THE PHILOSOPHY OF TV NOIR

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JOHN DRAKE IN GREENELAND: NOIR THEMES IN *SECRET AGENT*

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The television series *Secret Agent*, though regarded as mere entertainment by most viewers, contains philosophical themes that raise it above most television shows of its time and connect it with themes found in such noir espionage films as *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949) and *Ministry of Fear* (Fritz Lang, 1944), both of which were based on the work of the British writer Graham Greene.[1]

Known in Britain as *Danger Man*, *Secret Agent* debuted in September 1960 as a half-hour espionage thriller starring Patrick McGoohan in the role of John Drake, an American agent for NATO who traveled the globe. Each episode began with Drake leaving an unidentified federal building in Washington, lighting a cigarette, and heading toward his car, as the voice-over said:

> Every government has its secret service branch. America its CIA, France Deuxieme Bureau, England MI5. A messy job? Well, that's when they usually call on me. Or someone like me. Oh yes, my name is Drake, John Drake.[2]

The success of this initial series led to a second, hour-long one that ran in the United Kingdom from October 1964 through November 1965. This second series was shown on CBS in the United States under the name *Secret Agent* in 1965 and 1966, attracting a popular following. In the second series, not only was the show lengthened from a half hour to an hour, but Drake was transformed into an Englishman working for a mythical British intelligence service called M9.

Perhaps as a result of their common Catholic backgrounds, Graham Greene and Patrick McGoohan share an interest in exploring the moral dimensions of situations in which good men are confronted with the realization that the world has become a place void of meaning, haphazard, and morally indifferent. In discussing this negative view of the world, Greene says the following in the second volume of his autobiography *Ways of Escape:*

> Some critics have referred to a strange violent "seedy" region of the mind . . . which they call Greeneland, and I have sometimes wondered whether they go round the world blinkered. "This is Indochina," I want to exclaim, "this is Mexico, this is Sierra Leone carefully and accurately described. I have been a newspaper correspondent as well as a novelist. I assure you that the dead child lay in the ditch in just that attitude. In the canal of Phat Diem the bodies stuck out of the water . . ." But I know that argument is useless. They won't believe the world they haven't noticed is like that.[3]

Like Greene's protagonists, John Drake travels the world only to find that he is continually confronted with moral depravity, not only on the part of Britain's enemies (e.g., the Soviets, corrupt foreign governments, international criminals, etcetera.) but also in the actions of his supposedly more virtuous employer, the British government. Repeatedly Drake must confront his own role in perpetuating moral injustice. In some cases he reluctantly goes along with his employer's morally ambiguous dictates (e.g., at the end of the episode "Colony Three"), while on other occasions he directly disobeys the orders of his superiors in order to place the dictates of his own conscience above the demands of professional obedience and patriotism (e.g., in the episode "Whatever Happened to George Foster?").

Why Drake Is Not Bond

Although the literary James Bond appeared in 1953, *Secret Agent* predated the first James Bond film, *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962) by two years, and because of his popularity in *Secret Agent,* Patrick McGoohan was originally offered the role. McGoohan's decision to reject the film initially seems puzzling: while of course he had no way of knowing how successful the Bond franchise would become, it is hard to see why a television actor would refuse the chance to star in a major motion picture, especially given that the part

appears to be so similar to his TV series role. Playing James Bond in the film might well have brought McGoohan considerably more money and fame for considerably less work.

To understand his decision it is helpful to compare the roles of Bond and Drake to see why McGoohan rejected the former while accepting the latter. James Bond has become an icon, a character whose qualities are emblematic of the societal changes taking place in the 1960s. This was a time when Western culture was becoming much more open about sexuality, when such magazines as *Playboy* became popular with their celebration of male sexual fantasy. Traditional mores were challenged by the so-called sexual revolution and the emergence of the youth counterculture with its acceptance of hedonism as a way of life

Despite their apparent similarities, McGoohan's John Drake has little in common with Bond. Whereas Bond is depicted as a womanizing playboy type who nevertheless courts danger and is willing to kill on command, Drake is presented as a deeply moral character. Apparently at McGoohan's insistence, Drake never kills and does not even carry a gun. When attacked, he fights back but uses only the minimum amount of violence necessary to subdue or escape his enemies. Bond, on the other hand, routinely kills enemy agents in a variety of unusual ways and often with a flip remark.[4] Furthermore, Drake never becomes romantically involved with the women he meets, even when his mission may seem to require it. In "The Colonel's Daughter," Drake uses his supposedly romantic interest in his target's daughter as his cover, yet we never see him do anything that might be interpreted as a romantic advance, so, in the end, Drake can turn her over to the police without having had to exploit her emotional vulnerability.

