

Le Carré's
The Spy Who Came In From The Cold:
 A Structuralist Reading

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'Superbly constructed, with an atmosphere of chilly hell' — that was J. B. Priestley's view of John Le Carré's 1963 novel, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*.¹ Now if we agree that the novel is 'superbly constructed' (as we well may), what exactly are we agreeing to? And what is the relationship between the 'construction' and the hellish 'atmosphere'? Or are 'construction' and 'atmosphere' two separate qualities in the book?

The present paper attempts to explore these questions by means of certain structuralist theories and methods, especially those of A. J. Greimas. The discussion will focus on applying structuralist ideas to a reading of Le Carré's novel, but it seems necessary at the beginning to sketch a least the general outlines of some of the theories of the structuralists.²

We may begin with the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic made by the Swiss linguist F. de Saussure. 'Synchronic' refers to elements or factors present in the system of a language at some particular time (in practice, very often the present time). 'Diachronic', on the other hand, refers to elements and factors in a language system at two or more points in its historical development; the diachronic point of view implies historical comparisons in the study of some phenomenon. This synchronic/

1 I refer to chapters and pages in the Pan paperback edition of the novel (1964). For convenience, the title will be abbreviated as *The Spy*. The Priestley quotation is part of the publicity material for the Pan edition.

2 'Structuralism' is a rather loose term commonly used to refer to the work of a group of theorists and critics who in fact often differed from one another. For accessible accounts of the structuralist 'movement', see Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974); Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); and Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1983). All these books provide bibliographical material. For A. J. Greimas, see *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966); *Du Sens* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); and A. J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979).

diachronic opposition can be extended from linguistics into the study of narrative forms.³

Now the oldest spy story in Western fiction known to the present writer is in Book X of Homer's *Iliad*; it tells of a secret night expedition by two Greek chieftains, Odysseus and Diomedes, against the camp of their Trojan enemies and of how they killed a Trojan spy, one Dolon. A very old English spy story tells about the Anglo-Saxon king Athelstan and his enemy Olaf Cuaran in the year 937 AD. It goes like this.⁴

Athelstan was defending his realm of England against the Viking Olaf. Seeing that a decisive battle was at hand, Olaf decided that he would spy on the English in person. He took off his own royal garments, disguised himself as a minstrel, and entered the English camp. So well did he play and sing there that Athelstan requested the 'minstrel' to entertain him and his generals while they ate; and as Olaf did that he took careful note of everything he could see. When the meal ended, Athelstan dismissed the 'minstrel' with thanks and a gift of money. But Olaf felt he could not accept money from an enemy under false pretences, and so he buried it in the ground as he returned to his own army. A man who had once been in Olaf's service noticed this strange action of the supposed minstrel. He realized who the minstrel really was and informed King Athelstan. Athelstan demanded to know why he had not been told in time to capture his enemy. The man replied that in time past

- 3 To illustrate the distinction between synchronic and diachronic, we can take the word *spy*. As a substantive, sense 1 of *spy* is given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'One who spies upon or watches a person or persons secretly; a secret agent whose business it is to keep a person, place, etc., under close observation; esp. one employed by a government in order to obtain information relating to the military or naval affairs of other countries, or to collect intelligence of any kind'. *OED* defines *espionage* as 'the practice of playing the spy, or of employing spies'. These two definitions are synchronic definitions of the words as they are used in English at the present time. But *OED* also tells us that *spy* was borrowed into English from French, and was in use by about 1250 AD (it replaced a native English word, *sceawere*). In the fourteenth century, *spy* could also mean 'an ambush', a sense which it no longer has. *Espionage* is also borrowed from French, but does not appear in English until 1793, the time of the Revolutionary wars. Data of this kind, which is fascinating enough, is called diachronic.
- 4 The *Iliad* as a whole is dated to about 700 BC; Book X, the Doloneia, may be a later addition. The story of Olaf and Athelstan is told by William of Malmesbury; William died in 1142, but had access to older sources. The paraphrase of his story is based on a version given in C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939).

he had sworn an oath to Olaf and therefore could not betray him into the hands of the English. He could in good conscience, however, suggest a stratagem to the English king. Athelstan took the man's advice and won the battle.

Many of the essentials of the contemporary spy story are already present in this old tale: the need for military intelligence; deception and disguise; suspicious out-of-pattern actions; and matters of honour and conscience. It is quite possible to trace these themes diachronically from ancient times down to the present day, observing how conscience and loyalty are treated at different historical moments, and how the old chieftains and kings have been replaced by anonymous operatives in raincoats. *The Spy* will mainly be treated here synchronically as a novel of the Cold War years, but older fictions will be alluded to from time to time.

