

# In the Shadows: The Spy in Australian Literary and Cultural History

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## I

"Spying is eternal," says John le Carré's George Smiley, at the end of his career.<sup>1</sup>

Yet certain political and historical events seem to bring espionage to the surface. Such were the events of 9/11 and its various aftermaths.

Was there ever a halcyon time before espionage? Some pristine paradise before the eye of God, or one of his proxies, kept watch on the garden and reported on activities? The purpose here is to sketch a map of an emergent field of investigation.

## II

The European history of Australia suggests that present-day Australians are inheritors of a long tradition of espionage, before what is generally seen as the period of highest activity in the Cold War.

An early phase occurred in the courts of Europe and among seafaring explorers in search of new lands in the southern hemisphere. Portuguese intelligence, for example, was at work more than two hundred years before Captain Cook, as K. G. McIntyre has observed in *The Secret Discovery of Australia*. ("The cartographical spies," he calls these Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and others who plotted to obtain each other's secret maps (chapter 7)). The French and English also kept each other under close observation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries around the islands, bays and coasts of a continent that later became known as Australia. Leslie Marchant's study *France Australe* shows the reasons for the French interest in south-western Australia, not least the wish to emulate England in the transportation of convicts because French jails had become so crowded (*France Australe* 224–5). Mention of the French is a reminder that the English verb "to spy" comes from the Old French "espier," which does not necessarily prove that the French were doing it before the English. The role of espionage in pre-European maritime explorations, such as those of Zheng He and other Chinese voyagers in the fifteenth century, is more speculative.<sup>2</sup>

With the establishment of the Great South Land as a British colony from 1788, attention shifted somewhat from international espionage to internal security. The convict

system depended for its continuance on spies and informers. Robert Hughes observes in *The Fatal Shore* that:

The basis of prison discipline was the informer. On Norfolk [Island] the policy of splintering the convicts as a class, dissolving solidarity in mutual suspicion, was taken to extremes; the authorities felt, quite correctly, that if prisoners were given the smallest chance to combine there could be a bloody uprising, even a general massacre. (463)

The cases of two convicts, John Knatchbull and John Boyle O'Reilly offer different angles on spying, or informing, and its consequences. Knatchbull, who had been transported to Australia for forging a check, conspired with other convicts on board a ship to their incarceration on Norfolk island in 1832 to poison the crews' and guards' food with arsenic. An informer reported them, the arsenic was found, but it was seen as too much trouble to return the prisoners to the mainland for trial and they became known among their fellow convicts as "Tea-Sweeteners" (Hughes 471). Another attempted mutiny by Knatchbull and fellow convicts on Norfolk Island more nearly succeeded. The prison governor, Morriset, and his deputy Fryans, received an overload of vague and contradictory reports—what might today be called "info-glut"—from their informers about a planned rebellion in which some two hundred prisoners were said to be implicated. When the mutiny did in fact occur in 1834, it was quickly put down. Knatchbull amazingly escaped punishment by acting as an informer on his fellow conspirators (Roderick 10, Hughes 447). Knatchbull was an incorrigible turncoat and informer in his own interests. He was later hanged for murdering a woman with a tomahawk (Roderick 11). It is difficult to find any redeeming features in this early example of spy as villain.

John Boyle O'Reilly was a different kind of spy, perhaps one to be more readily identified with. O'Reilly was an Irish political prisoner who was transported to Western Australia in 1867 in the last phase of convict settlement in Australia. Whether O'Reilly took the Fenian oath or not, he was attached to the underground movement called the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). He joined the British Army and, as an IRB agent, became a successful recruiter into the British Army of Irish Republican true believers who could be mobilized to rebel and eject the British from

Ireland. O'Reilly's biographer, A.G. Evans, notes how successful O'Reilly was in undermining "the traditional loyalty of the whole regiment" (*Frantic Heart* 29). When the plot was exposed by undercover agents working for the British Government, O'Reilly was tried, convicted and transported on the convict ship *Hougoumont*, where he and other Fenians debated whether to attempt a mutiny but decided against it on the grounds that "the problem of restraining and controlling over 200 criminal convicts, some of whom were violent and deemed not to be trusted," was considered too great (Evans 65). Nevertheless, O'Reilly made an audacious escape by whaling ship from Fremantle in 1869, helped by some excellent intelligence from his network of sympathisers, and made his way to Boston, where he edited a newspaper, the *Pilot*, wrote lectures, poems and the bushranger novel *Moondyne* (1879) about his memories of Western Australia, the convict system and law reform and played a significant role in the planning of the rescue of six Irish prisoners in 1876 from Fremantle Gaol, which is commemorated in the Australian folksong "The Catalpa." A statue to O'Reilly stands at a busy intersection near the Fenway in Boston. O'Reilly might be described as an idealistic activist and spy of a kind that is seldom seen again until the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West some eighty years later.

