

## Course Syllabus

### The Culture of Intrigue: Modernism and the National Security State

In *The Spy Story*, John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg characterize the modern era as the “Age of Clandestinity,” suggesting that the figure of the spy has, in effect, become the archetypal modern subject. In addition to living in an increasingly cosmopolitan world dominated by high-tech gadgets and sophisticated technologies of surveillance, we constantly find ourselves negotiating multiple identities, traversing the border between public and private spheres, and attempting to reconcile individuality with bureaucratic collectivity. Within this context, the spy story becomes more than a mere “entertainment.” While some narratives of espionage and intrigue reinforce nationalist ideologies and offer illusory fantasies of agency, others work to critique the very concepts of secrecy and security. Taking into consideration a variety of novels, memoirs, poems, and films, *The Culture of Intrigue* examines the way spying intervenes in culture and vice versa. More specifically, this course focuses on the manner in which the arts and humanities have simultaneously witnessed and participated in the machinations of the secret state from the early twentieth century to the present day. From the British secret service’s recruitment of writers in the First World War to the CIA’s manipulation of arts and letters during the Cold War *Kulturkampf*, “intelligence” has conspired with imagination, troubling the divide between fact and fiction, history and fantasy. By investigating these intersections of aesthetics and politics, we may better understand the modernist parallels and postmodern implications of twenty-first-century security issues, from the War on Terror to the emergence of WikiLeaks.

### Assignments

Students will complete four assignments over the course of the semester: an in-class presentation on a primary text and three essays. In addition, students will also receive a participation grade based on attendance and the completion of five informal responses to readings and viewings (posted the day before class on our class website; students may choose to scatter these five responses as they see fit).

#### Class presentation:

On the first day of class, students will sign up to give presentations on the primary texts (one or two students per week). Presentations will take approximately fifteen minutes. Essentially, students will offer their “take” on the given text—for example, they may wish to historically contextualize the work based on additional research or offer a critical argument/interpretation—and then lead a whole-class discussion based on their prepared questions.

#### Papers 1 and 2:

The first two papers will be critical analyses (5-7 pages) based on one of several essay prompts that I will provide two weeks before the due date. For example, students will have the option in Paper 1 of analyzing a film adaptation of one of our readings—such as Hitchcock’s film version of Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Comparing and contrasting the book and film, students will construct an argument about the politics of adaptation itself. What significance should we attach to the filmmaker’s alterations? How do the technical properties of cinema (music, sound, lighting, etc.) both reinforce and undermine the novel’s themes?

Paper 3:

The final paper will be a research assignment (7-10 pages) in which students will argue that one of the texts from our class speaks to—or sheds light on—a current issue. For example, how might Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* shed light on contemporary terrorism?

**Grading**

Class Presentation	10%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	25%
Paper 3	30%
Participation	15%

**13-Week Syllabus**

**Week 1, The Heroic Tradition**

Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans"  
John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

**Weeks 2-3, The Ironic Tradition**

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*  
*Sabotage* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock)

**Week 4, Spy Poetry**

W. H. Auden, "Missing," "The Secret Agent," "The Questioner Who Sits So Sly," "Half Way,"  
"His Excellency," and excerpts from *The Orators*  
*Cambridge Spies* (dir. Tim Fywell; episodes 1 and 2 required; episodes 3 and 4 optional)

**Weeks 5-6, A Case for the Traitor**

Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*  
Rebecca West, excerpts from *The Meaning of Treason*

**Weeks 7-8, On Her Majesty's Secret Service**

Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love*  
Skip Willman, "The Kennedys, Fleming, and Cuba: Bond's Foreign Policy" from *Ian Fleming and the Cultural Politics of 007*  
*From Russia with Love* (dir. Terence Young)

**Weeks 9-10, The Cold**

John le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*  
*The Third Man* (dir. Carol Reed)

**Weeks 11-12, The Campus**

Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*  
*The Good Shepherd* (dir. Robert de Niro)

**Week 13, Whistleblowers**

*We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks* (dir. Alex Gibney)

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julian Assange, “In Conversation with Julian Assange”

Excerpts from “Espionage Act and the Legal and Constitutional Issues Raised by WikiLeaks,”

Hearing before the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary