

Intelligence in Public Media Reviewed in *Studies* 70, No. 3 (September 2026)

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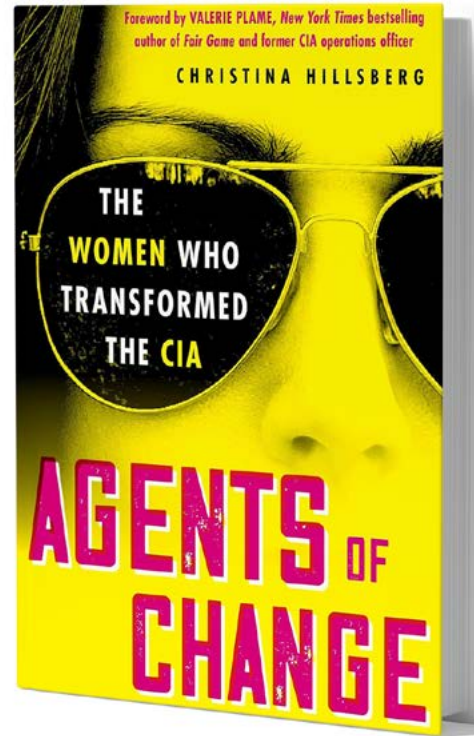
Cromwell's Spy: From the American Colonies to the English Civil War, the Life of George Downing by Dennis Sewell
A Stranger in Corfu (a novel) by Alex Preston
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intelligence in public media

Agents of Change *The Women Who* *Transformed the CIA*

Reviewed John M. Pulju

Author: Christina Hillsberg; foreword by Valerie Plame
Published By: Citadel, 2025
Print Pages: 240
Reviewer: John M. Pulju is a retired CIA officer.



In her author's note, Christina Hillsberg writes that she had set out to tell the stories of ordinary women at CIA who broke through barriers to do extraordinary things. Hillsberg planned her book to be "the kind of pop history she would want to read" and would appeal to readers beyond "spy aficionados and history buffs." (xvii) She writes that her research led her to emphasize gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and even assault. She should have stuck with her original plan. Instead, she mixed pop elements with her new emphasis. The result is disjointed and doesn't deliver on either approach.

The book comes closest to achieving Hillsberg's original plan. Its half dozen chapters open with a breezy pop feminist overview of each decade beginning with the 1960s; the role of women in James Bond films is a feature.

The overviews are followed by what amounts to oral history, based mainly on interviews and memoirs. Hillsberg also draws on her own experience during almost a decade at the agency, where she started in the Directorate of Intelligence (since renamed the Directorate of Analysis) before moving to the Directorate of Operations (DO).

Hillsberg concentrates on the career histories of 10 women who served in the DO. She supplements these profiles with snippets about a dozen women who served in analysis, science and technology, and information systems. The earliest careers started in the late 1960s, and a few appear to be ongoing; certainly some of the women were still working after the COVID pandemic. Several of the women rose to senior management positions over

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Agents of Change

their careers of 20 to 30 years. Others spent a decade or less at CIA.

Clearly, this doesn't add up to a history of "the women who transformed the CIA." Hillsberg doesn't profile operational trailblazers in the early decades of the agency—the first women case officers and chiefs of station, for example—although she mentions a couple. And, her emphasis on the DO is unfortunate because there is plenty of material to profile women from other directorates, including the first women heads of directorates and of such key positions as general counsel. Career highlights of DO and other trailblazers can be found on CIA's public website.

Still, collectively the career histories offer a valuable addition to the intelligence bookshelf. They weave a colorful tapestry that richly illustrates not only how women broke through barriers but also what they accomplished and the trade-offs they made balancing work, family, health, and other interests. The histories are filled with vivid details on hiring, training, and human operations. They give good insight into the changing culture of CIA and the role of women, culminating in Gina Haspel's appointment as director.

A strength of the histories is the variety of experiences they convey. We see smart, determined women overcome open sexism during the 1980s to enter the ranks of case officers, some with the help of supportive men. We see the stress they felt to continually prove themselves and to balance careers, relationships, and families—including whether to have children. We see women who took advantage of growing opportunities to carve out satisfying careers that advanced US national security. One started as a teenage secretary, got her degree with CIA help, and held an array of field positions, including acting chief of station. Another was a midcareer hire who applied her niche expertise to drive operations on a critical topic. We see other officers who grappled with the challenge of war zone and austere assignments, including their perception

that childless officers are disproportionately expected to pursue them. And, we see the agency grappling with making tandem assignments work—including for same-sex couples—and with the expectations of different generations.

Readers should keep in mind the limits of oral history. Interviewees are speaking from memory and, presumably, are trying to be interesting. Oral history tends to emphasize overcoming challenges. And, it is not confession. There is little self-criticism, whether about job performance or personal behavior. By contrast, judgments about other people often are not tempered by the doubts interviewees undoubtedly had about their ability to get into another person's head.

Readers should also consider how Hillsberg's pop feminist approach affects the narrative. She notes that although she tried to be balanced, her own conscious and unconscious biases undoubtedly color the book. She quotes CIA's critics uncritically and seems to accept at face value interviewees' sweeping statements, such as women make good case officers because they are better listeners and judges of character than men.

For the most part, *Agents of Change* delivers on Hillsberg's objective. She weaves her tapestry in bold colors. Her prose is clear and lively; it moves right along. Too much critical analysis or data would have bogged it down. It is easy for readers to account for her biases, which are clear even if not always consistent.

Agents of Change is more problematic when drawing conclusions about complex issues, including how well CIA has done handling specific allegations of sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault. Tonally, there is a clash with the overall pop tone of the book. More importantly, Hillsberg lacks the access to CIA records and people or the expertise to draw conclusions. In a few recent cases, she does not appear to have sought alternate perspectives, leading to an unbalanced presentation. It would have been better to exclude these cases. ■

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The Closing of the Russian Mind *How Putin's Ideology Took* *the Nation Hostage*

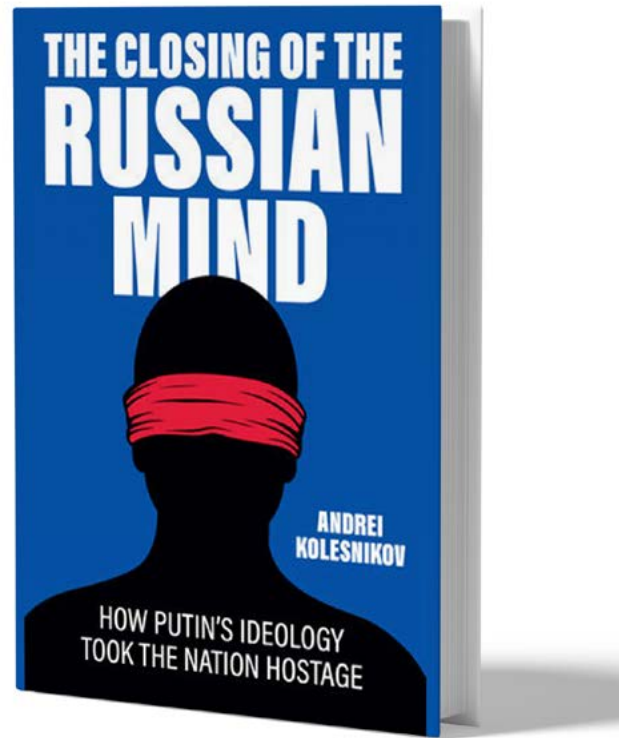
Reviewed John Ehrman

Author: Andrei Kolesnikov

Published By: Polity, 2026

Print Pages: 250 pages; notes, index

Reviewer: John Ehrman is a retired CIA officer and frequent contributor of reviews of intelligence literature.