A second Saussurean idea which needs mention is expressed by the paired and opposed terms *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* or 'language' refers to the system of communication which is shared by a community of speakers; *langue* is language in its social aspect, language as 'a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise [the faculty of human speech].'⁵ *Parole* or 'speech' on the other hand refers to the actual utterances of individuals in particular situations. All speakers of English, for example, share the same *langue*, but each sentence that any one of them utters or writes down is an example of *parole*; it is an individual realization of the potentialities of *langue* in some particular context.

It is possible to reconcile this *langue/parole* distinction with the notion of conventional literary forms and individual works. We can say that the spy story has become a fictional institution (a 'sub-*langue*', as it were), a collection of conventions which are shared by both writers and readers. If you want to write a spy story at all, there are certain things that you must have: hostility between States, for example; the need to know or to protect secrets; ways of getting secrets by force or guile; and so on. Detective stories are similar, though there the context is civil rather than political or military. Each writer of spy or detective stories knows and uses the conventions, but they use them in their own distinctive ways. In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* John Buchan reflects straightforward, gentlemanly Edwardian attitudes; Ian Fleming in his novels about James

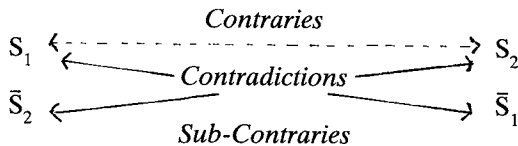
5 F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. W. Baskin (Glasgow: Fontana / Collins, 1974), p. 9.

Bond has a kind of upper-class romanticism, and Len Deighton a kind of non-chic wryness; and through his American heroes Charles McCarry expresses and endorses a sober and dutiful stoicism. So if John Le Carré has created 'an atmosphere of chilly hell' in *The Spy*, then that is one of the ways in which he has realized the potentialities of the espionage novel in his own fashion.

Two further structuralist principles have been successfully transposed from linguistics into the study of narratives. One is the idea of binary opposition, that is to say, distinguishing linguistic units in terms of their having mutually exclusive properties. Phonology provides classic examples. In the making of speech sounds, for example, the vocal cords either vibrate or they do not. This principle enables us to distinguish the voiceless plosive /p/ in *pay* from the corresponding voiced plosive /b/ in *bay*, and to make use of the distinction in communication. Examples could be multiplied indefinitely. The binary principle is a fundamental aspect of language, and it can be extended from phonology to grammar and to the study of meaning.⁶ The other general principle is that within the system of a language, each element acquires its significance and value from *being a part of the system*. No element stands free, independent and self-sufficient. Each element in a language system has a *relational* value; it gets its definition from all the other elements in the system, and in turn it helps define them. That is one reason why this present paper is seeking to explore what the relationship may be between 'construction' and 'atmosphere' within the 'system' which Le Carré has created in *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*.

Circus and Abteilung and the Semiotic Square

Many of the structuralist ideas outlined above are combined in A. J. Greimas's device of the 'semiotic square'. (Its design also owes a good deal to the Square of Opposition of traditional logic.) It is best to set it out immediately in a slightly simplified form and to offer a few comments on it before going on to see how it may help us understand the 'construction' of *The Spy*.⁷



6 See, for example, Geoffrey Leech, *Semantics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), ch. 6.

7 This slightly simplified figure is based on Greimas-Courtés s.v. *Carré sémiotique*.

The abstract terms in the square are labelled 'S', which stands here for 'seme' as an element of meaning. None of the semes can be fully understood by itself; each contributes to the meaning of the others. By convention S_1 is usually taken as a 'positive' value, and S_2 is opposed to it as a contrary and as differing from it in some quality. One can say that S_1 and S_2 are a binary pair with some mutually exclusive feature. \bar{S}_1 is the contradiction or negation of S_1 , and \bar{S}_2 is the contradiction or negation of S_2 . \bar{S}_1 and \bar{S}_2 are opposed to one another as a pair of sub-contraries. This description does not bring out the full subtlety of the square, but one can see that each term depends on all the others for its value within the system. The square itself is of course an abstraction, a schematic map of relationships, analagous perhaps to the rules of grammar which state that nouns enter into certain relationships with verbs. It is now time to apply the square to Le Carré's novel and to see what may result. How might term S_1 , which is conventionally a 'positive' term, be realized in the construction of *The Spy*?

It seems clear that the principal character in *The Spy* is the British agent Alec Leamas. The book begins and ends with him. He appears in almost every chapter, and on the whole the reader sees what he sees and hears what he hears. In the few chapters where Leamas is absent, events still revolve around him and he remains the focus of attention (as in ch. XI and ch. XV). This perspective encourages the reader to sympathize with Leamas and with what he may stand for in the world that the novel creates.

Leamas belongs to the closed world of 'the Circus'.⁸ We are given to understand that he has been with the Circus for most of his adult life, beginning with war service against the Nazis (p. 77). He has little life outside the Circus. His marriage has broken up, and he has few possessions. The most important people in his world are his superiors like Control, his colleagues like De Jong, and his agents like Karl Riemeck. Leamas leads the very specialized life of a senior intelligence officer.

In fact from page to page *The Spy* often reads like an 'espionage procedural'. The plot shows in detail the procedures by which Leamas goes under cover, how he is approached by the opposition and passed up their hierarchical chain, and how the process is

8 'Circus' is a term used in town-planning to refer to a circular range of houses, a completed 'crescent', as it were; a number of 'circuses' were constructed in London in the eighteenth century. The novel supposes that some such organization as SIS has its headquarters in Cambridge Circus. 'Abteilung' is simply German for 'Department'.

monitored by the Circus (the man in the fog, pp. 37-8; the press coverage of the assault on Ford, p. 45; and so on). In Germany, much of Fiedler's case against Mundt depends on uncovering the techniques employed in Operation Rolling Stone: how money was transferred to Scandinavian banks, who handled the files in London, and when and where the accounts were drawn on. These details of 'tradecraft' had a good deal to do with the success of this and other spy novels. The details lend verisimilitude to plots which are often schematized and fantastic, and they give readers the impression that the secrets of espionage are being revealed to them. Police, hospital and military 'procedural' fictions have a similar fascination for laymen, though this does not necessarily mean that any of them reflects 'reality'.

As we read *The Spy*, we are shown the events of the narrative mainly from Leamas's Circus point of view, and we are encouraged to participate vicariously in his experiences. Remembering the convention that S_1 is a 'positive' term, we can try realizing it as 'the Circus' in this novel.

If S_1 is the Circus and if S_2 is to be its contrary, then S_2 will be the Abteilung, the East German equivalent of the Circus and its enemy. (In *The Spy*, 'Moscow Centre', which presumably exercises an authority over the Abteilung, is somehow kept in the background; see pp. 56 and 76.) The opposition between Leamas's Circus and the Abteilung is established at more than one level. First and most obvious, Leamas as a Circus man has information which Fiedler, as deputy head of Abteilung counter-intelligence, is anxious to get (p. 118). There is a further opposition between British and Germans, and for Leamas the duel with the Abteilung must be in some sense an extension of his wartime service against other Germans. More generally, in the 1963 context of the Cold War, there is an opposition between West and East.

Yet although Circus and Abteilung are locked in a national and ideological struggle with each other, there are similarities between them. Tensions exist in both espionage hierarchies, and if Mundt hates Fiedler, then Smiley at least finds Control's operation 'distasteful' (p. 56). Both services keep secluded houses in the country, and in both it is curiously difficult for the senior officers to get food and drink when they want it (pp. 20, 55, and 120). Control and Fiedler each recognize that for them the highest good is to get results (pp. 20, 174, and 229). Nevertheless, the oppositions are there: knowers vs. finders-out; British vs. Germans; West vs. East.

The contraries S_1 and S_2 help define each other; neither can be understood without the other, any more than the word 'left' has meaning without the word 'right'. Given that S_1 and S_2 are the major contraries, the sub-contraries which are their negations will be \bar{S}_1 and \bar{S}_2 , 'Non-Circus' and 'Non-Abteilung'. These labels are superficially clumsy and perhaps even alienating, but the relationships between the main terms and the negatives will prove crucial for both the 'construction' and the 'atmosphere' of *The Spy*.

In a novel, it is not mandatory that each term in the semiotic square gets equally full realization, and in fact 'Non-Abteilung' is not represented very fully. It comprises citizens of the DDR who are outside their government's intelligence apparatus. Some in fact have connections with it in various degrees, such as the officials of the Tribunal and the complacent, anti-Semitic Commissar of the gaol (ch. XX and ch. XXIV). Others are completely ordinary people like Frau Ebert and her family in Leipzig. Liz Gold is amazed at the similarity between Party meetings in London and those in Leipzig, and Frau Ebert plainly has no desire to become involved with powerful officials of her own government (ch. XIX).

