Baudelaire's famous assertion in his journal that "[the] man of letters is the enemy of the world" (*IJ* 43) arguably resonates throughout the "Journal of an Airman," in which the would-be hero assumes an adversarial posture, waging a war of words on an undefined foe. In his "Translator's Preface" to his 1930 edition of *Intimate Journals* Isherwood writes: "[Baudelaire's] life is not the dreary tale of a talented weakling, it is the heroic tragedy of a strong man beset by great failings" (x). Indeed, Isherwood's description of Baudelaire's journal could serve as a description of *The Orators*: "What we have here is an assortment of wonderful fragments, cryptic memoranda, literary notes, quotations, rough drafts of prose poems, explosions of political anger and personal spleen" (x). In his "Introduction" to the journals, Auden notes that "[random] jottings though they are, most of the entries revolve around one central preoccupation of Baudelaire's, namely: what makes a man a hero, i.e. an individual; or, conversely, what makes a man a churl, i.e. a mere unit in human society without any real individual significance of his own?" (xiv). Auden might have added: what makes a man an *enemy*. Baudelaire's "dandy,"

according to Auden, is "the defiant one who asserts his freedom by disobeying *all* commands, whether given by God, society, or his own nature" (xix). Conversely, for Baudelaire, the figure of the poet as a heroic man of action is more ideological than subversive: "To be added to the military metaphors: The fighting poets. The literary vanguard. This use of military metaphor reveals minds not militant but formed for discipline, that is, for compliance; minds born servile […] which can think only collectively" (*IJ* 39).

The idea of the artist as "enemy" also finds a peculiar parallel in D. H. Lawrence's semi-autobiographical *Kangaroo* (1923), which relates the wartime persecution and subsequent exile of "a writer of poems and essays" (8) who, along with his German-born wife, is suspected of espionage and treason under the terms of the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). In the "Nightmare" chapter, Lawrence paints a chilling picture of a wartime England where the lower classes are mobilized in a kind of mass surveillance: "There was an atmosphere of terror all through London, as under the Czar when no man dared open his mouth. Only this time it was the lowest orders of mankind spying on the upper orders, to drag them down" (254). In *The Orators*, Auden evinces a similar—albeit more satirical—distrust of the proletariat, "Spying on athletes playing on a green, / Spying on kisses shown on a screen, / Their minds as pathic as a boxer's face, / Ashamed, uninteresting, and hopeless race" (94).

Together, these "literary influences" suggest that Auden's *The Orators* has less to do with foreign than *domestic* spies; in a national security culture in which every citizen is—as both DORA and the Official Secrets Act make clear—a potential "enemy" of the state, the poet both reaffirms and parodically undermines this villainization by adopting the guise of a hostile agent as his only means of resistance.

[12] In a chapter titled "My Spy Story," Churchill describes his own susceptibility to "Spy-mania" (87). While touring the northern harbors in the Scottish Highlands during the First World War, Churchill and a group of officials spot a suspicious searchlight on the shore, which they suspect may be sending signals to the Germans. After interrogating the owner, who claims that the light is used to spot game for hunting, Churchill departs with the intention of starting an investigation. "I have told this story exactly as it happened," Churchill concludes, "but the most extraordinary part in my opinion is yet to come. There was nothing in it at all" (95). This anticlimactic ending to Churchill's "spy story" certainly is extraordinary, given that Churchill begins the chapter by observing that real intelligence work is every bit as exciting as its fictional counterpart (88).

[13] Prior to founding the Boy Scouts, Robert Baden-Powell, who had served as an army officer in a variety of capacities in Africa, India, and the Mediterranean throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was something of a national hero after successfully defending the British garrison during the Siege of Mafeking in the Second Boer War (1899-1902)—one of the few standout moments in an otherwise demoralizing conflict. A great believer in scouting and spying, the prolific officer had written a number of reconnaissance manuals for the British Army that were also eagerly read by boys throughout the empire. Upon learning of the popularity of his books, Baden-Powell realized the potential for a youth movement that would simultaneously provide training for young men in the "art" of scouting, offer an ideal of social equality to boys of lower and middle classes, improve physical strength, and reinforce patriotic and imperialist ideologies for a new generation. In 1908, he published *Scouting for Boys*. Two years later, the Scouting Movement had over 100,000 adherents in Britain alone and by 1910 had spawned the Boy Scouts of America as well. By 1920, there were over 300,000 Boy Scouts in the United Kingdom, and by the early 1930s, when Auden wrote *The Orators*, that number had climbed to over 400,000. In 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, there were over 3 million members worldwide—the population of a small country. As Michael Rosenthal points out, "*Scouting for Boys* alone probably makes [Baden-Powell], after Shakespeare, the most widely read British writer of all time" (13).

[14] Like *The Orators*, *Scouting* is itself a deeply divided and paradoxical text. Elleke Boehmer notes that the book's simultaneous "resistance to book-learning" (xv) and "[devotion] to verbal illustrations from the canon of romance and adventure fiction" (xxvi) are characteristic of the many contradictions embodied in *Scouting*, which also include the development of civilized behavior through the emulation of "uncivilized" tribal customs and the idea that manliness and adulthood are best achieved through "playing at being men" (xxvi). This "multi-voiced" quality (xiii), Boehmer contends, situates *Scouting* as a kind of "modernist Edwardian text" (xxxv)—a fragmentary collection of slogans, manifestos, and snippets that bears comparison with the Vorticist magazine *Blast* (1914-15) and that even anticipates T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) (xxxvi). From this perspective, the idea that Baden-Powell's handbook may have been an influence on Auden's experimental poem seems less strange; *The Orators* is itself a polyvocal text with a similar investment in the problematic relationship between child and adult, play and responsibility, freedom and rule. I would suggest, moreover, that the general structure of *The Orators* oddly parallels the basic outline of *Scouting for Boys*, which begins with examples of heroic models and offers guidelines for establishing a troop, then lists a series of games and activities designed to promote physical well-being and "good citizenship," and ends with a collection of camp songs that reiterate the values of the movement. *The*

Orators, in turn, begins with the organization of a group based upon a heroic code of behavior ("The Initiates"), offers a description of an extended game of espionage and intrigue ("Journal of an Airman"), and culminates in a series of comprehensive verses ("Six Odes").

[15] Historians and cultural critics have noted the peculiarly British desire to engage in espionage. In *The Second Oldest Profession* (1986), Phillip Knightley offers a telling anecdote: Dick White, the chief of the Secret Intelligence Service from 1956 to 1968, "once told a French colleague that SIS was constantly inundated with offers from British businessmen going abroad who wanted to do a little espionage work on the side. His French colleague replied that this highlighted the difference between the British and French character. 'When a French businessman goes abroad', he said, 'it's not a bit of spying that he wants on the side'" (289).

[16] Auden argues, for example, that the Scouting Movement's privileging of the "natural" environment over the city inevitably promotes fantasy at the expense of reality. In a 1937 review of *The Scout* editor Haydn Dimmock's *Bare Knee Days*, in which Dimmock discusses the impact of the Boy Scout Movement on his life, Auden writes: "If one puts the book down with a feeling of disquiet, it is not the fault of the author, but of the great movement which he represents" (*Prose* 424). Auden goes on to say that while the movement "gets [boys] out into the open air" and "teaches them to be observant and self-reliant," it seldom "[teaches] them to think" (*Prose* 424). In privileging the "*real* life" of the camp over the "*artificial* town life," the Boy Scout mentality forestalls critical engagement with "the real state" of society at home and abroad (425). Auden quotes the "Chief Scout" (i.e. Baden-Powell), who in his foreword advises: "Dive into good comradeship with a lot of cheery fellows, join in their activities, and become, like them, normal" (qtd. in *Prose* 425). "Good comradeship," Auden comments, "cheeriness, action, are all good, but are they, in a democracy, enough? As for normality, when one considers the normal state of the world today, one is not reassured" (425). In his review of Baden-Powell's autobiography, he makes the same point in relation to the Scout Law:

> Clause One of the Scout Promise: "To do his duty to God and King." The bracketing of the Civitas Dei and the existing social order indicates that the scout is not encouraged to understand social structure. The accident that I personally dislike the present order is beside the point; it is an equally dangerous principle under any. Reform is always disloyalty to King, President, or Commissar. (63-4)

Here, Auden suggests that, in addition to substituting a fantasy of active engagement for a true understanding of "the existing social order," the Scout Law forestalls criticism and reform by rendering such actions symbolically (but effectively) treasonous.

In "Boys' Weeklies" (1940), George Orwell offers a similar criticism of popular adventure magazines: "The major facts are simply not faced. It is admitted, for instance, that people sometimes lose their jobs; but then the dark clouds roll away and they get better jobs instead. No mention of unemployment as something permanent and inevitable, no mention of the dole, no mention of trade unionism. No suggestion anywhere that there can be anything wrong with the system *as a system*; there are only individual misfortunes, which are generally due to somebody's wickedness and can in any case be put right in the last chapter" (208).

[17] The tenth law, which Baden-Powell added in the 1911 edition of *Scouting*, actually reads: "A Scout is pure in thought, word, and deed."

[18] As David Vincent argues in *The Culture of Secrecy*, the Official Secrets Act was originally meant to enforce a (previously unwritten) gentlemanly code of conduct among middle-class public servants who, it was believed, lacked the necessary ethos to maintain secrecy and security while serving in an official capacity; in short, the Act responded to "the growing requirement to recruit to government offices those whose breeding, education, and pay excluded them from the rank of gentleman" (*Culture* 91). In a strikingly similar way, the true "mission" of *Scouting for Boys* may have been "to distribute public school values to a wider social pool—of lower-middle-class and even working-class boys—than the public school was able to reach, while simultaneously, by emphasizing obedience to authority, keeping the class structure intact" (Boehmer xxii).

[19] A further parallel between the Official Secrets Act and the scouting code is Baden-Powell's characterization of transgression as resulting in a kind of metaphorical capital punishment. In *Scouting for Boys*, the Chief Scout writes that the scout's badge—containing the Scout's Motto ("Be Prepared') on a three-point arrowhead representing the three clauses of the Scout's Oath ("duty to God and the King," the promise "to help others," and obedience to the Scout Law)—"represents and is called his 'life'" (35). "If a scout were to break his honour," Baden-Powell declares, "[he] must hand over his scout badge, and never be allowed to wear it again—he loses his life" (44). In effect, violation of the Scout's Oath and Scout Law constitutes for Baden-Powell a kind of treason punishable by symbolic death.

[20] In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault asserts that "[we] must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (194). Similarly, in his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault critiques what he terms the "repressive hypothesis" by arguing that the censorship and prohibition of sexuality actually serve to transform sex into discourse (12). In a similar vein, we might say that legislation such as the Official Secrets Act generates as much, if not more, discourse than it prohibits; by labeling something "secret," we instill it with an aura of "truth" or significance—something to be stolen, exposed, revealed—just as sexuality, for Foucault, results in confession, itself a function of power. Espionage is one result of secrecy; the emergence of the spyography is another.

[21] There seems to be some confusion among Auden's commentators as to which Lawrence the poet has in mind—D. H. Lawrence or T. E. Lawrence, both of whom exerted considerable influence on the young Auden. The most likely candidate is D. H., who died in March 1930 and would therefore require a "memorial." As Auden writes in his 1966 introduction, he had been reading Lawrence's work at the time of the poem's composition. Consequently, Lawrence's fascist leanings—particularly his conception of the strong individual—hang over *The Orators*, which seems to simultaneously parody and endorse the Lawrentian hero.

Peter Edgerly Firchow's assumption that Auden's comment refers to T. E. Lawrence also makes a certain amount of sense. While T. E. would not die until 1935, his decision to withdraw from public life and assume a new identity as RAF airman "T. E. Shaw" arguably constitutes a kind of "death" or "failure" of one type of romantic personality. Even so, Auden praises Lawrence's decision, suggesting that it marks his transformation from a Truly Weak Man, the neurotic hero who must continually prove himself through the Test, to the Truly Strong Man, who is quiet in himself and content to remain anonymous (*Prose* 61). Given Auden's comments, it is likely that T. E. served as one of the models for the airman in *The Orators*.

[22] In this, Baden-Powell was very much a product of his time. Advising his scoutmasters that "[recent] reports on the deterioration of our race ought to act as a warning to be taken in time before it goes too far" (184), Baden-Powell reinforces the rhetoric of "deterioration" found in Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) and may be said to anticipate C. F. G. Masterman's *The Condition of England* (1909).

If read as a reflection upon (or parody of) the Boy Scouts, the first book of *The Orators* makes an unsettling point: games are never innocent. They serve as training activities for domestic espionage. While Baden-Powell stresses the value of scouting at a (then) hypothetical time of war and national crisis, his descriptions of recommended games and activities make it clear that the Scouting Movement's more important "peacetime" function is to reinforce normative ideologies of class, race, and sexuality. Observing that "Scouting comes in very useful in any kind of life you like to take up, whether it is soldiering or even business life in a city" (14), Baden-Powell suggests that one not only spies upon one's enemies, but also upon one's own. Accordingly, many of his games teach the subtle art of recognizing physical and economic "signs." For example, Baden-Powell instructs his scouts to observe, like Kipling's Kim, the "Details of People":

> When you are travelling by train or tram always notice every little thing about your fellow travellers; notice their faces, dress, way of talking and so on so that you could describe them each pretty accurately afterwards; and also try to make out from their appearance and behaviour whether they are rich or poor (which you can generally tell from their boots), and what is their probable business, whether they are happy, or ill, or in want of help. (67)

The ostensible humanitarian and "good deeds"-oriented goals of such surveillance mask a normative gaze that encourages boys, through a positivistic attentiveness to physical attributes, facial characteristics, and so forth, to recognize and reinforce class divisions and ethnic differences. This more sinister function of play is underlined by Baden-Powell's warning to his youthful readers: "In doing this," Baden-Powell advises, "you must not let them see you are watching them, or else it puts them on their guard" (67). Even though Baden-Powell asserts his desire for the Scouting Movement to be a classless organization—"Remember," he writes, "whether rich or poor, from castle or from slum, you are all Britons in the first place, and you've got to keep England up against outside enemies" (281-2)—he repeatedly instructs his scouts to categorize Britons themselves, to hone's their ability to determine "character" and, if necessary, to assist the police in apprehending criminals (66). "Send scouts out for half an hour," Baden-Powell suggests to scout leaders, "to look for, say, a brutish character, or a case of genteel poverty, etc." (74).