An editor's note in the December 2024 edition of *Studies* pointed out that the "longer [Russian President Vladimir] Putin has been in power, the worse things have gotten for Russia, its people, his opponents, and the West."^a That statement is even more true today as the human and material costs of the war in Ukraine, growing political repression, the loss of allied governments, and increasing dependence on China combine to make Russia poorer and weaker than at any time in the quarter-century-plus of Putin's rule. Still, the mystery remains: given all this, why does Putin's grip on power appear to remain unshakeable? Other ruthless, repressive regimes—East Germany, Ceausescu's Romania—collapsed, so why not Putin's? These are the questions that lie at the heart of Russian political journalist Andrei

Kolesnikov's insightful analysis of the Putin regime's ideology and its effects on Russia. His answers make *The Closing of the Russian Mind* an important, and sobering, contribution to "Putin studies."

Putin's leadership, Kolesnikov tells us at the start, is a special case because "his ideology has led to war in Europe" in an era when such an event was supposed to have become unthinkable. (2) How Putin has "managed the impossible"—that is, both starting the war in Ukraine and getting the Russian people to go along with it, even if only as passive supporters—is what Kolesnikov explains.

Kolesnikov sees the post-Soviet, modernizing Russia of the 1990s as an emerging, if imperfectly so, Western-

a. "Editor's Note," *Studies in Intelligence* 68, No. 4 (Review Special, December 2024), 1.

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The Closing of the Russian Mind

style liberal democracy and consumer society. Putin, however, was from the start a rigidly anti-liberal and anti-Western authoritarian figure and rejected this path. Instead, he has developed what Kolesnikov in the first chapter describes, as a “hybrid totalitarian state with a semi-mobilized society built upon nationalist-imperialist messianic ideology and state capitalism.” (21) It is a mix of nineteenth-century Slavophilism and Stalinism, with the fascism of Ivan Ilyin and the pseudo-history of Alexander Dugin providing an intellectual gloss.

The basics of this order are familiar to anyone who has had a class in Russian history: the centuries-old belief in the superiority of Russian civilization and its redemptive mission on the one hand, combined with, on the other, a sense of victimhood and conviction that Russia is under nonstop attack from outside forces and internal traitors. These, in turn, require a strong government to protect Russia. Thus, says Kolesnikov, Russian identity and politics are negatives, “forged through the denial of everything alien to Russia.” (33) During the Cold War this meant rejecting the US-led ideologies of democracy and capitalism, and updated with the addition of opposition to the Western idea of open, tolerant societies. It is, Kolesnikov concludes, a backward-looking and comprehensive rejection of modernization in favor of a world of ethno-nationalism, brute force, and competition for territory. (36)

With this as his foundation, Kolesnikov goes on to describe Putinism in detail. It is, he contends, a mash-up of “nationalist and imperialism, ultra-conservative, and fundamentalist” views that assert Russia is a “state-civilization”—a system wherein the regime claims to embody and protect Russia’s distinct civilization and its history.(30) The messianism, for example, leads Moscow to claim that it represents the true values of Western civilization, as opposed to the decadence that has overtaken Europe. This, in turn, leads to an imperialism that cloaks expansionism as standing up to the outside threat of Western influence. From there, it celebrates the use of military force, justifying war as a path to peace, and glorifies heroic death in state service. Again, much of this thinking goes back centuries, but given Putin’s KGB background, it is unsurprising that it shows a lot of Soviet influence. In particular, says Kolesnikov, it echoes Stalin’s use

of alleged Western threats to justify repression and leads to nostalgia for the time when the USSR was treated as a superpower on par with the United States. And make no mistake: “scientific Putinism,” however strange or incoherent it may seem to us, is now Russia’s official state ideology, one that tolerates no dissent.(82)

From here, Kolesnikov examines the impact of Putinism on various aspects of Russian life and society. Whether looking at how it has been inserted into the curricula of the education system, the rewriting of history and memorials, or its use as a tool of political repression, Kolesnikov sees the effects as reinforcing one another. The emphasis on the ancient roots of the state-civilization means that everything is explained with reference to the past. “History is everywhere,” says Kolesnikov, but manipulated to serve Putin’s ends with the mistakes of the past forgotten or ignored, while victimhood becomes a justification for militarization and the continual consolidation of state power.

State and society, as in the Soviet era, have merged, and individuals are in the process of being “nation-alized” by the state—that is, losing their autonomy. Violence against dissenters has returned, which leads to self-censorship among intellectuals; it leads, as well, to passivity among the remaining population. These may be Kolesnikov’s most critical points, as they explain why no viable opposition to Putin exists. People who don’t emigrate simply withdraw from civic life as they seek only to protect themselves and their families.

The Closing of the Russian Mind is a compelling analysis of Putinism and, living in the belly of the beast, Kolesnikov certainly is the man to have written it. A 1987 law graduate from Moscow State University, he initially worked at the Supreme Court of the Russian SFSR and then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, moved to journalism and a fellowship at the Carnegie Moscow Center. Long a harsh critic of Putin, he has bravely remained in Moscow, despite being labeled a foreign agent. His examination draws on extensive current research and applies the work of the mid-twentieth-century scholars—Hannah Arendt, George Kennan, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, among others—who analyzed the politics of totalitarian states.

That said, Kolesnikov's prose has the flaws common to the writings of Russian intellectuals. He writes with passion but can be ponderous at times and, while he makes solid points, most come in the first half of the book. Indeed, as Kolesnikov looks at the workings and impact of Putin's ideology across different fields, he frequently repeats himself. As Kolesnikov makes the points about the role of history, the glorification of the state, and cults of war and heroic death over and over, the arguments quickly become predictable.

