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AMBLER'S MODIFICATIONS TO THE THRILLER:

A Comparative Analysis of *Epitaph for a Spy* and
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

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Abstract:

Title: *Ambler's Modifications to the Thriller: A Comparative Analysis of Epitaph for a Spy and The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

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Abstract:

Eric Ambler is known for his revision of the thriller and the modifications of the conventions entailed with the spy genre. The essay argues that Ambler applies these revisions to his novel, *Epitaph for a Spy*. The specific aim is to examine how Ambler has employed genres and techniques to modify the convention of the spy thriller with a comparative analysis of the "whodunit". The essay has two sections and each section is divided into two parts. The first subsection compares the setting with a comparable setting in the "whodunit" story. The second subsection compares the gossip and presumption of guilt in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *Epitaph for a Spy*. The second section consists of a more specific study of the two essential characters from each novel: Joseph Vadassy in *Epitaph for a Spy* and Hercule Poirot in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. The first subsection analyses the typical traits and behaviour of Vadassy via consideration of spies and detectives. The second and final subsection is an analysis of the comical aspect of each novel and character and how the authors use comedy to modify the genres. Overall, this essay is a comparative analysis that seeks to answer how Ambler modifies the genre conventions of the spy thriller.

Keywords: Eric Ambler, *Epitaph for a Spy*, Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, whodunit, Vadassy, Poirot, genre conventions, modification

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1. Introduction

Mr Ambler, a worldly Englishman, is generally credited with having raised the thriller to the level of literature. He brought intellectual substance to the genre at a time when it often suffered from shortages of surprise, maturity and verisimilitude and literary skill.

(Pace, *New York Times*)

Eric Ambler (1909-1998) was a brilliant writer, who during the 1930s wrote five thrillers, one of which was *Epitaph for a Spy*. *Epitaph for a Spy* narrates the events from the perspective of the main character Joseph Vadassy, a Hungarian refugee and language teacher living in Paris. During a holiday in the French Riviera, Vadassy is accused of espionage by the French Police. To prove his innocence, he will need to find the real spy among the guests of the hotel. Critics of the spy genre, such as Snyder, Buckton and Denning, know Ambler as the author who has modified spy fiction; one way in which this revision of the genre conventions took place was with inspiration from the “whodunit” story. *Epitaph for a Spy* was published in 1938, around the same era as the “Golden Age” of the detective novel and “whodunit” stories, amongst which we have *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* by Agatha Christie, published in 1926. Ambler applied many of the conventions and ideas set up for the “whodunit” novel to his own. The alleged modifications to the (spy) thriller genre made him, as the book cover puts it, a “master storyteller”. As a consequence of these revisions, I will argue that Ambler modified the genre conventions of the spy thriller.

Ambler stated that he wanted to turn away from the typical spy story (Denning 80), but before the essay can establish how he moved away from the spy conventions, it is important to give a definition and background to what a spy thriller was before Ambler’s significant revisions. I will consider the conventions set up by John Buchan, estimated as an earlier master of the spy thriller and an essential figure in the transition to the modern spy novel (Buckton 12). Furthermore, I will try to categorize the differences between spy and detective story referring to the different branches of narratology to establish what these conventions are specifically.

The first question is, what is a spy thriller? According to the Oxford Dictionaries, the definition of the ‘thriller’ is “[a] novel, play, or film with an exciting plot, typically involving crime or espionage” (‘Thriller’, Oxford Dictionaries). Denning, in *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller*, gives Ambler’s definition of the “typical” spy thriller. Ambler states that the spy story is a story in which the central character is a secret intelligence agent of one sort or another (7). Ambler continues with stating that he has never written one

such story (7), a statement that will be important to my essay. According to Denning, the spy thriller is a cover story that is in constant change (142). The cover story is relative to its historical context of technical and professional work and national and imperial ideologies (142). To follow Denning's argument about cover/spy stories, the setting in the modern spy novel is often cross-country chase with a foreign public enemy, which changes according to the country's rivalry. One great writer of the spy genre and cover stories is John Buchan who wrote the book *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, an intensely nationalist tale, and a classical spy story (45). The character and the structure in Buchan's novels are tropes to the genre; these themes and motifs came to represent the clichés of the spy story. Clichés and tropes such as theory of disguise and impersonation of a spy, stereotypical Germanic villain (as it is set right before the start of World War 2), a cross-country chase, ridiculous luck of the main character and adventure (47-48). Buchan incarnates the spy thriller in his character Richard Hannay (11), where he incorporates the 'fantastic' and the professional 'amateur' (12). Hannay is the personification of the essential lineaments of the hero of the early spy. The typical spy hero in early spy fiction is an amateur, although this amateurism should be considered together with professionalism (52). The entire narrative and ideological theme in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* considers the authorities incompetent and hopeless in comparison to an amateur spy like Richard Hannay (53).

The second question is, what is the difference between the genres, detective and spy fiction? Detective and spy fiction descended from the nineteenth-century growth of the adventure narrative (Hepburn) and according to the definition provided by Oxford Dictionary both genres qualify as thrillers. Although the genres have some similarities, the two thrillers are asymmetrical and different from each other (Hepburn). To view them as equal is, as Hepburn puts it, to "obscure their differing subjects, narrative structures, and ideological values" (Hepburn). To that statement, Hepburn creates a list where detectives and spies are put axiomatically alongside each other:

A detective deduces; a spy surmises. A detective explains; a spy interprets. A detective exposes; a spy vanishes. A detective solves; a spy betrays. A detective is almost never culpable; a spy is never fully innocent. Spy fiction relies on codes; detective fiction relies on clues. Spy fiction abides by a principle that nothing is ever what it appears to be: a word might be a cipher, or a trusted employee might be a mole. In detective fiction suspicion temporarily alights on several people, but only the guilty dissimulate and are consequently unmasked. Each genre takes a stance on the nature of crime and justice. Both spy and detective fiction perpetuate ideas about guilt; but in spy fiction guilt derives from violations of national security, whereas in

detective fiction guilt derives from violations of individual property and bodies.
(Hepburn, "Detectives and Spies")

I will take this quote from Hepburn's article into consideration when analysing the two books, as it gives an overview of what is entailed with each genre.

Robert Snyder argued that Ambler has "virtually created the modern espionage story" (Snyder 227) as he changed the conventions of the thriller, modifying the genre and its characteristics (227-228). The novels Ambler wrote are, therefore, regarded as revisionist thrillers set out to reinvigorate the genre (227). There is one specific aspect of his revisions that has been noted by previous critics, amongst which there is Snyder and Buckton; in *Epitaph for a Spy*, Ambler takes inspiration from the classic detective novel and borrows characteristics from the "whodunit" story. My essay, such as Snyder's, will give particular focus to one of these "whodunit" stories, namely, Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Consequently, I seek to answer the questions of how much he borrowed from the "whodunit".

