

Jost Hindersmann, John le Carré. Der Spion, der zum Schriftsteller wurde. Portrait und Bibliografie. Bibliografie unter Mitarbeit von Thomas Przybilka. [John le Carré. The Spy Who Became a Writer. Portrait and Bibliography. Bibliography in Cooperation with Thomas Przybilka.] KrimiKritik 2. Wuppertal: NordPark Verlag, 2002, 108 pp., EUR 11.00.

John le Carré is the world's best known author of spy novels. Not only he tops the bestseller lists but has also received widespread critical acclaim from reviewers and scholars alike. This book intends to give an overview of his life and work and to discuss the major topics of his novels.

David Cornwell, as is le Carré's real name, spent his childhood under the influence of his father Ronnie, a con man, who employed David in his various criminal activities. David considered this the first step in his career as a spy and has written about his complex relationship to his father ever since. He studied at Berne and Oxford, taught at Eton and finally joined the British Foreign Service. He has admitted that he also worked for both MI5 and MI6 during that period. As he wrote his first novel while employed by the Foreign Office, he had to adopt a nom de plume and chose „John le Carré“. He pretends he does not know where the name has come from, he just wanted a name which sounds interesting. After the success of his third novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* he quit his job and became a full-time writer. So far he has published 18 novels and some short fiction.

A major theme in le Carré's novels is the conflict between an individual and an institution. Le Carré's spies are often lonely isolated men who turn to an institution in search of love and faith. The institution, however, takes decisions according to rational aspects only and has no scruples in sacrificing its own agents.

Le Carré also comments extensively on the state of British society. He uses the secret service in his novels as a microcosm for England. He criticizes the establishment for not being flexible enough to adapt to the new post-war realities. This longing for the old days of the Empire can lead to failure or even betrayal. With regard to the Cold War, le Carré

has repeatedly stated that the West has the right to combat communism but he wonders whether the end justifies the means. In the struggle against communism the West sometimes sacrifices the individual to defend the individual's right against the collective. Le Carré fears that the West uses methods in defence of our society which may lead to a society which is not worth defending.

It is discussed how realistic and authentic his spy novels are regarding real-life models of le Carré's characters and the spy jargon he uses.

With the thawing of the Cold War and Gorbachev's new politics of glasnost and perestroika, le Carré called upon the West to help the Sowjets with their reforms. He feared that the West had defined itself too long in terms of its opposition to the East and that now the West would face an identity crisis. Especially the spies would not welcome the new entente, because the cold war legitimised their existence.

After the end of the Cold War spy novelists generally fell on hard times. Sale figures declined and some juggernauts of spy fiction made long pauses or turned to other genres. Le Carré is the one who adapted best to the new situation. His post-Cold-War-novels are marked by continuity and change at the same time. On the one hand he has chosen new settings (e.g. Panama, the Caucasus, Africa) and taken on new evil empires (esp. capitalists run amok). On the other hand he still writes about his old topics like complex father-son-relationships or men who follow their own ideals and thus get in conflict with their organization. Just like he criticized the Western politics during the Cold War, he now criticizes the Western politics after the end of the Cold War. He believes that the West has betrayed the ideals it had fought for and that the peace has been wasted.

The second part of the book consists of a structured bibliography listing le Carré's primary publications, more than 1.000 items of secondary literature, and the film versions of his novels.