[23] In addition to Kipling, *Scouting for Boys* is rife with references to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous sleuth. In *My Adventures as a Spy*, Baden-Powell claims that "[one] of the attractive features of the life of a spy is that he has, on occasion, to be a veritable Sherlock Holmes" (70).

[24] Damascus may allude to the wartime activities of T. E. Lawrence. The seat of Turkish rule in the Levant, Damascus was both the ultimate goal of the Arab Revolt as well as the focus of what Lawrence perceived as his and the British government's betrayal of Arab independence. As such, Damascus would, for Lawrence, register as a "wound" of sorts. But there is also, perhaps, a more personal and physical allusion to Lawrence in the writer's love-hate relationship to the wound. The most infamous incident in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1927) concerns Lawrence's apparent sexual abuse at the hands of Turkish soldiers in Deraa. While he provides no direct description of being forcibly sodomized, most readers take his concluding remarks as an admission of violation; Lawrence writes of the "burden, whose certainty the passing days confirmed: how in Deraa that night the citadel of my integrity had been irrevocably lost" (456). However, in his description of the incident, Lawrence admits taking pleasure in his beating. "Pain of the slightest," he writes, "had been my obsession and secret terror, from a boy" (455). Whether or not this controversial chapter in Lawrence's memoir serves as proof (as some commentators have suggested) of Lawrence's masochism or homosexuality, *Seven Pillars* remains, in its own way, a letter to a wound.

[25] Boehmer points out in her introduction to *Scouting for Boys* that "[for] Baden-Powell, as for the many military men and politicians preoccupied with the defence of the realm and problems of recruitment […], the key index of the state of the nation's health and well-being—or lack thereof—was the body of the young male" (xx) and the "proper functioning of its orifices of nose, mouth, and anus" (xxi). Among the "Health-Giving Habits" that Baden-Powell lists in his "handbook" is the imperative to "Avoid Self-Abuse" (195). In his "Notes for Instructors," Baden-Powell is more specific, including a section called "Continence" on the dangers of masturbation, a topic that he considers of the utmost importance to "a boy's education" (316). "The prudish mystery with which we have come to veil this important question," Baden-Powell asserts, "is doing incalculable harm" (316): "The very secrecy with which we withhold all knowledge from the boy prompts him the more readily to take his own line, also secretly, and, therefore, injuriously" (316). But while Baden-Powell acknowledges that secrecy inadvertently encourages disobedience, he nevertheless veils his own language in euphemistic jargon: "You can warn him that 'indulgence' and 'self-abuse' is a temptation more likely to assail him than any other vices, such as drinking, gambling, or smoking, and is more harmful than any of them, since it brings with it weakness of heart and head, and, if persisted in, idiocy and lunacy" (316). Originally intended to be included in the games (!) section of *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell's diatribe against masturbation suggests that "play" has its limits after all.

In spite of Baden-Powell's own secrecy and murky language, his section on "Continence" provides us with an example of what Foucault, in his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), describes as sexuality's "transformation into discourse" (12); the more something is prohibited and labeled "secret," the more we talk and write about it. For Foucault, the discourse of masturbation in particular results less in repression than in "the sexualization of childhood" (153) and in the idea that the sex of the child has an impact on the (re)productivity of the adult:

> In the sexualization of childhood, there was formed the idea of a sex that was both present (from the evidence of anatomy) and absent (from the standpoint of physiology), present too if one considered its activity, and deficient if one referred to its reproductive finality; or again, actual in its manifestations, but hidden in its eventual effects, whose pathological seriousness would only become apparent later. If the sex of the child was still present in the adult, it was in the form of a secret causality that tended to nullify the sex of the latter (it was one of the tenets of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medicine that precocious sex would eventually result in sterility, impotence, frigidity, the inability to experience pleasure, or the deadening of the senses); by sexualizing childhood, the idea was established of a sex characterized essentially by the interplay of presence and absence, the visible and the hidden; masturbation and the effects imputed to it were thought to reveal in a privileged way this interplay of presence and absence, of the visible and the hidden. (*History* 153)

Within the "family milieu," Foucault argues, "[the] child's 'vice' was not so much an enemy as a support; it may have been designated as the evil to be eliminated, but the extraordinary effort that went into the task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere, to proliferate to the limits of the visible and the invisible, rather than to disappear for good" (42). In a 1975 lecture, Foucault clarifies the manner in which "sexuality is one of the constitutive elements of [the] family": "By highlighting the child's sexuality, or more exactly the child's masturbatory activity, and by highlighting the body of the child in sexual danger, parents were urgently enjoined to reduce the large polymorphous and dangerous space of the household and to do no more than forge with their children, their progeny, a sort of single body bound together through a concern about infantile sexuality, about infantile autoeroticism and masturbation" (*Abnormal* 248). As *Scouting for Boys* makes it clear,

this concern also played a role in reducing the even larger and more polymorphous space of the nation—and perhaps the empire—to one body; by asserting that failure on the part of scoutmasters to educate their patrols on this issue "would be little short of a crime," and by establishing a correlation between the health of the scout and the future of Britain, Baden-Powell suggests that masturbation is not only a family matter but a matter of national security.

[26] The double agency of play is arguably represented in security legislation itself. While the Official Secrets Act encourages, to a certain extent, playing spy as a means of maintaining surveillance (i.e. in its implicit imperative to report on suspicious persons), it likewise recognizes that play and impersonation may also be directed against the state. Section 1(d) of the 1920 Official Secrets Act criminalizes anyone who "personates, or falsely represents himself to be a person holding, or in the employment of a person holding office under His Majesty, or to be or not to be a person to whom an official document or secret official code word or pass word has been duly issued or communicated, or with intent to obtain an official document, secret official code word or pass word, whether for himself or any other person, knowingly makes any false statement."

[27] In *The Orators*, Auden simultaneously reproduces and renders ironic the ideological figure of the "enemy." "Auden's intention," Firchow suspects, "is to show the fallacy of fascism as a force that always seeks an external enemy, a scapegoat" (103). If so, then *The Orators* would seem to corroborate Carl Schmitt's argument in *The Concept of the Political* (which appeared in its revised form in 1932) that "[the] specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (26). But Auden seems to be concerned not only with the "public enemy" (in Schmitt's sense) but also with the *rhetoric* of enmity itself. As Paul Fussell argues in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), "[the] most indispensable concept underlying the energies of modern writing is that of 'the enemy'" (76). "If truth is the main casualty in war," Fussell continues, "ambiguity is another" (79). Consequently, "[the] physical confrontation between 'us' and 'them' is an obvious figure of gross dichotomy" (79), resulting in a "paranoid melodrama" (76).

Crucially, security legislation plays a role in crystallizing and perpetuating this melodrama. Section 1(1)(b) of the 1911 Official Secrets Act targets anyone who "makes any sketch, plan, model, or note which is calculated to be or is intended to be directly or indirectly useful to an enemy." In *Espionage and Secrecy* (1991), Rosamund M. Thomas notes that the word "enemy" in the 1911 Official Secrets Act was problematic from the start: "[What] does the word 'enemy' mean in the context of section 1?" (54). During the short debate over the Bill in the House of Lords, "[a] suggestion was advanced […] that, in order to avoid the acquittal of an offender in peacetime when no 'enemies' as such exist, paragraphs (b) and (c) should be redrafted substituting the words 'foreign power' for that of 'enemy'" (54). But the change was not made, and subsequent infringements of the act in the years leading up to the First World War set a precedent for allowing the Official Secrets Act to "cover 'a *potential* enemy with whom we might some day be at war'" (55).

[28] Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) offers some suggestions for parents of self-abusers. "Try to contain yourself," he advises parents to tell their children. "Always try to contain yourself, and be a man. That's the only thing. Always try and be manly, and quiet in yourself" (112). In *Pornography and Obscenity* (1929), Lawrence stresses, like Baden-Powell, that secrecy itself brings on the desire to masturbate. His solution: "Away with the secret! No more secrecy! The only way to stop the terrible mental itch about sex is to come out quite simply and naturally into the open with it" (*Late* 247).

[29] Appropriately (or ironically) enough, in the early days of the Secret Intelligence Service, semen was considered to be an effective invisible ink. Former MI6 officer "Frank Stagg recalled that 'all were anxious' to obtain secret ink 'which came from a natural source of supply'. He said that he would 'never forget "C's" [Mansfield Cumming's] delight when the Deputy Chief Censor, F. V. Worthington, came one day with the announcement that one of his staff had found out that 'semen' would not react to iodine vapour, and told the old man that he had had to remove the discoverer from the office immediately as his colleagues were making life intolerable by accusations of masturbation'. 'We thought,' wrote Stagg, 'we had solved a great problem'. But 'our man in Copenhagen . . . evidently stocked it in a bottle—for his letters stank to high heaven and we had to tell him that a fresh operation was necessary for each letter'" (Jeffery 66).

[30] Auden considered his immigration an act of rebellion, and his comments on the defection of Guy Burgess may shed some light on his own decision to abandon Britain: "England is terribly provincial—it's all this family business. I know exactly why Guy Burgess went to Moscow. It wasn't enough to be a queer and a drunk. He had to revolt still more to break away from it all. That's just what I've done by becoming an American citizen. You can become an Italian or a French citizen—and that's all right. But become an American citizen and you've crossed to the wrong side of the tracks…." (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 179).

Incidentally, after moving to the United States, the poet was himself suspected of espionage. Although Auden was proud of his Scandinavian ancestry, his "Nordic look" would get him into trouble: "During the Second

World War some American neighbours denounced Wystan Auden to the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a spy ('They obviously thought I'd come off a submarine'): the agent who came to interview him asked, 'You're a Scandinavian, aren't you?'" (Davenport-Hines 16).

[31] This revisionary move toward the cryptonymic had begun as early as the late 1930s. As Fuller points out, the third edition of the US *Poems* (1937) has "Seeker, Lightweight, Lolloper" in place of "Wystan, Stephen, Christopher," and the other references to "Stephen" and "Christopher" are replaced with "Pokenose" and "Oddfellow" respectively (113).

CHAPTER FOUR

True Lies: Virginia Woolf, Fictional Spyography, and Feminist Agency

> Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping.
> —Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

> Secrecy is essential.
> —Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938)

In the graphic novel *Black Dossier* (2007), the third volume in Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* series, Allan Quatermain and Mina Harker traverse an Orwellian, mid-century Britain in quest of a top-secret file containing a history of the "league," a secret service composed entirely of characters from literature. Essentially, the dossier represents a "sourcebook" for the series, complete with accounts of earlier members of the illustrious group dating back to the Renaissance. The centerpiece of the collection, "The Life of Orlando," traces Virginia Woolf's immortal, gender-bending hero(ine) through centuries of outlandish adventures. We learn, for instance, of Orlando's birth in Bronze Age Greece to the blind seer Tiresias, and we follow along as (s)he fights in the Trojan War, campaigns with Alexander the Great, serves as a Roman legionnaire, joins the Crusades, helps to found the first Elizabethan spy network, takes part in the French Revolution, and, finally, assists Quatermain and Harker in thwarting a plot against King George V at his coronation in 1910. The narrative ends in 1943, with the three-thousand-year-old Orlando listening to the air-raid sirens over London and reflecting on the "pointless wars" and perpetual conflicts of human history.

Representative of the contemporary genre of steampunk, *Black Dossier* draws heavily from late-Victorian and Edwardian popular literature in constructing its pseudo-history of Britain. However, as the inclusion of Orlando indicates, steampunk also has a way of mining modernism for source-material, often "borrowing" the most unlikely protagonists and tasking

them with the defense of the realm. Like Moore and O'Neill's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Kim Newman's successful *Anno Dracula* series of novels incorporates a surprising range of characters from modern literature: Oscar Wilde's Basil Hallward, George Bernard Shaw's Mrs. Warren, E. M. Forster's Henry Wilcox, and D. H. Lawrence's Clifford Chatterley, to name a few. In pitting these characters against the likes of Count Dracula, Professor Moriarty, and Dr. Fu Manchu, steampunk arguably hyperbolizes and lampoons what I have termed the militant aesthetic state, the spectral regime that seeks to weaponize literature in the interests of national security. In doing so, the genre also approaches the problematic of modernism's political valence in an oblique, but creative way. On the one hand, it is possible to read these fictions as imputing to "high modernism" in particular a political activism or *agency* that many commentators (in the vein of Georg Lukács) find insufficient or lacking. On the other hand, even the most outrageous narratives sometimes contain a modicum of truth, an implied reading or uncovering of modernist "action potential." While Moore and O'Neill's treatment of Orlando in *League* bears little resemblance to Woolf's 1928 novel, their enlistment of Orlando calls to mind the author's famous observation in her diary that she and her sister, Vanessa, formed a "league […] against the world" (*Writer's Diary* 120), a comment anticipating the veritable league of extraordinary women that she advocates in *Three Guineas* (1938). Moreover, like the Orlando of *Black Dossier*, the Woolf of "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940) views all history as a continuous tragedy, but one in which individuals should intervene not by taking up arms, but by "[fighting] with the mind" (*Death* 244).

Steampunk is not the only genre to "recruit" modernism into the world of the thriller; the parallel genre of speculative historical fiction engages in a similar operation, but with a certain measure of realism. There are, in fact, two different spy novels in which Virginia Woolf herself

serves as the heroic protagonist. The first, Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso's *The Shadow of the Moth: A Novel of Espionage with Virginia Woolf* (1983), follows the "unlikely sleuth" as she works in parallel with the Security Service (MI5) to thwart a conspiracy to leak British military plans to the Germans in 1917. While recovering from a nervous breakdown, Woolf becomes obsessed with the apparent suicide of a Belgian refugee in London, and her investigation leads her into an underworld of agents and double agents, where books are used as secret codes and bookstores serve as fronts for shadowy cabals. The second, Stephanie Barron's *The White Garden: A Novel of Virginia Woolf* (2009), pits Woolf against the notorious Cambridge Spy Ring during the Second World War and suggests that her suicide may have been a murderous cover-up. In a contemporary frame narrative, an American landscape artist travels to England to study the famous White Garden designed by Woolf's friend and former lover, Vita-Sackville West. While there, she discovers a lost Woolf manuscript that appears to have been written after the author's death. In it, Woolf records the events that led her to uncover a Bloomsbury plot to warn Stalin about Hitler's imminent invasion of the USSR, a scheme that involves encoding secret messages in the manuscript of *Between the Acts*.