Another revisionist aspect I will take into consideration is Denning's argument of the creation of the "accidental spy figure". The "accidental spy" was first created in World War 1, but found new life in the 1930s with Ambler (Buckton 55). Together with the accidental spy came the "serious thriller" which incorporates realism and moral seriousness to the story (55). Unlike the typical amateur "professional" spy (like Richard Hannay), Ambler's typical protagonist "is an amateur spy, but not the enthusiastic and willing amateur that Hannay is; rather he is an incompetent and inexperienced amateur in a world of professionals" (Denning 62). This aspect will be considered in the essay as an important feature of the revisions and modifications Ambler made to the espionage genre.

I will apply narratological aspects and methods to prove my arguments, using established narratology scholars such as Tzvetan Todorov, Porter Abbott and Seymour Chatman. The reason why I have chosen the narratological approach for the essay is for the different concepts of the method; I will use the concepts of genre conventions, narrative techniques, trait-analysis of characters and analysis of setting.

The structure of the essay is divided into two parts: "Genre Conventions" and "Characters". The first part of the essay focuses a great deal on previous research and the overall modifications to the narrative and setting; the second part is trying to find a new argument to Ambler's modification (still with consideration to previous research). The first section of "Genre Conventions" contains a subsection of "Setting", which main focus is on

the theme of isolation. The theme of isolation will follow the rest of the essay as it affects the narrative and the characters. The following subsection is about “Gossip and Presumption of Guilt”. The second section is specifically about “Characters”, with focus on Ambler’s “accidental spy figure” (Buckton 55). The question I pose on the penultimate subsection is whether the main character’s ambiguous behaviour makes him deviate from the typical spy figure and behave more like a detective, while considering the behaviour of the detective in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. The last subsection concerns the “Comedy of Manner” of the main character from each book and whether there is a resemblance between the “whodunit” and *Epitaph for Spy*. All aspects and arguments presented in my essay become important since these alterations, not only, entailed modifications to the thriller writing in Ambler’s books, but as Denning quotes in his book:

Eric Ambler took over the form in a sad state of disrepair. Buchan had forsaken it, largely, and a heavy dominance of E. Philips Oppenheim had grown excessively tedious. Ambler took the spy story by the scruff of its well-washed neck, whipped the monocle out of its astonished eye and pushed it down among people, away from the world of diplomatic mummies. (60)

As a result, his novels became an inspiration to new narrative techniques and conventions to other writers.

2. Genre Conventions

2.1. Setting

George Grella explains in “Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel” that a “whodunit” is a murder committed in an isolated place where the murderer is amongst the group of people located in that exact place, typically in an English country house (30). In that place everyone is a suspect, and everyone seems to lie (30). The characteristic “whodunit” is a mystery that baffles everyone (even the authorities), until a famous detective comes to the rescue (30). The setting is an essential characteristic of the “whodunit” and completely isolates the story from the rest of the world (39). Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is one novel that follows the conventions of the “whodunit” setting, and so is Ambler’s *Epitaph for a Spy*. The argument of this section is that Ambler uses the typical “whodunit” structure of isolated setting to modify the spy genre. Therefore, the section will attempt to show how setting and isolation are presented in *Epitaph for a Spy* and how this relates to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

Porter Abbott explains in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* that the word "setting" has become unpopular, as it connotes more of a confined space, or rather a “container”, than a world where the setting grows and becomes more complex (20). Abbott's theory becomes relevant, because for *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* the word “setting” is more appropriate as it is an isolated and “contained” space from beginning to the end. McManis describes Christie’s narrative space as having “evocative descriptions” and “limited definition of geography” (322). Isolation in the “whodunit” connotes an area like the description of McManis, where people gather in a specific place; where they do not have any contact with the outside world; and where the characters remain until the murder is solved. Christie’s main preference of isolated place in her stories is the village-rural landscapes (McManis 322), with an English country house and characters living in an aristocratic atmosphere and luxurious surroundings. This example is shown in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* as the Fernly Park-house (owned by Roger Ackroyd), the most important house of the area, located in the village rural-landscape of King’s Abbot (Christie 7). Additionally, many common areas for the guests to gather arise within the isolated community and the *mise en scène*. Christie’s novel puts much emphasis on the context and gives the reader an idea and a picture of the structure of the house, with a description of the position of the public areas and shared rooms for the guests to gather. Examples of common rooms are the billiard room, the study and the dining room (Christie 59). Buckton explains the mood of isolation, as in the

example of the common rooms, as a contribution “to the atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion” (62). It is there to bring people together so that they can conspire and discuss with each other. It is not an isolation evoked by the authorities or the detective, but rather a symbolic “mood” (McManis 328) which emerges from the small town life.

In line with the isolated setting and the isolated "mood" in a “whodunit”, in *Epitaph for a Spy*, the description of the setting position is introduced as:

For several kilometres on the way from Toulon to La Ciotat, the railway runs very near to the coast. As the train rushes between the innumerable short tunnels through which this section of the line has been built, you catch quick glimpses of the sea below, dazzling blue, of red rocks, of white houses among pine woods. It is as if you were watching a magic lantern show with highly coloured slides and an impatient operator. The eye has no time to absorb details. Even if you know Gatien and are looking for it, you can see nothing of it but the bright red roof and the pale yellow stucco walls of the Hôtel de la Réserve. I had heard of St Gatien and its pension from a friend in Paris. The cooking at the Réserve was épatant, I had been told: the rooms were comfortable, the situation was pleasant; and St Gatien was not yet ‘discovered’. For forty francs a day in pension one could live well at the Réserve. (2)

