



“ALHS! ALHS! Why Are You So OSINT?” Reading Books During Office Hours

by Paolo Caponi

This is not a story for people who cannot digest acronyms. Indeed, it is as if the secret services, generally considered, simply could not do without them. If, as many contend, in the term “military intelligence” resonates the echo of an oxymoron, acronyms may undoubtedly reach the practical goal of saving mental and phonetic energy, killing not less than two birds with a single stone. Applied to secret services and intelligence, acronyms fulfill a double function: they confer an indisputable aura of scientific dignity to what they aim at referring to, and they conceal behind a succession of usually eerie capital letters what they also intend to reveal.

The latter aspect propels us towards the heart of the matter, which is a description of the working methods of a peculiar kind of intelligence consisting in gathering and analyzing data deriving from open sources, i.e. from sources theoretically (and practically) made available to human beings by other human beings. OSINT is the name (or, better, the acronym) meaning “open source intelligence”, an activity that, believe it or not, forms one sector of the contemporary secret services alongside HUMINT (human intelligence, read: 007), SIGINT (signal intelligence), TECHINT (technical intelligence), IMINT, COMINT, ELINT, MASINT... In spite of the paucity of official statistics (after all, we are speaking of secret services), it is generally estimated that the potential of OSINT has not yet been fully exploited (Mercado 2004¹). Naturally enough, OSINT sounds, here again, like a contradiction in terms, since

¹ Many essays from *Studies in Intelligence* are now re-published online on the CIA site, but not always in PDF and/or with the indication of the original page numbers. When not mentioned, the reference is



espionage is not an activity that we habitually associate with the “open” reading of a newspaper, a novel or, even less, a poem. In fact, the bulk and relevance of secreted information about a foreign country that can be filed after a technical, professional reading of open sources, and its proper analysis, is astonishing, and all the more so when limiting the research scope to a pre-Facebook era.

Posing the advent of social networks as an *ante-quem* limit of this essay, the most difficult aspect is to establish when a history of OSINT can be made to begin. If espionage, as has been contended, is the second oldest profession in the world, the origins of a skillful reading of “open sources” loses itself in the night of time. If quoting Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* might seem almost commonplace, one could turn to a much-neglected source from the Elizabethan period, Nicholas Faunt’s “Discourse Touching the Office of Principal Secretary of Estate” (1592), for a revealing, early instance of applied intelligence. Faunt was Sir Francis Walsingham’s secretary from 1580 to circa 1590, and after his honorable service for the Queen’s “spymaster” he wrote this intriguing *vademecum* for his appointed successor. In the same period as Shakespeare’s theatre was echoing the strain with France – with the enemy “advised by good intelligence” against the English, and King Henry V who “hath note of all that they intend, / By interception which they dream not of” (very likely, of ciphered messages) – Faunt described the proper keeping of the “office of principall Secretarie” of a man like Walsingham, “touchinge the private ordering and distribucion of the Charge committed vnto him” (Faunt 1592: 500). In his guidelines, Faunt included the necessity of having “sundrie books of paper” to store and classify data and, among them, books “of discoueries and newe invencions, of discripcions most exactly taken of other Countries as well by mappes and Cardes as by discouringe the present state of their gouernment their alliances dependancs etc. with many other discourses devices plottes, and proiects of sundry natures etc.” (Faunt 1592: 507).

Given the magmatic nature of the flux of information that OSINT entails, however, such fascinating archeology must ruefully be left aside in favor of a practical principle of discrimination. In this essay, the study of OSINT will be restricted to the 20th century and almost exclusively to the English-speaking world and its literary dimension. Indeed, fruitful and mutual cooperation, not to say a real osmosis, has always been the rule rather than the exception between the realms of fictional literature and espionage. This osmosis, however, has gone well beyond the routine recruitment of men of letters by the secret services (Marlowe, Defoe, Graham Greene being only the top of the iceberg), just as it has gone beyond the capitalization of personal involvement in espionage for literary purposes (Ian Fleming *docet*). My purpose is to tackle a rather neglected side of this relationship in general and of OSINT

intended to be <<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies>> (latest access December 2013). I take the opportunity provided by this first footnote to express my gratitude to my friends and colleagues Luigi Bruti Liberati for his historical tips and to Cinzia Scarpino for her help in deciphering NY city geography.



