

REIMAGINING THE GOLEM

THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF DANIEL SILVA'S SPIRITUALLY-MOTIVATED PROTAGONIST, GABRIEL ALLON

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ABSTRACT

Daniel Silva's legendary hero, Gabriel Allon, is intended to embody the concepts of justice, order and spiritually-motivated retribution and has been created to combat threats against the contemporary social order via a combination of guile, ruthlessness and heroism. He is also designed to be unhindered by any physical, emotional or financial restrictions and can therefore exercise his power (against any person, organisation or situation) in the pursuit of an ideology which defines and promotes the political intentions and the cultural influences of his author.

This thesis challenges the figure of Gabriel Allon by arguing firstly, that he is in fact a highly ambivalent, morally problematic figure and secondly, in demonstrating where elements of real-life (adapted by the author to support his ideological stance) have undermined the reliability of the narrative. The thesis has also examined some of the political sub-texts employed by the author to question whether his methodology is serving to enhance the plausibility of the fiction or whether it is embedding dangerously subjective depictions of counter-terrorism into the reader's consciousness.

Some of the acts of revenge which empower Silva's protagonist are based on specific, real-life events and have been considered against secondary source texts. Some of the activities, and the personnel involved, have also been interpreted (via different political ideologies) in popular films. The assessment of the Silva texts has therefore been considered within the wider social, political and commercial contexts that surround the literature.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed Date

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a source of knowledge containing elements of truth and meaning. Much of the truth and meaning contained in a text however, can only be revealed to those readers who are qualified to interpret the author's intent. An author who has ambitions to access the greatest number of readers (for commercial advantage or general popularity) must therefore create text which simplifies the intellectual demands of the interpretation and which accords with the reader's own philosophical viewpoints. It is not possible to create text that allows every reader to recognise every aspect of its meaning but popular writers, like Daniel Silva, create text according to rules and conventions which enable the greatest number of readers to recognise their intentions. In adopting such an approach, the author can convey an accurate representation of the narrative's intention to both the knowledgeable reader and to the reader who may not be fully conversant with the presented themes. The author can, in short, increase the readership through adhering to a generic literary formula which simplifies the interpretation of the text and in producing text which is populated with familiar settings, characters and events. The overall appeal of such a narrative can also be enhanced with the inclusion of a protagonist who represents a sought-after type (i.e. the heroic Gabriel Allon) and one who will seek to defeat a recognisable enemy on behalf of a government, an organisation or a people that is a close representation of the reader's own.

The huge commercial success of the Gabriel Allon series attests to Daniel Silva's successful adoption of this formula and suggests that the books have

had a significant (albeit incalculable) influence on his readership's perception of the Israeli, US and European efforts to oppose contemporary threats. And, perhaps in an effort to offset any charges of crude, ideological positioning, Silva has created a morally troubled, but spiritually motivated, protagonist who has taken part in well-known events from history and one who continues to battle against threats that are easily recognisable to the readers of the present day.

The protagonist, and the philosophies underpinning his activities, have formed the major part of this study. This is because Silva has based his literary figure on the real-life leader of Israel's covert mission of revenge, 'Operation Wrath of God' (OWG): a controversial, counter-terrorist initiative launched in response to the killing of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. And in electing to place his fictional hero into an historic event – and an event which revealed much about the paradoxical nature of counter-terrorist policies, endorsed government-sanctioned assassination and exposed the participants to critical moral and ethical pressures - the author is making a very clear statement about his own protagonist's intent. Non-fiction accounts of OWG furthermore, as well as the two feature films that the operation inspired, have also made it possible to chart the early influences and the creative development of the protagonist through other cultural representations.

CHAPTER ONE

ADAPTING THE PERSPECTIVE

‘... we invent a society where it’s always wartime.’¹

Silva’s narratives adopt a ‘conspiratorial approach to history’² in which elements of reality co-exist with invented characters and events. The ‘conspiratorial’ approach is particularly effective in supporting the credibility of a storyline but, unlike the reported reality of the events (which are viewed comparatively and often subjected to valued judgement and expert consideration), the writer of fiction can produce a narrative which is formed from an historical foundation but which has also been adapted into a purely fictitious construct. In some respects the resultant construct can assume even greater authority than the real-life version because the distinction between the real-world event and the fictional narrative of the same event has simply become a matter of perspective. Silva moreover, enhances his own fictional construct with the inclusion of the heroics of a problematic protagonist, a semi-moralistic narrative and the liberal application of historical context and comparatives. Similar stylistic techniques can be found in other popular novels (which may also try to ‘seduce us as headline-conditioned readers into reflecting on their degree of verisimilitude’³) but few other popular novelists attempt to reinterpret the factual foundations to such an extent or to challenge the reader’s perceptions of what is commonly

¹ Don DeLillo, *Libra* (London, Penguin Books, 2006), p. 64.

² Brett F Woods, *Neutral Ground: A Political History of Espionage Fiction* (New York, Algora Publishing 2007), p.2.

³ Robert L Snyder, *The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction* (North Carolina, McFarland & Co 2011), p.5.

understood. Few other novelists also try to define the combatants within quasi-religious distinctions.⁴

The protagonist's own inner turmoil – particularly between self and cause – lends a greater sense of literary credibility to the texts and illustrates the thought processes which drive his more extreme, but apparently necessary, behaviour. These efforts to justify what would normally constitute disproportionate and/or illegal behaviour are frequently supported with an outline of the challenging political and social environments in which he and the other characters are forced to operate; an environment riddled with untruth, betrayal and conflicting ideologies. The moral and ideological standpoints adopted by Allon have therefore formed a critical part of this study and have also been considered alongside other fictional and non-fictional versions of the same events. They have also been used to analyse how the author has attempted to establish a tangible relationship between the real world and his own fictional version of it.

In engaging a different form of reality, and applying a fiction-driven version of the same thing onto a factual geo-political occurrence, Silva has created a sort of literary hybrid that links a wider fictional premise with a non-fictional underpinning. To Eagleton, 'the quality of reality in literary representation, whether understood as an expression, reflection or reproduction of critical responses to reality, means that the literature continues to have an aesthetic

⁴ Silva wanted a 'biblical name' for his protagonist and decided to name him after the archangel Gabriel: 'a beautiful name ... filled with much religious and historical symbolism ... He is the prince of fire and the guardian of Israel and, perhaps most important, Gabriel is the angel of revenge.' <<http://danielsilvabooks.com/books/the-rembrandt-affair/behind-the-series>> [accessed Nov 2016].

truth content, however distorted.⁵ To deploy the technique successfully the author must also provide the reader with the assurance of subject knowledge⁶ but, when applied convincingly, the resultant text can function as a sort of co-existent medium that serves as a vehicle for any political sub-texts. (It can also provide a useful device to articulate some of the political positions normally concealed from readers of popular literature.)

Silva's engagement with plot conforms to the traditions of a number of modern literary genres but his refusal to constrain himself to a particular type (he considers himself 'a writer of international intrigue stories'⁷) makes it difficult to consider his works within a rigid theoretical framework. Any theoretical analysis is also complicated by his inclusion of components from the modern espionage novel ('a permutation of the adventure tale and detective story'⁸) and many of the literary devices employed in the traditional detective, thriller and suspense genres - albeit with different sets of complex properties.

Classic detective fiction (a 'closely related literary form'⁹ to the espionage novel) complies with a number of established protocols. Todorov suggests that George Burton provides the most accurate characterisation of the genre in his novel *Passing Time (l'emploi du temps)*. In it, the author explains to his narrator that 'all detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first,

⁵ Terry Eagleton & Drew Milne, eds. *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 22.

⁶ Hence Silva's inclusion of an appended section at the end of each novel acknowledging his extensively-researched sources of information.

⁷ Daniel Silva <<http://danielsilvabooks.com/the-books/interviews/the-confessor>> [accessed Nov 2016].

⁸ Robert L Snyder, *The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction*, p.3.

⁹ *ibid.*

committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective.¹⁰ The narrative therefore 'superimposes two temporal series: the days of the investigation which begin with the crime, and the days of the drama which lead up to it.'¹¹ Silva adopts much of this two-part, structural form in the Allon novels (the story of a crime, or an impending crime, and the story of the investigation) but where the two styles differ is that in detective fiction the investigator is immune from serious physical harm (otherwise the investigation could not be completed). Silva's investigating protagonist is, in contrast, subjected to enormous physical and mental damage. But, in subjecting him to such risks, the elements of suspense can also be increased and the author is offered greater opportunity to emphasise the morality of the cause.

Silva also uses another key formula from the traditional detective novel - separating the story of the crime from the story of the investigation. Or, more simply, providing a clear divide between the story and the plot. As such 'the first notion corresponds to the reality evoked, to events similar to those which take place in our lives; the second to the book itself, to the narrative, to the literary devices the author employs'.¹² The techniques deployed in both styles are, in structural terms at least, very similar: the murder of the detective story is simply replaced by the conspiracy of the espionage novel.

¹⁰ David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (Harlow, Pearson/Longman, 2008), p.227.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

The finality is also apparent - although the potential scale of either threat materialising is markedly different.

Gabriel Allon's physical isolation (from the key events and from his colleagues) utilises an absence formula (a literary device also commonly used in detective fiction) which allows him, as the investigator, to step clue-by-clue towards the two separate parts of the fiction. It also allows Silva to present the reader with a separate view of much the same thing. The approach - incorporating shifts in presence and absence – involves the use of numerous conventions and literary devices but the significance of the information presented has been sifted and determined for the reader by the 'created' character conveying it. And, although the reader may feel that they may now know the fictitious character better than any real-life acquaintance (and can enjoy experiencing a life normally inaccessible to them), their understanding of the 'reality' is being shaped by the character's own 'human' thoughts. This sort of 'privileged accessibility'¹³ however, comes with complications; the created person is replicating a real-life person to an unknown degree, the 'verbal transcription'¹⁴ may be inaccurate or misleading and, most significantly, the created character can struggle to find a true 'verbal equivalence'.¹⁵

The development of the '*serie noire*' (the thriller) revised the two-part structure of the 'whodunit' with the amalgamation of the crime and the investigation. The narrative of the thriller coincides with the action and

¹³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977) p.207.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

utilises a form in which 'prospection takes the place of retrospection.'¹⁶ Marcel Duhamel described the thriller as 'violence – in all its forms'¹⁷ with 'immorality as much at home here as noble feelings.'¹⁸ Todorov extends the concept to include 'danger, pursuit and combat'¹⁹ – the three constituent parts of the Allon novels. The thriller writer is however, confined to a well-understood set of limits (on which the writer and reader have tacitly agreed) and is required, as part of this agreement, to incorporate elements of suspense and page-turning excitement into the text. The agreement also demands that the writer provides a resolution that includes either the punishment of the villain(s) or the satisfaction of catharsis.

Two other elements also demonstrate Silva's increasing adoption of the thriller techniques: curiosity (from effect to its cause) and suspense (from cause to effect). As a result, the Silva reader is encouraged to think about what is likely to happen and to base this consideration on what has already happened - a fundamental requirement in maintaining interest in a series of novels based on a single lead character.

A third literary form employed by Silva is the suspense novel which combines the mystery of the detective novel with the past and present aspects of the thriller. The suspense novel differs from the other two forms however, in promoting the present viewpoint to the central place of the story. It also

¹⁶ David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds., *Modern Criticism and Theory*, p.229.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.230.

demands that the reader considers the potential links between the historic events and the events yet to be disclosed.

In many respects, Silva's protagonist falls into a specific sub-type of detective fiction: what Todorov refers to as 'the story of the vulnerable detective'²⁰ developed by Hammett and Chandler. In this particular typology, the investigator loses his immunity, gets physically and/or mentally harmed, repeatedly risks his life and integrates himself physically into the story's environment. This is a particularly challenging technique for an author to deploy successfully though because the accuracy of the narration is now being manipulated through the application of personal values and beliefs. The adoption of the technique has in effect removed the character's observational independence and introduced an element of the author's own political beliefs into the text.

The remaining genre influencing Silva is the spy novel. This is perhaps the most influential in any critical study of the author's works simply because, in placing his protagonist at the centre of international intrigue, he is positioning his narrative within a political and social context. 'And spy fiction, more than any other kind of fiction, reflects the political and social conditions of the time.'²¹ Spy fiction has also been fundamentally shaped and developed through similar 'real-life' experiences to Allon's own and continues to evolve as a distinct literary genre because it reflects on the social attitudes towards a changing enemy and on any efforts to exploit contemporary paranoia. In

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.231.

²¹ Aly Monroe, *Sleuths, Spies and Sorcerers: Andrew Marr's Paperback Heroes*, BBC4, 02 Nov 2016.

1906, for example, Le Queux's fictional account of a German invasion constructed a compelling atmosphere of fear that some have suggested 'led directly'²² to the early formation of a formal, counter-espionage structure in the UK. And, although it is unlikely that a similar type of scaremongering could generate the mania to match that of Le Queux's, what the public is encouraged to be fearful about today is radically different to what Le Queux encouraged his readers to be fearful about in the early 20th Century. So, new climates of (real and fictitious) fear may need new types of heroes to defend us against but it seems that the same existential demons are still with us more than a century later (and are still readily available for the contemporary novelist to exploit).²³

More than any other literary genre, spy fiction must absorb and reflect political, economic and societal changes to remain relevant. It must also, in spite of the adoption of highly sophisticated surveillance systems that demote the value of *humint*, continue to focus on the inner conflicts of the individual spy to encourage its readers to remain faithful to the founding concept of the fiction: the human condition. Key to this is the narrative description of complex human relationships and a clear definition of the supposed enemy.²⁴ Such an analysis can also be extended to include a consideration of self and enemy and Silva frequently uses such a technique

²² Stella Rimington *Sleuths, Spies and Sorcerers: Andrew Marr's Paperback Heroes*, BBC4, 02 Nov 2016.

²³ These new climates of fear tend to ignore the fact that there is no such thing as a safe life – although the lives of the citizens of a modern-day western society are remarkably secure by historical, global and absolute standards.

²⁴ Espionage fiction tends to use the personal-confrontation scenario as a finale, a denouement far more compelling than an analysis of two conflicting ideologies.

(the compare-and-contrast technique) to examine the characteristics shared by the combatants.

In spite of its rapid development, and the literary repute of some of its practitioners²⁵, espionage fiction 'remains outside of an accepted definition of a literary genre.'²⁶ It also continues to 'languish under a cloud of academic suspicion'²⁷ and remains something of a marginalised form because of its 'supposedly formulaic plot structure and thematic values.'²⁸ Some critics however, argue that the dynamics of the narrative techniques are far more sophisticated and so this thesis, in reviewing a large part of Silva's fictional output, has also considered where Silva should be positioned within those two parameters.