While you may find yourself skimming the middle chapters, Kolesnikov's conclusion is worth a close read. Russia, he tells us, is now a country without a future, trapped by an official ideology that looks back and never forward. Any hope for modernization, whether economic or political, has evaporated as war and emigration reduce the population. This will only get worse—families, “living in a permanent state of military and psychological conflict with the civilized world,” have given up having babies.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ The world is passing Russia by, leaving it technologically and economically backward, and ever more impoverished. Most frightening, at Putin's level the cult of glorious death for the Motherland is leading to talk of a nuclear apocalypse. Still, Putin and his cronies carry on, unable to conceive of alternatives to their policies and uninterested in finding any. Indeed, if the *Financial Times* is

correct, Putin has retreated to his bunkers, listening only to yes men, and too afraid of assassination to come out—hardly a situation likely to result in a search for solutions to Russia's problems.^a

Putin's is a “banal regime,” says Kolesnikov early in *The Closing of the Russia Mind*, and “dictatorships of this sort are ultraconservative and leader-centric.”⁽²¹⁾ He returns to this point at the end, when he considers how reform might come to Russia. Kolesnikov's answer is that there will be none until Putin passes from the scene, and given that he is only 73, he could be around for some time. The longer Putin is in power, says Kolesnikov, the worse the situation will become and the more painful the aftermath. Moreover, given Russia's record on modernization, the prospects for successful post-Putin reforms are not bright.

Russia in the last two centuries has compiled a long record of efforts to move away from authoritarian rule that have wound up dead-ending in even worse situations. If Kolesnikov is correct, and the depth of his research and sophistication of his analysis suggest he is, then Russia is on a path to disaster. For this reason alone, *The Closing of the Russian Mind* is an important book for anyone interested in Russian affairs, worried that Moscow's political failures might spill over into Europe and the wider world, or still harboring the view that Putin's regime is not as bad as often portrayed. ■

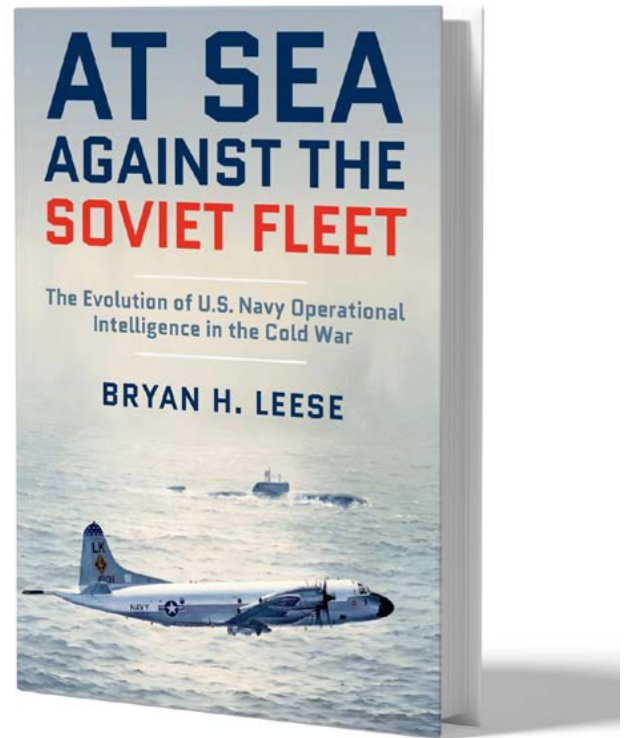
a. “Vladimir Putin Hunkers Down for Fear of Assassination,” *Financial Times*, May 4, 2026.

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At Sea Against the Soviet Fleet *The Evolution of U.S. Navy Operational Intelligence in the Cold War*

Reviewed by Scott A. Moseman, PhD.

Author: Bryan H. Leese
Published By: Naval Institute Press, 2025
Print Pages: 472, maps, photos, endnotes, bibliography, index.
Reviewer: Scott A. Moseman is a retired Naval Intelligence officer, who is presently a member of the Department of Military History at the Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.



The activities of military intelligence units and their enabling technologies are often seen by outside observers as mysteries and are simply dismissed. What happens behind locked iron doors seems unobtainable and too highly classified to pursue. Therefore, one might assume there is little unclassified that can be added to military historiography on the subject. These skeptics, of course, are wrong. Every now then a scholarly work breaks down the vault doors that conceal intelligence history.

In *At Sea Against the Soviet Fleet*, historian Bryan H. Leese has done just. In this revelatory work, Leese portrays naval operational intelligence (Opintel) as a continually changing enterprise. He contends that Naval Intelligence leaders fostered the evolution of shipboard operational intelligence, starting in the early 1960s and

through the early 1980s. These officers recognized the importance of a corps of well trained, high-achieving, and motivated intelligence officers who could deliver timely, credible intelligence about a potent maritime adversary to operational leaders at sea. (15) The evolutionary, and sometimes revolutionary, processes of a formal and informal, centralized and, more importunately, decentralized nature were critical to naval intelligence professionals in delivering sound information to their bosses. Leese succeeds in showing readers that intelligence innovation was a difference-maker in the Cold War.

Leese succeeds because he provides clear definitions and parameters. He makes his arguments as though he were teaching a college leadership seminar on organizational change. Military institutions like the Army Command

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At Sea Against the Soviet Fleet

and General Staff College have leadership departments and provide multiple lessons on the subject. Leese references works such as Edgar H. Schein (*Organizational Culture and Leadership*) and John P. Kotter (*Leading Change*) to show how organizations can improve when their leaders put forth the effort. Leese points out that change can happen formally (e.g., through orders and doctrine) *or* informally (e.g., through experimentation or jerry-rigging of machines to do an operators' bidding). He states that some decentralization—disbursing missions and tasks to multiple suborganizations—is critical in improving intelligence methods; and innovation and adaptation can occur between centralization and decentralization in an ebb and flow. (298)

Leese argues that the Navy has also developed revolutionary technologies—e.g., the Integrated Operational Intelligence Center, the Ocean Surveillance Information System (OSIS), and Outlaw Shark-Supplemental (SupPlot)—that forced shipboard Opintel professionals to struggle to keep up. But they and their processes evolved to improve the intelligence they were able to give their commanders. Leese's arguments are generally clear, and through mounds of research, he proves his thesis.

Leese also shows how his work fits into Naval intelligence historiography; he mentions the essential authors: Christopher Ford, David Rosenberg, Norman Friedman, and Wyman H. Packard. All of them, especially Packard, broke new ground in Naval history because other scholars have yet to touch the most interesting naval intelligence topics. The same is true of Leese's book, which, with its focus on Opintel, nicely complements this reviewer's March 2025 book *Defining the Mission: The Development of US Strategic Military Intelligence up to the Cold War*. It both leads into Leese's work and is complemented by Leese's operational focus.

The book's organization is acceptable. His preface and prologue lay out his thesis soundly. The narrative follows in four parts that roughly coincide with the technologies that have driven Opintel's innovations and adaptations. The first part (four chapters) covers how the stresses of the naval air campaign during the

Vietnam War helped shape adaptation in shipboard intel spaces, culminating in state-of-the-art intel centers aboard aircraft carriers. The next section (two chapters) in effect "goes ashore" to Opintel's adaptation on Navy patrol aircraft and in-country installations. Part III (five chapters) focuses on decentralization of the use of OSIS in places like Fleet Ocean Surveillance Information Facility (FOSIC), Rota. Their work harnessed all-source fusion to provide better tactical warning for operators. The last chapter of Part III again addresses bringing the power of OSIS ashore to create a "little brother" in SupPlot (196-98) that could provide traditionally shore-based quality intelligence to battlegroup commanders. (211) The book's last 50 pages—"Observations," "Epilogue," and "Conclusions"—could have been merged, redundancies removed, and shortened. However, the book's layout is adequate for the subject, and its roadmap is easy to follow.