Though written a quarter of a century apart, *The Shadow of the Moth* and *The White Garden* share some striking similarities; both are set in a wartime England threatened from within by leaks, by subversive political factions that have penetrated Westminster and Bloomsbury alike; and both place Woolf in a position in which she must resist or rebel against patriarchal authority—Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, the government itself—in order to expose a threat to national security. More importantly, in assigning Virginia Woolf an active role in the intrigues of the First and Second World Wars, both novels effectively carry out a fictional recruitment of the modernist artist, a recruitment that serves as a figural complement to

the literal recruitment of writers by the British secret service in the first half of the twentieth century. Like steampunk, these novels both reproduce and ironically comment upon the militant aesthetic state that attempts to mobilize the writer and weaponize the book. But the question remains: to what extent should we take these novels *seriously*? In other words, is it possible to read *The Shadow of the Moth* and *The White Garden* as informed treatments of Woolf? Or, is the presence of "Virginia Woolf" in these spy yarns a mere novelty, an imaginative conscription that has little or nothing to do with the *real* Virginia Woolf?

To be fair, neither novel offers itself as a genuine conspiracy theory or as a truthful representation of Woolf's life. Each begins with the customary disclaimer against confusing fantasy with reality. Hawkes and Manso's "Author's Note" states that the book "is a novel, and while Virginia Woolf and a number of her contemporaries appear side by side with fictional characters, the scenes in which we have placed them, as well as their dialogue, thoughts, and actions, are our own invention and should not be construed as historical fact" (n.p.). Likewise, Barron asserts that references to real people and places "are intended only to give the fiction a setting in historical reality" (n.p.). These novels constitute, in short, what Graham Greene calls "entertainments"; that is to say, pulp fictions. I want to suggest, however, that far from rationalizing our dismissal of such texts the pulp status of these novels actually justifies a uniquely Woolfian reading. Indeed, Woolf herself took an interest in what her biographer, Hermione Lee, labels "trashy novels" (408). In "Bad Writers" (1918), Woolf recognizes the "quality of unfettered imagination" that can only be found in popular fiction:

> The bad writer seems to possess a predominance of the day-dreaming power, he lives all day long in that region of artificial light where every factory girl becomes a duchess, where, if truth be told, most people spend a few moments every day revenging themselves upon reality. The bad books are not the mirrors but the vast distorted shadows of life; they are a refuge, a form of revenge. (*Essays* II 328)

In locating the agency of popular writing in its power to enact "revenge," Woolf draws our attention to fantasy's ability to imaginatively redress or intervene in (historical) reality. As "the vast distorted shadows of life," such texts shelter, Woolf implies, a kernel of truth, albeit in disguise. If, as I have argued in the preceding chapters, espionage narratives are themselves the shadows of modernism and vice versa, then these Woolf spy novels may shed light on Woolfian "intelligence" as they revenge themselves upon historical and biographical records.

As speculative fictions, *Shadow* and *White Garden* arguably correlate with Woolf's own investment in what we might call "counterfactual" inquiries. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf begins her treatise by paradoxically emphasizing its unreality. That is, Woolf freely admits that the places she mentions have "no existence," that her "I" is but "a convenient term for somebody who has no real being," and that her evidence is compounded of "lies" (3). Most famously, Woolf offers an account of "Judith Shakespeare," William's (nonexistent) sister, as a means of investigating and dramatizing the economic and social factors that serve as the preconditions for literature itself. In effect, Woolf approaches the topic of "women and fiction" through the agency of fictional women, whom she juxtaposes with "real" women writers—in particular, the seventeenth-century playwright, novelist, adventurer, and (appropriately enough) former spy, Aphra Behn.[1] Woolf's rationale behind this unorthodox approach has much to do with the discursive and archival conditions of knowledge itself. Throughout *Room*, the author consults various institutions and authorities—"Oxbridge," the British Museum, and the library—in quest of a useful "truth" or an "authentic fact" (44) about women. Unable to find a satisfactory account, Woolf discovers that the very categories of facticity, authenticity, and truthfulness are themselves historically and rhetorically gendered. Ironically praising "man's writing" as "direct" and "straightforward" (109), the author suggests that a new conception of

truth calls for a new medium, one employing tactics that are circuitous, oblique, and perhaps—like Behn herself—a bit "shady" (71). Both *A Room of One's Own* and its "fictional" counterpart, *Orlando*, illustrate that Woolf's "new novel" is also, in a sense, a new history of women. As such, Woolf's feminist texts dispute the myth that "high modernism" is solely invested in formalism or "art for art's sake." Far from being politically disinterested, Woolf develops a unique politics of form that renders inoperative the fact-fiction dichotomy. From this perspective, *Shadow* and *White Garden*, while not exactly "experimental," may be said to participate in a similar telling of "true lies."

One way to investigate such works that transgress and trouble the borderlines between literary, historical, and theoretical domains would be to regard these texts as representing "possible worlds." Like the fictional "biographer" in *Orlando*, whose life-writing method negotiates "the region of 'perhaps' and 'appears'" (227), possible-worlds semantics are concerned with counterfactual conditionals, statements about how the world *might be* or *might have been*.[2] The advantage of possible-worlds over one-world models is that we need not be concerned with the "truth" of the text or its (mimetic) fidelity to the "real world." Lubomír Doležel points out that "fiction makers," unlike historians, "practice a radically nonessentialist semantics; they give themselves the freedom to alter even the most typical and well-known properties and life histories of actual (historical) persons when incorporating them in a fictional world" (*Heterocosmica* 17). In these nonactualized worlds, Napoleon might win Waterloo, Trotsky might lead the Soviet Union, and Virginia Woolf might expose an espionage ring. However, while Doležel maintains a strict separation between literature and history, arguing that "the different aims of *poiesis* and *noesis* [invention and description] require two different kinds of texts, one performative, with the attending lack of truth valuation, the other constative, with

the attending truth functionality" (*Possible* 44),[3] I would suggest that the Woolf spy novels do, in fact, have a noetic dimension as well, but one that replaces "truth functionality" with critical functionality. Positing a Woolf that *might have been* involved in espionage, these novels help us to better understand the role of counterfacticity in the "real" Woolf's work, by playing on her own investment in the clandestine histories and secret agencies of women. To put it another way, just as modernist metaphors are often summoned to comment upon intelligence work,[4] the tropes of espionage perform a similar function for modern literature, making visible through fictional agencies and imagined complicities the plots (*les intrigues*) of modernist politics and aesthetics. Perhaps it is time for New Modernist Studies to expand the category of "bad modernisms" to include the full panoply of modernism's "worlds"—implausible narratives that perform, in their own way, a critical interpretation of modernist writers and texts.

In what follows, I will argue that Hawkes and Manso's *The Shadow of the Moth* and Barron's *The White Garden* operate as counterfactual biographical enquiries and critical investigations into Woolf's life and political thought. In carrying out their fictional recruitment of the writer-as-spy, these novels do not impose the world of the thriller onto Woolf; rather, they draw out and allegorize a "spy function" that is already present in Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. I will begin by suggesting that what Hermione Lee describes as Woolf's attentiveness to "the relationship […] between public and private, official and secret lives" (12), is not limited to her writing on biographical method, but characterizes her aesthetics in general. In a famous passage from *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Lily Briscoe sits at the feet of Mrs. Ramsay and ruminates on the constitutive "secret" that animates personality:

> [She] imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public. What art was

> there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? (78-9)

This "art," which takes as its subject the undisclosed and ciphered domain, meets truth "half way" (78), yet it is able to accommodate a multiplicity of identities, or what Orlando's biographer calls a "variety of selves" (*Orlando* 226), obscured by public facts and figures. Woolf reminds us that stream-of-consciousness writing is itself an infiltration of a secret state—moreover, one with a political as well as an aesthetic valence. Moving from the realm of art to the field of action, I will discuss the way Woolf figures feminism as a kind of secret agency, an "Outsider's Society" that nevertheless operates from within social, cultural, and political spheres, and whose messages emerge through various forms of public discourse, "sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly between them" (*Three Guineas* 136). In keeping with the *modus operandi* of the militant aesthetic state, Woolf weaponizes reading and writing, but in such a way as to penetrate and sabotage what she considers to be the fascist state at home—the academic, military, and professional "procession" that privileges secrecy and violence. Woolf's strategy, we might say, is to adopt a conspiracy of her own.

Turning to *Shadow* and *White Garden*, I will then consider the manner in which these spy novels simultaneously engage and problematize Woolf's mission. On the one hand, these texts reflect and dramatize Woolf's avant-garde, "outsider" politics through the action of an espionage narrative. On the other hand, in turning Woolf against her own circle, these novels also enlist Woolf in a rearguard action that is as much a critique of leftist radicalism as it is of fascism. In short, *Shadow* and *White Garden* carry out a retroactive interrogation of modernism and an act of revenge against the "adversary culture" of Bloomsbury itself—which has always seemed, to suspicious observers, "a coterie conspiracy" (Lee 263).

Strangers on a Train

A committed pacifist, Virginia Woolf hardly seems, at first glance, a likely candidate for espionage, fictional or otherwise. As Hermione Lee illustrates, Woolf's life was not particularly "sensational":

> She did not go to school. She did not work in an office. She did not belong to any institution. With rare exceptions, she did not give public lectures or join committees or give interviews. And in private terms her life-story is sensational only for her breakdowns and suicide attempts. She did not have children. Her sexual life, though unusual, was not dramatic or notorious. She was not the subject of any public scandals or law cases. She did not engage in any hazardous sports or bizarre hobbies. She never flew in an aeroplane, or travelled outside Europe. Her exploits and adventures are in her mind and on the page. And here too, in her writing life, she is intensely private. (16)

Lee's synopsis manages to capture the general image that we have of the historical Woolf, but with one significant exception: a daring act of spying that informs the author's subsequent work and helps to frame her attentiveness to what we might call "scenes of intrigue"—moments not simply of *being*, but of *clandestinity*.

On 7 February 1910, Admiral William May of the British Royal Navy received a telegram from the Foreign Office reading: "Prince Makalen of Abyssinia and suite arrives 4:20 today Weymouth. He wishes to see the Dreadnought. Regret short notice. Forgot wire before. Interpreter accompanies them" (qtd. in Lee 279). When the Abyssinian delegation arrived to tour HMS *Dreadnought*, then flagship of the navy, Admiral May and Commander William Fisher rolled out the red carpet and ordered a naval band to play the Anthem of Zanzibar (since the Abyssinian National Anthem was unavailable). The officers then proceeded to show the prince and his entourage around the battleship, including its state-of-the-art—and top-secret—wireless system. After a pleasant visit, Admiral May and Commander Fisher escorted the royal party off the ship and cheerfully sent them on their way. All in all, it seemed a successful diplomatic encounter. The only problem was that the Abyssinians were not Abyssinians at all,

but a young Virginia Stephen (dressed as a man), her brother Adrian, and other friends wearing elaborate costumes and speaking in a tongue of their own devising.

"The Dreadnought Hoax," as it quickly came to be known, is one of the more colorful incidents in Woolf's life. In a speech delivered to the Rodmell Women's Institute in 1940, Woolf describes how Adrian's friend, Horace Cole ("the ring leader"), and their fellow "conspirators" planned the escapade, arranged for the bogus telegram to be sent, and generally "[told] a variety of lies" to cover their tracks (*Platform* 186). Their disguises were evidently quite good; even Fisher, who happened to be Virginia and Adrian's cousin, failed to see through the deception. Nevertheless, Woolf's account of the tour reads like a slapstick sketch, with the party constantly on the verge of exposure. Upon their arrival, the navy informed the retinue that they had an Abyssinian speaker on board, who just happened to be on leave that day. Climbing up a mast to view the wireless equipment, Virginia's beard nearly blew off in the breeze. Invited to view the officers' bath rooms, she feared that the plot had been discovered and that the officers would "give us each a good ducking" before throwing the party overboard (192). Despite these close-calls, the British navy fell for the ruse—hook, line, and sinker. Indeed, the officers were so friendly that that Virginia began to feel "slightly ashamed" (193).

A few days later, official tempers flared when Cole, who considered the hoax a "work of art," proudly informed the London papers of what had transpired, much to Virginia's horror. As she recalls, there were those in the government for whom the incident represented a significant breach of national security:

> Some member of Parliament had seen the Daily Mirror—indeed the story had been in all the papers; and he got up and asked whether his Majesty's government were aware that a party of irresponsible and foolish people had dressed themselves up as Abyssinians and gone on board the Dreadnought. There were roars of laughter. But the speaker went on to point out that it was a very serious matter. He said that it reflected upon the credit of the navy. He said that it showed that anybody however foolish had only to send a forged

> telegram and he would take in the Admiral of the Channel Fleet. He said that we might have been German spies. He said that we had been shown secret instruments. [….] And he asked finally that steps should be taken to deal with us. (196-7)

Luckily for the hoaxers, the 1911 Official Secrets Act did not yet exist. If it had, the "conspirators" could have been found guilty of a felony and sent to prison for entering an unauthorized zone. Indeed, one wonders if the Dreadnought Hoax cast a shadow, the following year, over the drafting of the Act itself, which designates a "prohibited place" as "any work of defence, arsenal, factory, dockyard, camp, ship, telegraph or signal station, or office belonging to His Majesty" (section 3[a]). To entertain such an idea is to imagine that Virginia Woolf played a role in the creation of the modern secret state. But we need not make so dramatic a claim in order to examine the significance of the hoax in Woolf's conception of feminist agency.

