

John le Carré and Brexit

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John le Carré loathed Brexit. He loathed the hypocrisy of British voters who rejected the European Union. He loathed the posturing of British politicians who instigated the referendum in the first place and who played on fears about immigration. Boris Johnson earned particular condemnation for his brazen hypocrisy and for pretending that Europe was an enemy. Le Carré despised British officials who curried favour with Americans for purposes of trade – rolling out the red carpet for Donald Trump, who sneers at Britain’s “hard-won ties with Europe”¹ – while repudiating economic and political goals within an integrated Europe.

Unapologetically pro-European, le Carré repeatedly paired Brexit with Trump’s first presidency as examples of how democracy can betray its best impulses. Trump, he wrote in a letter to the journalist David Greenway, “set the stage for the worst things happening in the world right now, from Eastern Europe to the Middle East.”² In the period before and after the Brexit referendum in June 2016, le Carré’s anger about Britain quitting the EU never let up. The last novel that he published while still alive, *Agent Running in the Field* (2019), is a scathing indictment of British treachery, mixed motives, and opportunism vis-à-vis Brexit.

Europhilia

More often than not, le Carré’s novels read like dispatches from the frontlines of international crises. “I try to keep up with the news,” le Carré told an interviewer in 1986.³ His novels are larded with references to contemporary events. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963) speaks directly to escalating tensions in the Cold War, made tangible in the building of the Berlin Wall. *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1973) adjudicates treachery within British intelligence, with the betrayal of Kim Philby – the MI6 officer who defected to Russia in 1963 – providing a historical analogue to the unmasking of Bill Haydon as a Russian spy within the highest echelons of British secret services. *The Russia House* (1989) tracks the changing relation between the West and Russia during the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, initiated under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. In the novels that he wrote after the Cold War, le Carré turned increasingly to human rights as his primary subject. *The Secret Pilgrim* (1991) and *The Mission*

Song (2006) both represent scenes of torture as a violation of basic human rights, and *The Constant Gardener* (2001) indicts Big Pharma for experimenting on vulnerable human subjects in Africa.

As they track the changing political terrain from the Cold War through Brexit, le Carré tends to focus on the place of the UK within Europe. His three spy thrillers from the 1960s, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *The Looking Glass War* (1965), and *A Small Town in Germany* (1968), return repeatedly to the frontier between East and West Germany, with regard to NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances. In these novels, le Carré makes that point that the Cold War is not fought on one front with a single antagonist, but on multiple fronts with multilateral relations operating in push-me-pull-you oscillations. Power is exerted through espionage and diplomatic channels, always with a view to how British foreign policy does or does not align with positions taken by other European countries.

Typically, le Carré's sympathetic characters have a European sensibility, either by inclination or by birth. Many of his characters become infatuated with German culture. George Smiley, for instance, has a donnish interest in literature, "his beloved German literature," which extends to Lessing, Heine, and Thomas Mann.⁴ In *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, Smiley accidentally leaves a rare first edition of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius Simplicissimus* at his club, which happens to be the same work that Magnus Pym uses as a codebook to send messages to his Czech handler, Axel, in *A Perfect Spy* (1986).

This Germanophilia mirrors le Carré's own experience. At age sixteen, he left Sherborne, the public school that he was then attending in Dorset, to study German at Bern University. While in Bern, he once shook Thomas Mann's hand backstage after the legendary German author gave a speech.⁵ In *Smiley's People* (1979), le Carré gives one character the name Claus Kretzschmar, presumably in honour of Wendell Kretzschmar in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. With a nod to *Death in Venice*, a character codenamed "Tadzio" flits briefly through the pages of *Agent Running in the Field*.

