

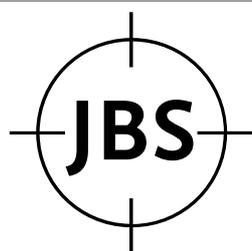
From Dimitrios with Love

Ian Fleming's Cold War Revision of Eric Ambler's *A Coffin for Dimitrios*

LUCAS TOWNSEND

One of the most recognisable titles of Cold War popular fiction is certainly Ian Fleming's 1957 novel *From Russia With Love*. Listed among American President John F. Kennedy's top ten favourite novels in *Life* magazine and later marking Sean Connery's second film appearance as James Bond, *Russia* occupies a crossroads of multilateral Cold War culture, becoming a quintessential marker of the deadlocked political tensions between East and West. *Russia* was a noticeable departure from the successful formula Fleming developed in the four Bond novels that preceded it: *Casino Royale*, *Live and Let Die*, *Moonraker*, and *Diamonds Are Forever*. In *Russia*, Bond's chief M orders him to Istanbul on a mission to "pimp for England" (Fleming 2012b, 117) and seduce the beautiful Soviet cipher clerk Tatiana Romanova. In exchange, Tatiana offers a cutting-edge Soviet encryption machine, the Spektor. As the reader learns from the opening section of the novel, this is an elaborate ploy, a "honey trap" laid by the Soviet Union's SMERSH¹ intelligence branch to cripple the reputation of the British Secret Service in a murder-suicide sex scandal involving their best agent. *Russia's* unique

1 As Fleming defines it, "SMERSH is a contraction of 'Smiert Spionam [Смерть Шпионам],' which means 'Death to Spies'" (2012b, 27). SMERSH (СМЕРШ) was a real collaborative department of several Soviet counterintelligence agencies.



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narrative structure (the first ten of the novel's twenty-eight chapters are dedicated to the internal machinations of SMERSH before finally introducing a Bond suffering from his relegation to "the soft life" (ibid., 97) of desk work in the eleventh chapter) certainly raises questions about the nature of Fleming's writing process. Writing always exists in a revisionary conversation with nearly all writings that come before, leading to conscious and unconscious meaning-making from these previous texts. This is no different for Fleming, who operates on Julia Kristeva's idea that the text "is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (1980, 36). However, to be more accurate, *Russia* actually adopts Gérard Genette's concept of hypertextuality outlined in his *Palimpsests*. Hypertextuality, Genette argues, "refers to any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (1997a, 5). Perhaps the most well-known example of a hypertextual rewriting is the 1922 novel *Ulysses* by James Joyce, a Modernist retelling of the Homeric tradition's *Odyssey*. Likewise, Fleming's *Russia* contains more than a few passing similarities to Eric Ambler's 1939 interwar thriller *A Coffin for Dimitrios*; the presence of Ambler's novel (the original UK title of which was *The Mask of Dimitrios*) within 007's attaché case gives a not-so-subtle clue to Fleming's primary literary influence on his conscious hypertextual construction of the fifth Bond novel.

James Bond's personal library is surprisingly well-developed for a professional secret agent. While some of the books Bond peruses are for the purposes of gathering information for his mission – such as Patrick Leigh Fermor's Caribbean travelogue *The Traveller's Tree* in *Live and Let Die* (Fleming 2012a, 23) – Bond primarily reads for pleasure: a Raymond Chandler novel in an airport (Fleming 2012c, 263), Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* in a resort hotel room (Fleming 2012d, 66), a German thriller of Fleming's creation (*Verderbt, Verdammt, Ver-raten*) in the safe house of "The Living Daylights" (Fleming 2012e, 75), or any number of sporting manuals on golf and card-playing. Before a storm thrashes his BEA flight to Istanbul in *Russia*, Bond, we are told, "reached for the slim, expensive-looking attaché case on the floor beside him and took out *The Mask of Dimitrios* by Eric Ambler and put the case, which was very heavy in spite of its size, on the seat beside him" (Fleming 2012b, 114-115). Fleming pays homage to Ambler's legacy by implicitly using Gérard Genette's aforementioned idea of hypertextuality: *A Coffin for Dimitrios* is very much the hypotext for Fleming's novel. Fleming creates a hypertext of *Coffin* to modernise (or rather, postmodernise) many elements of Ambler's novel – but especially by creating a Cold War parable

through the struggle between James Bond and Soviet agent Donovan “Red” Grant, by rewriting Ambler’s emblematic interwar protagonist Charles Latimer and antagonist Dimitrios Makropoulos. Bond’s copy of *Coffin* also saves his life during his climactic showdown with Grant on the Orient Express. By including the text of *Coffin* as a significant plot-object within the narrative of *Russia*, Fleming offers a metafictional signal to both the reader and to Bond himself (should he actually finish reading *Coffin*) of the imminent danger to be found in the post-World War II chaos of Europe.

