

# How the cold war context created new perspectives: film and literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

During the Cold War period, new and heterogeneous ideas and perspectives arose in response to the perplexing, unprecedented dangers and concerns, shaping artists' understanding of the zeitgeist. These competing perspectives found in texts offer differing interpretations of the issues, fears, philosophical notions and ideologies and reveal a holistic view of the time period. In this way, John Le Carre's novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* subverts the traditional conventions of the spy-fiction genre, exposes the moral hypocrisy of the West. Similarly, *Agent 6* by Tom Rob Smith highlights the corruption and disillusionment of Soviet-centric view and Western triumphalism. George Clooney's neo-noir docu-drama *Good Night, and Good Luck* elucidates how the notions of freedom and control are central to the Cold War context, whereas *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, a play by Dario Fo, further expands on how institutions to restrict freedoms due to their own biased perceptions. In looking backwards, such sources demonstrate that the Cold War was marked by moral complications, not by a predictable conflict between good and evil. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* alters audience perceptions of the East and West through its representation of its characters and exposes both blocs as morally corrupted as the other. Traditionally in spy fiction, the Western spies are archetypal heroes, while Eastern spies are conniving, traitorous enemies. However, Lemas as a protagonist is established as an anti-hero who "would probably meet death, with cynical resentment and the courage of a solitary." This characterisation presents Lemas as disillusioned, utilitarian and nihilistic. In Control's rhetorical question, "You can't be less ruthless than the opposition simply because your government's policy is benevolent, can you now?", the West's lack of ethics and moral relativism is revealed, <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-cold-war-context-created-new-perspectives-film-and-literature/>

challenging the contextual audiences' perceptions of espionage in moral, civilised society. Le Carre comments on the hypocrisy of the Western bloc, who demonise the East but in reality, neither side has any moral superiority. Furthermore, Fiedler exposes how both the East and the West have little difference - " All our work - yours and mine - is rooted in the theory that the whole is more important than the individual." The employment of the parenthesis emphasises the distinct similarities between both blocs and the shared immorality and utilitarianism. Fielder's representation also positions audiences to empathise with him, undermining the traditional anti-Communist and anti-Semitic undertones in Western literature during this context. He describes the concept of collectivism, which prioritizes the groups, rather than individualism. Collectivism is often associated with Communism, thus elucidating that the West's crusade against the Eastern bloc is hypocritical. Eventually Liz, as a Communist, realises both governments are " more wicked than all of us." By employing repetition in " because of their contempt, contempt for what is real and good; contempt for love," Le Carre reinforces the inhumanity of the Eastern bloc and showcases that the oppressive and unethical nature of espionage corrupts even the most idealistic and pure. Thus ' The Spy Who Came In From The Cold' explores the immorality and corruption of both the East and West blocs, subverting the traditional spy fiction genre and shaping audience's views of the perceptions of the context. Similarly, Tom Rob Smith's novel Agent 6 exposes the detrimental impacts that espionage has on a spy's health and psyche, underscore the corruption of idealism and faith in the Soviet state. Agent 6 follows the story of Leo Demidov, an disenfranchised ex-MGB agent whose wife Raisa is murdered in a Soviet conspiracy plot to inspire

<https://assignbuster.com/how-the-cold-war-context-created-new-perspectives-film-and-literature/>

international Communist revolutions and create anti-American sentiment. Leo begins the novel as a stereotypical, hard-boiled agent, evident in the anaphora of “ We are not permitted the luxury of interpretation. We are not judges. We don’t decide what evidence to present and destroy.” This displays Leo’s blind obedience and his utilitarian approach to espionage, much like Lemas. Unlike Lemas’ existentialism, Leo has faith in the Soviet state – he believes his job of hunting political dissidents, is rewarding and “... worth it, my friend. It is worth it.” However, his growing disillusionment transforms his outward appearance, exemplified in his changing characterisation, “ There was insanity in his movements.” His corruption is continued as he is reassigned to Afghanistan, becoming addicted to opium, a symbol of his despondency and the corruption of his idealism – “...the drug would cocoon him against the cold, and everything else – the disappointment of the life he was living and the regrets of the life he’d left behind...Opium had made him hollow, scooping out the bitterness and reproach.” The word choice of cocoon represents Leo’s attempts to protect himself from his emotions and previous life, exemplifying the detrimental impacts of espionage. This displays Jean-Paul Sartre’s principle of authenticity, which outlines that humans live as inauthentic creatures, while an authentic live is characterised by love, meaning, freedom and joy. In this way, Leo’s addiction exemplifies his inauthentic life, due to his existentialist outlook of the world, a result of the hegemonic Soviet state. However, Leo begins to regain his authentic life after he defects to America, then returns to Russia to see his daughters – “ They were a projection from his mind, a mirage, constructed to protect himself from the bleak reality that he would never see them again.”