That Woolf chose the Dreadnought incident as the subject for her 1940 talk at the Rodmell Women's Institute—when she had, in fact, been asked to "speak about books" (Johnston 2)—suggests that she felt the hoax was in some way linked to her creative life and work. In the speech, "which made her audience laugh themselves silly" (Lee 722), Woolf narrates how she had gotten the better of the military and made them look ridiculous. Consequently, Woolf's commentators regard the hoax as an early manifestation of her antiauthoritarian politics. Phyllis Rose describes the hoax as "a primal event, the acting out of her own rebellion against paternal authority" (qtd. in Kennard 151). Her admittedly problematic use of blackface has been viewed by Kathy J. Phillips and others as a gesture of solidarity with oppressed races, a sympathetic move that she repeats in her political writing by identifying the plight of women with that of the colonized. Additionally, the fact that Woolf dressed as a man has led some critics, such as Jean E. Kennard, to theorize the ways in which "cross-dressing […]

has the effect of carnivalizing political and cultural power and thus of undermining it" (152), an effect that would become central to *Orlando*.

Critics have neglected, however, to treat the hoax as a *literal* act of espionage that anticipates the *figural* spying that we find throughout Woolf's writing. Like her treatise against militarism in *Three Guineas*, Woolf's speech figures resistance and subversion as an incognito infiltration, a kind of mission impossible whose goal is the sabotaging of the patriarchal "procession" by taking the wind out of its sails, so to speak. Although Woolf was the only female member of the party—albeit a party clothed in decidedly effeminate attire—her description of the hoaxers as "conspirators" is noteworthy given the word's gendered valence in Woolf's texts. Appearing with surprising frequency and usually signifying a bond between women, the trope of "conspiracy" imparts a subversive tenor to the Woolfian "league […] against the world." In the draft of her memoir, "Sketch of the Past," which Woolf worked on in the last years of her life, she observes that, as children, she and her sister, Vanessa, "formed together a very close conspiracy. In that world of many men, coming and going, we formed our private nucleus" (*Moments* 123). Suggesting not only privacy, but active complicity, this initial "conspiracy" anticipates the secret societies and scenes of intrigue that inform Woolf's fiction and nonfiction. "Her books," Lee writes, "are full of images of war: armies, battles, guns, bombs, air-raids, battleships, shell-shock victims, war reports, photographs of war victims, voices of dictators" (336). Lee should have added "spies," for Woolf consistently employs the imagery of espionage to figure not only her feminism, but also her approach to writing. This appropriation of clandestinity, an appropriation that is itself a form of "cross-dressing,"[5] constitutes a "spy function" that allows Woolf to develop a politics of aesthetics; that is to say, a conception of literary activity as an infiltration and undermining of patriarchal authority.

Woolf's first literary expression of espionage comes not in her nonfictional or biographical writing, but rather in her 1921 short story collection, *Monday or Tuesday*. Two stories in particular, "A Society" and "An Unwritten Novel," embody, respectively, the political and aesthetic dimensions of the "spy function," which become more intertwined in Woolf's later work. As critics have observed, "A Society" makes direct use of the Dreadnought Hoax, and it also anticipates the "society" of female outsiders that Woolf elaborates in *Three Guineas*. More to the point, the group is literally a spy ring, which works to expose the material conditions that underlie codes of gentlemanly behavior. In the story, a group of women take it upon themselves to "[judge] the results" of centuries of patriarchal rule by surreptitiously infiltrating various male-dominated institutions, gathering intelligence, and reporting back to the group:

> [We] made ourselves into a society for asking questions. One of us was to visit a man-of-war; another was to hide herself in a scholar's study; another was to attend a meeting of business men; while all were to read books, look at pictures, go to concerts, keep our eyes open in the streets, and ask questions perpetually. (*Complete* 119)

As in her nonfiction tracts, Woolf's primary targets are the military, the university, and the professions, organizations with the ostensible goal of producing "good people" and making the world a safer and more productive place. More often than not, the women discover that these institutions are primarily concerned with maintaining power by reinforcing a particular image of themselves. In order to investigate the nature of "Honour," one of the members, Rose, dons the garb of "an Aethiopian Prince" and visits "one of His Majesty's Ships" (120). Upon discovering the deception, the Captain seeks out the woman, who is "now disguised as a private gentleman," and "[demands] that honour should be satisfied" (120). After trading symbolic strokes with a cane, the two retire to a restaurant, get drunk, and "[part] with protestations of eternal friendship" (121). Honor, Woolf suggests, is a matter of surface formality. The other members of the ring have similarly disheartening experiences, coming to the conclusion that duty and glory are also

empty concepts, mere ciphers for the truly important things: "aeroplanes, factories, and money" (125). In the end, the society concludes that there is only one thing left for a literate woman to believe in, "and that is herself" (130).

While "A Society" introduces the idea of a secret cabal of women who penetrate and, in some sense, rhetorically sabotage the strongholds of male power, Woolf's story "An Unwritten Novel" indicates that the role of the female artist is also to spy upon other women in an effort to reveal their hidden lives and thereby achieve a more naturalistic expression of character. As the title suggests, this story works as a kind of prospectus, a novel in miniature that is also an implicit manifesto of the novelist's art. On a train "[rattling] through Surrey and across the border into Sussex," an unnamed narrator clandestinely scrutinizes the woman opposite, attempting to reconstruct her story based upon her behavior and appearance in a manner not unlike that of Sherlock Holmes (*Complete* 107). Noting the particular "venom" with which the woman mentions her sister-in-law and imaging possible family dramas, the narrator believes she has cracked the woman's code: "Leaning back in my corner, shielding my eyes from her eyes, seeing only the slopes and hollows, greys and purples, of the winter's landscape, I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze" (108). The narrator constructs a complex, but fragmentary world for the woman, whom she codenames "Minnie Marsh." While doing so, however, she senses that there is always something of the other that is withheld or indecipherable. "Have I read you right?" the narrator wonders: "[Now] you lay across your knees a pocket-handkerchief into which drop little angular fragments of eggshell—fragments of a map—a puzzle. I wish I could piece them together!" (111). Silently observing this stranger, the narrator contemplates the notion of identity in general—the "life, soul, spirit, whatever you are of Minnie Marsh" (111)—and the means through which the artist communicates personality.

Minnie herself is ultimately one of many "unknown figures" who populate the writer's world and become subjects of writerly surveillance: "Wherever I go," the narrator thinks, "mysterious figures, I see you, turning the corner […]. I hasten, I follow" (115).

As Lee points out, "A Unwritten Novel" parodies the sort of "first class railway carriage" novels that Woolf associated with Edwardian fiction (400). It is also the story, Lee contends, that "turned Virginia Woolf into a modernist" (401); coming between *Night and Day* (1919) and *Jacob's Room* (1922), "An Unwritten Novel" develops the interior monologue, employing it to create a "female narrative" (401). If so, the story also illustrates that Woolf's modernism takes as one of its governing metaphors the scene of intrigue—here, a loaded encounter between strangers on a train, a scene familiar to readers of that other Edwardian genre, the spy yarn. While the intervention of the Great War may have signaled the belated demise of Edwardian culture, thereby moving prewar England into the realm of melancholic parody, the tropes of espionage emerge from the crucible of war as a newborn culture of intrigue. Significantly, Woolf's unnamed narrator begins the story reading in her newspaper about the Paris Peace Conference, only to engage in her own covert, peacetime surveillance. Such operations, the story implies, persist in the postwar era; in spite of the armistice, the narrator traverses a world of borders, a world permeated by the rhetoric of secrecy and encryption, of figures to be followed and messages to be "deciphered."

Not surprisingly, *Jacob's Room* itself develops the trope of the train journey within a larger context of feminine espionage. Like the omnibus passengers on their morning commute down Oxford Street, strangers catching glimpses of other strangers, unable to read the other's true identity "shut in him like the leaves of a book" (85), Mrs. Norman watches the nineteen-year-old Jacob Flanders on a Cambridge-bound train. Noting with trepidation "that men are

dangerous," she looks "stealthily" at the unknown student, attempting to interpret his nature: "All was firm, yet youthful, indifferent, unconscious—as for knocking one down!" (35-6). Jacob, for his part, seems unaware of "her presence" (36). While the subject of surveillance is, in this case, a man, the scene speaks to one of the primary concerns of Woolf's novel, the secret character, or what Marcel Proust in *Swann's Way* calls "the mystery of personality" (*Remembrance* 336). "Nobody sees any one as he is," Woolf's narrator reflects, "let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage"; instead, "[they] see themselves" (36). As they reveal her own suspicious nature and fear of violence, Mrs. Norman's thoughts nevertheless touch upon a kind of truth, not of the youth's individuality, but of his complicity in patriarchal order; the indifferent Jacob Flanders, absorbed in his *Daily Telegraph*, on his way to university, rides to meet the coming violence that his surname portends. When the narrator, not unlike Mrs. Norman, engages in her own bit of spying, inspecting Jacob's rooms at Cambridge while the young man is Dining in Hall, she offers a telling catalogue of his books: "Lives of the Duke of Wellington, for example; Spinoza; the works of Dickens; the *Faery Queen*; a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages; all the Elizabethans" (48-9). Martial, romantic, and eminently English, Jacob's library—like the blood-red poppies of "Flanders fields" lore—answers not so much the mystery of his personality as his devotion to what Woolf will later term "unreal loyalties," the ideology of nationality and heroism that licenses violence and greets with open arms a war that will reduce the authoritative, academic, and "orderly procession" (38) to "a procession of shadows" (96).

In her fiction from the early 1920s, Woolf draws correlations between reading, writing, and spying. In doing so, she arguably constructs her own version of the militant aesthetic state, but one concerned with a distinctly female "intelligence." In her subsequent nonfiction, she

merges the properties of "A Society," "An Unwritten Novel," and *Jacob's Room*, the sabotaging of patriarchal institutions and the revelation of hidden lives, into a common political aesthetic, a modernist method focused not on the verification of individual identities, but on disrupting traditional "loyalties" and transforming narrative techniques. As in her experimental fiction, the encounter between strangers on a train serves as the narrative basis for one of Woolf's most famous essays on modern literature and method, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924). Contrasting the "Edwardians" (H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy) with the "Georgians" (E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Lytton Strachey, and, by implication, herself), Woolf points out the limitations of the former in treating "character in itself" (327). To do so, she once again describes a train journey, this time from Richmond to Waterloo:

> One night some weeks ago […] I was late for the train and jumped into the first carriage I came to. As I sat down I had the strange and uncomfortable feeling that I was interrupting a conversation between two people who were already sitting there. […] They were both elderly, the woman over sixty, the man well over forty. They were sitting opposite each other, and the man, who had been leaning over and talking emphatically to judge by his attitude and the flush on his face, sat back and became silent. I had disturbed him, and he was annoyed. The elderly lady, however, whom I will call Mrs. Brown, seemed rather relieved. […] There was something pinched about her—a look of suffering, of apprehension, and, in addition, she was extremely small. […] I felt she had nobody to support her; that she had to make up her mind for herself; that, having been deserted, or left a widow, years ago, she had led an anxious, harried life, bringing up an only son, perhaps, who, as likely as not, was by this time beginning to go to the bad. All this shot through my mind as I sat down, being uncomfortable, like most people, at travelling with fellow passengers unless I have somehow or other accounted for them. (*Collected* I 321-2)

Lest the reader conclude that the couple's issues are in any way common or innocent, Woolf indicates that the situation smacks of intrigue, perhaps of crime. "Obviously," she thinks, "[the man] had an unpleasant business to settle with Mrs. Brown; a secret, perhaps sinister business, which they did not intend to discuss in my presence" (322). After her entrance, the couple continues speaking in a kind of code, a forced conversation concerning mutual acquaintances.

But Woolf's interruption has disturbed the power relation between the two. In a sense, her desire to read or narrate "Mrs. Brown" also serves to temporarily dislodge the man's hold over the woman, a hold that she then correlates with the male writerly gaze.

Woolf's purpose is to demonstrate that each of her Edwardian colleagues—Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy—would interpret the situation in his own way. Wells would scarcely take notice of the woman, for "[there] are no Mrs. Browns in Utopia" (327). Galsworthy would see only a manifestation of factories and social injustice, Mrs. Brown as "a pot broken on the wheel and thrown into the corner" (328). Bennett would notice every detail of the woman and then offer endless descriptions with little insight. For Woolf, however, Mrs. Brown is the "thing itself." Once the suspicious man leaves and the two women are left alone, Woolf projects her "fantastic and secluded life," surrounded by sea-urchins, ships in bottles, and her dead husband's medals (324). "The important thing," Woolf insists, "was to realize her character, to steep oneself in her atmosphere. I had no time to explain why I felt it somewhat tragic, heroic, yet with a dash of the flighty, and fantastic, before the train stopped, and I watched her disappear, carrying her bag, into the vast blazing station" (324). "The story ends," Woolf writes, "without any point to it" (324). We never learn the "secret" of Mrs. Brown, but we are given to understand that a prewar aesthetic is insufficient. If Mrs. Brown is to be "rescued," it must be through the "smashing and crashing" of old forms and conventions: "Thus it is that we hear all round us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays, the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction. It is the prevailing sound of the Georgian age […]" (333-4). Woolf establishes a connection between politics and narrative, arguing that experimental forms, though often "failures and fragments" (335), have the best chance of liberating both women and women's writing from what she designates in "An Unwritten Novel"

as "the man's way" (*Complete* 113). The work of the modern artist, she implies, is conspiratorial; she intrudes and eavesdrops, disguises herself and breaches security.

In her short stories and essays, Woolf's campaign against patriarchal authority thus involves two interrelated strategies. First, she exposes and deconstructs what she considers to be the strongholds of power: the university, the military, the government, and the professional sphere. Second, she focuses on reading and writing the lives of women as integral to the first—not just the lives of the famous, but also those of the unknown and, indeed, the nonexistent. For Woolf, the biography—or, more specifically, the *fictional* biography—is a privileged form of intelligence. As the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and good friend of the iconoclastic biographer Lytton Strachey, author of the ironically titled *Eminent Victorians*, Woolf was well-aware that "life writing" could both reinforce and resist nationalist ideologies. But her investment in biographical inquiry is unique, I would suggest, in its manipulation of counterfacticity. It is not important, Woolf insists, that we believe the subject is "real," that we know the "truth" of Mrs. Brown; what is important is that, through our idea of her, we approach the essence or "atmosphere" of the "thing in itself" that is irreducible to facts, dates, and numbers. Arnold Bennett, who "[observes] every detail with immense care" (328) and provides "facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines" (330), never really sees Mrs. Brown. Like the realist "tools" of Edwardian fiction, the accumulation of data is likewise a means of establishing and maintaining power, a method of bureaucracies and professions. Woolf's response is to represent women's lives without reducing them to a collection of figures—that is, to free herself from the constraints of "man's writing" (*Room* 109).