Ambler’s *Coffin* details the chance encounter of detective novelist Charles Latimer with the cold-case of one Dimitrios Makropoulos, an international criminal-for-hire who has run the gamut of assassination, espionage, drug smuggling, and human trafficking under various assumed names. Dimitrios has just been found dead in the Bosphorus, and Latimer becomes obsessed with writing the “strangest of biographies” (Ambler 2001, 34) of the deceased Dimitrios, a man who has achieved a certain mythological status as a larger-than-life criminal with a hand in almost every international intrigue since his escape from Turkey sixteen years before.

Fleming’s *Russia* shares more than just a few cursory similarities with the setting, plot, and characters of Ambler’s text. Both novels open on a palatial residence overlooking the Black Sea, with Latimer first entering the novel at Madame Chavez’s Bosphorus mansion, while Grant – in what Umberto Eco suggests is an opening reminiscent of a film title sequence (2003, 51) – is introduced at his Roseland estate on the Crimean peninsula. Both narratives take place across an East-West divide, set in Istanbul and across the Balkans, and both make significant use of the Orient Express, already a symbol of international intrigue and opulence replicated in earlier works such as Graham Greene’s *Stamboul Train* (1932) and Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). The morally enigmatic friend-foe Mr. Peters tells Latimer he used to smuggle heroin to Paris through a train car on the Orient Express, and Fleming references this specific scene during Bond and Kerim’s conversation about the conductor of the Orient Express: “He believes we are after a smuggling gang. They’re always using this train for running Turkish opium to Paris” (Fleming 2012b, 215). As Oliver Buckton notes in regard to the “mask” of Dimitrios, the “purpose of the ‘mask’ (referred to in the UK title) is not just limited to Dimitrios, who uses several false identities[;] most of the characters wear a mask of some kind” (2015, 83). Fittingly, Fleming names the cabal of Bulgarian spies in Istanbul which Bond encounters “The Faceless Ones” (Fleming 2012b, 127). Other aspects lifted from

Ambler are more tongue-in-cheek, such as *Coffin*'s Marxist reporter Marukakis's claim to Latimer that "[i]f an assassination is going to be good for business, then there will be an assassination [...] the assassin will not steal forth from a board meeting" (Ambler, 92); the SMERSH forum which orders Bond's murder is quite literally a "board meeting" that arranges for assassinations.

Russia also updates several characters from *Coffin*; Mr. Peters becomes the Turkish agent Darko Kerim, an ally to Bond in the employ of the British Secret Service,² while SMERSH's conference room in Fleming's novel seems to draw inspiration from the Turkish Colonel Zia Haki, who first informs Latimer of Dimitrios's dark history.³ Latimer and Bond also share the same absurd obliviousness to their surroundings and several impending warning signs of danger: Latimer's investigations into the past of Dimitrios are easily tracked by Mr. Peters and lead to his quick capture, while Bond is uncharacteristically trusting of obvious traps and enemies (such as a disguised Grant on the Orient Express or the hidden surveillance equipment in the honeymoon suite of his hotel).⁴ The reader is given little chance to sympathise with either of the protagonists, as the narrator is immediately distanced from both. Latimer is scorned, we are informed, even by "superhuman Law, [as the] choice of Latimer as its instrument could have been only made by an idiot" (ibid., 10), and Bond's belated entry into the novel after the detailed introductions of SMERSH operatives Grant, Grubozaboyschikov, Kronsteen, Klebb, and Romanova – who refer to Bond as a "dangerous professional terrorist" (Fleming 2012b, 51) – prompts the reader towards a respectful understanding of the novel's villains.

