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Reviewed by **Jonathan Nashel**, Indiana University, South Bend

"It Was All Secret"

Christopher Moran is one of the leading new scholars of intelligence during the Cold War. He is a veritable cottage industry with books and articles appearing at an astonishing rate; more importantly, they are all solid histories.¹ In this article he has written on the curious relationship between the real CIA during the Cold War and the imagined CIA as seen in the works of Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels. Within this one article, though, lurk two essays: the first is a relatively brief discussion of the CIA's efforts to control its public image during the Cold War. The second is a longer discussion of Fleming's efforts to fight the Cold War in the literary realm with his imagined CIA in a key supporting role. Fleming's work then provides Moran with the link between these two projects. It was Fleming who was one of the first to fictionalize the CIA, and by being first, and also by being so immensely popular, he set the mold for how others would view the CIA from the early 1950s on.

Fleming's success created a legion of imitators. While the James Bond novels were appreciated in Langley given how positively the CIA was portrayed (and often at the expense of the FBI), darker versions of the CIA soon came to the marketplace. Untangling the real CIA from an imagined one since the early 1960s has caused no end of problems for the CIA and for scholars of the Agency. Moran isn't so much interested in

¹ Moran's publications include *Classified: Secrecy and the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); an edited collection, with Christopher J. Murphy *Intelligence Studies in Britain and the US: Historiography since 1945* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013); and an edited collection with Patrick Major, *Spooked: Britain, Empire and Intelligence since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

the fruitless task of untangling the real from the imagined. Instead he is fascinated with the way the CIA came to be portrayed in the era of the Bond novels. He writes: “even though scholars have explored the CIA’s cultural investments in great detail, they have given much less thought to the issue of ‘representation,’ specifically how the CIA *itself* has been portrayed in culture” (120, emphasis in original). Moran’s article becomes a case study of how the CIA’s failure to control these representations became the source of its woes. A bit of public relations (PR) might have smoothed matters, but the CIA at this time made a determined effort to preserve secrecy about itself—whether for good or ill, public versions of the CIA were not to be commented upon. The upshot is that a more strategic openness by the CIA at this time would have been the wiser course. The long-term consequences of that early bunkered mentality is that fans of spy fiction can find one deceitful, lying, amoral CIA story after another on the bookshelf of any airport bookstore.

Moran locates a CIA that was passionately, almost obsessively opposed to anyone discussing it in any way, shape, or form. Even positive portrayals were shunned because the CIA was, by definition, a secret organization and secret organizations must not give any hint about themselves. Mystique was a central part of the CIA’s power, and so the idea that this seemingly all-powerful organization would get involved in such grubby matters as explaining itself to the public was simply not to be entertained by its officials. Or as William Colby said in 1976, a year after he was forced to resign as Director of the CIA, “it was all secret...we weren’t allowed to say anything about it and pretended it didn’t exist” (121). Colby did not say this in despair. On the contrary, according to Moran, Colby’s waxing nostalgic about the CIA almost defies belief. Could there have been a less sympathetic audience in 1976? One can only imagine how his college student audience responded to Colby, given that the Agency’s dirty laundry was being aired on a daily basis. Colby’s comment becomes all too understandable when one sees him as simply another cold war true believer steeped in the ‘cult of intelligence’ later chronicled by so many critics.²

The secrecy that Colby prized also explains why the very problem that the CIA sought to combat could not be solved. As Moran notes, “in being so secretive about its activities, [the CIA] indirectly allowed the ‘culture industry’ to write the first draft of its history” (122). In much the same way that nature abhors a vacuum, western popular culture (and the Soviets for that matter) sought to understand the CIA, and since the CIA was not forthcoming, fictional treatments came to dominate all conversations. The CIA’s code of silence only allowed these fictions to spawn into something approaching a hydra-headed

² The phrase comes from the title of one of the first and most caustic critiques of the CIA, Victor Marchetti’s *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York, 1974). Scholars of intelligence should examine with care (and horror) the 2011 documentary made about Colby by his son Carl Colby. Entitled, *The Man Nobody Knew: In Search of My Father, CIA Spymaster William Colby*, this film uses archival and family films to reveal a Cold Warrior who believed in nothing more than the idea of secrets. His family suffered mightily, just as the U.S. suffered as a result of Colby’s love of secrets.

monster where nothing was beyond the realm of possibility. Turn on the TV, look at the web, watch a movie, read any number of potboilers, or best yet play one of the video games where the CIA is featured as a menacing figure, and you can see what the end result has been. The CIA is far from secret; it is imagined by all.

