



The Confidential Agent

Graham Greene , Ian Rankin (Introduction)

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WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY IAN RANKIN.

In a small continental country civil war is raging. Once a lecturer in medieval French, now a confidential agent, D is a scarred stranger in a seemingly casual England, sent on a mission to buy coal at any price. Initially, this seems to be a matter of straightforward negotiation, but soon, implicated in murder, accused of possessing false documents and theft, held responsible for the death of a young woman, D becomes a hunted man, tormented by allegiances, doubts and the love of others.

The Confidential Agent Details

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Author : Graham Greene , Ian Rankin (Introduction)

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Genre : Fiction, Spy Thriller, Espionage, Mystery, Thriller, Classics

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From Reader Review The Confidential Agent for online ebook

Wanda says

28 FEB 2016 - recommendation through Bettie. Thank you. A new lunchtime listen. Many thanks.

James says

In the introduction of this book Graham Greene confessed that the book was written as an entertainment designed to appeal to enough people to leave his family financially secure in case he died in WWII and secondly that to get the energy to push it out while writing the power and the glory he consumed large quantities of amphetamines. This last fact answers an idle curiosity I never knew I had, but which has now become rather all consuming. What would ones favourite authors produce if they ingested large quantities of recreational drugs and what would be the impact of trying different drugs have been. I can see Tolstoy consuming quantities of magic mushrooms and churning out Brothers Karamazov but what if he had used cocaine instead. PG Woodhouse on heroin? I feel like apart from the effect of drink and opiums effect on literature this is a sadly neglected field.

With that inane digression aside, The Confidential Agent follows a man sent by his government to secure essential resources from the UK while a civil war rages in his home country. Reading the book in the present day I was impressed by the broody atmosphere so expertly conjured by Graham Greene. The hero is an everyday man utterly unsuited to his task, morally conflicted, emotionally scarred, trying to do his duty to the very best of his limited abilities for a cause he can no longer really believe in. A character so widely copied by subsequent authors that the freshness it had on publication was lost me. A good and interesting read none the less. Particularly the Esperanto driven craziness rammed into the plot, the pathos of Elsa and the self righteousness of an outraged citizen versus constable plod.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

346. The Confidential Agent, Graham Greene

The Confidential Agent (1939) is a thriller novel by British author Graham Greene. Fueled by Benzedrine, Greene wrote it in six weeks. To avoid distraction, he rented a room in Bloomsbury from a landlady who lived in an apartment below him. He used that apartment in the novel (it's where D. hides for a day) and had an affair with the landlady's daughter. He wrote the book for money and was so displeased with his work that he wanted it published under a pseudonym. But critics took a far different view; The New York Times, for example, called the novel "a magnificent tour-de-force."

Plot: D, a former university professor speaking perfect English, is sent by his government, two years into a vicious civil war, on a secret mission to buy coal in England. Traumatized by the war, in which his wife was executed in error and he was buried alive in an air raid, England to him is a place of peace and happy memories. ...

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umberto says

A 3.5-star book.

First published in 1939 (the first year of World War II) I found reading “The Confidential Agent” by Graham Greene relatively entertaining due to its seemingly remote setting which vaguely reminds its readers on the looming atmosphere of countries at war. However, we should read its Goodreads synopsis and introduction by Ian Rankin so that we get some background understanding, in other words, we have more light with essential information rather than keep reading like being in a dark tunnel and tediously reach nowhere.

I think it has an apt structure and I liked how the four-part story starts with ‘The Hunted,’ ‘The Hunter,’ ‘The Last Shot’ and ‘The End’ since each title obviously reveals the protagonist’s role and the heart of the matter. From this kind of structure, we can see that Mr Greene has designed something a bit more advanced and modern than others. I sometime read some spy novels by John le Carre and found his structure like this; however, I don’t know who first invented it in the writing world.