Consequently, the argument is that applying the conventions of the “whodunit” setting, the location of St. Gatien parallels with King’s Abbot, and the location of the Hôtel de la Réserve parallels with Fernly Park. *Epitaph for a Spy* follows the main principle of the “whodunit”, as the location is a small town, where there is a place or a house for every guest to gather. Then there is an "investigator", or rather a "spy", which has the job to find the culprit within the Réserve’s ten other guests, namely the main character Vadassy (Snyder 235). The main setting replicates the typical “whodunit” story (Snyder 236); however, the difference in *mise en scène* is that, instead of a country house, there is a hotel, and furthermore, the shared spaces are not all within the hotel “with large grounds” (Ambler 31). The first example of common areas in *Epitaph for a Spy* is “the terrace” (Ambler 33) of the hotel, where the guests frequently gather. Another familiar setting is “the lounge” (Ambler 68), where the guests play Russian billiard, all in line with Grella’s theory of typical *mise en scène* for the “whodunit”. Nevertheless, the setting in Ambler’s novel is a bit more like Abbott’s idea of “story-world”, meaning that the setting is somewhat more complex and dynamic (Abbott 20). For instance, places outside the “isolated space” of the hotel are the “[c]ommissariat de Police” (Ambler 7), where Vadassy was brought when they found the illegal pictures; or “[t]he post office” (Ambler 54), where Vadassy on several occasions went to ring Inspector Beghin. Another important public place outside the hotel is “[t]he small beach” (Ambler 33) where the hotel guests often gather during the day. Just like McManis explains that the isolated setting is a

mood, the beach is another setting that creates that mood of isolation. The mood of isolation is a curious aspect of the story, as the beach serves as a symbol for the isolation and confinement, at the same time the ocean becomes a representation for the immensity of the world outside the hotel. This symbolism shows Vadassy's psychological unease, more specifically, psychological isolation, because he is an unwilling agent forced to do a mission (Snyder 235). Vadassy is forced to stay because he does not have a national belonging and is a refugee after the Treaty of Trion, 1929 (235). He becomes a *persona non grata* to the country and risks expulsion or jail for a crime he has not committed (235). Thus, the sea is there as a reminder of an immense world outside the Riviera, and the beach a symbol of Vadassy's confinement to the hotel. Ambler creates a physical isolation presented as the hotel, at the same time an utter psychological isolation presented as a "narrative of displacement" from the main character (235), giving the story a moral seriousness the other spy novels before were lacking.

Unlike Ambler's semi-physical-isolation, where the setting is somewhat open, Christie creates an utterly isolated community in Fernly Park where King's Abbot is a typical small village community. The isolation becomes stronger since everyone living in King's Abbot remains in King's Abbot. Thus, it is not strange that everyone knows each other and if there is someone new the whole town will know about it. One instance is when Poirot moves to the neighbourhood, and Dr Sheppard mentions him: "The house next door, The Larches, has recently been taken by a stranger. To Caroline's extreme annoyance, she has not been able to find out anything about him, except that he is a foreigner" (Christie 17). On the other hand, in *Epitaph for a Spy*, the free movement of the guests would, in theory, make the isolation weaker. However, this free movement does not, because the story is told from the perspective of Vadassy whose isolation is confined to the hotel. The other notion making the theory of isolation stronger is that, even though the guests are allowed to move freely, they always return to the Hôtel de la Réserve. One example of free movement is when Major Herbert Clandon-Hartley tells Vadassy that he was in another town "doing some shopping" (Ambler 45). This example is very unusual for spy fiction, because as stated in the introduction, the typical setting is open and constantly changing (cross-country setting), with a variety of national and international movement. Ambler does the opposite, as he applies a closed and restricted setting to his story.

In conclusion, *Epitaph for a Spy* follows the setting-structure of a "whodunit", whereby a clear modification to the spy genre occurs with space and location. The difference is that Christie's novel is a clear-cut "whodunit", with the murder and the isolated English country

house and a confined space. The setting of the story is there to create a mood (McManis 328) of isolation in her novel. Eric Ambler modifies the classic thriller, incorporating elements that are similar to the “whodunit” by, just like Christie, creating a mood of isolation. Nevertheless, he still inserts concepts of spy conventions. Some examples of how Ambler's book conforms to spy conventions are replacing the murder with espionage and diverging from familiar England by setting the story in an international environment of the French Riviera. Nevertheless, Ambler uses the setting in the same way as Christie, by applying isolation and closed setting to a genre whose usual setting is international and free movement in the form of cross-country case. Ambler uses the concept of isolation to create suspense and paranoia, which consequently leads to the next topic: gossip and presumption of guilt.

2.2. Gossip and Presumption of Guilt

This subsection explores the impact and involvement of secrecy and gossip in *Epitaph for a Spy*. It specifically concerns another aspect of Grella's theory and definition of the “whodunit”. The definition of the "whodunit" is, as presented earlier, that "everyone is a suspect" and "everyone seems to lie" (30). As stated in the previous subsection, the issue of gossip (and secrecy) is a consequence of the feeling of paranoia and suspense caused by an isolated space (Buckton 61). Therefore, what I will examine here is how the use of gossip and secrecy from the “whodunit” inspires Ambler to apply it to his own story. This section will try to answer the following questions: (i) how is the spy thriller similar to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and the “whodunit” and (ii) how does Ambler present the gossip in *Epitaph for a Spy* to modify the spy thriller.

According to Todorov, in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, the detective story plays with the testimony of the characters. The speech of the characters can, thus, be true or false (83). Principally, for the detective novel, the play on a false statement is constant to the genre (Todorov 83). I will connect Todorov's concept of false testimony with Heather Worthington argument of gossip from *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*. Worthington argues that there is a constant gossip, which the detective uses to solve the crime. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the false statements and gossip are relevant aspects, as they dominate the narrative of the story. The notion of gossip is one of the aspects in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which first presents itself as a contemptuous comment by Dr Sheppard (Grella 45), as he states that “[o]ur hobbies and recreations can be summed up in the one word, ‘gossip’” (Christie 7). The gossip plays with conventions by constantly tricking the characters by diverging from the truth (Grella 45). In the previous section, I noted that the

isolated setting in a “whodunit” becomes a functional arena (Grella 39) for false testimony and gossip. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, one connection to gossip and isolation is the overall setting, namely, the small town of King's Abbot. Another example, in Christie's novel, are more specific settings where people gather to gossip; one such example is in the chapter of “An Evening in Mah Jong” (Christie ch.16). In this chapter, since the setting is confined, nothing seems to go unnoticed and the characters gather to gossip about the murder and the possible culprit. This gossip is comparable to *Epitaph for a Spy*, where Ambler uses the same concept of isolation to make people gossip with each other. The difference here is that, besides the culprit and Vadassy, the rest of the guests are not aware of the crime. However, in one way or another, the guests of the hotel always find something (or someone) to talk about. An example of such gossip is when Vadassy tells the Skeltons that several things from his suitcase have been stolen. After Vadassy repeated the list of the stolen objects, the Skeltons answer:

‘But it was about nine-thirty when we saw you talking to the Major.’ ‘Yes but I left my room at nine.’ Skelton leaned forward confidentially. ‘Say, you don't suppose the Major was engaging you in conversation while his wife did the job, do you?’ ‘Shut up, Warner. This is serious. It was probably one of the servants.’ (Ambler 119)

The example shows the Skeltons starting to conspire about the possible culprit and engage in typical gossip.