This is a persuasive argument—but a caveat is in order. While Moran uncovers a CIA that was saying ‘no’ to any number of positive portrayals put before it, simply because it believed in this code of silence, and also because it felt it did not need to advertise its actions, he tends to downplay the fact that there was another part of the CIA that sought the public spotlight, particularly during its ‘Golden Age’ of the 1950s. There was, for instance, Allen Dulles, the director of the CIA in this period. He was an American Cold-War celebrity, with any number of glowing profiles about him. *Time* magazine even put him on its cover for the August 3, 1953 issue. He loved the spotlight in much the way a movie star did, and he was only too happy to both shock the American people about the communist threat and reassure them that he and his underlings were on the job fighting the Red Menace. There is no easy way to reconcile the CIA’s efforts at maintaining its secrecy with the fact that its director was running around talking to all kinds of audiences about what he and his Agency were up to.³

However, Moran’s real interest in this period is Ian Fleming and the Bond novels, as they informed the CIA’s public persona. To begin with, there was a real friendship between Fleming and Dulles. Fleming’s depiction then of the heart-felt relationship between Bond and his CIA side-kick, Felix Leiter mirrored—partially at least—the one between Fleming and Dulles. The Bond/Leiter friendship served other purposes too, with the most obvious being its embodiment of the Cold-War alliance between the U.S and Great Britain. Moran then considers a complicated question: what exactly made the ‘special relationship’ of these countries work? He notes that the historiography of this topic needs to be broken down into a series of camps. There is the ‘evangelical’ school that sees an almost mystical bond between the two countries, one based on a shared history and faith. In opposition to this school is a ‘functional approach’ that is more realist in conception, and finally a ‘terminal’ school which argues that no special bond ever really existed and that the British deluded themselves by not coming to terms with their decreasing role in world affairs (124). Moran argues that Fleming’s Bond fits into the ‘evangelical’ school, especially when the novels suggest that the deep and abiding relationship between Bond and Leiter is possible because of the larger close relationship between British Intelligence (SIS) and the CIA. Moran then offers a series of close readings of the novels showing how the personal relationship between these two characters mirrored Fleming’s vision of the Special Relationship.

³ See Jonathan Nashel, “The Rise of the CIA and American Popular Culture,” in Dave Schmitz and Chris Jespersen, ed., *Architects of the American Century: Individuals and Institutions in 20th Century U.S. Foreign Policymaking* (Imprint Publications, 2000): 65-80.

One of the curious qualities here is that even though Fleming was über-English, he had a decidedly American quality of ‘making it.’ That is, Fleming’s desire for financial reward marked much of his life. Fleming’s desire for fame and fortune almost derailed the Bond bandwagon at its conception. Moran notes that for many Americans, their first introduction of Bond was not in the novels but on TV where they got to watch Bond transformed into “Jimmy Bond, American spy.” This 1954 adaptation of *Casino Royale* is one of the most astonishingly bad plays ever produced for the small screen—even the great Peter Lorre is reduced to wooden acting and to reciting horribly written dialogue. Though Moran discusses the ins and outs of this TV drama, it must be watched to fully appreciate its awfulness. And thanks to YouTube you now can:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bBnVDj5SkA>

Happily, it did no lasting harm to the nascent Bond phenomenon. The novels soon came to America by the millions, and the TV version was quickly forgotten, especially once the pleasure of the movies began. It is here that a real star, a real script, and real fun began with the appearance of *Dr. No* in 1962. Here was an example of soft power at work. It also points to another ‘special relationship’ of interest, one between the CIA and Hollywood

Overall, this is an incisive article that covers a great deal of material. Moran helps us to appreciate Ian Fleming’s work as a Cold-War artifact, one worth exploring to get at the cultural texture of this history. Moran’s work then fills in one more piece of the cold war puzzle of how the West viewed itself and its foes.

Jonathan Nashel received his Ph.D. in History from Rutgers University. He is an Associate Professor of History and Chair of the Department at Indiana University, South Bend. His book, *Edward Lansdale’s Cold War*, was published in 2005 by the University of Massachusetts Press. He is currently writing a cultural history of the CIA.

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