The various literary forms used by Silva - the detective story, the thriller, the suspense and the espionage novel - co-exist throughout the series and tend to typify the key attribute of each of the genres, i.e. the duality of the crime and the investigation (the detective novel), the coinciding of the narrative with the action (the thriller), the application of the past to affect the action of the present (the suspense novel) and the reflection of political and social conditions (the espionage novel).

A final complication of any analysis of the Allon series is that some elements of Silva's work suggest that he could also be viewed as a political writer - in as much as that so many contemporary world events are used as a backdrop

²⁵ Conrad, Kipling, Greene and Maugham for example.

²⁶ Robert L Snyder, *The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction*, p. 1.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

to his plotlines. The political descriptor could also be used to interpret his literary impression of the complex and ethically hazardous environments in which many real-life participants, unlike his own protagonist, pursue causes that are in many respects unwinnable.

Silva's political sub-text, coupled with his efforts to confuse appearance with reality, suggested that this analysis should also employ a literary theory which questions the representation of reality and allows a more objective assessment of the moral choices presented. Silva may, for example, wish to persuade the reader that the issues raised can be defined into a simple battle between a 'good guy' and a 'bad guy' but his trick, as a writer, is in also convincing the reader that the circumstances in which the 'good guy' finds himself dictate that he *has to* avoid complying with normal moral standards. Placing his protagonist into the brutal and dangerous environment of counter-terrorism furthermore, promotes his literary interpretation of a 'good guy' to a heroic standard and rewards the character with the status such a literary moniker accords, i.e. idealism, patriotism, bravery and an uncanny ability to triumph regardless of the threat.²⁹

The author's use of an enigmatic protagonist having to adapt to fast-changing political developments (in which ideology and personal beliefs are constantly challenged) also necessitates the use of a theory which links ideology with composition. Such a theory requires the body of work to be considered alongside Silva's own social and political influences and to reflect on the author's ideological function through his cultural background and his

²⁹ Such exemplary human characteristics also enhance the protagonist's authority to act as a reliable narrator.

political ideology. Inevitably, Silva's own social situation will be reflected to a great extent in his writing. His texts will also be driven by the effects of market-led demand and the creative pressures of composition. But then 'he [the author] cannot do exactly as he would have wished because of the pressures and limits of the social relationship on which he, as a producer, depends.'³⁰

Criticism of any literary shortcomings in Silva's work - and therefore attempts to define it as too formulaic, too implausible or too limited in appeal – have also been considered alongside some key points from recent Middle-Eastern history. Adopting such a process has highlighted the various cultural, social and political implications of the fiction and, again, allowed it to be placed into some form of historical context. The popularity of the series itself has also allowed it to be considered as an active component of cultural history and as a responsive measure of a defined political ethos.

This thesis, like the Allon series, focuses on a relatively recent time period (from 1972 to the present day) but encompasses a distinct shift in the perception of morality in the war against terrorism. The journalist, Jeremy Scahill, divides this period into two parts, pre-9/11 and post-9/11, where the 'post 9/11 moment allowed Rumsfeld, Cheney and their cohort to realize the ambitions they had long held for an all-powerful executive branch, with the virtually unlimited right to wage wars across all borders, justified in their minds by a global national security threat.'³¹ There is little doubt that international relationships changed dramatically after 9/11 and that complex

³⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p.193.

³¹ Jeremy Scahill, *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield* (London, Serpents Tail, 2013) p. 14.

sets of strategic alliances are still being forged today. Greater constraints on civil liberties are also being accepted that, prior to 9/11, were unlikely to have even been considered. The governments of countries with close commercial and strategic ties with the US (including Israel and the UK) have also elected to make significant political and sovereign concessions simply to enable them to take an active part in the US-directed 'war on terror'. These evolving relationships are represented in Silva's texts through his references to: (i) an increasing reliance on US intelligence resources, (ii) the development of closer Israeli, US and UK working relationships, (iii) the Israeli's shift from its previous 'Blue-and-White' (i.e. in-house) operational philosophy towards one directed by the US and, (iv) Allon's increasing involvement in western-centric security issues.

The new social order of changing cultural shifts, political instability and apparently omnipresent threats, has propagated a greater sense of uncertainty within the populace and it is this phenomenon that writers like Silva - who blend fact and fiction so seamlessly - can exploit. A growing disillusionment with the established political elite, and the development of popular nationalism, has also indicated that there may be some fragility in the existing social order and that the efforts of many first-world governments to counter these new types of threats are failing. Any heroic, literary figure designed to thwart the perils of real and imaginary life (and who can also outline, in simple terms, the root cause of those threats and the potential damage to the society should those threats come to fruition) can therefore

rely on a large base of popular and sympathetic support.³² Viewed within this apparently unstable, uncertain and fearful environment it could then be argued that the fantastical threats contained in Silva's literature may not be as far-fetched as they may first appear but are instead just challenging the accepted beliefs of what *will* happen as opposed to what is *likely* to happen. The growing dominance of the implausible may also indicate that writers like Silva are benefitting from the fact that, after the events of 9/11, no fictional attack - no matter how extreme - seems quite so unimaginable now.

When critiquing spy fiction some reference needs to be made to the fact that espionage is by its very nature dishonest, unrewarding, dangerous and likely to lead at some point to the participant's exposure. The normal efforts to obtain secret information are also of little interest to a reader seeking adventure, thrills and escapism. And, although some spy novelists have painted a bleaker, perhaps more realistic picture of the spying environment³³, there is also a limit on how much of the 'James Bond' elements of spy fantasy (i.e. exotic locations, caricatured villains and sexual conquests) can populate a book before the reader loses faith in the arc of the plot or the author's political positioning. This is a particularly difficult challenge for a popular writer wishing to both entertain and to persuade towards a preferred ideology. It is further complicated if the author is also hoping to provide some clear distinctions between heroes and villains in a genre which has lost its previously simplistic concept of 'us and them'. It is therefore of no coincidence that Silva's fiction has had to adopt many of the techniques used

³² Propaganda is, after all, most effective when it targets deep-seated anxieties

³³ Le Carre and Deighton novels, for example, in which betrayal, treachery and inter-departmental intrigue figure largely.

by the intelligence services to retain the confidence of their publics (or the credibility of his narratives) and to ensure their own survival (or the literary life of his protagonist). These persuasive messages moreover ‘thrive best in times of international tension’³⁴: (i) success and failure are indistinguishable if clandestine counter-measures are used to nullify the threat, (ii) a different perspective is used to analyse the information presented, and (iii) too few resources are available (including the more draconian powers employed by Allon) to thwart all of the threats. In a similar manner, Silva can also exploit the tendency of western governments to exaggerate the scale of the supposed threats (to support adopting aggressive counter-measures and/or increasing resources) and can be confident that his fiction may, at some point in the future, be considered as accurately predictive (because terrorist attacks remain inevitable whenever political and economic victims remain victims and can see no other recourse for their plight).³⁵

The activities of the protagonist in countering the presented threats are carried out for his own self-interest, the safety of others on the ‘same-side’ and on behalf of US-facing governments. They are also enacted whenever he himself deems them necessary. In this regard, the protagonist embodies much of the more militaristic intentions of his nation state and he has thus positioned himself as a sort of visible and a clandestine instrument of its

³⁴ Phillip Knightley, *The Second Oldest Profession: The Spy as Bureaucrat, Patriot, Fantasist and Whore* (New York, Norton & Co, 1987) p.5.

³⁵ Daniel Silva writes in the Foreword to *The Black Widow*: ‘I commenced work on this novel before the Islamic terrorist group known as ISIS carried out a wave of shootings and bombings in Paris and Brussels that left more than 160 people dead. After briefly considering setting aside the typescript, I chose to complete it as originally conceived, as though the tragic events had not yet occurred in the imaginary worlds where my characters live and work. The similarities between the real and fictitious attacks, including the links to the Brussels district of Molenbeek, are entirely coincidental. I take no pride in my prescience.’ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow* (London, Harper Collins, 2016).

wider security ambitions. Ironically though, in acting to preserve these objectives, he is also undermining the laws of his own country, the countries in which he operates and those of the countries he is attempting to protect. The external power of the state's defensive agencies may therefore have been conferred upon him but the authority under which he acts has, it could be argued, convinced the author that this power (which by its very nature is dark and corrupting) has gained undue influence in the identity and the actions of the protagonist himself.

In a series of 18 novels, the retributive figure of Gabriel Allon is transformed from the 'broken and bitter man'³⁶ of the earlier books into the 'restored'³⁷ character of the most recent. Silva has nevertheless, in spite of the age and notoriety of his protagonist, retained his character's retributive function and aligned him with 'the great traditions of the [Mossad's] past.'³⁸ Perhaps an inherent flaw in Silva's counter-factual intentions though is that, on the one hand, the statement is trying to place the past in a seemingly progressive light but, on the other, it is also forging a link between his fictional service's impressive past and its rather chequered, real-life history. In positioning his protagonist firmly in the centre of the history of Israel's intelligence services, Silva is also choosing to place his fiction within another definable historical and political context. The text and the methodology may have proved useful in conveying the political intention but, in adopting such an approach, the

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 512.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 509.

author is now also required to place greater emphasis on the key comparative function of politically-focused fiction.³⁹

Building on the established single-perspective form of espionage fiction developed and popularised by Ian Fleming, Silva's novels consider Israel's continuing struggle for survival through his protagonist's own point of view. This perspective shifts during the course of the novels and reflects not only Silva's earlier intentions to confine his protagonist to a single novel but also to the challenges of maintaining originality in a long-running series of books. The political messages contained in the texts (the maintenance of a Jewish homeland and combating anti-Semitism) have, nonetheless, remained largely intact throughout the series but the commercial demands of publishing annually have also necessitated that the author has had to extend his fictive world from European-based 1970s terrorism to the 21st century's global war on terror. Revolving through these diverse, geo-political timelines are narratives influenced to a great extent by the ever-changing nuances of US and Israeli politics, Israel's sense of isolation (geographically and politically), its growing reliance on fickle allies and, most importantly, the author's own creative and political tensions in his engagement with plot.

The Israel of Silva's novels is still an embattled state, more than 60 years after its creation, and one whose very survival still depends on the 'subversion, lying and killing'⁴⁰ of its founding years. According to Silva Israel's vulnerabilities are also now much in evidence across the European continent and will only be countered if the Europeans adopt the same hard-

³⁹ Analysis of the inherent conflict between human values, morality and pragmatic action.

⁴⁰ Gordon Thomas, *Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad*, p. 359.

line methodologies used by his fictional protagonist and his historical counterparts. His novels may therefore appear to be simplistic - and occasionally formulaic - but they also contain complex messages encouraging wider support for a hard-line response to both the real-life and the imaginary scenarios that he presents.⁴¹

Silva's Jewish-American background is evident throughout the Allon texts but his cultural heritage appears to exert its greatest influence whenever the narratives refer to threats made directly against Jewish and US interests. As such, the frequent shifts in the protagonist's operational remit can be seen to reflect both the author's own assessment of a rapidly-changing geo-political environment and the demands placed on him (through publishing annually) to detail his protagonist's natural development (i.e. ageing, career progression and familial relationships). The vocational shifts also reflect many of the social and political restrictions imposed on Silva, as an author, in trying to keep his protagonist allied with real-time events.⁴²

A great deal of Gabriel Allon's popularity is simply because he always triumphs over the presented threats. But what sets him apart from other, more conventional, heroic figures is his evident self-doubt. This doubt, to a great extent, focuses on the status, identity and policies of his homeland and its expression is again used by the author to communicate his two culturally-

⁴¹ The geo-political themes also serve as a platform for Silva to air his views towards Israeli nationhood, the state's control of post-1967 borders, the plight of Jews living abroad and the operational effectiveness of Israel's armed forces and intelligence services.

⁴² It is also a useful device to convince the readership that terrorism is an increasingly problematic issue for the international community and that countering it can only be managed through a cohesive, multi-national strategy directed by the US.

based concerns: 'nationality and religion.'⁴³ To Silva there is 'far too much opposition to Israel in the world for an Israeli character ever to be successful in the long term.'⁴⁴ The comment helps to explain the protagonist's literary development from a single-purpose character to a universal-figure⁴⁵ and also indicates how the author challenges some of the more common representations of a literary hero in a morally ambiguous setting – or at least in the environments in which the lines between right and wrong are blurred.

The 18-book series represents a perspective of a number of present-day, geo-political issues that extend far beyond the apparently overt themes of the novels: securing the safety of a single state, a religious people and a US-dominated, western society. The series furthermore, provides the author with the opportunity to extend his views towards the wider, political elements that maintain such an influence over these themes. It is also becoming increasingly influential in attempting to convince populist readers as to how some of these concerns should be acted upon.

Unfortunately, the levels of influence on popular thought cannot be determined accurately (irrespective of the number of books sold) but in exploring Silva's fiction through a critical framework of literary theory, national identities and current cultural influences, the thesis has tried to locate the series within its correct social and cultural context. It has also considered the novels against a range of historical (i.e. non-fiction) sources

⁴³ Daniel Silva <<http://danielsilvabooks.com/books/the-rembrandt-affair/behind-the-series>> [accessed Nov 2016].

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Assuming a more international status and operating on behalf of other governments.

and highlighted any inconsistencies or misrepresentations that they may contain.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

'I deal with the real world, not the world as I would like it to be.'⁴⁶

This thesis has used textual analysis as its primary methodology and applied different critical theories to determine the concepts (or the techniques) required to interrogate specific aspects of text. Text, in this regard, refers to the generally accepted description of text ('a written or printed work' and 'a written work chosen as a subject of study'⁴⁷). The analysis has also considered other forms of readable text, most notably film, and used non-fiction sources to provide historical context to the fictional narratives.

Different literary theories ask different questions (and apportion different emphases) about the author, the text and the reader but most, by necessity, will also involve the use of concepts from other theories to determine their theoretical viewpoint. Focussing attention on the context, as this thesis has done, has allowed the engagement with the text to focus greater attention on the social and historical environment in which the narrative is placed. And, in having considered the text through aspects of Marxist literary criticism - which defines literature as a material product with economic and political significance - the author, the readers and the text itself have all been viewed within a wider sociological perspective. The process has, furthermore, supported efforts to de-code the text and to recognise where the author has attempted to direct the reader towards interpreting the messages in a

⁴⁶ Daniel Silva, *A Death in Vienna* (London, Penguin, 2005), p. 267.

⁴⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 1491.

particular way. It is also indicative of how closely the decoder's knowledge accords with the encoder's text and can help to illustrate the reader's knowledge of the codes used (i.e. language, context, culture and history).