Ordinary people are also represented in the scenes set in Britain, and once again there is a spectrum. Corresponding to the Commissar in ch. XXIV there is the Governor of the London gaol where Leamas serves his time, though this man's prison with its unruly IRA songster seems more humane than the soundless labyrinths in the East. We have cranks in London like Miss Crail, we have nasty people like Ford the grocer, and we have decent people like Arthur in the trilby hat (p. 40). All these are \bar{S}_1 , 'Non-Circus'.

The most important \bar{S} figure in this set is Liz Gold, the Jewish librarian and Communist Party member in London. More will be said about her later; all that need be remembered now is that she is drawn into the world of espionage as the book progresses. Leamas thinks of Liz Gold from time to time, but he also has a number of other images of ordinary people in his mind, and these images are distributed in the text with some emphasis and pattern. As Leamas listens to Control on the subject of 'hardness' and 'sympathy', he recalls the Luftwaffe bombing refugees near Rotterdam twenty years before (p. 19).⁹ A second image is of a girl casting bread to

9 The bombing of Rotterdam by the Germans on 14 May 1940, killed about 1,000 people and left about 78,000 homeless. It was regarded as one of the great horrors of the first year of the war, and is commemorated in a sculpture by Zadkine.

seagulls on the beach, near the seaside villa ironically named 'Le Mirage'. To Leamas she represented a simplicity and a faith in ordinary life which he had never been allowed to have (p. 100). The third image is of a little car Leamas once saw caught in the fast lane of an autobahn near Karlsruhe. Children were waving cheerfully from the back window, but the car was caught in the torrent of hurtling giant lorries (pp. 113-4). Leamas thinks of this car and the children in it as he goes East into the cold, and it reminds him of the helpless Dutch refugees. It seems to be the last thought in Leamas's mind when the Vopos shoot him dead.

The semiotic square, in its first application, has grouped characters who appear in Le Carré's *The Spy*, and it shows how each term or group of characters helps define the others and in turn is defined by them. The square is also more than Aristotelian logic or some kind of narrative algebra. By its oppositions it suggests currents of tension, as if a cast were assembled on a stage, ready to enact a drama; and while the most obvious conflict is between Circus and Abteilung, it will be argued that the most important tension is between S and \bar{S} , between the secret world (whether Circus or Abteilung) and the world outside it. In any case, though the semiotic square may be a dramatic tableau, it is not in itself a plot.

Plot

For the analysis of plot, Greimas supplies a different set of terms, which also make use of the idea of binary opposition. He developed these terms from the proto-structuralist work of Propp and Souriau.¹⁰

The first paired set of terms are labelled Subject and Object. The opposition between them is essential to 'Quest' plots. In such plots, someone (a Subject) desires something (an Object), and sets about getting it. An 'Object' may be defined as any desirable value within the world of a particular fiction; it may be a person or a thing, an abstraction or a concrete thing. Quests in this general sense provide the plots for innumerable narratives, especially those of the popular and traditional kind. Myths, folktales and legends provide familiar examples. Jason, for example, quests for the Golden Fleece; folktale heroes and heroines seek the Water of Life; King Arthur's knights set out to seek honour, fame and the Holy Grail. Quest

10 See V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott, rev. L. A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975); Étienne Souriau, *Les deux cent mille situations dramatiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1950).

plots can be seen on television any night of the week. It is usual to call Subject and Object and other roles in plots 'actants'. The term emphasizes how, in plot analysis, the essential feature is the kind of actions which Subject, Object, Sender or Helper performs (see below). 'Actant' does not specify any details of age, sex or social status, let alone any traits of individual 'character'. It is a term belonging to *langue* rather than to *parole*.

We can say that Alec Leamas plays the part of Subject in *The Spy*. Unlike the heroes of antique fiction, the goal of his Quest is not a treasure nor a princess but the more abstract one of weakening the Abteilung. For the modern State is infinitely more strong and complex than the archaic kingdoms of myth and folktale, and no realistically presented hero can hope to do more than damage it. Similarly in the crime novel, though individual criminals may be brought to justice, no one pretends that crime can be abolished. At best Leamas can weaken and confuse the Abteilung for a time. Leamas's Object is an abstract one; but the means are concrete enough. Leamas is to discredit and if possible remove the Abteilung's most dangerous man: Mundt (as Leamas is led to believe). The way in which Leamas sets about reaching his goal will be discussed presently.