### III

In any historical consideration of spying and its significance for Australians, a question must arise as to when Australian interests could be considered separately from those of Britain and Ireland. In his book *The Frightened Country*, Alan Renouf has accurately observed that when a Department of External Affairs was set up by the new Commonwealth of Australia government in 1901, "it was small and unimportant because Australia's foreign policy almost always was that of Britain" (499). This can be seen in the first recorded incidents of the newly independent country's espionage activities. William (later General Sir William) Bridges seems to have been sent to discreetly "assess the situation" in German Samoa in 1898 (Clark 27); and in 1902 he was sent under cover of a commercial traveller to report on military emplacements at Noumea, capital of the French possession, New Caledonia (Clark 43). Bridges was appointed Australia's Chief of Intelligence in 1905. Historian C. E. W. Bean remarked that "there was a popular impression that the branch of military work which above others called for intensive study was that of Intelligence" and it was significant that Bridges, "a man of fine intellect," was selected for it.<sup>3</sup>

Australian journalist and fiction writer, A. G. Hales (1860–1936), nicknamed "Smiler," developed an interest in the aims, techniques and impact of spying during his broad experience as a war correspondent in the Boer War (in which he was taken prisoner), the rebellion against the Turks in Macedonia in 1903, the Russo-Japanese War and

the First World War. Some of these intelligence interests appear in his adventure/romance novel, *Little Blue Pigeon: A Story of Japan* (1905). The titular heroine is a remarkable geisha girl who works in a cha-ya teahouse, in Tokyo, where she overhears many political and other secrets. Her English has been helped by two years in Sydney but the clandestine activities in which she becomes involved relate to British, Russian and Chinese intrigues leading up to the Russo-Japanese war. These intrigues include the smuggling of arms and explosives through England to Japan in cargo falsely labeled for Sydney. Fortunately for British (and by implication Australian) interests in this novel, *Little Blue Pigeon* falls in love with the red-bearded British secret agent Clifford and is thus prepared to betray another lover, the Chinese agent Quong Foy. Within the constraints of its genre, this novel offers some interesting observations of secret service attitudes and activities in Tokyo during the run-up to the Russo-Japanese war. As such, *Little Blue Pigeon* is a prelude to intrigues in that city a generation later concerning Japan's southward advance in World War II.

Before and during the Great War in Europe a number of Australians worked in British intelligence in a variety of roles.<sup>4</sup> Security issues were also considered important by many on the home front in Australia. As Gerhard Fischer has shown, an "enemy within the gates" was discovered among German-Australians:

... Australians joined together to form patriotic associations and to mount concerted actions against the imagined "enemy in our midst." The press got into the act, as did authors of sensational spy novels; some newspapers played a particularly inflammatory role. Once it was found that sensational war stories had the desired effect of lifting circulation figures, the tabloids of the "yellow press" were not be stopped: there were fanciful spy stories, grotesque fabrications involving acts of sabotage, or horrid propaganda tales about the treacherous and barbaric "Hun" who had his eyes set on beautiful and innocent Australia as the most desirable prize to be won in this war. (*Enemy Aliens* 124)

Many of the spy novels Fischer refers to were in fact British—pre-eminently novels by E. Phillips Oppenheim, William Le Queux and Baroness Orczy (the first two relevant to the German situation, the third to thrillers of the French Revolution). These spy thrillers were very popular among Australian readers, as research on Australian circulating libraries shows (Dolin 119–23). Oppenheim's and Le Queux's novels directly addressed and fed prevailing fantasies of a Britain and its allies riddled with German spies as a prelude to invasion. The invasion scare theme also recurred in some of the Australian fiction of these years.<sup>5</sup>

The most culturally significant event in Australia in the 1930s that demonstrates the clash between communist and fascist values and modes of operating, and the fear of communist spies, was the visit of the then famous Czech writer,

journalist and activist, Egon Erwin Kisch. Kisch was invited to speak at the Movement Against War and Fascism conference in Melbourne in 1934. When he was held captive by the captain of the ship, on Australian Government orders, he jumped overboard, broke his leg and became a famous figure in newspapers and in arguments between the political Left and Right in Australia.<sup>6</sup> The mythology that developed around him makes Kisch an early example of the "enigmatic" suspected spy.

Australian authors from the left and right of the political spectrum have been equally fascinated with Kisch's visit and its significance. Katharine Susannah Prichard, who had returned from a recent visit to the USSR, and written her pamphlet *The Real Russia* (1934), took the train across from Western Australia to speak on the same platform as Kisch at the Australian Peace Congress in Melbourne in October 1934. Prichard remarked: "Kisch's adventures are painful to recall. Dragged from the ship to prison, from prison to hospital where he lay under armed police guard, he was subjected to a farcical language test as a prohibited immigrant" ("Egon Erwin Kisch" 75). A generation later, Nicholas Hasluck's novel *Our Man K* was more intrigued with the ambiguities and enigmas of Kisch's visit. Hasluck's Kisch is an inquisitive, role-playing journalist with powerful sources of information who was suspected of being a secret agent—perhaps a double agent. Hasluck's novel explores these possibilities, the links between Kisch and Kafka, his former schoolmate, and the legal labyrinth caused by his visit to Australia. Hasluck has remarked: "My novel about the enigmatic Egon Kisch—*Our Man K*—must be shaped (as all novels are shaped), by serendipity masquerading as research, and by constant speculation" (*Legal Labyrinth* 56).