There is no single, clearly-defined reader to whom the author can direct every discourse but the author can attempt to direct the narrative towards a 'virtual reader'⁴⁸ (the type of reader held in mind when drafting the narrative) and an 'ideal reader'⁴⁹ (the one who understands the writer's every nuance). Signals are therefore given in the narrative that are supportive of the conscious thought of these readers and which offer a facility to respond to their questions, philosophies and criticisms via their own interpretation of the text. In Silva's literature, some of these signals are given by the protagonist himself who, in his role as a reluctant and cynical participant, provides an analysis of the thought processes that drive his participation. (These explanatory thoughts also serve to demonstrate the author's own moral and political positioning.)

Gestalt psychology suggests that the human mind discerns bits of information 'as configurations of elements, themes, or meaningful, organised wholes.'⁵⁰ Individual items therefore look different within different concepts and, even within a single field of vision (i.e. a reader or a protagonist's viewpoint) they can only be viewed within an active response mechanism. The act of perception is influenced by a number of cultural, historical and societal factors that determine how the actual meaning of the text is

⁴⁸ Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory* (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 50.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 46.

interpreted. In the act of reading (however simple or complex the text) the reader is influenced by an unconscious bias that demands a greater reliance on self-reflexivity to unravel its true, objective meaning. The addressee must therefore be actively involved in the process of interpretation and be able to make sense of the signs (or to interpret the codes) used by the author. This process of interpretivism needs an understanding of the world in which the text is based (social knowledge) and the medium and genre (textual knowledge) through which it is being transmitted. The complex relationships between the two are thus confined within the limitations of the reader's own cultural capital. In theoretical terms, this simply means that the interpretative process depends on the decoder's ability to determine the signals that trigger the conscious thought.

Minority groups frequently include cultural clues in text which are only visible to those in-the-know. So Silva, as a convert to the Jewish religion, can use these clues - and the long tradition of Jewish storytelling - to support the spiritual direction of his narratives. This tradition of storytelling was established in eastern Europe long before Jewish immigrants arrived in America and has since absorbed the collective expression of 'Yiddishkeit, a culture ultimately threatened by the devastation of the Holocaust.'⁵¹ The culture 'takes root in the dramatic articulation of a collective and unique experience and flourishes in the insistent expression of a narrative voice.'⁵² The resultant voice adopts elements of the troubled, but enduring, Jewish history and applies it within a framework that suggests a better future

⁵¹ Victoria Aarons, 'American Jewish Fiction' in *American Fiction after 1945*, ed. by John N Duvall (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 129.

⁵² *ibid.*

(irrespective of modern-day Jewish writers not being able to draw upon direct experiences of the Holocaust themselves but who can still embrace suffering as a trope).

For those authors, like Silva, who didn't experience the Holocaust directly but who feel compelled to raise it within their imaginary works⁵³, 'memory becomes the master trope, the elusive and cryptically coded narrative figure in their work.'⁵⁴ Such narratives try to articulate the horrors of the past and to reveal 'the desire not only to communicate the conditions under which Holocaust victims suffered, but also to suggest the ways in which the memory of the Holocaust has come to shape their own identities.'⁵⁵ Gabriel Allon's initial call-to-arms, for example, is instigated through the Auschwitz experience of his parents ('their scars were his'⁵⁶) and, more directly, by the influence their experiences had on his upbringing. His mother's emotional traumas moreover serve to form, and inform, the life of her child ('he learned to be quiet around her, lest he awaken the demons'⁵⁷) and are to become indelibly definitive of his adult character: 'He became a natural keeper of secrets, a perfect spy.'⁵⁸

Since the 1980's, there has been a profusion of Jewish writers for whom the Jewish experience forms 'the very marrow of their being'⁵⁹ and for whom the

⁵³ Silva refers to his first trilogy (*The English Assassin*, *The Confessor* and *A Death in Vienna*) as the 'unfinished business of the Holocaust.'

⁵⁴ Victoria Aarons, 'American Jewish Fiction' in *American Fiction after 1945*, ed. by John N Duvall, p. 138.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵⁶ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin* (London, Penguin, 2005), p.48.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Victoria Aarons, 'American Jewish Fiction' in *American Fiction after 1945*, ed. by John N Duvall, p. 130.

injustices of history are not to be ignored. And, although more populist in nature than typical Jewish writers, Silva draws upon the same literary models as 'foundations on which to secure identity, if not place.'⁶⁰ What his narratives also share with the work of other contemporary American Jewish authors is a tendency to present a literary hybrid: one-part American perspective, one-part trauma/suffering and one-part Jewish history and culture. All three are intrinsic to the other and all three make reference to, and are influenced by, the transitory nature of American political and cultural thought. Silva's own hybrid narratives are also representative of the shift in the literature of contemporary American Jews 'from community to the isolated individual, from a communal sense of shared identity and past - if only an imagined one - to a disconcerting sense of isolation and fragmentation.'⁶¹ And, notwithstanding his protagonist's vocational need to assume multiple identities, he also shares their tendency towards anonymity, emotional disconnection and physical exile.⁶²

The symbolically isolated figure presented by Silva draws upon the Yiddish concept of *menschlikeit*, in which a *mensch* is a 'man of heart and ethical responsibility [who] pursues ideals.'⁶³ The man however, is not a divinity⁶⁴ but one who 'must fulfil his obligations in the world as it is though sometimes striving to better it.'⁶⁵ By investing in this concept, Silva's protagonist is thus permitted to face danger in the pursuit of justice, to reach conclusions

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶² Silva's Allon novels follow a familiar pattern: the protagonist is drawn out of semi-retirement or seclusion (usually by an act of violence) to find himself at the centre of an international adventure.

⁶³ Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940* (Harlow, Longmans, 1992), p. 74.

⁶⁴ Nor an archangel however symbolic the author's intention.

⁶⁵ Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940*, p. 74.

missed by less well-informed men and to triumph against seemingly insurmountable odds (albeit with the pragmatic mind-set of a realist). The *schlemiehl* concept, it should be noted, differs between the European Yiddish and the Jewish American versions: the European *schlemiehl* is often used to dramatize the persistence of faith in adverse conditions, whereas the US (Silva) version 'is used as a cultural reaction to the prevailing Anglo-Saxon model of restraint in action, thought and speech'⁶⁶ and which declares the character's humanity through suffering. Or, in Silva's terms, as an emotionally-cold, 'heretic.'⁶⁷

The shift from the community-focussed narrative to the isolationist 'is revealed largely through the response to a transient culture for which there is no clear ethical measure, no narrative of Jewish identity.'⁶⁸ The character must therefore suffer alone. Silva's killing of Allon's son (in the Prologue of the first book in the series) and the continuing shadow of the *Shoah* are arguably particularly relevant examples of a trend amongst US Jewish writers to respond to 'the compromises of the successfully assimilated American Jew'⁶⁹ through developing characters who are, in many ways, lost. But it could also be argued that Silva's hero-based fiction is, in fact, just drawing upon the image of the Jewish figure as the universal man and that his protagonist is merely symbolic of the tragic experiences of man

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 97.

⁶⁸ Victoria Aarons, 'American Jewish Fiction' in *American Fiction after 1945*, ed. by John N Duvall, p. 136.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.129.

(transcending race and culture) and the 'embrace of suffering'⁷⁰ that figures so largely in Jewish American fiction.

Fredric Jameson explores the same questions about the effects of social and cultural change, albeit within the transient status of capitalism, and 'sees a profound connection between the electronic and nuclear-powered technology of the multinational global economy and the depthless, fragmented and randomly heterogeneous images of postmodernist culture.'⁷¹ The resultant culture has, Jameson believes, blurred the lines between high culture and mass culture, deprived the artists of an individual style and left them wholly reliant on mimicry. (The storyline of *The Kill Artist*, for example, replicates the same storylines used by John Le Carre in *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983) and Howard Kaplan in *Bullets of Palestine* (1987)).⁷² It could therefore be argued that Silva's popular texts, which follow accepted thematic and formulaic principles, could just be replicas, reinterpretations or revisions of a particular commercially-successful style which accommodates 'the individual's loss of conscious control in modern society.'⁷³ This simple style avoids the necessity of objective reasoning to interpret its meanings and tends to promote a simplistic view of a hierarchical global structure which defines the social groupings as either us or them.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940*, p. 95.

⁷¹ Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 50.

⁷² The technique used by Le Carre's fictional Israeli to recruit the female agent - challenging and exposing her fictionalised past - is later replicated by Silva in *House of Spies*. *Bullets of Palestine* and *The Little Drummer Girl* are also notable because they describe a radically different political and racial perspective of the same plotline.

⁷³ Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 84.

⁷⁴ The simplicity of a plot and a straightforward narrative also deter the reader from examining the other side of the story too deeply.

One of the basic tenets of Marxist criticism is that the material interests of the dominant social class determine how people experience human existence individually and collectively. As such, a writer can only present an accurate impression of life if 'all the contradictions and tensions of social existence are realised as a formal whole.'⁷⁵ A good writer should be able to direct the reader towards a more accurate insight of reality and a more meaningful reflection of life. Close readers of even the best writers however, must also recognise that the work itself is just 'a special form of reflecting reality'⁷⁶ and that the version presented reflects (to an unknown degree) the writer's own cultural and political values. Silva's own efforts to reflect reality (including the re-telling of real-life events, changing the character's identities and shifting the perspectives) should nevertheless provoke his readers into questioning the representations offered and to ask questions about the moral choices the author chooses to present. But he also applies subtle persuasion techniques in the text which direct the normal response processes by, for example, trying to convince the reader that the hugely complex issues of Middle-Eastern terrorism can be simplified into a battle between good and evil. The key to the success of this literary trick is in also managing to convince the reader that the circumstances in which the 'good guy' finds himself actually prevent him from complying with accepted moral standards. The reader is therefore encouraged to fall into a state of passive acceptance of a complex environment but is presented with a protagonist who is both unfamiliar (the hero) and easily recognisable (the flawed man) - and also with one who can

⁷⁵ Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 77.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 76.

sustain a sense of reality. To complete the trick, the author must then place the problematic protagonist in such life-threatening situations that the defined characteristics of good and evil are sufficiently clear to ensure an empathic reaction to the outcome.

The deployment of an enigmatic protagonist having to adapt to fast-changing political developments - in which ideology and personal beliefs are constantly challenged – also demands that the reader has a sound (and supportive) knowledge of the philosophies which link the protagonist's ideology with the composition itself. This will require the reader to have some awareness of Silva's own social and political influences and an understanding of the author's ideological function. It will also require the reader to consider Silva's cultural background within an environment populated with extremist views.

The debates that Silva uses to demonstrate the opposing arguments however, are always presented as polar opposites: a well-researched supporting argument for 'us' and a sense of pessimistic inevitability for 'them'. And this tendency to avoid expressing the views of the 'other side' (as he is inclined to do) makes the narratives far less balanced, diminishes the shock value of the threat and avoids attributing blame onto any recognisable human agency. The technique is also symptomatic of the 'one-dimensional quality' that permeates much of what the critics refer to as the modern-day culture of the masses – a culture that discourages active engagement and avoids any disturbance to existing social systems.

A sequence of novels that takes a cast of characters through real-time years, or as the French refer to it, a *roman fleuve*, normally includes a protagonist

who grows old in real time and one who lives in the same times, and grows old at the same rate, as the readers. This method of recording the natural ageing process has become a popular literary technique and can be used with great effect to reflect on changing political and social conditions. In permitting the reader to witness the development of the characters, and to express an interest in what will happen to them next, the reader has, in effect, created a special companion (albeit an imaginary one) who will live alongside them and who will share their own trials and tribulations. In the past, it was common for such serialised characters to remain the same age and, although references to changing times were made, the characters themselves remained fixed in an ageless physical and mental form. Some of the great American novelists of the late 20th Century however, removed the 'agelessness' technique to allow them to pursue their maturing characters through history and to make comment, as author and literary creation, on key socio-economic events.⁷⁷ Silva's development of a flawed protagonist across an 18-book series mirrors this technique but, in allying his protagonist to the 1972 Olympic Games, and drafting his first book of the series in 2000, his lead character has aged at an even faster rate than his readers. For Silva, this means that Gabriel Allon is consigned to a fixed time period and is forced, if only as recognition of his increasing frailty, to assume a more sedentary and more reflective role.

To underpin the analysis of the texts via materialist criticism, and to ensure that further key concepts have been explored, the thesis has also deployed

⁷⁷ John Updike's *Rabbit* series and Philip Roth's *Zuckerman* novels for example.

elements of 'colonial discourse'⁷⁸, or postcolonial criticism, in its methodology. Post-colonial criticism considers the implications of materialist criticism within a power-relations context (i.e. 'first-world' and 'third-world'). At the centre of this perspective is the belief that the 'western traditions of thought and literature, including versions of postmodernism, are guilty of repressive ethnocentrism.'⁷⁹ The western model, it argues, dominates global culture and marginalises (or ignores) non-western traditions and forms of cultural life. Equally significant, in relation to the concept of representation, is the fact that popular western-based authors can exploit the advantages of their privileged status (i.e. nationality, wealth, education and political influence) whereas the voices of the third-world liberation movements tend to be aired through the representatives of a political movement, i.e. the PLO. These organisations are often tainted, within the western understanding at least, with violence. But the 'Israeli and the Palestinian 'sides' – for want of a better term – have both engaged, in acts of terrorism'⁸⁰ in a dispute that, in simple terms, revolves around 'an affirmation and a denial.'⁸¹ From an Israeli perspective this demands an interpretation of history that 'confirms the validity of the Zionist claims to Palestine'⁸² and which simultaneously 'denigrates'⁸³ the Palestinian argument. To Ahluwalia the Palestinian paradox is that the group of people who had been subjected to perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century have 'come to occupy the

⁷⁸ Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 188.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Pal Ahluwalia, 'Towards (Re)Conciliation' in *Relocating Postcolonialism* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 189.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

mantle of power and reproduced the very practices of colonialism that sought to marginalize and dispossess the Palestinian people.⁸⁴ In a vivid demonstration of the uncanny, the victims have become the perpetrators⁸⁵ and have positioned themselves to 'block the narratives of the Palestinian people.'⁸⁶

The Palestinian narrative is further hindered by the Israeli public's attitude towards acts of violence. Recent history suggests that violent attacks against Israel are likely to produce two possible outcomes: the first, that political support tends to shift towards the more hawkish leaders and the second, that it 'provokes an overreaction by the Israelis that, in turn, generates support for the terrorists' cause.'⁸⁷ Either outcome will derail any movement towards peace. The Harvard academic, Alan Dershowitz, cites the escalation of suicide bombings following Arafat's rejection of the Barak-Clinton proposal⁸⁸, and the subsequent international condemnation of Israel's reaction to these bombings, as particularly representative of this causal effect. Silva, moreover, recognising the apparent interdependence of each of the factors (i.e. violence + retaliation = political shifts + failing peace talks) uses the concept to support the retributory philosophy of his literature (i.e. retribution = spiritual justice): 'There's the justice of civilized men, the kind of justice that is

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸⁵ 'The Jews are the world's new Nazis ... In the West Bank and Gaza, they operate like the Gestapo and the SS.' (voiced by the Palestinian character, Rashid Hussein), Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 173.