in particular, namely the use made by intelligence of pre-existing, purely fictional artifacts with the purpose of extracting sensitive data from them. This activity is highly controversial in the realm of espionage itself, generating a wide spectrum of responses ranging from the staunchest skepticism – the same that made a former CIA director give a sarcastic definition of OSINT as the “Encyclopedia Britannica factor” (quoted in Keegan 2003: 3) – to unconditional support, given the relatively low costs of OSINT compared to other intelligence activities and, also, given the physiological risks traditionally associated with the habitual employment of 007s. What is noteworthy, however, is that the rise of the novel among the most eligible sources of intelligence activity is a fact that goes beyond the mere historical datum. It tests the flexibility of fiction in what might seem the least obvious of places and speaks in favor of the irreplaceable nature of the human factor as inextricably connected to the glacial gathering of facts. In this peculiar instance of OSINT, the apparently conflicting missions of fiction and intelligence cannot be kept apart, nor is the reading able to make them diverge, regardless of how persistent the attempt or how deep the desire to do so. In spite of the progressive approximation to perfection typical of contemporary mapping and aerial reporting, considerable space is left to a warm interpretation of the flux of technologically-generated pixels, a flux that in itself cannot account for the temporal, kinetic references that are lost. The more TECHINT, or SIGINT, produce in terms of data, the less they offer “in the way of archeology of spaces” (Horn 2003: 74), where space is intended as a palimpsest with different layers of experience inscribed in it. From this point of view OSINT yields a reading that fills the blanks of sheer reproduction, a peculiarly varying interpretation where “Space is rendered intelligible and structured by its representation” (Horn 2003: 74).

1. ASSIGNMENT IN OSINT

To outline a history of literary OSINT is more than a difficult task – it is a wishful thought that clashes with the paucity of data, with the imperatives of concealment that still classify many red-hot files as top secret and, in particular, with the official absence of prescriptive guidelines in this sense. It must be kept in mind that the secret services’ *forma mentis* remained for a long time anchored to the kinetic activities of HUMINT, which accounts for the initial status of the intelligence of open sources as a kind of Cinderella of intelligence itself (Giannuli 2012: 120-121). Research must therefore be carried out by piecing together scraps of evidence and archeological case-studies of novels, or other kinds of fictional artifacts, capable of finding their way through the stratified maze of intelligence reports.

An early source of influence, with traceable effects on the intelligence think-tank, proved to be Erskine Childers’ 1903 novel *The Riddle of the Sands* – in practice, the only reliable knowledge of the British about the Frisian islands before World War I (Deacon



1969: 158²; Keegan 2003: 4; Moran & Johnson 2010: 1-12). Born in London into the upper class and educated at Haileybury College, a school founded to train young men for colonial service in India, Childers was a staunch imperialist who enlisted in the Honourable Artillery Company in 1899 to fight in South Africa against the Boers, where he was shocked at how the British Army, numbering almost half a million soldiers, could take nearly three years to defeat a guerrilla force of roughly 60,000 men (Moran 2010: 8). Upon his return, he therefore resolved to write a kind of fictional war-prophecy intended mainly as propaganda, one that should warn the British against the porosity of their eastern coastal areas as well as against the increasing menace embodied by the German or the “Boche”, that Kiplingian “shameless Hun” who had so appalled him, while in South Africa, for his barefaced support to the Boers. *The Riddle* remained Childers’ only novel, though one that was to prove highly influential among spy-novelists and, more relevantly within the purview of this argument, also among British coeval intelligencers. Transfusing his love for yachting into a mixed compound of facts and fiction (*faction*, in Newspeak), Childers brought to life an utterly unconventional plot in which two patriotic British yachters, the stolid Carruthers and the simpleton Davies, stumble upon a German plan to invade Britain from the East Anglian coast while they are duck-shooting off the Frisian Islands. Traditional in its forms and structures, prefaced, post-scripted and fictionally edited by an “E. C.” telling how Carruther’s story came into his possession, featuring an odd couple of civilians drawn into an international war-plan much larger than their lives, *The Riddle* combines the best maritime literary tradition with an evocative description of muddy and frozen landscapes, of a Northern no-man’s land which unexpectedly offers a chance of redemption, and even of heroism, to two defeated, self-exiled loners temporarily alienated from the fashionable urban routine. After a good deal of adventures, both for the characters aboard the *Dulcibella* and for the author (forced by Reginald Smith of “Smith, Elder & Co.” to insert a love-story out of the blue to make the novel more palatable to the increasing female reading public), Carruthers and Davies foil the German plan and save their country from a D-Day. In case things were not altogether clear, Childers thought it well to provide a lengthy editorial epilogue where he sums up the contents of a ciphered document, lying on his “study-table [...] of a confidential memorandum to the German Government embodying a scheme for the invasion of England by Germany” (Childers 1995: 275).