Woolf finds a unique vehicle for this newfound freedom in *Orlando*, a self-styled "biography" that is also a critique of biographical inquiry. The book's readers, as Conrad Aiken remarks in his 1929 review, must decide "whether to regard it as a biography, or a satire on biography; as a history, or a satire on history; as a novel, or as an allegory" (qtd. in DiBattista xl). This crisscrossing of both genres and disciplines allows *Orlando* to dissolve the barrier between literature and history, while also performing the (productively fragmentary) study of personality the writer outlines in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Throughout the text, Woolf's unnamed biographer repeatedly reminds the reader that the account is based on an imperfect archive; there is a chronic lack of facts and figures, documents and data, regarding the immortal and gender-defying Orlando. "[The] first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth," ultimately founders on the "dark, mysterious, and undocumented" (49). Confronted with "burnt papers and little bits of tape" (93), the detritus of a life, the biographer must fill in the gaps, as it were, with fancy:

> Just when we thought to elucidate a secret that has puzzled historians for a hundred years, there was a hole in the manuscript big enough to put your finger through. We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination. (88)

As Maria DiBattista has observed, the Woolfian biographer supplements "the truth of fact" with "the aura of personality" (xlvi), the spirit of what Woolf once again designates as "the thing itself" (*Orlando* 15), which may even privilege the fictive as more authentic than the factual. However, in making her biographer undeniably male ("he"), Woolf is simultaneously able to continue her critique of "man's writing" by way of authorial cross-dressing. While the biographer seems to have no qualms about laying bare Orlando's boyhood and youthful dalliances, the female Orlando presents him with the need to introduce a double standard in the

form of censorship; when the heroine gets a bit too ribald, reflecting on the appropriate term for a woman of flexible virtue, the biographer intervenes: "But we must omit that word; it was disrespectful in the extreme and passing strange on a lady's lips" (115). This ironic play of exposure and concealment, of filling gaps and leaving holes, is further compounded by *Orlando*'s reception as a private "joke" for Bloomsbury friends and a cryptic "love letter" to Vita Sackville-West—in short, the impression of being a roman à clef, which led Elizabeth Bowen to label the work a "transgression" against the modernist imperative to "[sublimate] personality" (qtd. in DiBattista xli).

All biography, Woolf implies, is autobiographical. But if Orlando encodes both the aristocratic Vita and the famous Bloomsbury author, s/he is likewise a secretive figure with an investment in clandestinity, anticipating the type of engaged "outsider" that Woolf develops in the 1930s. Brought up among the intrigues of Elizabethan England, reigned over by a paranoid queen who "[sees] always the glistening poison drop and the long stiletto" (18) and who keeps a mirror at hand "for fear of spies" (20), the young courtier leads a double life of his own. "Stealing away from talk and games," the biographer tells us, "he [hid] himself behind curtains […] with an inkhorn in one hand, a pen in another, and on his knee, a roll of paper" (57). Plagued by an ungentlemanly urge to *write*, Orlando gravitates between a desire for fame and a yearning to live "anonymously" (77). While performing "the public life" of an ambassador in Constantinople (88), he habitually slips "out of his own gates late at night so disguised that the sentries [would] not know him. Then he would mingle with the crowd on the Galata Bridge; or stroll through the bazaars" (91). After becoming a woman, a transformation that DiBattista terms "gynomorphosis" (lx), Orlando continues to write surreptitiously, but she realizes that her public existence has been radically altered: she can no longer "swear," she tells herself, "or sit

among my peers, or wear a coronet, or walk in procession, or sentence a man to death, or lead an army, or prance down Whitehall on a charger, or wear seventy-two different medals on my breast" (116). Foregoing the masculine "procession," Orlando begins to take an active interest in the lives of common women. In eighteenth-century London, she dresses as a man and "[lets] herself secretly out of doors" (157). Soliciting a prostitute, to whom she reveals her true gender, Orlando listens as the woman tells "the whole story of her life"—a narrative that the male biographer naturally chooses to omit (159).

In the end, Orlando's transformation constitutes not only that of man into woman, but "martial ambition" and desire for "power" into "contemplation, solitude, [and] love" (119). Lest we misinterpret this as passivity, Woolf continually emphasizes that the contemplative and, indeed, literary study of personality, the cultivation of sympathy, has the potential to disrupt the machinations of power. In *Jacob's Room*, the narrator observes that "men in clubs and Cabinets"—representatives of both social and political spheres—"say that character-drawing is a frivolous fireside art, a matter of pins and needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy, flourishes, and mere scrawls" (216). When "[the] battleships ray out over the North Sea" and "blocks of tin soldiers" invade foreign fields, when "[these] actions, together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancellories, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward" (216), what use is literature in the face of such "an unseizable force" (217)? The answer, she suggests, is that sympathy—which is, for Woolf, a form of conspiracy—works against the false "loyalties" that drive both department stores and dreadnoughts. But literature is not the only weapon at hand; as we shall see, Woolf also advocates a more dynamic approach, a vision of the engaged feminist agent who is, in her own way, "dangerous" to authority.

Femme Fatale

In the first chapter of *The Years* (1937), the ten-year-old Rose Pargiter has something of a late-night "adventure" (26). Stealing her nurse's latchkey, she sneaks out of the family house in Kensington (where Woolf herself grew up) to visit Lamley's toy shop. Along the way, she imagines herself "riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison":

> She had a secret message—she clenched her fist on her purse—to deliver to the General in person. All their lives depended upon it. The British flag was still flying on the central tower—Lamley's shop was the central tower; the General was standing on the roof of Lamley's shop with his telescope to his eye. All their lives depended upon her riding to them through the enemy's country. (27)

Drawing from iconic images of "military Victorianism" (Glitz 15)—the Indian Mutiny, the fall of Khartoum, and the Charge of the Light Brigade—the child reenacts the martial and imperialist escapades romanticized in popular culture. However, Rose's fantasy abruptly ends when she encounters a strange man on Melrose Avenue, a flasher who makes sucking noises and proceeds to "[unbutton] his clothes" (*Years* 29). Terrified, she flees, imagining as she does the sound of "his feet padding on the pavement" behind her (29). Whether or not this incident exerts an influence on Rose's troubled adulthood—her violent and suicidal tendencies—this short scene treats, in a complex way, the position of the female subject within the patriarchal order. On the one hand, as Rudolf Glitz points out, the fantasy alludes "to cases of male imperialists falling victim to the very power structures they helped to defend" (14). On the other hand, in emulating these lionized shades of imperial sacrifice, Rose is brutally reminded of her own outsiderism, her subjection to a "power structure" marked by exhibitionism and sexual aggression. As the narrative basis for Woolf's projected "novel-essay," *The Pargiters*, *The Years* dramatizes the critique of patriarchy that Woolf develops in her polemical treatise, *Three Guineas* (1938). But while the knife-brandishing, brick-throwing Rose Pargiter represents one type of feminist

agitator, Woolf's book-length essay endorses a more peaceful, albeit forceful, mode of opposition to authority. Like Orlando, whom we initially find chopping away at the mummified head of a Moor, full of quixotic longings for conquest and glory, and who finally chooses a life of critical inquiry, the passage from the militant Rose to the anonymous subjects of *Three Guineas* characterizes Woolf's conception of how contemplative, literate women may make a difference in "the world outside" (qtd. in Lee 610) without resorting to physical violence.

While Woolf's first full-length treatise, *A Room of One's Own*, focuses on the role of the female artist, *Three Guineas* more ambitiously takes on the social and political agency of women in general, particularly at a time of escalating international conflict. In many ways, Woolf's later treatise draws together and develops the various aspects of the spy function that emerge in her earlier stories, novels, and essays—her critique of militarism, her concept of the secret "society" of women, and her emphasis on biographical inquiry as a means of establishing a feminist counternarrative—while presenting them for the first time in the form of an imperative. The primary targets of Woolf's critical project in *Three Guineas* are what she calls the "unreal loyalties" (95) fostered by various institutions. For Woolf, these may take any number of forms, from the parading of the military (to illustrate this, Woolf helpfully provides a photo of Lord Baden-Powell in full regalia), to the splendor of the academic "procession," to the pageantry of nationalism and imperialism—in short, the aesthetic state that renders competition, conquest, and warfare as honorable and beautiful pursuits. Refusing to limit her argument to women alone, Woolf declares that all people should aim to free themselves from these ideological constraints: "By freedom from unreal loyalties is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family pride, sex pride and

those unreal loyalties that spring from them" (97). The "real loyalties," for Woolf, are "the full development of body and mind" (97).

Structurally, *Three Guineas* appropriates key qualities of the "procession"—namely, its simultaneous invasiveness and evasiveness—and turns them against authority. In effect, this strategy allows Woolf herself to reveal and conceal at will—in essence, to practice secrecy. Taking the form of three letters in which Woolf responds to questions posed by various societies seeking donations (hence the guineas), the text positions the reader as a kind of eavesdropper or spy. To put it another way, in *Three Guineas*, reading is indistinguishable from perlustration, the interception and inspection of private correspondence that one would normally associate with an intrusive security state. In the first place, this structure grants *Three Guineas* a measure of subterfuge; layers of (fictional) letters, hypothetical letters within letters, and extensive textual apparatuses often make it difficult to decide when—or if—Woolf is being ironic. In the second place, Woolf is able to employ the epistolary form as a means of productively dissolving the border between public and private "states." Addressing her first (male) correspondent, Woolf characterizes the letter as a view "of your world as it appears to us who see it from the threshold of the private house; through the shadow of the veil that St. Paul still lays upon our eyes; from the bridge which connects the private house with the world of public life" (22-3). St. Paul, whom Woolf describes in a note as "the virile or dominant type, so familiar at present in Germany" (198), comes to represent for Woolf a whole tradition of subjugation. One of her most salient points is that those who are "veiled" and do not live by the sword may still die by the sword; wartime photographs of "ruined houses and dead bodies [of] men, women and children" remind us that "the public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (168). The

dangerous intersection of these "worlds" serves as a justification for Woolf's offensive, though nominally "passive," posture; women must intervene as a matter of literal survival. In making her case, Woolf oddly corroborates the primary assumption of those government officials who would shortly impose the wartime Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939, which extended itself into all aspects of everyday life: in a state of war, nothing is private.

The problem confronting women, Woolf suggests, is that their entry into the academic and professional spheres will inevitably involve accepting "unreal loyalties": "If you succeed in those professions the words 'For God and the Empire' will very likely be written, like the address on a dog-collar, round your neck" (85). This leaves few options: "Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. [….] It is a choice of evils" (90). The solution, Woolf believes, rests in uncovering the secret and hidden lives of women, past and present, whose lived "experiment" may provide a model for resistance and action. "Is it not possible," she asks, "that by considering the experiments that the dead have made with their lives in the past we may find some help in answering the very difficult question that is now forced upon us?" (91). While advocating that biographical inquiry may offer women a useful compass, Woolf also implies that one must look beyond the standard archives and repositories of knowledge. "Happily," she notes, "old boxes are beginning to give up their old secrets" (91). Woolf points out that not only in biographies, but also "between the lines of biography" (93), one finds examples of women critically engaged in "professional" activities, like the author and antiquarian Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), "who, though the diplomatic service was and is shut to women, occupied a post in the East which almost entitled her to be called a pseudo-diplomat" (93). Others, like the

educational reformer Josephine Butler (1828-1906), are notable for their desire to avoid recognition and reward (92-3). All of the women whom Woolf offers as examples had, she explains, "the same teachers": "Biography thus provides us with the fact that the daughters of educated men received an unpaid-for education at the hands of poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties" (95). In the end, Woolf asserts that "ridicule, obscurity and censure are preferable, for psychological reasons, to fame and praise" (97). She might very well have added "for pragmatic reasons"; like the spy, whose intelligence-gathering must be carried out under cover of anonymity, the Woolfian investigator achieves more latitude by working in "obscurity."

Based on her analysis of the patriarchal "procession," as well as her investigation into the prehistory of "professional" women, Woolf concludes that modern women, while deserving greater access and initiation into these traditionally male-dominated spheres, should simultaneously seek an "outsider" position from which to resist and critique the "unreal loyalties" and "interested motives that are at present assured them by the State" (134). Abjuring fame and recognition, this "anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders" (130) should dedicate "themselves to [obtaining] full knowledge of professional practices, and to reveal any instance of tyranny or abuse in their professions" (132):

> [They] would consider it their duty to investigate the claims of all public societies to which, like the Church and the universities, they are forced to contribute as taxpayers as carefully and fearlessly as they would investigate the claims of private societies to which they contribute voluntarily. They would make it their business to scrutinize the endowments of the schools and universities and the objects upon which that money is spent. (133)

In short, the Society of Outsiders would effectively keep tabs on the state and its institutions. Its members, moreover, would work to prevent war by refusing "to fight with arms," "to make

munitions," or "to nurse the wounded" (126). Crucially, this society must avoid the bureaucratic trappings of the "procession":

> [What] chance is there, you may ask, that such a Society of Outsiders without office, meetings, leaders or any hierarchy, without so much as a form to be filled up, or a secretary to be paid, can be brought into existence, let alone work to any purpose? Indeed it would have been waste of time to write even so rough a definition of the Outsiders' Society were it merely a bubble of words, a covert form of sex or class glorification, serving, as so many such expressions do, to relieve the writer's emotion, lay the blame elsewhere, and then burst. (135-6)

There is, Woolf suggests, a "model": "evidence of their existence is provided by history and biography in the raw—by the newspapers that is—sometimes openly in the lines, sometimes covertly between them" (136). As in her earlier discussion of biographies, Woolf offers examples (from newspaper clippings) of women who are already working to undermine "unreal loyalties": the Mayoress of Woolwich's refusal to "darn a sock to help in a war"; the decision on the part of women's sports teams to withhold trophies and "[play] the game for the love of it"; and the growing "paucity of young women" attending Church of England services (137-9). Most of these instances, Woolf points out, constitute a "passive experiment" marked by refusal or absence (139). It would seem, then, that in addition to auditing the "procession," the tradecraft of Woolf's Society of Outsiders comprises intelligence-gathering from open sources: "[Since] we are generalists not specialists, we must rely upon such evidence as we can collect from history, biography, and from the daily paper" (154).