Incidentally, I would not try to tell you everything I think after reading this book, rather I would say something from what I scribbled in pencil of course on some pages with my remarks. For example, from this excerpts:

D. walked to the ditch where his coat lay; he couldn’t remember leaving it there near L.’s car – and his wallet too. He stooped and as he painfully straightened again he saw the girl – she had been sitting all the time in the back of L.’s Daimler. ... She looked back at him through the glass with disgust; he realized that he was still bleeding heavily.

The manager said, ‘Leave Miss Cullen alone.’

He said gently, ‘It’s only a few teeth gone. A man of my age must expect to lose his teeth. Perhaps we shall meet at Gwyn Cottage.’ She looked hopelessly puzzled, staring back at him. ... (pp. 38-39)

My point is that Mr Greene’s protagonist is quite different from Mr le Carre’s, I mean he seems timid, oldish and evasive (less action) but we have to be content with D., a former professor in medieval French, not a former soldier or secret agent. In the last sentence, it’s simply divine to find the adverb placed there like magic.

Alexander Bell says

A good book but not a great one. Greene apparently wrote it over 6 weeks while on speed and had no idea how the plot was going to work out before he wrote it. He had the opening, and the rest sort of evolved. It is well-written, of course, but the plot is somewhat meandering and lacks a convincing arc. There are also many coincidences, most of them somewhat improbable.

Nonetheless, there is a world-weariness to it and Greene's acute observations on the naughtiness of Britain, which is probably why he chose to spend so much time out of the country. I enjoyed it, but there is

something a bit wrong with a thriller if you can make the final 40 odd pages last several days. I was busy, it is true, but the story wasn't gripping in a page-turning sense. Still, by no means a dull read. I am going to follow this up with *The Heart of the Matter*. Greene obviously deserves to be read at length.

Bill says

A friend of mine was being the "Christmas Culture Fairy" when she gave me this book for Christmas. Sadly I have never read Greene before and this book was written in the 30s. In my experience the language of many classics written pre 1950 has badly dated. However I am happy to report that in the case of 'The Confidential Agent' that is not the case.

This is an excellent book with a great plot that the narrative drives along at a wonderfully fast pace. It also has a rather nice twist at the end too.

It looks like I may be reading more Graham Greene sometime soon

Laura says

Unabridged

Duration: 7h 30 min

Read by Patrick Tull

From BBC Radio 4 - Drama:

Graham Greene's masterful tale of suspense. When Edgar Dominguez is sent to England on a mission to arrange a supply of coal for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War it seems a straightforward business negotiation; but no sooner does he set foot on English soil than he finds himself a hunted man, with seemingly no one he can trust and implicated in murder.

*Greene wrote *The Confidential Agent* at the same time as his masterpiece *The Power and The Glory*. It was written in six weeks in 1938 as England stood on the brink of war, and the story is suffused with paranoia, distrust and urgency. He wrote it as an 'Entertainment' with the hope of getting a film made of the book and therefore providing much needed income for his family, in which he succeeded. A tense thriller where the hero must avoid trap after trap that is set for him haunted by the memory of his dead wife and his own time in prison awaiting execution.*

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07x1rct>

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037610/?...>

Bettie? says

Read by Patrick Tull

Description: *In a small continental country civil war is raging. Once a lecturer in medieval French, now a confidential agent, D is a scarred stranger in a seemingly casual England, sent on a mission to buy coal at*

any price. Initially, this seems to be a matter of straightforward negotiation, but soon, implicated in murder, accused of possessing false documents and theft, held responsible for the death of a young woman, D becomes a hunted man, tormented by allegiances, doubts and the love of others.

So, what we have here is a good old-fashioned pot-boiler:

Fueled by Benzedrine, Greene wrote it in six weeks. To avoid distraction, he rented a room in Bloomsbury from a landlady who lived in an apartment below him. He used that apartment in the novel (it's where D. hides for a day) and had an affair with the landlady's daughter. He wrote the book for money and was so displeased with his work that he wanted it published under a pseudonym." -(wiki sourced)

It was an enjoyable listen, yet I would have to agree with Greene to some extent, it is a little 'odd'.