⁸⁶ Pal Ahluwalia, 'Towards (Re)Conciliation' in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, p. 189.

⁸⁷ Alan M Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (New York, Wiley, 2004), p.179.

⁸⁸ Camp David 2000 and Taba 2001.

dispensed in courtrooms by men in robes, and then there is the justice of the Prophets. *God's justice.*⁸⁹

Dershowitz's regard for the causal relationship goes even further. He suggests that 'the history of Palestinian terrorism clearly shows that terrorism increases whenever Israel offers peace or is involved in an election in which a dovish candidate is running.'⁹⁰ This, he believes, is why the sort of aggressive retaliation deployed by Israel (including the type of assassinations carried out by Gabriel Allon) discourages further violence. Any argument that the cycle of violence can be reduced simply from one side choosing not to respond to violence from the other is, in his opinion, choosing to disregard the historic precedents: 'when Israel chose not to respond to Palestinian terrorism, more terrorism followed, and when Israel took appropriate military steps, the number and severity of terrorist attacks were reduced.'⁹¹

Objective criticism of the entrenched political views and extremist arguments is constrained by powerful Western assumptions that attempt to homogenise world history from a privileged view. Said appeals instead for a more 'critical, decentred consciousness'⁹² to allow the critic to make more objective comment on the relationship between the text and the reader and to do so without the constraints of a western-centric perspective. He also questions the validity of any post-structuralist thought that discounts the non-textual and challenges the question of context towards a past text. The critic can, for

⁸⁹ Daniel Silva, *A Death in Vienna*, (London, Penguin, 2005), p. 290.

⁹⁰ Alan M Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*, p. 178.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 179.

⁹² Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, p. 191.

example, comment on the meaning of an historic text but can only do so through the perspective of the present. And there is much to suggest that the writing of the Palestinian position – and its interpretation of the past and the present - has been dominated in recent times by writers from Israel and the US. 'Literature itself can, after all, be read as a way of understanding the past or as a way of reinterpreting the present.'⁹³

Wolfgang Iser suggests that all literary texts contain 'blanks'⁹⁴ which only the reader can complete and that 'the reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning.'⁹⁵ The consequent difficulty of any critical theory is in establishing whether or not the text itself 'triggers the reader's act of interpretation, or whether the reader's own interpretative strategies impose solutions on the problems thrown up by the text.'⁹⁶ In short, do Silva's texts invite the reader to collaborate in the production of the meaning or have the underlying ideological influences, and the formulaic construct, shaped the reader's subjectivity?

Textual analysis has been used to direct the methodology of this enquiry. Elements of literary theory have also been used to identify and interpret some of the viewpoints offered via the authors, the texts and the readings. The thesis has nevertheless recognised, and made efforts to minimise, two potential drawbacks to this approach: (i) that each reader will bring a unique

⁹³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 197.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

perspective to the decoding process of reading, and (ii) that the process of criticism itself represents an element of political or ideological positioning.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MAKING OF A HERO

‘It’s what we do. It’s who we are. It’s the only way we are going to survive in this land. It is our punishment for having survived.’⁹⁷

In a 2016 interview with the *New York Times* Daniel Silva was asked to name his favourite fictional hero. He replied that it was Gabriel Allon, ‘a rather strait-laced character who has no real personality flaws, other than the fact that he’s a bit of a loner and has killed a good many people, most of whom deserved to die.’⁹⁸ This assessment of his own creation – particularly his interpretation of the constituent parts of heroism – appears to undermine his own claims towards his protagonist’s retributory function and invites analysis of the author’s fictional interpretation of Allon’s killings and the secondary source material of the same events (including the supposed rationale behind the author’s selection of these events). Silva’s overt support for government-sanctioned assassination has also necessitated that some comment be made on the intention behind the policy and the intended benefits from adopting such a strategy.⁹⁹ Finally, in acknowledging the issues of the wider morality of state-sanctioned assassination, this thesis has also considered whether there is any validity in the accusations of human

⁹⁷ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, (London, Harper Collins, 2016) p.155.

⁹⁸ www.nytimes.com/2016/09/04/books/review/daniel-silva-by-the-book [accessed Nov 2016]

⁹⁹ It should be noted that this thesis avoids making comment on three basic assumptions: (i) that Israel has a right to exist (albeit with the recognition that this position is polarised by extremist argument), (ii) that Israel has a right and a duty to protect its citizens from terrorism, and (iii) that Israel has a right to defend its borders from hostile enemies. The author also recognises that Israel is a country which has faced, and is continuing to face, incomparable challenges to its existence and that the violence perpetrated against the state (in the past and in the present) has made the Israeli public and the Jewish people particularly sensitive towards terrorist attacks.

rights organisations, like B'Tselem, who suggest that such policies 'violate both Israeli and international law and constitute extra-judicial executions.'¹⁰⁰

The literary figure Gabriel Allon was created as a symbolically retributive figure (an avenging 'angel of death'¹⁰¹) and purposefully designed to combat threats against the state of Israel and worldwide Jewry. The character was intended to appear in one book only, *The Kill Artist* (2000), the story of a hard-line Palestinian terrorist attempting to undermine the peace process via several high-profile attacks across Europe and North America. The Israeli intelligence officer given the task of stopping him was Gabriel Allon, a former assassin from OWG: 'It was not about justice, Shamron had said. It was about taking an eye for an eye. It was about revenge, pure and simple.'¹⁰²

The significance of OWG in the creation and development of Silva's protagonist has demanded that this thesis also examines the circumstances leading up to the Olympic massacre, the operational remit of the assassination team(s) deployed to respond to the attacks, and Gabriel Allon's imaginary role within OWG itself.

The real-life lead officer of the OWG team had already featured in George Jonas' best-selling account of the mission published 17 years before Silva introduced his own version in 2000. Jonas' book relies on information given to him by a single source - a source who would become known as Avner to readers, television viewers and filmgoers around the world. It is worth noting however, that much of the information contained in Jonas' book could not be

¹⁰⁰ www.btselem.org/press_releases/20010123 [accessed Jan 2017].

¹⁰¹ Daniel Silva, *The Secret Servant*, (London, Penguin, 2008), p. 348.

¹⁰² Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin* (London, Penguin, 2005), pp, 47-48.

verified to the investigative journalist's normal standards and much of the dialogue used had to be reconstructed from Avner's 'personal recollections'¹⁰³ and was therefore susceptible to the frail or self-serving memory of the human source.¹⁰⁴ The task of investigating a covert operation from open source material is also, by its very nature, a challenging one – and made even more so when investigating an operation conducted at arm's length by a government notoriously reluctant to disclose such information.¹⁰⁵ This paper can, nevertheless, make informed assumptions about the validity of the open-source material because it is only concerned with how the information has been selected, interpreted and adapted by the author. The material is, in short, of comparative rather than informative value.

THE RETALIATORY CONCEPT

The concept of retaliation is not a one new to Israel. Reprisal raids had been a fundamental part of the Jewish defence strategy since the 1930s when the British Officer Orde Wingate helped to develop and direct the Jewish Night Squads. In the 1960s (Gabriel Allon's teenage years) 'the first fumbling efforts of the Fatah guerrilla stiffened into a sustained campaign of terror ... every Israeli became reluctantly conscious of the shadows lengthening

¹⁰³ George Jonas, *Vengeance* (London, Harper Perennial, 2006) p. xviii.

¹⁰⁴ It should also be noted that there was a 10 to 12 year time lapse between the mission and the first draft of Jonas' account and a 40+ year gap between the mission and this contemporary analysis. Both time gaps will have been influenced by a knowledge of the terrorist attacks that have been carried out since 1972 and the changing attitude towards counter-terrorism initiatives.

¹⁰⁵ The restrictions on information may be particularly frustrating to the writer of non-fiction but they are, in contrast, of huge benefit to a writer of fiction who can selectively sift through the known facts before then weaving them into a literary construct. The accuracy of the resultant construct will also remain intact and largely unchallengeable - even when greater access to the historical record is allowed - because the published records of any covert operation omit much of the fundamental detail to protect future operational procedures and to safeguard sensitive assets.

around them.¹⁰⁶ This sense of impending danger would have been particularly apparent to the teenage Gabriel Allon who, at the time, was living on a Kibbutz not far from the Arab-controlled West Bank and within a year of starting his military service. He would also, no doubt, have been aware of the regularity of the cross-border raids into Israel,¹⁰⁷ the Syrian shelling of settlements in northern Israel and the high casualty count on both sides. By the time Gabriel started his own military service the Israeli government had declared that 'Fatah terrorists crossing the Jordan Valley into Israel were to be captured or killed by the use of overwhelming force.'¹⁰⁸ Though successful in strict military terms, internal debate on the actual strategic effectiveness of the 'severe and prompt military retaliations'¹⁰⁹ was pronounced.

Israel's propensity and rationale for retributive action may have even extended beyond the founding of the state. In the updated Foreword to the book *Vengeance*, Avner claims legitimacy for his mission through its adherence to the Babylonian law of retribution, the Code of Hammurabi, which states that 'if a man put out the other eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.'¹¹⁰ To Avner this confers an authority which is 'imbued with the spirit of what philosophers call equal retaliation.'¹¹¹ The phrase 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' is also, he suggests, included 'three times in the Torah.'¹¹² So, in Avner's opinion, Israel has simply 'embraced, implemented and perfected this principle – not merely for the sake of vengeance but as a

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ 35 raids in 1965 and 41 in 1966. Max Hastings, *Yoni: Hero of Entebbe*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 110.

¹⁰⁹ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London, Penguin Books 2001), p. 98.

¹¹⁰ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. xiii.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *ibid.*

means of survival.¹¹³ As such the retaliatory concept is considered by one of those who carry out such actions as Israel's 'guiding strategy in response to terrorism'¹¹⁴ and it is, he believes, a strategy which has been supported by an unbroken succession of Israeli governments (who have all apparently 'endorsed the notion that it is the only sensible response.'¹¹⁵)

In spite of the paradox of his own position (having to resort to the same tactics as the terrorists) Avner concedes that whilst 'we did nothing to stop terrorism'¹¹⁶ he would 'make the same choice again'¹¹⁷ - his rationale being that 'there are real differences between us'¹¹⁸ and the terrorists.'¹¹⁹ This evidently-contradictory approach thus attempts to make a distinction between two 'sides' and is supported with the view that a more pacifist position could be taken against a 'civilized opponent like the British Empire'¹²⁰ but would have little effect on adversaries 'willing to commit crimes on the order of the Munich Massacre, or 9/11 or, for that matter, the Holocaust.'¹²¹ Like Silva's later literary creation, the real-life leader of OWG is simply trying to convince the reader that a standard of behaviour can be awarded to one party that cannot be applied to the other.¹²² For Avner, this polarity of moral behaviour is most apparent in the respective methodologies

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. xv.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ The familiar us-and-them motif common to Silva's literature.

¹¹⁹ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. xiv.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² In modern times, political and military leaders also try to emphasise the moral differences between us-and-them to assert the legality and legitimacy of their own cause. If the approach is successful, it establishes the guilt of the enemy and ensures that us then killing them is considered a just act.

of the two 'sides', i.e. 'shedding blood indiscriminately and targeting innocent people'¹²³ and 'targeting only those responsible for the incident that triggered the mission.'¹²⁴ The eye-for-an-eye spiritual code adopted by the Israelis is not, according to Avner, 'a license for unrestrained barbarism'¹²⁵ but a simple adaptation of the methods through which Israel conducts conventional warfare: 'they regard war as rather like surgery – an unpleasant but sometimes necessary business which, if it has to be waged, should be swift, efficient and precise.'¹²⁶

Aside from the questionable moral posturing, and the failure to equate the terrorism deployed by the Zionist paramilitary organisations in Mandate Palestine with the terrorism deployed by Palestinian nationalists today, Avner (and by default, Gabriel Allon) does not target 'only those responsible' for Munich and nor does he (or Gabriel) operate swiftly, efficiently or precisely in trying to achieve his objectives. What Avner instead does is focus resources on the minor, and more accessible, Palestinian figures then at large in Western Europe and, in taking this approach, incites a tit-for-tat spiral of killings that inflames the underlying tensions and leads to the later deaths of a number of Israeli agents, officials and diplomats.¹²⁷

¹²³ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. xiv.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.xv.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, (London, Vintage, 2007) p. 351.

¹²⁷ The Mossad agent, Victor Ostrovsky, also claims that Mossad's concentration on the PLO during this period led them to miss the warning signs of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Victor Ostrovsky and Claire Hoy, *By Way of Deception: The Making and Unmasking of a Mossad Officer*, p. 197.

BIRTH OF A NATION, BIRTH OF A HERO

Israel entered the 1960s with an increasing sense of international isolation and the likely prospect of confronting a third Arab-Israeli war – this time led by Nasser’s Egypt with support from Jordan and Syria. The mid-1960s also brought about the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (the PLO) and the creation of al-Fatah – a Palestinian, nationalist political movement under the leadership of Yasser Arafat. The movements may have posed little threat to Israel in their infancy, but they were developing at a rapid pace into influential political forces and organised movements of armed struggle. Most importantly, they allied a Palestinian identity with a Palestinian ideology and provided an internationally-recognised voice for the Palestinian refugees.

Aside from the growth of a liberation movement in neighbouring Jordan, the 1960s in Israel were dominated by the trial of Adolf Eichmann. And, whilst the effects of the lengthy trial infiltrated every facet of Israeli life and brought back horrifying memories to the Holocaust survivors (two of whom were Gabriel’s own mother and father), its import in Silva’s fiction is completely overshadowed by the author’s focus on the physical kidnapping of the ex-Nazi leader. This is partly because Gabriel’s fictional mentor, Shamron, is identified in the texts as the leader of the kidnap team and the key ‘snatch-man’ of the capture. The seamless integration of fact and fiction is a familiar Silva motif but, in this instance, the dominance of the capture is at the expense of the far more significant legal process which ‘helped to educate a

generation of Israelis to the full horrors of what had happened.¹²⁸ Nor, more significantly, could the effect of the televised trial on the Israeli national psyche be 'overestimated'¹²⁹ - particularly to those many Israelis who, up until that point, had only thought of the survivors as some sort of 'morbid curiosity'.¹³⁰ The trial also forced issues of identity to greater prominence (i.e. the Jew as a victim) and generated much debate about the developing status of the *Sabra*¹³¹ (an Israeli-born Jew) in the new society. The younger Allon could not, in short, have avoided being affected by the coverage of the lengthy legal processes nor its adherence to a system of formal proceedings and appeals. But, whilst the kidnapping remains a recurring theme in the Allon series, any reference to the trial itself is largely avoided. This may be because Silva chose to devote little textual narrative to Allon's childhood in the early part of the series. It may also be because the author has chosen to focus on the derring-do of the capture - rather than the mundanity of a formal judicial process - to avoid raising questions about his own hero's methodology.