At Sea Against the Soviet Fleet's strengths derive from Leese's experiences as a historian and a naval Opintel professional. These show up in his research. First, his bibliography is wide-ranging and large: He references open-source periodicals, newspapers, the Naval History and Heritage Center, as well as think-tank products. Most impressive are the 26 oral history interviews Leese conducted or consulted; what better way to understand the goings on and atmosphere of an Opintel workspace than to talk with officers who worked in the FOSICs, SupPlot, or the carrier intel center (CVIC)? (The stories Leese recited may also amuse veterans of Opintel work as they recall moments of controlled-chaos in their own active-duty days.) Leese also had to shepherd his work through DoW's prepublication classification review process, as formally required by his prior service and by the fact that his subject had originally been highly classified. As a result, Leese has revealed a world few Opintel practitioners over the decades fully experienced.

This reviewer has a handful of minor issues with the book. First, I wish Leese had provided more of the past history of shipboard intelligence officers and operational intelligence, which he glossed over in the prologue. Leese starts his narrative at 1945, but naval intelligence, the senior member of the US IC,

was created in March 1882 and its Opintel processes and tools had adapted and improved greatly up to and through WWII. Second, more detailed definitions of “adaptation” and “innovation” were probably warranted, given the author’s frequent use of the words.** Do the words have the same meaning? Authors David Barno and Nora Bensahel in their book *Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime* (Oxford University Press, 2020) do not seem to think so. They argue innovation happens in peacetime and adaptation occurs during war. Does such a definition affect Leese’s arguments about Opintel’s progress after WWII? Finally, the presence of too many passive voice sentences distracts from the story, whose readers should know who is behind the actions described.

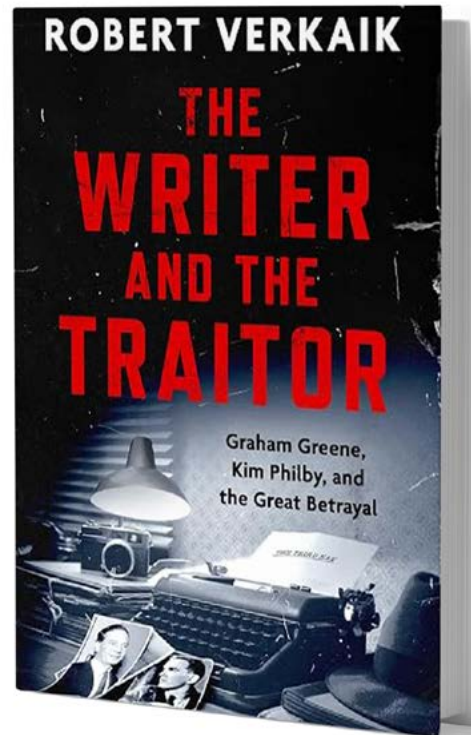
These quibbles aside, Leese accomplished what he set out to do in *At Sea Against the Soviet Fleet* and provided a valuable contribution to military intelligence literature. The book should be a standard for US staff and intelligence schoolhouses, especially in the Naval Intelligence Officer Basic Course at Information Warfare Training Command, Virginia Beach. Staff schools will more understand the intricacies of organizational change on the leadership aspects of *At Sea Against the Soviet Fleet*. Students of Naval intelligence can glean insights into how their future commands evolved the way they did over the seven decades. ■

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The Writer and the Traitor Graham Greene, Kim Philby, and the Great Betrayal

Reviewed Ian B. Ericson

Author: Robert Verkaik
Published By: Headline Welbeck, 2026
Print Pages: 384 pages; photos, endnotes, and index
Reviewer: Ian B. Ericson is the pen name of a CIA officer.



Kim Philby and Graham Greene had much in common. They were scions of the British establishment who discovered far-left politics in college. Each behaved abominably toward their wives and oversaw wildly successful intelligence operations for MI-6 during World War II. They were also, in distinct ways, deeply religious. Greene was a committed, though heterodox, Catholic while Philby adhered throughout his life to the secular faith of communism, remaining devout despite Marxism's endlessly growing body count. They also maintained a long and strange friendship that Philby's public outing as a KGB spy in 1963 seemed only marginally to strain. In his intriguing, yet flawed, new volume, *The Writer and the Traitor*, journalist and author Robert Verkaik examines the Philby-Greene relationship and ponders whether Greene left clues to Philby's treachery in his short story (and film) the "Third Man."

The book does not quite deliver, however. Though Verkaik makes use of some newly released archival material, these tend to reinforce much of what is already known about the two men. In the absence of new revelations, Verkaik often relies on speculation. The result are many assertions that often flounder for lack of evidence.

Verkaik tells Philby and Greene's stories mostly in parallel. Their interactions are noteworthy but limited, and Verkaik mostly does a good job recounting highlights from their biographies. Greene only meets Philby in 1941, when the latter, who had joined MI-6 the year before, participated in vetting Greene's application to join the service. By this time, Greene was 36, an established writer, and looking for a way to participate in the war effort. Philby, recruited by the Soviets in 1934, had worked as a journalist in Spain during the civil war there and used

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The Writer and the Traitor

his superb connections and unique charm to overcome questions about his communist activities while at Cambridge University in the early 1930s and nevertheless gain employment at MI-6.

Philby spent most of the war in England, overseeing counterintelligence operations against the German *Abwehr* on the Iberian Peninsula, and of course keeping the Soviets fully informed. Greene, after a year spent in Sierra Leone countering German espionage efforts in West Africa during the Battle of the Atlantic, took a position as Philby's subordinate at MI-6 Headquarters. The two bonded and Greene would speak glowingly of Philby even decades later. In his foreword to Philby's self-serving (and KGB approved) autobiography, *My Silent War* (1968), Greene would say: "No one could be a better chief than Kim Philby ... he worked harder than anyone and never gave the impression of labor." (139) Philby wrote similar paeans to Greene, saying that working with him was "wholly delightful." (140)

Had Greene reserved his praise for Philby's work against the Germans, perhaps it could have been excused. Verkaik recounts, however, Greene's fulsome praise for his boss in a July 1963 letter to the *Times*, six months after Philby's defection to the Soviets, in which he recalled his former chief "with great affection" (291) and proposed that the true threat to international peace emanated from Washington, DC, and not Moscow.

Greene and Philby's mutual acquaintance with Harry Smolka (aka Peter Smollett), an employee of Britain's Ministry of Information during the war and KGB spy recruited by Philby in 1939, forms the basis of Verkaik's suggestion that Greene knew of Philby's KGB work years before it was uncovered. Smolka served as an informal consultant on Greene's *Third Man* in Vienna in 1948, and Verkaik speculates that Smolka revealed Philby's true loyalties during these conversations. Greene, the theory goes, thus used Philby as the inspiration for Harry Lime, the film's villain played by Orson Welles.