In some episodes Drake clearly cares for women (e.g., Lisa in "Fair Exchange," Pauline in "Whatever Happened to George Foster"), yet we are given only hints of his feelings for them—he displays no romantic sentiment. In both of these cases, we surmise that Drake has known these women for a long time, yet the true nature of these relationships is kept hidden from us, almost as though it is none of our business. From episodes of both *Secret Agent* and his later series, *The Prisoner,* it is clear that McGoohan is concerned with issues of privacy in a society in which technology has the potential to make even the most intimate scenes public.[5] Thus, while it is hinted that Drake has a private life, and that, unlike Bond, he is not just a spy, that side of Drake's life is simply not open for our voyeuristic enjoyment.

Another suggestion of Drake's private life comes in an offhand comment

at the beginning of "Say It with Flowers." Posing as a cabdriver to receive instruction from a superior in British intelligence, Drake suggests that a missing double agent, Hagen, might have simply decided to retire. When his superior responds, "Retire?" in a puzzled voice, it is clear that such a possibility had never occurred to him nor could he take it seriously. No one in the intelligence business is ever allowed to retire voluntarily. It simply is not done. Like members of the Mafia, intelligence agents are either forced out or killed. Drake does not pursue the point, yet we cannot help but wonder if he is thinking of himself, of his desire to be his own person, no longer required to obey the orders of his morally bankrupt employers. While McGoohan has always denied that Number 6 in *The Prisoner* is John Drake, it is not hard to imagine Drake angrily resigning out of moral indignation.

Drake's lifestyle also has very little in common with Bond's. When he drives, Drake's cars are no Aston Martins. This point is illustrated vividly in "Whatever Happened to George Foster?" where Drake follows Certhia Cooper's Rolls-Royce from the London airport in his cheap, boxy Mini (presumably all he can afford on his salary). In this episode wealth and luxury are associated with greed and corruption. Drake is repeatedly offered large bribes to drop his investigation but he never accepts them nor would he consider doing so.

Drake's opponents, unlike most of James Bond's, are quite plausible. In "It's Up to the Lady," he tries to stop a British scientist from defecting to China by way of Albania. In "Colony Three," the training school for spies is clearly located in an Eastern Bloc country, while "The Galloping Major" takes place in a newly independent African nation that seems very real. In "Judgement Day" Drake attempts to outwit Israelis to procure for Britain the services of a former Nazi scientist and war criminal. Drake never saves the world, nor is it always clear that he is in the right and his enemies wrong.

And, of course, there are the gadgets. Every Bond film attempted to outdo its predecessor with ever more outrageous toys and devices—from ejector seats to flying jet packs. John Drake also had his gadgets, but they were realistic and useful, like small wiretapping devices or the electric shaver that is actually a tape recorder. Obviously it was the Bond approach that came to dominate spy thrillers throughout the 1960s and beyond. TV shows such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Avengers*, and *The Wild Wild West* competed with each other and the Bond films to present the silliest, most nonsensical stories and situations.

By valuing realism and a genuine concern for ethical issues over the morally indifferent pursuit of escapist thrills, the *Secret Agent* series places itself in the tradition of films noirs such as *The Third Man* and *Ministry of Fear,* which also use the setting of the espionage thriller to explore serious philosophical issues.

The Influence of Graham Greene

THE MINISTRY OF FEAR

Graham Greene's novel *The Ministry of Fear* was presented to the public in 1943 as a spy thriller. In 1944 it was released as a film directed by Fritz Lang with Ray Milland starring as Stephen Neale, a Londoner who inadvertently stumbles upon a nest of Nazi spies trying to smuggle important photographs out of England.

The film *Ministry of Fear* unquestionably takes place at the exact time it was made, that is, during the London blitz. The backdrop for the story is a city being destroyed by daily bombing raids, a place in which the geography changes on a daily basis. Neale's mental condition is identified with both his physical surroundings and a more general psychosis affecting everyone. Indeed, he represents the future as a time of bleakness and moral relativism.

