

The Spy Story Behind The Third Man

Author(s): Thomas Riegler

Source: *Journal of Austrian-American History*, 2020, Vol. 4 (2020), pp. 1-37

Published by: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jaustamerhist.4.0001>

## REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jaustamerhist.4.0001?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jaustamerhist.4.0001?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



**JSTOR**

*Penn State University Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Austrian-American History*

# The Spy Story Behind *The Third Man*

THOMAS RIEGLER

Austrian Center for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies (ACIPSS)

**Abstract** | *The Third Man* symbolically stands for espionage. Indeed, though its storyline concerns friendship and the hunt for an unscrupulous black-market dealer, the film has been connected to the Cold War struggle between intelligence services since its release in 1949. This perception is partly related to the film's setting—the bombed-out ruins of Vienna—which was then (and still remains) a major hub for spies. What has been less noted, however, is that the film's origins itself represent an espionage story. All major figures involved had a background in intelligence, from the author Graham Greene, to the producer Alexander Korda and the figure of Harry Lime, whose real-life model was the KGB mole Kim Philby. By drawing upon archival material as well as secondary literature, this article explores this other history of *The Third Man* and puts the film in the context of postwar Austria, and highlights how real-life events and personalities inspired its story.

**Keywords** | Cold War, espionage, Graham Greene, *The Third Man*, Hollywood, Vienna

Shot in Vienna just over seventy years ago, *The Third Man* (1949) symbolizes espionage. And yet, espionage is not the subject of the film, whose plot revolves around the hunt for an unscrupulous black-market trafficker.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the word

1. The American dime-novel author Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) is promised a job in Vienna by his school friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles). Upon his arrival, however, Martins learns that Lime has just died in a traffic accident. After he attends Lime's funeral, Martins begins to investigate the accident, meeting, among others, Lime's Czech girlfriend, Anna (Alida Valli), and Colonel Calloway (Trevor Howard), from the British occupation authorities, who tells him that he had been investigating Lime as a black-market trader. Martins eventually finds that Lime has faked his death and is invited by him to meet. At

---

DOI: 10.5325/jaustamerhist.4.0001



*Journal of Austrian-American History*, Volume 4, 2020

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution CC-BY-NC-ND

“spy” is uttered only once in the film.<sup>2</sup> Still, *The Third Man* has been associated with the intelligence services of the Cold War ever since its premiere in 1949. When, for example, the largest “spy swap” since the end of the Cold War took place at Vienna’s Schwechat airport in 2010, the CIA director at the time, Leon Panetta, commented in his memoirs: “The Cold War was over, but the scene in Vienna was proof that the old games were alive and well. All that was missing was the sound of the zither playing the theme of the movie *The Third Man*.” It is also said that a poster of *The Third Man* hangs as a sort of homage in the headquarters of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (BVT) in the Rennweg-Kaserne in Vienna.<sup>3</sup>

That the movie has become a synonym for espionage may be explained, first and foremost, by its nonfictional setting, namely bomb-damaged, divided, and occupied Vienna. After the end of the war in 1945, intelligence services from the West and East set up shop in Vienna. That the very origins of the movie are riddled with both former and active intelligence agents has, however, received much less attention. These agents include everyone from the producer (Alexander Korda) to the author of the original novella and screenplay (Graham Greene), to the inspiration for the main character “Harry Lime” (Kim Philby), while behind the scenes were assistant Elizabeth Montagu, a former agent, and the Vienna-born, possible Soviet spy Peter Smollett-Smolka, who acted as a stooge. As film historian Brigitte Timmermann stated, the movie may be a “product of the imagination,” but the entire story was shaped by knowledge that “only an insider could possess.” This article explores this insider knowledge, seeking to understand how it was acquired, and how it flowed into the movie. Based on primary sources from Austrian and British archives, an interview with a contemporary witness, and the available secondary literature, it

---

that meeting, which takes place on the Great Wheel in the Prater amusement park, Lime tries to convince Martins to work with him. Disappointed by Lime’s unscrupulousness, Martins decides to work with Colonel Calloway instead and to thwart the crimes of his erstwhile friend. Their showdown takes place in the sewers, as Martins shoots the mortally wounded Lime. In the film’s final scene Anna rejects Martins, refusing even to acknowledge his presence. The zither music by Anton Karas holds a special place in the film, and certain melodies, such as the “Third Man Theme,” remain popular today.

2. “What kind of a spy do you think you are, satchel foot?” Graham Greene, *The Third Man*. Directed by Carol Reed (1973; London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 85.

3. Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 284; Tom Schimmeck, “Gesichter Europas: Das Riesenrad der Agenten,” *Deutschlandfunk*, January 25, 2014, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/das-riesenrad-in-der-agenten-spione-in-wien-pdf.media.bfdc61f6318ca91a472045955d47409d.pdf>.

illuminates the origins of *The Third Man*, the people involved, and the historical context that inspired and influenced the film.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, where realism and the involvement of “real” spies are concerned, *The Third Man* is not unique. Numerous classics of the spy fiction genre emerged under similar circumstances. Like Greene, David John Moore Cornwell was an agent of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6). He, too, would later use his experiences as the basis for a number of novels under the pseudonym “John le Carré.” And for le Carré, as for Greene with his text for *The Third Man*, postwar Austria played an important role.<sup>5</sup> In 1951 Cornwell/le Carré was deployed with the British army’s Field Security Section (FSS) to Austria, where he held the rank of second lieutenant and was stationed in the Palais Meran in Graz, the hub of the British Occupied Zone at that time. From here, telephone calls were intercepted, translated, and transcribed, though Cornwell also once traveled through the Russian zone to Vienna on the night train. During his stay in Vienna, he recalls attending a “very interesting” communist meeting. Of his time in service, Cornwell also reports being attached to a team running an informers network in the Russian zone.<sup>6</sup> He says,

4. Brigitte Timmermann and Frederick Baker, *Der dritte Mann: Auf den Spuren eines Filmklassikers* (Vienna: Czernin, 2002), 88. Considerable scholarship has accumulated around the film. For a study based on primary sources, see Charles Drazin, *In Search of the Third Man* (London: Methuen, 1999). Brigitte Timmermann offers a comprehensive account of the production and shooting locations in *The Third Man’s Vienna: Celebrating a Film Classic* (Vienna: Shippen Rock Publishing, 2005). Siegfried Beer was among the first to explore the friendship between Greene and Kim Philby as a key to understanding the film. See “Film in Context: The Third Man,” *History Today* (May 2001): 45–51. Frederick Baker’s documentary *Shadowing the Third Man* (2004) traces the production history of the movie. Also, of interest is the Vienna Third Man Museum, which opened in 2005 at Preßgasse 25 and includes a collection of memorabilia and contemporary documents. Recently, as well, the *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies* devoted a special issue to *The Third Man* (vol. 12, no. 2 [2018]). A shorter, German version of the current article appeared there.

5. Gordon Corera, *The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2011), 20–21.

6. Adam Sisman, *John le Carré: The Biography* (London: Bloomsburg, 2016), 97–98. In his first clandestine mission, le Carré accompanied an Air Force Intelligence Officer (AIO) on a “top-secret night trip” through the countryside to Austria’s border with Communist Czechoslovakia. According to the AIO, they were to meet a high-ranking defector from the Czech air force. But after finishing a beer in a tiny inn, the AIO gave the command to abort and return to Graz. No explanation was offered, though “with the ripening of years” le Carré believes that “there was no defector crossing the border that night.” For the AIO, as he speculates with hindsight, “the gap between the dream and the reality became too much for him to bear, and one day he decided to fill it.” Whether this episode really happened as described is unclear. John le Carré, “The spies Who Lost It,” *The Telegraph*, September 27, 2008.

We ran small agents, little guys on motorbikes selling pornographic photographs to Russian sentries, that kind of thing. We were also supposedly Nazi-hunters, trawling displaced-persons camps, debriefing refugees, wholesale. A pitiful business — I wrote about it in *A Perfect Spy*, which is drawn entirely from that period. Do dip into it: it was quite a funny period, too.<sup>7</sup>

Le Carré remains active today and, like Greene, his work explores the moral pitfalls and the bureaucratically “gray” character of the spy business—even though his portrayals have a more fictional character and are less attached to specific historical situations and persons. It was, perhaps, another former spy whose literary creations achieved the greatest impact. In 1952 Ian Fleming, who had served in the British Naval Intelligence Division during the Second World War, mixed his own experience and lifestyle with fantastical elements, while also echoing wartime events in a Cold War setting, to create the Secret Service agent James Bond. Thanks to numerous and ongoing movie adaptations since 1962, moreover, Bond has even influenced the self-representation of the intelligence service. In fact, as Ben Macintyre has observed, Fleming’s depictions “spread a legend of British espionage efficiency that persists to this day.” But if Fleming’s original Bond character, unlike his film counterpart, is capable of fear, mistakes and pain, “on screen, Bond never suffers from such human frailties.”<sup>8</sup> When in one of the films, *The Living Daylights* (1987), James Bond pays a visit to the Great Wheel in Vienna, a key location in *The Third Man*, both the sensational and realist lineages of the British spy film converge.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of *The Third Man*, the underlying historical references are difficult to decode. In 2017 the Belgian author Jean-Luc Fromental explored its allusions and puzzles in his graphic novel *The Prague Coup*. He recounted the “creation” of the movie as a partly fictional spy thriller that was nevertheless closely aligned to real occurrences: In this story Greene arrives in Vienna in early 1948 to conduct research for the screenplay, but is in fact on a mission. He tries to uncover evidence that there is a dangerous mole in the SIS. In the finale, it is revealed that the culprit is a former colleague and personal friend of

7. Philippe Sands, “John le Carré, Nazis and the Moral Contradictions of the Cold War,” *Financial Times*, September 28, 2018.

8. Ben Macintyre, *For Your Eyes Only: Ian Fleming + James Bond* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 86–87, 89–90, 185. On the intelligence services, see Trevor McCrisken and Christopher R. Moran, “James Bond, Ian Fleming and Intelligence: Breaking Down the Boundary between the ‘Real’ and the ‘Imagined,’” *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 6 (2018): 804–21.

