

Emotion and Espionage

in

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold

by

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In the world of espionage, what is morally acceptable or justifiable is often a controversial argument. Intelligence agencies quite frequently require their agents to perform gruesome tasks which cause ethics and morals to be tested. When men and women are put in situations that cause their perception of right and wrong to be inverted, their emotions erupt and passionate thinking overcomes the logical. In John le Carrè's , The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, the characters encounter situations where they must alter their morals in order to accomplish a more important task. Some of these spies allow emotion to interfere with their judgement, and consequentially, are placed in very dangerous situations – some that lead to death. However, some of the spies are able to repress those moral convictions and remain emotionless. Therefore, I would argue, that in order to survive in the

espionage world – a world of deceit, murder, and lies –, one cannot allow his or her emotions to interfere with their mission nor allow their morals to overpower their orders.

In both Circus and the Abteilung, the British and East German Intelligence agencies, the spies are required to perform horrible actions without questioning authority. “They are not paid to think” (120); rather, they are paid to kill, cheat, lie, steal, murder. They “have to live without sympathy”(15); “They’re a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, saidists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten up their rotten lives” (235). Some of the agents are unable to cope with this lifestyle and allow their personal lives to interfere with their occupational lives. Other agents, however, are able to bear the emotional strain that comes with the profession, and, as a result, are very successful in their missions.

Ashe is one of these spies- emotionless and passionless. His and Leamas’ interactions show Ashe’s lack of intelligence and ingenuity. Leamas continuously toys with Ashe throughout their conversations, and Ashe “constantly scamper[s] back from some cul-de-sac into which Leamas had enticed him” (51). Although Ashe is not a bright agent, he simply followed orders and did not ask questions. His mission is to make contact with Leamas and gain some intelligence regarding Leamas’ current state, and by following his orders, Ashe secures his safety. Sam Kiever is quite similar to Ashe. Kiever is on a higher rung of the espionage hierarchical ladder, and he knows more of the operation than Ashe. His conversation with Leamas is much more intellectual, but they are still very

straightforward and to the point. While talking, “...nothing in his voice or his manner indicated that he had done other than negotiate an adequate business arrangement” (68). Similarly to Ashe, Kiever is sent on a mission and he accomplishes the mission without asking any questions or showing any emotion. However, although he does not totally lose control, Leamas notices that “[Kiever] is on edge, too” (69), suggesting that a harder task comes with more pressure and responsibility being laid on the agent. This pressure and responsibility causes Kiever to erupt at a waiter at the airport over the “used cups, saucers and ash-trays” (72) left on the table. Although this is an insignificant event, it subtly shows that uncontrolled emotion can cause a lack of focus and present a minor danger.

Peters is a completely emotionless agent. Little description is given about Peters’ personality, but we are given an indication that he, like Ashe and Kiever, is simply doing his job. Leamas notices that there was “something very unorthodox” (81) about Peters. He is a strong and confident agent that shows a lack of emotion but a strong sense of purpose. He performs his job with maturity and calmness, and possesses a much more intelligent persona than Ashe or Kiever. He analyzes the facts that Leamas is giving, and responds with remarkable speed. His manner of speech is intellectual, and he “display[s] a technical curiosity and expertise which entirely accorded with Leamas’ own temperament” (81). This intelligence, I would argue, comes from years of experience, and with this experience, Peters has learned to place a barrier between his emotions and his occupation. Once again, this ability to control his emotion ensures that he does not put himself in danger.

The next East German spy that Leamas encounters is Fiedler. A great deal of description is given about Fiedler, pertaining to both his personality and his appearance. He is a “slim, neat man, quite young, smooth- faced” (118), but he has the reputation of being a man “seemingly without ambition for himself but remorseless in the destruction of others”(118). Leamas, however, soon discovers that Fiedler is not the horrible killer that he originally perceived him to be; rather, Fiedler is quite understanding – almost friendly. He and Leamas, although they are essentially enemies, have several discussions that do not pertain to their respective agencies. They talk about philosophy and go for walks together. On one of these walks, Fiedler comments on morality. He states that he “would have put a bomb in a restaurant if it brought [them] further along the road. Afterwards, [he] would draw the balance” (135). He, too, is able to separate his emotion from his mission – almost. Fiedler’s great downfall, or his tragic flaw, is his ultimate hatred for Mundt. He allows this one emotion of hatred to cloud his judgement, and accuses Mundt of being a double agent. This plan backfires on him, when he learns that this was part of Leamas’ plot. This mistake leads to his death – a direct result of him allowing his emotion to get the best of him.

Mundt, being the last East German spy to be introduced, is certainly the most cold and emotionless of the five:

Leamas found no difficulty in recalling that Mundt was a killer. There was a coldness about him, a rigorous self-sufficiency which perfectly equipped him for the business of murder. Mundt was a very hard man. (167)

Mundt killed many people, and most likely had no second thoughts about the deeds. He undoubtedly restricts his morals (if he has any) from affecting his conscience. He is a relentless killer who has little or no compassion for anyone. This quality not only enables Mundt to remain in complete control of his actions, but also eliminates any weakness or vulnerability that might coincide with excessive emotion. For example, Fiedler's Jewish heritage and his emotional attachment to this heritage create a vulnerability. Mundt capitalizes on this vulnerability and causes hateful emotions to arise within Fiedler, and eventually control him. Once again, emotions bring about the cataclysmic downfall of agents who cannot control their passion.

The most obvious example of emotional interference is that of Leamas. At the beginning of the novel, he "was not a man accustomed to living on dreams" (46), but at the conclusion, he loses complete control and allows his emotions or dreams to overcome him. This is not a sudden change, however. I would argue that the beginning of this gradual downfall is the death of Karl Riembeck. Mundt murders Riembeck, and Leamas, like Fiedler, allows his hatred for Mundt to affect him, and his motive for his mission now becomes personal. Secondly, Leamas becomes emotionally attached to Liz. His relationship with her causes fear: "For the first time since it all began, Leamas was frightened" (104). This fear could be a result of Leamas' attachment to Liz, and his fear of losing her. Altogether, this emotion begins to build up within Leamas. We see during the car scene with Liz that he is conflicted inside, and this confliction erupts when he is climbing over the wall, but Liz is left behind. He could easily have made it over to safety, but by going back for Liz his

emotions got the best of him, and he chose emotion over logic – a decision that cost him his life.

In order for agents to survive in the world of espionage, they must force their morals to be thrown away, and they cannot allow their conscience to direct their actions. This emotional inversion is difficult to maintain, and, as a result, Leamas and Fiedler buckle under the emotional stress. Ashe, Kiever, Peters, and Mundt are able to remain cold and emotionless, but consequentially, they also maintain their sanity and their lives.