Throughout the work, Greene contrasts Neale's current situation with that of the serene and beautiful past of his childhood memories. To Neale, that golden time (England before the onslaught of World War I), represents a period in which life had both order and meaning. Right and wrong were clearly differentiated, and happiness and love were still possible. In the new world, life has lost all meaning and the strongest emotion available is pity, an emotion described in Greene's initial title for the novel as "The Worst Passion of All."[6] Remembering his trial for the euthanasia of his terminally ill wife, Neale "saw reflected in the crowded court the awful expression of pity. . . . He wanted to warn them: don't pity me. Pity is cruel. Pity destroys. Love isn't safe when pity's prowling around."[7]

Neale confronted such a decision in the face of his wife's suffering. Filled with pity, he murdered his wife, an act Greene clearly condemns. As a result of his choice, Neale now lives in a world that mirrors his moral vacuity, a vacuity shared by us all. Neale is a kind of "everyman"; his guilt symbolizes the moral relativism of his age.

Neale's position as prophet of the coming age is reflected in his intuitive use of the correct password at the book's beginning. Visiting the tent

of the fortuneteller at a local fete, he quickly responds to her fairly accurate description of his past by demanding, "Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future." Thinking he is a Nazi agent because he has given the correct response, she tells him the proper weight for the prize cake, which contains the vital photographs. It is no accident that Neale is now identified with the Nazis he supposedly opposes.

He too wishes to overcome and forget the past and is willing to ignore his former moral sensibilities to do so. This point is emphasized when Neale meets Willi Hilfe (Carl Esmond), the Austrian refugee who turns out to be Neale's primary Nazi opponent, even though he is the brother of Carla (Marjorie Reynolds), Neale's eventual romantic partner. In the novel Hilfe tells Neale,

> The difference is that these days it really pays to murder, and when a thing pays it becomes respectable. . . . Your old-fashioned murderer killed from fear, from hate—or even from love very seldom for substantial profit. None of these reasons is quite—respectable. But to murder for position—that's different, because when you've gained the position nobody has a right to criticize the means. . . . Think of how many of your statesmen have shaken hands with Hitler.[8]

One of the striking things about *Ministry of Fear* is that on the surface the villains appear to be no worse, and sometimes even more affable, than the heroes. Indeed, Mr. Prentice (Percy Waram), the police detective who helps Rowe, is bad-tempered in comparison with the polite and friendly Hilfe. At the film's end, when Hilfe is unmasked as a Nazi spy, he tells Neale how much he has always liked him. But, unfortunately, he explains, Neale and Carla would not stop involving themselves in his business, so he regretfully attempted to kill them with a bomb.

When Neale demands, "How could you kill your own sister?" Hilfe responds, "You killed your wife." Hilfe is Neale's evil doppelgänger. In Hilfe, Neale is forced to face his greatest fears about who he has become. Neale and Hilfe struggle for the gun and Hilfe manages to knock Neil down. Carla picks up the gun as Hilfe runs out the door saying, "You couldn't shoot your own brother!" But Hilfe is wrong: Carla shoots him through the door, killing him. Thus, like Neale, Carla now has her own guilt to bear. Although the movie has the usual happy ending, with the couple even joking about having a cake at their wedding, one cannot help wondering how genuinely happy they can

be. For Greene, moral innocence and goodness can only exist in childhood, adulthood necessarily brings with it immorality and remorse.

THE THIRD MAN

Based on an original screenplay written by Greene and directed by Carol Reed, *The Third Man* begins with a voice-over narration describing life in Vienna during the four-power occupation following World War II. The narrator depicts Vienna as one enormous black market where anything could be bought and sold. The four powers did their best to maintain order, but this was impossible given their inability to speak the language, their unfamiliarity with the terrain, and their distrust of one another. Like London during the blitz, postwar Vienna is a place of bleakness and despair.

The narrator says he has a funny story to tell us, one that illustrates the moral corruption of this place. It seems that there was a naive American, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten), a writer of cheap pulp westerns who came to Vienna because he was down on his luck and needed a job. A childhood friend, Harry Lime (Orson Welles), sent him a plane ticket and the promise of work. The story turns out not to be very funny and, having done his job, the jocular narrator disappears from the film.