2* The Man Within (1929)
TR Stamboul Train
3* A Gun for Sale (1936)
4* Brighton Rock (1938)
3* The Confidential Agent (1939)
3* The Power and the Glory (1940)
4* The Ministry of Fear (1943)
2* The Heart of the Matter (1948)
3* The Third Man (1948)
4* The End of the Affair (1951)
TR Complete Short Stories (1954)
3* The Quiet American (1955)
3* Our Man in Havana (1958)
4* A Burnt Out Case (1960)
5* The Comedians (1965)
4* Travels With My Aunt (1969)
3* The Honorary Consul (1973)
4* The Human Factor (1978)
4* Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party (1980)
4* Monsignor Quixote (1982)
WL The Tenth Man
3* The Captain and the Enemy (1988)

D. H. says

I don't think this one holds up.

Peter says

D is a confidential agent, a poor intellectual, who has come to post-war England to make a coal deal for the government of his unspecified Eastern European country. On the boat he sees L, an upper-class confidential

הוא נשאר חסר אונים, מנסה להימלט אך נכשל. הוא נשאר חסר אונים, מנסה להימלט אך נכשל. הוא נשאר חסר אונים, מנסה להימלט אך נכשל.

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1. Berckhamsted
2. Babbling April
3. Vivienne Dayrell-Browning
- 4.The man within
- 5.The name of action
- 6.Rumour at night fall
7. Lawless roads

8. The power and The Glory

9. Hawthorden

10. Confidential Agent

11. My Silent war

12. Our man in Havana

13. Third man

14. Carol Reed

15. Catinant Fashions

16. Continental Hotel

17. Parc au Buffles

Bryn Hammond says

I seemed to be keenest on those he subtitled 'An Entertainment'. The inside of this one explains, "in order to distinguish it from more serious work." Hey. I thought his entertainments were great.

Tim says

I don't remember now whether *The Power And The Glory* was the first Greene novel I read - it might have been *The Third Man* or *Our Man in Havana*. I mention this because *The Confidential Agent* was written in parallel with *The Power And The Glory*, working on one each morning, and switching to the other in the afternoon. An unusual writing regime. One might have expected that the novels would turn out to be very similar, but had I not known the publication dates and read Greene's Introduction where he explains the process, I should have imagined them to be from quite different periods of his career.

That might be because the purposes driving each are also very different. *The Power And The Glory* was a deliberate exercise in exploring religion and morality, and Greene did not expect it to sell very well. He undertook *The Confidential Agent* as a more commercial enterprise - it was what he called an "entertainment", more of a light thriller.

It's certainly light in the sense of being quick and easy to read, yet the story is anything but. The book was written in 1939, and Greene has said that he had both the Spanish Civil War and the Munich Agreement in mind.

The result is a dark story of politics and betrayal, set against a cold, gray background. The Agent of the title, D., from a country embroiled in a bloody and drawn out civil war, becomes a hunted man as his simple but desperate mission to England is thwarted by a complex series of mischances and deliberate sabotages.

In the process, Greene shines a harsh light on the seamier side of pre-war Britain, and along the way touches on the eternal themes of love, honour, greed, and betrayal. He also has some interesting things to say about ideology and politics. Fascism is not directly mentioned, although some of D.'s pursuers are very much from the pre-war Fascist mould, but D., once a bourgeois academic, is an agent for a Communist government. Asked why he fights for a cause which is so destructive he says that he knows his own leaders are at least as corrupt and morally bankrupt as their opponents, but sides with them because the ordinary people of his country do. Like Orwell, Greene can see the evil in both popular ideologies of the time. D., forced into choosing one over the other, will not demean himself with the rationalisation that one side is morally superior, claiming only that it is no worse.

The edition I picked up has an introduction by Ian Rankin, in which he compares D. to Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*. There are certainly similarities - espionage, men on the run hunted for crimes they didn't commit - but I find the points of difference more interesting. Hannay is a very British hero, hunted by the British authorities only because they have been misdirected - in the end Hannay is embraced by British Intelligence and together they hunt down the foreign agents.