It is similarly significant that there are frequent references in the series to Gabriel being the son of Holocaust survivors but there is little mention of the mental scarring that his mother bore until the *The Black Widow* (the sixteenth book in the series) even though this too would also have had a profound effect on her child's development. We learn in that book, for example, that

¹²⁸ Neill Lochery, *Why Blame Israel* (Cambridge, Icon Books, 2004) p. 80.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ The term *Sabra* refers to the hardy desert plant, the prickly pear, and is used as a slang term to denote the typical characteristics of the Israeli-born Jew, i.e. a tough skin with a soft interior.

'soon after naming her infant son, Gabriel, she promptly turned her back on him.'¹³² On one occasion, Gabriel asks his mother about her wartime experiences and, after giving him a non-revelatory account of her time in Auschwitz, she falls 'into a deep depression and was bedridden for many days.'¹³³ Thereafter Gabriel avoids any mention of the war and becomes, through his mother's emotional distancing, a more withdrawn, solitary and inward-facing figure. The troubled, loveless childhood is a recurrent trope in espionage fiction and is commonly used to account for the unusual characteristics required by the successful spy (emotional coldness, ruthlessness, independence of mind a penchant for the art of dissimulation). It is perhaps also most powerfully depicted by John Le Carre in his novel, *The Perfect Spy* - a descriptor that Silva will later apply to his own protagonist.

Gabriel's cultural history is the archetypal, modern Jewish *Sabra*: born within a couple of years of the founding of the state and raised within the socialist ideals of a kibbutz by European intellectuals fleeing from persecution. In addition to his multi-cultural pedigree, Silva's protagonist has also been blessed with a name with religious and historical meaning: 'the mightiest of God's angels and His most important messenger. He is the prince of fire and the guardian of Israel. And, perhaps most important, Gabriel is the angel of revenge.'¹³⁴ It is nevertheless noticeable that the initial characteristics of his protagonist's name (i.e. biblical, historical and vengeful) differ markedly from

¹³² Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, p. 136.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ www.danielsilvabooks.com/books/the-rembrandt-affair/behind-the-series/ [accessed 10 Mar 2017]

the more spiritual underpinnings that Silva attributes to Gabriel's mother sixteen years later: 'She named the child Gabriel, the messenger of God, the defender of Israel, the interpreter of Daniel's visions.'¹³⁵

THE CLIMATE OF FEAR

The Six Day War was 'the most spectacular military victory in Israel's history.'¹³⁶ At its conclusion, Israel found itself in control of 26,000 square miles of Arab territory (including the Sinai, the Golan Heights and the West Bank of the River Jordan) and over one million displaced people. But the military success also 'marked the beginning of a new era in Israel's history – an era of uncertainty'¹³⁷ that the Palestinian movements were quick to exploit. The Israeli writer David Grossman describes the 1967 war as a 'turning point for Israel ... a kind of navigational error, when Israel strayed off course ... before '67 there was still a hope that things can be corrected, that we are not doomed to continue to fight with our neighbours for another 50 years. To have to live by the sword and to die by the sword.'¹³⁸ The seemingly unending cycle of violence had been a worrying factor of Israeli life prior to 1967 but, after the war, the reality of the extended borders also stirred up deep political and social divisions and introduced a new climate of fear into a populace already scarred with the dangers of past trauma. This period of political and social volatility, it should be noted, occurred just when the fictional Gabriel Allon was undertaking his military service.

¹³⁵ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, p. 135.

¹³⁶ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, p. 240.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ David Grossman interviewed by Jonathan Freedland (*The Guardian*, Saturday 26 Nov 2016).

Most democratically elected governments will respond to violent attacks with retaliatory military action. And they will do this, not to gain any significant strategic advantages, but because they are conscious of the fact that, in the words of Thomas Hobbes: 'the obligation of subjects to the sovereign is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth by which he is able to protect them.'¹³⁹ And the consequences of violence against the state (i.e. retaliatory violence by the state), the general perception of any hiatus in the efforts towards peace and the propaganda generated by the authorities in outlining the risks of an impending threat, all maintain a constant presence in Silva's literature because they each represent the various elements of the social and political environment in which he is trying to place his fiction. In simple terms, without Israel's history of first-strike military success, tit-for-tat retaliations, repeated breakdowns in peace talks and the promotion of a climate of fear, the author has little source material with which to fuel his imagination.

Political support for defence-at-a-distance however is fickle and without clear signs of progress the operatives and their supporters will lose confidence in their leaders' ability to manage the situation. For an unstable government like Israel's (in which the balance of power can be influenced disproportionately by minority groups) this demands that the population is convinced that its military is employing direct action against a recognisable form of enemy. For a political movement, like the PLO, Fatah or Hamas, it means keeping the eyes of the world focused on the plight of the Palestinian people. It also

¹³⁹ Chris Brown, *An Introduction to War Theory* (Stroud, The History Press, 2014), p. 34.

means that the sight of civilian casualties plays in the favour of the victims and alters the perceptions of right-and-wrong to one of simple arithmetic.¹⁴⁰

Silva's literature contains no such ambiguities, but he does provide his readers with the opportunity to access the terrorist's own point of view. Or, more accurately, to the author's own interpretation of the terrorist's point of view. The process of reading may therefore appear to provide Silva's readers with a unique form of access to the combatants from the other 'side' but, in providing that access via his own interpretation of their cause, he is actually restricting any consideration of their activities to one from his own perspective.

There was much speculation about the whole future of espionage fiction with the ending of the Cold War in 1989 and so Silva, and his like-minded fellow authors, has been forced to identify a new enemy; one who is easily-recognisable and who conforms to a populist conception of 'them'. Authors like Le Carre were quick to adapt to global-political changes and used the opportunity to explore the consequences of the end of super-power conflicts and the emergence of new threats to the social order.¹⁴¹ The increasingly connected world has also forced other popular writers to identify an enemy who cannot be defined as either the representative of a nation state or of an identifiable organisation - hence the emergence of the criminal syndicate, the

¹⁴⁰ Extended periods of non-violence also reduce international interest and tend to shift the base of popular support towards more extremist groups.

¹⁴¹ *A Most Wanted Man*, for instance, was published seven years after the Twin Towers attack and focuses attention on the changes to an international environment in which threats against US interests have shrunk from the global (the super-power) to the individual (the terrorist) but ones which still have their roots in the Middle East.

shadowy cabal and the individual rogue-element; the three indefinable enemies of Gabriel Allon.

CHAPTER 4

THE REAL GABRIEL ALLON

'No more tears now; I will think upon revenge.'¹⁴²

In 1984, the Canadian journalist George Jonas published an account of the assassination campaign, Operation Wrath of God (OWG), the operation launched by the Israeli government in response to the 1972 Munich Olympic attack. The book, *Vengeance*, describes the story of Avner, the leader of the OWG team and, as noted previously, the prominence of the operation in the Gabriel Allon series signifies its relevance to the author, his interpretation of its objectives and his consideration of its methodology. Jonas' non-fiction account of the event also allows a fictional character to be considered alongside the real-life counter-terrorist on whom he is modelled.

Despite some marked similarities between Jonas' book and Silva's Allon texts, *Vengeance* does not feature in the list of books that Silva acknowledges as a source. Jonas' book however, was researched and written in the early 1980s and when Silva's first Allon novel was published (sixteen years later) the political and cultural environment had changed dramatically. In 1972, for example, when members of Black September carried out the Munich attack, world opinion viewed them very much as terrorists. But by 2000, this previously clear definition had become far more ambiguous. Disputes about the actual definition of terrorism had also emerged during this period and the media, in seeking to avoid accusations of

¹⁴² Daniel Silva, *The English Spy*, Epigram – Mary Stuart.

political bias, chose to revise their descriptions of hijackers and bombers to militants and insurgents and to record their acts of violence as a different form of political expression.¹⁴³ Jonas' book though, like Silva's novels, has no difficulty in differentiating between an act of terrorism and a form of political expression and, although created in distinctly different environments, both promote the notion that the battles against terrorism require some re-definition of what is permissible.

Although the IDF is considered to be a great leveller of Israeli society, Avner is fiercely critical of the two-tier class structure which, he believes, still divides the country. On the one side are the *Galicianers* (originally from Eastern Europe) and, on the other, the more sophisticated *Yekkes* (largely migrants from Western Europe). These clear societal distinctions may have been very apparent to Avner, who blames the corrupt and deceitful *Galicianers* for his final betrayal, but Silva chooses to make no comment on the influence of the divisive ancestral background in his literature – even though it is as apparent between the fictional Allon and Shamron as it would have been between Avner and Ephraim. The exclusion may be because Silva (a US citizen) has little first-hand knowledge of Israeli life but it may also be because the avoidance of any comment on the inherent social divides typifies Silva's reluctance to criticise aspects of the Israeli state.

¹⁴³ In an e-mail from Joanna Mills, a BBC Editor, dated 02 May 2002, Mills states: It is the style of the BBC World Service to call no-one a terrorist, aware as we are that one man's terrorist is another one's freedom fighter. By using the word terrorist, we would take sides. For this reason, the Tamil Tigers, the IRA, ETA, Palestinians etc are all referred to as militants, gunmen, activists or by some other description. What they do is made clear in the reporting. <<http://www.unitedjerusalem.org/>> cited 10 May 2017.

Apart from the social advantages of being native-born Israelis, the two characters also share the advantage of being the sons of fathers with exemplary national-service records. There is little known about Allon's father, except that he was killed in the Six Day War ('he was no match for the Egyptian artillery shell that blew him to bits in the Sinai'¹⁴⁴), but Avner's father's life, and the consequences of his exposure as a spy, foretells much of what will later happen to Avner. (It also provides Silva with a template on which he will later model the Allon childhood.)

Avner's father had worked in the import-export business and 'sometimes for the government.'¹⁴⁵ He was arrested and imprisoned for spying (in an undisclosed country) and released shortly after the Six Day War. His lengthy absences during Avner's childhood though meant that Avner spent the latter part of his school years living on a kibbutz.

Interestingly neither Avner nor Allon express any fond memories of their kibbutz childhoods. Avner is particularly critical of the experience - although his criticisms are directed more towards the circumstances that necessitated him being there rather than making any comment on the lifestyle. Allon, in contrast, benefits from the prestige of having spent his formative years on one of the first kibbutzim. But he too fails to display any later affection for the model-collective experience. Nor, furthermore, does he show any longing to return to its more simplistic, rural lifestyle (declaring in later life, a 'passionate hatred of farming.'¹⁴⁶) Placing his protagonist's childhood on one of Israel's

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p.47.

¹⁴⁵ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 46.

most esteemed kibbutzim (populated largely by German Jewish refugees), and then avoiding any reference to the social and personal values gained through that experience, is nevertheless symptomatic of Silva's habit to reference selectively. In this instance, it betrays the intention of the author to sift material away from the ideals of a Marxist-community and to steer it towards a more US-dominated social norm.

This tendency to sift information advantageously is perhaps best typified in the author's avoidance of any reference to the practicalities of mounting his own fictional version of OWG. Jonas describes how Avner's boyhood friend, Andreas, provided him with access to the vital underground networks of Europe but, as Andreas was a fringe member of the Baader Meinhof group, this sort of access would not accord with the idealised background of a heroic and moralistic counter-terrorist. Andreas will also provide Avner's team with their entrée into *Le Group*, an organisation of privateers with close links to international criminal and terrorist networks. This relationship was fundamental to the success of the Israeli operation because 'up until the summer of 1973, neither Mossad, their informers nor Avner's team themselves had been able to track down any of the 11 targets without *Le Group's* input.'¹⁴⁷ The OWG team were, in short, wholly reliant on *Le Group* for information, materials and logistical support (including armaments and support personnel). Without them, or the fringe-terrorist Andreas, they would not have succeeded in locating their targets or of completing the assassinations. The level of contribution from *Le Group*, in fact, determined

¹⁴⁷ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 210.

the level of the real-life team's success but neither they, nor a literary adaptation of a similar support function, feature in Silva's literature. The exclusion of any reference to a bunch of financially-motivated anarchists is perhaps understandable - on a social, political and commercial level - but avoiding any reference to an alternative support function diminishes the credibility of the recreated version and removes any chance of its (albeit fictional) success. How, for example, did Gabriel counter the likelihood of exposure during the two-year, clandestine operation? And how, without utilising the services of a third party, could he obtain information about his targets without disclosing that he was seeking such information? Most critically, once he was exposed - which after two years of investigating, tracking and killing high-profile targets across Europe he inevitably would have been - his career as a secret counter-terrorist agent, and as a literary figure, would have effectively been over.

A recurring theme in Jonas' book is Avner's lack of self-confidence. He confesses to Jonas, for example, that he always thought that he lacked the personal qualities that initially led the recruiters to him. Each team member has a specialism, he was told, (whether bomb-maker, forger, driver, or post-op sweeper) and he had been selected simply because 'they need you to lead the team.'¹⁴⁸ The team itself is modelled on a special-forces unit with sufficient flexibility for each team member to perform any of the given roles and with no single member specialising in just one thing.¹⁴⁹ In this informal,

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁴⁹ Selection tests for elite soldiers (like Avner and Allon) require extreme levels of self-belief, stamina drive and determination. Successful candidates therefore have few of the normal human conditions that may curtail the extraordinary efforts required. The selection process

non-hierarchical model, Avner was merely 'the first among equals.'¹⁵⁰ He was not even in sole control of the operation itself - as he would have been had the team been conducting either a formal military operation or operating within one of Silva's narratives. Allon, in contrast, has no such qualms or doubts about assuming the leadership of a team. He in fact adopts the completely opposite approach, demanding 'complete authority to run the venture as I see fit'¹⁵¹ and the 'independent authority to spend money and use resources as I deem necessary.'¹⁵²

Surprisingly with his penchant for the dramatic, and his frequent inclusion of senior politicians and religious leaders in the narratives, Silva also avoids referring to Avner's alleged meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister (Golda Meir) in his storylines. Nor is Allon provided with the emotive speech Meir gave to Avner before the start of the mission: 'The State of Israel exists to defend Jews ... She would not descend to the level of her enemies. She would try to observe restraint even in the defence of her children. She would try to save them while keeping her own hands clean, to save them while obeying every command of civilized conduct.'¹⁵³ Meir's comments, of course, need to be viewed within the context of Avner's recollection of that meeting, his propensity for exaggeration and his own ambitions towards self-glory. ('What we are doing is changing Jewish history ... to do something no Israeli soldier had ever been asked to do before.'¹⁵⁴) Irrespective of the

itself moreover, tends to identify self-sufficient, solitary characters who find the mundanity of civilian life disappointing.