To make his case, Verkaik draws parallels between Lime and Philby, some of which are interesting and others being stretches. Greene's Lime worked at the International Refugee Office in Vienna, which is

close to Philby's work with the Committee for Aiding Refugees from Fascism, also based in Vienna, in 1933. On the other hand, Lime's girlfriend sharing a surname (Schmidt) with a former *Abwehr* agent whose ring Philby and Greene had broken up in Lisbon is less compelling. Verkaik's theory that Greene left clues in his film to help MI-5's mole hunt is far-fetched, and no real evidence explains why the Soviet spy Smolka would tell Greene about Philby and risk his own exposure?

The author use of speculation surfaces in other places. Verkaik cites Philby's role in scuttling a proposed postwar MI-5/MI-6 merger and notes that had the merger occurred it "would surely have been only a matter of weeks before the treachery of Philby and the other Cambridge spies was uncovered." (217) This seems far too optimistic, and Verkaik supplies no evidence. Verkaik also speculates that MI-6 directed Greene to go to the USSR in the 1980s for unexplained operational reasons, but possibly including an effort to coax Philby back to Britain. The mechanics of this absurdity are left to the reader's imagination. Much more likely is that Greene liked Philby and remained broadly sympathetic to the goals of communism.

Factual errors also mar the volume. Verkaik misuses the term "double agent" throughout; Philby would only have been a double agent had MI-6 permitted his contacts with the KGB for operational purposes, which it obviously did not. The Soviets murdered Ignace Reiss in Switzerland, not Moscow. The KGB officers Anatoly Gorsky and Boris Krotenschield were not illegals; they were under diplomatic cover while handling the Cambridge Five in London. Catholics do not worship Saint Anthony, they venerate him. Flora Solomon was not a Soviet spy. Verkaik's speculation that Philby's letter to Greene in 1985 might have been a coded message meant for Anthony Blunt is unlikely in the extreme in light of Blunt's death in 1983. Some of these errors may be minor, but they are still errors.

Mistakes and unsupported assertions aside, Verkaik has produced a work that is still useful in places. Greene and Philby remain two of the most fascinating, if disreputable, characters in the annals of espionage. Verkaik has produced a volume that sheds light on their relationship, though perhaps not as much as he had hoped. ■

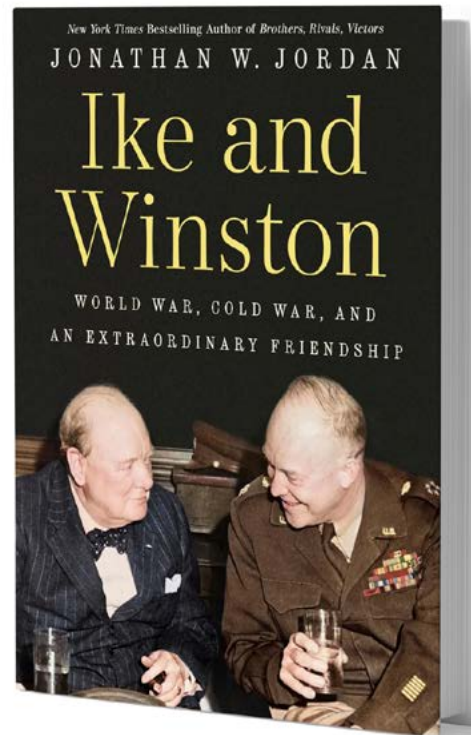
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Ike and Winston

*World War, Cold War, and
an Extraordinary Friendship*

Reviewed JR Seeger

Author: Jonathan W. Jordan
Published By: Dutton Press, 2025
Print Pages: 544, photos, bibliography, index.
Reviewer: JR Seeger is a retired CIA officer and frequent contributor to *Studies*.



Historians have always debated whether events or individuals are more important in historic moments. Jonathan Jordan certainly comes down on the side of individuals. His earlier books on World War II focused specifically on the men who shaped the Allied victory. In *Ike and Winston*, Jordan takes the reader well beyond World War II and into the early to mid-Cold War through the relationship between two of the giants of mid 20th century: Winston Churchill and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The characters in this book will be well known to intelligence officers. Their actions during the 1940s and 1950s

have been detailed in books that focus on their strategic, operational, and tactical decisions and how they used intelligence to the best advantage.^a Individuals more interested in the roles of personalities in military campaigns of WWII will have shelves of books focusing on the Allied generals, including Jordan's own *Brothers, Rivals, Victors*,^b and, more recently, *The Light of Battle: Eisenhower, D-Day and the birth of the American Superpower* by Michel Paradis.^c Jordan's new book spends very little time on the details of these actions in the hot and cold wars of the 1940s and 1950s. Instead, he offers the reader insight into how the relationship between these two men shaped their decisions.

a. Three examples are *Roosevelt and Churchill: Men of Secrets* (Overlook Press, 2000) and *Churchill and the Secret Service* (Overlook Press, 1999), both by David Stafford, and Dino A. Brugioni's *Eyes in the Sky: Eisenhower, the CIA and Cold War Aerial Espionage* (Naval Institute Press, 2011).

b. Jonathan Jordan, *Brothers, Rivals, Victors. Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley and the Partnership that drove the Allied Conquest in Europe* (NAL Caliber, 2012).

c. Michel Paradis, *The Light of Battle: Eisenhower, D-Day, and the Birth of American Superpower* (Mariner Books, 2024).

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Jordan avoids making a long story even longer by skipping details of Eisenhower or Churchill before they first met in 1940. He assumes readers will understand Churchill's challenges in WWI and his robust effort after the war to destroy the early Soviet state. He also offers little on Eisenhower's time as a deputy to MacArthur or as a staff officer for Marshall. Readers not familiar with that background may have trouble understanding why or how either of these men made the decisions they made.

This is a book on grand strategy and the very different views held on the subject by a prime minister who was a product of the 19th century British Empire and had a broad commitment to superpower imperialism and a general officer and president who learned his trade in the hallways of West Point in the 20th century. Nor does this book detail the military decisions Eisenhower and his lieutenants made in battle—except for the fight in February 1943 for the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia (the first major US engagement, a defeat, with the German army and the Battle of the Bulge in Europe in the winter of 1944–45). Intelligence officers will be disappointed that there is only one fleeting reference to the Office of Strategic Services and no reference to its UK counterpart, the Special Operations Executive.

Jordan is equally selective in his Cold War vignettes. He spends time on the creation and expansion of nuclear weapons, the joint US/UK Operation AJAX (Iran, 1953), and Operation PBSUCCESS (Guatemala, 1954), but he leaves out the creation of NATO (1949), Soviet expansion into Poland (1945), the joint UK-US special operations against Albania (1949–54) and intelligence operations during the Greek civil war (1944–49). He spends a good deal of time on US and UK decisions regarding Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal and the aborted Anglo-French-Israeli effort to capture it (Operation MUSKETEEER, 1956) but barely mentions the Hungarian rebellion against Soviet occupation that same year. Including the skipped events might have made the book overly cumbersome, given it now has well over 500 pages.