The Second World War years produced conditions in which Australia's first and perhaps only heroic woman spy emerged. Nancy Wake was no Mata Hari: though Wake could be sexually adventurous she was not dependent on this; moreover her exploits were in many respects more audacious than Margaretha Geertruida Zelle's. Born in New Zealand and brought up in Australia, Nancy Wake was an Anglo-Australasian patriot. Her biographer Peter FitzSimons summarizes: "Britain was the mother country, Australia and New Zealand her proud and strapping sons ready to do their bit to defend her" (13). Wake was in the front line for such action.

Like many Australians and New Zealanders before her and since, Nancy Wake traveled to the northern hemisphere. The French Riviera appealed to her, and in 1936 she tangoed with a rich young man from Marseille, Henri Fiocca, whom she married in 1939. He was called up for the French army and she joined a voluntary ambulance corps. In due course, Nancy Wake became "a courier for a shadowy network of people operating undercover against the interests of both the Vichy government and, more particularly, Germany" (FitzSimons 125). She continued her courier work for the French resistance movement in 1940

and 1941 with forged identity papers, playing the role of "a good-time girl" and earned the German code-name "White Mouse" and a substantial reward for her capture. Later, she remarked, "I should have been an actress" (FitzSimons 235)—a theme in the life-stories of many secret agents. Wake parachuted back into France, where she carried out some dangerous sabotage operations with the Maquis as well as conveying important information back to London. The loss of her French husband, her postwar recognition by the Allies, and her belated recognition in Australia are other stories. Sebastian Faulks's novel *Charlotte Gray*, and the film starring Cate Blanchett, capture the spirit of a figure such as Nancy Wake and the intrigues of her times.

#### IV

The Cold War still offers a close-up history for those Australians who lived through it, but it is fading fast for a new generation. One of the most astute Australian historians and commentators on this period, Robert Manne, has remarked that the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 "signalled a new intellectual landscape, where the old Cold War alignments of left and right were certain to dissolve and where the persistence of that peculiarly embattled tone, which characterised intellectual combat during the Cold War, would be nothing less than lazy mental habit" (*The Shadow of 1917* 1). Manne's judgment is essentially correct. Yet because no influential Western analysts seem to have predicted such a rapid end to Soviet-style Communism, and because new schisms have opened up in old patterns since then, the Cold War remains an important phase of our recent history. Could something like it happen again? To what end? What remains puzzling is the question of who will emerge retrospectively as heroes, heroines or villains of that period? Will retrospective accounts and novels of life behind the Iron Curtain, such as Anna Funder's *Stasiland* or Nicholas Shakespeare's *Snowleg*, both set in East Germany, capture the imagination and mindset of the new generation? Or will contemporaneous Cold War accounts win the day?

The major event for cultural analysis in the Cold War period from Australia's point of view remains the dramatic defection of Soviet agents in place in Australia, Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov, in April 1954. As Robert Manne has noted, the Petrov affair was "the last in a series of major Soviet spy dramas which shook the Western democracies during the early period of the Cold War (1945-54)" (*Petrov Affair* xii). The defections were "of extreme value to Western counter-intelligence in its war against the Soviet espionage system." But what made the Petrov defections, and the subsequent Royal Commission on Espionage unique in the Western world was that these events "precipitated a split in the Australian Labor Party, which in turn kept it from government for the best part of a generation" (*Petrov Affair* xii). In the swirling dust storms of such ideological and political conflict, in which so many careers

and reputations were made and lost, it is still difficult to pick the heroes from the villains, and vice-versa.

Theatrical events of many other kinds occurred, as Australians found in the public hearings of the Royal Commission on Espionage following the defection to Australia of Soviet diplomats and spies, Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov in 1954. The information provided by these two fearful Russians and their impact on Australian politics were huge. The accessibility of Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) files and records in the Australian Archives, together with memoirs of some of the participants, makes it now possible to recognize some of the posturing and performance elements also behind the scenes—the hidden dramas of those times. Though the hearings of the Royal Commission on Espionage were charged with tension, ambiguity and drama, the Royal Commission transcripts do not lead to easy conclusions about copycat McCarthy-ist witch hunts in Australia (Report of Royal Commission on Espionage *passim*). Behind these publicly orchestrated events, however, other kinds of drama can be discerned and a number of characters emerge.

One of the most engaging characters in the drama of the Petrov defections is Michael Bialoguski, who was the key undercover agent for ASIO in bringing Petrov across. Petrov's wife Evdokia followed in dramatic, highly publicized, last-minute fashion when she sought asylum at Darwin Airport on 20 April 1954, as two Russian minders tried to hustle her aboard a flight to return her to Russia. The interesting feature of Bialoguski in the prelude to this melodrama is his mobility of character, his many-sidedness, a capacity perhaps essential in the good spy.