9. James Chapman, *License to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 234.

Greene's, for whom he covers: Kim Philby. Fromental argues very convincingly that Greene's novel and the movie contain innumerable subliminal messages that refer to this real case of espionage—as though Greene were through this medium sending a coded message to Philby: "I saw you, I won't inform on you, but now you know that I know."<sup>10</sup>

There is no specific evidence to prove that Greene had already seen through Philby before he was officially exposed in 1963. *The Prague Coup* remains an interesting speculation, which is nevertheless based on facts. To start with Greene: while he may only have been an agent of the SIS from 1941 to 1944, he remained connected to the service for the rest of his life. On his numerous travels, including behind the Iron Curtain, for example, his expenses were often covered by the SIS. In return, the journalist and novelist served his former employer until the early 1980s as a source of information on countries that were otherwise difficult to access, such as Vietnam, Poland, China, and the Soviet Union. His vocation as a writer and his international renown were a perfect cover, as Greene's biographer Michael Shelden explained:

He could pretend to be a harmless author, not a spy, and could easily be forgiven for wandering the streets in search of local color or of some curious literary connection which only he could appreciate. And there were publishers who wanted to see him, writers who wanted to discuss their works with him, admiring Catholics who wanted him to sign books. With so many reasonable excuses available, he could go almost anywhere and talk his way out of a tight spot. Such freedom allowed him to do any number of valuable tasks for his employers back home—delivering messages and receiving them, interviewing dissidents, recruiting local contacts, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of various factions, reporting on security measures.<sup>11</sup>

Movie producer Alexander Korda (1893–1956), the man who originally conceived of a thriller shot in a European capital devastated by the war, had an equally pronounced background in the intelligence service. Korda, who was originally from Hungary, had begun his career in Budapest and Vienna before emigrating to London in 1932. He became part of the *éminence grise* of an entire era of British cinema. Like Greene, he moreover maintained close relationships to the Anglo-American intelligence services, especially during the Second

10. Jean-Luc Fromental and Miles Hyman, *The Prague Coup* (London: Titan, 2018), originally published under the title *Le coup de Prague* (2017).

11. Michael Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within* (London: William Heinemann, 1994), 36–37.

World War.<sup>12</sup> Korda demonstrably crossed the Atlantic twenty-four times between 1935 and 1945, “mostly at the behest of the intelligence service,” as Timmermann has found. Specifically, Korda made German shooting locations available to British agents for training purposes and, while location scouting in North Africa, helped the Allies prepare the Normandy landings. On location in Austria, Korda had a congenial partner, Karl Hartl (1899–1978), with whom Korda had worked in the 1920s as a production manager. Hartl became the director of Wien-Film in 1938 and continued his career without interruption after 1945. It was Hartl who suggested to Korda to set the planned movie in Vienna in order to shoot in original locations.<sup>13</sup>

American studio executive David O. Selznick (1902–65) also came on board as co-producer and contributed £200,000 as well as one of his own contract stars, Joseph Cotten, for free. Although the creative personalities were British, Selznick wanted a film “that would appeal to an American sensibility” Thus, he sought to involve himself in every detail of the production “no matter how small and no matter that he was not actually making the film” While Greene tended to ridicule Selznick’s role in retrospect, the evidence suggests that he inspired some important changes—most notably skipping Greene’s original romantic ending.<sup>14</sup>

### On a Research Trip in Vienna

In January 1948 Korda commissioned Greene to research and write the story for *The Third Man*. The resulting script was to be directed by Carol Reed, with whom Greene had just completed a successful collaboration on the film *The Fallen Idol*.<sup>15</sup> In order to get the necessary background information as well as original ideas, Greene visited Vienna twice in 1948, February 12–23 and June 10–30. Greene’s travel arrangements for the first of these visits, the more important one, were organized by an employee of Korda’s company London Films. A former SIS colonel, Joseph Cordington, not only procured all the necessary documentation for Greene but also booked him a room in the Hotel Sacher.<sup>16</sup> This was not a coincidence. Korda had already used his connection

12. Peter Wollen, “The Vienna Project,” *Sight and Sound* (July 1999), <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/169>.

13. Timmermann and Baker, *Der dritte Mann*, 90, 22–23.

14. Drazin, *In Search of the Third Man*, 30, 41, 43; Charles Drazin, “Behind the *Third Man*,” Criterion Collection, May 21, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1020-behind-the-third-man>.

15. Drazin, “Behind the *Third Man*.”

16. Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 1939–1955 (New York: Viking, 1995), 251; Sheldon, *Graham Greene*, 36.

to Hartl's Wien-Film as a cover for SIS operations during and after the Second World War. For Greene, the Hotel Sacher was an ideal information hub, for this is where the Information Service Branch and the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office were located, all of which were highly sensitive switch points. The Red Bar in the hotel thus provided Greene "access to first-hand information; the constant friction between the Western Allies and the Soviets did not remain hidden from him here."<sup>17</sup>

Greene moreover had an interpreter, assistant, and "tour guide" on hand: Elizabeth Montagu. The second daughter of Lord John Montagu of Beaulieu, she had given up her privileged life during the Second World War to serve as an ambulance driver. Following the German victory over France in 1940, she fled from the Gestapo to Switzerland. There she worked in Bern for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor of the later CIA. In Switzerland she discovered that her family's home in New Forest, south of Southampton, was being used as a "spy school" for the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a special unit dedicated to operations behind enemy lines. After the war, Montagu worked for Korda's London Films. He dispatched her as an emissary to revive or establish anew his old contacts in the Central European movie industry. To this end, Montagu traveled first to Prague and then to Vienna. Shortly before her departure, she received a telegram in which Korda announced Greene's imminent arrival. She was tasked with picking up the writer from the airport and organizing his affairs. Thus, Montagu organized tours for Greene in the Soviet sector, to the Central Cemetery, and through the sewer system. From the outset, the entire affair had a distinctly secretive veneer: even before Greene arrived, he instructed Montagu to send a telegram from Vienna to his wife announcing his arrival, although he was still in Brighton in the United Kingdom at the time. Once in Vienna, he did not utter a word about this incident.<sup>18</sup>

The quest for the storyline was a tiresome affair. Years before he came to Vienna, Greene had noted the following lines on the cover of an envelope: "I had paid my last farewell to Harry a week ago, when his coffin was lowered into the frozen February ground, so that it was with incredulity that I saw him pass by, without a sign of recognition, among the host of strangers in the Strand." Greene began to follow the "traces" of his fictitious Harry Lime.<sup>19</sup> His "pho-

17. Beer, "Film in Context: *The Third Man*," 46; Timmermann and Baker, *Der dritte Mann*, 25.

18. Elizabeth Montagu, *Honourable Rebel* (Beaulieu: Montagu Ventures, 2003), 304, 374–81.

19. Graham Greene, *The Third Man: Bonus Material* (London: Vintage Digital, 2015), [10].



ney funeral” was the only “scrap of plot” that Greene could cling on to as he explored Vienna seeking inspiration. Of that time, he wrote,

All that came as the days too rapidly passed were bits of photogenic background; the shabby Oriental nightclub, the officers’ bar at Sacher’s (somehow Korda had managed to fix me a room in the hotel, which was reserved for officers), the little dressing rooms which formed a kind of interior village in the old Josefstadt Theatre [. . .], the enormous cemetery where electric drills were needed to pierce the ground that February. I had allowed myself not more than two weeks in Vienna before meeting a friend in Italy where I intended to write the story, but what story?<sup>20</sup>

Montagu opined that Greene was not interested in the romantic Vienna of the past, but rather in the war-damaged, rundown city of the present: “He would talk to anyone he met, constantly searching for a theme on which to build his story.” An important source was the British occupation authority. So, for example, a young intelligence officer, Group Captain Charles Beauclerk, mentioned the Sewer Brigade, a special division of the Viennese police force set up in 1934. With their white overalls and heavy rubber boots, these policemen would later play important supporting roles in the final chase scene in *The Third Man*. During their tour of the sewer system, Montagu saw terrifying musk rats in the torchlight, the size of small dogs. These animals had originally been kept in fur farms and had escaped during the chaos of war. The torchlight attracted the rats, who began following the group’s every step: “Needless to say, when at last we emerged into the streets, we ran into the nearest cafe to down a couple of stiff glasses of Schnapps.”<sup>21</sup>

Greene was fascinated by this subterranean labyrinth and made it one of the most important locations in his story. In his description thereof, like at many other points, he allowed his on-site observations and research to flow into the text:

People used them in air raids; some of our prisoners hid for two years there. Deserters have used them—and burglars. If you know your way about you can emerge again almost anywhere in the city through a manhole or a kiosk. [. . .] The Austrians have to have special police for patrolling these sewers.<sup>22</sup>

20. Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London: Bodley Head, 1980), 98–99.

21. Montagu, *Honourable Rebel*, 381–82, 394; Timmermann, *Third Man’s Vienna*, 29.

22. Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (1949; New York: Penguin, 1999), 127–28. This “channel brigade” (*Kanalbrigade*) had been formed at the end of February 1934, shortly after

At another point, Greene noted visibly impressed:

The main sewer, half as wide as the Thames, rushes by under a huge arch, fed by tributary streams: these streams have fallen in waterfalls from higher levels and have been purified in their fall, so that only in these side channels is the air foul. The main stream smells sweet and fresh with a faint tang of ozone, and everywhere in the darkness is the sound of falling and rushing water.<sup>23</sup>

But Greene did not only inspect the scenery. Conversations in bars and other meetings provided ideas for plot elements and characters. One informant with whom Montagu established contact was of special importance in this context. Five days before his departure, Greene had a conversation with Peter Smollett-Smolka (1912–80), who at the time was the Vienna correspondent for *The Times*. Greene and Smolka probably knew each other beforehand, as they had been colleagues at the wartime Ministry of Information. Between May 1940 until his recruitment into SIS in August 1941, Greene had worked in the writers' section, while Smolka had been employed in another section of the Ministry of Information since 1939.<sup>24</sup> Now in Vienna, the two ended up spending several nights conversing and, according to Greene-biographer Norman Sherry, even visited the Soviet sector together, though Montagu states in her memoirs that Greene and Smollett-Smolka met only once, in the latter's villa in Wiener Jagdschlossgasse 27 (today Seelosgasse). Montagu remembered the scene well, writing, "This meeting was very successful and the two men talked for almost two hours. When we left, I noticed Graham had Smollett-Smolka's manuscript tucked under his arm. 'Please don't lose it, I've got only one copy,' pleaded Peter full of hope that Graham might help him find a publisher."<sup>25</sup> Montagu later returned the manuscript. She had the impression that Greene had only perused it as there were no annotations to be seen. One of the stories contained in the manuscript she found especially interesting: It involved a mysterious man who ran a black-market business with diluted penicillin.

---

civil war, when there were concerns that the sewers could still be used by insurgents as an arms depot or for staging a surprise attack. Another purpose was to look out for criminals, who used the sewers as a getaway. In 1945 the unit was re-formed and received its arms and equipment from the British occupation forces. In 1946 it counted thirty policemen and was also used for cracking down on the black market. Werner Sabitzer, "Streifen im Untergrund," *Öffentliche Sicherheit*, nos. 5–6 (2020): 35–36.

23. Greene, *The Third Man* (Penguin ed.), 149.

24. Timmermann, *Third Man's Vienna*, 91.

25. Sherry, *Life of Graham Greene*, 251. Montagu, *Honourable Rebel*, 382.

It was precisely this illegal activity that the fictional Harry Lime, together with several Austrian companions and a corrupt British medical orderly, would pursue in *The Third Man*.<sup>26</sup> In his treatment of the material published as a novel, Greene also elaborates generally on the penicillin trade. It was at first “relatively harmless”:

Penicillin in Austria was supplied only to the military hospitals; no civilian doctor, not even a civilian hospital, could obtain it by legal means. [. . .] Penicillin would be stolen by military orderlies and sold to Austrian doctors for very high sums—a phial would fetch anything up to seventy pounds. [. . .] This racket went on quite happily for a while. Occasionally an orderly was caught and punished, but the danger simply raised the price of penicillin. Then the racket began to get organised: the big men saw big money in it, and while the original thief got less for his spoils, he received instead a certain security.<sup>27</sup>

The trade was taken over by gangs of traffickers who “decided that the profits were not large enough. [. . .] They began to dilute the penicillin with coloured water, and in the case of penicillin dust, with sand.” This profiteering led to fatalities, for example in pediatric hospitals, where the adulterated penicillin was used to treat meningitis: “A number of children simply died, and a number went off their heads. You can see them now in the mental ward.”<sup>28</sup> Greene, it seems, was well-informed of the occurrences of the time.