While the intelligence and courage of his two subjects have captivated Jordan, he is more than willing to show their flaws and foibles. Eisenhower is presented

as a man of two characters—committed to a personal relationship with Churchill and his own general officer colleagues, while he remained able, when he felt a strategic choice demanded, to make decisions Churchill opposed. Jordan is blunt about this:

Ike treasured friendships, but he never let them get in the way of the job/.... In Europe, he had busted and sent home a West Point classmate for loose talk about Overlord's invasion date. He had cut Kay Summersby from his life the way a surgeon wields a scalpel on a growth that might not be benign. He fired his dear friend George Patton for shooting off his mouth one too many times. He humiliated Omar Bradley during the Battle of the Bulge, banished Harry Butcher for penning his memoirs, nearly cut Dick Nixon from the ticket, and disappointed Bettie Smith, the man to whom he owed so much. (447–48).

Like Eisenhower, Churchill was fully capable of compartmenting his personal relationship from his loyalty to Britain. Through his selection of Churchill's own dispatches, letters and diaries, Jordan shows how during the war Churchill did his best to put Britain and his own views first. He would undermine Eisenhower's senior leadership position and, when that would fail because of Eisenhower's relationship with the president and General George Marshall, he would switch to pressing Eisenhower directly for unequal support to British Field Marshall Montgomery. And if seriously disappointed, he would retreat to complain later and perhaps act out in frustration.

Jordan has used a blend of the personal writings of both individuals with diaries of their closest associates and archival material from both British and US archives to present an accurate and vivid assessment of these two men in moments of trial, tragedy, and success. Jordan has drawn out his characters so well that at times the book reads like a novel. For those familiar with the events of the "plot line" of World War II and the early Cold War, Jordan's revelations make the book hard to put down. This is especially true during critical moments like D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, the end of the war, and the Suez Crisis. It reveals a different perspective on US and UK decisionmaking during 1940–61. ■

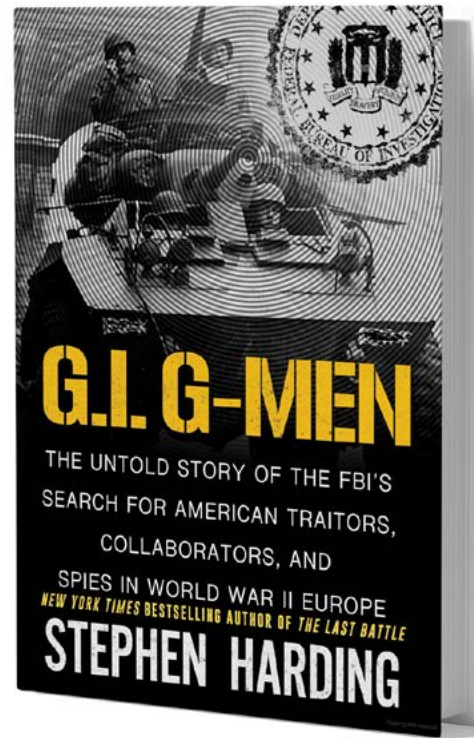
intelligence in public media

G.I. G-Men

The Untold Story of the FBI's Search for American Traitors, Collaborators, and Spies in World War II Europe

Reviewed JR Seeger

Author: Stephen Harding
Published By: Kensington Publ. 2026
Print Pages: 406, photos, bibliography, index.
Reviewer: JR Seeger is a retired CIA officer and frequent contributor to *Studies*.



The challenge for a writer focused on counterintelligence in World War II is to decide which story to tell and from whose perspective. Both the US and UK security and intelligence communities in the 1940s were filled with personal and professional jealousies. Even during the darkest days of the war in Europe and the Pacific, the seniors in these critically important organizations often worked harder to defeat their bureaucratic competitor than the German, Italian or Japanese forces. Anyone who has an interest in these missions and the diverse units involved must accept the old saying: where you stand on an issue is where you sit.

The best advice for a student of this topic is to explore as many different authors and archival sources as possible. Stephen Harding's recent book, *G.I. G-Men*, offers an

excellent insight into FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's effort to expand the FBI into the pre-eminent, worldwide security and counter-espionage organization. He does that through case studies of 22 FBI special agents sent to Europe to find US traitors.

By 1942, US intelligence and security programs were a blend of civilian and military organizations that rarely collaborated, almost never shared information, and were opaque to the White House and the president. Counterintelligence and counterespionage were regularly defined as the same mission. Professional counterintelligence officers in the military and the FBI focused more on finding and prosecuting US traitors than understanding and disrupting Axis intelligence networks. The counterintelligence officers of the Office of Strategic Services

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(OSS/X2) were trained by their British colleagues to think of counterintelligence as a program designed to disrupt and defeat a foreign adversary.

The FBI had a major advantage. Director Hoover had a professional cadre of special agents that had experience conducting transnational investigations. He also had President Roosevelt's approval to conduct counterespionage in the Western Hemisphere. And, the FBI had a formal relationship with both the British Security Service (aka MI5), the office of the British Security Coordination (BSC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). In contrast, the Army and Navy had the counterintelligence charter focusing exclusively on military targets and military personnel.

The youngest organization in the nascent intelligence community was the OSS. By 1943, it had a separate charter to conduct counterintelligence operations in partnership with the UK Secret Intelligence Service (aka MI6) and MI5, both in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) and the China, Burma, India Theatre (CBI).

Stephen Harding's book offers a series of clear case studies of formal treason investigations by FBI agents dispatched in 1944 to the ETO. The book follows a clear outline of three parts:

- Why and how Director Hoover arranged to send special agents into the war zone;
- Specific investigations of the special agents serving in uniform and officially in what the FBI and US Army headquarters called the Army Liaison Unit (ALU); and
- The political wrangling in the ETO and Washington that eventually forced Hoover to pull his men out of the theatre.

Harding is especially good at turning what likely were relatively dry FBI reports into chapters that read like a modern thriller. The special agents' pursuit of some of the American traitors (or *renegades* as Harding describes the individuals) most often started when the Army Criminal Investigative Division or the Army Counterintelligence Corps detained Americans who had been accused by locals of collaboration. These detentions were temporary and the FBI agents had to race to a location, begin their interrogations, and make a recommendation to FBI headquarters and the

Department of Justice whether to charge the individuals with treason. Some cases were relatively simple. The famous US poet Ezra Pound had been directly involved in Fascist broadcasts during the war and fulfilled the predication for a charge of "giving aid and comfort to the enemy."

Other investigations were far less straightforward, and obtaining witness statements and evidence in a war zone were both challenging and high risk operations. In the end, the ALU had 22 agents in the ETO, and Harding provides excellent details on their background, their investigations and their post war careers.

What is missing from the book are detailed discussions of collaboration among the various players in the ETO including CID, CIC, ALU, OSS/X2 as well as OSS/Art Looting Investigative Unit. For example, Harding does not provide any detail about how (or if?) the OSS/X2 files established in the field (both in London and the Army Command headquarters) were passed to the FBI or CIC after OSS was disbanded in 1945 by President Truman.