Like Smiley, le Carré embraced the German muse with enthusiasm. He spoke German fluently. He also spoke excellent French, much to the awe of Bernard Pivot, the host of the influential television show *Apostrophes*, when he interviewed le Carré about espionage and *The Russia House* in November 1989. At Eton in the late 1950s, le Carré taught German and French.⁶ His early immersion in German culture, as he acknowledges in *The Pigeon Tunnel* (2016), gave him a "patch of eclectic territory," while stoking his romanticism, and instilling in him a commitment to "unending education" across a lifetime.⁷ German drama, he observes, combines "classic austerity" with "neurotic excesses."⁸ "The trick, it seemed to me," he adds, "was to disguise the one with the other,"⁹ as if camouflaging rigour with exuberance, or reason with emotion, were a clandestine act. For a spy, both austerity and excess are necessary, but less so, perhaps, than the masking of one with the other, a masking facilitated by operating in a second language.

Many of le Carré's characters have mixed European heritages. They see themselves as British and European at the same time. Fred Leiser in *The Looking Glass War* is a German-

speaking Pole naturalized as a British subject; because of his linguistic abilities, he is sent into East Germany to locate a Soviet missile installation. Peter Guillam, a recurring character in le Carré's novels, is said to be the offspring of a French businessman who spied for the British during the war, and his mother an Englishwoman who "did mysterious things with codes."¹⁰ In *A Legacy of Spies* (2017), narrated in the first person by Guillam, he varies this heritage somewhat. His father, in this revised story, was "the wastrel son of a wealthy Anglo-French family from the English midlands," and his mother the "sole offspring of a long line of Breton farmers."¹¹ Whichever version is true hardly matters; more to the point, Guillam sees himself as having allegiances to Britain, France, and Europe generally.

Mixed heritages complement rather than contradict each other in le Carré's fiction. Frequently, these characters with international backgrounds speak several European languages. Jim Prideaux, the wounded, athletic agent in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, was educated in Paris, Prague, Strasbourg, and Oxford. He speaks Czech and French, yet he is a staunch patriot known for his "passionate Englishness."¹² Languages enhance the facets of a spy's personality while multiplying opportunities for clandestine activities: the more languages a spy speaks, the more he or she has access to information. More often than not, these characters who have several national allegiances are the most loyal agents, since they make a conscious decision about where their loyalties lie, as do Leamas, Prideaux, and Guillam.

No doubt, le Carré's fluency in German helped him during his postings to Bonn and Hamburg as an MI6 agent working under diplomatic cover in the early 1960s. Acquaintance with other European languages widened his understanding of diplomacy and national ambitions. In 1962, he delivered a lecture on British foreign policy to an audience of seven hundred people in Oberhausen.¹³ Much of his experience abroad as an MI6 agent makes its way into *A Small Town in Germany*. In this novel, recidivist fascism in postwar Germany has measurable consequences for British chances of joining the EU, or the European Economic Community (EEC) as it then was. Charles de Gaulle vetoed two British bids to join the EEC in 1963 and again in 1967. With de Gaulle no longer president of France, the third British bid was successful and Britain officially joined the EEC on 1 January 1973.

A Small Town in Germany focuses on postwar diplomacy, especially as it bears on British lobbying and negotiations to enter the EEC. Klaus Karfeld, a former Nazi and political aspirant, tamps down reminders of his past as vigorously as he can. During the war, he used prisoners to conduct experiments concerning the effects of gas on human beings. Thirty-one prisoners died as a result of these horrific experiments. Their bodies, along with the corpse of a foreign guard who knew what was going on, were buried in a stony field near Hapstorf, close to the laboratory where Karfeld conducted his so-called research. After the war ends, Karfeld claims to have fought on the Eastern front; he falsifies documents to substantiate this lie. In a ghastly gesture of defiance, he uses data from his wartime experiments to obtain a doctorate.

Politically, Karfeld stokes anti-European feeling. He campaigns on slogans such as "'Send the Foreign Workers Home!' 'Rid us of the Whore Bonn!' 'Unite Germany First, Europe Second!'"¹⁴ Even as these slogans appeal to hermetic, right-wing nationalism, they activate

fascist and anti-European sentiment. At a rally, Karfeld wonders aloud, “what was so *very* wrong about Nazism that it should be punished eternally with the whole world’s hostility” (*STG* 334). By making such a provocative, egregious comment, Karfeld tries to divert 1960s revolutionary feeling, chiefly discontent among youth who did not live through the war, to his neo-fascist cause. In this sense, the novel documents the convergence of numerous, not always compatible energies in postwar Germany: youth culture, European unity, populism, neo-Nazism, and hostility to immigrants.