Michael Bialoguski was born of Polish parents in Kiev, capital of the Ukraine, in 1917. In the turmoil of post-Russian revolution events, his family moved to the eastern provinces to Vilna, then a city of some 200 000 people. It is tempting to see Bialoguski's border-crossing capacities as a product in part of the checkered history of his home city Vilna, which he later fled as a refugee from the Nazi occupation. Now the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius has suffered more than name changes. At different times it has been under the control of Russia, Poland and the Germans. Further back, it was occupied by the Swedes and the French. Bialoguski, a medical doctor, commenced working part-time as an undercover agent for Australian intelligence in 1945. He was introduced to Petrov in 1951 by an attractive blonde Russian woman, Lydia Mokras, at the Russian Social Club in Sydney (Manne 12, Whitlam 7). Mokras and Bialoguski became lovers and she told him much about Petrov. Over the next few years, women and whisky would play a large part in the developing camaraderie, perhaps friendship, between Bialoguski and Petrov. Robert Manne asserts that Petrov "began cultivating Bialoguski with the intention of bringing him into action as an agent" (Manne 11). Each was playing the other; neither was trusted by his superiors. ASIO tailed Bialoguski, while Petrov was under recurrent surveillance by Soviet intelligence.

An interesting and revealing feature of the ASIO reports is the code name given to Bialoguski: he was "Diabolo." Another medical doctor, the ophthalmologist Dr Beckett, who plays a relatively straightforward role compared to the devious Bialoguski in helping ASIO to bring their Petrov prize across is code-named "Frankman." The impression of a Morality Play narrative is reinforced by the knowledge that the ASIO chief of counter-intelligence at this time, Michael Thwaites, was a member of Moral Re-armament and a poet. After the defections, Thwaites transmuted himself into the Petrovs' ghostwriter of their memoir *Empire of Fear* and later wrote his own account *Truth Will Out*. Despite Vladimir Petrov's assertion that he told the "truth" about "the Communist world" in this book, it is also a moral fable about good and evil empires and the choices that can be made for "freedom," or its opposite, incarceration in a deadening ideology and authoritarian power structure. Despite Petrov's appendix to *Empire of Fear*, in which he diminishes the apparently excessive claims Bialoguski made in *The Petrov Story* about his role in the defection, it remains a fact that without Bialoguski's involvement the defection would not have occurred. To the end, however, Bialoguski was deeply distrusted as a possible Soviet triple agent. At the very least, he was considered disreputable and unethical to an Australian secret agency that, despite its questionable methods, firmly assumed the moral high ground.

The "nest of traitors" who were alleged to have been exposed by the Petrovs and the Royal Commission also offer some fascinating case studies of Australians caught in webs of espionage, or espionage-thinking. I have written elsewhere of suspected Soviet spies in Australia's Department of External Affairs during the Second World War and after, Ian Milner and Ric Throssell.<sup>7</sup> Their cases highlight the powerful attraction of left-wing ideology for certain idealists in Australia, as elsewhere, along with a continuing dominance of more conservative values.

## V

It would be wrong to suggest that Cold War dramas in Australia were restricted to the Petrov affair and its fallout. From different perspectives, the figures of Charles Howard ("Dick") Ellis and Wilfred Burchett add color and reach to the story of Australian spies and spying in the international arena. Toohey and Pinwill describe Ellis as "the most intriguing figure who has crossed the often-surprising landscape of Australian intelligence" (Oyster 20). Their reasons? "A self-confessed traitor who admitted spying for the Nazis in 1939-40, he is believed by many experts to have worked for the Russians both before and after World War II" (20). Ellis, who was born in Sydney in 1895, fought and was wounded on the Western front in World War I before studying languages at Oxford and the Sorbonne in the postwar years. He married a White Russian, Lilia Zelenski, the first of four wives. As a junior diplomat in the British

Foreign Office, Ellis joined the SIS in Berlin in 1924 and operated under double cover—for British embassies in Europe and as a journalist. Frank Cain notes that experts have dismissed the claims that Ellis was spying for the Russians, “if only because important information held by Ellis was known not to have been transmitted to the Soviet Union” (93). But the experts remain divided on Ellis.

From an Australian point of view, Ellis’s apparently key role in the establishment of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) in 1952 is of special interest. The founding Director of ASIS, Alfred Deakin Brookes, told me in 2004 that he remembered Ellis “very well, of course” but had no view on the allegations about him. A “dear little man,” his wife chipped in, “loved his food,” especially Vichyssoise in a dinner they had shared in New York.<sup>8</sup> More ominously, according to Toohey and Pinwill, there is “some evidence” that Ellis was the conduit through whom the Soviet KGB “reactivated their most valuable asset,” Kim Philby, in 1954, but they do not specify this evidence (Oyster 23).

Wilfred Burchett was a more public player than Ellis in international affairs, especially in Asia and Eastern Europe, in the post-Second World War years. As a famous Australian journalist who had the scoop of his life when he graphically described Hiroshima after the bomb—the first Western journalist to do so—Burchett achieved a continuing attractiveness for some and notoriety for others with his reports from behind enemy lines, especially in North Korea and Vietnam. Was Burchett an agent of the communists in these countries or was he the fearless independent reporter he claimed to be? While there is some substance in Burchett’s claim that his principal interest was in national independence movements rather than Communism, his memoir *At the Barricades*, reveals a man deeply imbued with communist ideals and values. The most trenchant charge against Burchett was that he had treacherously supported the North Koreans and Chinese by extorting confessions from Allied prisoners about germ warfare allegedly carried out by the Americans against the Koreans. The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) took the claims so seriously that they sent officers overseas to gather evidence for a prosecution for treason. To ASIO, David McKnight asserts, Burchett was “a KGB ‘asset’ and a traitor to his country” (McKnight 263). The Director-General of ASIO, Colonel Spry, sent officers overseas in 1953 to collect evidence for a prosecution for treason against Burchett. This prosecution did not however proceed.