In Quest plots, the values of the particular fictional world are *acquired*. Values can also be transferred or 'communicated', and some plots accordingly belong to the 'Communication' type. The word 'values' is once more taken in a general sense which may include (singly or in combination) material goods, information, and such social or personal values as loyalty and affection. The 'transfers' may take the form of gifts (genuine or poisoned); exchanges (equitable or not); promises (true or false); commissions and contracts (genuine or deceptive); and so on. The chief actants in a Communication plot are called the Sender and the Receiver. Once again they are familiar from traditional fiction: a king commissions a hero to rid the land of a dragon in return for the hand of the princess and half the realm; King Arthur's knights seek fame and glory in exchange for admission to the fellowship of the Round Table. Private detectives sit in shabby offices and accept commissions to find something out for their clients in exchange for fifty dollars a day plus expenses.

In *The Spy* Leamas takes part in transfers of value of many kinds. He has given his loyalty to the Circus and simply asks Control to say what he wants him to do. Control offers him a mission which Leamas can accept or decline (p. 19). If he accepts it, he will get a

reward and can come in from the cold. The mission is to transfer certain information to the Abteilung. In the course of it, Liz Gold gives Leamas her love; there is no need to detail all the forms of transfer of values in the book. It is important, however, to see that none of the acts of 'communication' which Leamas takes part in is entirely untainted and genuine. Control holds back the real truth about Leamas's mission, and Leamas never gets his reward. The information passed to the Abteilung is false. Peters does not keep his promises about the course the interrogation is to take (p. 122). Liz Gold is proud of the love she gives to Leamas; he seems ashamed (p. 37).

The final pair of binary opposites which can help generate plots is perhaps auxiliary, but important none the less. These actants are Helper and Adversary, and their roles do not need elaborate explanation. In *The Spy* the Abteilung is the Adversary to be defeated; and various Circus members are working to help Leamas from behind the scenes, from Elsie in Accounts (p. 24) to Mr Pitt of the Labour Exchange. Without her knowing it, Liz Gold is also enrolled as a Helper in Leamas's mission.

Yet while Le Carré makes use of all these ancient roles in his modern novel — Subject vs. Object, Sender vs. Receiver, Helper vs. Adversary — he complicates their interrelationships enormously. Leamas 'taking a swing at Mundt' is both a solitary Quester and Control's Helper; and Control as Sender does not tell Leamas the full truth about either role. In Germany, Leamas thinks he is helping Fiedler discredit the Adversary Mundt, but in fact he is helping Mundt destroy Fiedler. Smiley and Guillam come as 'friends of Alec' to help Liz Gold in ch. XI, or so they say. In fact they want to make her their Helper in a conspiracy of which she understands nothing, and they are the enemies of her love. As for Leamas, the deceptive and contradictory roles in which he becomes enmeshed prove intolerable to him in the end.

While the plot is unfolding, however, Leamas appears for the most part in the guise of a solitary Quester, playing out a difficult game alone. Now in Quest plots the principal interest lies in the Quester's performance — in his strength, his courage, his endurance, his cunning, and in how he mobilizes all his heroic qualities in order to reach his goal. Indeed there are times when Leamas as Quester has to fight, but his main resource in the novel is cunning. He affects the drinker's shuffle (p. 94); he stubbornly maintains that if the Circus had had a high-level agent in East Germany, he would have known (p. 99). He skilfully follows

Control's script, being difficult, confusing the Abteilung with detail, letting them *deduce* what Control wants them to deduce (p. 114). To achieve his end, Leamas as Quester must deploy all the cunning of Odysseus, the legendary 'man of many wiles'.

It would be tedious to catalogue all the deceptions which Leamas wittingly or unwittingly performs in *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*. To chart these deceptions, and others, we may once more apply the idea of the semiotic square. The abstract terms may now be given the following values:

S_1 *Being*

S_2 *Seeming*

\bar{S}_2 *Non-Seeming*

\bar{S}_1 *Non-Being*

The major contraries S_1 and S_2 may be taken as the domain of truth; the sub-contraries \bar{S}_1 and \bar{S}_2 are the domain of falsehood; S_1 and \bar{S}_2 are the domain of secrecy; S_2 and \bar{S}_1 are the domain of lies.¹¹

Before we attempt to apply this schema to the chief figures in *The Spy*, we need to remember two things. The first is that the reader's perspective changes and becomes enlarged as the plot unfolds. For most of the novel's course, the reader is encouraged to share Leamas's perspective (though one realizes that Leamas knows more about Control's plans than is revealed to the reader from page to page). By the end of ch. XXIV, however, Leamas has discovered the truth about the operation and revealed it to Liz Gold: that Mundt is a British agent who has to be protected. Besides this, we need to remember that the novel does not present mere abstract ciphers, but rather 'characters' with certain believable and individualized characteristics. This applies especially to Mundt. He is described as a killer, as a very distasteful man, 'ex Hitler-Youth and all that kind of thing'. There is a physical description of him to match (pp. 14, 22, and 166).