Besides having characters that like to gossip, such as The Skeltons or Flora Ackroyd (from the chapter of “An Evening in Mah Jong”), the novels have another factor in common. Not only is the gossip always present in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, but as Heather Worthington explains, Christie also makes sure of its presence by creating a character “with sharp eyes, taste for gossip, a nose for scandal and time on their hands ... [the] figure of Caroline Sheppard” (Worthington 28). Caroline becomes the embodiment of Gossip. The first example of clear-cut gossip and Caroline's need to talk is already in the first pages when she and Dr Sheppard talk about the suicide of Mrs Ferras:

‘You've had an early call,’ remarked Caroline.
‘Yes,’ I said. ‘King's Paddock. Mrs Ferrars.’
‘I know,’ said my sister. ‘How did you know?’
‘Annie told me.’
Annie is the house parlourmaid. A nice girl, but an inveterate talker. (...)
‘Well?’ She demanded
‘A sad business. Nothing to be done. Must have died in her sleep.’
‘I know’ said my sister again.

This time I was annoyed.

‘ You can’t know,’ I snapped. ‘I didn’t know myself until I got there, and I haven’t mentioned it to a soul yet. If that girl Annie knows, she must be a clairvoyant.’

‘ It wasn’t Annie who told me. It was the milkman. He had it from the Ferrarses’ cook.’ (Christie 3-4)

This quote shows the extent of the gossiping and the narrator’s, Dr Sheppard’s, dislike of it. In an attempt to find out more about the suicide, Caroline has already talked to the whole town and found out almost everything there is to know about it. Ambler, just like Christie, creates a character who is the personification of gossip, Monsieur Duclos, whom Vadassy describes as a “most appalling liar, and an inveterate gossip” (Ambler 222). This type of gossip has a similar consequence in both novels. The consequence is that the connection between the gossip and solving the crime either throws the detective off or helps with essential details for solving the crime. For Poirot, the slander is beneficial for his deduction (Worthington 108), while for Vadassy it throws his deduction astray.

Another detail helpful for Poirot's deduction is also the most apparent example of false testimony and gossip, namely the unreliable narrator in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, as the narrator is also the culprit of murder (Todorov 83). The unreliable narrator diverges from the rest of the story, as it creates a conflict between narrative and the narrator (Chatman 148-149). Therefore, the narrator Dr Sheppard creates a conflict by continuously lying and deceiving, but that does not affect the judgment of Poirot, as he reveals in the end that he knew who the culprit was, but lacked evidence (Todorov 83). For Vadassy, the gossip worked to his disadvantage, as it made him even more confused and lost in the search for the culprit. Therefore, the gossip becomes the thing that leads Vadassy away from the truth. When he discovers the truth about Monsieur Duclos being a compulsive liar, his only response is "he's a what?" (Ambler 222). Nevertheless, Todorov’s argument on false testimony is aligned with Ambler’s use of gossip, as the main character is dependent on the testimonies and the gossip of the other characters in the novel. Consequently, both novels have an interaction between the gossiping and false testimony; the difference here is that one character (Vadassy) is more affected by the gossip than the other, and this creates problems for his deduction.

Another characteristic of Todorov’s theory of false testimony is the “said in the unsaid” which also could be connected with Grella’s definition of a “whodunit”. Grella’s definition states that “everyone is a suspect, and everyone seems to lie” (30); therefore, everyone is a suspect because no one is saying anything, or avoiding telling the actual truth. Here the discussion brings out two issues. The first one is the issue of awareness and the second issue

is the presumption of guilt. The issues are clearly shown in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* as everyone is aware of the crime and Christie creates the presumption of guilt, meaning that everyone is guilty until proven innocent. These two aspects are evident when Poirot states that: “[e]veryone of you in this room is concealing something from me” (Christie 152); therefore, it is evident that everyone knows the crime has happened and everyone has a secret concealed from the “investigator”. As for *Epitaph for a Spy*, Ambler uses the same type of suspicion proposed by Grella and makes Vadassy think that each one of the guests of the hotel might be a spy, to the point of a game of "Cluedo". Like a game of "Cluedo" (which is a typical "whodunit" game), the players are in a locked house, and one of the players is the murderer, but no one knows who and, hence, the suspicion falls on all the players. The difference is that, instead of finding the murderer amongst a group of suspects, the purpose is to frame the spy. Therefore, *Epitaph for a Spy* creates an atmosphere of presumption of guilt.

Both spy fiction and the detective novel abide by the rule of presumption of guilt. The distinction is, as Allan Hepburn explains, in “spy fiction guilt derives from violations of national security, whereas in detective fiction guilt derives from violations of individual property and bodies” (Hepburn “Detectives and spies”). These two types of violations occur parallel to each other in Ambler’s novel. There is a violation of national security that occurs in the story, but the most recurrent theme is a violation of Vadassy’s individual property. This violation of individual property is related to how Vadassy is being framed for a crime he has not committed. Someone has exchanged his camera with another camera carrying the pictures of military sightings, and for that, he may pay the consequences of someone else’s action. Hence, the novel consists of violation of individual property, like in a detective novel. Vadassy, just like Poirot, follows the idea that everyone is guilty until he can prove the opposite; however, there is a significant difference between the two books. Unlike Christie’s novel where everyone is aware of the crime, in *Epitaph for a Spy*, there are only two characters, within the Hôtel de la Réserve, who are aware of the offence: Vadassy and the real spy. *Epitaph for a Spy* is told from a homodiegetic narration, meaning that the protagonist, Vadassy, is the narrator of the story. Vadassy is the only one aware of the crime and the course of the investigation; thus, the overall awareness of the crime amongst the guests is lower in Ambler’s novel.

In brief, how Ambler incorporates gossip and secrecy in comparison to the example of Christie can be summarised by two points. The first part discusses Todorov's concept of the narrative play and testimony, and Worthington concept of gossip, where the argument is that both writers’ incorporate false testimony and gossip to lead the central characters astray.

Ambler, just like Christie, includes a character that is the personification of gossip to help confuse Vadassy. The second part refers to the presumption of guilt connected with the knowledge of false testimony. Although both Poirot and Vadassy believe in the presumption of guilt, the difference is that Poirot seems to know when someone is lying or hiding the truth. As for Vadassy, his deductive skills to discover the truth seem not to work as well. These changes show how Ambler has set up to change the characteristics entailed with the genre with focus on the theme of "whodunit" as the gossip and secrecy are all consequences of the isolated setting. Ambler does that by explicitly modifying the overall structure and perceptions, and consequently, paves the way for a new type of genre, serving as an inspiration for future writings.