When he arrives, Martins is told that his friend Harry is dead, killed in an automobile accident. At the funeral he meets Major Calloway (Trevor Howard), a British officer who tells him that Harry was a racketeer. The major gets Martins drunk to pump him for information. With an almost childlike innocence, Martins refuses to believe that his friend did anything wrong. Like the hero from one of his westerns, Martins sets out to get to restore his friend's good name. Unfortunately for Martins, it proves impossible to impose his American ideals onto the noir environment of Vienna. Everyone he meets recognizes this and tells him to go home, but he fails to grasp the import of what they are telling him.

For example, Martins is shocked to discover that Harry's girlfriend, Anna Schmidt (Alida Valli), is using false papers to claim Austrian citizenship. He does not realize that he has entered a world in which decent people need forged papers to avoid deportation, a world in which the Russians would claim her and she would be forced to return to her native Czechoslovakia. Major Calloway understands all this and tries to puncture Martins's naiveté. Martins declares that he will only leave Vienna when he has gotten to the bottom of things. Echoing Heidegger, Calloway responds, "Death is at the bottom of all things. Leave death to the professionals."

After a number of futile attempts to clear his friend, Martins is finally convinced by Calloway's overwhelming evidence that Harry was guilty of horrific crimes. Using a medical orderly named Joseph Harbin to steal scarce penicillin for him, Harry had been diluting it and selling it on the black market for huge sums. Because of the dilution, the tainted penicillin is lethal when given to the ill, especially children.

Martins eventually discovers that Harry is still alive and is following him. He chases Harry but loses him in the shadows. Returning with Calloway to the city square, they discover that Harry has escaped by entering a kiosk and going down into the sewers.

Martins tells Harry's associates that he must see him and waits alone beside Vienna's famous Ferris wheel with its enclosed stalls. At last Harry appears and they ride the wheel together. Welles does an extraordinary job of communicating both Harry's allure and the frightening nihilism of his philosophy. Very much like Hilfe in *Ministry of Fear,* Harry is an apostle of the noir ideology, a cheerful rejection of all traditional values, including loyalty toward one's loved ones and friends. Harry is very amusing as he defends his actions by comparing himself to a modern government. "Governments accept that civilians must occasionally be harmed for the sake of their overall goals. I am like one of those governments," he tells Martins. "They have their five-year plans and I have mine."

Martins is horrified to discover that Harry has purchased his own safety in the Russian sector by feeding the Russians information, including that Anna is carrying the forged papers Harry had made for her. He cheerfully betrays Anna and, before Martins tells him that Calloway knows all, he even plans to throw Martins from the Ferris wheel to stop him from revealing his secret. At this point Harry presents Martins with his most chilling justification for his acts. With the door to the stall open in preparation for killing his best friend, he asks Martins to look down at the people below and asks, "Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever? If I said you could have twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money without hesitation? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare?"

Martins makes no response to Harry's arguments. Like the audience, he intuitively knows that Harry represents all that is evil, but in the noir world, Martins is unable to articulate arguments in response. Harry leaves Martins with this delightful speech: "In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love—they had five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock."

In the end, Harry himself is betrayed and killed by Martins in a superbly filmed sequence in the sewers, a classic distillation of noir camera angles and shadows. Holloway persuades Martins to betray Harry by first promising to provide new papers for Anna. With a feeling of poetic justice Martins condemns Harry to save Anna, a perfect counterweight to Harry's betrayal of Anna to save himself. But Anna will have none of it. When she discovers Martins's arrangement with Calloway she accuses him of betraying his best friend and tears up her new papers.

Calloway ultimately persuades Martins when, in a hospital, he confronts the young victims of Harry's scheme. And when he comes face to face with Harry cowering in the sewers, he chooses to kill his doppelgänger, becoming most like him in the act of destroying him. The film ends where it began, at Harry Lime's funeral. Just as before, Martins leaves the funeral in Calloway's jeep and watches Anna walking as they pass her on the road. In a last gasp of naive optimism, Martins asks Calloway to drop him off. He waits for Anna to approach him as he leans against a cart. He obviously hopes that Anna will be moved to forgive him for killing Harry and fall into his arms, providing us with the happy ending we would expect from one of his westerns. But *The Third Man* is no western. Without a word, she passes Martins and walks away, leaving him in despair.