2 Kerim and Peters are both motivated by revenge and a personal sense of retributive justice, yet Fleming updates the soft-spoken, peevish character of Mr. Peters to the boisterousness of Kerim in order to offset Bond's cold demeanour. Compare, for instance, Kerim's adage "Life is full of death, my friend, [...] And sometimes one is made the instrument of death. I do not regret killing that man" (Fleming 2012b, 179) to Peters' encouragement to criminality by the "Great One" (Ambler, 192).

3 Colonel Haki and SMERSH are ostensibly representative of a twisted order and justice (both belonging to organisations of secret police), but are instead perpetrators of chaos and crime, with Haki and SMERSH's Rosa Klebb both infamous for torturing prisoners.

4 Latimer owes "his life to a criminal's odd taste in interior decoration," a fact that *Coffin*'s narrator finds "breathtaking in [its] absurdity" (Ambler, 9). In *Russia*, notice how Bond seems to ask important questions of his security while resolutely ignoring his suspicions: "Why not take the room? Why would there be microphones or secret doors? What would be the point of them?" (Fleming 2012b, 137). This is replicated in his suppression of his natural instincts towards Grant and his disregard for Tatiana's later warnings.

Moreover, “Red” Grant takes up Dimitrios’s mantle in Fleming’s novel; Ambler’s influence upon Fleming in this choice is evident in the description of Grant’s face as “drowned and morgue-like” (ibid., 7), evoking Dimitrios’s dead body which, it is believed, had been submerged and, during the novel, now lay in an Istanbul morgue. Compare, for instance, the sentence structure of both novels’ expositions, which seem to offer a side-by-side comparison of the their respective “corpse”-like antagonists. Here is Ambler’s:

The body lying on the trestle was that of a short, broad shouldered man of about fifty [...] wrapped in a mackintosh sheet. By the feet was a neat pile of crumpled clothing: some underwear, a shirt, socks, a flowered tie and a blue serge suit stained nearly grey by sea water. Beside this pile was a pair of narrow, pointed shoes, the soles of which had warped as they had dried [...] Lyons, all except the suit and shoes which are Greek. Poor stuff. (Ambler, 32)

And the opening passage of *Russia*:

The naked man who lay splayed out on his face beside the swimming pool might have been dead. He might have been drowned and fished out of the pool and laid out on the grass to dry while the police or the next-of-kin were summoned. Even the little pile of objects in the grass beside his head might have been his personal effects, meticulously assembled in full view so that no one should think that something had been stolen by his rescuers [...] To judge by the glittering pile, this had been, or was, a rich man. (Fleming 2012b, 1)

Note that neither “Dimitrios” nor Grant are actually dead; the body in the morgue is actually that of one of Dimitrios’s former business partners (and not Dimitrios himself), and Grant stirs from his death-like state upon the prompting of his masseuse. Both nude bodies have the appearance of being drowned (with the corpse of “Dimitrios” having been actually thrown into water) and each lay upon their respective slabs next to piles of their worldly possessions – although Fleming’s divergent use of “rich” evidently wishes to impress upon the reader a vision of a wealthier figure than Dimitrios’s “poor” clothing implies. One must disagree with Eco’s statement – that “[a]s soon as [Fleming] has infused the scene with a subtle sense of death, the man moves [...] because he is alive and is about to be massaged. The fact that lying on the ground he seems dead has no rele-

vance to the purpose of the narrative that follows” (51) – as this scene has referential meaning when placed in the hypertextual sphere offered by its obvious connection to *Coffin*.