Whether the source of this information was Smollett-Smolka cannot be determined with certainty. Timothy Smolka, Peter Smollett-Smolka’s son, recalled in an interview in 2019 that his father had “only” shared the idea of the sewer system as a setting. “He repeatedly spoke of it with great enthusiasm,” he recalled.

My father had written an article about the Viennese sewer system in 1932 or 1933—either for *Der Tag* or for *Die neue Jugend*. It was entitled “There is

26. James Milano, who served in Austria as an officer both in the Counterintelligence Corps and the CIA, confirmed the accuracy of the depiction of the black market trade in *The Third Man*. In his memoirs, he calls the film “the enduring image of those few years immediately after the war” when “the country was destitute, ruined, and starving.” The underlying theme of Greene’s tale “is the all-pervasive despair and misery and the corruption caused by fear and hunger.” James Milano and Patrick Brogan, *Soldiers, Spies, and the Rat Line: America’s Undeclared War Against the Soviets*, (1995; Dulles: Potomac Books, 2000), 34.

27. Greene, *The Third Man* (Penguin ed.), 96–97.

28. Ibid.

gold under the streets.” He explained that he had accompanied a “*Strotter*” through the sewers to this end. A *Strotter* was a kind of semi-criminal who searched the sewer system for lost valuables from which he made a living. My father had agreed on a payment with the *Strotter* but when they resurfaced, he categorically wanted more. My father then ran for his life because this guy wanted to prey upon him. That was his story for *The Third Man*. The penicillin smuggling business may have occurred in that manner in Vienna at the time, but it did not originate with my father. I never heard him speak about that.<sup>29</sup>

What exactly Smollett-Smolka contributed is also unclear, but he did undoubtedly make a contribution. This is also evident from Montagu’s memoirs, as she reports that she became uneasy during the shooting when she began to notice similarities to Smollett-Smolka’s manuscript. She discussed the matter with a producer, who assured her that an agreement had been reached with Smollett-Smolka.<sup>30</sup> His wish to have the manuscript published was not realized, but he was contractually assured £210 on July 24, 1948, for services such as “giving advice on the film script” as well as providing “assistance in Vienna in connection with the production.”<sup>31</sup> This agreement was of course made conditional on Smollett-Smolka never raising any claims in connection to *The Third Man*.<sup>32</sup> In any case, Greene never mentioned his contribution, just as he never mentioned Montagu’s contribution. Moreover, Greene claimed in his memoirs that the tip regarding the penicillin trafficking business had originated with the group captain, Beauclerk, who had also informed him about the Sewer Brigade. According to Greene, his time working for the SIS during the Second World War had thus paid dividends. While this is undoubtedly true, the question remains why the author concealed Smollett-Smolka’s role.<sup>33</sup> In the movie, in any case, there is a hidden credit. Major Calloway, the British officer, who is hot on Lime’s trail barks the order “Schmolka!” (= Šmolka) to his driver, Sergeant Paine. This is in reference to a basement tavern in the Kärntnerstraße, where he wants to pay for a round.<sup>34</sup>

29. Timothy Smolka, interview with author, March 27, 2019 (hereafter Smolka interview).

30. Montagu, *Honourable Rebel*, 392.

31. This is documented in papers from London Films that were kindly provided to the author by the manager of the Vienna Third Man Museum, Gerhard Strassgswandtnr. London Films to Peter Smollett-Smolka, July 24, 1948, author’s archive.

32. Montagu, *Honourable Rebel*, 392.

33. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 99.

34. Peter Foges, “My Spy: The Story of H. P. Smolka, Soviet Spy and Inspiration for *The Third Man*,” Roundtable, *Lapham’s Quarterly*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/my-spy>.

The fact that Greene, after his first trip to Vienna, traveled to Rome via Prague, of all places, is another clue that something strange was afoot. Greene ostensibly only took this detour because back then one “had to” fly to the Italian capital via Prague. Thus, he used the “opportunity” to meet his Catholic publisher there and coincidentally ended up witnessing the communist coup on February 25, 1948.<sup>35</sup> Greene later wrote somewhat duplicitously:

On the evening I left Vienna there were rumors of a Communist take-over, but I was more concerned about the heavy snow which delayed the plane for hours from taking off. There were two English correspondents travelling on the same plane, one belonged to an agency and the other to the BBC. They told me they were on their way to report the revolution. “Revolution?”<sup>36</sup>

Greene’s biographer Shelden did not accept this account and described the entire trip as a cover for an intelligence operation.<sup>37</sup>

In any case, little is known about Greene’s activities during the week he stayed in Prague. He himself mentioned just two visits to his publisher and an appearance at the writer’s union, “where there was only one writer to be seen.”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps he was referring to an incident recounted by the Scottish poet Edwin Muir in his memoirs. Muir, who was also present in Czechoslovakia at the time, reported that Greene appeared at a literary evening event accompanied by a communist PEN Club member. The noise of a Communist Party rally could be heard from outside, leading Muir to ask provocatively why one was again able to hear “Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!”<sup>39</sup> In any case, at least one episode, told by Greene himself, has the flair of a spy mission. In an Old Town bookshop, he reported being handed a note that said

someone would guide me to see a Catholic deputy who was in hiding. I thought he needed help to escape and I brought a variety of currencies in my pocket, but he explained he did not require such help—he had merely thought the situation would interest me because I had written *The Power and the Glory*.<sup>40</sup>

35. Shelden, *Graham Greene*, 31.

36. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 100.

37. Shelden, *Graham Greene*, 324.

38. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 104.

39. Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), 261.

40. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 104.

## Kim, Litzi, and the “Fourth Man”

Smollett-Smolka had even more connections to *The Third Man*. He was the link between the fictional Harry Lime and his real-life model, an acquaintance of both Greene and Smollett-Smolka, Harold Adrian Russell Philby (1912–88), whom everyone referred to merely as “Kim.” The son of a wealthy diplomat and a student of history at Cambridge University, Philby had come to Vienna in 1933 in order to improve his German before entering into the diplomatic service. A convinced Marxist, Philby also wanted to get involved in the looming confrontation between the social democrats and the Austrofascist regime of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß. In Vienna, he was active on behalf of the Workers International Relief and as a courier for the underground Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ).<sup>41</sup> A contact had given Philby an address in Vienna’s ninth district Alsergrund, where “regular discussions concerning the organization of illegal political activities” took place: Latschkagasse 9.<sup>42</sup> This was the address of the apartment of Alice “Litzi” Kohlmann—twenty-three years old at the time and already divorced from her first husband, whom she had married at age eighteen.

Litzi was above all a passionately political woman. She was a member of the KPÖ and in contact with the Comintern, the Communist International. There was an immediate connection between the experienced activist and the naïve upper-class scion:

He was two years younger than me, and I was already divorced from my first husband and a member of the Party. He had come from Cambridge, where he had just completed his studies, was a very attractive man, behaved like a gentleman, and moreover, was a Marxist—a rare constellation. He stuttered, sometimes more and sometimes less, and like many people with a handicap he was very charming. We fell in love very quickly.<sup>43</sup>

Philby was soon acting as a courier between the banned KPÖ and contacts in Hungary, Paris, and Prague.<sup>44</sup> When the four-day civil war erupted on February 12, 1934, and some Viennese municipal housing blocks were being bombarded with artillery fire, Philby helped provide money, food, and clothing

41. Christopher Andrew and Wassili Mitrochin, *Das Schwarzbuch des KGB: Moskaus Kampf gegen den Westen* (Munich: Ullstein, 2001), 87.

42. Barbara Honigmann, *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (Munich: Hanser, 2004), 48–49.

43. *Ibid.*, 59.

44. Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: HarperPerennial, 1991), 213.

to fleeing members of the social democratic *Republikanischer Schutzbund*.<sup>45</sup> In Heiligenstadt a group had hidden in the sewer system.

While searching for clothing to use as a disguise, Philby ended up in the apartment of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent Eric Gedye. As Gedye wrote, "I opened my wardrobe to select everything. When Kim saw several suits there, he cried, 'Good God, you have seven; I must have them. I've got six wounded friends in the sewers in danger of the gallows.'" Gedye gave Philby the suits, who in turn gave them to the *Schutzbund* group and sent the group via an escape route to Czechoslovakia.<sup>46</sup> Soon, Philby himself would need to flee. On February 24, 1934, he and Litzi married in a hastily arranged ceremony at the Vienna City Hall. Philby's British passport ensured his bride protection and a way out.<sup>47</sup> Philby's time in Vienna had a formative influence on him. As his biographer E. H. Cookridge put it, he had become a "third man."<sup>48</sup>

A few weeks after his return, Philby was recruited by the Soviet intelligence service KGB (then still the NKVD). Another Jewish emigrant from Austria, the photographer Edith Tudor-Hart (née Suschitzky, 1908–73), led Philby to the Boating Lake in London's Regents Park. This is where the first interview with

45. Richard Davenport-Hines, *Enemies Within Communists, the Cambridge Spies and the Making of Modern Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 2019), 233.

46. Philip Knightly, *The Masterspy: The Story of Kim Philby* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 42.

47. Ben Macintyre, *A Spy among Friends: Philby and the Great Betrayal* (London: Bloomsburg, 2015), 38. One of the marriage witnesses at Philby's wedding was Anton Straka, who emigrated to Britain during the Second World War and after his return made a career in the Austrian Interior Ministry, becoming head of the state police in 1966. One of his subordinates researched Straka's background and found the marriage certificate bearing Straka's name. No evidence for a further connection between him and Philby was unearthed, mainly because Straka had suffered a fatal heart attack in the meantime. Leo Frank-Maier, *Geständnis: Das Leben eines Polizisten. Vom Agentenjäger zum Kripochef Oberst Leo Maier* (Vienna: Grosser, 1993), 49ff. Also present at Philby's wedding had been Teddy Kollek, who served in SIS during the Second World War and in 1965 became mayor of Jerusalem. When visiting the CIA headquarters in 1950, Kollek noticed the familiar face of Philby in the hallway. The latter served at that time as chief British intelligence representative in Washington. Kollek warned his friend at the CIA, counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton, that Philby may be a mole: "Once a Communist, always a Communist." But Angleton, who trusted Philby, "never reacted." "The subject was dropped and never raised again." Jefferson Morley, *The Ghost: The Secret Life of CIA Spymaster James Jesus Angleton* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017), 50–51.