3. Characters

3.1. Characteristics: Traits and Behaviour

This subsection argues that Ambler modifies the image of the spy, as presented in the introduction. One way in which this modification alters the perception of the spy is the influence of the "whodunit" detective in Vadassy's behaviour. Ambler creates an enigmatic character whose world is distorted by intruders; this distortion creates a character that does not know where he belongs or how to act. Accordingly, this part of the essay seeks to answer the questions of whether Vadassy truly acts as a spy, in consideration of John Buchan's spy-character Richard Hannay, or if he acts more as a detective, like Hercule Poirot. The second question this section will answer is how Ambler uses the differences of the character to move away from the spy thriller. The primary focus is on one specific character from each book where the analysis will be on individual traits and actions, continuing with a comparative discussion of these aspects. The study will take into account some of the spy/detective categories and examine to what an extent Ambler uses the detective examples to modify the spy theme.

Christie combines *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* with the Holmesian tradition (Grella 38), where Poirot is supposed to be similar to Sherlock Holmes. Comparable to Holmes, Poirot is the stock character of a "The Great Detective", perceived as knowledgeable and eccentric. Poirot's eccentricity and meticulousness are two significant aspects of the detective's process, deduction and concealment. The portrayal of his peculiarity starts with the description of him from Dr Sheppard's perspective: "His name, apparently, is Mr Porrott [*sic.*] – a name which conveys an odd feeling of unreality. The one thing we do know about him is that he is interested in the growing of vegetable marrows" (Christie 18). This quote conveys a sense of secrecy about the character, since, throughout the story, the reader does not get to know much about Poirot's personal life. The other factor of the quote is that the other characters perceive him as an odd man. The first concrete example of Poirot not "revealing information" in an eccentric way is the re-enactment scene in Chapter Fifteen after Flora Ackroyd leaves the scene and Dr Sheppard starts discussing the event with Poirot:

'What was the point of that question about the glasses?' I asked curiously.
Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

'One must say something,' he remarked. 'That particular question did as well as any other.'

I stared at him.

'At any rate now, my friend,' he said seriously, 'I know now something I wanted to know. Let us leave it at that.' (Christie 186)

Here Poirot shows that his methods involve asking questions that may appear mundane, but that always have a purpose in his deduction and conclusion, just like Sherlock Holmes. The point is to find clues in every detail, even if the details seem dull. The next example is connected with Poirot's interest in the trivial information:

'But – just that, monsieur. Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me.' He raised his hand as a faint murmur of protest arose. 'Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. It may be something unimportant – trivial – which is supposed to have no bearing on the case, but there it is. Each one of you has something to hide. ... 'C'est dommage,' he said, and went out. (Christie 152-153)

This example shows the secrecy of the characters. This secrecy bears a strong resemblance to the Holmesian tradition, that everyone is hiding something from the investigator. However, equally to the narrative of the Holmesian tradition, all the secrets come out eventually and the truth adds up in the end as a summarizing chapter. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, this moment of revelation comes in the chapter of "The Whole Truth" (Christie ch.25), as Poirot explains "what actually happened" to the other characters and the reader. He conceals the process from the police and ignores their help. Poirot believes that he is better off on his own. Hence, the secrecy and clandestine aspect become dominant in the "whodunit", where Poirot has to live in a state of secrecy to avoid the "red herrings" set up to delude and lead him away from a logical pattern of the crime committed (Singer 158-159), such as previously mentioned with gossip and false testimony. As a consequence of this secrecy and concealment, the detective story becomes a riddle, where nothing is definite until the end of the narrative (158-159). Thus, Poirot's clandestinity makes the whole matter even more difficult for the reader (and the rest of the characters) to understand, as the reader does not know what Poirot is thinking, nor does he, as the examples above, tell us until the very end of the novel. I also theorise that the concealment is because Poirot tries to set up "red herrings" and keep his ideas secret from the protagonist Dr Sheppard, who plays the role of the (unreliable) narrator and the perpetrator of the crime.

The sense of concealment and secrecy applies to the concept of the double agent in Ambler's novels (Cawelti & Rosenberg 20). He specialises in stories about ordinary characters who end up in a world of danger, mysteries and intrigue (29). Ambler employs the interplay of two worlds; besides having the ordinary world, of the protagonists, he also

creates a second world related to clandestinity (29). He creates a “schizophrenic” ambiguity between the clandestine and the everyday worldview (29). *Epitaph for a Spy* is of this type; it is a story about an ordinary teacher, Vadassy, who by mistake (or rather, by force) takes on the mission and becomes a temporary and accidental spy. This “schizophrenic” ambiguity of interplay between two worlds is not only physical but also present as a psychological state of mind, where Vadassy has to struggle between these two worlds, which consequently affects his actions and determines his traits. The issue of secrecy in *Epitaph for a Spy* fits into the espionage genre but is also in lines with the Holmesian tradition, where Vadassy needs to live a clandestine life as a spy, and at the same time, still resembles Poirot in the way he handles the case and conceals information. However, what Vadassy does wrong is the same thing Poirot does right, avoiding the help of the authorities and not revealing the process of his detection to the *Commissariat de Police*. The difference is that, for Poirot, the job as a detective and the process of concealment works because his deduction skills are exceedingly more advanced than Vadassy’s. This theme of “deduction” raises a question: even if Vadassy’s deduction skills are lacking, is it in his terms of reference as a spy to deduce from the beginning? Allan Hepburn presents the differences between the characteristics of the detective and the spy. The categories are placed axiomatically beside each other; the examples are “[a] detective deduces; a spy surmises. A detective explains; a spy interprets ... Spy fiction relies on codes; detective fiction relies on clues” (Hepburn “Detectives and spies”). Vadassy deduces; he does not surmise; he examines; he does not interpret; he looks for clues; he does not rely on codes, which is in line with the Holmesian tradition. At best, he tries to “deduce”, “examine” and find “clues”. However, Vadassy's power of logical deduction in most cases, is deficient and fallacious (Snyder 236) and not receiving help from the authorities does not work to his advantage; therefore, this raises another issue for Vadassy, the problem of unprofessionalism.