Instantly greeted by public and critical acclaim (three editions in that same 1903 plus a cheap “penny packet” issue that alone sold more than 100,000 copies, as well as a number of distinguished admirers among whom Rudyard Kipling – Moran 2010: 10), *The Riddle of the Sands* stands as a powerful and famous instance of OSINT. *In primis*, a great deal of interest arose from the four maps of the North Sea and the Frisian archipelago that Childers, a passionate sailor in a pre-Googlemap era, succeeded in

² Richard Deacon was the pseudonym of the British journalist George Donald King McCormick (11 December 1911-2 January 1998), a co-worker for a period with Ian Fleming at the *Sunday Times*.



preserving from the surgical cuts that Smith wanted to perform. A point repeatedly made in *The Riddle* is “the prehistoric rottenness of the English charts” (Childers 1995: 76) compared to the “German charts of excellent quality” (Childers 1995: 93), both included in the scanty dotation of the *Dulcibella* but only the latter, Carruther explains, “to use in practice” (Childers 1995: 126). Lowering his head before the sentimental turn imposed to the novel by the publisher, Childers saved his updated cartographic materials from oblivion and showed his strategic proficiency disclosing, with depth indications, pilotage routing and topographical details, the tellurian sands and archipelagos of the North Sea mudflats. Some ten years later, the Director of the Naval Intelligence Division, William Reginald Hall, was said to be disappointed at realizing that British cartographic intelligence of the North Sea had not progressed since Childers’ times (Deacon 1969: 158), but it is doubtful whether Childers’ accurate survey of the islands could have been significantly bettered before the advent of satellite monitoring. If Childers’ maps were intended as a visual backup to the reader, who is indeed induced to follow the yachters’ route through the archipelago and so experience that precise correspondence between fiction and data that is Childers’ flagship (“All went well till we were off Wangeroog, the last of the islands – *here* – and then it began to blow really hard. I had half a mind to chuck it and cut into the Jade river, *down there*” [...], 68; italics in the original), they also aimed at demonstrating the liability of the British at a possible, foreign invasion from the Vikings.

While *The Riddle* was still making its way through the meanders of British intelligence, Childers was invited to lunch by Captain Charles Ottley, of the Naval Intelligence Division, who asked him for a supplement (which he received) of nautical charts. Some of the big boys in the NID pored over *The Riddle* in search of sensitive data, and although Lord Louis Battenberg, then head of NID, declared it “rubbish” as a “war plan”, a couple of experts were sent to reconnoiter the Frisian Coast to prove the feasibility of the German plan as envisaged by Childers (Moran & Johnson 2010: 11). In 1906, Childers was contacted by Francis Gathorne-Hardy from the War Office Staff College, who submitted to the author a series of questions from which it was evident that the novel had been scanned in search of geostrategic intelligence. One of the questions was about the possible removal of the several buoys mentioned in *The Riddle* since its publication date (Moran & Johnson 2010: 12). *The Riddle* soon became the staple diet for anyone involved in naval policy or espionage, as attested by the fact that in April 1908 the Admiralty ordered 117 copies for use in its Fiction Libraries. Four years later, the War Office issued a secret handbook entitled *The Special Military Resources of the German Empire*, which still praised Childers’ novel and highly recommended it as background reading for British agents (Moran & Johnson 2010: 12).

At the beginning of the 20th century the Admiralty web of fiction libraries was something more than a repository of literary curio. Before Pearl Harbor, specialized libraries in American and English intelligence departments could count on only a few



reference works and some of the best items were works of fiction (May 1995).³ In the long run this may possibly be at the root of the CIA's professional decision to organize a special spy-fiction library in Langley, the fourth part of a total which also comprised, in 1964, a special library storing biographic and industrial intelligence, a document center, and also the flagship of the times, the electronic brain WALNUT (Wise & Ross 1964: 239). The spy-fiction section (once housed, before Langley, in the old Christian Heurich Brewery near the State Department) contained "thousands of past and current mystery and spy stories" (Wise & Ross 1964: 240). Among them, William Somerset Maugham's close-knit collection of short stories *Ashenden: Or the British Agent* (1928) reportedly played a part as a prototype handbook for the Anglo-American spy (May 1995). In the years of *Ashenden*, an important part of the Allies' OSINT activity was done "on location" by several *attachés*, "the Army's eyes and ears abroad in the days before satellite photography and sophisticated electronic intelligence collection techniques" (Koch 1995). Given their importance, however, their training and linguistic proficiency was often unsatisfactory. When an *attaché* arrived at his new post he faced obstacles concerning rank, language, money, and his relationship with the local ambassador. It is a given fact that MID "gradually addressed the first, was ambivalent to the second, was powerless to do anything about the third, and left the fourth to the personality of the *attaché* himself" (Koch 1995). After his recruitment in Wiesbaden in 1930 Leslie Nicholson, an early SIS spy in Czechoslovakia, was taught some basic notions of cryptography and book-accounting; when he finally met his senior contact in Vienna and asked to be briefed on the technicalities of his spying work, he was told he had to find them out for himself (Andrew 1985: 32). A recurrent problem in the *attaché's* reports was that of their being written without knowing precisely what Washington, or London, needed and expected – a consequence of the *attaché's* elementary training based mainly on codes and finances without any kind of writing instructions. "Picture a hemisphere situation arising which necessitates the United States sending the assistance of an expeditionary force", an exasperated Col. J. A. Crane explained once to a military *attaché* in Cuba, "Picture yourself as the Commanding General of this force. Then ask yourself what information you and your staff *must* have before you can make intelligence plans for the expedition" (Koch 1995).