48. "During this momentous year in Austria in 1934, Philby had received the first taste of conspiratorial activities and cloak-and-dagger work. In a sense he had already become at that time a 'third man'; self-effacing, secretive and fully dedicated to danger, leading a double life in more than one way." E. H. Cookridge, *The Third Man: The Full Story of Kim Philby* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 34.

the handler Arnold Deutsch (1904–42), who used the alias “Otto,” took place. In his “confession,” dated January 11, 1963, which has only recently been made available in parts, Philby recounted the meeting. He remembers Deutsch as

stout, with blue eyes and light curly hair. A tough convinced Communist, he had a strong humanistic streak. He hated London, adored Paris, sad spoke of it with deeply loving affection. He was a man of considerable cultural background. Otto spoke at great length, arguing that a person with my family background and responsibilities could do far more for Communism than the run-of-the-mill Party member or sympathiser. [. . .] I explained my own position with great care, and he interrogated me at length. He maintained his offer, and I accepted. His first instructions were that both Lizzy and I should break off as quickly as possible all personal contact with our Communist friends.<sup>49</sup>

Deutsch had also been born in Vienna, where he studied chemistry and physics. He had been in the service of the Soviets since the early 1930s and studied at the Philosophical Faculty of the University of London, where he was on the lookout for communist sympathizers among the students. According to the KGB files examined by the British historian Christopher Andrew and the archivist Wassili Mitrochin, who defected to the West, Deutsch managed to make twenty-nine contacts and recruit twenty agents during his time in London. His recruitment strategy had proven to be a “resounding success”: In the first years of the Second World War, five of Deutsch’s agents, the later called “Cambridge Five”—Philby, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt, and John Cairncross—would enter positions in the intelligence services, the Foreign Office, and the Treasury.<sup>50</sup> Deutsch did not live to see his success and some have said that he died on November 7, 1942, in a maritime incident in the North Atlantic, when the SS *Donbass* was torpedoed by a German submarine. On this account, Deutsch was badly wounded and died trying to save other shipwrecked passengers.<sup>51</sup> According to the journalist Ben Macintyre, however, it is likely that Deutsch in reality fell victim to a purge of the Soviet intelligence service.<sup>52</sup>

49. Extract, original from Philby’s notes (Document 3), in The National Archives (hereafter TNA), KV 2/4428, 38z.

50. Andrew and Mitrochin, *Schwarzbuch*, 86, 87.

51. Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels: The British Secrets Exposed by the KGB Archives* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 113.

52. Macintyre, *Spy among Friends*, 47–48.



Tudor-Hart performed the important function of talent scouting: “It had been her idea to recruit Kim, her idea to introduce him to ‘Otto,’ whose task it was to dissuade him from committing the folly of becoming an ordinary party member. He could serve Moscow in a far more significant manner. Just as she had been serving the Comintern for a few years already, albeit as an officially self-professed communist,” wrote Peter Stephan Jungk in his biography of his aunt. Without Tudor-Hart, he continued, “the most significant spy ring of the twentieth century would probably never have been created.”<sup>53</sup> The seed sown by Deutsch and Tudor-Hart sprouted. They had knowingly targeted members of the establishment—young men with prospects of a shining career, predestining them for infiltration of the government apparatus—above all Philby. The first sacrifice he made to this end was to divorce Litzi. A marriage to a foreign communist would have been a liability. The couple formally divorced in 1946. The following year, Litzi left the United Kingdom and moved to East Berlin, where she married Georg Honigmann, the later editor of the *Berliner Zeitung*. This relationship also ended in divorce, in 1966. In the GDR Litzi worked in the movie business, dubbing English-language movies in German. Even her daughter Barbara Honigmann was not able to ascertain whether she remained a spy or not:

She said very little about her own role and function in the Soviet intelligence service. In fact, she said nothing about this. How long she continued working [...] for the KGB, what this work actually entailed, she only responded to such questions very vaguely, even during our conversation in my studio. It only became clear to me much later that, although she had grandly announced the “details” she wanted to tell me about, she had essentially shared very little.<sup>54</sup>

There is no Stasi file on the mother—for the East German intelligence service would not have been responsible for Litzi, as she was directly “administered” by the KGB. In fact, she would have presented a risk, as an indiscretion on her part could at any moment have exposed her ex-husband. Yet Litzi was loyal to this “life pact” until the end.<sup>55</sup>

Documents in the Austrian State Archives give insight into Litzi’s later return to Vienna, the city of her birth. In 1979, then sixty-nine years old, she turned to the Austrian embassy in East Berlin, requesting a visa in order to visit her aunt

53. Peter Stephan Jungk, *Die Dunkelkammern der Edith Tudor-Hart: Geschichten eines Lebens* (Frankfurt a/M: Fischer, 2015), 85, 90.

54. Honigmann, *Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, 63.

55. Ibid.

in Döbling, Vienna's nineteenth district. This request would repeat itself over the following years. Soon, the embassy began issuing the visas without prior consultation with the authorities in Vienna, albeit "informing" the Federal Ministry of the Interior each and every time after the fact.<sup>56</sup> In 1984—then seventy-four years old—Litzi went a step further: On July 4 she traveled to Austria. Registered with relatives in Dommayergasse 8, she requested an unlimited visa: "The applicant would like to spend her twilight years with friends in Austria (Vienna). They will provide accommodation and shall be liable jointly," as a report of the immigration authorities summarized.<sup>57</sup> For their part, the State Police (domestic intelligence service) certified that "Honigmann Alice, née Kohlmann, divorced Friedmann, divorced Philby, born 05.02.1910, is not of ill repute." Moreover: "From a state and immigration security perspective, nothing negative could be ascertained about her to date."<sup>58</sup>

Litzi had genuinely left her life in the GDR behind. Documents required for the renaturalization as an Austrian citizen were smuggled to Vienna, where Litzi had hired a lawyer to handle her case. When everything was arranged, she was careful to avoid any misunderstandings, sending her apartment keys to her former neighbors in the Karl-Marx-Allee—along with a note proclaiming that nobody should reckon with her return. She also sent a message to the East German embassy. "I request to be released from citizenship in the GDR so that I may adopt Austrian citizenship." There was no reply. Nonetheless, Litzi received the desired documentation without bureaucratic hurdles, along with a victim identification card that "entitles the bearer to a largely privileged treatment." It appeared as though she had "not left Vienna since the day of her birth." After all, Litzi loved the city "despite the Austrians." She settled down in the Theresianumgasse in the fourth district and spent the final years of her life in a bustle. One morning per week she helped out at the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance. She died in 1991, three years after Philby.<sup>59</sup>

Her ex-husband had by contrast become a top source among the Cambridge Five.<sup>60</sup> Philby and his colleagues Burgess, Maclean, Blunt, and Cairncross

56. Fernschreiben Bundesministerium für Inneres [BMI] an Bundesministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten [BMfAA], August 25, 1980, in Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Archiv der Republik (hereafter ÖStA/AdR), BMI II/C 139.019/85.

57. Bericht, June 8, 1984, in *ibid.*

58. Staatspolizeiliches Büro an den Magistrat der Stadt Wien, June 4, 1985, in ÖStA/AdR, BMI II/C 139.019.

59. Honigmann, *Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, 129–36.

60. It only became known in 2009 that there had been another important agent in contact both with Tudor-Hart and Peter Smollett-Smolka: The Austrian exile Engelbert Broda (1910–83) had begun spying on the Anglo-American nuclear bomb projects in 1942 under the alias "Eric." He was a researcher at one of the switch points, the Cavendish

shared in common the fact that they acted not out of financial interest but from political conviction. Naturally, they had no idea about the conditions reigning in the Stalinist Soviet Union. They were able to pass on a veritable treasure trove of information to the Soviet intelligence service, encompassing some 20,000 pages of documents and reports between 1935 and 1951. However, the Soviet leadership for a long time mistrusted the Cambridge Five, suspecting a British subterfuge.<sup>61</sup> This mistrust went so far that an eight-men surveillance team was sent from Moscow to the London residency to trail the Cambridge Five and other supposedly bogus agents in the hope of discovering their (nonexistent) British handlers.<sup>62</sup> But on June 29, 1944, Moscow Centre informed the London residency that the most recent SIS documents provided by Philby had been corroborated by material from other sources. It was now clear that intelligence from the Cambridge Five was of “great value” and had to be maintained. But it became even better: At the end of 1944 Philby succeeded in becoming the head of an expanded Section IX, charged with the “collection and interpretation of information concerning Soviet and Communist espionage and subversion in all parts of the world outside British territory.” According to Christopher Andrews, “the history of espionage records few, if any, comparable masterstrokes.”<sup>63</sup> His verdict is that the Cambridge Five as a whole was the most capable group of British agents ever spying for a foreign power.<sup>64</sup>

---

Laboratory in Cambridge, from where he relayed information on the progress being made. Jungk, *Dunkelkammern*, 156–59. Broda returned to Vienna in 1947, where he continued his scientific career with great success. His brother, Christian Broda, of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ), was the Austrian Minister of Justice for many years. British historian Andrew Brown spoke of a “Vienna Connection” in reference to Broda, Deutsch, and Tudor-Hart. According to Brown, a group of young emigrants who had fled to the UK in the face of antisemitism and political persecution had undermined the society that had taken them in. Andrew Brown, “The Viennese Connection: Engelbert Broda, Alan Nunn and Atomic Espionage,” *Intelligence and National Security* 24, no. 2 (2009): 173–92. Broda and Smollett-Smolka were friends and maintained their friendship even in violation of party orders. When in 1952, for example, Smollett-Smolka was accused in a Czechoslovak show-trial of being a British agent and therefore was shunned by his comrades, Broda stood by him and continued to meet him. Paul Broda, *Scientist Spies: A Memoir of My Three Parents and the Atom Bomb* (Leicester: Troubador, 2011), 243.

61. Stephen Grey, *The New Spymasters: Inside Espionage from the Cold War to Global Terror* (London: St. Martins, 2015), 39–40.

62. Christopher Andrew, *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* (London: Yale University Press, 2018), 650–51.

63. *Ibid.*, 661–62.