¹⁵⁰ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 336.

¹⁵¹ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 85.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 72.

accuracy of Avner's memory, the alleged meeting with Meir is important because it identifies the key strategists, applies a semblance of political legitimacy to the mission's objectives and enhances Avner's own status within the history of Israeli counter-terrorism.¹⁵⁵

Although the meeting itself is not included in Silva's texts he does use similarly emotive wording to convey his own impression of the Israeli Government's objectives: 'Golda Meir wanted revenge of biblical proportions and so she ordered the Office to "send forth the boys" to hunt down the members of Black September who had planned the attack'¹⁵⁶ His readers are also told that: 'Golda had ordered Shamron to "send forth the boys" to take down the Black September bastards who had carried out this bloodbath.'¹⁵⁷ It later transpires that the fictional Meir would not have considered using such a drastic approach had Shamron not suggested it to her: 'I told her we had to change our tactics, that we had to terrorize the terrorists. I gave her a list of names, men who had to die. Golda wanted none of it.'¹⁵⁸ The comments, in Silva's thirteenth book in the series, are far more explicit than in his earlier references to OWG and reflect the thirteen-year development of his action-driven narrative and the starkly different socio-political environments of 2000 and 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Gabriel Allon's demands for participating in a later mission also seem to suggest that, unlike his predecessor, he is not driven solely by idealism but also by the potential for financial and personal reward.

¹⁵⁶ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁷ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Silva, *The English Girl*, p.26.

There is little doubt that the Israeli nation was traumatised by Munich, an event which ‘tore deeply into the nation’s psyche’¹⁵⁹ and reminded the young country that ‘Jews had been led yet again to their death on German soil.’¹⁶⁰ It had, after all, been only twenty-seven years since more than six million Jews had died in the concentration camps and so to many Israelis, Munich served to remind them that the ‘the wounds of the Holocaust had bled again.’¹⁶¹ The Israeli public demanded an equally significant form of retribution from their leaders: ‘one that would imprint itself on the minds of conspirators everywhere and be remembered by the free world.’¹⁶² The counter-terrorist commando Col. Muki Betser (on standby to fly to Germany to confront the hijackers during the siege) remembers that ‘every Israeli watching the horror of the drama in Munich in 1972, thought of Germany and the Holocaust. Once again, Jews died in Germany simply because they were Jews.’¹⁶³ (Silva makes a similar claim: ‘Once again, Jews are dying on German soil.’¹⁶⁴) As a senior officer in the highly secretive *Sayeret Matkal*, Betser, along with other senior officers from Israel’s ‘entire military and intelligence community’¹⁶⁵ had been ordered by Meir to ‘target the people who planned and executed the attack.’¹⁶⁶ The proposed response was described by Betser as an ‘extraordinary request for revenge, [in which] Mossad agents shot it out with Palestinians in Western Europe all that summer, in a twilight

¹⁵⁹ Aaron J Klein, *Striking Back: The 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and Israel’s Deadly Response* (New York, Random House, 2005), p. 92.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁶³ Moshe Betser, *Secret Soldier* (London, Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 155.

¹⁶⁴ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁵ Moshe Betser, *Secret Soldier*, p. 155.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

war of espionage and assassinations.¹⁶⁷ It is somewhat ironic though that Golda Meir's own recollection of the post-Munich period appears to contradict Betser's real and Silva's fictional versions: 'The citizens of Israel – that conglomeration of people, languages and cultures – had to be taught that the government, and *only* the government, was responsible for their security. It would obviously have been much simpler to have permitted the formation of a number of antiterrorist vigilante groups, shut an official eye to private acts of retaliation and vengeance and then loudly disclaim all responsibility for the resultant "incidents". But that was not our way.'¹⁶⁸

Aside from the different circumstances surrounding their recruitment, their salaries and their different methods of operating, the two characters also differ in their personal motivations. Whereas Allon's involvement in *The Kill Artist* is primarily revenge-driven (he only agrees to participate after hearing that he will be allowed to 'take down Tariq'¹⁶⁹), Avner has 'no personal feelings of enmity'¹⁷⁰ towards the men he pursues. To Avner, their elimination was just something that was demanded 'by necessity and honour.'¹⁷¹ And, although conceding many years later that his mission did very little to reduce the number of terrorist attacks, he 'still feels that more innocent people would have become victims of terrorist attacks in Israel and Western Europe if his team and other teams had not killed some top terrorist organizers during the 1970s.'¹⁷² His recognition that the mission had failed to

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Gold Meir, *My Life* (New York, Putnam, 1975), p. 286.

¹⁶⁹ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 84.

¹⁷⁰ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 335.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² *ibid.*

achieve its primary objective, and his acknowledgement that those men originally targeted (who were believed by the Israeli security services to have had a direct involvement in the Munich attack but who have, in the operation's aftermath been relegated to 'organizers') is however a particularly damning indictment of the whole Israeli strategy. The killing of al-Kubaisi, shot with handguns by Avner and Hans on a Parisian street (and a killing that Silva would attribute to Allon), is perhaps the most notable example of this loose definition of 'directly-involved' because al-Kubaisi, the fourth man to be killed, had no known links to the Munich attack. As such, his death underlines the accusation that 'Israel's policy of counter-strikes against terrorists was considerably wider than a mere revenge action against individuals responsible for Munich.'¹⁷³ It also introduces another moral complexity into the Israeli strategy, i.e. differentiating between hard targets (difficult to access and attack) and soft targets (exposed and vulnerable). The admission to the adoption of such a pragmatic strategy though adds much weight to one of the main criticisms of OWG: that the selection of targets was determined as much by accessibility as by responsibility. It also questions whether Allon's fictional role in it can still be defined as a truly heroic one and whether Silva's rationale for selecting the operation as a representative example of his protagonist's just and retributory function still remains valid.

A further difference between the two characters is their sentiment towards the architects of the mission. Avner is dismissive of the Israeli political elite

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 376.

who, he maintains, demand loyalty from their citizens but, instead of offering them the same levels of loyalty in return, use them as ‘pawns with no regard for their feelings or welfare.’¹⁷⁴ His patriotism, nevertheless, remains a powerful motivator even after the mission’s conclusion – albeit tempered with his accusation that the elite may exhibit selfless and patriotic impulses but these expressions are only being used to disguise ‘their clannish, ruthless and self-seeking ways.’¹⁷⁵ Avner can also recognise, as most critics of secret government agencies do, that it is in the very nature of all secret services to be clannish and ruthless and so it was perhaps naïve of him to expect anything less. This recognition of the apparent ruthlessness required from the individuals charged with the safety of their societies is also a recurring motif in the Allon storylines. The operation that Shamron mounts to trap Tariq, for example, is described by the protagonist as being ‘too monstrous to contemplate’¹⁷⁶ but evidently justified because ‘someone has to do these things [or] another Hitler might get the idea that he can exterminate my people while the world stands by and does nothing.’¹⁷⁷ Silva has thus invoked the shadow of the Shoah again to convince the combat-hardened hero that even some present-day threats may dictate that it is necessary to use methods that he (and the reader) might find disagreeable, ‘but secretly you’re glad I’m here. It helps *you* to sleep at night.’¹⁷⁸ (The philosophical argument used by the author is an adaptation of Control’s confession to Leamas in Le Carre’s *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*: ‘We do

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 336.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 410.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

disagreeable things so that ordinary people here and elsewhere can sleep safely in their beds at night.¹⁷⁹⁾

The alternative viewpoint, particularly when voiced by someone not directly involved in Silva's real or imaginary wars is, in a similar way, used to outline and to challenge some of the more controversial actions presented. The technique employs a fictional character to explore the imaginary circumstances in which such issues may present themselves and then uses the plotline to convince the reader that the fictional remedy is a proportionate and appropriate response. For example, in *The Confessor* a broadsheet journalist confronts Gabriel with the accusation that, 'in my opinion, a state which resorts to assassination as a matter of policy is no better than the enemy it's trying to defeat. In many respects, it's worse. You're a murderer, in my book.'¹⁸⁰ The opposing argument is not voiced by Allon though because he 'had learned long ago that arguments like this could never be won. He'd had too many just like it with himself.'¹⁸¹ The hero can therefore accept the validity of the journalist's argument - and can recognise the moral conundrum in which he himself has been placed - but can avoid debating the point because there would be little value to him in doing so: he is unlikely to be able to persuade to the alternative point of view and neither he (nor the author) can provide a robust counter-argument. The accusation is nevertheless countered powerfully with the protagonist's knowing silence. The validity of the accusation has also been undermined through the

¹⁷⁹ John Le Carre, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* (London, Penguin Books, 2013), p. 14.

¹⁸⁰ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 145.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*

reader's awareness that Allon has had to adopt this position because he operates in an environment in which his accuser has no first-hand experience. He (and the reader), in short, knows what the apparently well-informed reporter does not. In case the point has been missed, the opposing point of view is repeated by another informed character: 'the Israelis unnerved him. They played the game differently than the Western Europeans and the Americans. They came from a tough neighbourhood, and the shadow of the Holocaust hung over their every decision. It led them to deal with their adversaries in a ruthless and pitiless fashion.'¹⁸² This second viewpoint has a number of benefits for the author: it provides further evidence of the operating environment from another active participant, it supplies an historic, geo-political rationale for Allon's ruthlessness and it provides an informed overview of the Israeli's effectiveness. The same character then receives a vivid description of the suffering of the Palestinian people (which includes graphic examples of injustice, humiliation and mistreatment) but it is one that he quickly dismisses as a 'diatribe.'¹⁸³ Interestingly, the Palestinian man providing the account may have had the outward appearance of a 'doctoral student'¹⁸⁴ but is, the reader is told, the 'chief of European operations for the PLO's foreign intelligence service.'¹⁸⁵ The similarity between Silva's Palestinian translator (with close links to the PLO's terror factions) and that of another Palestinian translator, Wael Zwaiter

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

(the alleged head of Black September's terror operations in Italy and the first target to be killed in OWG) is, one can only assume, deliberate.

The selective sifting (or cherry-picking) of source material occurs throughout the series and it is noticeable that any successful Israeli intelligence operations prior to Allon's recruitment is attributed to his mentor, Shamron, who, notwithstanding kidnapping Eichmann from Buenos Aires in 1960, was also responsible for directing the 1986 Vanunu affair.¹⁸⁶ Vanunu's disclosures to *The Sunday Times* were originally thought to be hugely damaging to the Israeli government but Silva's narrative follows the now generally-accepted version of the episode, i.e. that Vanunu was allowed to flee the country (with evidence supporting his knowledge of the Israeli reactor) in order to inform the world that Israel had become a nuclear power. This betrayal of Israeli secrets, for which Vanunu received a lengthy custodial sentence had, it seems, 'been choreographed and manipulated by Ari Shamron as a way to warn Israel's enemies that they had no hope of ever bridging the nuclear gap, while at the same time leaving Israel with the ability to deny publicly that it possessed nuclear weapons.'¹⁸⁷

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SPY

To Jonas, Avner was a man of 'two distinct physical moods: an imperturbable, almost indolent calm, alternating - practically without warning

¹⁸⁶ Mordechai Vanunu, a disgruntled worker at the Dimona atomic facility provided details of Israel's nuclear weapons programme to the British press. Lured to Rome by a female agent, he was kidnapped and taken by a small boat to an Israeli vessel waiting just off the Italian coast. Convicted of treason by a closed-door Israeli court, Vanunu served more than eighteen years in prison.

¹⁸⁷ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 214.

– with a sudden, lizard-like agility.¹⁸⁸ He also possessed a ‘craving for the high’¹⁸⁹ and, like most recently-retired soldiers, retained ‘a longing for experiences filled with tension.’¹⁹⁰ This psychological need for excitement is, Jonas believes, the real reason why Avner became a counter-terrorist rather than any deep sense of patriotic duty (although Jonas does concede that patriotism was also a factor in the decision).

The type of personality attracted to adventure and excitement is often expressed through the individual’s preference for careers or hobbies with an element of risk. Removing the opportunities to challenge danger will not eradicate these traits - even if the individual has elected to remove themselves from further risk or has lost the will or the courage required to continue to indulge. The selection criteria on which Avner was judged to be effective, and which he himself couldn’t recognise, may therefore have been the sort of criteria which would have deterred others (fear, censure, favouritism, feelings of inadequacy) but would only have served to spur men like him on. According to Jonas, Avner ‘belonged to a very small minority of human beings who are fuelled by adversity’¹⁹¹ and so may have been selected for no other reason than he was one of few people ‘who would instinctively try to rid themselves of whatever terrified them, not by keeping their heads down, but by attacking it.’¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 334.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 202.

¹⁹² *ibid.*

Allon's motives for joining OWG, in contrast, were psychologically driven rather than personality-led. The emotional pressures that were placed on him also prevented him from mounting any real resistance to his inclusion and, like Avner, he appears to have only been selected because he displayed the unusual personal qualities required for such an unusual mission: 'Gabriel was found arrogant and selfish by his superiors; prone to periods of melancholia, but also highly intelligent and capable of taking independent action without waiting for guidance from commanding officers. He was also multilingual.'¹⁹³ He also shared two other character traits with Avner: 'a meticulous attention to detail and an unflagging desire to see every task, no matter how mundane, through to its conclusion.'¹⁹⁴ The reasoning behind Gabriel's selection, and his own awareness of the gifts that apparently made him the most qualified candidate are, nonetheless, as inexplicable to Allon as they were to Avner: 'I was recruited because I spoke German. Not classroom German or audiotape German, but real German with the Berlin accent of my mother.'¹⁹⁵ When asked if he knew how to fire a gun, he replies: 'Not very well, actually, my IDF career was unremarkable to say the least. I was much better with a paintbrush than I was with a gun.'¹⁹⁶ The extraordinary gifts that Shamron had uncovered in Allon's unremarkable army files would however, determine the path that the remainder of his life would then follow and, although these gifts are not evident in the first book of the series, they are developed and displayed throughout the remainder.

¹⁹³ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 64.

¹⁹⁴ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 58.