The principal exponents to date of the prosecution and defense cases for Wilfred Burchett are respectively, Robert Manne and Gavan McCormack. Manne’s views, espoused in his monograph *Agent of Influence: The Life and Times of Wilfred Burchett* and his more recent essay “He Chose Stalin: The Case of Wilfred Burchett,” seem compelling. But how much are we swayed by current worldviews in such assessments? A new biography by Tom Heenan has appeared. But the jury is still out on Wilfred Burchett.

The later Cold War period, from the 1960s to the 1980s, had its share of theatrical, cultural performances on espionage themes in Australia. One was “the Combe-Ivanov” affair in the early 1980s when the KGB tried to exploit David Combe’s connections with the Australian Labor party who were then in government, with Bob Hawke as Prime Minister. An inquiry, chaired by Justice Hope, led to the expulsion of Valeri Ivanov, the KGB spook under diplomatic cover who had been cultivating Combe; Combe was blacklisted by the Australian Labor Party.<sup>9</sup>

The second big espionage event of the 1980s was “the Spycatcher Trial.” Peter Wright, the British author of an autobiographical manuscript called *Spycatcher* was determined to have it published as a book in Australia, having been blocked by Margaret Thatcher’s government in Britain. Wright had taken up residence in Tasmania. The chief legal defendant of Wright’s right to publish *Spycatcher*, Malcolm Turnbull, is now a Liberal Party member of the Australian government. His book *The Spycatcher Trial* (1988) shows why the three-week trial in Sydney caught the imagination of Australians and a wider world. Turnbull’s cross-examination of British Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, is the book’s centerpiece and reveals a youthful, post-colonial brashness speaking out in defiance of the old Mother Country under cover of a case about censorship.

## VI

The extreme attention given by Australian Security Intelligence Organization officers to writers with left-wing views from 1920 to 1960 has been effectively analyzed by Fiona Capp in her book *Writers Defiled*. Capp’s reading of the ASIO files of writers such as Dorothy Hewett, Jean Devanny, Frank Hardy, Judah Waten and Clem Christesen extends her interest in ASIO’s “fantastic obsession” with the Communist menace in Australia and their profligate use of the genre of the “incriminating biography.” Her book is a warning against acceptance of the view that some higher authority of knowledge and certainty lies behind the fragmented, often inaccurate and frequently slanted views recorded by “spooks” paid to inform on writers and other citizens.

Australian creative writers, especially novelists and short story writers since the 1980s with an interest in spies and spying have been less concerned with ideological point-scoring than with the romance and irony of trans-national identities as these are played out in the world of espionage. Although it has been ignored in most literary histories of Australia, a recurrent strain of interest in international espionage can be traced in Australian literature. I will draw brief attention to some of the features of this writing since the 1980s. In doing so, I will distinguish between those authors who have made use of the thriller/espionage genre and those who have implanted a significant espionage theme in literary works of wider scope.

Three Australian writers who have set somewhat different patterns in their use of the espionage thriller genre are Richard Hall, Sandy McCutcheon and Matthew Reilly. Hall's novels *Costello* (1989) and *Noumea* (1999) form part of his deep engagement with espionage expressed in non-fiction works such as *The Secret State* (a critical analysis of Australia's security and intelligence agencies), *A Spy's Revenge* (about Peter Wright and the *Spycatcher* saga) and *The Rhodes Scholar Spy* (about Ian Milner). Hall's two novels *Costello* and *Noumea*, deal respectively with Cold War and post-Cold War situations. Both novels feature Costello, an independent-minded, skeptical agent of Australia's secret security organization who knows his tradecraft well but resists incorporation into the organization's conservative ethos. Whether phone-tapping, searching for documentary evidence, code-breaking, trying to track down a mole in the service, or discovering the source of gun-running to whites in French New Caledonia, Costello's problem-solving capacities are on show. An underprivileged Catholic boyhood in an orphanage lies behind Costello's refusal to accept old school ties in the secret service. Similarly, a sense of unequal social justice informs his investigation of French colonialism operating towards the suppression of Kanak independence movements in *Noumea*. Stephen Knight's attempt to conflate Australian spy stories with crime fiction tends to diminish the special qualities of a writer such as Hall, but his separate comments on Hall's two novels capture something of their flavor. Of *Costello*, he writes that it shows: "Spycatching in Australia as it really is; much closer to the grimy world of Petrov than to James Bond . . ."; and of *Noumea* that it "picks up the quirky and dark realities of espionage."<sup>10</sup>

Sandy McCutcheon's string of espionage thrillers begins with *In Wolf's Clothing* in 1997—a novel about a Russian undercover spy or "sleeper," who wants to return home when the Cold War seems to be over but knows too much for this to happen. McCutcheon's other espionage novels include *Poison Tree*, *Safe Haven*, and *The Haha Man*, which takes up the theme of Afghani refugees in Australia and how they become caught in the crossfire between the internal security agencies of their former and present countries of residence. If an interest in politics and a skepticism about intelligence organizations inform Hall's literary work, McCutcheon seems influenced mostly by his interest in international affairs strengthened by his role as a national broadcaster, his Buddhist views and a commitment to human rights.