The “live” versions of Dimitrios and Grant maintain remarkable similarity in description as well; both villains are referred to as bestial (Ambler, 111, 280; Fleming 2012b, 5), reptilian (Ambler, 270; Fleming 2012b, 5), or otherwise possessed of an intrinsic inhumanity (Ambler, 204; Fleming 2012b, 6). Dimitrios’s smile, we are told, “was a slow tightening of the small, thin lips; nothing more. Yet there was something inexpressibly savage about it; something that made Latimer feel glad that it was Mr Peters who had to face it” (Ambler, 271-272), while Grant’s attempt to smile only causes his “thick lips [to] writhe [...] briefly. There was no light in the very pale blue eyes” (Fleming 2012b, 229). When Dimitrios is finally revealed to Latimer as one of the members of an exploitative banking corporation, the Eurasian Credit Trust, he “was a picture of distinguished respectability” (Ambler, 269), much like Grant’s disguised appearance as fellow British agent Nash. Consequently, Bond more or less immediately trusts “Nash”. Dimitrios and Grant are also both addicts: Fleming expands upon Dimitrios’s “simple” vice of heroin, imbuing Grant with a blood lust that could only be satisfied within the confines of a totalitarian state. As Rosa Klebb explains, “[Grant] is in the position of a drug addict. He would no more abandon the Soviet Union than a druggie would abandon the source of his cocaine. He is my top executioner. There is no one better” (Fleming 2012b, 91). In *Coffin*, Latimer wishes “to understand, to explain [...] the inhuman, professional devil” (Ambler, 204) that is Dimitrios. Fleming imitates this through his own creation of Grant’s extensive biography. Fleming’s placement of Grant’s life story at the forefront of *Russia* operates as an extension of Latimer’s hermeneutical discovery of Dimitrios’s personal history – “They knew so little about [Dimitrios]! A few odd facts about a few odd incidents in his life, that was all the dossier amounted to! No more” (ibid., 33) – by readily presenting the reader with the entire history of Grant’s life. Fleming elevates Grant to a more active role in the plot at both the introduction and conclusion of the narrative, as well as through numerous insights into Grant’s psychology and upbringing (all of which are completely absent from Ambler’s presentation of Dimitrios). As Ambler notes, the face of Dimitrios is “like a devil mask; a device to evoke in others the emotions complementary to his own. If he is afraid, then he must be feared; if he desires, then he must be desired. It is a screen to hide his mind’s nakedness” (ibid., 269). By contrast, Grant’s mind is anything but naked: “[n]aturally Grant had no friends. He was hated or feared or envied by everyone who came in contact with him [...] The only indi-

viduals he was interested in were his victims. The rest of his life was inside him. And it was richly and exceedingly populated with his thoughts” (Fleming 2012b, 25).

More broadly speaking, one cannot truly “understand” Dimitrios as a “unit in a disintegrating social system” (Ambler, 83) unless one considers the political and economic forces at work behind the onset of war in Europe in 1939. The war was not an isolated phenomenon; the economic and political punishments levied on the defeated Central Powers following World War I combined with the “Balkanisation” of long-standing empires created a turbulent environment rife with inflation and anarchy across Eastern Europe. Accordingly, the interwar period gives rise to the corporate exploitation, fascist dictatorships, and war-mongering atmosphere discussed in *Coffin*:

Europe in labour had through its pain seen for an instant a new glory, and then had collapsed to welter again in the agonies of war and fear. Governments had risen and fallen; men and women had worked, had starved, had made speeches, had fought, had been tortured, had died. Hope had come and gone, a fugitive in the scented bosom of illusion. Men had learned to sniff the heady dreamstuff of the soul and wait impassively while the lathes turned the guns for their destruction. And through those years, Dimitrios had lived and breathed and come to terms with his strange gods. (ibid., 33)

The character Marukakis states that “[s]pecial sorts of conditions must exist for the creation of the special sort of criminal typified [by Dimitrios]. I have tried to define those conditions – but unsuccessfully. All I do know is that while might is right, while chaos and anarchy masquerade as order and enlightenment, those conditions will obtain” (ibid., 303). While these conditions can be easily defined through the retrospective eye of the modern historian, Ambler’s contemporary readers would likely have viewed Dimitrios in an ambiguous manner: as a representative figure symbolic of interwar strife. The return of repressed chaos after the re-establishment of order following the first World War creates an indeterminate simultaneity of neither war nor peace in the interwar period that seems to be prophetic of the Cold War era following 1945. The years after the Allied victory create the same disturbing parallels of order and chaos in which the Soviet Union becomes a key player in global geopolitics, sparking new conflicts fought on the battlegrounds of espionage, ideological propaganda, third-world proxy wars, and races of both the nuclear and space persuasions.