64. Christopher Andrew, *MI5: Die wahre Geschichte des britischen Geheimdienstes* (Munich: List, 2011), 402.

When a seven-year-old telegram of the Soviet People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB, the precursor of the KGB) was partially decrypted in 1951 in the context of the "Venona" project, the first two agents were exposed: Burgess and Maclean. Philby, who in 1949 had been posted to Washington as chief British intelligence representative, was suspected to have tipped off Burgess and Maclean. He was interrogated, but survived, even if his promising career was essentially over. Philby was asked to resign and received a severance payment. Doubts did still remain, however, that he had acted as a "third man" in Burgess and Maclean's spy ring. In 1955 Prime Minister Anthony Eden was challenged by an MP, who asked how long he was going to go on shielding "the dubious Third Man activities of Mr. Philby." A few days later, Philby himself gave a press conference at his home and was asked if he had been "third man"—to which he replied: "No, I was not." As journalist Gordon Corera noted: "By a strange quirk of fate, the title of Graham Greene's screenplay was now applied to the man who, unbeknown to anyone, may have helped to inspire it."<sup>65</sup>

Philby had once again succeeded in pulling his head out of the noose. He was relocated under the guise of a journalist to Beirut. Only in 1963 was his cover completely blown.<sup>66</sup> Philby managed to escape to the Soviet Union—not least of all because, as Ben Macintyre stresses, "the prospect of prosecuting Philby in Britain was an anathema to the intelligence services." Since his trial would have been "politically damaging and profoundly embarrassing" and Philby "knew far too much," he practically was allowed to slip away.<sup>67</sup> The many years that Philby then spent in Moscow were overshadowed by alcoholism and isolation. But he did receive a visitor from his home country—Graham Greene, who traveled to Moscow in September 1986. Further meetings followed in early 1987, then again in September, and again in February 1988. During their first reunion after many decades, Greene is supposed to have said that he had no questions—save one: "How's your Russian?"<sup>68</sup> Of course, it is likely that the two discussed intelligence matters. What is controversial in this respect is that Greene was not only friends with the "traitor," but also with the head of the British foreign intelligence service MI6, Maurice Oldfield. Thus, the historian Martin Pearce concluded, Greene was acting as an "unofficial go-between" for Philby and Oldfield. According to Greene, Philby knew that everything he told his friend would be passed on to Oldfield. The MI6 head in turn suspected that

65. Corera, *Art of Betrayal*, 69, 74–75.

66. Andrew, *MI5*, 402–23.

67. Macintyre, *Spy among Friends*, 260.

68. Knightly, *Masterspy*, 245.

this is why the KGB had never really trusted Philby and had him watched.<sup>69</sup> Only in the final years of his life was Philby allowed to instruct KGB recruits and to help motivate the Soviet hockey team. He was awarded the Order of Lenin, the highest decoration in the Soviet Union. Philby would only be publicly honored following his death on May 11, 1988.<sup>70</sup> Most recently, in 2018 a square in Moscow near the headquarters of the Russian foreign intelligence service SVR was named after him.<sup>71</sup>

In 1948, when *The Third Man* was being produced in Vienna, Philby's world was still intact. He was a rising star in the SIS. That is where he met Greene. When Greene unexpectedly resigned on May 9, 1944, he had most recently been working in "Section V"—directly under Philby's supervision.<sup>72</sup> Greene was greatly impressed by Philby's performance:

He worked harder than anyone and never gave the impression of labor. He was always relaxed, completely unflappable. He was in those days of course, fighting the same war as his colleagues: the extreme strain must have come later, when he was organizing a new section to counter Russian espionage, but though then he was fighting quite a different war, he maintained his craftsman's pride.<sup>73</sup>

But maybe Greene's understanding of Philby went even deeper. His biographer Shelden considers it plausible that Greene had seen through Philby long before his exposure as a double agent simply by putting two and two together: As Greene's superior, Philby had in 1944 done his utmost, in the spirit of Moscow, to undermine the plans of the German resistance to negotiate a separate truce with the Western Allies. Philby's marriage to an outspoken communist and his apparent attempts thereafter to cast himself as an anticommunist were further indicators.<sup>74</sup> He had expended a lot of effort into covering up his past by getting involved with a radical right-wing group and by working as a correspondent based in General Francisco Franco's camp in Spain.<sup>75</sup> Be this as

69. Martin Pearce, *Spymaster: The Life of Britain's Most Decorated Cold War Spy and Head of MI6, Sir Maurice Oldfield* (London: Bantam, 2016), 369.

70. Macintyre, *Spy among Friends*, 285.

71. Moscow names square after British double agent Kim Philby, in *The Guardian*, November 8, 2018.

72. Shelden, *Graham Greene*, 33.

73. Preface to Kim Philby, *My Silent War: The Autobiography* (London: Modern Library, 2003), xix.

74. Shelden, *Graham Greene*, 308, 316.

75. Macintyre, *Spy among Friends*, 43–47.

it may, any information on the personal background of Philby would have been of interest to Greene—especially if someone knew Philby's past intimately.

At this point, Smollett-Smolka reenters the picture. Even though there is no evidence to support the following claim, it is entirely possible that when Greene talked to Smollett-Smolka in Vienna in 1948, among other things they conferred about their mutual acquaintance, Philby, whom Smollett-Smolka had first gotten to know through Litzi.<sup>76</sup> Timothy Smolka is only willing to confirm that his father and Philby were friends: "But Litzi was no childhood friend of my father, as is often claimed. No, she was primarily a friend of my mother. They got to know each other through a friend in England."<sup>77</sup> Smollett-Smolka had already lived in England between September 29, 1930, and March 25, 1931, when he had been both a student and a correspondent for the magazine *Der Tag*. He returned to Britain on May 6, 1933, in the company of his wife and was still called Peter Smolka. He now represented *Neue Freie Presse*. In November 1938, when applying for British citizenship, he anglicized his name to Peter Smollett-Smolka.<sup>78</sup> His link to Philby is evident from November 1934, when the two got together to found the short-lived press agency named London Continental News. Its business was the distribution of news from Central Europe. Smollett-Smolka held 98 percent of the shares, Philby 2 percent.<sup>79</sup>

However, that was not all they did: According to the above-cited Mitrochin documents, Philby recruited his friend and business partner in 1939 under the alias "ABO."<sup>80</sup> In 1980 Philby recounted this incident as such:

Once, on my own initiative, I decided to recruit an agent, a Henri [sic] Smolka, an Austrian who was the correspondent of the right-wing *Neue Freie Presse*. In spite of working for the magazine, Smolka was hundred percent Marxist, although inactive, lazy and a little cowardly. [...] I asked him to pass me, on a personal basis, any item that would be of interest [...]. We did so several times and he gave me some really good material.<sup>81</sup>

76. Davenport-Hines, *Enemies Within*, 240.

77. Smolka interview.

78. Intelligence Organisation, British Troops Austria, B.T.A.4., Smollett-Smolka, Harry P., in TNA, KV 2/4169, 227a.

79. Smollett Smolka, Harry Peter, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 189a, 225D; Charmian Brinson, "Nothing Short of a Scandal? Harry Peter Smolka and the British Ministry of Information," *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016): 63–75, at 65.

80. Andrew and Mitrochin, *Schwarzbuch*, 127.

81. West and Tsarev, *Crown Jewels*, 157.

According to Philby, he mentioned this recruitment only belatedly to his handler and “received a severe rebuke.”<sup>82</sup> Still, Timothy Smolka remains to this day convinced that his father never spied for the Soviet Union:

My brother traveled to Russia when the documents were released. He told me that his search was successful. It was documented that Smollett-Smolka was unsuitable as a spy as he was far too attached to his family. So my father was surely a so-called fellow traveler, a sympathizer. To my knowledge, he was never a member of the Communist Party and was also no Soviet agent. He was in the Soviet Union in 1935 and 1936 and saw things that he should have recognized but did not. He was in camps and did not realize what was happening there.<sup>83</sup>

In any case, on account of his good relations with Winston Churchill’s Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, Smollett-Smolka was promoted to head the Ministry of Information’s Soviet Relations Division in 1941. He was tasked with diminishing the public’s reservations regarding the Soviet Union and making an alliance against the Third Reich more palatable.<sup>84</sup> Oleg Gordievsky, like Mitrochin a defector from the KGB, interpreted this as one of the greatest coups in the realm of influencing operations (“active measures”) in the history of the Soviet intelligence service. In his function, Smollett-Smolka “energetically organized pro-Soviet propaganda and suppressed ‘unfavorable comment’ on Stalinist Russia.”<sup>85</sup> He is presumed to have been the “important official” who advised publisher Jonathan Cape against bringing out George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in 1944.<sup>86</sup> In the course of his tenure at the Ministry of Information, moreover, Smollett-Smolka also crossed paths with another Cambridge Five spy, namely, Guy Burgess, who in 1940 was a specialist in the broadcasting section. Together with Smollett-Smolka, Burgess worked on an overseas propaganda radio bulletin and helped to “shape public opinion in favor

82. Ibid.

83. Smolka interview.

84. Foges, “My Spy.”

85. Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, 334, 337.

86. Daniel J. Leab, *Orwell Subverted: The CIA and the Filming of Animal Farm* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 3. In a notebook George Orwell listed some 130 people as “crypto-Communists” and “fellow-travelers.” Included here is “Peter Smollett,” whom Orwell described as a “very slimy person” (152). Smollett-Smolka was also the only person Orwell fingered as “some kind of Russian agent”; Dorian Lynskey, *The Ministry of Truth: A Biography of George Orwell’s 1984* (London: Picador, 2019), 204.

of the Soviet Union.”<sup>87</sup> There had been reservations about Smollett-Smolka’s employment early on, but any objection was waived on “a strong recommendation” by an official from the Foreign Office.<sup>88</sup> Yet the uneasiness about Smollett-Smolka did not go away. There had been “no opportunity to of removing” him, a commander in the Air Ministry conceded in 1940:

Since his [Smollett-Smolka’s] employment in the Ministry of Information, he has been brought to our notice on several occasions as a possible source of leakage of certain information, but although enquiries showed that he had attained to a position where he was in possession of a lot of confidential information and was the center of a group of enemy alien refugees, it was impossible to get any concrete evidence that he was working against the country’s interests.<sup>89</sup>

When an MI5-officer inspected Smollett-Smolka’s file in 1941, he was only inclined to think “that Smolka is very much too closely concerned with his own prosperity to commit himself to any side until he is sure it is the winning side.”<sup>90</sup> A year later, after the military advisors at the Ministry of Information were still “very perturbed” about Smollett-Smolka, his file was again consulted by an officer, who remarked

that whilst we had nothing against him [Smollett-Smolka] from a security point of view, he seemed on the face of fit a most unsuitable person to occupy his present position. He is an Austrian Jew, 30 years of age, and does not appear to have any special knowledge of Russia though he seems to have paid short visits to that country. He has many associates in this country among Austrian refugees and it seems probable that he is, if not a Communist, at least strongly in sympathy with the movement. I pointed out, however, that if it was hoped to remove Smollett from his present position objection to him could only be made on purely personal grounds. There is no evidence in our records which would justify us in having him removed.<sup>91</sup>

87. Andrew Lownie, *Stalin’s Englishman: Guy Burgess, the Cold War, and the Cambridge Spy Ring* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2016), 104–5.