The third writer in this group is Matthew Reilly, whose novels ranging from *Ice Station* to *Area 7* and *Scarecrow* are fast-moving international adventure stories that overlap with the genres of speculative fiction and sci-fi. A Law graduate of the University of New South Wales, Reilly is a fan of Hollywood action blockbusters and his best-selling novels seem an invitation to screen treatment. Their plots are relatively unhampered by ideological or ethical dilemmas.

A number of better-known Australian novelists, including Nicholas Hasluck, Christopher Koch, Brian Castro, Frank Moorhouse, and Janette Turner Hospital have explored the romance, horror, and irony of the spying game. The image of an intriguing, half-hidden world is evident in Hasluck's work since his first novel, *Quarantine*. Mysterious, Kafka-esque forces seem at work in Suez in that novel. In *The Bellarmine Jug* and *The Blossville File*, Hasluck extends his awareness of intrigue in his contemporary world to the lives and situations of Dutch and French maritime explorers of Australia's West Coast. Hasluck's unusual take is that it seems as if Australia has always been involved in webs of intrigue, then and now. As mentioned, Hasluck's novel, *Our Man K*, explores the significance of Egon Erwin Kisch's visit to Australia in the 1930s and the forces for and against him. Hasluck's fiction thrives on the simulacrum of courtroom dramas, and in *Our Man K* as in other novels in which espionage occurs, a fascination is evoked for secret knowledge, who owns it, the power that it offers, and how it is used. Hasluck has a special interest in the way language is distorted by organizations that develop their own special understandings and codes.

The reality of Australia's deepening involvement with countries of the Asia-Pacific in the post-Second World War years is reflected in novels by Blanche d'Alpuget, Robert Drewe, and Christopher Koch in which intelligence operatives and transfers of secret information occur. D'Alpuget's first book *Mediator*, her biography of Australian international jurist, Sir Richard Kirby, took the author to Indonesia to research Kirby's handling of war crimes investigations. This and other work in Indonesia informs d'Alpuget's novel *Monkeys in the Dark*, which explores the chaotic transition period following the coup of 1965 but before the New Order of the Indonesian Army has overthrown President Sukarno. D'Alpuget's spook in the Australian embassy in Jakarta, Frank Greaves, and his protégé Anthony Sinclair (in league with the CIA) are shown attempting to locate the new sources of information and power in Indonesia. Alexandra Wheatfield, the novel's protagonist, is betrayed first by her Indonesian lover, Maruli, and then by Australian intelligence. A masked ball brings together a variety of players in Jakarta, the city of intrigue, and epitomizes the wider environment of disguise, deception, role-playing and confusion.

Christopher Koch's novel *The Year of Living Dangerously*, like d'Alpuget's *Monkeys in the Dark*, explores something of the confusion for Western observers in the 1965 coup in Indonesia and its aftermath. This was an environment that bred rumor, counter-rumor, disinformation and spying at various levels. As in the period of Marcos's martial law regime in the Philippines, in which Robert Drewe's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* is set, the Indonesian crisis provokes suspicion, uncertainty and an often thwarted need to discover the reality of the situation in which characters are embroiled. Koch's other novel in which spying is given prominence is *Highways to a War*. In this novel, the search

for Mike Langford, a war photographer who has crossed from Vietnam into Cambodia and apparently disappeared, is presented as itself a kind of intelligence puzzle. In addition, the reader enters the search for Langford via information from spies and double agents who offer a context of hints, clues, and sometimes valuable information. The spying game is more central to this novel's meanings than to many others.

Very few serious Australian novelists have presented a spy as their central character. Brian Castro does this in *Stepper*, a novel that uses details from the espionage career of Richard Sorge, the notorious Soviet double agent in China and Japan in the 1930s. Sorge posed as a loyal Nazi and worked as an espionage agent for the German embassy in Japan, thus enabling him to "obtain information about Germany's intentions towards the Soviet Union and its developing relationship with Japan."<sup>11</sup> It is likely that Sorge warned the Soviet Union about Japan's planned attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Sorge and many of his network were arrested by the Japanese in October 1941 and he was hanged in 1944.

Brian Castro is selective in his use of Sorge's life-story in the novel *Stepper*, preferring to focus on graphic scenes, internal monologues and rapid switches of point of view. The notion of romance in the novel derives chiefly from the erotic and other excitements of the life of intrigue across cultures. Irony is in the ascendancy. Castro's essay "Auto/biography" reveals his own precarious sense of self as an Australian citizen who was born in Hong Kong of an English and Chinese mother and a Portuguese father from Shanghai. With his inherited liking for languages and the transgressive qualities of hybridity, Castro relishes the proliferation of selves of his protagonist, Stepper, and the clever ruses of his protean personality. David Matthews remarks: "In the rain-slicked trenchcoat tradition, Stepper is the liminal man, belonging nowhere, insinuating himself everywhere and always, as his name suggests, moving on."<sup>12</sup> *Stepper* is not, then, a moral tale; nor does it resile from the violence and treachery into which Stepper's espionage activities lead him. When he is outwitted, and betrayed, by his Japanese lover, his desire for her seems a sign of his humanity. In Japan at this time, love and betrayal seem to go together. The novel seems to ask: What price loyalty to a single self and a single nation today?