Andy Wright has argued that SMERSH's conspiracy to eliminate Bond in *Russia* "invokes the deadlock of the historical Cold War around which Fleming set his story, and in which both Western and Soviet powers fought a sort of closed war against one another" (2018, 1). Fleming's narrative utilises the explicitly Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (which explains Bond's relatively non-aggressive and covert mission to acquire the Spektor machine) as "neither Soviet nor Western forces risked even conventional warfare, for fear of offering the opposing side a 'rational' cause to strike first" (ibid., 2). The bookending of World War II with both Ambler's and Fleming's novels reflects a prescient vision of the armed conflict struggle to come (in the case of Ambler) or a yearning for the excitement and clear-cut ideologies of the bygone war (in the case of Fleming). Bond reminisces over his past intelligence experience "nostalgically", musing on the "excitement and turmoil of the hot war, compared with his own underground skirmishings since the war had turned cold" (Fleming 2012b, 225). For the Cold War audience, Fleming overhauls Ambler's villain, injecting a modicum of supernaturalism into Grant, who is not simply criminal but something altogether more reminiscent of a mythical evil: as "an advanced manic depressive whose periods coincided with the full moon" (ibid., 21), Grant is a werewolf.

The similarities between the pre- and post-World War II eras are reflected in the attempts by both Ambler and Fleming to find refuge in the structural turbulence of their respective novels, as each subverts the genre conventions which their works ostensibly occupy. Tzvetan Todorov has noted that "every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of the two norms: that of the genre it transgresses [...] and that of the genre it creates" (1997, 43). Both Ambler and Fleming, then, create new norms for espionage fiction by reinterpreting the genre laid down by their predecessors. Although *Coffin* primes itself as a standard Christie-esque detective novel through Latimer's creation of Dimitrios's biography, Oliver Buckton has noted that "*Dimitrios* suggests the impossibility of closure in the spy novel" (83) upon which most detective stories are contingent. Indeed, as Buckton notes, "*Dimitrios* – with its detective-novelist protagonist – might be read as an ironic critique on the limitations of the mystery genre [and] its vain effort to grasp the complexities of the world of international relations just prior to World War II" (ibid.). Moreover, Colonel Haki reduces Latimer from "the condescending professional [...] suddenly into the ridiculous amateur" by presenting him with a "real" murderer: "I find the murderer in a *roman policier* much more sympathetic than a real murderer. In a *roman policier* there is a corpse, a number of suspects, a detective and a gallows. That is artistic. The real murderer is not artistic [...] Here is a real murderer. [Dimitrios] is typical" (Am-

bler, 22). Ambler deftly moves away from the fabricated art of the “whodunit” genre (Todorov, 44). Robert Lance Snyder suggests that Ambler’s work actually reconstructs the pattern of the mystery tale, taking the form of “the whorled and diegetic pattern of most spy narratives, in contrast with the linearity and largely mimetic design of detective stories” (2007, 258).

Fleming enacts the same method of genre subversion in *Russia* by breaking out of the conventions of his own sensational spy thriller and into the realm of Todorov’s suspense novel. Todorov notes that such subversion

keeps the mystery of the whodunit and also the two stories, that of the past and that of the present; but it refuses to reduce to a simple detection of the truth [...] The reader is interested not only by what has happened but also by what will happen next; he wonders as much about the future as about the past. The two types of interests are thus united here – there is the curiosity to learn how past events are to be explained; and there is also suspense: what will happen to the main characters? (50-51)

The first ten of *Russia*’s twenty-eight chapters are organised into a section subtitled “The Plan”, and are dedicated to “Red” Grant’s biography and the Soviet *konspiratsia* to bring about the destruction of the British Secret Service’s reputation; Bond isn’t even mentioned until the end of the fifth chapter, much less seen until his appearance in the second of the novel’s sections, “The Execution”. Genette would likely comment that these two section titles, or “paratexts”, are intended to shape the reader’s perception of *Russia* via masterful use of dramatic irony. We witness as Bond blunders guilelessly into SMERSH’s trap and are similarly expected to judge his failures. As these sections are not only spaces of “transition but also of transaction”, Genette argues that paratexts are always “at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (1997b 2). Hence the placement of the Soviets’ plan ahead of the execution of their conspiracy against Bond, as it directs the reader’s “horizon of expectations” from the onset of the novel to sympathise with Grant in a way that conceivably replaces Bond – now both distanced and alienated from the reader – as protagonist. Fleming’s four preceding Bond novels are focalised almost entirely through Bond; thus Fleming’s decision to decentralise his hero from the first third of *Russia* enacts a process of genre revision defined by Hans Robert Jauss as the “corresponding process of the continuous establishing and altering of horizons [that] also determines the relationship of the individual text to the succession of