D. on the other hand is a foreigner, whose cause most of his British pursuers would reject even if they knew him to be innocent of the crimes he is accused of. The futility of D.'s position has a kind of Kafkaesque quality, and there are some dreamlike, absurdist moments that might have come straight from *The Trial*.

D. can expect no help from officialdom, and must find his allies in unexpected places - the young hotel maid who falls in love with him, the gang of youths who flirt with Anarchism because they're bored. His enemies are everywhere - agents of the other side, agents of his own side who may have been suborned, the police, and many of the ordinary English men and women D. encounters.

Unlike Hannay, D. can expect no respite even should he succeed - he will be hunted while he remains in England, and quite possibly he will be executed should he return home. In the end, acceptance of this infuses him with a kind of reckless power that enables him to take the initiative - for a little while at least.

The most Hannay-like character in *The Confidential Agent* is arguably not D. at all, but Captain Currie, the bumptious middle class fool set on D. by an enemy agent. For Buchan, Hannay presumably represented the best of the British officer class, and Currie is Greene's unflattering caricature of a lesser member of it, contemptuous of foreigners and social inferiors, anxiously obsequious toward his betters, unequipped for serious thought and reliant upon a narrow but extensive set of rules to guide his actions. At first appearance Currie is merely amusing, then contemptible, but by the end of the story he is perhaps more a figure to be pitied. Apart from D. himself, he is probably the most fully drawn character in the book, and I wonder whether that was Greene's intention. Currie personifies a darker view of a complacent and comfortable middle class England, blind and indifferent to the horrors taking place on the continent.

Overall this is a good period thriller, wonderfully atmospheric, but I did find the bleakness of Greene's England unsettling.

BrokenTune says

Review first published on BookLikes: <http://brokentune.booklikes.com/post/...>

"The gulls swept over Dover. They sailed out like flakes of the fog, and tacked back towards the hidden town, while the siren mourned with them: other ships replied, a whole wake lifted up their voices – for whose death?"

So begins the story of D.

D. is an agent - a confidential agent - who is sent to England on a mission. Having arrived in Dover, nothing goes to plan and D. is soon pitched against another agent (L.).

In this race to fulfill his task, D. is thrown into the centre of a time and place pulled into antagonising directions - there is a battle between the young and old, the aristocracy and the ordinary men, the natives and foreigners, the mad and the sane, the powerful and the helpless, the stupid and the enlightened, love and indifference - all elements which would come to define the somewhat harrowing place that is Greene-land.

"It was absurd, of course, to feel afraid, but watching the narrow stooping back in the restaurant he felt as exposed as if he were in a yard with a blank wall and a firing squad."

Graham Greene famously wrote *The Confidential Agent*, fueled by Benzedrine, in parallel to *The Power and the Glory*. In contrast to *The Power and the Glory*, he expected to earn money from the sales of this "entertainment". It is of no surprise then that *The Confidential Agent* does not dwell on morality or religion as much as some of Greene's other books. It does have elements of those deliberations - after all *The Confidential Agent* is based on and inspired by the Spanish Civil War - but it does not go into great depths.

And, this for me is where it falls down. What I love about Greene is that he commits his protagonists to something - an ideal, a cause, a situation, anything - and gives them depth. This is lacking a bit here. D. is portrayed well and we learn much of his back-story, but knowing D.'s past does not help much to figure out other characters in the book. So, despite a promising start and interesting plot, the story itself loses grip on a number of occasions because there is little chemistry, or tension, between the characters - not between D. and his nemesis, not between D. and his persecutors, and not even between D. and Rose.

The Confidential Agent was first published in 1939, ten years after his first novel *The Man Within*, and knowing of Greene's life and career, it is still an "early" work. It shows all the potential that would fully develop in his subsequent work, but it just isn't of the same quality. However, I do wonder...

I haven't read *The Power and the Glory*, yet, but I almost want to wager that Greene put in it what he held back on in *The Confidential Agent* - less aimless caper and more study of the human condition.