In such a context, a well-documented novel of espionage allegedly based on real-life incidents could appear as a Polar Star in the field of early spy-training. As Maugham himself declared, he had modeled the character of John Ashenden on his old persona, i.e. on his sporadic experiences in the espionage during World War I when he served in the Secret Service (letter to Paul Dottin, quoted in Morgan 1980: 313). His memories were so vivid that Winston Churchill dissuaded the author from including 14 stories from the final selection on the basis that they violated the Official Secrets Act,

³ Earnest. R. May (1928-2009) was an American historian who served on the 9/11 commission and highlighted the failures of the government intelligence agencies. For page references, see note 1.



that kind of vow of silence for ex-spies to which we will be obliged to return later. During the 20's, Maugham had performed his spying duties in Switzerland under cover as a writer living in a neutral country to complete a play, while his main task was to keep an eye on a German fellow-writer who was filing secreted documents to the UK (Calder 1989: 135). The fact that this surveillance had to be carried out in total secrecy, while both men knew of each other, may have contributed to that sense of the ridiculous that sometimes accompanies spying activities in the stories, activities defined by Maugham in his introduction "extremely monotonous" and "uncommonly useless" (Maugham 1977: 7) and that made him venture to think that "at all counts in England it is the first time anyone has written of the business who knew anything about it" (letter to Paul Dottin, quoted in Morgan 1980: 313). What permeates his stories is a strong meta-fictional element and a recurrent sensation of the writer and the spy sharing the same destiny, essentially that of compulsive devisers of fiction whereby the chronic absence of data and meaning in reality is filled. When Ashenden's Chief of Staff "R" grows suspicious of a Swiss agent's reporting activity, he sends Ashenden to investigate, only to discover that the Swiss Gustav is not in Germany as he should be but comfortably sitting at home. It turns out that the unquestionable, and perhaps precisely for this, highly suspect, quality of Gustav's reports actually derives from beer-hall gossip and OSINT reading of German newspapers, all arranged in a coherent narrative which works only too well *in absentia* of the spy's physical presence. "Did you think I was such a fool as to risk my life for fifty pounds a month? I love my wife", is Gustav's explanation (Maugham 1977: 126-127).

Unlike *The Riddle of the Sands*, however, *Ashenden* has not left a luminous trail through the meanders of the British Secret Service, nor does it leave us clues as to the possible "intelligent" reading practices that it is so frequently said to have prompted. Although *Ashenden* clearly recommends, among many other things, not to trust blonds, especially if the agent is carrying important brief-cased documents with him; how advisable it is to refer to the head of British intelligence only by an initial; how to grow suspicious of Swiss neutrality; how to trust well-bred and not yet decolonized Indians; and how useful it is, for a spy, to regularly tip hotel porters, we are left to conjecture as to how this book of instructions was actually *read*, if at all, by budding British and American 007s. It is true that a fellow intelligencer of Maugham, and later also writer, Alfred E. W. Mason, declared he had taken his idea of feigning himself an entomologist while in Mexico during World War II directly from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Deacon 1969: 217), but this is admittedly too scanty a reference for us to outline a theory, if one does actually exist, of the early spies' *modus operandi* as derived from fictional books.

Like *Ashenden*, and even more so, Helen Clark MacInnes' *Assignment in Brittany* (1942) boasts an OSINT pedigree. For what it's worth, however, private Donald Burgett makes no mention of it in his memoirs of his life with the so-called "Screaming Eagles", a newly formed Airborne Division parachuted behind enemy lines in 1944 Normandy,



even though he clearly remembers how, while in Torquay for his training, he was regularly shown aerial photographs, maps and plastic models of Northern France (to the point that he could draw a map of the area by heart – Burgett 1967: 78-79). His daily intelligence briefing went to the lengths of including detailed information about a German commander in chief who rode a white horse and had a very good time with a French female teacher then living near a German Camp in Deauville, but still there is no reference, in his candid book, of any OSINT activity involving novels (Burgett 1967: 74-79). What recurs in the various net-forums of our day is the talk of the grapevine about *Assignment in Brittany* being required reading for Allied intelligence agents sent to work with the French Resistance against the Nazis, in spite of the absence of concrete evidence in this respect. If the BBC, recruited in preparation for the landing on the Normandy coast, officially appealed for holiday pictures and snapshots of France to help create detailed geological maps of the area, it has seemed more than reasonable to think that the details of the Breton countryside, the seacoast villages, and even the behavior of their inhabitants so vividly described in MacInnes' novel had to be subjected to a close reading in search of sensitive, and sensible, data. The first chapter of parachuting into Brittany, or the following ones when the agent goes around with an assumed identity, are so minutely detailed in their technicalities as to fuel the myth of the novel as being a part of the training for paratroopers in the military as well as for Allied personnel who would be working covertly in German-occupied France. In fact, all this appears to be related more to MacInnes' life than to her novel's afterlife.