Despite beginning to live an authentic life, Leo still has a nihilistic outlook, <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-cold-war-context-created-new-perspectives-film-and-literature/>

evident in the word choice of bleak reality. This underscores the long-term effects that Soviet espionage has on the relationships and psyche of its spies. Thus, ' Agent 6' exposes the corruption of morality and faith, as well as the destructive impacts on one's health and mentality. Evident in Good Night, and Good Luck, freedom of the media and speech in response to government control allow individuals to excoriate the society and culture in which they live, providing social commentary of the context and exposing the diverse perspectives. This is highly exemplified in Edward R Murrow, a CBS reporter in the 1950's, noted for challenging the House of Un-American activities and Senator Joseph McCarthy's protectionist campaign of paranoia and blacklisting. Murrow is an archetypal hero who stands for truth and justice against a ruling government who violate the rights of others, a proverbial David-and-Goliath conflict. In his speech condemning the government-pursued Communist witch-hunts, he states " We were not descended from men who feared to write, to associate, to speak and to defend the causes that were for the moment unpopular," the accumulation exposing the extent of government control in the Cold War context. The pan shot of the other reporters and television workers reveal the vast majority of individuals who were intimidated by the McCarthy hearings and demonstrates the risk that people will take to maintain their freedom of speech. With the use of split screens, Murrow represents the Fourth Estate, freedom of press and freedom of speech, whereas McCarthy represents government control, propaganda, censorship and Cold War anxiety. In this way, McCarthy and Murrow are antithetical to the other, evidently displaying the archnemesis TV trope. The idea of a diametrically opposed archnemesis is also symbolic of the contextual, global conflict - East versus West, <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-cold-war-context-created-new-perspectives-film-and-literature/>

Communism versus Capitalism, freedom versus control. Furthermore, Chomsky's propaganda model is evident, outlining that mass media manipulates viewers and creates an inherent conflict of interests, becoming propaganda for undemocratic forces. One filter of this model is 'fear ideology', exemplified by McCarthy – "if people are frightened, they will accept authority". Both Murrow and McCarthy offer differing responses to the Cold War period and American life. Therefore, the After the Bomb module is characterised by the relationship between the Fourth Estate and governmental control, revealing the multifaceted views of the Cold War period. Furthermore, Accidental Death of an Anarchist exposes the institutional anti-leftist sentiment of the Cold War period and highlights individual perspectives that challenge this notion of police control. This play is an absurdist political satire, which dramatizes the death of Giuseppe Pinelli, an Italian anarchist railway worker who died in police custody. The absurdist dramatic convention of nameless designators – such as the Maniac, the Journalist, the Inspector and the Superintendent. – is employed to represent the various contextual social groups and those involved in the cover-up, highlighting the range of political perspectives of the era. Fo satirises the police and exposes their inconsistencies through the Maniac, who has been diagnosed with 'acting mania'. He first reveals the corrupt nature of police control – "Don't throw me out, Inspector. I love it here with you, among policemen. I feel safe." The irony denotes that the police system uses its power to crush dissidents, like anarchists and other leftists, in order to maintain their control, subverting the people they were sworn to defend. The Maniac further emphasises this irony by saying "...Let me stay, or I'll throw myself out of the window." This underscores that, much like McCarthy, <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-cold-war-context-created-new-perspectives-film-and-literature/>

government institutions justified their leftist witch-hunts by claiming it was to protect the public, but ultimately created a tense culture of fear. Much like the Maniac, the Journalist also attempts to expose the police brutality occurring, however in realistic way. The contrast between the absurdist Maniac and the realist Journalist exposes the diverse perspectives of the context, yet highlight the unifying, anti-establishment bias that characterises this module. She challenges the police with facts, rather than mind games like the Maniac, stating “ So you’ll be unaware that of the 173 bomb attacks to date...102 have been proved to be the work of fascists? “ The rhetorical question exposes the police’s anti-leftist perspective, revealing an understanding of the ways of thinking of those in higher positions of power had during the context. It also conveys a tone of disbelief and suspicion, reinforcing the idea of Cold War anxiety and a distrust of institutions. Thus, the After the Bomb module is characterised by institutional anti-leftist hysteria. ‘ Accidental Death of An Anarchist’ exposes the perspectives of both the police, and those who criticise and challenge them. The Cold War period was characterised by new, diverse and competing perspectives of the dangerous and unprecedented times, altering the interpretation, development and reception of texts and offering a variety of philosophical ideas, paradigms and concerns. As is evident in The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and Agent 6, the tense political atmosphere resulted in the need for espionage, which had harmful impacts on spies and their associates and changing the ideas of patriotism and utilitarianism. Good Night, and Good Luck and Accidental Death of an Anarchist both expose the range of perspectives surrounding the anti-leftist sentiment during the Cold War context and highlight the dangers of blind obedience to institutions.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-the-cold-war-context-created-new-perspectives-film-and-literature/>