texts that forms the genre” (1998, 938-939). *Russia* is “[t]he new text [that] evokes for the reader [...] the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced” (ibid., 939). *Russia* is undoubtedly more of a postmodern novel than Fleming’s earlier work, as this intentional audience subversion comments more on the qualities of his established spy novel structure, mastering what Jauss calls the “ideal case [...] of the objective capability of such literary-historical frames of reference [...] to evoke the reader’s horizon of expectations, formed by a convention of genre, style, or form, only in order to destroy it step by step” (ibid.). According to Eco, Fleming works in reductive types representative of good and evil, and yet,

[Fleming] tempers his choice with irony, but the irony is completely masked and is revealed only through incredible exaggeration. In *From Russia, With Love*, the Soviet men are so monstrous, so improbably evil that it seems impossible to take them seriously. And yet, in his brief preface, Fleming insists that all the narrated atrocities are absolutely true [...] The author seems almost to write his books for a two-fold reading public, those who take them as gospel truth and those who see their humour. (46)

The reader should then be intentionally aware of Fleming’s literary milieu, and depending on their reading knowledge, may even be familiar with the metatextual inclusion of Ambler’s text. The title(s) of the work should be the first signal for reconstructing the reader’s horizon of expectations, even without having read the novels. Jauss’s reception theory claims that a “literary work, even when it appears to be new [...] predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions”, thus evoking “memories of that which was already read”, bringing the reader to “a specific emotional attitude” and arousing expectations for the “middle and end” which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre (938). As Bond reads *The Mask of Dimitrios*, the novel speaks metatextually to the duplicitous nature of the enemies who lie in wait for him in Turkey; the American title of “*Coffin*” implies death or burial (although whether for Bond or for SMERSH is to be determined), while both the American and British titles (*Coffin/Mask*) allude to an object that hides, conceals, or covers over another object – in this case, the story of Dimitrios’s death.

Beyond the aforementioned structural similarities present in the characters and settings of both novels, the showdown between Latimer and Dimitrios pre-

figures the nearly identical scene between Bond and Grant in the compartment of the Orient Express. Fleming places a copy of Ambler's novel in Bond's attaché case alongside a veritable display of weaponry, as if to signal to the reader that Ambler's novel is just as valuable a defense as any of the other gadgets from Q Branch. The novel's warning is lost on Bond, however, as "Bond put aside his book and the thoughts that kept coming between him and the printed page" (Fleming 2012b 116). On the second occasion that Bond attempts to read the book (this time directly before he is ambushed by Grant), again he fails to acknowledge the advance notice of the imminent threat posed by the Dimitrios-figure: "[h]e picked up his Ambler and found his place and tried to read. After a few pages he found that his concentration was going. He was too tired. He laid the book down on his lap and closed his eyes" (ibid., 239). Presented with his would-be assassin, Bond reads Grant's "opaque, almost dead" eyes, the "eyes of a drowned man", as having "some message for him. What was it? Recognition? Warning? Or just the defensive reaction to Bond's own stare?" (ibid., 227). Bond's fight-or-flight instincts are awakened by the disguised Grant's tie, as he "mis-trusted anyone who tied his tie with a Windsor knot. It showed too much vanity [, but] Bond decided to forget his prejudice" (ibid., 230). He further suppresses his doubts about the sanity of the man when Grant's "pale eyes swivelled to meet his. There was a quick red glare in them. It was as if the safety door of a furnace had swung open" (ibid., 231); Bond chalks this up to shell-shock from the war. He even ignores the extremely clear "last-chance" warning given by Tatiana about Grant's *nom de guerre*, "Nash": "I suppose you know what that means in Russian. Nash [наш] means 'ours'. In our Services, a man is nash when he is one of 'our' men. He is svoi [свои] when he is one of 'theirs' – when he belongs to the enemy" (ibid., 235). As Mr. Peters from *Coffin* tells Latimer, "this is not a detective story. There is no need to be so stupid" (Ambler, 191); had Bond focused on the content of Ambler instead of letting his attention wander every time he tried to read the book, perhaps he would have heeded the warning signs laid out for him.