Assignment in Brittany was not properly a literary success, though its patriotism granted it a more than decent reward from the movies. And it was a professional piece of work, not an amateurish one, the third item in a long list of novels from a prolific Scottish-American woman author of espionage who could rely on first-rate sources for her stories thanks to her marriage to Gilbert Highet, who served as a British intelligence agent in addition to working as a classics scholar. It was her husband who, after reading his wife's notebook analyses and predictions based on newspaper cuts of Nazi activities, encouraged her to attempt her first novel, *Above Suspicion* (1941) – a story, suspiciously enough, about a young Oxford couple who regularly pass their summers in Europe (just like MacInnes and Highet did) and as such "above suspicion" and hence ideal to be used as amateur spies. Indeed, the relation between the flesh-and-bone Highets and Anglo-American intelligence was mutual and reiterated, although the details of their cooperation seem to be purportedly left in the dark by an unseen hand. Both Glaswegians, Highet and MacInnes attended Glasgow University which they left with, among other things, uncommon proficiency in German later enhanced by their frequent visits to Germany in the 1930s. Reportedly, it was their disillusionment about the British policy against Hitler that led them to embrace the US as their new home in the late 1930s and early 1940s and, ultimately, to settle there and to become American citizens. At the outbreak of World War II, Highet joined the British



Army to become one of those British officers overseas who never served in combat, being employed full-time in intelligence operations. According to his son, he worked in New York City's Rockefeller Center, engaged in a joint Anglo-American counterintelligence operation run by the Canadian Counterintelligence (Highet 2002: 391). A small brains trust was created there of bright Oxford dons and their friends, together with cosmopolitan young Britons who had travelled extensively before the war including, interestingly enough, Ian Fleming and Ivor Bryce, the latter passing into history thanks to a copy of James Bond's *Birds of the West Indies* that he owned and placed by Fleming's bedside during a stay at Bryce's house in the Bahamas (Highet 2002: 391). At the Rockefeller Center, Highet seems to have periodically submitted psychological profiles of Nazi leaders (though how useful they were, it is difficult to guess) and was certainly engaged in OSINT activities, since his son clearly remembers their Princeton house filled with a collection of German magazines showing the war "from the German point of view", with particular concern for the campaign in Russia ("how my father had acquired so many I never knew, but they must have had a clandestine provenance" – Highet 2002: 396). What is certain is that, while his wife was ascending the ladder of literary notoriety – also being called to Washington to reveal her sources after her portrayal of the Polish Resistance to the Nazis in her 1944 novel *While Still We Live* (Baker 1974) – Highet's intelligence work became increasingly focused on Latin America, notoriously a nest – especially Chile, Paraguay, and Argentina – of pro-German sympathies. *Assignment in Brittany*, centering around a British agent parachuted into Brittany in the summer of 1940 to impersonate a Breton Nationalist whom he closely resembles, thanks to the protagonist's adventures gathers detailed information about fortifications and military activity in an area not geographically remote from the one soon to be chosen for D-Day. Because of the previously mentioned British Official Secrets Act, however – to which Highet felt tied for all his life, in spite of his becoming an American citizen in 1951 – the extent of his feeding his wife scraps of intelligence remains basically unverifiable, though – *pace* the heirs' protests – highly probable. What remains, in the end, is nothing more than the rough material for a tantalizing spy-story involving a distinguished professor and wife, just waiting for the Hollywood touch – the vicissitudes of a mysterious, powerful, and potentially dangerous couple with a secret life behind two most respectable facades, treasuring a myriad of invaluable secrets buried, possibly forever, with them.

2. ALHS! ALHS!

The 1941 Pearl Harbor debacle had, if anything, the effect of highlighting the importance of steady, professional intelligence activity. As Sherman Kent, a top executive of Watergate-era CIA and author of the classic *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (1949), once admitted, "In 1941, the number of people who had



had prior intelligence experience and who at the same time were available for new government assignments in intelligence was very small [...]. Intelligence was to us at that period really nothing in itself" (Kent 1955: 1).

With the end of World War II, a debate took place among the NATO countries, and especially in the English-speaking world, as to whether to maintain the secret services in full activity or to afford them only a kind of limited, peacetime funding. The first option prevailed, a consequence and at the same time a cause of the Cold War paranoia, and the budget of the newly born CIA began to be conveniently, and increasingly, shrouded in mystery. Hence the maddening proliferation of acronyms, and hence the official birth of OSINT as a branch of intelligence activity to be carried out alongside, notwithstanding, and sometimes even in spite of, other acronym activities such as HUMINT, SIGINT and so forth.