Noir Themes in *Secret Agent*

Ministry of Fear and *The Third Man* illustrate the difficulties that confront secular heroes who try to overcome the world's moral indifference through reliance on traditional values and institutions. In both of these tales the protagonists seem to be abandoned by corrupt societies no longer capable of resolving the moral ambiguities that increasingly characterize life during and after the Second World War. In the end each is able to overcome nihilistic adversaries only by becoming complicit in that nihilism through the betrayal and destruction of those for whom they should care most.

Many episodes of *Secret Agent* explore similar issues. In "That's Two of Us Sorry," it appears that a Soviet spy who mysteriously vanished during World War II is responsible for the theft of plans from the briefcase of a scientist named Braithwaite, who works at a Scottish atomic-research lab.

After Braithwaite discovers that the plans are missing, fingerprint testing reveals the spy's prints on the briefcase. Drake's investigation leads him to disrupt the life of a quaint Scottish village whose inhabitants are valiantly struggling to preserve their way of life in the face of modern economic pressures and unwanted governmental interference.

Falsely convinced that the villagers are shielding the Soviet spy, Drake brutally reveals all their secrets including an illegal still and a forbidden romance between a young Scottish woman and a Russian sailor. In the end, he uncovers the identity of the missing spy from World War II. The spy has changed his name to Angus McKinnon, married a local woman, and become a leading member of the community. When his identity is revealed, McKinnon explains to Drake that his spying activities during the war were the result of misguided idealism, and he claims to have done no spying since he moved to the village. Despite his protests of innocence and the pleas of his family and fellow villagers, Drake takes McKinnon into custody.

However, when Drake brings McKinnon face to face with Braithwaite, it turns out that they are friends and McKinnon's prints on the briefcase are entirely innocent. Braithwaite then discovers that the missing papers have been in a drawer in his house all along and that Drake's efforts have been unnecessary. Although, under the circumstances, Drake would like nothing better than to release McKinnon, unfortunately, he has already reported his arrest of the World War II spy who still must face charges. Drake tells McKinnon how sorry he is and McKinnon can only respond, "That's two of us sorry."

This episode presents a common television theme but gives it a noir twist. We are used to watching shows in which the lone representative of the law stands up to a hostile town where it seems everyone is out to get him. Usually in such shows (often westerns) it is clear that the lawman is right and the whole town is wrong; the lawman always gets his man and the town learns a valuable lesson in respect for the law.

So, as we see Drake relentlessly invade the privacy of the town's residents and betray the trust of its most appealing inhabitants (e.g., a kindly tavern owner, an eccentric writer, et cetera), we naturally assume that these characters are really evil and that Drake's actions will be justified in the end. However, exactly the opposite occurs: it is Drake who unknowingly acted the villain and all of the town's accusations against him and the government he represents turn out to be true. In the end Drake realizes this himself, but, by that point, there's nothing he can do but apologize.

In "It's Up to the Lady," Drake is ordered by his superior, Hobbs (Peter Madden), to use a defector's wife, Paula, to persuade her husband, Charles, to return home. Hobbs promises Drake repeatedly that Charles will not be arrested and that he will no longer even be watched. Drake believes Hobbs, and it is this sincerity that ultimately persuades the couple to return home with him. Throughout the episode, Nikos, the agent for the Albanians, warns Paula and Charles not to trust Drake, that his promises are just lies and that Charles will be arrested the moment he steps foot in England. Drake assures them that Nikos is a paid enemy agent lying to them to win their trust just long enough to get them to Albania, where Charles will be a prisoner. Even after Nikos shows them newspapers trumpeting Charles's defection, Drake reassures them: "The situation has not changed. I've been on to London, and I have their word."

In the end it is Nikos who was telling them the truth. Charles is arrested at the airport the moment he steps foot on British soil. When the arresting officer asks a protesting Drake, "Who are you, sir?" it is clear that Drake has no real governmental authority. Even though he asks them to wait while he telephones, the officers promptly take Charles away. As Paula is blocked from following them, Drake angrily speaks to Hobbs on the phone:

Drake: Commander Hobbs, what's going on?
Hobbs: Oh, Drake, well, you've done a good job.
Drake: The Indians are arresting him!
Hobbs: Good.
Drake: But you assured me that they wouldn't. It's the only reason he came back!
Hobbs: Well, it worked very well then, didn't it?
Drake: But you gave me your word!
Hobbs: Did I, Drake?
Drake: You hypocritical [click of Hobbs hanging up phone].