¹⁹⁵ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, p. 138.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

It is perhaps the very ordinariness of Avner that makes him seem so different from Silva's literary model and, despite also being a former member of an elite military unit, and fluent in German, he doesn't appear to possess any of the qualities that one would expect from the leader of an extraordinarily complex and challenging mission.¹⁹⁷ Nor does Avner exemplify either the cold-hearted, emotionless killer or the supremely intelligent and highly-motivated agent (both probably excluded from selection because the former would require close supervision and the latter because such a unique talent would not have been expended on a one-off mission. But not, apparently, a bar to Allon's own recruitment.) The fictional representations of the super-spy (the highly accomplished, highly skilled and physically attractive male) may therefore have become a part of our cultural expectations but, in real life at least, it also appears to be just a figment of an author's imagination. Any literary character who appears to fall short of the anticipated, super-human aspects of our imagination can then only disappoint. But this seeming lack of outstanding personal qualities in a real-life spy (or the individual's very ordinariness) may, in fact, be the reason why that agent is selected. Silva's own understanding of the recruitment standards also seems to support this view: 'We used to get only the best. Like you, Gabriel. Now we get the ones who are too stupid or lazy to make it in the real world.'¹⁹⁸ With OWG, for example, the only questions the real-life team members needed to address were: (i) where are the targets located? (ii) how do we kill them? and, (iii) how do we get away afterwards? The solutions to the first and third

¹⁹⁷ Avner's case-officer once confides in him that he had been chosen because he never gives up, is determinedly obstinate and, although neither strong nor fast, can 'run forever.' George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 327.

¹⁹⁸ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 73.

questions were provided by a group of privateers. The solution to the second was determined by whatever resource was available. The simplicity of the task, the simplicity of directing a self-contained unit and the simplicity of paying funds to a service provider (*Le Group*) suggests that very few acts of personal valour or initiative were required from either Avner or his team for them to succeed. The emotional and physical effects of Avner's participation were, nonetheless, clearly visible to his wife, Shoshana, who comments, 'your hair isn't getting grey or anything, but ... you look about ten years older.'¹⁹⁹ (Descriptions later adapted by Silva to describe the physical effects on Allon from his own participation, 'his temples were shot with gray ... the stain of a boy who's done a man's job ... smudges of ash on the prince of fire.'²⁰⁰)

It would not be possible to calculate the potential number of attacks that Avner's team thwarted, nor the number that might have occurred if they hadn't been known to be targeting the men on their list, but the fact remained that despite their efforts 'the monster was alive and well. Growing one head after another.'²⁰¹ More critically, by October of that year, 'diplomatic and military developments had been taking place in the Middle East that would render the success or failure of their mission largely academic.'²⁰² Even so, their supporters might still have argued that 'in counter-terrorism, as in terrorism itself, military objectives often took second place to symbolic acts.'²⁰³ Be that as it may but, fearing for the destruction of Israel itself, Avner

¹⁹⁹ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 199.

²⁰⁰ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 48.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁰² *ibid.*, p. 215.

²⁰³ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 218.

returned home in 1973 to join his old unit where 'everything would become much simpler. A soldier like the rest ... with guns firing face-to-face.'²⁰⁴

As their doubts about the apparent futility of the mission and their own effectiveness grew, it had also become clear - when a car bomb blew up two Arabs in Rome in June 1973 - that 'theirs was not the only team'²⁰⁵ operating. (Markedly different again from Silva's account which has only one team operating with Allon as the sole assassin.) Avner's suspicions about the car bomb attack were confirmed later when the Lillehammer incident, led by Michael Harari, hit the headlines.²⁰⁶

Some critics believe that Gabriel Allon is based on the real, European-based *katsa* (Mossad Case Officer), Harari. This is unlikely though because, as noted, Silva takes a great deal of care to sanitise his protagonist's history and will no doubt have been aware that Harari was the officer in charge at Lillehammer - a fiasco that resulted in Harari getting fired and the whole Israeli European spy network being closed down.²⁰⁷ Silva therefore distances Allon from any involvement in the incident: 'I also know what happened in Switzerland.'²⁰⁸ he says to Shamron, the fictional character tasked with clearing-up Harari's, real-life mess.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ On 21 July 1973, a team of Israeli agents shot dead an Arab man in the Norwegian town of Lillehammer. The killers believed him to be Ali Hassan Salameh, the no.1 target on Avner's list. He was in fact Ahmed Bouchiki, an innocent bystander. Several of the assassination team were then captured by the Norwegian police whilst trying to make their escape.

²⁰⁷ Gordon Thomas, *Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad* (London, Pan Books, 2000), p. 129.

²⁰⁸ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 72.

For more than a year, from June 1973 and the killing of Boudia in a car bomb attack, Avner's team had failed to carry out any successful operations but had had to cope with the fiascos of Lillehammer and Glarus and the loss of one of their team members. They were unlikely to be allowed to continue unless they could produce either more results or an indication that they were still making progress. It came as no surprise then, that in September 1974, two years almost to the day since they started the mission, they were instructed to terminate it. They chose to ignore the order. This was not, Avner maintains, because of vanity, insubordination or fanaticism but because of what they thought they saw on the ground: 'the disarray into which the forces of terror had been thrown by the elimination of nine of their top leaders.'²⁰⁹ This disarray, they concluded, had been the principal reason why the Black September attacks across Europe had reduced. Their field decision may have been an accurate reflection of their own impression of the late-1973 ground, but it failed to take into account the true status of those men they had killed or that intelligence officers back in Tel Aviv may have had access to information that presented a very different picture. It also ignored the fact that Israel's success in the Yom Kippur War had thrown the PLO leadership into disarray and that the subsequent, internal squabbling had reduced the organisation's opportunities to launch further attacks.

The final humiliation for the OWG team was their killing of a young Arab security guard at a villa in Tarifa, Spain in November 1974. Like the three security guards in Glarus, the Arab was also armed but not on their list. The

²⁰⁹ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 277.

total number of people killed, who had not been included in their original list, had reached seven. Having lost two team members themselves, it was difficult not to view the net OWG result as ‘two top agents in exchange for no military gain in the war against terror’²¹⁰ and, because the level of terrorist attacks in 1975 was similar to those from two years earlier (and one of their objectives had been to reduce these levels) in all of the practical considerations they had failed. Equally damningly, having been instructed to terminate the mission, but then electing to continue, they had acted in defiance of a direct order and, in doing so, had surrendered any pretence of having operated under formal control. But to Avner’s ‘amazement’²¹¹ their mission back in Israel was regarded as a success and, for a short time at least, he was treated like the ‘real, genuine hero’²¹² that he had always wanted to be.

Significantly, Ephraim’s attempts to re-employ Avner, and then to move him and his family back to Israel, mirror the attempts by Shamron to re-employ and relocate Allon. Ephraim also uses the same nationalist argument (‘You, born in Israel, you’re going to leave the country?’²¹³) that will also trouble Allon and will later allow him to be manipulated back into the environment from which he had previously struggled to escape. The persuasive techniques adopted by Shamron though also provide the author with the opportunity to detail, in simple terms, the nature of the threats the protagonist is required to oppose and then, when Allon provides a rational counter-

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 284.

²¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 300.

²¹² *ibid.*

²¹³ *ibid.*, p. 308.

argument to his participation, to fill in the factual gaps that he and the reader may have overlooked. And whereas Avner doesn't have the courage to tell Ephraim that he wishes to resign from operational deployment, Allon's strength of character (and independent financial means) allows him to choose whether he wishes to be directly involved. The four-stage process of dialogue ((i) the outline of the threat, (ii) the reasoned counter-argument that questions the scale of the threat and tries to exclude the protagonist from involvement, (iii) the explanation of the missed facts, and (iv) the agreement to surrender all other priorities in order to participate) describes the conscious, reasoned choice of the protagonist (the selfless hero) and provides the resultant action with its apparently moral legitimacy.

Avner's notable reluctance to return to Israel is because, in his eyes, 'he had become a hero under false pretences.'²¹⁴ Terrorist attacks across Europe were still occurring and, in failing to retrieve the bodies of his three dead colleagues, he had betrayed Israel's long-standing, military tradition of never leaving a fallen comrade behind. He also believed that if the mission's failings ever came to light he would never be considered a hero in a country which demanded exemplary standards ('great, heroic, sacrificial standards'²¹⁵) from each and every one of its citizens. 'He was not a hero', he admits to himself at the end of the operation, he was 'just an ordinary guy' wishing to live an ordinary life.'²¹⁶

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 310.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 327.

In direct contrast to Avner's own damaged reputation, Allon's performance in OWG concludes with widespread respect ('the Great Gabriel Allon'²¹⁷) and a foretaste of his future accomplishments: 'One of the greats. A legend, truly'²¹⁸ says the newly-appointed Director of the CIA in *House of Spies*. He is also thought to be 'the best'²¹⁹ candidate to run another covert, anti-terrorist operation in Europe and, somewhat surprisingly, the only person capable of rescuing the Mossad from its then critical administrative and operational position. The organisation's dire situation, it seemed, could only be resolved through the successful implementation of some daring and audacious operations undertaken by a man with the indefinable qualities of a 'prince.'²²⁰

The real Mossad was experiencing a number of operational crises during this period and, unusually for Silva, these upheavals are recorded in his texts: 'there was a saying inside the Office these days: the further we are from our last disaster, the closer we are to our next'.²²¹ (The phraseology is not dissimilar to Gordon Thomas' assessment of the predicament: 'the further Mossad is from its last public humiliation, the closer it is to the next.'²²²) But it seems that these troubling situations could only be resolved - in Silva's fictional world at least - with acts of derring-do rather than any radical restructuring of the administration. As such, the fictional head of Israel's security apparatus, Lev, may be 'brilliant'²²³ within an organisational function

²¹⁷ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 122.

²¹⁸ Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 314.

²¹⁹ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p.73.

²²⁰ *ibid.*

²²¹ *ibid.*, p. 45.

²²² Gordon Thomas, *Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad*, p. 357.

²²³ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 77.

but his brilliance is confined to his role as a 'headquarters man.'²²⁴ The representative figure of officialdom is thus dismissed as neither a man of significance nor import and, although he may be ideally suited to re-energise the failing organisation, he has been relegated into the ranks of the untrustworthy, self-serving careerists who populate so much espionage fiction and over whom the hero must also triumph if he is to succeed.

REPLICATING THE REAL

In April 1973 Israel launched Operation Spring of Youth as a sub-operation of OWG. The three men targeted in the operation²²⁵ were all considered a high-priority for assassination but, because they were located in fortified apartments in Beirut, were thought to be beyond Avner's operational capabilities. Avner did, nevertheless, participate in the Beirut raid - albeit in a supporting role – and the same methodology was used again by the Israelis for a later raid in Tunis (which Silva replicates in his fiction for Allon). Silva's fictional representation of the raid has therefore allowed a further factual/fictional comparison to be made, this time between the contribution of the real-life agent in a military-led operation and his literary equivalent.

Avner and his team undertook most of the reconnaissance for the Beirut raid (although they were again heavily reliant on *Le Group* contacts and resources) and were later tasked with driving the attack force from the beach at Ramlet-el-Beida to either the PLO headquarters in the city or the apartment block housing the targets. On the night of the attack, Israeli

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ Kamal Nasser, Mahmoud Yussuf Najjer and Kemal Adwan.

commandos killed the outlying guards with silenced handguns and knives before rushing into the building. Avner and his two colleagues 'stayed by the cars.'²²⁶ They were not needed 'and might, in fact, have been in the way.'²²⁷ All of the targets were 'riddled'²²⁸ with phosphorous rounds, a controversial munition that continues to burn after penetrating human tissue and whose victims cannot be treated in a conventional, medical manner.²²⁹ Also killed in the attack was Najjer's wife, who died whilst trying to shield her husband, and an innocent woman from a neighbouring apartment who just happened to open her front door at an unfortunate moment. Avner and his colleagues were evacuated with the commandos by sea. They did not join the commandos back in the landing craft but were taken by boat to a fishing vessel organised by *Le Group*. Israeli casualties numbered 'one dead and two or three wounded.'²³⁰ The PLO lost 'over a hundred guerrillas.'²³¹

Allon's very similar operational remit, to assassinate an identified target in Tunis, re-enacts almost exactly the methodology of the attack carried out in Beirut in 1973 and the later attack, led by the *Sayeret Matkal* commando, Nahum Lev, in 1988.²³² Lev was 'an outstanding soldier'²³³ who had risen to

²²⁶ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 184.

²²⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁸ *ibid.*

²²⁹ It should be noted that they were not killed with Allon's favoured .22 Beretta rounds but with high-powered, penetrative rounds and the resultant chemical burning.

²³⁰ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 185.

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² The details of Lev's Tunis killing were only released by the IDF's censors in 2012, 24 years after the event and more than 10 years after Lev had disclosed details of the operation to the journalist, Ronen Bergman. Although it was something of an open secret that Israel had carried out the attack, the Israeli government has never acknowledged any involvement in it and it is still unclear why the military censors allowed its details to be released in 2012 - particularly because two very prominent Israeli politicians were allegedly key players in the assault (Ehud Barak, Minister of Defense, and Moshe Yaalon, Deputy PM).

²³³ Michael Shmulovich, *24 years later, Israel acknowledges top-secret operation that killed Fatah terror Chief*, (The Times of Israel, 01 November 2012) cited 01 June 2017.

the rank of deputy commander in the highly-secretive *Sayeret Maktal* unit. Like his fictional counterpart he was also convinced about the necessity of the attack and his role within it: 'He [Abu Jihad] was involved in a lot of horrible things against our citizens ... he was a dead man walking. I shot him without hesitation.'²³⁴ The target, Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir), had co-founded the PLO with Yasser Arafat in 1964. He was also thought to have been responsible for planning a number of violent attacks against Israel (which included the 1978 'Coastal Road' attack on a bus near Tel Aviv that killed 380) and to have been the organiser of the first *Intifada*.

The members of Lev's assault team were ferried to the Tunisia coastline in rubber dinghies. They then split into two groups, one to assault the house and the other to provide a defensive perimeter. Copying the operational technique deployed previously by Ehud Barak in Beirut, Lev strolled towards the house with one arm draped around a 'woman' (a male commando in disguise) and the other clutching a large box of chocolates (concealing a handgun). He shoots Abu Jihad's driver, who had fallen asleep in the car, before entering the house. A second guard then starts firing at the attackers from the hallway but is killed in the return fire. The gardener is also killed during the initial assault because 'in that type of operation we have to make sure that any possible interference is neutralized.'²³⁵ Proceeding to the staircase, another soldier 'shot at Abu Jihad first [but] after that, I shot him

²³⁴ *ibid.*

²³⁵ *ibid.*

with a long burst of fire. I was careful not to hurt his wife, who had showed up there. He died.²³⁶

Lev's assault was a joint Mossad, *Sayeret Matkal* operation with the Mossad overseeing the reconnaissance and with members of *Sayeret Matkal* leading the attack. It would not be practicable for a well-coordinated, highly-trained commando unit to include an inexperienced outsider in such a high-risk operation. But the outsider in Silva's fictional version of the raid doesn't just source the transport, or drive the commandos along the selected route, he actually takes Lev's role as the assault force commander. Communicating directly with the operational HQ (located in an El Al-chartered Boeing 707 flying in the civilian air corridor just off the Tunisian coastline) Allon leads the team of commandos across the beach at Rouad to the waiting transport, a minibus with the ex-lingerie model, Jacqueline Delacroix²³⁷, at the wheel. And, even though he is smoking to calm 'his nerves'²³⁸, he still has the presence of mind to reassure Jacqueline that she is 'doing fine.'²³⁹

Delacroix and Allon had jointly undertaken the surveillance for this operation and it was their earlier reconnaissance work that had allowed the Israelis to build a mock-up of Abu-Jihad's compound in the Negev. Allon, it is therefore suggested, is sufficiently qualified to lead the attacking force in the practice runs and in the assault itself. So, he will copy Lev's killing of the sleeping chauffeur and he will also kill the same Tunisian security guard that Lev's

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ Although a leading player in the Tunis raid of the first book, it is noticeable that Delacroix is omitted from Allon's recollection of it in the seventeenth, *House of Spies* (2017).