Vadassy unprofessionalism can be detected with the help of trait analysis. The trait analysis of A. C. Bradley is a study in narratology for finding traits as “metonymic skids” and key-characteristics of characters in novels (Chatman 134-135). Vadassy could, therefore, with the help of A. C. Bradley’s analysis, be described as unprofessional, inexperienced, eccentric, awkward and behaving “far too stupidly” (Ambler 21). The main example of unprofessionalism and inexperience is when he attempts to solve a mission, which is not initially his task. The example is when Inspector Beghin's explains the task as “[f]inding out which of them have cameras” (Ambler 27) by crossing out names from a list. However, Vadassy becomes more and more involved and dedicated:

One of those who nodded to me was a spy. One of them had paid to make his or her way secretly into military zones, to take photographs of reinforced concrete and guns so that someday warship out at sea might safely and accurately fire shells to smash to pieces the concrete and the guns and the men who served them. And I had two days in which to identify that person. (Ambler 31)

And instead, as the quote shows, he interprets the mission as solving the whole case and framing and identifying the actual spy.

While the negative traits of Vadassy are many more than the positive, some qualities could have made him an excellent spy. His language skills and lack of national belonging are such aspects. Nevertheless, he quickly becomes clouded by his unprofessionalism and inexperience, and as a result, the positive qualities do not work in his favour. Vadassy's negative traits can be analysed as opposed to John Buchan's character, Richard Hannay. Hannay finds himself swept up in an international conspiracy, and still uses his extensive knowledge to his advantage to solve the mission and save the world. As a result, Vadassy becomes the antithesis of Hannay (Buckton 62).

Besides being the antithesis of the "typical spy" character, Vadassy, also has common characteristics with the "typical detective". One characteristic Vadassy has in common with Poirot is the eccentricity. Vadassy shows his ignorance in his introverted manner and self-importance, but as he becomes a more dynamic and complex character with the progressing of the novel, the frequency of these "eccentric" episodes intensifies. From a narratological analysis, Vadassy is considered a round character with unpredictable behaviour and a variety of depth and complexity (Abbott 133). One of these episodes is when Vadassy daydreams a conversation with Beghin and all of a sudden knows that one should: "Always investigate a man with a name like Heinberger" (Ambler 42). Another example of his self-importance is when he considers getting a pistol, or maybe even two pistols (Ambler 50). These examples conform with how he misinterprets the mission, since having to check names off a list does not require guns, nor does it involve investigating people's nationalities. In that way, comparable to Poirot, Vadassy's eccentricity and self-importance combined with odd behaviour and ideas are similar to the Holmesian tradition, proving suitable for the category of the "eccentric detective". However, as Snyder explains it, even though he attempts to emulate Sherlock Holmes and the "eccentric detective" it is all ill-fated and a complete failure in the end (241).

To sum up Vadassy's behaviour as "eccentric detective", as stated in the introduction, Ambler wrote *Epitaph for a Spy* during the "Golden age" of the detective novel. Hence, the resemblance between Vadassy and Poirot is not entirely unforeseen. There are some points in which the characters resemble each other. Bearing in mind Hepburn's list of characteristics, Vadassy has certain similarities with the detective character. Here, Ambler alters the conventions of spy fiction in two ways. The first one is following the "whodunit" by making his character deduce and examine the "clues", while at the same time moving away from the conventions by making his character fail in almost everything he does, which is unusual for spy fiction. The standard before was spies such as Hannay whose luck almost became ridiculous; instead, Vadassy's unprofessionalism and unluckiness becomes ridiculous. Ambler uses characteristics set up for the detective genre to modify the conventional style and to make Vadassy more ambiguous and lost in a clandestine world. This makes the reader question his suitability as a spy even more. Vadassy does not know how to act, or what to do, making his fantasy culminate in doing a job he was supposed to do.

3.2. Characteristics: Comedy of Manners

This section concerns Grella's theory of comedy, where he advocates W. H. Auden's argument that "the detective novel's true appeal is literary. Neither a picture of actual crime, a pure game of wits, nor a popular but degenerate version of tragedy, it is a comedy" (Grella 33). Thus, this subsection argues that Ambler uses satirical elements in *Epitaph for a Spy* to alter the conventions associated with the genre the same way Christie modifies the genre conventions of her own version of the "whodunit". This section will examine whether Ambler uses the same techniques of satire to alter the genre conventions through his character Vadassy and if, accordingly, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and Hercule Poirot inspire this technique.

My theory is that one thing both the "whodunit" and the spy genre have in common is the gothic aspect, as a result of the isolated setting and an undertone of a dark atmosphere in both novels. The gothic elements convey a sense of unease and mystery, and just like a gothic novel; there is a tendency in applying an undertone of satire and gothic humour (Grella 45). As a consequence of the gothic isolation, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* exhibits tampering with characteristics of the "typical detective" novel in the form of parody and satire (45). Denning argues that one important revisionist aspect of Ambler's novel is his "seriousness". However, I will further argue that this "seriousness" causes a comic relief to the story. This means that Ambler breaks from the "seriousness" by satirising the gothic element of the

isolated setting (since isolation, as established in the earlier section of “Setting”, is an element Ambler takes from the “whodunit”).

One way in which the genre is altered, in line with the gothic aspect, is in the stereotypical character(s). In a way, as every comedy has a comic hero (Grella 34), this could also be applied in this case. Thus, the stock character of “the great detective” becomes the comic hero. According to Grella, the “great detective” frequently derives from the brilliant, eccentric hero of nineteenth-century detective stories; but in reality, they owe more to the archetypal heroes of comedy (34). There is more of Shakespeare, Congreve, and Sheridan than Poe, Conan Doyle, and Chesterton in their creation (34). For the typical detective tasks, the characters ally with the archetypal problem-solvers of their plays, such as Brainworm, Tony Lumpkin and Prospero (34). Thus, these figures could be summed up as “the tricky slave, the benevolent elf, the Prospero figure” (37).