These public manifestations of resistance notwithstanding, the society's investigations and operations should be, ideally, conducted *sub rosa*. "Secrecy is essential," Woolf insists: "We must still hide what we are doing and thinking even though what we are doing and thinking is for our common cause" (141). The reasons Woolf offers for the importance of secrecy are job security ("Fear is a powerful reason; those who are economically dependent have strong reasons

for fear") and an ambiguous, but deep-seated resistance to gender equality embedded in culture and religion, a "fear that […] makes concealment necessary" (141). As a result, Woolf's investment in secrecy and disguise also works to position her Society of Outsiders as a response to—or even parody of—the sorts of "secret societies" she encountered in her life. Throughout *Three Guineas*, Woolf repeatedly points out that the "procession" has traditionally employed secrecy to bar women: "[There] are many inner and secret chambers that we cannot enter. What real influence can we bring to bear upon law or business, religion or politics—we to whom many doors are still locked, or at best ajar, we who have neither capital nor force behind us?" (28). Woolf's intention may be to organize a "force" of her own; indeed, it is tempting to imagine Woolf's society of women as a clandestine "league together against the world"—an underground, feminist version of Leonard Woolf's Cambridge Apostles, or an answer to his beloved but ineffectual League of Nations.[6]

If there is a potentially satirical vein in Woolf's treatise, it should remind us that, in spite of the writer's sober appeals to security and equality, there is also a general pleasure in secrecy. In addition to criticizing, obliquely, the pretentions of Bloomsbury, Woolf locates in secrecy a kind of joyful *poiesis*. In *Orlando*, another private "letter" made public, the hero(ine) meditates simultaneously on "the value of obscurity" and "the delight of having no name" (77). While acknowledging, not unlike the letter-writer in *Three Guineas*, that "obscurity rids the mind of the irk of envy and spite," Orlando observes that "such is the way of all great poets" (77). Like the furtive versifier's unauthorized sallies into the bazaars of Constantinople and the alleyways of London, Orlando's secrecy permits intimacy and sexuality—not only the act itself, but the "cypher language" (207) in which poets and lovers conspire. Furthermore, as the reader penetrates this sanctum, as she translates Orlando's cry of "Life, Life, Life" (199) into

"Vita,Vita, Vita," or as she becomes a spectral third party among the correspondents in *Three Guineas*, she takes her own pleasure in spying and decoding.

This is not to downplay the seriousness of Woolf's project, or to suggest that her hidden motive is actually "secrecy for art's sake." Rather, like Maugham in his darkly comic *Ashenden* and Mackenzie in his farcical *Water on the Brain*, Woolf marshals the constellation of humor, disguise, and sexuality into an attack on both officialdom and the culture that legitimizes hero-worship and bloodshed. Woolf's implicit argument in her 1938 treatise is that fascism is as much at home in Britain as it is in Germany and Italy. Consequently, the mission of her secret society is not to combat a threat from abroad—for the outsider, Woolf observes, "there are no 'foreigners,' since by law she becomes a foreigner if she marries a foreigner" (128)—but rather a domestic one. Woolf's conception of British fascism is much more explicitly stated in her wartime essay, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940), in which she aims "to drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down" (*Death* 245). Drawing a correlation between "the Englishmen in their planes" and "the Englishwomen in their beds" ("We are equally prisoners tonight," she declares), Woolf argues that the best way to combat fascism on both sides of the channel is not to take up arms, but to convert thought into action, to "fight with the mind" (244). There is a relationship, Woolf indicates, between militarism and sexual oppression, and it falls to women to defuse "the desire for aggression": "We must help the young Englishmen to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations. We must create more honourable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun" (247).

Within this wartime context, Woolf's 1940 talk on the Dreadnought Hoax for the Rodmell Women's Institute takes on a more critical and subversive character than the original act itself. In demystifying the military, Woolf continues the project of *Three Guineas* by trivializing the (often absurd) demands of honor; the "ceremonial taps" to the backside suffered by Woolf's fellow "conspirators," which she lampoons in "A Society," seem as ridiculous as the chests full of medals and dandyish uniforms she satirizes in her treatise. However, as an admission of espionage, even in jest, Woolf's talk plays on contemporary fears of leakage, particularly those involving women. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, the Second World War brought about "a resurgence of patriarchal politics" (212); in addition to figuring women as symbols of maternity to be protected from the invader, wartime propaganda also characterized women as a potential threat to national defense: "Posters enjoining silence as a protection against spies implied that women's talk would kill fighting men. The female spy, the femme-fatale or vamp whose charms endanger national security, was sinister in her silence, for her allure could penetrate the security needed to keep the fighting forces safe" (230). While it is admittedly a stretch to picture Virginia Woolf as a "vamp" or as attempting to identify with such an image, we should keep in mind that this was precisely the effect of the hoax in 1910; after the incident went public, Willy Fisher informed Adrian Stephen that the sailors were calling Virginia "a common woman of the town" (qtd. in Lee 280). Thirty years later, Woolf puts the constellation of sexuality and security to use in her conception of the engaged feminist agent for whom the "leak" is not a liability, but a strategy, a means of exposing and defusing the "subconscious Hitlerism" that constitutes the true enemy.

To think of Virginia Woolf in the way I have been suggesting, as identifying both the artist and the feminist with the spy, is to conceive of a late-modernist Woolf who is more in

company with the "Auden generation" than she is with the pantheon of "high modernists." Despite Woolf's reservations about the overtly political approach of the "young poets,"[7] we find some striking similarities between her writing in the 1930s and the early work of Christopher Isherwood, who developed his own strangers-on-a-train motif in his pseudo-spy novel, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935), and W. H. Auden himself, whose investment in the poet-as-spy suggests he would have agreed with Orlando that "writing poetry [is] a secret transaction" (238). Like them, Woolf comes to the realization that fascism is also a British sickness, sees the necessity of converting art into action, and figuratively recruits the writer as a "secret agent" or "conspirator." The tropology of train journeys, border crossings, disguises, and clandestine meetings so common in the leftist poetry of Auden and the novels of Isherwood finds an unlikely parallel in the mysterious passengers and secret societies that populate Woolf's writings on fiction and feminism. These same codes of espionage and intrigue make it possible for Woolf to be posthumously recruited into the popular thriller, but whereas the "real" Woolf's clandestine society primarily targets an uncritical nationalism, in these fictional worlds, we find a Woolf bent on exposing a conspiracy within the conspicuously cosmopolitan enclave of Bloomsbury itself.

The Unacted Part

Perhaps it is appropriate that the fictional Leonard Woolf in *The White Garden* should choose to encode his secret message to Stalin in the proofs of *Between the Acts* (1941). Woolf's final, posthumously published novel is very much concerned with the manner in which the war leaks through, so to speak, on a more or less ordinary day in June 1939, staining and discoloring all attempts to forget the conflict through community and art, reminding us that literature itself is often only subterfuge. From the first line—"It was a summer's night and they were talking, in

the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool" (*Between* 3)—the reader is aware of something foul, just below the surface, which occasionally intrudes into discourse, but always subsists between the lines. How can one sit in a country house and appreciate the view, Giles Oliver reflects, or perform in a theatrical pageant of English history, when Europe is "bristling with guns, poised with planes" (37)? This intersection of beauty and violence finds an intriguing parallel in the juxtaposition high and popular literature in the Pointz Hall library. If "[books] are the mirrors of the soul," Woolf writes, then the library evinces "a tarnished, a spotted soul": "Nobody could pretend, as they looked at the shuffle of shilling shockers that week-enders had dropped, that the looking-glass always reflected the anguish of a Queen or the heroism of King Harry" (12). Here, the presence of "shilling shockers"—the sort of "bad books" that Woolf in "Bad Writers" describes as "not the mirrors but the distorted shadows of life" that "[revenge] themselves upon reality" (*Essays* II 328)—signifies more than the "soul bored" and in need of pulp to satisfy "mind hunger" (*Between* 12); the intrusion of the thriller into high culture embodies a desire, particularly at a time of crisis, for fictional worlds in which one may act out what Woolf calls the "unacted part" (104), the heroic self *in potentia* that exists outside of historical and biographical time.

Both Stephanie Barron's *The White Garden* and Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso's *The Shadow of the Moth* project, in different ways, Woolf's own "unacted part," by dramatizing the author's conception of feminist agency through the device of the contemporary thriller. Approaching, to use Woolf's term from "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," the "atmosphere" of her secret society, her image of the modern feminist writer as a clandestine observer and potential agent of change, these fictional biographical inquiries *subjunctively* speculate as to the form such agency *could have* taken in Woolf's life. Employing the same sort of "shadow" trope that Woolf

herself applies to popular fiction, Wai Chee Dimock has characterized the subjunctive mood as "hovering just below the threshold of actualization, casting its shadow on the known world" (243). A "syntactic underground," the subjunctive offers, according to Dimock, "thinkable versions of the world" (243), "a rich ecology to be found nowhere else, a time-warping and world-multiplying fictiveness peculiar to the constitution of literature" (244). In offering counterfactual scenarios with heuristic potential, *Shadow* and *White Garden* extend, I would suggest, the subjunctive from the realm of the grammatical and syntactical to a *narratological* level; as "underground" narratives, these novels investigate the relations between art and action, artist and agent, by treating Woolf *as if* she were involved wartime espionage. Speculating about what happens between the lines of literature and history, they reconstitute the thriller itself as a critical interrogation or "reading" of modernism.

While exploiting the relative freedom of invention afforded them by the subjunctive mood, *Shadow* and *White Garden* also carry out their own projects of revenge that depart from what I have characterized as Woolf's original "spy function" in interesting and problematic ways. Arguably motivated not only by aesthetic, but also by critical and political concerns, the authors of these novels are not exactly what we would call disinterested parties. Ellen Hawkes, who co-wrote *Shadow* with her partner Peter Manso, received her Ph.D. in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford, where she wrote her dissertation on Woolf's feminism. In response to Quentin Bell's 1972 biography of Woolf, Hawkes published an essay titled "The Virgin in the Bell Biography" (1974),[8] in which she criticizes Bell for offering a vision of Woolf as "a neurotic virgin cloistered from experience" (96), thereby eliding Woolf's "sense of herself as a woman […] and her criticism of culturally and publically defined masculine values [which] are at the heart of both her fiction and, as one would expect, her diaries" (98). In light of this,

Shadow emerges as a further corrective to the Bell biography, figuring a Woolf whose dramatic intervention also exposes the ideological blindness of her (male) Bloomsbury associates, who are involuntarily drawn into an international conspiracy. Likewise, Stephanie Barron,[9] who studied history at Princeton and Stanford before joining the Central Intelligence Agency, where she spent four years as an analyst, recruits Woolf into a narrative in which the men of Bloomsbury are willing accomplices of traitors and Soviet moles. In short, the villainous plotters in *Shadow* and *White Garden* are not fascist, but cosmopolitan and communist, respectively. One might expect that even a fictional version of Woolf—who in *Three Guineas*, according to Jane Marcus, "invents herself as the female Marx and writes the *Communist Manifesto* for women" (lii)—would be sympathetic to such intrigues. But in both novels, Woolf risks her life to expose the plot. As she does so, she maintains a feminist resistance to patriarchal authority that is, ironically, made to serve in the interests of nationalism and national security, occasioning a peculiar indictment of modernism and "adversary culture" itself.

In their 1983 spy novel, Hawkes and Manso dramatize Woolf's conception of the engaged feminist agent by having their fictional Woolf take part in an investigation that is also a biographical inquiry triggered by a clipping from a newspaper, what Woolf in *Three Guineas* calls "history in the raw" (9). While recovering from a nervous breakdown in 1917, Woolf becomes obsessed with the death of Anna Michaux, a Belgian refugee in London, whose apparent suicide by drowning, Woolf suspects, is actually a cover-up for something more sinister. From the outset, Woolf is hampered by various authorities—government officials, Scotland Yard detectives, and newspaper editors—who believe that, as a novelist, she is a liability, a scribbler who threatens to publicize a story that "[the] Yard wants to keep the lid on" (*Shadow* 12). With the help of an American journalist, Bobbie Waters, Woolf learns that Anna

was working as governess for Sir Henry Cranford, a prominent arms manufacturer, whom she had been spying on for both the Belgian secret service and a shadowy organization dealing in stolen military secrets. While the plot defies easy summary, it should suffice to say that the true villain is revealed to be an English peer, Lord Ladbrooke, who blackmailed Anna into working against her own people, and who now plans to use the information she supplied to warn Germany of an impending tank offensive against the Hindenburg line. With the help of MI5's Sir Vernon Kell, Woolf foils the nefarious scheme, but only after discovering the unwitting complicity of Bloomsbury itself.

As Regina Marler observes, readers of *Shadow* "can sense Hawkes's satisfaction in inventing precisely the plucky, heroic, damned clever Woolf she hoped to find, years earlier, in the Bell biography" (280). More to the point, the novel works against Quentin Bell's "cloistered" depiction of Woolf by transposing his gesture of containment to the first generation of Bloomsbury males, who unsuccessfully attempt to prevent Woolf from involving herself in wartime intrigues. Throughout the novel, the young Virginia is in constant conflict with Leonard Woolf, who believes her actions to be motivated by madness, and Clive Bell, who likewise suspects that her interpretation of events is nothing more than an empty conspiracy theory, the product of an overactive imagination. Significantly, just as the narrative ultimately corroborates Woolf's spymania, thereby establishing the naïveté of her protectors, it also suggests that intellectual and artistic circles, in their effort to remain above and beyond the machinations of generals and statesmen, become implicated in acts of violence.