For his own political reasons, Karfeld inclines to a strategic alliance with Moscow and away from Western Europe and NATO. At the British embassy, rumours circulate about high-level talks taking place between West Germany and Russia. One diplomat summarizes these talks in disjointed, incomplete sentences: “They’re joining Comecon and signing the Warsaw pact. All to please Karfeld and bugger up Brussels. Britain out, Russia in. Non-aggressive Rapallo” (*STG* 146). This burst of nouns requires some deciphering. Signed in 1922, the Treaty of Rapallo cancelled financial claims between Germany and Soviet Russia and established normative relations between the two countries after the First World War. In the mid-1960s, were Germany to sign the Warsaw Pact and join Comecon – the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance that operated among Soviet bloc countries from 1949 and 1991 – it would rejig alliances and thwart British negotiations with the EEC, headquartered for the most part in Brussels. Obviously, Britain and the NATO alliance are keen to prevent an alliance of any sort between Germany and Soviet Russia because of the power vacuum that would create in central Europe.

The spectre of EEC membership haunts *A Small Town in Germany*. Largely about conversations among diplomats, the novel demonstrates how difficult it is to advance negotiations about where, when, and how Britain might join the EEC. These talks are hampered by individuals whose motives do not coincide with British foreign policy or who mingle personal with professional motives. Leo Harting, a low-level diplomat working inside the British embassy in Bonn, pilfers files relating to Karfeld and his unconscionable experiments. If these sensitive files are made public and traced back to security breaches inside the embassy, negotiations between Britain and Europe could be ruined. Meanwhile, British diplomats worry about a “leadership crisis at home and the gold row in Brussels” (*STG* 110), fairly clear references to the sudden devaluation of the pound in November 1967, an economic crisis that led to destabilization of Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s Labour government and a run on British gold reserves in March 1968.

Unsure of their footing inside the European community, the British hedge their bets: they want to join the Common Market, but they also want to keep alive the special relationship between Britain and the US. Rawley Bradfield, the British ambassador in Bonn, executes a triple gambit. First, he bets on Brussels and the Common Market and therefore pursues negotiations in that direction. Second, during a secret meeting with Karfeld, he discusses Bonn-Moscow trade while claiming to be anti-American. Third, he tries to hush rumours about Leo Harting’s investigation into Karfeld’s past, because that investigation originates inside his embassy and

therefore appears to be a British attempt to blackmail Karfeld. A statute of limitations restricts any likelihood that Karfeld would be prosecuted for war crimes, but his responsibility for killing thirty-two people during the war would damage his political career.

Bradfield's and Karfeld's names have an eerie symmetry. As paired characters – one a diplomat, the other a politician – they share a broad streak of hypocrisy. Bradfield, with good reason, declares himself “a great believer in hypocrisy” (*STG* 321). In novel after novel, le Carré indicts hypocrisy as an ineradicable disposition among the British. In *The Secret Pilgrim*, George Smiley attributes British hypocrisy to private education and the class system: “the privately educated Englishman – and Englishwoman, if you will allow me – is the greatest dissembler on earth. [...] Nobody will charm you so glibly, disguise his feelings from you better, cover his tracks more skillfully or find it harder to confess to you that he's been a damned fool.”¹⁵ British hypocrisy infects personal relations and foreign policy alike. Britain, as a signatory to the UN Charter and the UDHR, officially supports human rights, yet uses that public support as camouflage for its capitalist and neo-colonial interests.