Poirot, as stated in the previous section, resembles the structure of a “Holmesian genius” with his high intellect and various abilities. Poirot is an ordinary, bourgeois citizen who intrudes into the exclusive and aristocratic society (Grella 34). Poirot is, as Grella describes him, unable to comprehend the intricate and delicate social code, and his manner continuously becomes stymied (34). Although he has high authority and brilliance, some factors and characteristics make his demeanour comical. Three of these amusing traits are his language skills, presence and appearance. Starting out with the language aspect, one humorous part of Poirot is the continuing language errors that he makes during the novel. The first example is when he talks to Dr Sheppard:

‘I thank you, no,’ said Poirot, rising. ‘All my excuses for having deranged you.’
‘Not at all, not at all.’
‘The word deranged,’ I remarked, when we were outside again, ‘is applicable to mental disorder only.’
‘Ah!’ cried Poirot. ‘Never will my English be quite perfect. A curious language. I should then have said disarranged, n’est ce pas?’
‘Disturbed is the word you had in mind.’ (Christie 207)

Thus, as the example shows, Poirot's problem does not only have to do with English collocations but also idioms, grammar and meaning of words overall (Grella 38). Despite all his errors, Poirot also tends to mix languages, and besides the example(s) above, there are also examples such as: “Voilà ce qui est curieux” (Christie 86) or “what do they call it? – canard of the newspaper’s” (Christie 250). The aspect of Poirot's presence is shown in his eccentricity and silly appearance: The first example is a description of him from the point of

view of the narrator, Dr Sheppard. He describes him as “[a]n egg-shaped head, partially covered with suspiciously black hair, two immense moustaches, and a pair of watchful eyes. It was a mysterious neighbour, Mr Porrot [*sic.*]” (Ambler 19). This is a description packed with adjectives like “covered”, “suspiciously”, “watchful” and “mysterious”. These adjectives convey oddity and suspicion and show an enigmatic character that seems to have something to hide. Poirot seems to be a character with a disguise as he hides behind “immense moustaches” and “suspiciously black hair”; nothing seems to be natural, almost to the point of him wearing a funny mask. This eccentricity of Poirot continues on the same page when the reader gets the first hint of his odd behaviour:

I demand of you a thousand pardons, monsieur. I am without defence. For some months now I cultivated the marrows. This morning suddenly I enrage myself with these marrows. I send them to promenade themselves – alas! Not only mentally but physically. I seize the biggest. I hurl him over the wall. (Christie 19)

The image the reader gets is of a person who gets angry at vegetables and decides to throw them over a wall, and this is not only strange but also amusing. The way Poirot expresses himself by telling Dr Sheppard that he decided to “send them to promenade” (Christie 19) and that he is enraged “Not only mentally but physically” (Christie 19) is also quite odd and humorous. Every argument made so far about Poirot's demeanour, and appearance serves as the comic relief to a serious story. Poirot's demeanour is in line with Grella's theory of satire in a gothic environment and his language mistakes and an overall silly character are there to diverge from the tragic events (Grella 42). Consequently, because of his demeanour, Poirot becomes the foreigner tolerated by his society because he is faintly laughable (42).

Ambler also uses parody in his novel, satirising the spy thriller conventions and the gothic aspects and using ironic and cynical characters (Denning 76). Ambler deviates from the typical over-class main character in spy fiction by writing “bourgeois storytelling” (81). Therefore, just like Poirot, Vadassy is a middle-class citizen who enters into a world of aristocratic society. Ambler uses isolation to modify the setting, and in that way, it resembles the “whodunit” in structure, this gothic isolation creates a seriousness which is modified in both Ambler's and Christie's novel. Both writers use the same comical demeanour for the characters to satirise the conventions of seriousness and realism of the stories. The question that follows, hence is, how does Ambler use the satire in the story to break from the seriousness of the novel? The most interesting aspect is how Vadassy is a foil to a “typical spy” like Richard Hannay. The description of Vadassy is laughable since, unlike Hannay and

his good fortune, everything he does in his mission leads to a disaster (Buckton 61). This feature of failure of Vadassy serves as the comic relief or a “comic realism” to the clandestine world he was forced into entering. One example of this occurred when he was supposed to question Monsieur Roux and Mademoiselle Martin:

I went downstairs feeling several kinds of fool. Instead of doing the pumping I had been pumped. Far from extracting the valuable information I had been forced into a defensive position and answered questions as meekly as if I had been in the witness box ... As usual, I began to think of the crushing things I ought to have said. The trouble was that my brain moved far too slowly. I was a dullard, a half-wit. (Ambler 167)

This aspect is a consequence of his unprofessionalism and inexperience. Vadassy is not a spy and does not know how to be one; therefore, the results of his actions are never what he anticipates. The second example of inexperience is when he was planning to search Schimler’s room, and an attempt to keep the plan does not quite work as expected:

cool and careful. I must keep my head. Soft shoes? Most necessary. A revolver? Absurd! I didn’t even have one, and even if I had... A torch? Idiot! It wasn’t even dark. And then I remembered that I didn’t even know the number of his room. (Ambler 78)

In this quote Vadassy shows in a comic soliloquy that he is not a spy and tries to concoct a plan to frame (whom he thinks is) the culprit, a plan that is supposed to be simple. Vadassy makes a list of things that may be needed. However, he realises that he neither has these things nor can he do anything about it. Finally, to conclude, he recognises that he does not know where the person he is going to spy on lives. Therefore, Vadassy fails miserably with his mission and in a comical manner.

The second aspect that makes Vadassy humorous is the issue of language. Differently from Poirot, Vadassy’s language skills and knowledge are more extensive. He teaches “German, English and Italian, occasionally Hungarian” (Ambler 10) and knows French. The comical part is that his language skills are a trait that would have made him a good spy, but even though he has the knowledge and opportunity, he still uses his abilities inefficiently. One example comes from the scene with Monsieur Roux and Mademoiselle Martin. According to Vadassy, the two characters have an accent that is not French, however, the characters claim to be French and they manage to fool him:

‘ ... Where are you going when you leave here?’
 ‘Back to Paris’
 ‘Paris? Why?’
 ‘I live there,’ I stared him in the eyes. ‘And you, I suppose, will be going back to Germany.’
 ‘And why, Vadassy, should you think that I am not a Frenchman?’
 His voice has dropped. The smile was still on his face, a very ugly smile. I saw the muscles of his legs tighten as though he were about to spring.
 ‘You have a slight accent. I don’t know why, but I assumed that you were a German.’
 He shook his head. ‘I am a Frenchman, Vadassy. Please do not forget that you, a foreigner, cannot tell a true French accent when you hear it. Do not, please, insult me.’ (Ambler 166)

Here, Vadassy realises that Roux speaks with an (Italian) accent, but he cannot recognise its origins and, thus, ignores it immediately. The fact that Vadassy ignored his accent would not have happened with some experience. One reason why he should have recognized the accent is because Vadassy has been in Italy and knows the language. However, the most significant reason comes in the end when Vadassy realises that “it was the same accent as that of my colleague Rossi, the Italian at the Mathis School of Languages” (Ambler 218). The language-miss has a clear presence of irony, which is typical for Ambler’s stories (Denning 81). Accordingly, Ambler satirises Vadassy’s language skills by ridiculing him.