This book is only about the ALU investigations. It is not a strategic discussion of the FBI counterespionage mission during WWII. For that strategic view, a better choice would be the books of Raymond Batvinis or Leslie Rout and John Bratzel's book, *The Shadow War*. Nor does *GI G-men* even begin to reveal the complex intelligence and counterintelligence operations that were taking place in the ETO among CIC, OSS/X2, and their diverse British allies. Readers looking for a starting point for that discussion should start with Nicholas Reynolds' recent history of US intelligence in World War II.

In sum, one lesson for intelligence professionals from many of these excellent works, including Harding's book, is that US intelligence works best when its various parts cooperate. When the different arms of the community choose not to collaborate against a committed adversary, the chances of success are much lower. ■

John Ehrman's Summer Reads

John Ehrman has been writing articles and reviewing books and film for Studies in Intelligence since 2000.

Dennis Sewell, ***Cromwell's Spy: From the American Colonies to the English Civil War, the Life of George Downing***. Pegasus, 2026. X + 380 pp. Notes, bibliography, index.

George Downing, says Dennis Sewell, was a “spy, a diplomat and a shameless turncoat,” as well as a “liar, blackmailer, seducer and thief, [a] shapeshifter [who] would betray both friends and principles without a moment’s misgiving.” (1, 7) In other words, the perfect subject for an intelligence biography.

We need to start, however, with a caveat for American readers. While most of us know that Oliver Cromwell and his army deposed and then executed King Charles I of England, few on this side of the Atlantic know the details of the years of civil war that had come before, English religious factions, let alone about Cromwell’s diplomacy, the restoration of Charles II, the Anglo-Dutch Wars, and other events that figure prominently in this book. Sewell, writing for an English audience, assumes that his readers will know the players and events, and so provides only brief explanations of who’s who and what’s going on. You may want to keep Google or a printed reference handy as you read, but that should not discourage you. Even though Downing is offstage for much of the book, Sewell’s descriptions of scheming, battles, and gruesome executions will hold your interest.

George Downing was born in Dublin in 1623 to an English barrister but spent most of his childhood in London. The family were well-connected Puritans (Massachusetts Governor John Winthrops was his uncle) and emigrated to Massachusetts in 1638. There, George went to Harvard, where he was in the class of 1642, the college’s first. He then spent the next several years teaching at Harvard and as a seaborne preacher in England’s Caribbean colonies before returning to England toward the end of 1645.

Upon his arrival, Downing became a chaplain in the New Model Army. The First English Civil War was ending but his connections ensured that Downing soon was moving

in the army’s leadership circles, where he remained in his chaplain role through the Second Civil War (1648). This was a time of education for Downing, when he observed high-level politics at close range; it appears likely, though Sewell cannot say for certain, that this is when Downing came to Cromwell’s attention. In any case, Charles was executed in January 1649 and, sometime in the late summer or fall of that year, Cromwell appointed Downing to be Scoutmaster General, as the chief of military intelligence was called. Downing was sent to Edinburgh—during his time as a chaplain, the army had operated in Scotland or the border areas—where he ran agents and used a system of enciphered letters and accommodation addresses to report on the exiled Charles II’s contacts with his Scottish allies.

The Scots in 1650 proclaimed Charles II to be their king and he returned to Edinburgh. Downing soon made the wise decision to depart and went south, where he linked up with the English army that was advancing on Scotland and continued in his intelligence role on Cromwell’s staff. Downing interrogated prisoners and sent reports back to London, though Sewell says he sometimes slanted or omitted important details to avoid making Cromwell look bad. Downing was not, however, simply a desk-bound officer. He was wounded in the Battle of Dunbar, where the Scots suffered a decisive defeat and after which Cromwell’s army took Edinburgh and laid siege to Edinburgh Castle. Unfortunately for the Scots, the commander of the castle’s manservant was an agent of Downing’s and supplied regular reports on the number of soldiers in the castle, ammunition stocks, and the location of the powder stores. Eventually, the castle surrendered without a fight. (A good thing, too—otherwise today Edinburgh would have one less major tourist attraction.)

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Civil war continued until September 1651, when the English again defeated Charles's Scottish army, this time at Worcester. The Royalist cause collapsed, Charles went off to exile in France and, with the need for spies reduced, Downing turned to additional pursuits. He married a much younger woman from a noble, rich, and connected family and his expanded network brought him into a high position in the new Commonwealth government, dealing with military procurements and various diplomatic issues. Downing also took the opportunity to begin making a fortune of his own. The properties of defeated Royalists were liable for confiscation or, alternatively, the owners could pay to avoid seizure. It was a system riddled with corruption and, Sewell notes, "as an intelligence officer, [Downing] would have been privy to knowledge that could be exploited for personal gain." (214) Even with all this going on, Downing still ran agents in Scotland—small rebellions continued to flare up—though by 1655, things were settled enough for him to be elected a Member of Parliament for Edinburgh.

Downing then moved on to the next phase of his career. In the fall of 1655, Cromwell sent him on a diplomatic mission to the Continent where, among other errands, he exchanged intelligence with Louis XIV's chief minister, Cardinal Mazarin. (The two conversed entirely in Latin, fluency in which Harvard had required in Downing's day but regrettably no longer does.) Downing then went on to Geneva, but Sewell is light on the details. His performance must have been satisfactory, however, as in January 1658 Downing was sent to The Hague as Britain's envoy. Once there, in addition to his overt duties, Downing began monitoring the local English Royalists and building networks to penetrate their organizations and plots.

After Cromwell's death in September 1658, England again fell into political turmoil as various factions competed for power. Downing, who Sewell says by now had "developed a carapace of cynicism," began calculating which side to support. (227) The details are sketchy and inconsistent, but it appears that by early 1660 he had thrown in his lot with Charles II, offering to tell what he knew of plots against him. Whatever the exact case, as Charles in May 1660 prepared to return to London from Holland, he bestowed a knighthood on Downing. "Most of the court was as astonished as the wider public," notes Sewell. (266)

No less astonishing was what came next. Several of Downing's Cromwell-era associates and patrons were

executed as regicides by the new regime, but he managed to get himself appointed as a commissioner on the Council of Trade. In April 1661, Downing was on his way back to The Hague for another turn as ambassador. There, says Sewell, Charles gave Downing "an allowance designated for 'intelligence and other private services'... [to be used] to monitor the 'disaffected' British expats." (275) He soon was hunting fugitive regicides in the Netherlands and oversaw the capture and rendition of several. Charles rewarded Downing with promotion to baronet, £1,000 in cash, and a lease on some land in Westminster. Flexible loyalty clearly had its rewards.