Conflating the literary community with the intelligence community, *Shadow* projects a militant aesthetic state in its depiction of a wartime environment wherein books and bookshops serve as "covers" for secret agencies. As it does so, however, the novel demonstrates that such

mobilizations have the effect of reducing belles-lettres to "dead letters." While rummaging through Anna's room in search of clues, Woolf discovers a copy of James Joyce's (recently published) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with extensive markings. Noting the number of underlined words, Woolf suspects that Anna may have employed the book to transmit messages. "Maybe she was writing in code," Woolf conjectures. "Or maybe there are messages in invisible ink […] like Mata Hari writing between the lines of books" (99). Woolf eventually learns that Anna had been using Joyce's novel as a shared book code to send information to the Belgian secret service, which owns and operates a network of publishers and bookstores for the purposes of espionage. Aside from its practical role in advancing the plot, Hawkes and Manso's decision to incorporate *A Portrait* into their "novel of espionage with Virginia Woolf" has a twofold effect. From one angle, this cameo suggests that the content of Joyce's text might intersect in some way with the spy narrative. The Joycean mantra of "silence, exile, and cunning" (*Portrait* 247) readily lends itself to an espionage context. Moreover, Stephen Dedalus's *non serviam*, his adversarial posture, arguably correlates with the Woolfian spy function, the "outsider" position that works in opposition to the establishment or "procession." Accordingly, *Shadow* hints at a potentially scandalous sympathy between the fictional Woolf and her fellow modernist, a writer whom the real-life Woolf famously abhorred. While reading *A Portrait*, Hawkes and Manso's Woolf finds herself "enjoying the prose": "Perhaps she'd misjudged Joyce, she thought, too quickly dismissed him as a showman" (161). From another angle, *Shadow* forestalls any reconciliation between Joyce and Woolf by reconstituting *A Portrait* as a mere data set. That is, upon further investigation, Woolf discovers that the underlined words have been selected at random. As *Shadow* indicates, book codes work against

aesthetic or thematic recuperation; reducing literature to a collection of signifiers, they reveal nothing so much as the bare materiality of the letter.

The book's decidedly "unwitting" conscription is but one of several ways in which *Shadow* consigns both modernism and modernists to a condition of instrumentality, a conduit for "intelligence." In addition to the weaponization of the literary text, the novel offers scenarios in which members of the Bloomsbury circle serve as unsuspecting agents and couriers. Traveling to Le Havre, Woolf locates Anna's former controller, the Belgian publisher and secret agent, Henri Giraud, who encourages her to cultivate her artistic and intellectual contacts:

> You've done a good job of making people uncomfortable. That's exactly what I want you to continue doing. Let the yard know you're not going to drop it. Make a pest of yourself. [….] Use your friends, your social connections, Mr. Keynes, Mr. Bell and Mr. Fry, even your sister and your husband. [….] Let everyone know you've adopted Anna as a case of your own. If they think you're going to write about her, even better. (121)

In essence, Giraud suggests that Woolf use her own reputation as a writer to her advantage, sending messages through her Bloomsbury associates and threatening to publish the story in order to find out who wants to keep Anna's death under wraps. "On the one hand," Woolf thinks, "[Giraud] was telling her she was needed. On the other, that she would become a target, possibly a decoy. It was to invite paranoia; but this time it wouldn't be her imagination. The line between reality and fantasy would be frighteningly blurred" (121). But Woolf soon discovers that the line has already been crossed. Ladbrooke, putting a similar strategy into effect, has enlisted the help of Clive Bell in transporting stolen military secrets to a German spy working out of a bogus art gallery in Paris. Unbeknownst to Bell, the purchase order for the paintings that Ladbrooke has given him is actually a complex code detailing the Allied tank attack. When Woolf tries to warn Bell, he dismisses her theory, insisting that his work for Ladbrooke is a matter of "art, not politics" (238).

By representing Bloomsbury as a coterie so easily manipulated by shadowy forces, Hawkes and Manso's novel carries out an oblique indictment of the modernist notion of "art for art's sake." Creatively undermining the myth of modernist autonomy, *Shadow* asserts that art, politics, and conspiracy are inextricably intertwined. From this perspective, there is no position from which to reign, like Joyce's "invisible" and "indifferent" artist-god, over an autonomous creation (*Portrait* 215). Indeed, the novel implies that intellectual and artistic indifference actually licenses and permits violence. Crucially, Hawkes and Manso avoid caricaturing Ladbrooke as a fascist; instead, they depict him as an idealist who cultivates the Bloomsbury economist Maynard Keynes and other thinkers in an effort to bring about an ambiguous *international* order. Ladbrooke insists that his ultimate goal is not a German victory, but rather a prolongation of the war, which will allow his organization time to consolidate its power: "What I've done," he explains, "is bring together eminent men of every nation […] committed heart and soul to a new order—an order superseding all national affiliations. Our objective is to ensure a prosperous and efficient postwar society, nothing more, nothing less" (255). In spite of her victory over Ladbrooke, Woolf recognizes that such thinking is symptomatic of a greater mindset: "Ladbrooke was a fanatic but his ideas are only an exaggerated version of what one hears over dinner in Mayfair. The way Englishmen are traditionally educated, conspiracies are inevitable" (271). Against her wishes, the entire incident is hushed up by MI5: "The government," she is told, "can't have the public worrying about traitors in the upper class or at the Yard" (271). Disillusioned, Woolf finally decides that the only way to be "faithful to her vision" is to remain "an outsider, alone with her writing" (276).

On the surface, the fictional Woolf's ostensible decision to withdraw seems to reverse what I have characterized as *Shadow*'s critique of modernist autonomy. Throughout the novel,

Hawkes and Manso imply that artistic separatism permits a potentially dangerous appropriation. But the narrative ends by suggesting that Woolf's "outsider" modernism nevertheless remains a threat to the establishment. In an epilogue that gestures ahead to the Second World War, Hawkes and Manso insinuate that Woolf's adversarial writing may have been responsible for her untimely demise:

> In 1937, with war once again threatening Europe, Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas*, her indictment of masculine aggression, German fascism and incipient totalitarianism at home. Four years later, in 1941, her body was found in the river Ouse behind Monk's House, her home in Sussex. To this day, her death is commonly believed to have been a suicide. (280)

Cryptically, *Shadow* hints that Woolf's feminist critique of "masculine aggression" made her into a security threat, an enemy of the state who required, we might say, "liquidation." In her 2009 spy novel, *The White Garden*, Stephanie Barron develops a similar idea, only this time Woolf's death becomes the central mystery of the novel. Through the device of a contemporary frame narrative—in which Jo Bellamy, an American landscape specialist searching for Vita Sackville-West's "cultivation secrets" (14), happens upon the literary secret of the century—Barron posits the existence of a lost Woolf manuscript (an extension of her diary) that was composed after she had supposedly drowned, but before her actual body was discovered. Upon discovering a plot within Bloomsbury to leak information to Stalin, Woolf (the document discloses) fakes her suicide and goes into hiding at Sissinghurst, the home of Vita and her husband, Harold Nicolson. Eventually, the conspirators track her down, but not before she has recorded her discovery and entrusted the manuscript to Vita's young gardener, Jock. In the end, the reader is left to assume that the villains have killed her and placed her body in the river. While the novel offers no clear-cut motivation for murder—Woolf might have been killed by communist moles or perhaps by members of the government wishing to protect themselves from

a scandal—*White Garden* follows its predecessor in pitting Woolf against a male-dominated conspiracy with ties to the government itself.

Through its counterfactual inquiry or "fictional biography" of the author, *White Garden* both dramatizes and revises the real Woolf's indictment, in *Three Guineas*, of esotericism within the academic and professional "procession," the prevalence of closed doors and secret societies that necessitates the conceptualization of her own clandestine "Society of Outsiders" as a countermeasure. Barron's novel takes as its representative secret society the Cambridge Apostles, the elitist intellectual club that included not only Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keyes, Lytton Strachey, and other Bloomsbury notables, but also two of the most infamous double agents in the history of modern espionage, Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt. In the novel, the two NKVD agents learn of Hitler's intention to break the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from a German agent who has been captured and "turned" by MI5's XX ("Double Cross") Committee. In an effort to warn the Soviet Union of Germany's imminent invasion, Burgess and Blunt enlist the help of Leonard Woolf, who contrives to smuggle the information out of Britain through his capacity as a publisher. Essentially, whereas Woolf's political tracts focus on what she calls the "subconscious Hitlerism" of British elitism, *White Garden* transposes her critique from fascism to a leftist radicalism that licenses treason in the name of homosocial and homosexual relationships. The Apostles, as one character points out, observe their fellow member E. M. Forster's famous dictum: "If I were forced to choose between betraying my friends and betraying my country, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (qtd. in Barron 226).

Barron's fictional Woolf, it seems, chooses the opposite. But while her efforts to expose the conspiracy are driven, in one sense, by an ambiguous patriotism, her break with Leonard is likewise a response to his personal betrayal. As in *Shadow*, Woolf's rebellion reveals her mental

illness to be a construct; that is to say, Leonard's method of controlling and censoring her "vision." In her secret manuscript, Woolf admits that her "madness" permits her husband's "mastery" over her: "*I am never so much L.'s own*," she writes, "*as when I am mad*" (88). The author's decision to fake her own suicide and flee to Vita—to trade madness for "life"—is the result of her discovery that Leonard has encoded his secret message to Stalin between the lines of *Between the Acts*. As Woolf explains to Harold Nicolson, Leonard changed the wording, "[a] sentence here, a sentence there. [….] Tony Blunt told him what to say, and Guy would deliver it. My book was to be the handmaiden, Harold. *My proofs.* Passed to someone else. Who'd know exactly how to read them" (256). The fictional Leonard's attempt to appropriate Virginia's art for his own purposes correlates in an interesting way with the real Leonard's work as Woolf's editor and publisher, a role that her feminist scholars view with both annoyance and suspicion. In this sense, *White Garden* follows *Shadow* in staging a critical intervention through its subjunctive representation of Leonard's various strategies of containment and appropriation—schemes that are (posthumously) thwarted by the contemporary character, Jo Bellamy, who comes to represent the engaged Woolfian "outsider" in her commitment to justice through persistent inquiry and investigation.

At the same time, Leonard's own manipulation at the hands of Burgess and Blunt imbues *White Garden* with a more political and historical critique than we find in *Shadow*. While Hawkes and Manso's novel suggests that Bloomsbury is inadvertently recruited into wartime intrigues, Barron's narrative not only figures Bloomsbury as a willing participant in a seditious plot, but also foregrounds a complicitous rapport between the elite and the treasonous. In his controversial history of Soviet penetration into artistic and intellectual circles in the first half of the twentieth century, *Double Lives: Spies and Writers in the Secret Soviet War of Ideas Against*

the West (1994), Stephen Koch hypothesizes a similar relationship between espionage and the intelligentsia:

> The obvious yet rarely understood stroke of secret service genius behind all [penetration] operations was the simple recognition of an essential bond between the so-called 'establishment' (by which is meant little more than the elite of a given society), and what Lionel Trilling called the 'adversary culture'—that part of society which, by virtue of its superior education and critical equipment, develops for itself a leveraged position within the middle class, based in ambiguity and the perspectives of criticism and argument, insight and protest. (154)

The enlistment of the Cambridge spies and others like them, Koch argues, "was based on this simple insight: The adversary culture *is* an elite" (154). For Koch, Bloomsbury epitomizes the adversary culture as an economically and academically privileged class that adopts a half-hearted radicalism, making it an easy and willing target for communist exploitation. As "a kind of intellectual mafia created to allow the offspring of the British establishment to join the adversary culture without any sacrifice to their status in the hierarchy into which they had been born" (182), Bloomsbury, according to Koch, was able furnish Soviet recruiters with "radicals" who already held—or would soon hold—positions in the highest echelons of the British government.

Koch does not entirely negate adversary culture; he acknowledges that "[in] most of the liberal democracies, the adversarial culture includes much that is best in the whole society: most alive, most probing, most inventive, most conscious" (156). Nevertheless, his polemic effectively puts Bloomsbury on trial for treason in much the same way that we find in *White Garden*. While Barron's novel lacks Koch's overtly critical stance, its characterization of Bloomsbury—"Radicals, free-thinkers, passionate homosexuals—the lot" (*White* 128)—vilifies the adversary culture, implying that its loyalty to the coterie takes precedence over the security of the nation at a time of war. In *Double Lives*, Koch places a great deal of blame on Lytton Strachey, "whose legacy was to show how elite standing could be encoded in anti-establishment

contempt—always in the name of friendship" (183). Blunt and Burgess, Koch goes on to suggest, "used their own great shrewdness to make their Soviet controls see how a homosexual coterie based on Strachey's model could be exploited, both in its unstated loyalties and its unstated possibilities for blackmail, and thereby form the basis for an espionage ring" (186). Choosing "friendship" over country, the Cambridge spies, Koch contends, are "Bloomsbury's children" (181). Although sexuality is only one factor in the complex alchemy of intrigue that we find in Barron's novel, *White Garden* nevertheless reproduces a similar association of homosexuality with "leakage," in a manner that would not seem out-of-place in the novels of John Buchan and Ian Fleming. *White Garden* does not go so far as *Shadow* in literally aligning Woolf with MI5, but the novel does make her into a figure of containment in her own right. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that Barron, a former CIA analyst, retroactively recruits Virginia Woolf as an agent of counterintelligence, enrolling her in a denunciation of the leftist adversary culture that enabled the most successful Soviet penetration—and embarrassment—of the Anglo-American intelligence community.