In *A Small Town in Germany*, the British embassy complains that it has no space to preserve all the briefs, communiqués, dossiers, and files that it generates and receives – the masses of paper required for multilateral negotiations and the proper running of an embassy. Registry has only so much space to archive all this paper. The solution, therefore, is to cull old files. Destroying files, however, is another form of hypocrisy: with each file, the past in all its compromising detail disappears. Leo Harting steals files because they contain proof of Karfeld's lies and crimes. Both Britain and Germany want to cover up historical information for the sake of smoothing out relations between the two countries. “That's the fascination of files; there's nowhere to stop” (*STG* 199), an archivist says about the tangles of information that dossiers contain. The files at the British embassy in Bonn help explain the murky motives of British foreign policy: the desire to repress old animosities against Axis powers so that Britain can become a member of the EEC.

Europhobia

For an interview aired on *60 Minutes* in 2017, le Carré was asked about his national allegiances. While admitting that he was an Englishman “born and bred,” he qualified his answer in light of the Brexit vote: “My England would be the one that recognizes its place in the European Union. The jingoistic England that is trying to march us out of the EU – that is an England I don't want to know.”¹⁶

About Brexit, le Carré was unequivocal. It was the wrong thing to do. It was an “act of economic suicide mounted by charlatans.”¹⁷ In *Agent Running in the Field*, he is even more explicit. He describes Brexit as “sheer bloody lunacy,” “self-immolation,” a “total disaster,” and an “unmitigated clusterfuck” (*ARF* 35, 60, 222, 57). In le Carré's view, the craven manipulations of the Tory government demonstrate a failure of leadership, as well as an abandonment of democratic integrity, before and after the Brexit referendum. He categorically declares his allegiance to Europe rather than England or Britain. He wrote to a friend in 2017, “I w[oul]d

rather be Dutch, German, French, or for that matter Polish, than a Brit subjected to this truly shaming process in which we are engaged.”¹⁸

Le Carré feared that Britain, under lacklustre leadership, conceded too much to Donald Trump’s and Vladimir Putin’s bullying, lies, and manipulations. According to le Carré, Theresa May, one of the many residents at 10 Downing Street in the Brexit aftermath, perceived a chance to score political points domestically by making a hash of Brexit negotiations. In March 2018, he wrote to Philippe Sands, the eminent human rights lawyer, “I think [Theresa] May has protested too much for two reasons. She has seen a golden opportunity to sideline [Jeremy] Corbyn, look tough, raise the bar on chauvinism, and distract us from the massive concessions she is making to Europe on Brexit. But as far as our allies are concerned, insofar as we have any left, she has dug herself in too deep and is still digging.”¹⁹ As le Carré implies, treachery lies at the heart of British politics. Isolation from historic and strategic allies leaves Britain exposed to the depredations of Trump and Putin.

Among political leaders, Boris Johnson, “a Trumpist through and through,”²⁰ is singled out for le Carré’s particular contempt. In January 2020, le Carré wrote to Pierre Schori, chairman of the Olof Palme Memorial Fund, “Britain is in the hands of far-right Trumpists, as every small new event indicates. Journalists suspected of unsound sympathies are excluded from official press briefings, which now take place, not in the people’s parliament, but at No. 10, on Johnson’s home ground. Cowardice & bullying go hand-in-hand, & Johnson is a practitioner of both. The Democrats in America are making prize asses of themselves, Putin is appointing himself Ruler for Life, so we look like having a pretty awful decade.”²¹ In *Agent Running in the Field*, an unnamed Foreign Secretary is described as “that fucking Etonian narcissistic elitist” (ARF 117). Although the appointee remains anonymous, this unflattering description surely refers to Boris Johnson, not his immediate predecessor in that office, Philip Hammond, who was not an Etonian.

While accepting the Olof Palme Prize, le Carré denounced Johnson and Brexit with lashings of irony: “We Brits are all nationalists now. Or so Johnson would have us believe. But to be a nationalist you need enemies and the shabbiest trick in the Brexiteers’ box was to make an enemy of Europe. ‘Take back control!’ they cried, with the unspoken subtext: and hand it to Donald Trump, along with our foreign policy, our economic policy, our health service and, if they can get away with it, our BBC.”²² In le Carré’s commentary on Brexit, a willingness to become a vassal state to the US, as against a partner among equals within the EU, manifests both a wanton lack of judgment and flagrant hypocrisy on the part of David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and other Tory politicians. Nor, it should be said, does le Carré think highly of the Labour party either.