88. Minute Sheet no. 166, May 19, 1942, in TNA, KV 2/4169.

89. Letter dated October 25, 1940, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 147a.

90. Minute Sheet no. 155, in TNA, KV 2/4169.

91. Minute Sheet no. 166, May 19, 1942, in TNA, KV 2/4169.



According to a memorandum from September 1942, Philby had done his share to dispel concerns. A colleague of his had found references that Smollett-Smolka had formed London Continental News “with a certain H.R. Philby”:

I think that that is almost certainly our mutual friend in Section V. I should be extremely grateful if you could ask Philby for any information he would let us have about this man. Smollett is employed in the Ministry of Information and there can, I think, be no doubt that he has good connections with the C. P. G. B. [Communist Party of Great Britain], which explains our interest in his.<sup>92</sup>

Within two days, the intermediary reported that he had spoken to Philby about Smollett-Smolka:

The press agency in question never actually functioned, but Philby knew Smollett quite well at the time. He says he is an Austrian Jew who came to this country about 1920, did well in journalism and is extremely clever. Commercially he is rather a pusher but he has nonetheless a rather timid character and feeling of inferiority largely due to his somewhat repulsive appearance. He is a physical coward and was petrified when the air-raids began. Philby considered his politics to be mildly left-wing but had no knowledge of the C.P. [Communist Party] link-up. His personal opinion is that Smollett is clever and harmless. He adds that in any case the man would be far too scared to become involved in anything really sinister.<sup>93</sup>

British intelligence nonetheless kept interest in Smollett-Smolka, even after he returned to Vienna in June 1945 as a representative of various British newspapers. He also managed to get the aryanized villa of his father-in-law restituted.<sup>94</sup> In 1946 London received the following about Smollett-Smolka: “There are indications that he has been asking questions about Austrian Barracks Unit, and about our Representative in Vienna. Also that he is cultivating Ernst Fischer, former Minister of Education and his wife, and is in contact with Tito Yugoslav circles in Vienna.” In 1949 it was reported that Smollett-Smolka had undertaken a journey to the “Sokol Festival” in Prague the previous July: “He had been spending his leave in Dobrisch, a rest home for Communist writers 25 miles S.W. of Prague.” But in 1951, when the cover of first two members of

92. Internal memorandum, September 10, 1942, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 172A.

93. Internal memorandum, September 12, 1942, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 173A.

94. Biography of Timothy Smolka, Centropa, <http://www.centropa.org/de/biography/timothy-smolka>.

the Cambridge Five was blown, the MI6 representative in Vienna responded that “he knows of nothing to connect Smollett-Smolka with Burgess.” Instead, Smollett-Smolka was “very rarely” seen by members of the community in Vienna; “he is in very bad health and attends mainly his business interests.” The US Army Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) held a different view: It considered Smollett-Smolka, already at the end of the 1940s “extremely dangerous,” since he believed in “Soviet international imperialistic aims.” Smollett-Smolka’s villa was said to be a meeting point for the higher echelons of the KPÖ. Visitors among other included former KPÖ minister Ernst Fischer, a correspondent for the Soviet news agency TASS and the secretary of KPÖ-chairman Johann Koplenig. According to the report, among his friends Smollett-Smolka was known to be “brilliant, ambitious, and completely unscrupulous.”<sup>95</sup>

But his health deteriorated. From 1958 on, Smollett-Smolka was confined to a wheelchair because of multiple sclerosis. In September 1961, for the first time in fifteen years he visited London and stayed at the Savoy Hotel. An interview by an MI5 officer was arranged at the War Office on October 2. According to historian Richard Davenport-Hines, Smollett-Smolka was “quick, wily and forceful.” He claimed that his former business partner Philby was “anti-Jewish” and had shunned him. Smollett-Smolka also called Burgess “a colorful and attractive nut” and “a very vain busybody,” who asked him to supply reports on conversations and opinions that he heard. As to his own politics, Smollett-Smolka described himself a fellow-traveler during his years at the Ministry for Information, and as a member of the Communist Party from 1946 until the anti-Semitic show trials of the Czechoslovak communist leader Rudolf Slánský and his associates in 1952. From then on, Smollett-Smolka counted himself as a Titoist. “Nothing that he said was demonstrably false, but most of his statements were untrue,” argues Davenport-Hines.<sup>96</sup>

Despite his frail appearance, Smollett-Smolka displayed a considerable amount of energy until his death on November 4, 1980. After having his father’s aryanized business, the Wiener Metallwaren- und Schnallenfabrik in Schwechat, restituted to him, he developed a ski-bindings firm, Tyrolia-Skibindungen. Following the sale of this company in 1974, his childhood friend, Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, helped him to realize one final project. In 1975 the first volume of the English-language quarterly *Austria Today* was

95. Letter dated March 29, 1946, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 185; letter dated February 5, 1949, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 202; letter from MI6 re Smollett, June 28, 1951, in TNA, KV 2/4169, 213B; extracts from 430 CIC Det. MOIC dated October 6, 1950, in TNA, KV 2/4169.

96. Davenport-Hines, *Enemies Within*, 494.

published, which from 1980 onward also began appearing in French.<sup>97</sup> Issued via Austrian agencies in 139 countries, *Austria Today* conveyed a “realistic picture of modern Austria.” “It is read primarily by opinion leaders abroad, but also by foreigners in Austria. It presents a positive image of Austria and demonstrates our achievements in science, research, medicine, culture, politics, trade, business, and industry.” This is how Kreisky summarized it in a letter to Gerhard Weissenberg, the Federal Minister for Social Administration, on July 12, 1978. In 1978 the Federal Chancellery took out 7,700 subscriptions from Smollett-Smolka, thus contributing “the maximum for the distribution of this interesting publication.” It soon transpired that these subscriptions were sold for about 500,000 Schillings more than the comparable total of private subscriptions.<sup>98</sup>

Given the many connections described here, it is hardly conceivable that Smollett-Smolka and Greene would not have discussed Philby in 1948. However, Greene remained discreet, as Shelden opines. Rather than making the issue public and thereby bringing the Western intelligence services into disrepute, he apparently found other ways to send subliminal messages to his counterpart: “He could always write fiction.”<sup>99</sup> Another reason was ostensibly that Greene had a soft spot for Philby. When the ex-agent and defector wrote his memoirs in exile in 1968, Greene provided a preface, in which he interpreted Philby’s treason as a gesture of a higher belief: “He betrayed his country—yes, perhaps he did, but who among us has not committed treason to something or someone

97. Timothy Smolka recalled: “My father was an enthusiastic journalist. Due to his illness, he was no longer able to practice his profession. In order to somehow establish himself as a businessman, he wheeled himself up to the *Hochschule für Welthandel* [today the Vienna University of Economics and Business] and completed the first state examination. Then he established his company Tyrolia, which he sold in 1974. I know that my father told Kreisky during a meeting back then that it was actually frightening how little the world knew about Austria—encompassing the Lipizzaner and the fact that Maria Theresia had so many children and that was it. That was a shame. And then Kreisky responded: If that is your opinion, then write something about it. Thus, my father began to publish *Austria Today*. After all, he had connections from his time as a journalist and as a businessman and invested a lot into publishing articles in this journal. And to Kreisky’s astonishment, *Austria Today* began to have an impact within a very short time, which was not at all expected. It was issued by Austrian agencies, embassies, and companies abroad. In 1983, three years after my father’s death, *Austria Today* was finally discontinued.” Smolka interview.

98. Kreisky an Weissenberg, July 12, 1978, and information für den Herrn Bundeskanzler, January 10, 1978, both in Stiftung Bruno Kreisky Archiv (hereafter StBKA), Box V/3-1 ORF.

99. Shelden, *Graham Greene*, 316.

more important than a country? In Philby's own eyes he was working for a shape of things to come from which his country would benefit."<sup>100</sup>

Even if the theory that *The Third Man* was a kind of message to Philby constitutes mere speculation, Harry Lime bears his undeniable likeness. The similarities begin with his first name Harold, which was transformed to "Harry," and ends with the dark charm that make both Lime and his real prototype so fascinating. Just as Philby characterized his work for the intelligence service as a "racket," Greene had his character Lime utter the same word to describe his handiwork. The final chase through the sewer system, probably the most famous scene in *The Third Man*, is reminiscent of Philby's underground activities in 1934 when he himself smuggled refugees through the sewers. Finally, when the now-cynical Lime and his childhood friend, the naïve and gullible writer of Western novels Holly Martins, face each other down, loyalty counts more than do abstract principles—just as it did in the relationship between Greene and Philby.<sup>101</sup>

### A Year of Suspense: Shadow War and Fears of a Putsch

In June 1948 Greene was in Vienna for the second time. This time he stayed for twenty days, June 10–30. "Late nights, hard drinking, hard writing," is how Sherry summarized Greene's life. Also present was the later director of *The Third Man*, Carol Reed, with whom Greene toured the city and then together they paced out scenes for the screenplay in Reed's hotel room.<sup>102</sup> As the "picturesque" bomb damage had already been cleared away in the meantime, Greene awkwardly remarked to Reed: "But I assure you Vienna was really like that—three months ago."<sup>103</sup>

100. Preface to Philby, *Silent War*, xvii. In contrast to Greene's sympathetic views of Philby, fellow novelist John le Carré referred to Philby "as spiteful, vain and murderous." He had given himself body and mind "to a country he had never visited, to an ideology he had not deeply studied, to a regime which even abroad, during those long and awful purges, was a peril to serve; he remained actively faithful to that decision for over 30 years, cheating, betraying and occasionally killing." Sisman, *John le Carré*, 313. Le Carré often talked about his refusal to meet Philby when the opportunity arose on a visit to Moscow in 1987: "I couldn't possibly have shook his hand. It was drenched in blood. It would have been repulsive" (xviii). Philby, in turn, once remarked that he got the "vague impression, perhaps wrongly," that le Carré "didn't like me. But we are generous, and have no objection to contributing to his vast affluence" (388).

101. Shelden, *Graham Greene*, 323; Timmermann, *Third Man's Vienna*, 101; Beer, "Film in Context: *The Third Man*," 50–51.

102. Rob White, *The Third Man* (London: bifi Publishing, 2003), 11.

103. Sherry, *Life of Graham Greene*, 251; Timmermann, *Third Man's Vienna*, 33; Nicholas Wapshott, *The Man Between: A Biography of Carol Reed* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), 212.

The description of the war-torn city with which Greene opened the novel was, by contrast, grimly realistic:

I never knew Vienna between the wars, and I am too young to remember the old Vienna with its Strauss music and its bogus easy charm; to me it is simply a city of undignified ruins which turned that February into great glaciers of snow and ice. The Danube was a grey flat muddy river a long way off across the second bezirk, the Russian zone where the Prater lay smashed and desolate and full of weeds, only the Great wheel revolving slowly over the foundations of merry-go-rounds like abandoned mill-stones, the rusting iron of smashed tanks which nobody had cleared away, the frost nipped weeds where the snow was thin.<sup>104</sup>

In early 1948 Vienna not only lay in ruins. It had simultaneously become a sensitive locus in a new geopolitical conflict. The Cold War was just in its particularly “hot” opening stage: In February 1948 the Czechoslovak government was overthrown in a communist putsch. Immediately thereafter, the Communist Party in Hungary established autocratic rule. The next flashpoint was West Berlin, which the Soviets blockaded for fifteen months beginning on June 24, 1948. A civil war raged in Greece, while Italy, which held its first post-war elections in April 1948, stood on the brink. These manifold convulsions were felt especially keenly in postwar Austria. This was where the hostile power blocs faced each other down. The negotiation of the State Treaty had long come to a standstill and during the Berlin crisis the Soviets also impeded access to Vienna. The danger that the country would be divided was just as real as the risk that the KPÖ would seize power with the support of the Soviets. The party had about 150,000 to 170,000 members. Not only that: The KPÖ had also participated in the federal government until 1947, when its last remaining minister resigned. Until December 1945 KPÖ politician Franz Honner had been state secretary of the Interior within the then-provisional Austrian government. He put a trusted party member, Heinrich Dürmayer, in charge of the reorganization of the state police, which meant that a key component of the security apparatus was under Communist control, at least until Dürmayer was forced to resign in 1947.<sup>105</sup>

104. Greene, *Man*, 14–15.

105. Günter Bischof, “‘Prag liegt westlich von Wien.’ Internationale Krisen im Jahre 1948 und ihr Einfluss auf Österreich,” in *Die bevormundete Nation: Österreich und die Alliierten, 1945–1949*, ed. Günter Bischof and Josef Leidenfrost (Innsbruck: Haymon, 1988), 315–45, at 315–16, 321, 325; Stefan Karner, *Halt! Tragödien am Eisernen Vorhang: Die Verschlussakten* (Salzburg: Ecowin, 2013), 59.