If Castro's *Stepper* is a postmodern appropriation of an historical figure, Janette Turner Hospital's novel *Due Preparations for the Plague* brings us directly into the late twentieth and early twenty-first century age of espionage and international terrorism. Her novel concerns the 1987 terrorist hijacking of Air France flight 46 and the calculated killing of its passengers, but the novel was completed in the shadow of the events of 11 September 2001 and bears some marks of Hospital's incorporation of these events into her thinking. The imaginative and emotional appeal of *Due Preparations for the Plague* hangs largely on the impact of such terrorism on those who may survive, especially chil-

dren. Twenty children were released before Air France 46 was blown up by Middle Eastern terrorists and it is their club, the Phoenix Club, and especially two psychologically maimed victims, Lowell and Samantha, who carry out the intelligence work, thirteen years after the event, that reveals American complicity in these tragic events. The novel explores violence, pain and the possibility of love in the tangled lives of its protagonists.

The major spy in Turner Hospital's novel is Lowell Hawthorne's father, who worked for the CIA. Lowell's mother was killed in the hijacking but his father lives on with the guilty recognition of his involvement in the plots and counter-plots that brought about the hijacking and its horrific aftermath. Lowell's father dies, in suspicious circumstances, apparently of a heart attack at the wheel of his car, and leaves his son a sports bag filled with videotapes and encrypted journals. Lowell ultimately learns that his father (code-named Salamander) was closely involved with a Middle Eastern double agent, code-named Sirocco, who had worked in *mujahideen* camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, spoke five languages, held four passports and knew all about explosives and chemical warfare. The American Salamander is outwitted by Sirocco but is somewhat redeemed morally by his haunted attempts to inform the next generation of the mess he and his generation have made in their attempts to make the world more "secure."

The "radiant calm" that Turner Hospital heard in the final conversations of some victims on the planes "before they were used as torpedoes on the people on the upper floors of the World Trade Center on 11 September"<sup>13</sup> informs the ending of her novel, which is both hopeful and ironic. Her character Samantha finds a kind of peace from her hauntings in St. Paul's Chapel, Manhattan, in August 2001, a month before the shattering events that have changed the nature and tone of international relations and the spying game irrevocably.

## VII

It is clear from this rapid survey of Australian representations of spies that our society has been "informed" by them since its earliest beginnings. A halcyon era of innocence before spies and spying appears not to have existed. Yet there may be signs of a new prominence in the present era of the figure of the international spy. National or "home-land" security is an emergent research priority in Australia as recruitment grows rapidly in the various security agencies. What human dramas underlie our present situation? What hopes, fears, comedies and tragedies underlie the new public prominence of spying?

Melissa Reeves's play *The Spook*, produced in Sydney in 2004, brings some aspects of Cold War paranoia back on stage in the figure of an ASIO spy who has second thoughts about his career. The play's story is not bound to its time and place. Director Neil Armfield remarks that the playwright taps some "powerful mythic energies in the play" in

her central character, managing to convey an "innocent and charmingly empathetic" young Australian man who, "with a heartbreaking optimism, in turn both comic and tragic, believes he's helping his country."<sup>14</sup>

Memoirs and commentaries have also been popular. Andrew Wilkie, whose memoir *Axis of Deceit* (2004) traces the events that led to his resignation from Australia's senior intelligence agency, the Office of National Assessments, in 2003 in protest over the misuse of intelligence in the run-up to the Iraq War is an example of this genre. (Wilkie subsequently stood as the Green candidate in Prime Minister John Howard's seat at the federal elections and was resoundingly defeated.) Another attention-catching memoir that presents a "conscientious" spy is Kirsty Sword Gusmao's *A Woman of Independence* (2003). Codenamed Ruby Blade, the Melbourne-born woman worked as a secret agent (a term she prefers to "spy") for the East Timorese independence movement, had a love affair with its leader Xanana Gusmao, and is now first lady and mother of his children in the fledgling nation.

Australian newspapers, especially the national daily, the *Australian*, have warmed to spy sagas of many kinds in the early twenty-first century. The most persistent have been the "spy/terrorist" stories such as emerged from the trial of Jack Roche in Perth, or the Frenchman Willie Brigitte's arrest and deportation to Paris for interrogation. Both men were Al-Qaeda trained. Both were Muslim converts. Brigitte had apparently been in Australia for five months when he was arrested in October 2003. He allegedly traveled to Australia to help prepare for a major terrorist attack.<sup>15</sup> A much fuller picture of Jack Roche and his activities has been published following his confession, conviction and jailing for nine years for plotting with Al-Qaeda to blow up Canberra's Israeli embassy.<sup>16</sup> Roche's surveillance of Israeli interests that could be targeted could hardly represent a clearer example of spying in Australia against Australia's interests. Yet Roche's full, and in some ways fulsome confession, together with attempts prior to his arrest to contact ASIO after he had allegedly decided to extricate himself from the terrorist plot, have led to more sympathetic representations of a pathetic figure, a drunkard with a series of failed marriages who thought himself "saved" by Islam.<sup>17</sup>