A sign of the times, as well as decisive progress in OSINT is documented, albeit incidentally, by Fleming's second episode in the James Bond's epic, *Live and Let Die* (1954). Here OSINT proves to be a basic ingredient in the staple diet of spies as well as a narrative intimation of verisimilitude. Momentarily absconding to Jamaica under the protective wings of CIA and MI6, and almost ready to launch the final attack on Harlem's prince Mr. Big, Bond thinks it well to refine his training by carrying out extensive research on sharks, barracudas and all kind of sea predators that infest the deep marine valley between himself and Mr. Big's yacht. While waiting to receive from London "all the dope they can get from the Natural History Museum" (Fleming 1957: 179), Bond begins his OSINT work poring over "the books [...] borrowed from the Jamaica Institute" (186). Fleming's prose makes it clear that, in this case, Bond's activity goes far beyond the routine gathering of preliminary information for his next mission, involving instead systematic research based on scientific premises that appears, at this point of the saga, perfectly in tune with Bond's character and professionalism. Bond's sources accurately discriminate between "books on the tropical sea and its denizens" written "by the naturalists" (Fleming 1957: 186-7) and books "on sub-marine hunting" (186), and combine narrative reports by renowned oceanographers of the times like "Beebe and Allyn [...] Cousteau and Hass" (Fleming 1957: 186) with the latest results of US Naval Research Laboratory tests on shark repellents (Fleming 1957: 192) which Fleming could easily have stowed away during his times as a British naval intelligencer. If "The facts set out by the naturalists", Bond decides, "were chilling and awe-inspiring [...] the experiences of Cousteau in the Mediterranean and of Hass in the Red Sea and Caribbean were more encouraging" (Fleming 1957: 187). Bond's approach is composite and stratified, and if he recognizes that many of his books do not go beyond the "practical lore" (Fleming 1957: 192) picked up from his local guide Quarrel, he also reads out to him a long passage from the US tests to prove the fruitfulness of integrating empirical knowledge and scientific observation (Fleming 1957: 193). Unlike the artifact pedigree of French towns such as Royale-les-Eaux in *Casino Royale* (1953), with its renowned mineral water typically sold in torpedo-shaped bottles, all the



oceanographers cited here by Fleming are real, and were all alive and kicking in his times: “Beebe” is Charles William Beebe (1877-1962); “Allyn” alludes very likely to Allyn C. Vine (1914-1994); Hans Hass (1919-2013) was the first to employ systematic photo-monitoring in his dives while Jacques Cousteau’s fame has reached our times unaltered as one of the most famous popularizers of marine science. *Live and Let Die* adopts this highly invasive, decidedly conjunctive pattern, featuring a hybrid *mise en abîme* that outlines the by then habitual protocol of behavior for British spies stranded in alien and hostile contexts. Unfortunately, all the narratives centering around pirate Morgan and his treasure, also present in the novel and indeed essential to diegesis, do not rely on similar, identifiable written forms, surviving, so to say, only in the oral narratives of “M” in London and Strangways in Jamaica, even though their show of knowledge implies extensive, *ad hoc* documentation of Morgan’s vicissitudes. In this case, the texts relate metonymically to the coins of Morgan’s epic treasure that appear in the least obvious of places and rely, for their value and interpretation, on solid historical premises that we, as well as Bond, can only infer.

It is, however, in the quasi-mythical character of that CIA professional reader famously code-named “Condor” that OSINT finds its monument. The aura of myth here derives from the fact that OSINT is given, for the first time, the full credit that up to that point could only be surmised by wary model citizens and passers-by. In this case, the eclectic nature of the approach is justified by the tripartite nature of the “text”, in the sense that Jim Grady’s seminal 1974 novel *Six Days of The Condor*, Semple and Rayfiel’s stratified screenplay, and Sydney Pollack’s 1975 instant box-office success *Three Days of the Condor*, all cooperate in founding that kind of transmedial epos so typically capable of addressing the most convoluted social dynamics of the 70’s. From the *Condor* macrotext, OSINT emerges in all its prismatic, hidden-in-plain-sight nature, one inextricably connected with its geography both in the sense of its very peculiar spatial forefront (ALHS, or American Literary and Historical Society) and of its planetary areas of interest and fallout. And if, given the fictional nature of the entire process, a residual suspension of disbelief as to the magnitude of the intelligence activity involved might persist, Grady’s recent memoir of his love affair with Condor (the character) dissipates once and for all the mist of very unreasonable doubts.