Vehement in its anti-Brexit rhetoric, *Agent Running in the Field* complicates the British withdrawal from the EU with a plot about generational conflict. Nat, a forty-seven-year-old secret service agent on the verge of retirement, and Ed and Florence, a pair of agents in their twenties, feel ineffectual in their attempts to do what is right, as opposed to doing what they are told. Florence delivers an angry speech about flagrant hypocrisies that protect the rich and flout

principles of democracy: “Fuck the law courts! Fuck fair trials! Fuck *human* rights” (*ARF* 269). Even though she is performing for hidden microphones when she utters these words, her irony is directed at democratic institutions that pretend to uphold principles while seeking financial gain.

Florence’s boss, Dom Trench, is married to Rachel, a peeress and a co-owner of a wealth management company that provides “non-responsible, unaccountable oversight” (*ARF* 154-55) to rich clients who wish to funnel dirty money through London banks. Not coincidentally, Rachel also sits on a treasury sub-committee that approves financing to secret operations. In that capacity, she quashes a request for money to investigate Orson, a Russian oligarch, who is one of her clients. That, at least, is Florence’s surmise, since Rachel’s clients all remain anonymous. Rachel is in flagrant conflict of interest: she uses her authority on the treasury committee to protect her private enterprise. Orson, it so happens, donates £1M to the Leavers in the Brexit campaign. Financial companies like Rachel’s not only launder money from dubious sources, but do so while pretending to serve the public good through charitable works and government committees.

If Rachel’s conduct begs questions, so does her husband’s. Dom longs to head the Russia department of the secret service, yet lacks judgement and skills for that job. He does not speak Russian; he puts his career ahead of other considerations; he is underhanded and discreditable. Recruited from the City, he apparently has a background in finance, although details about his accomplishments remain sketchy. For the time being, Dom has been appointed head of a “home-based Russian outstation that’s been in the shade too long” (*ARF* 23). That post is too small to satisfy Dom’s ambitions. Although Dom and Rachel are bit players in the plot, they offend not just le Carré but the other characters in the novel with their lack of scruples and undisguised powerplays.

Anger motivates *Agent Running in the Field*. Florence has a searing temper. Nat’s personnel file indicates that he can be “*irascible*” (*ARF* 8). At the slightest mention of Brexit or Trump, Ed launches into angry soliloquies. Nat has several heated conversations with contacts who tell him how Brexit is perceived outside Britain. In no uncertain terms, Arkady, once a British double agent, now a Russian oligarch living in Karlovy Vary, accuses the British of selling him “a cartload of hypocritical horseshit” and of turning their backs on Europe. To show his contempt, he does an imitation of the way Brexiteers think: ““We’re special. We’re British. We don’t *need* Europe. We won all our wars alone. No Americans, no Russians, no anyone. We’re supermen”” (*ARF* 140-41). Arkady makes British superiority not just a matter of contemporary arrogance but also a question of historical revisionism.

The greatest treachery perpetrated in the novel turns out to be a rebranding of the special relationship between the UK and the US. Renate, a German agent, reveals to Nat that a covert, Anglo-American operation called “Jericho” has been mounted to undermine social democratic institutions in the EU and dismantle international trade tariffs. Post-Brexit, Britain looks for new trading partners and sucks up to the US. Operation “Jericho” will be conducted through persuasion, including bribery and corruption of elected officials, and the widespread dissemination of fake news.

As in le Carré's previous novels, the good guys – Ed and Nat – have mixed bloodlines. Nat is a British subject by birth, his father being Scottish and his mother a White Russian with a generous dollop of German blood in her veins. Ed's father was Irish, and he has fallen in love with German culture. Germans "were simply the best Europeans ever" (*ARF* 66), says Ed, who lived for two years in Germany without fully mastering the language. He sees himself as a European first, a British subject second. In light of his Irish heritage and his elective German affinities, he resents that the "Brexiters were conspiring to deprive him of his European birthright" (*ARF* 66).