When an Israeli diplomat and suspected spy was expelled from Australia in February 2005, the spy scandal genre was in full flight in Australia's newspapers. One journalist put the current situation thus: "Dozens of foreign spies are hard at it behind peaceful facades throughout Canberra's diplomatic community. They work under diplomatic cover posing as a first, second or even lowly third secretary on the political, trade or consular desks."<sup>18</sup>

The espionage genre, once scratched, is infectious, even in its low-key form as third-secretary level realism. When an Australian senator was reported in Parliament and the press in March 2005 as smuggling cash into Iraq on behalf of an Australian oil company, the journalists moved into

comic parodic mode. The senator, Ross Lightfoot from Western Australia, was described as "Lightfoot of Arabia." His report to Parliament on his visit to Iraq, said one journalist, "reads like a cross between Sinbad's adventures in the Arabian nights and the recollections of William Boot in Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*"; it was difficult to tell if he saw himself as James Bond, "saving the Kurdish people, carrying cash, armed to the teeth," or Walter Mitty.<sup>19</sup>

The Australian senator in question had talked himself into a novel of espionage and intrigue, and tried to justify his gun-toting behavior. Iraq, he said, was "not the ACT, this is not Manuka on a Sunday morning...These people play for keeps over there and if someone was going to shoot at me, I was going to shoot back."<sup>20</sup> Yet if Canberra is not Baghdad (and long may it remain not so), it remains an integral staging post in international espionage. On Saturday mornings, when I have coffee at my local bakery, I smile and nod to the heads of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization and the Department of Defense. The lives of these men, and many other men and women in this city, as in others around the world, are bound up in espionage, in watching and reporting on others in the perceived interests of their country, more intensely so at certain moments of history. What does this career do to them, and to their opponents? What happens to their lives, loves, loyalties and world-views? These questions have a certain fascination and deserve to be investigated further. □

#### Notes

1. John le Carré, *The Secret Pilgrim* (London: Coronet/Hodder and Stoughton, 1991). Smiley continues: "If governments could do without it, they never would. They adore it. If the day ever comes when there are no enemies left in the world, governments will invent them for us . . ." (184).

2. Rivalry among Chinese explorers is evident in the fact that most of Zheng He's records "were destroyed after his death to frustrate another powerful eunuch who demanded a similar fleet" (Rolls 7). Nicholas Jose's novel *The Rose Crossing* further explores the rivalry between Chinese and English explorers in the 17th century for secret knowledge and new skills and devices.

3. See Clark, *A Heritage of Spirit*, 49.

4. Many of these remain unknown, but among them Charles William Blocksidge, better known as the poet William Baylebridge, might be included. Charles Howard ("Dick") Ellis, who joined the British SIS in Berlin in 1924, as a secret agent, had fought in the trenches of the First World War in Europe.

5. A good example is Alfred Chandler's story "Renton's Intrusion" in the *Westralia Gift Book*, ed. Walter Murdoch et al, V.K. Jones, Perth, 55–8.

6. See Heidi Zogbaum, *Kisch in Australia: The Untold Story*. Zogbaum describes the Australian "farce" in the wider context of fascism in Europe and the ideological struggles of the 1930s.

7. See Bruce Bennett, "Espionage and Exile," unpublished paper.

8. Alfred Deakin Brookes and Margaret Brookes at 75 Mathoura Road, Toorak, on 24 October 2004.

9. See David Marr, *The Ivanov Trail* and Harvey Barnett, *Tale of the Scorpion*. Barnett, a former ASIS officer, in Southeast Asia, was director-general of ASIO at this time.

10. See Stephen Knight, *Continent of Mystery: A Thematic History of Australian Crime Fiction*, Carlton South, Melbourne University Press, 1997, 166–7. The two quotations are taken from endorsements of *Costello* and *Noumea* on the back covers of the two books.

11. See Richard M. Bennett, *Espionage*, 257.

12. David Matthews, "Spy who stayed out in the cold." *The Weekend Australian*. 12–13 April, 1997, 9.

13. See Sandra McLean, "Dispute just around the corner." *The Courier Mail*, 24 May 2003, 3.

14. *The Spook*, directed by Neil Armfield, was first produced at Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, in November 2004. Quotes are from the Director's Notes in program.

15. See "Claim bungle over Brigitte could set him free," *Canberra Times*, 12 July 2004, .

16. See Cameron Stewart, "Fatal Attraction," in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 25–26 September 2004, 18–23; and Tim Clarke, "Terrorist loses bid to reduce jail term," *Canberra Times*, 15 January 2005.

17. e.g., see "Fatal Attraction," op. cit.

18. Ian McPhedran, "Spies Stalk our Leafy Streets," *Herald Sun*, 19 February 2005, 14.

19. See Matt Price, "Lightfoot of Arabia's seriously funny adventures," *Australian* 18 March 2005, 4.

20. Ibid.

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