Still, we can plausibly say that Fiedler actually is what he seems to be, namely, a loyal Abteilung officer (S_1 and S_2); and whatever we feel about counter-intelligence operatives or the secret police, there is a certain integrity and authenticity about Fiedler as the novel presents him. Leamas also judges Peters to be an authentic professional. The other main figure who is what she appears to be is of course Liz Gold. Control, however, plans to attack Fiedler in the Abteilung while not seeming to do so; and that is the deeply secret plan which even Leamas is not to know (S_1 and \bar{S}_2). Within the

11 See Greimas-Courtés, p. 32.

Abteilung Mundt appears to be a loyal — even a super-loyal — officer, but in fact he is not (S_2 and \bar{S}_1). There is nothing extraordinary about that in the world of espionage. Karl Riemeck was the same. While appearing loyal to his government, Riemeck sold its secrets for money. Leamas quite liked 'Karl' as a man (pp. 82-4 and 23).

Leamas's own position in this web of being and seeming is easily the most complex, since he faces in three directions. First, as Control's agent he secretly remains a loyal Circus man but must seem so far alienated from his service that he is ready to betray it comprehensively (p. 90; S_1 and \bar{S}_2). Conversely he must seem to Peters and Fiedler to be a defector who will sell all he knows for fifteen thousand pounds (S_2 and \bar{S}_1). In his relationship with Liz Gold in London, Leamas either cannot or does not love her in the way she loves him, and he either cannot or does not pretend to. He accepts the meals she prepares, he half-listens to what she says, and becomes her lover only reluctantly (\bar{S}_1 and \bar{S}_2). Liz Gold is baffled by his behaviour (pp. 36-7). This triple duplicity sets up enormous strains, especially when Leamas finally realizes the truth about his mission. The fact that Mundt is a traitor to his own people is neither here nor there in the world of espionage; subornation is normal in that world. Rather, Leamas comes to see that in the struggle between the Abteilung and the Circus to which he has given his loyalty he and Mundt are on the same side. Leamas has become the associate of a killer, a very distasteful man, 'ex Hitler-Youth and all that kind of thing'. He and Mundt are, as it were, mirror-images of each other. It is the dimension of human values in the world of secrecy and lies that we now turn to.

'Sympathy' and 'hardness'

As remarked earlier, Control offers Leamas what appears to be the genuine choice of accepting the mission or declining it. Control may be a donnish desk man, but he understands well enough the strains that his field agents must endure out in 'the cold'. He enquires whether Leamas has had 'enough'. Agents (Control goes on) have to act 'all this hardness' to one another, but in the end one cannot live without 'sympathy' (p. 19). Now these two opposed terms which Le Carré assigns to Control do not belong to the politico-military domain of Circus and Abteilung, nor to the sphere of plot-generation in narrative, nor yet to the cognitive discrimination between truth and falsehood. They are rather terms which apply to feelings and to judgements about humanity. The complex of meaning involved in Control's two terms can once more be charted

in a last realization of the semiotic square. The values of the abstract terms will now be taken as follows:

S_1 <i>Sympathy</i>	S_2 <i>Hardness</i>
\bar{S}_2 <i>Non-Hardness</i>	\bar{S}_1 <i>Non-Sympathy</i>

We can say that the values S_1 and S_2 share a quality of commitment, while \bar{S}_1 and \bar{S}_2 are the domain of detachment. At least in this novel, S_1 and \bar{S}_2 are qualities that you find in ordinary life, whereas S_2 and \bar{S}_1 are properties of 'the cold'.

The positive term 'Sympathy' is most clearly represented in the affectionate and vulnerable Liz Gold (S_1). To her antithesis Mundt (S_2), she is merely 'trash' (p. 225). For Mundt is a 'very *hard* man', as Control reflects; and he has a 'blank, hard face' (pp. 14, 56, and 166). 'Non-Sympathy', which is here term \bar{S}_1 , may be recognized in Peters, the man who interrogates Leamas at 'Le Mirage' and later takes him East. His face is said to be grey and without expression; it is a face which is unlikely ever to change. Peters is a dispassionate, professional intelligence agent, and there is something in him which accords with Leamas's own temperament. Mutual respect can exist between the two men, but neither will feel anything like Liz Gold's 'sympathy' for the other. 'I can do without the good will,' Leamas tells Peters. 'You've got a paid defector — good luck to you. For Christ's sake don't pretend you've fallen in love with me' (p. 75).