The *Condor* story-line famously revolves around a CIA “reader” at the ALHS who, like his co-workers, sifts through literature, comics, magazines etc. for plots to be plugged into the CIA computer (hence the imperative of code-names), both to see if the Agency has a similar operation under way and to supply ideas for future plans. One rainy day, it is his turn to get lunch for everybody in the house and sneaks out the back-way to the restaurant, only to return a few minutes later and find all his co-workers murdered. Condor spends his next few days hiding and trying to unravel the reasons for the carnage. With the help of a woman he at first kidnaps, he dodges the team of assassins hired to exterminate his CIA section and realizes that everything is happening because one of his reports (in the novel it is one of his colleagues’ report)



has uncovered a secret government plot. The endings differ widely from novel to film: the end of the novel “had guys parachuting down with Sten guns and big cannons and heroin and the kind of stuff that didn’t excite me personally”, Robert Redford said, remembering the pre-production period of *Three Days of the Condor*. “But in the middle was a great concept, about a guy struggling to deal with a situation he cannot understand. It was basically about paranoia, and that did grab me” (Callan 2011: 221). The transfer process from page to screen indeed involved a fair amount of changes, *in primis* the shrinking of the six original Condor days of the chase into three since, Pollack explained to Grady, he “couldn’t show Redford on the run for six days and nights” (Grady 2011: 424⁴). Another major change was substituting oil for the heroin cover-up (a new element, allegedly Redfordian, in tune with the environmental stance he was taking in Utah), and Condor’s final turning over of his story to *The New York Times* as an extreme profession of faith in the boulevards of democracy *malgré tout*. Also the character’s name changes, from the symmetric, nerd-like Ronald Malcolm to the more unbalanced Joe Turner (curiously enough, one of the readers’ names in the commando’s black list, Martin Bishop, will recur in Redford’s filmography from then on). What passes unaltered through the stages of the adaptive process is Condor’s job, his – and his colleagues’ – precise OSINT assignment in that anonymous, brownstone townhouse:

TURNER

Listen. I work for the CIA. I’m not a spy. I read mystery novels, adventures, journals, everything published all over the world. We feed the plots – dirty tricks, codes anything – into a computer, to check against actual CIA Plans and Operations. We look for leaks. Or new ideas.

(no response)

Who’d invent a job like that?

(he reads her expression)

You’re right: a lunatic! ... One probably did invent it... but it wasn’t me...

(Semple & Rayfiel 1975: 55).

As already said, what could initially appear as the product of a young writer’s fertile, lunatic imagination turned out in the long run to be a quite accurate scrutiny of a very special intelligence activity. Three years before his first, and almost only, literary output, James Grady had been a twenty-one-year-old trainee journalist on the Washington staff of Democratic Senator Lee Metcalf. Every workday in Washington he walked past a ghostly, white stucco townhouse with a bronze plaque by the front-door that said American Historical Association, without ever seeing anyone go in or out. In the mind of a young wannabe writer of spy-fiction, as he defined himself, this

⁴ In this case, the number does not refer to the page but to the “position” in the 2011 kindle edition of the *Six Days of The Condor*, the only place where Grady’s “Confession” has appeared so far.



habitual, bleak sight was enough to form the nucleus of a spy-fiction about a dilapidated CIA front, a nucleus that began to acquire an even more definite outline on hearing that another “gray concrete building with an always-lowered lowered garage door and a windowless, locked, unlabeled entrance” that “crouched on Pennsylvania Avenue amidst restaurants, bookstores, and bars just three blocks from the Capitol and the House of Representatives’s office buildings” was actually one of the secret “translation centers” of the FBI (Grady 2011: 117).

Very special credit here should be granted to Grady, since he is one of the very, very few authors to recognize the leap forward made by the film with respect to his novel, “elevated and enhanced” by the adaptation process (Grady 2011: 430). Pollack’s film detains, among many other things, the unquestionable merit of making ALHS visible, both from the outside and the inside, with those computers scanning books, and those punch-card terminals and modems only slightly less than science-fictional in 1975. Essentially because of Redford’s very full agenda (he was also on Alan Pakula’s set for *All the President’s Men* in Washington, while his wife and two children lived in New York) the location of the novel was changed from Washington to New York, where a two-story, white stucco townhouse in the rather posh upper east side, at number 55 on 77th street, was chosen for ALHS – indeed, a very respectable façade for a CIA hiding-in-full-view front in the Watergate era, compatible with the CIA offices in “New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Miami, Pittsburgh, Houston, St. Louis, New Orleans, Seattle, Denver and Minneapolis” listed by Wise and Ross in 1967, “whose phone numbers, but not their addresses, appear[ed] in the telephone book”. Among them, Zenith Technical Enterprises, Inc., in Miami (Wise & Ross 1967: 142, note).