To sum this up, both novels are thriller novels with gothic aspects. Christie and Ambler attempt to re-invent and modify the conventions by adding comical elements, whereby one issue that both have in common is the use of language. Poirot, Belgian, and Vadassy, Hungarian, become coloured by their provenance so that they turn into “parody figure types”. The narrator describes Poirot as having a lack of language skills; he commits errors and mixes French and English continuously. As a consequence of Poirot’s language errors, he becomes the type of foreigner who is tolerated by society because he is laughable and amusing (Grella 14). In Vadassy’s case, he gets described as brilliant in languages, an aspect that could potentially make him a good spy; however, with an ironic twist, that quality becomes omitted. My second argument relates to their traits and actions. On this point, Poirot and Vadassy differ from one another. Grella delineates three different archetypical-figures of problem-solvers (38). Although, he does not provide a complete definition of what all those stand for, he still describes Poirot’s experience and professionalism as excellent. The description of Poirot’s language and eccentricity fits into the archetypical problem-solver of an elf (38). Grella's definition of Poirot as an elf is a ludicrous dandy characteristic, but still not a genius to the same extent as Sherlock Holmes (38). Poirot is “The Great Detective” in his novel,

while Vadassy tries to be the same thing in his story. However, inexperience prevents him from becoming that stock character. Applying Grella's concept of archetypical problem-solver to explain Ambler's character, Vadassy fits into the problem-solver of the Prospero figure (38). Vadassy has, using Grella's expression, an "airy manner of the gracioso" (38) making him ridiculous in his monologues, with an imagination that runs wild and an eccentricity that, at some points in the novel, borders on hubris. The aspect of archetypical problem-solver gives an idea of how different the two characters are concerning the "problem-solvers". Poirot handles his case more professionally, while Ambler alters the thriller by applying realism making Vadassy awkward and unprofessional, which is quite unusual for spy fiction. But in the end, they both fit into comical-figures. Consequently, by following the conventions of the "whodunit" of isolated gothic setting, Ambler applies comedy and changes the conventions of the spy fiction; he uses comedy to modify the genre conventions made by John Buchan. Buchan creates a figure that has skills in everything and gets lucky in every instance, while the mishap and "stupidity" characterises Vadassy's experience as a spy. Thus, Ambler creates a protagonist and character as the antithesis of the otherwise "typical spy".

4. Conclusion

John Le Carré described Eric Ambler's legacy and importance as "the source on which we all draw" (qtd. in The Guardian "Dangerous games") and Graham Greene described him as "unquestionably our best thriller writer" (qtd. in The Guardian "Dangerous games"). The consequences of his revisions became just that: an inspiration to future writing. As the previous spy novels were strictly novels of adventure, Ambler added another level to the genre by modifying its conventions. This essay shows that Eric Ambler modifies the spy genre in *Epitaph for a Spy*, with a comparative analysis of the "whodunit" and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Therefore, the argument of each section sought to answer how much he borrowed from the "whodunit" to change the conventions. It also aspired to answer what overall modifications Ambler made to the espionage genre by changing the "typical" spy fiction.

The first section focuses on the main definition of the classical "whodunit". *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a classical "whodunit" where the definition is a murder committed in an isolated place, where everyone is a suspect, and everyone seems to lie (30). I discuss Ambler's play on this definition with setting, gossip and concealment. I argue that Ambler structured the novel in the same manner as the classical "whodunit" taking inspiration and then applying it to *Epitaph for a Spy*. Therefore, as the *mise en scene* in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is Fernly Park in King's Abbot, *Epitaph for a Spy* has the Hôtel de Réserve in St. Gatiens. This isolation from the outside "world" has a functional purpose, where the group of people become forced to gossip with each other, and the culprit stays amongst them to create unease and suspicion. It is both the testimony and the lack of testimony that the novels have in common, where the characters tend to lie about their background and knowledge of the crime. The difference between the two stories, besides Ambler's novel belonging in the spy genre and therefore containing spy elements, is that the consequences of Poirot's actions and behaviour are in his favour, while Vadassy fails and for that reason the gossip, secrecy and isolation become antagonistic to his deduction.

While scholars previously focused their arguments on the conventions of the setting and structure of the novel, the second section of the essay is centred on finding a different argument on Ambler's modifications. This different focus is on the resemblance of specific characters from *Epitaph for a Spy* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. As the argument is about the borrowings from the "whodunit" and the changes of the conventions, the first subsection concerns Eric Ambler's inspiration of the typical "whodunit" detective, in this

case, to determine whether Vadassy is more of a detective or a spy. The conclusion is, in a way neither, as he by profession is not the one or the other. Vadassy follows some aspects and traits from Hepburn's list of categories associated with the detective. Such traits are that he attempts to deduce just like a detective, and not to surmise like a spy; he gathers clues, instead of deciphering cyphers; and he examines, instead of interpreting. However, Vadassy is a "normal person", who by mistake ends up in a world of spies and danger and does not know how to act. He is disenfranchised and ridiculously inexperienced and therefore fails as a spy and as a detective. He ends up in a clandestine world forced to do something he does not want to do, where his purpose is to save his own skin (Buckton 62); thus, he becomes a product of Ambler's creation to modify the genre in two ways. This first way Ambler modifies the genre is via Vadassy's lack of experience and ignorance as to how to pursue the mission, and secondly, by having him fail miserably in every instance of the investigation. All this shows the level of substance that Ambler gives to the genre, not following the classical linear conventions and moving away from the typical characteristic of a spy. The second subsection concerns the comedy of manner and parody of both characters. The argument is that: both writers use the element of "isolation" to satirise the conventions of the genres; in this regard, *Epitaph for a Spy* resembles *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in the use of comedy. Both use comical elements to revise the features of the stereotypical characters from each genre. Nevertheless, Ambler differs from the humorous aspect of Christie's novel, as he uses it to modify a standard set up by previous spy thriller writers. While Christie satirises Poirot's provenance with eccentric behaviour, a peculiar look and a funny English, Ambler satirises the professionalism of the main character by applying mishap and failure. By doing so, Ambler distances his character from the concept of the "Great Detective", or in this case "The Great Spy" and gives a comical realism to his story.

To categorise the changes of the genre is significant because it shows how Ambler has contributed to the history of the changing narrative and evolving of the genre. As a whole, each section of the essay demonstrates how Ambler's modifications consist in applying different aspects and narrative techniques to his novel, in that way just like Snyder wrote in his essay; he becomes a revisionist of the thriller. He opens the door to new ways of writing the spy genre, modifying the conventions set up before him by employing them as foils to his novel. Ambler becomes as La Carré described him "the source on which we all draw" (qtd. in *The Guardian* "Dangerous games"). To show these revisions may open doors the further studies and categorisation of Ambler's modifications and his contributions, as he is a subject very few have previously studied.

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