Control, on the Circus side of the war, could not hold his place without a degree of hardness which he dissembles in fussy, upper-class mannerisms. Such a man must do his work with dispassion, but it is not quite the dispassion of a Peters. In Control's view, the espionage professional soon passes outside the register of love and hate as they are understood in the ordinary world. 'All that's left in the end is a kind of nausea; you never want to cause suffering again' (p. 23). This view can perhaps be characterized as a 'Non-Hardness' (\bar{S}_2) which belongs partly to the world of the cold, but yet in its recognition of human feelings belongs partly to the normal human world. Control has the attitude appropriate to the high government official who performs his duty, and it is an attitude which he shares with Fiedler, though the styles and ideologies of the two men are very different (cf. pp. 134 and 174).

The main formalities of the structuralist reading of *The Spy* have now been completed. You can say — and it has been said — that the literary structuralism of the sixties and seventies was too abstract and

too schematic, and that Greimas was perhaps too Aristotelian and perhaps a little too close to Propp and Souriau.¹² On the other hand, there are things to be said in defence. The structuralists were trying to work out a 'grammar' of narrative at the level of *langue*, as it were, and this grammar would bear to actual narratives the same sort of relationship that the rules of ordinary grammar bear to the sentences of *parole*. At least there was no hidden mystique about structuralist procedures. The theories were set out, and anyone could attempt to prove, improve or disprove their validity or their applicability by experiment.

In any case, the method of operating with binary pairs seems quite appropriate for exploring the 'construction' of Le Carré's *The Spy* because the novel itself is clearly full of strong and even theatrical contrasts. It begins with Leamas at the Berlin checkpoint. A white line on the road marks the boundary between East and West, 'like the base line of a tennis court' (and perhaps suggesting, on the second page of the novel, that a formal game is to be played out). To the East, barriers, searches and controls. In the West, tense policemen in a sandbagged emplacement. On either side the Berlin Wall stretches away into the distance. It is dusk. The boundaries of time and space intersect as Leamas waits. At last Riemeck comes in the gathering dark. Just as he is about to cross the line, he is caught in the brilliant beam of a searchlight and killed.

Similar theatrical stylizations can be found throughout *The Spy*. Mundt with his blonde hardness is very like the standard Germanic 'heavy' of popular fiction; the Commissar in ch. XXIV is his female counterpart in 'hardness'. On the other hand, Control with his knitted cardigan and his petulance about coffee is as much a caricature as Ian Fleming's M in the James Bond books, though in a different key. As the power struggle in the Abteilung develops between near-Nazi and Jew, Mundt arrests Fiedler, then Fiedler overthrows Mundt, and then Mundt triumphs again in a series of *coups de théâtre* which culminate in 'court-room drama', complete with surprise witness. In the Tribunal chapters, all the principles confront each other within the same four walls: Circus and Abteilung, British and Germans, truth and lies. It is all as improbable as the idea of a king dressing up as a minstrel and spying on his enemies while they eat their dinner. Yet the most improbable scene of all occurs in ch. XXIV. There, the anti-Semite conspirator

12 See E. Meletinski in the French translation of Propp, *Morphologie du conte*, trans. M. Derrida and others (Paris: Seuil, 1970), pp. 220-30.

Mundt drags the bewildered and helpless Jew Liz Gold through the subterranean labyrinth of his own prison, hissing 'Hurry, you fool'. For all the 'realistic' detail of the espionage procedural, *The Spy* often reads like melodrama; the last scene at the Wall will need no comment. In short, a schematic structuralist reading suits a schematic novel quite well.

In any case, we can now return to the matter of the 'superb construction' and the 'hellish' atmosphere which Priestley admired. The construction is essentially a layered one. Superimposed on a 'Quest' plot where success depends on cunning, there lies a 'Communication' plot in which every exchange of values is in some way deceptive and fraudulent. The chief actants must therefore play roles which are not only multiple and complex, but in the end irreconcilable. Take Liz Gold. She is 'Non-Circus', and truly represents the 'Sympathy' which she seems to have; yet she is also made a 'Helper' in Control's 'filthy lousy operation to save Mundt's skin' and learns secrets which prove fatal (p. 226). Similarly, Leamas believes that his mission is to attack Mundt as chief enemy of the Circus, but Control has made such a false bargain with Leamas that he finds himself yoked to the hateful Mundt as an ally. If there is a movement in the novel which has not been explicitly formalized here, it is Leamas's progressive alienation from the cold war between the two spy organizations and his movement towards the natural freedom of the Dutch girl on the beach and towards Liz Gold's giving of love.¹³

For the relationship of a plot which elaborates on institutionalised deception (and violence) to the 'hellish', we may call upon Dante Alighieri, the great poet of hell and also of love. In Canto XI of his *Inferno*, Dante has Vergil discourse on the nature of fraudulence and its punishment in the iciest region of his realm of negation and torment.¹⁴

'La frode, ond' ogne coscienza è morsa,
 può l'omo usare in colui che 'n lui fida
 e in quel che fidanza non imborsa.