Jonfaith says

This is Greene at his best, providing a gnashing noir, a tale of chase and deception. *The Confidential Agent* distills the fears of the late 1930s, people are being driven to an almost post-human ignobility. Attempting to stay above the feral pragmatism, an agent known as D. makes his way to England. The timeframe and circumstances suggest The Spanish Civil War, but the details blur into a generic European nightmare. D. is a classics professor and the reader feels for his obsolescence in these dark times. The landscape, the weather and even radio advertisements conspire and haunt. Greene provides no relief and actually mocks the possibility of a sentimental response or conclusion. Highly recommended.

A. Dawes says

This is a lot of fun. A fuddy-duddy lecturer, D, comes to England as the confidential agent. Only he seems pretty incapable and scared of his own shadow. He befriends a young woman, and the pair grow humorously

close as they face constant danger and espionage. D gradually finds the courage and conviction he needs.

A well-written thriller and one of my favourites out of Greene's "less serious" works.

Jan-Maat says

Many a long and weary year ago I read a fair few Greene books. This one has a nice grimy atmosphere and a very real uncertainty about who, if anyone, can be trusted. The Esperanto lesson always seemed like a nice touch, invented stories, pretended loyalties, unreal language, no end of deceptions.

Mark Joyce says

This is one of Graham Greene's self-styled "entertainments", a label I've always found slightly irritating because it seems to contain more than a little false modesty. In truth *The Confidential Agent* is, like pretty much everything else Greene wrote, very, very good. As an espionage thriller it is top notch, as tightly written as Eric Ambler's best stuff and with the seedy, claustrophobic mood of John le Carré's better Smiley novels. I thought there were also strong nods to Kafka, not just in the naming of the secret agents as "D", "L" and "K" but also in the borderline surreal, waking nightmarish atmosphere and the way in which faceless bureaucracies exercise their power through a succession of seemingly benign or hapless individuals. So whilst undoubtedly entertaining there is as you would expect from Graham Greene a great deal else going on besides.

Steve Greenleaf says

In 1938, Graham Greene was busy writing two novels. The better-known book became his classic, *The Power and the Glory*, about the Mexican whiskey priest. But Greene feared that *The Power and the Glory* would not sell, and he needed money to support his family. Therefore, in the mornings, he wrote one of his "entertainments", *The Confidential Agent*. As an entertainment, *The Confidential Agent* qualifies as a thriller. It has a fast-moving plot, reversals of fortune, and plenty of action. In this regard, Greene's tale is like those of his contemporary, Eric Ambler, and later writers such as Alan Furst, who inhabit the same shady and treacherous underworld of pre-World War II Europe.

But this is Graham Greene. This is Greenland.

So while *The Confidential Agent* meets all of the requirements of a thriller, nevertheless, it has that twinge of angst for which Graham Greene is famous. For instance, the protagonist is never given a name, only the initial "D.". In this, we perceive shades of Kafka. Further, D. is haunted by the past. The civil war in his home country (the Spanish Civil War?) killed his wife and left him in prison, expecting execution. Having escaped captivity, D. is assigned a mission to England by his embattled government. But D's past pulls at him all the while. His memories, his wounds, and the adversaries have traveled with him to try to thwart his mission to buy coal on behalf of his government. D. is not a James Bond or even a George Smiley. He's an amateur, a scholar of the medieval French text *The Song of Roland*. He's intimidated by the thought of

personal violence even though he has suffered his share.

I don't know if there's any Graham Greene book that I wouldn't recommend. Graham Greene's "entertainments" are weightier than many other writers' most ambitious works. Greene establishes characters quickly and deeply. Although one can describe the tale as "action-packed", you are taken by fleeting and seemingly minor characters such as Else the cleaning girl at the hotel and the gang members of the mining town. Thus, if you're looking for something both entertaining and more considerate, you will likely enjoy Graham Greene's *The Confidential Agent*.

P.S. If you happened to get the Vintage books edition, be sure and read the introduction by Scottish (crime) writer Ian Rankin. For a further appreciation of Greene, check out Pico Iyer's *The Man Inside My Head*.