Ultimately, both Stephanie Barron's *The White Garden* and Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso's *The Shadow of the Moth* are postwar novels with their own peculiar ideological nuances. While each may be read as using the codes and convolutions of the spy thriller as a means of revealing and dramatizing the "spy function" that informs Virginia Woolf's writing, each likewise constitutes a kind of conscription; in positing the author's "unacted part" in wartime intrigues, both novels subjunctively enlist Woolf's participation in a veritable mole-hunt, a rooting out of leaks and double agents within the British secret state. But just how *forced* is this conscription? That is, to what extent should we regard these novels as misreadings of Woolfian politics? Certainly, each reinforces in its own way a Cold War-inflected suspicion of

academic and artistic elitism. However, as we have seen, Woolf herself does not necessarily exclude Bloomsbury from the "procession"; just as *Orlando* lampoons the male-dominated literary circles that reduce literature to "an elderly gentleman in a grey suit talking about duchesses" (206), *Three Guineas* positions its "Society of Outsiders" in opposition to the secret societies of Oxbridge and Westminster, those enclaves of enlightened liberalism that exclude women and perpetuate "unreal loyalties" under the guise of intellectualism and reform. Perhaps what *Shadow* and *White Garden* inadvertently attest to is the difficulty of categorizing Woolf's politics in terms of standard political dichotomies. In doing so, they gesture toward modernism's greater double agencies, its simultaneously leftist and reactionary sympathies that coalesce within, and finally leak through, the ostensibly neutral ground of artistic autonomy. Like the Woolf of Barron's novel, modernism does not exist in "a world of absolutes" (253), a world of clearly delineated categories of good and evil, loyalty and betrayal, where "allegiances are always clear" (259). More than a song of exile, modernism is irrevocably "out in the cold." Even so, Woolf's feminism, a fundamentally "bipartisan" assault on patriarchy, offers a means of checking the totalitarian dimension of democracy that is itself a province of both patriots and insurgents; Orlando's appeal to "contemplation, solitude, love"—in a sense, Woolf's answer to the Joycean rule of "silence, exile, and cunning"—is not simply a means of denying the seductions of "power," but a way of intervening in the militant aesthetic state that romanticizes violence, weaponizes art, and unites both ends of the political spectrum in a culture of intrigue.

NOTES

[1] Prior to taking up a literary career, Aphra Behn (1640-1689) famously worked as a spy for Charles II during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667), operating out of Antwerp and using the codename "Astrea." Indeed, it was Charles II's refusal to pay her for services rendered that eventually compelled her to write for a living. Although Woolf does not mention the author's involvement in espionage, her valorization of Behn anticipates the sort of secretive and autonomous "outsider" that she develops in *Three Guineas*.

[2] A branch of philosophy and logic with its origins in the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, contemporary theories of possible worlds are no longer concerned with metaphysical realities coexistent with our own, or with Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds," but with heuristic models of modality. According to John Divers, "[philosophers] typically recognize four central and interrelated *cases* of modality: possibility (can, might, may, could); impossibility (cannot, could not, must not); necessity (must, has to be, could not be otherwise); and contingency (maybe and maybe not, might have been and might not have been, could have been otherwise)" (3). While philosophers continually dispute the ontological status of modalities, most adherents agree that the actual world is one of many possible worlds, each embodying a modal claim. Although careful to acknowledge that fictional worlds are not the same as logical worlds in philosophy, literary critics with an interest in this field borrow terms and concepts from possible-worlds semantics and apply them to narratology to investigate the ethical and theoretical relationships between the actual world and fictional universes. See for example Ruth Ronen's *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (1994), Lubomír Doležel's *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998) and *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* (2010), and Thomas L. Martin's *Poiesis and Possible Worlds: A Study in Modality and Literary Theory* (2004).

[3] The nonessentialist and performative character of the fictional world, Doležel suggests, limits its epistemological yield. "[What] do we learn about the past when we fill in the gaps in the historical world by fictional invention?" Doležel asks. "I am afraid that the cognitive gain is nil" (*Possible* 51). Because fictional worlds, even those "based on historical research," are not subject to truth valuation, they are ultimately unverifiable as history. Seeking to remedy the postmodern challenge to historiography, which collapses the historical into the fictional, Doležel thus reasserts the separation between literature and history, *poiesis* and *noesis*.

[4] As I discuss in my introductory chapter, espionage historians frequently refer to modernism when describing the experience of spying—for example, the spy's Joycean mantra of "silence, exile, an cunning."

[5] Curiously, while the detective genre seems to attract women writers—Agatha Christie being an obvious example—the genre of espionage has had comparatively few well-known female purveyors. This may have much to do with the nature of the genre, which seems to offer a limited choice of female roles, typically ranging from prudish secretary to vacuous "Bond girl" or "vamp." It may also indicate a preference for the *private* detective, who owns and controls her own "agency," as opposed to the professional spook, who serves a faceless organization dominated by rigid hierarchies and traditions, a manifestation of what Woolf in *Three Guineas* calls the patriarchal "procession." Thus, for a female writer to adopt the codes of the spy novel to carry out a feminist critique is tantamount to operating "under cover," so to speak, among hostiles.

[6] In 1928, Leonard Woolf wrote: "The League stands for a synthesis instead of a conflict of civilizations, for tolerance and co-operation, for an international society of interrelated rather than warring parts, for the adjustment of relations and the settlement of international disputes by discussion, compromise, and adjudication" (qtd. in Lee 609). As Lee points out, this passage evinces "the Cambridge language of rational liberal optimism" held by many of his contemporaries, including fellow Cambridge Apostle E. M. Forster (609).

[7] In "Letter to a Young Poet" (1932), Woolf offers "a little lecture" in which she criticizes the younger generation for, among other things, employing colloquial and offensive language in order to "shock" readers (*Collected* II 187). "[For] heaven's sake," Woolf famously advises, "publish nothing before you are thirty" (193). In her later essay, "The Leaning Tower" (1940), Woolf criticizes "the pedagogic, the didactic, the loud-speaker strain that dominates" the leftist poetry of Auden, Day Lewis, and others (175). These modes, Woolf suggests, mask a deeper, political naivety: "How can a writer who has no first-hand experience of a towerless, of a classless society create that society?" (175).

[8] Published under her full name, Ellen Hawkes Rogat.

[9] "Stephanie Barron" is a pseudonym for the spy-novelist Francine Matthews, the author, among other things, of a series of detective novels about Jane Austen.

CODA

Modernism's Thrillers

> One writes criticism when one cannot create art, just as one becomes a spy when one cannot be a soldier.
> —Gustave Flaubert[1]

In a 1987 lecture ("When Was Modernism?"), Raymond Williams traces, in brief, the passage of modernism from its initial avant-gardism, to its post-WWII canonization, to its inevitable appropriation by popular culture:

> What has quite rapidly happened [in the postwar era] is that Modernism quickly lost its anti-bourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable integration into the new international capitalism. [….] The isolated, estranged images of alienation and loss, the narrative discontinuities, have become the easy iconography of the commercials, and the lonely, bitter, sardonic and sceptical hero takes his ready-made place as star of the thriller. (72-3)

Here, Williams is lamenting something like a figural "recruitment" of modernism, a portrait of the artist as a Hollywood secret agent. The experience of "endless border-crossing," the naturalization of "visual and linguistic strangeness" (71), and the image of "the lonely writer gazing down on the unknowable city from his shabby apartment" become, in the wake of both mass-cultural and "academic endorsements," the *modus operandi* of "commercial cinema" (72) and the tropes of advertising (think Orson Welles touting cheap chardonnay). Originally gravitating between "the formerly aristocratic valuation of art as a sacred realm above money" and "the revolutionary doctrine […] of art as the liberating vanguard of popular consciousness" (72), modernism, Williams suggests, sold out, opting instead for a mercenary spot in a Cold War comic book.

Williams's contention that modernism lends itself to "cultural competition" (72-3) would seem to be corroborated by modernism's peculiar role in the "cultural Cold War" waged by the American intelligence community. Although the British secret service apparently learned its

lesson about recruiting writers as agents—in 1939, the novelist Geoffrey Household was told by SIS that his reputation as an author would generate suspicion, and so he spent the war posing as an insurance salesman (a more trustworthy profession)[2]—both the wartime Office of Strategic Services and the infant Central Intelligence Agency inherited their predecessor's penchant for "literary agents." In particular, OSS/CIA mined the humanities departments of Ivy League universities for candidates with exceptional analytical abilities. This new breed of academic intelligencer is exemplified by James Jesus Angleton, the Yale-educated poet and founding editor of the literary magazine *Furioso*, who, after serving in OSS, went on to reign as the CIA's chief of counterintelligence from 1954 until his resignation in 1975. A friend and correspondent of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Angleton not only believed that modernist alienation spoke to the experience of espionage, but also that the literary critical faculty could be cultivated as a form of tradecraft, reportedly advising his agents to familiarize themselves with William Empson's 1930 New Critical treatise, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.[3] But the CIA was interested in more than analytical potential; as Frances Stonor Saunders has argued, the agency prided itself on being a bastion of high culture, which it considered a bulwark against populist arts and discourses that could so easily degenerate into communism (249). In the early days of postwar Berlin, the American intelligence community arranged for the production of plays by Goethe, Ibsen, and Strindberg, among many others, based on the Schillerian conception of theater as "moralische Anstalt" (21). In the 1950s and 1960s, this attentiveness to the (re)educating power of art and literature gave way to more extensive activities in the world of publishing. Unlike Williams's association of postwar modernism with mass-cultural appeal, the CIA took an actively elitist approach, appropriating and redeploying modern art in an extensive propaganda campaign against socialist realism. In this respect, the CIA's strategy differed greatly from that of its

fellow Cold Warriors; while J. Edgar Hoover was busy compiling files on James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway,[4] and while Joseph McCarthy, George Dondero, and Harold Harby were declaring that modern art was amoral, communistic, and conducive to Soviet "espionage,"[5] the CIA was covertly sponsoring modern artists and thinkers through the Congress of Cultural Freedom and academic journals like *Encounter*. In keeping with the quixotic machinations of the militant aesthetic state, the agency's recruitment of modernism eventually crossed into the realm of the absurd; in addition to bankrolling Russian translations of Eliot's *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, the CIA's propaganda office arranged for copies of the latter to be dropped on the Soviet Union from an airplane (Saunders 248)—an operation that gives new meaning to the expression "high modernism."

However, as I have argued in the preceding chapters, if modernism is positioned to "play spy," it does not play nicely. While modernism has always been, in a sense, the "star of the thriller," its agency exceeds what Williams castigates as the "heartless formulae" (73) that supposedly divest it of its critical potential. Rather, the tropes of espionage offer modernism a means of turning art against the state-sponsor. Reinscribing the literary agent as a liability, the violative texts of Somerset Maugham and Compton Mackenzie expose, in different ways, the state's intervention into literary and cultural spheres under the guise of national security. Adapting the formulae of espionage to their own adversarial projects, W. H. Auden and Virginia Woolf confront the authoritarian dimension of liberalism. These accounts of burned books and show trials, of hero-worship and "enlightened" militancy, are decidedly unnerving; far from signaling modernism's selling out or abandonment of political critique, the spyographic text carries out a crucial infiltration of the militant aesthetic state and its attendant ideologies, employing the codes of the thriller to reveal the totalitarian kernel at the heart of democracy

itself. In our present moment, in the age of the War on Terror and WikiLeaks, we do well to consider the modernist context of "secrecy for secrecy's sake," a legacy of the First World War that—as we approach the centenary of that conflict—seems alive and well. In the 2010 hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary concerning the possible criminalization of Julian Assange, the law in question was not, as one might expect, the Patriot Act, but the 1917 Espionage Act, which, like its British counterpart, conflates espionage with disclosure. Protecting a bureaucracy marked by an almost sublime (in the Kantian sense) system of "overclassification," such laws are easily abused and may very well present a threat not only to writers and journalists, but to freedom of speech in general.

Finally, as academics, we might take a closer look at our own role in the twenty-first-century culture of intrigue. Although few today may find themselves the witting or unwitting accomplices of the CIA, or the ideological penetration agents of a foreign power, the world's "second oldest profession" still whispers in the cloisters of the academy. Just as the spyography performs a critical function, I would suggest that a great deal of literary criticism tries, in its own way, to "play spy." On the one hand, as the postwar adversary culture took root in the privileged space of the university, the language of theory found an ally in the jargon of intrigue, which it quickly turned against the establishment. According to Stephen Koch, "[it] is in this deeper sense—in the bond between the language of the democratic elites and the language of revolt—that espionage is tied to culture" (181). On the other hand, the "critical agent"—in Lionel Trilling's words—may find that, like Auden's disillusioned spy, she too has been "seduced by the old tricks" (*CP* 32). Trilling himself reminds us "that an adversary culture of art and thought, when it becomes well established, shares something of the character of the larger culture to which it was—to which it still is—adversary, and that it generates its own assumptions and

preconceptions, and contrives its own sanctions to protect them" (xvi). It may be that laws such as the Official Secrets Act and the Espionage Act are the progenitors of the "hermeneutics of suspicion." As critics, we speak and write in terms of *agency*, *surveillance*, *interrogation*, and *containment*; we characterize our texts as *ciphers*, *codes*, and *dead letters*. If literary criticism may be said to have a genre, it is surely the thriller. Like the great library at Pointz Hall in *Between the Acts*, the archive of literary scholarship has its share of "shilling shockers."

NOTES

[1] Quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 302.

[2] In his 1958 memoir, *Against the Wind*, Household writes: "I was forbidden to travel on my current passport which gave my profession as author. Authors, said the authorities, were immediately suspected by every security officer. Compton Mackenzie and Somerset Maugham had destroyed our reputation as unworldly innocents for ever. So I was given a new passport which stated that I was an Insurance Agent. Nobody could know less than I about insurance, but, as I did not have to practise or pretend to practise the profession, that mattered little" (101).

[3] For an analysis of the impact of the CIA on the New Criticism, see William H. Epstein, "Counter-Intelligence: Cold War Criticism and Eighteenth-Century Studies." For further discussion of Cold War and post-Cold War contexts of eighteenth-century literary studies and the figural "recruitment" of poets, see Mark David Kaufman, "A Hermeneutics of Recruitment: The Case of Wordsworth."

[4] See Claire A. Culleton, *Joyce and the G-men: J. Edgar Hoover's Manipulation of Modernism* (2004).

[5] In *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (1999), Saunders writes that Congressman "Dondero's neurotic assessment [of modernism's communist sympathies] was echoed by a coterie of public figures, whose shrill denunciations rang across the floor of Congress and in the conservative press. Their attacks culminated in such claims as 'ultramodern artists are unconsciously used as tools of the Kremlin', and the assertion that, in some cases, abstract paintings were actually secret maps pinpointing strategic United States fortifications. 'Modern art is actually a means of espionage,' one opponent charged. 'If you know how to read them, modern paintings will disclose the weak spots in US fortifications, and such crucial constructions as Boulder Dam'" (253).

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