After hanging up the phone, Drake returns to Paula, now standing alone by the airport gate. As Drake walks towards her, his arm still in a sling from the bullet he took in the course of the mission, Paula stares into his eyes and sees that, like her and her husband, Drake too has been betrayed by an English government morally no better than its enemies. Without a word, she slowly turns and walks away, leaving Drake alone in the shadows with his despair. The look and feel of this ending, like that of *The Third Man*, could not be more noir.

It can be no accident that Drake's superior is named Hobbs. The British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1687) is perhaps most famous for his claim that in its natural state human life is characterized by "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[9] Life is a war of all against all, and the only possible security comes from a "Leviathan," a powerful government that protects its citizens from the chaos caused by the corruption of human nature. Hobbes's greatest fear is of the "state of nature" (society without strong government) so, like Drake's boss, Hobbes was more than willing to act unethically to ensure the government's power over its citizens even if that means lying and the needless imprisonment of innocent citizens.

In "Colony Three" a mock English village is used to train enemy spies within the borders of some unnamed Eastern Bloc country. The odd juxtaposition of traditional village life with ominous elements of totalitarian moral depravity raises noir concerns. Physically resembling the bombed-out London of the blitz, this ersatz English village in fact makes a mockery of traditional British values, such as fair play and optimism. With its threats of torture and murder coupled with the inevitable lack of privacy, the village represents our worst fears for the future. By the end of the episode Drake has escaped and warned his employers of this attempt to infiltrate and subvert British life. However, this ending suggests that Britain may already have undergone a process of moral subversion when Drake realizes that Hobbs intends to do nothing to rescue the innocent British girl still trapped in the "village." Like Charles in "It's Up to the Lady," the girl is an innocent causality of the war of all against all, a war that will never end. This episode presents us with a village that, despite its charming facade, is explicitly constructed to spy on and manipulate its inhabitants. To this extent, "Colony Three" foreshadows the noir setting of *The Prisoner.*

In "Whatever Happened to George Foster?" Drake realizes almost from the beginning that the British government has entered into a morally dubious pact with a British industrialist who intends to overthrow the democratically elected government of a small nation for purely monetary motives. While his employers are clearly identified as immoral, Drake is able to obtain blackmail material that allows him to prevent the industrialist's scheme. So, in this episode, although Drake may no longer be able to rely on the moral authority of his government, he can still tell right from wrong and bring about a satisfying result through his own efforts even if, like Neale and Martins, he must adapt his döppelganger's immoral tactics to achieve it.

"Judgement Day" removes even that slight hedge against moral chaos while plunging Drake fully into a noir world of ethical ambiguity and impotence. Returning from a mission in a Middle Eastern country, Drake is ordered to pick up a man called Dr. Garriga and bring him to England immediately. Because of problems with the telephone, Drake only receives partial instructions: he knows his mission is vital and dangerous but he does not know why. Like a character in a Beckett play, Drake must do his job without knowing who anyone is or what they want, including himself. Eventually he discovers that Garriga is really a Nazi war criminal who infected and killed innocent civilians to create a vaccine against potential, but currently nonexistent, biological weapons.

Drake's charter pilot is bribed by agents from an outlawed Israeli group that seeks justice for Jewish victims by kidnapping and executing Nazi war criminals. Drake soon comes to realize that his government wants Garriga precisely to put him back to work on his morally dubious research, this time for the British instead of the Nazis.

Drake plays on the consciences of the Israelis to get them to set up a mock tribunal to try Garriga for his crimes. Sounding very much like Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (although admittedly much less charming), Garriga surprises everyone by confessing at once and arguing that the death of a few innocent Jews is a small price to pay for a vaccine against biological weapons. At this point Drake's only defense is to call Garriga a "moral imbecile" and claim that he is not guilty by reason of insanity. Yet, the Israelis point out, such a defense could exculpate all Nazis, indeed all sincere criminals, and destroy any notions we may have of individual moral responsibility. Eventually, one of the Israelis bypasses the tribunal and kills Garriga for the sake of personal revenge for his murdered family. In the end, Drake is asked what he really thinks is the best moral solution to this dilemma. "I don't know," he responds. "Maybe nobody does."