The peculiar quality of the Condor storyline is, however, remarkable in two ways. If, on the one hand, it is typically rooted in the paranoia-ridden world of the 70’s and in its surroundings, on the other it looks forward to the increasing spread of similar places, and jobs, in geography and literature. In Don De Lillo’s *White Noise* (1985), Dana Breedlove is a secret agent who reviews novels for the CIA in search of embedded codes; in Ed Mc Bain’s *Money Money Money* (2001), the CIA front is a publishing house; in Robert Muchamore’s *Mad Dogs* (2007), Condor reappears for a cameo in an insane asylum, not to mention Redford’s own late reappearance in the guise of a CIA intelligencer in *Spy Game* (2001; here, Bishop is the name of Brad Pitt’s character). Even a flesh-and-blood assassin dressed as a mailman in D.C. Beltway, in 1980, could not exclude having been inspired by *Three Days of the Condor* for his mission (Grady 2011: 458). None of these apocrypha can compete, however, with the old KGB generals’ copycat reaction to the screening of *Condor* when, after watching the film, they realized they were not putting enough effort into analytic work. At the time when addresses and phone numbers were difficult to obtain in Russia because there were still few public directories, Sergei Tretyakov was then a brilliant young Soviet intelligence officer recruited to work for NIIRP, a Russian acronym standing for the



rather nonsensical All-Union Scientific Research Institute of System Analysis located in Flotskaya Street, Moscow. Thanks to Sergei's subsequent defection to the US (followed by the inevitable publication of a memoir of his old days with the KGB, which in turn followed the habitual reluctance of the journalist to edit and publish it), we can catch a glimpse of a day of authentic routine work at a deliberately inflated Russian replica of ALHS. Unfortunately enough for our purpose, Sergei was not assigned to the fictional section, but to monitor NATO, meaning that he had to work his way through "a stack of at least fifty newspapers and other publications from U.S. and European cities [...] waiting for him when he reported each morning" (Earley 2008: 39). It is, however, a remarkable instance of real OSINT, one of those extremely rare breaches in the security walls of intelligence that satiate the needs of our reality principle and allow us to imagine, if not properly see, a real plethora of analysts at work on Western fictional literature and journalism (forcibly including in their number such bulwarks of capitalism as *Playboy* magazine – Earley 2007: 38). According to Sergei, KGB instructors at NIIRP were extremely deficient as to the principles of reading, extracting and analyzing useful information from public sources, and apparently based their theory on derivative knowledge of CIA analysis. "Our instruction", said Sergei, "was all about the CIA and what it was doing. We were told its analysts looked for scraps of information – maybe a new railroad station opening in Siberia or a new movie theatre under construction that could seat eight hundred people. Because there was nothing else in these desolate Siberian areas except polar bears and wolves, they'd know they'd found the location of a Soviet military base. Why else would you need a rail station or movie theater there?" (Earley 2008: 39). Among his case studies, the most fictional one had to do with the creative profiling of François Mitterrand. Sergei was responsible for uncovering compromising material and began collecting skeletons using French and European publications that dated back to World War II. Among other things, his report identified, one wonders why, what sort of woman would be most likely to seduce Mitterrand as regards to hair color, height, weight, bust size, and personality (Earley 2008: 41).

Sergei left NIIRP in 1984 to become a KGB lieutenant and then a spy for the Americans from his privileged position of overseer of all covert operations for SVR intelligence in New York City (i.e. for the Foreign Intelligence Service, known by its Cyrillic initials, SVR). From the US, he could contemplate the crumbling to pieces of his warm old KGB niche and, with it, the progressive dismantling of the plethora of 2000 Russian employees recruited to aggrandize Condor's CIA front. What there was of NIIRP "literary" OSINT, and of the Western novels read as repositories of sensitive data that went with it, we would probably never know. Like the *Es* in Freud's conception of unconscious, OSINT speaks only diagonally to the productive centers of intelligence and its activity can only be surmised by its effects, typically differing in time and disfigured by the invasive, retrospective activity of analysis. If a proper archeology of OSINT during the Cold War should aim at bringing the *Ich wo Es war*, to continue in



Freud's jargon, the researcher must be prepared to deal with reticence and the testy refusal to come to terms with one's own past. What remains is, once more, the frustrating perception of what it is still *not* to be known.

It happens this way.

It is the first sunny day of spring, along the upper east side in 77th street, NY. The white stucco townhouse has gone through some considerable restyling but it is still perfectly in touch with the architecture of the area.

It is still there.

No fence anymore, but some vases. And the TV camera. On the doorphone a single entry, "Private house". No ALHS. A young man in a kind of a uniform is idly walking right there, as if he were slowly approaching me in slowly diminishing circles. I ask him if he works in the "Private House". He says he works in the adjacent townhouse and no, he adds rather amused, he didn't know that precisely that "Private House" was the setting for Robert Redford's massacre scene in Condor. Sorry.

Another five minutes and a very tall young woman, wearing a kind of brace I hadn't seen in years, comes out of ALHS. Out of it. She is very polite, she smiles, she thinks that the villa has changed several owners but now, she thinks, it's in the hands of a single one. Only I didn't ask about this. And she didn't know about the film, either. Robert Redford, who?

I'm making myself rather noticeable now and I better get going. After all, it is a CIA front. I still have a lot of questions about the place but I better keep them for another time.

For that day.





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