As a gesture of defiance against Brexit, le Carré obtained Irish citizenship in 2020. He wrote enthusiastically to the head of Foreign Births Registration upon receiving his certificate of citizenship: "You have given me back my long friendship with Europe and belatedly made me a child of Ireland."²³ In his fiction, Irishness becomes a sign of solidarity, if not hope for the future of Europe. In *A Legacy of Spies*, published the year after the Brexit vote, Alec Leamas is repeatedly described as Irish. He has an "Irish jaw" and is given to "raucous Irish obscenities."²⁴ Curiously, when Alec Leamas appears in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, his nationality is ambiguous. Some people attribute his "small, brown eyes"²⁵ to his Irishness, but the narrator neither confirms nor denies this lineage. By contrast, in *A Legacy of Spies*, Leamas's Irishness becomes an aspect of his Europeanness, and therefore his inherent reliability.

In *Agent Running in the Field*, Ed is prepared to hand over sensitive, insider information about "Jericho" to the Russians. Having signed the Official Secrets Act, he knows that he is betraying his oath and his country. No matter what motivates his actions, he is in way over his head. Since he is not much of a nationalist, his treachery probably does not spring from a feeling that Brexit is a "*national humiliation*" (*ARF* 221). He does not want money either. In the end, his treachery may be attributable to old-fashioned virtues of ethical responsibility. As an unabashed, anti-Brexit pro-European, he has "ethical expectations of the West" (*ARF* 205). Why, however, does he turn to Russia?

The conclusion of *Agent Running in the Field* is unlike other le Carré novels. More often than not, his protagonists are killed in the line of duty. Leamas dies at the end of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. Fred Leiser dies at the end of *The Looking Glass War*. Leo Harting dies at the end of *A Small Town in Germany*. Jerry Westerby dies at the end of *The Honourable Schoolboy*. Magnus Pym commits suicide at the end of *A Perfect Spy*. Justin Quayle is murdered at the end of *The Constant Gardener*. They are all casualties of double dealings and spying conducted in bad faith. There are some variations on this pattern. Karla defects at the end of *Smiley's People*, and Barley Blair anticipates a reunion with his Russian paramour in *The Russia House*. In general, le Carré's dénouements concern the fatalism, or fatality, attached to moral decisions taken in politically charged circumstances.

Unlike its predecessors, *Agent Running in the Field* ends with a hasty marriage between Ed and Florence, followed immediately by their exfiltration to Europe. If he stays in Britain, Ed will face criminal charges. Nat, being older and wiser, has arranged for the newly married couple to be lodged clandestinely at a guesthouse in the Transylvanian Alps run by a Catalan couple,

until such time, one presumes, as the scandal blows over, or circumstances change. If comedies end in marriage, the comic aspect of this marriage between two secret service agents who have turned their backs on their careers lies in their endorsement of Europe over the shady, venal dealings conducted by highly placed British spies and politicians.

As in other novels, le Carré's subject in *Agent Running in the Field* is British hypocrisy. Although Ed estimates that "Brexit is the most important decision facing Britain since 1939" (ARF 55), the referendum botches all the negotiations and diplomacy that went into EU membership for Britain. Secret service agents are reduced to apologizing "for Brexit to an assortment of European intelligence professionals" (ARF 79). Meanwhile, in a display of unparalleled cravenness, the special relationship that exists between the UK and the US descends into a game of kowtowing and flattery. "Sucking merrily on the hind tit of American power" (ARF 222) is how one senior intelligence officer describes the undignified British posture. The same officer describes Trump as "a gang boss" who makes it his mission "to screw civil society all ways up, not be part of it" (ARF 222). While Trump declares Europe his enemy and trashes NATO, the British stand by hypocritically, awaiting whatever opportunity presents itself next.