As in *Ministry of Fear* and *The Third Man, Secret Agent* takes place in a noir environment in which the old moralities have been jettisoned for the nihilistic hedonism practiced by many, and the nihilistic realpolitik that is its manifestation in governments. Those too naive to realize this (Neale, Martins, and Drake) are destined to be manipulated and exploited by those who do. This nihilism often presents itself in the guise of an affable charm that infects all those who are exposed, implicating them in its amorality.

Thus, like Neale and Martins, Drake could be said to act in Sartrean bad faith. Drake knows with certainty that his British masters often send him on

morally dubious missions, yet he continues to work for them Admittedly, when he discovers such immoralities he struggles to correct them, even when this means openly opposing his own government. Yet, how many times has he contributed to the success of missions whose real ends were successfully kept secret from him? Hobbs clearly knows Drake's reliability as an agent is hobbled by his integrity, but he has become expert in turning that liability into an asset, assigning Drake to missions where his apparent sincerity can be used to manipulate those equally naive (like Paula in "It's Up to the Lady").

In the absurd world in which we live, it is seemingly impossible to defeat nihilism. One might be able to occasionally rebel against this meaninglessness and win small limited victories (e.g., "Whatever Happened to George Foster?"), but, in the end, despair too often wins out over hope. For Greene there is an escape through a Kierkegaardian leap to faith, as in his religious novels such as *The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter,* and *The End of the Affair.* However, for those unwilling to make such a leap, or, like Drake, apparently unaware that such a possibility even exists, one can only escape by fantasizing about an unrealizable retirement or embracing the inevitable certainty of death, the destiny that haunts all our lives.

Notes

1. I wish to thank Steven M. Sanders for suggesting the comparison of *Secret Agent* to *The Third Man* and *Ministry of Fear.*

2. Transcribed at Matthew Courtman, "In the Beginning," *The* Danger Man *Website,* September 21, 2003, http://www.mcgoohan.co.uk/.

3. Quoted in Anne T. Salavatore, *Greene and Kierkegaard: The Discourse of Belief* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 4.

4. For instance, in *Thunderball* (Terence Young, 1965) Bond shoots a man with a spear gun and says, "He got the point," and in *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964) Bond electrocutes a man in a bathtub and declares, "Shocking!"

5. For further discussion of *The Prisoner,* see the essay by Shai Biderman and William Devlin "*The Prisoner* and Self-Imprisonment," in this volume 229–46.

6. Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene,* Vol. 2: *1939–1955* (New York: Penguin), 146.

7. Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear* (New York: Viking, 1945), 234–35.

8. Ibid., 44.

9. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; New York: Touchstone, 1997), 98.

Action and Integrity in *The Fugitive*

Aeon J. Skoble

The Fugitive aired on ABC from 1963 to 1967 and starred David Janssen in the title role of Dr. Richard Kimble, on the run from the law, wanted for a crime he did not commit. It was classic TV noir, both stylistically and thematically. In terms of the noir aesthetic—the first three seasons were in black and white, and even though the fourth season was in color, for its entire run—the series was filmed with a distinctly noir sensibility: unusual and unsettling camera angles, shots and scenes that emphasized the loneliness and isolation of the protagonist, extensive use of alleyways, warehouses, deserted streets at night, and fleabag hotels, and of course a voice-over narration. Thematically, film noir is often characterized as involving an inversion of values; this is practically guaranteed by the premise of *The Fugitive:* a wrongly accused man trying to capture the real killer while being pursued by law enforcement. This is what makes *The Fugitive* such compelling TV noir. Every week, Richard Kimble is obliged to live an underground existence and is compelled to adopt a wary, if not paranoid, stance toward not only law-enforcement officers but all decent people.

As we see in many flashbacks over the run of the series (and summarized in the opening to every episode), one night, Kimble returns home to see a one-armed man fleeing his house. Inside, he finds his wife, murdered. But the police do not believe his story about a one-armed man, and neither does a jury, which has heard that Kimble and his wife had had a terrible argument that night. Kimble is sentenced to death, but en route to death row, as we hear in the series' voice-over opening, "fate moves its huge hand," and the train is derailed, allowing Kimble to escape. The series chronicles his quest to find the one-armed man, and the simultaneous quest by "the police lieutenant