In the meantime, an undeclared shadow war raged between the intelligence services of the West and the East. As Siegfried Beer has written, Vienna, Salzburg, and Austria as a whole had “within just a few months and years after the end of the war and in total disproportion to the size and significance of the country become an international center and stomping ground for agents, informants, provocateurs, and spies”<sup>106</sup> In this sense, Vienna offered unique opportunities for the spies of East and West. As KGB officer and later defector Peter Deriabin remembered:

In Vienna the comparative looseness of the four power occupation scheme, by contrast with the rigid sector demarcations in Berlin, offered a rich breeding ground for contacts between the Soviet people and the West. Espionage and counter-espionage activities thrived, made all the more complicated by the ease with which so many local citizens entered into an agent's or informer's relationship. (It was not for nothing that Graham Greene set *The Third Man* in Vienna.)<sup>107</sup>

Local informers—many among them Eastern European refugees and Soviet army deserters as well as innocent people simply suspected of being spies—were the prime victims of the early Cold War intelligence struggle. In 1948 up to three people were being abducted by the Soviet intelligence services and their accomplices daily. The overall number of victims between 1946 and 1948 is estimated between 450 and 800. It was not a one-sided matter: As CIA veteran James Milano recounts, “Americans had not been averse to seizing people in the Soviet zone and spiriting them to the West.”<sup>108</sup> This lawless situation led to Vienna being referred to as “the shooting gallery, because of the frequent use of violence in running operations there,” former CIA station chief Peer de Silva recounted.<sup>109</sup> Another individual familiar with the situation from personal experience was the CIA agent William Hood. In his memoirs, which

106. Siegfried Beer, “Nachrichten—und Geheimdienste in Österreich, 1945–1955,” in *Österreich ist frei: Der österreichische Staatsvertrag 1955*, ed. Stefan Karner and Gottfried Stangler, Beitragsband zur Ausstellung auf Schloss Schallaburg 2005 (Horn: Berger and Söhne, 2005), 221–26, at 221.

107. Peter Deriabin and Frank Gibney, *KGB: The Secret World* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 285.

108. Siegfried Beer, “Rund um den ‘Dritten Mann.’ Amerikanische Geheimdienste in Österreich 1945–1955,” in *Österreich im frühen Kalten Krieg: Spione, Partisanen, Kriegspläne*, ed. Erwin A. Schmidl (Vienna: Böhlau, 2000), 73–99, at 88; Milano and Brogan, *Soldiers, Spies, and the Rat Line*, 173.

109. Peer de Silva, *Sub Rosa: The CIA and the Uses of Intelligence* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 43. Gordon Corera similarly notes that Vienna “was a lawless city in which the

were published in 1982, he called Vienna an “intelligence battlefield.” On the Soviet side, too, the Austrian capital had become one of the most challenging sites of operations by the late 1940s. Service there was considered so difficult that the Red Army officers (including those in the counterintelligence agency SMERSH) received two forty-five-day vacations per year.<sup>110</sup>

Some of the most infamous cases of kidnapping involved Margarethe Ottilinger, a key official in the Ministry for Asset Protection and Economic Planning (*Bundesministerium für Vermögenssicherung und Wirtschaftsplanung*), the undersecretary Paul Katscher, and the detective inspector Anton Marek along with his subordinate Franz Kiridus. The latter two were key staff members of the intelligence service, heading “Group 5,” a kind of private police force of the social democratic Minister of the Interior Oskar Helmer. They were involved in interrogating refugees from the Eastern bloc and passing the information on to the Western agencies. This led to the two men being deported to the Soviet Union; from where, they would only be released in 1955.<sup>111</sup> The black limousines and chase scenes depicted in *The Third Man* reflect the real atmosphere of the time—sometimes even too authentically, which is why a conscious decision was ultimately made not to have the female protagonist, a Czech emigrant, kidnapped as planned. This “perfectly possible incident in Vienna” was eliminated “at a fairly late stage,” as Greene wrote in the preface to the novel. This episode was not connected closely enough with the rest of the plot, “and it threatened to turn the film into a propagandist picture. We had no desire to move people’s political emotions; we wanted to entertain them, to frighten them a little, to make them laugh.”<sup>112</sup>

Greene did not hold back in the literary presentation, immediately referring in the preface to specific incidents that he had presumably heard about: “At night it is just as well to stick to the Inner Stadt or the zones of the powers tough even there the kidnappings occur—such senseless kidnappings they sometimes seemed to us—a Ukrainian girl without a passport, an old man beyond the age of usefulness, sometimes of course the technician or traitor.” At another point, he wrote pensively: “There is a lot of comedy in these situations if you are not directly concerned. You need a background of Central European terror, of a

---

police could not always be trusted and in which the rules of the Cold War espionage game had yet to be codified.” Corera, *Art of Betrayal*, 35.

110. William Hood, *Mole* (New York: Norton, 1982), 12; Vadim J. Birstein, *Smersh: Stalin’s Secret Weapon* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), 373.

111. Harald Knoll and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, “Die Fälle Marek und Kiridus. Zur sowjetischen Strafjustiz in Österreich,” in *Österreich ist frei*, ed. Karner and Stangler, 143–47, at 144–45.

112. Greene, preface to *Man*, 10. See also Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 98.

father who belonged to a losing side, of house searches and disappearances, before the fear outweighed the comedy.”<sup>113</sup>

In Marek and Kiridus's case, there was apparently a specific reason that they found themselves in the crosshairs: As the publisher Fritz Molden wrote in his memoirs, the two detectives belonged to a circle that had since 1946 been mulling a contingency plan for the event that the Eastern zone was to be “completely cut off by the Soviets.” Means of communication needed to be acquired, “above all radios as well as weapons and appropriately trained personnel.” With the support of the Western Allies, concrete plans for the formation of gendarmerie units were drawn up in August 1948, which would form the nucleus of the present-day Austrian Armed Forces.<sup>114</sup> Similar plans were being hatched by the other side, too: In late July 1948 the CIA noted that high-ranking KPÖ functionaries were visiting Czechoslovakia for meetings with the Cominform. This “Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties,” founded in 1947, also served the purpose of advancing the world revolution with all available means.<sup>115</sup> The directives of the Cominform were to be strictly observed, as Interior Minister Helmer explained during a visit to Switzerland in 1950: “Their infiltration begins in cinema as well as in newspapers and magazines and increases relative to one's higher standing in society. Those at the top end, meaning primarily the intellectuals, are more susceptible than the common people. Communism is rather disregarded by the general population.”<sup>116</sup>

In late August 1948 a multiday, strictly screened meeting of the KPÖ leadership took place in Leopoldstadt, Vienna's second district. An unverified report submitted to the CIA claimed:

The Communists['] plan to carry out a putsch in Vienna this fall. Plans for this action were being discussed in a Soviet-requisitioned villa at 6 Laufbergerstrasse [*sic*, Laufbergergasse], Vienna II, from August 23 to September 6. The villa was under constant Soviet guard during closed sessions. Twenty Communist Party members were present at the villa. All but Communist leader Franz Honner were required to remain at the villa

113. Greene, *Man*, 14, 121.

114. Fritz Molden, *Besetzer, Toren, Biedermänner: Ein Bericht aus Österreich 1945–1962* (Vienna: Molden, 1980), 125–29.

115. Information Report: Austrian Communist Leaders at Cominform Meeting in Prague, August 25, 1948, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/reading-room/docs/CIA-RDP82-00457R001800560006-9.pdf>.

116. “Aufzeichnungen über eine Aussprache mit Herrn Bundesminister Helmer, Innenminister Österreichs, über den kommunistischen Putschversuch im September/Oktober 1950 in Österreich,” November 23, 1950, Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz, <http://dodis.ch/8740>.



for the duration of the session. Uniformed Soviets were also present. [. . .] The final step in the planned coup is to take over control of the Austrian police. Selected Austrian quislings [i.e., traitors] are being briefed for this purpose.<sup>117</sup>

By contrast, a document in the Austrian Ministry of the Interior dates the beginning of the meeting two days earlier: “The work is being conducted under the supervision of the National Council member Honner, a certain Spanner, and Wrebka. Spanner and Wrebka are also forbidden from leaving the building and from having any other form of contact with the outside world. This originally confidential communique could be verified for its accuracy by observation.” In the meantime, Dürmayer had allegedly met with a police commissioner in the apartment of Johann Koplenig, a KPÖ member of the National Council, by order of an emissary of the Cominform to work on a plan to organize the “takeover of police powers.”<sup>118</sup>

But the situation remained calm. Not until 1950 did a massive strike movement take place, which could however be suppressed with the help of the CIA. The CIA station chief secretly formed raiding squads armed with ax shafts who could “forcefully” oppose the protestors. Only the death of the Soviet dictator Stalin in March 1953 finally opened the way to the State Treaty and the recovery of sovereignty in 1955. The situation in 1948, by contrast, was disorganized. Three years after the end of the war, the entire social structure was still shattered by shortages, lack of opportunities, unresolved questions of ownership, and a process of identity-formation that had only just begun. At the same time, the process of denazification and the judicial prosecution of Nazi perpetrators, which had initially been pursued proactively, started to come to an end with the amnesty granted to the “least incriminated” in 1947. The result was a societal atmosphere in which adventurers, informants, and traffickers flourished.<sup>119</sup>

This milieu was extensively explored in *The Third Man*. Concerning the black market, its centers lay in the Resselpark and the Naschmarkt along the River Wien, “where quixotic figures rose up to become millionaires and not infrequently drove up in luxury limousines.”<sup>120</sup> Still the Red Army, too, was

117. Information Report, September 14, 1948. Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82-00457R001801030001-1.pdf>. The abandoned Villa Putz in Sportklubstraße 8 was also named as the location of the secret meeting.

118. Reinhold Knoll and Martin Haidinger, *Spione, Spitzel und Agenten: Analyse einer Schattenwelt* (St. Pölten: NP Buchverlag, 2001), 305–6.