Bond is finally checkmated by SMERSH's conspiracy in the penultimate scene of the novel, where he comes face to face with an unmasked Grant at gun-point. To demonstrate his accuracy, Grant shoots Bond's wristwatch with the silenced pistol concealed within his copy of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; the combat between East and West configured in Fleming's novel thus becomes a duel between books, as Bond is armed only with his copy of *The Mask of Dimitrios*. Grant says "[t]hey think I'm pretty good with this bag of tricks. There are ten bullets in it – .25 dum-dum, fired by an electric battery. You must admit these Rus-

sians are wonderful chaps for dreaming these things up. Too bad that book of yours is only for reading, old man” (Fleming 2012b, 242-243). Here, Grant is wrong; although Bond has failed to read it, he uses Ambler’s novel in a last ditch effort to protect himself by slipping his cigarette case between the pages of *The Mask of Dimitrios* and holding the book over his heart in a symbolic (as well as pragmatic) defense against his would-be assassin’s bullet.⁵ Just as Ambler’s novel works for Fleming as an intertextual representation of death and duplicity, Bond plays dead himself in this moment, “pitch[ing] forward on to the floor and lay[ing] sprawled under the funereal violet light” (ibid., 252). Bond’s copy of Ambler’s novel narrowly prevents his death, although the “bullet must have gone through the cigarette case and then through the other half of the book” (ibid., 253), and his convincing death-like “mask” allows him time to retrieve the daggers stored within his case and, ultimately, to overcome Grant. Indeed, Latimer saves himself from Dimitrios by performing a similarly implausible action:

Why he chose that particular moment he never knew. He never even knew what prompted him to jump at all. He supposed that it was an instinctive attempt to save himself. Why, however, his instinct for self-preservation should have led him to jump in the direction of the revolver which Dimitrios was about to fire is inexplicable. (Ambler, 293)

Here, Latimer accidentally trips over a carpet, causing him to narrowly dodge Dimitrios’s bullet: the agency of both Latimer and Bond in deciding their own fates when faced with life-threatening danger is removed and instead placed in the hands of dumb luck due to their foolishly trusting acceptance of enemies and their equal failure to assess their surroundings.

Here, however, the novels diverge; Latimer leaves the Paris apartment and allows a dying Mr. Peters to execute Dimitrios, while Bond, after a struggle with Grant, kills the Soviet agent with his own disguised *War and Peace* book-gun. This reversal of an almost certain death for Bond seems to prompt intertextual commentary by Fleming, because Grant’s choice of weapon ultimately fails him, while Bond’s use of Ambler’s novel instead saves *him*. Tolstoy’s outdated saga of

5 When Bond begs Grant for a last cigarette before he is shot, Grant agrees but tells Bond “Careful, old man. No tricks. No Bulldog Drummond stuff’ll get you out of this one” (Fleming 2012b, 244). This playful reference by Fleming works on several levels of irony, as Bond’s cigarette-case-inside-novel defense is exactly in the style of H. C. McNeile’s larger-than-life Bulldog Drummond character. Bulldog Drummond was, of course, also a major influence on Fleming’s creation of James Bond.

the Napoleonic Wars, having been misappropriated for ideological reasons in the Soviet Union, represents the bygone aristocracy of cossacks and czars, an imperial system that had failed tragically for the Russian Empire in World War I. Despite Tolstoy's title, Ambler's novel, it could be said, better prepares the reader for the political concerns of the Cold War than a text from 1869. The last sentence of *Coffin* – “the train ran into a tunnel” (ibid., 304) – implies something of the shadow of war that would hang over the next six years of Europe during World War II, and here Ambler's novel ends with a repudiating Latimer who chooses to ignore his experiences with Dimitrios and instead turn back to writing something lighthearted: “[h]e would be writing a detective story with a beginning, a middle and an end; a corpse, a piece of detection and a scaffold. He would be demonstrating that murder would out, that justice triumphed in the end [...] Dimitrios and the Eurasian Credit Trust would be forgotten. It had all been a great waste of time” (ibid., 283). Tellingly, the chapter immediately before Grant attacks Bond ends with the almost exact same line as *Coffin* – “[t]he train gave a moan and crashed into a tunnel” (Fleming 2012b, 240) – and, indeed, in the struggle that occurs shortly afterwards, Bond forgets all about Dimitrios and the Eurasian Credit Trust, as Ambler predicts.