Conclusion

Throughout his novels, le Carré reflects on the nature of responsibility. In *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, for example, Smiley feels responsible for fighting the Cold War alone, and a schoolboy named Roach "shoulders the responsibility night and day for preserving the world's peace."²⁶ In Western democracies, are individuals responsible for the common good, or have they entirely devolved that responsibility to their respective governments? Do secret services allow citizens and governments to fulfil their responsibilities or evade them? In *Agent Running in the Field*, Ed declares that people prefer an easy life "as opposed to recognizing their duty as responsible opponents of the encroaching fascist enemy" (ARF 56). His decision to pass intelligence to the Russians may be misguided – there is a counterplan afoot to turn him into a double agent who passes disinformation to his contacts – but he assumes that doing something is better than accepting Brexit. He is aided and abetted in his efforts by Nat, who goes against the express wishes of his superiors by temporizing, by deceiving his superiors, then by sending Ed and Florence abroad. In other words, Nat assumes responsibility for protecting a generation younger than his own while launching his own protest against post-Brexit Britain.

In *The Russia House*, a Russian says that the English are the moral leaders of Europe, "the secret steadiers, the unifiers of the great European ideal."²⁷ As Brexit proves, that idealism turns out to be misplaced. In his Olof Palme speech, le Carré, as if speaking to the dead, appeals directly to the Swedish diplomat and prime minister who believed so firmly in Europe to give advice about how to turn the tide on Brexit: "I'm not just a remainer. I'm a European through and through, and the rats have taken over the ship, I want to tell him. It's breaking my heart and I want it to break yours. We need your voice to wake us from our sleepwalk, and save us from this wanton act of political and economic self-harm."²⁸

What would le Carré think about Trump's second presidency and the current state of

affairs after Brexit? He would deplore both. He would call loudly for a return of the English as the steadiers and unifiers of the European ideal. He would continue to wear his Irishness like a badge of belonging and solidarity with the EU. Were he alive, he would certainly write another novel about the current state of affairs, possibly about dictatorships in Eastern Europe, an idea that he mentions in passing as a possible subject.²⁹ Without a doubt, that novel would be about spies. It would also be about misguided motives, the ethical imperative of responsibility, and the consequences of hypocrisy.

¹ John le Carré, *Agent Running in the Field* (Penguin, 2019), 160. Subsequent citations appear in the text after the abbreviation *ARF*.

² John le Carré, *A Private Spy: The Letters of John le Carré*, ed. Tim Cornwell (Viking, 2022), 631.

³ Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, eds. *Conversations with John le Carré* (University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 88.

⁴ John le Carré, *Call for the Dead* (Penguin, 2012), 5.

⁵ Bruccoli and Baughman, *Conversations with John le Carré*, 117.

⁶ Adam Sisman, *John le Carré: The Biography* (Knopf, 2015), 166-67.

⁷ John le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life* (Viking, 2016), 4-5.

⁸ le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel*, 5.

⁹ le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel*, 5.

¹⁰ John le Carré, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (Penguin, 2002), 82.

¹¹ John le Carré, *A Legacy of Spies* (Viking, 2017), 2.

¹² le Carré, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, 12.

¹³ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 638.

¹⁴ John le Carré, *A Small Town in Germany*, 7. Subsequent quotations appear in the text after the abbreviation *STG*.

¹⁵ John le Carré, *The Secret Pilgrim* (Penguin, 1996), 29.

¹⁶ John le Carré, interviewed by Steve Kroft, "le Carré, Part 2," *60 Minutes*, CBS News Productions and CBS Entertainment (2017), 10:09-10:27.

¹⁷ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 576.

¹⁸ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 583.

¹⁹ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 588.

²⁰ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 631.

²¹ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 607.

²² John le Carré, acceptance speech, "Olof Palme Award" (30 January 2020), David-Cornwell-tal-engelska.pdf; also reprinted in *The Guardian* (1 February 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/01/john-le-carre-breaking-heart-brexit>

²³ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 629.

²⁴ le Carré, *A Legacy of Spies*, 64, 81.

²⁵ John le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Penguin, 2009), 8.

²⁶ le Carré, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, 214, 226.

²⁷ John le Carré, *The Russia House* (Viking, 1989), 86.

²⁸ le Carré, "Olof Palme Award."

²⁹ le Carré, *A Private Spy*, 622.