13 Other structuralist theories (not discussed here) can formulate this movement quite easily. See for example, Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du Décameron* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).

14 See Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, translated, with a Commentary by Charles S. Singleton, 2 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

Questo modo di retro par ch'incida
 pur lo vinco d'amor che fa natura;
 onde nel cerchio secondo s'annida
 ipocresia, lusinghe e chi affattura,
 falsità, ladroneccio e simonia,
 ruffian, baratti e simile lordura.
 Per l'altro modo quell' amor s'oblia
 che fa natura, e quel ch'è poi aggiunto,
 di che la fede spezial si cria;
 onde nel cerchio minore, ov' è 'l punto
 de l'universo in su che Dite siede,
 qualunque trade in eterno è consunto.'

(*Inferno* XI 52-66)

'Fraud, which gnaws every conscience, a man may practise upon one who trusts in him or upon one who reposes no confidence. This latter way seems to sever only the bond of love which Nature makes; wherefore in the second circle hypocrisy, flatteries, sorcerers, falsity, theft, simony, panders, barratry and like filth have their nest. By the other way both that love which Nature makes is forgotten, and that also which is added to it and which creates a special trust; therefore in the smallest circle, at the centre of the universe and the seat of Dis, every traitor is consumed eternally.'

With Dante, then, we may say that deceit and fraud are things against nature, for every human being owes natural friendship to every other by reason of their common humanity. Yet fraud exists, and it is practised in two main ways. The first way is against those who repose no special trust in one; and this is a simple severance of the bond of love which should join human beings, whether they live West or East. Such fraud and deceit are filthy enough ('lordura'), but the second way is worse. This is fraud against those who have given to others their special trust (as Leamas gave trust to Contol and Liz Gold to Leamas); this is a 'forgetting' or obliteration of the love which Nature has made and which human beings may enrich. According to Dante, this is so hateful to God and man that it must be punished in the lowest regions of hell where cold bites more than fire.

The most fundamental opposition in *The Spy*, then, is between those people who in some degree accept and remember the natural bonds of love¹⁵ and those who sever those bonds and 'forget' them;

15 Presentations of love (and also of treachery) can be found in other novels by Le Carré. In *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, for example, there is love between two men; in *The Honourable Schoolboy* there is love between two brothers; in *Smiley's People* and *A Perfect Spy* love between parent and child. In *A Small Town in Germany*, a British government is said to be ready to make a deal with neo-Nazis.

between those who live by 'sympathy' — Control's word; Dante's is 'amor' — and those who live by 'hardness'; between those who 'are' what they seem and those who mask themselves in endless 'seeming'. To live in the secret world of the cold, one must sever the bonds of humanity and nature and become enmeshed in an infernal web of lies and deceit and treachery. Given this point of view, we can see that Control is imprisoned in a dispassionate deviousness and Fiedler in a philosophy which authorizes rational murder (pp. 134-5). Peters has a grey, expressionless face which will never change. Leamas comes to understand the freer and fuller life that love may bring, but cannot escape to it. When he tries to escape, he is killed. Karl Riemeck made the same 'mistake' (p. 208). Not for nothing is *The Spy* filled with images of demarcation lines, enclosed spaces, gaols and walls which are barriers against 'sympathy'. The secret world makes its own hell on earth and imprisons and punishes itself there.

It is not so much the descriptions of mean streets and shabby flats and Berlin ruins that create the 'atmosphere of chilly hell' in *The Spy*, but rather the mental and moral deformation of humanity which is held up to us on almost every page; it is the 'construction' of the novel which creates its 'atmosphere'. In a deep sense (the kind of sense that structuralist analysis tries to find and describe), Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* is not a novel about spying at all, and that is one of the things which raise the book above the level of a popular entertainment. It is a statement about 'sympathy' and the bond of love which Nature makes. All the espionage apparatus is a device to show what love is, by setting out in complex detail its contraries and negations.

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