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Jost Hindersmann. *Der Britische Spionageroman: Vom Imperialismus bis zum Ende des kalten Krieges*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995. 250 pp.

The history of the spy novel is a comparatively brief one. There seems to be scholarly consensus to date the emergence of the genre to around the turn of the century, with the novels of E. Philips Oppenheim, William le Queux and Erskine Childers as the earliest works of fiction foregrounding thematically the activities of spies and secret agents, and outlining the structural profile of the new branch of generic fiction.

In his study of the history of the genre, however, Dr Jost Hindersmann pleads for the short story *The Battle of Dorking* by General Sir George T. Chesney from 1871 as the publication which made the foundation for what followed. Chesney's fictional account was intended as a warning to his fellow countrymen against the possibility of a German invasion in the wake of the country's victory over France. To see the emergence of the genre in a context of propaganda – maintained in Oppenheim, le Queux and Childers – is a divergence from the by now well-trodden path of historians who tend to apply a perspective of comparative literature and see early spy fiction in relation to the sub-genre matrix of detective or crime fiction.

Dr Hindersmann accounts for the history of the genre in the complex interaction of the individual stories with their historical epoch, breaking down the chronology from 1871 up to the present into the age of imperialism 1871-1914, World War One 1914-1918, between the Wars 1918-1933, the time of national socialism and World war Two 1933-1945 (with a further section on the spy fiction treating national socialism and the war in retrospect), the Cold war 1945-1989, the onset of "Glasnost" and the end of the Cold War 1989.

In each epoch he concentrates mainly on the dynamics of the enemy image, which constitutes the kind of threat posed at any time. But as the enemy image keeps changing so does the nature of values worth defending. A study of this kind will consequently have to be acutely aware of the dialectic nature of shifting collective values as nations form and re-form. Dr Hindersmann refrains from problematizing this aspect, but takes for granted the spy-fiction reader's general familiarity with the contemporary political climate.

As part of the British value complex defended in the early spy-fiction stories, Dr Hindersmann points to the "public-school code". This is undoubtedly so, but a more penetrating analysis of why the public-school-educated Richard Hannay reacts so vehemently

against the homosexuality of the German officer Stumm in *Greenmantle* would indeed have to consider the everything but simple status of sexual orientation in that particular educational institution. Among other things, such an analysis would very likely be helpful for a better understanding of the obvious cases of misogyny in much early spy fiction: the *dramatis personae* of *The 39 Steps* are all male, a trait later on not appealing to Director Hitchcock's casting department.

Dr Hindersmann goes along with John Sutherland in his sub-categorization of certain spy-fiction stories dealing with World War Two as "secret histories of the war", "the nightmare that wouldn't die", and "as if narratives". The point of the first category is that it presents dramatic events that might have happened, but did not, as we all know: Churchill was not murdered, Germany did not win the war, etc. However, it might be argued that this narrative experiment is not the marker of a sub-genre, but an essential genre characteristic. All spy fiction "confides" to the reader information about events which were prevented from developing in a way contrary to the political situation known to us. If it was not for Richard Hannay's, James Bond's or George Smiley's intervention, things would indeed look different today. Spy fiction always depends for its central narrative structure on the thwarting of designs threatening *status quo* by the heroic action on the part of anonymous secret civil servants.

The study focuses on the canon of spy fiction, not surprisingly with quite a lot of attention given to Ian Fleming, John le Carré and Len Deighton. One wonders, however, about the lack of any mention of Kipling's *Kim* (1901) especially since the "great game" is used a couple of times to refer to the business of the genre. Nor is there any mention of Joseph Conrad and his stories about turn-of-the-century anarchists. Surely they would have fitted nicely in the first sections of this study. Why Dr Hindersmann – and several other students of the genre – does not mention Peter Cheyney is enigmatic. This Anglo-Irish writer and man about town who wrote his series of spy-fiction novels all with "dark" in their titles during and just after World War Two, prefigured Ian Fleming in several respects. And in connection with the triumvirate of Fleming, le Carré and Deighton, a few comments on le Carré's *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983) and its end-of-Cold-War symptomatic transposition of the structural friend-foe-confrontation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would have been interesting, as would a consideration of Deighton's attempt at squeezing a complete pre-World-War-Two epic in between the first and second sets of trilogies to explain Bernard Samson's background in *Winter: A Berlin Family 1899-1945* from 1987.

It is refreshing that Dr Hindersmann chooses a perspective different from the orthodox ones of tracing the origins of spy fiction to sibling genres and of pursuing its development in the simplistic terms of a sensational and a realistic branch. Spy fiction is a genre necessarily tied up with the events in the international political arena. That it makes best critical sense to base any critical study on this fact is excellently demonstrated in this study.

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