119. John F. Richardson, *My Father the Spy: An Investigative Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 102–3; Tenneth H. Bagley, *Spy Wars: Moles, Mysteries and Deadly Games* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 33.

120. Timmermann and Baker, *Der dritte Mann*, 84.

involved in illegal trade from June 1945 onward. Soldiers expropriated food-stuffs in the countryside and traded these against clothing, watches, and jewels. The smugglers were on hand as business partners. Additionally, their networks were commissioned to perform dirty work like kidnapping—or their members hired themselves out as informants.<sup>121</sup> Such services are hinted at almost in passing by Harry Lime in *The Third Man*: He claimed to be safe in the Soviet sector “as long as they can use me.” What use he was is not further elaborated upon. In the novel, Lime says: “The price of living in this zone [. . .] is service. I have to give them a little information now and then.”<sup>122</sup>

Only from September 1949 onward did the Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) of the US Army take resolute action against the local henchmen for the Soviets. The “Benno Blum Gang” achieved particular notoriety, kidnapping on a monthly basis refugees from the Eastern bloc and deserters from the Red Army in Linz, Salzburg, and Vienna.<sup>123</sup> The black Chevrolets they used to this end became something of a trademark. The head of the gang was the Bulgarian Nikolai Borrisov, who called himself “Benno Blum.” Said to have been born in 1910, the “slippery, but massive 220-pounder with a black-moustached upper lip and a perpetual leer” had shifted his activities to Vienna in 1947.<sup>124</sup> Here he made a fortune by striking a deal with Soviet authorities for a monopoly to transport truckloads of smuggled cigarettes from the Hungarian border through the Soviet zone to Vienna.<sup>125</sup> According to contemporary newspaper reports, this black-market business inflicted a damage of 100 million Schillings (81.5 million Euros by today’s standards) at a time when American and British cigarettes functioned as the informal currency of the postwar economy.<sup>126</sup>

In return for this free hand, Blum had to undertake kidnapping missions in the US zones in Vienna and Western Austria “and deliver alive at least one person wanted by the Soviets each month.” Starting in 1949, up to thirty cases in nine months were tied to the Benno Blum Gang.<sup>127</sup> Between April 14 and July 28, 1949, its members alone snatched four “displaced persons” from the streets of Salzburg. It may have been Blum, who was on Greene’s mind, when

121. Ralph W. Brown III, “Making the Third Man Look Pale: American-Soviet Conflict in Vienna during the Early Cold War in Austria, 1945–1950,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 14, no. 4 (2001): 81–109, here 89–90.

122. Greene, *Man*, 130.

123. *Ibid.*, 98.

124. “Vienna’s Crimson Shadows,” *Collier’s Magazine*, October 6, 1950.

125. Reinhard Federmann and Bertrand Egger, *Raubersg’schichten* (Vienna: Hunna, 1962), 78–82.

126. “Der Zigarettenschmuggel der Blum-Bande: 100 Millionen Schilling Schaden,” in *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, January 4, 1950.

127. “Vienna’s Crimson Shadows.”

he wrote the following about the fictional Harry Lime: “He was about the worst racketeer who ever made a dirty living in the city.”<sup>128</sup> If so, then, Lime seems to have been a composite character: modeled after Philby, but also partly after Blum, who may have supplied inspiration for the “colorful” criminal, as CIA veteran William Hood suspects.<sup>129</sup> It is possible that his activities were already being discussed among the Allied intelligence service staff with whom Greene was in contact. However, the apex of Blum’s activities occurred after the movie production was completed. By that time, the gangster had reached notoriety. For example, an article in *Collier’s Magazine* from June 1950 referred to Benno Blum and his “playmates” and concluded that “The Third Man story is true.”

Down in the smoky depths of the Casino Orientale, where they shot some of the picture’s night-club scenes, the zither player likes to strum the Harry Lime theme. You’d think you were on a movie set. But the characters around the room are a grimmer gang than Harry Lime’s. Penicillin isn’t their racket. They’re dealing in the secrets and dirty work of the cold war—in espionage, kidnapping and death.<sup>130</sup>

Like Lime, Blum lived an “untouchable” life at the edge of Vienna’s Russian zone, but only as long as he was useful to his Soviet patrons. Things began to unravel when on January 10, 1950, one of Blum’s teams was caught red-handed. Soon many more members of the gang were arrested. Even worse, Blum’s close links to the Soviet Ministry for State Security (MGB, renamed KGB in 1954) were revealed. Two of his handlers were publicly named: MGB captains Josef Bielav und Nikolai Orlov, both of whom had lived for some time at an address that had also served as one of the “central bureaus” of the Benno Blum Gang.<sup>131</sup> To save face, Blum was imprisoned by the Soviets, but managed to escape on February 18, 1950. He hid in Vienna, where the CIC was intensely searching after him. On April 2, 1950, only a few weeks after *The Third Man* had premiered in Austrian cinemas, Blum was cornered and killed in an apartment in Thalhaimergasse 1-7. A relative of Blum had informed on his whereabouts.<sup>132</sup> Allegedly, Blum had tried to grab a gun out of one of the agents’ hands, who

128. Greene, *Man*, 30.

129. Hood, *Mole*, 10.

130. “Vienna’s Crimson Shadows.”

131. “Das Menschenräuberhaus in der Gußhausstraße,” in *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, September 4, 1950.

132. Winfried Meyer, Klatt: *Hitlers jüdischer Meisteragent gegen Stalin Überlebenskunst in Holocaust und Geheimdienstkrieg* (Berlin: Metropol, 2015), 1047–53.

had managed to place his thumb between the hammer and the firing pin. In the meantime, a second agent aimed at Blum and pulled the trigger.<sup>133</sup>

An even more tenuous parallel to *The Third Man* is a spectacular murder case. Eight days after principal photography had begun, on the eve of October 31, 1948, a murder took place that remains unsolved to this day. The body of US agent Irving Ross was found on a country road near the brickyard ponds in Vösendorf. It was “the most brutal murder that we ever encountered,” is how a detective later put it.<sup>134</sup> When the scene of the crime was examined in the morning, a terrible picture emerged. A Chevrolet Fleetmaster had been parked at the end of the Schönbrunner Allee, not far from the present-day Shopping City. The hood stood open and all four wheels as well as the spare had been removed.

A man in civilian clothing was lying on the driver’s seat, around whom the seat, the dashboard, doors, and windows were completely soaked in blood and pieces of brain. The unknown man bore heavy injuries to the head and was already dead. Beside the car, off in the field, the car’s back license plate lay on the one side and on the other side an ID card including a photograph made out to the name Irving S. Ross—SD—Civilian Attaché.<sup>135</sup>

This is how the police report summarized the scene, concluding that a holdup murder had occurred.

Ross had been working in the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) since 1947, tracing Marshall Plan money that disappeared into the Soviet zone.<sup>136</sup> A 1950 report in the *Reader’s Digest* claimed that Ross had specifically been investigating the activities of companies exporting strategically important goods behind the Iron Curtain. Although technically a diplomat and not a spy, Ross was supposed to have been on the trail of one of the most important players in this smuggling network.<sup>137</sup> More recently, US historian Ralph Brown has stated that Ross’s work had “threatened the black market gangsters in Vienna,

133. Ian Sayer and Douglas Botting, *America’s Secret Army: The Untold Story of the Counterintelligence Corps* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), 360–61.

134. “Ganz sichere Methoden,” *Der Spiegel* 48 (1948): 10–11.

135. Information, October 31, 1948, in ÖStA/AdR, BMI 157.513-2/4B, Ross Irving S., Ermordung.

136. Ralph W. Brown III, “U.S. Army Intelligence in Vienna and the Case of Irving S. Ross and Dana Superina,” *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 35–45, at 37.

137. O. K. Armstrong and Frederic Sondern Jr., “When Are We Going to Stop Helping Russia Arm?” *Reader’s Digest* (December 1950), 115–20, at 116.

some of whom were linked to the Soviets and one of whom served as a model for the villain in Graham Greene's *The Third Man*.<sup>138</sup> While there is no evidence for linking the murder victim directly to Benno Blum in the way Brown suggests, there are a number of parallels between the story of Ross and *The Third Man*: Like the fictitious US journalist Holly Martins in the movie, Ross had also been helping a refugee from the Eastern bloc, procuring documentation for her. In *The Third Man* these papers are issued for "Anna Schmidt." The woman Irving Ross had employed as a secretary and cared for—a Yugoslav refugee and suspected former "Communist agent"—had used a slightly familiar alias among others, "Martha Schmit."<sup>139</sup> Like Martins, Ross seems to have gotten caught up head over heels in a confrontation, although in the latter case the situation was to have a tragic end.

### Conclusion: A Timeless Classic

Principal photography for the *The Third Man* lasted until early December 1948. The audio engineer Jack Davies noticed at least one mysterious person on the set. He had been assigned to the production in the last moment; it was obvious that he was not from the business but learned his handiwork quickly. When principal photography was complete, he disappeared as abruptly as he had arrived. Davies did not recall ever hearing about him again.<sup>140</sup>

The city of Vienna did everything it could to support the moviemakers. Traffic was interrupted, police forces mobilized, and the fire brigade sent out to spray the streets in order to produce a glittering effect. The Soviet occupation authorities, by contrast, tried to impede the project in any way they could. In one incident, a member of the Red Army confiscated a camera at gunpoint from the co-director Guy Hamilton. On December 19, 1948, a couple of days after the crew departed on their homebound journeys, the nave of the war-damaged St. Stephen's Cathedral was reopened. That evening, the cathedral was illuminated with the spotlights that had been used on the shoot. These were a parting gift from the moviemakers to the city of Vienna.<sup>141</sup> Studio filming took place in London, first at Isleworth, then Shepperton, from December 1948 through to March 1949. At Shepperton, the Vienna cemetery was recreated and, in January 1949, the Great Wheel scenes were filmed with back projection.<sup>142</sup>

138. Brown, "U.S. Army Intelligence in Vienna," 37.

139. Thomas Riegler, *Österreichs geheime Dienste: Vom Dritten Mann bis zur BVT-Affäre* (Vienna: Klever Verlag, 2019), 145.

140. Timmermann and Baker, *Der dritte Mann*, 85–86.

141. Drazin, *In Search of the Third Man*, 66–67.

142. White, *The Third Man*, 12.

*The Third Man* finally had its world premiere in London on August 31, 1949. The German-language version was released in Austria on March 10, 1950. The movie remains a classic to this day. However, a full understanding of the movie is only possible through familiarity with the “secret” back story discussed here. The creation of *The Third Man* was, in essence, a “spy story” that reflected the conditions in occupied Austria after the war and the tension-filled years of the early Cold War. Greene obtained the necessary insider knowledge—as shown—through on-site research and discussions with a whole range of individuals who were closely connected to the world of espionage and intelligence. Much of the related events remain mysterious and unproven, which serves not least of all as a call for further research.

*Thomas Riegler (Ph.D.), born 1977, studied history and politics at Vienna and Edinburgh Universities. He now works as a journalist and historian in Vienna. He has published on a wide range of topics, including terrorism, film studies, and contemporary history.*