Downing continued this frenetic pace through the 1660s. Even as he continued to serve in Parliament and the Council of Trade, Downing was appointed as a Teller of the Exchequer and, later, Secretary to the Treasury. (Lifetime tenure in multiple appointed positions, which came with lucrative salaries, was not uncommon in this period.) In the latter position he advocated for fiscal reforms to place the government on a more stable financial footing (the job also enabled him to collect fees for himself). Downing also was involved in the planning for the British takeover of New Amsterdam in 1664; Downing Street in lower Manhattan, which today runs between 6th Avenue and Varick St., is named for him. Perhaps most important, Downing remained in his position in The Hague where, during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-67), he played his customary role of running well-placed agents and collecting and sending to London timely intelligence on Dutch military and political plans. Downing stayed in The Hague after the war ended but resisted Charles's instructions to foment another conflict. When the Third Anglo-Dutch War nonetheless broke out in 1672, Downing fled to England, where an angry Charles had him locked in the Tower of London for six weeks.

Downing's political career was over and he was fabulously rich, but he had one more venture left before his death in 1684. In 1652, he had purchased a property in London near Green Park and, while he had had to wait 30 years for a tenant to die and Charles II to issue a new lease, Downing in 1682 was able to build a street of townhouses on the land. Today, two houses Downing built on the street he named for himself, Nos. 10 and 11, are the residences of the British prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer, respectively.

Cromwell's Spy is an intriguing book, but ultimately unsatisfactory. Downing certainly was an accomplished

intelligence officer who led a varied and eventful life but, as interesting as Sewell's account is, it often is confusing. He omits or buries many details—you need to look in the footnotes, for example, to learn that when Cromwell “put him on the payroll of military intelligence” it means that he was made Scoutmaster General—that make the narrative hard to follow. (83) More important, whether because Downing and others did not leave much of a written record of his activities, or his and other records have been lost, Sewell generally provides only high-level descriptions of Downing's work and its impact. The details that would be of greatest interest to intelligence readers—how did Downing recruit agents and build and run his networks? How was their intelligence communicated, evaluated, and used? What counterintelligence measures did he employ?—simply are not there. While Sewell gives extensive accounts of the wars and politics of Downing's times, his titular subject remains a cipher and the reader gains little sense of Downing the man, or what he thought about his work or what he believed.^a

Sewell ends by addressing the charges of Downing's contemporaries and earlier biographers that he was

“morally heinous, hypocritical, or cynical,” a turncoat who was “understandably excoriated for capturing regicides and delivering them up for execution.” (310) He was all these things, Sewell acknowledges, but points out that so were a lot of other people in a time of shifting winds and regimes, when one did what one had to do to survive and exploiting high office was a legitimate road to riches. A better defense, however, might be to note that Downing resembles no one so much as Talleyrand, the great French diplomat of the revolutionary, Napoleonic, and Bourbon restoration eras who managed to survive multiple changes of regime (and the scale of whose corruption makes Downing look like a rank amateur). Talleyrand always viewed himself as serving France and its interests, regardless of who was at the top, and Downing may well have seen his actions in the same way.

Cromwell's Spy is a good reminder of the important role that intelligence collection played amid the political, military, and religious turmoil of 17th-century England. As a biography of George Downing, however, it unfortunately falls short and leaves the reader wishing for a much more complete account.



Alex Preston, *A Stranger in Corfu* (Canongate, 2026).

Oliver Harris, *The Shame Archive* (Abacus, 2024).

First it was Mick Herron's *Slow Horses* novels, then Tess Gerritsen's *The Spy Coast* (2023) and Mark Ezra's *A Sting in Her Tale* (2025). We seem to be getting more novels about spies who have retired or been put out to pasture—most of them British, for some reason—than about active spooks.

The latest in this new subgenre is Alex Preston's *A Stranger in Corfu*. It seems that Vidos, a small island just off the larger island of Corfu in the Ionian Sea, is something of a holding pen for MI-6 officers who have been shunted aside, whether for reasons of mental or physical health, internal politics, security problems, or operational failure. Known as “Spyland,” it's a combination retirement home, sanitarium, and prison for those “who because of chance or a single mistake had found their prospects irretrievably scuppered.” As one character

says, the “whole point of this island is that people are put here to be forgotten.”

The story is set in the mid-1990s, though some residents already have been there for decades. The newest arrival is Nina Woolf, who was wounded, captured, and repeatedly raped by the Serbs while she was operating in the former Yugoslavia during the civil wars a few years before. Though she's the daughter of a retired high-ranking MI-6 officer, it is unclear if she has been sent to Vidos to recuperate before returning to London—she sees the resident psychiatrist—or if her sentence is for life.

This being an espionage novel populated by former spies, the past is by no means in the past. Preston uses flashbacks to Oxford immediately after World War II to tell the backstories of several Spyland residents, how they

a. Jonathan Scott, “‘Good Night Amsterdam’. Sir George Downing and Anglo-Dutch Statebuilding,” *English Historical Review*, vol. 118, No. 476 (April 2003): 334-56, provides a good sense of how Downing viewed his work, as well as examples of the small clarifying details that Sewell omits.

are connected to one another, and how they wound up on the island. (Suffice it to say that Kim Philby is heavily involved.) Soon there is a murder, then another. Old plots, betrayals, and deceptions come home to roost and the bodies stack up.

Preston, a British journalist and novelist, is less interested in the nuts and bolts of a good spy story than he is in character exploration and atmospherics. That's actually for the good. Preston's Oxford spy ring doesn't have much credibility—forty-five years on, they're somehow about to take over the British government—even by the standards of espionage fiction. His prose, however, is beautiful and captivating and gives the reader a sense of the loneliness and loss that the exiles on Vidos live with. Nina, moreover, is an admirable character. She's perceptive, self-aware, and resilient; it is she, along with the questions of who's doing the killing and why, who maintains the reader's interest. Alas, despite Nina's best efforts, this is not a story where the good guys win, and the ending is downright depressing.

A Stranger in Corfu is a good espionage novel but not a great one, carried mostly by character insight and the quality of the prose. While it's not the kind of novel you can't put down, you'll likely keep turning the pages. ●

In contrast, *The Shame Archive*, by Oliver Harris, a British writer of crime and espionage novels, is one of those books that grabs you at the start and won't let you put it down.

It seems that MI-6 for decades has been collecting personal papers, phone and email intercepts, and video of hundreds of members of the UK elite—politicians, corporate executives, high-ranking military officers, and even some of its own. It's all stored at Vauxhall under the tightest security imaginable but now, somehow, has started to leak. Marriages and reputations are ruined, the government is collapsing, and suicides and murders are spreading. Elliot Kane, a former MI-6 officer who was involved in collecting the material, races amidst the mayhem to connect the dots and figure out who is behind the campaign.

The Shame Archive is tautly written, if nowhere near as elegantly as *A Stranger in Corfu*. It's a terrific read nonetheless, perfect for a vacation or evenings in a hotel room. As an extra bonus, Harris sprinkles the book with MI-6 terminology and a pretty good description of what it's like to come through the visitor's entrance at Vauxhall. This, along with his descriptions of London and compelling characters, gives the book a realistic sense of place and the stress of an unfolding disaster. ●