If *A Coffin for Dimitrios* is purely symptomatic of history, offering prognoses without solutions, then *From Russia With Love* is precisely diagnostic of the political problems of the day. Because “Red” Grant is as much a “unit in a disintegrating social system” (Ambler, 83) as Dimitrios is, Fleming dedicates almost as much time to that character's psychological development as he does to Bond's, drawing comparisons between the two men and therefore exposing more similarities than differences between the intelligence methods of the Eastern and Western blocs. Ambler's Marukakis asks: “[w]hat is the remedy [to Dimitrios]?” (ibid., 303); and Fleming answers, proposing that one should study the interwar period to understand the Cold War due to their precise historical similarities. Fleming works ironically within and around the framework provided by Ambler's novel to impart a clearer, parable-like, argument to the observant readers familiar with *Coffin*. For readers in 1939, “[t]he story of Dimitrios [had] no proper ending” (ibid., 283), as World War II – and the emblematic evil which Dimitrios represents – was far from abated. Thus Colonel Haki's pronouncement: “You see, Mr Latimer? There is your story. Incomplete. Inartistic” (ibid., 27). If one is to read *Coffin* as incomplete or unsuccessful text, then *Russia's* role as an inter-related, dialectical hypertext speaks much more to Jauss's commentary on the predictive potentiality of reading:

The experience of reading [notes Jauss] can liberate one from adaptations, prejudices, and predicaments of a lived praxis in that it compels one to a new perception of things. The horizon of expectations of literature distinguishes itself before the horizon of expectations of historical lived praxis in that it not only serves actual experiences, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience. (952)

Fleming shifts the ambiguous morality of the 1930s even further away from the simple ideological notions “good” and “evil” which characterised Cold War East-West relations, drawing stark parallels between the British and Soviets that indicate, as Oliver Buckton describes, “a kind of professional brotherhood, reflecting a similarity of training, methods, and behavior in rival agents that at times overrides their opposing ideologies” (133). In a sense, Fleming’s novel completes *Coffin*’s “improper” ending with its insinuations that a fallible Bond *could* have avoided future conflict had he only studied his history properly – presented to him, in this case, in the form of his favourite genre of pulp thriller: Ambler’s novel itself. Early on in *Russia*, Bond notes that “if M.I.5. and the Secret Service were to concern themselves seriously with the atom age ‘intellectual spy,’ they must employ a certain number of intellectuals to counter them” (Fleming 2012b, 103). Clearly, then, Bond fails to heed his own advice. For Fleming, the defeat of 007 operates as a cautionary tale for Cold War readers: a warning against anti-intellectualism, the mistrust of one’s instincts, and sheer stupidity. Amusingly, in 1959 and 1960, Fleming seems to replicate Bond in his own flight to Bahrain during his travelogue research for *Thrilling Cities* a few years after *Russia*’s publication:

I had armed myself for the flight with the perfect book for any journey – Eric Ambler’s wonderful thriller *Passage of Arms*, a proof copy of which had been given to me by Mr Frere of Heinemann’s for the trip. I had only been able to read a few pages and I was now determined to get back to it. I offered another book to my neighbor but he said he hadn’t got much time for books. He said that whenever someone asked him whether he had read this or that, he would say, ‘No, sir. But have you red hairs on your chest?’ I said that I was sorry but I simply must read my book as I had to review it. The lie was effective and my companion went off to sleep hogging more than his share of the arm-rest. (Fleming 2012f, 5)

Fleming has, at least, learned from Bond's mistake of being distracted from his reading of Eric Ambler. Indeed, Fleming is candid with his arm-rest companion on his own journey to the Middle East; as duplicitous Mr. Peters reflects in Ambler's novel: "[h]ow much better if we were frank and open, if we went on our ways without the cloak of hypocrisy and lies that we wear now!" (Ambler, 133). In its adoption of Ambler's hypotext, *From Russia with Love* fulfills Mr. Peters wish, unmasking Ambler's unfinished argument to better allow access to an honest and meaningful moral lesson relevant to Cold War readers: that East and West should learn – echoing Dr. Evil of the Bond spoof film *Austin Powers* – “We're not so different, you and I”.

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