²³⁸ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 128.

²³⁹ *ibid.*

assault team met in the entrance hall. Unlike Lev's controlled killing though, Allon would shoot the Tunisian guard twice in the chest and then offer him the opportunity to avoid being shot 'in the eye'²⁴⁰ if he disclosed the whereabouts of his employer. Racing up the stairs, Allon reloads his Beretta (he is not using Lev's automatic rifle with its controversial phosphorous munition) and charges through the study door where Abu Jihad is watching news footage of the *Intifada* 'which he was helping to direct from Tunis.'²⁴¹ Firing twice into Abu Jihad's torso and then twice into his temple he then exits onto the landing where he meets Abu Jihad's wife and children. He orders her to return to her room (in Arabic) before racing from the villa. The raiding party return to the beach at Rouad where they board their dinghies. Heading towards the lights of the patrol boat sent to pick them up, Allon recoils from Delacroix's touch, begins to shake violently and tosses his Beretta overboard having 'killed three people in thirteen seconds that night'²⁴² in an almost flawless raid.

The fictional Tunis operation had been an unqualified success (the Israelis killed all of their targets and suffered no losses themselves) but Allon's participation in it, marred by his infidelity with Delacroix, presents Silva with an opportunity to introduce one of the revenge-motivated motifs that dominate so much of his later literature. The motif in this instance is also supplemented with the tragic consequences of human frailty ('I used to have a wife and son, but a terrorist put a bomb under their car because I had an

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 130.

²⁴² *ibid.*

affair with my *bat leveyha* [female assistant] in Tunis'²⁴³). It is the transition from the abstract concept of a 'terrorist' into a recognisable enemy here though that dominates the Silva narrative because the protagonist now has an identifiable figure on whom to exact his later revenge.

In spite of its relevance to his literary creation, it is not possible to gauge what (if any) influence the real Avner has had on the fictitious Gabriel Allon. There are, as noted, some similarities between the two but perhaps of more significance are the evident differences. The most notable of these is the financial, mental and physical betrayal of Avner by his employers. And, in recording the failings, the post-operation fallout and the growing disillusionment of the participants, Jonas is therefore placing himself in direct opposition to the simple, black-and-white morality that lies at the heart of the Allon novels and which 'takes us away from moral doubt, and banishes perplexity with action, morality with duty.'²⁴⁴ Unlike Silva's heroic figure, who learns to accept greater extremes of behaviour in addressing the demands of duty, Avner comes to realise that, whenever radical counter-terrorism policies are applied, they remove any possibility of a final, conclusive victory for either side. Personalising the foe, as Avner tried to do, may go some way to reducing the moral and emotional impact of participation (and act as a form of buffer against outright brutality) but, as he also found, it will not prevent the participant from becoming trapped in an inescapable condition of extreme paranoia and human misery.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁴⁴ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London, Tauris, 2001), p. 169.

The despair of the participant is touched upon in the Allon novels - mainly through the references to the protagonist's morose personality and preference for emotional, physical and geographical isolation - but there is little real recognition that men who kill must also deal with their own tortured consciences. This may be because Gabriel Allon is not an isolated figure: his actions are taken on behalf of defined social groups ('us' rather than 'them') and implemented with the tacit consent of the readership (and the authority of these two elements may legitimise some of the fictional blood-letting.) But, that caveat aside, there is very little of the deep, sceptical questioning of the sort found in Le Carre or Greene's classic espionage fiction (writers from whom Silva claims to derive literary influence) and neither is there any evidence of the anti-romanticism that the two writers use as a central theme of their critiques, i.e. the potential treachery of the spymaster, the corruption of the political ideal or a wider commentary on general societal decline.

The games of deception played by opposing intelligence services - claiming credit for something they had no hand in or denying responsibility for something they did – promulgate the myths and legends of the real players and events and provide much of the source material for espionage fiction and thrillers. And these games of mendacity can sustain themselves indefinitely because 'no matter how convoluted reality may be, rumours have a way of being more convoluted still.'²⁴⁵ Silva is therefore free to ignore the anti-romantic approach of espionage fiction because the global environment in which he has placed his literature has changed in such a way that spying

²⁴⁵ George Jonas, *Vengeance*, p. 332.

is now considered to be one of the most effective weapons in the battle against present-day threats; a battle in which the enemy is no longer on the other side of a wall but hidden within the community.

Most reviewers agree that Jonas' account of OWG is largely accurate – although also noting that some minor details are at variance with other reported versions and that some details of which Avner claimed to have first-hand knowledge may also have included a significant amount of exaggeration. And, in the accepted tradition of secret-service deceptions, some of the information provided to Jonas from official sources may also have been provided for no other reason than to deceive. Even the name of the mission itself, Operation Wrath of God, which was allegedly given to the counter-terrorist initiative immediately after Munich 'may have been invented by Western reporters or their Israeli informants'²⁴⁶ (although the title is particularly advantageous for Silva with his penchant for religious symbolism).

Aside from individualising the action, and only accrediting Allon with the ostensibly more courageous handgun killings (rather than explosive devices or chemical munitions), the most meaningful difference between the real and the fictional version of OWG is the post-operational outcome. Whereas Avner finds himself in exile from his country and betrayed by his former employers, Allon chooses to place himself into exile - even though he is fettered by his employers and his fellow countrymen. But the same criticism of the operation itself (i.e. that the only tangible result was an ever-increasing cycle of

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 333.

violence) is shared by the two participants. Both also use a similar way of expressing its evident futility: 'revenge only leads to more killing and more revenge ... they're like shark's teeth: break one and another will rise in its place'²⁴⁷ says Allon in a close imitation of Avner's comment that his efforts had simply chopped off some of the monster's heads only to see stronger ones grow in their place. Silva's own feelings towards OWG (with the advantage of hindsight, a different cultural environment and a knowledge of the end result) is still nonetheless somewhat ambivalent: 'While we were busy killing the members of Black September, we didn't notice that the Egyptians and the Syrians were preparing to drive us into the sea. And they nearly succeeded. We killed thirteen members of Black September, and it didn't bring back one of the boys they slaughtered in Munich'²⁴⁸ says Allon. 'Yes, but it felt good'²⁴⁹ Shamron replies.

²⁴⁷ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 77.

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

THE AVENGING ANGEL ON FILM

‘The world has been rough with you, your tribe. It is right for you to respond roughly to such treatment.’²⁵⁰

The real figure on whom the fictional Gabriel Allon was based (the leader of the OWG team) made two high-profile appearances in film before finally arriving on the pages of Silva’s novels. The first was in the 1986, made-for-TV Canadian film, *Sword of Gideon*. The second in the 2005 film, *Munich*, produced and directed by Steven Spielberg. Both films use Jonas’ book as their source material and both also follow the book in naming their lead character Avner. There are, however, significant differences between the two film versions of Avner and, despite them adopting the same cover-name, neither makes any real effort to stay true to either the philosophy or the physical characteristics of Jonas’ prototype. The films are, as such, two distinctly different interpretations of a real person - a person who Silva will reinterpret once again to form his own literary creation. The four very different portrayals of Avner are thus symptomatic of a purposefully-selected formula intended to convey the didactic purpose of the interpreters. In simpler terms, all four versions of Avner - produced via the act of interpretation - reflect the political intention of each of his ‘authors’.

²⁵⁰ *Sword of Gideon*, dir. by Michael Anderson, (Alliance Entertainment, CTV Television Network, HBO, Rogers Cablesystems, Société Radio-Canada, Telefilm Canada, 1986) [on DVD].

Based on its profile, Academy Award nominations and box-office takings, Spielberg's *Munich* deserves the most attention – not least because Spielberg had the most latitude, authority and budget to explore the issues through a crafted cinematic experience rather than as a straightforward documentary. And, although also drawing heavily on some elements of Jonas' book, and intending to exploit its 'compelling drama'²⁵¹, Spielberg's film differs from the earlier 1986 film in its interpretation of the book, the selection and directing of the actors and its intended messages.

The interpretation of the text is in itself complex because Spielberg may very well have been 'comfortable'²⁵² with using Jonas' book for his source material, but his use of Kushner (a hugely talented playwright but also a fierce critic of the Israeli government²⁵³), coupled with the hiring-and-firing of a number of equally talented writers prior to Kushner, suggests that Spielberg had clearly decided to retell the story through his own, distinct 'take on human affairs'²⁵⁴. The input of the aggrieved and exiled Avner during the film-making process itself is also indicative of Spielberg's desire to distance himself from the spirit and the factual accuracy of Jonas' text. This aside, *Munich* is not a particularly radical reinterpretation of Jonas' book. But it does display a distinct shift towards the fundamental elements of a globally-appealing action-thriller, the dominance of style and aesthetics over

²⁵¹ *Munich*, dir. by Steven Spielberg, (DreamWorks, Universal Pictures, 2005) [on DVD].

²⁵² *ibid.*

²⁵³ 'Israeli government policy regularly comes in for Kushner criticism. So when Steven Spielberg commissioned Kushner to write the screenplay for *Munich*, Spielberg's hugely controversial 2005 film about Israel's covert response to the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics, it was a red rag to a bull. And the bull charged.' John Nathan, *Tony Kushner: Me? I am the Wicked Son*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 20 Oct 2006.

²⁵⁴ *The Spielberg Massacre*: www.georgejonas.ca, (07 Jan 2006) [accessed Feb 2017].

the dark brutality of Jonas' narrative and a distinct variance between Jonas' 1975 perspective and Spielberg's more recent, global-political view.

Cinematic and aesthetic differences aside, *Munich* also portrayed the events as an exterior story (i.e. relying on a series of events) rather than an internal one (i.e. focusing more on the on the psychological dramas involved.)

Interpreting the script is the first step towards developing the director's own ideas and so the initial narrative tools applied by Jonas (including multiple layers of plot and characterisation) had to be amended, to a greater or lesser extent, to reflect Spielberg's intention to focus on the arc of the story.

There are, of course, political, psychological and sociological overtones to every story and the emphasis to be placed on each is determined in a film by the director - albeit with some consideration for the views of the intended audience. The various thematic strands of the *Munich* story could therefore have been woven by Spielberg into one or more of these themes without any significant disruption to the wider cinematic appeal: (i) political - to consider the strategic intentions of the mission alongside the political imperative on the Israeli side, or to flesh out what the Black September leaders had hoped to achieve at the Olympiad, (ii) sociological - to consider the ongoing climate of violence/counter-violence, and (iii) psychological - to explore the lead character's journey from recruit, to believer, to doubter, to exile. A greater focus on the psychological perspective could also have been used, for example, to explore why Avner was selected as the group's leader and to explore what skill-sets he possessed that made him suitable for that role. This is a particularly critical omission of the film because Avner again fails to

convey any of the leadership traits typical of a traditional, heroic figure. Nor, for that matter, does the film allow any of the 'Israeli' characters to display the traditional heroic characteristics of coolness-under-fire and so they cannot harness any of the dramatic weight normally offered in action films through unspoken dialogue. And, unlike the traditional, tightly-knit male group (which grows ever closer as they face danger, disappointment and defeat), Avner's flaws as a leader become more exposed as the team starts to fracture.

Accrediting Jonas for the source material²⁵⁵ and then excluding him from any input into the screenplay is, from a practical and commercial perspective, not unreasonable. Jonas would not have been able to contribute as much as Avner to the original material (irrespective of whether that input is factually accurate or just imagined). Nor should Spielberg be criticised for wanting to employ a screenwriter who supports his own working style. So Jonas may have complained about his exclusion - and that his supposedly-reliable source was just another 'spook in the grip of celebrity worship'²⁵⁶ (who was now helping Spielberg to 'take the book where only Steven can take it'²⁵⁷) - but then, as Jonas concedes, his book is also wholly reliant on the same uncorroborated information and the same unreliable source. Jonas is also aware that 'many spooks possess the imagination of Baron Munchausen [and] their information being difficult to check, reinforce their inclination to tell

²⁵⁵ In his *Introduction* to the film, Spielberg describes Jonas' book 'the most credible account and the only account of the extensive history of the response.' The claim ignores two other accounts of the Olympic tragedy and the covert revenge operation: Simon Reeve's *One Day in September* (2000) and Aaron Klein's *Striking Back* (2005).

²⁵⁶ *The Spielberg Massacre*: www.georgejonas.ca, (07 Jan 2006)

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

tales, partly to enhance the financial value of their story, and partly to please their interlocutor by telling him what they figure he wishes to hear.²⁵⁸

It is with some irony that whilst Spielberg comments in his introduction to *Munich* that the film-making process stayed true to the authenticity of Jonas' text, the film itself clearly challenges the book's political and philosophical stance. But, as Jonas points out, 'my book was all about avenging evil. Then the King of Hollywood got hold of it.'²⁵⁹ Spielberg supporters could counter the accusations of a 'Hollywood makeover' with the argument that an imaginative adaption of a strong narrative, and the inclusion of more dramatic lines into the script, simply allows the audience to witness the political and human issues involved in greater detail. They could also put forward the view that Spielberg is merely replicating a dominant theme of the traditional war film (the war-weary combat unit moving from one deadly engagement to another) and that he cannot be criticised for just trying to adopt a direct, anti-romantic portrayal of 'soldiers' in a combat environment in more human terms.²⁶⁰ Or they could even suggest that the reality of what Spielberg has portrayed as real in the film is based on a text which has also been accused of airing several contradictory and unverifiable allegations. But then, as an equally concerned writer of an adapted film suggests, 'maybe you need craft and artifice to make something that looks real, a fake thing that looks more real than the real thing itself.'²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

²⁵⁹ www.georgejonas.ca/recent_writing, (07 Jan 2006).

²⁶⁰ In their first get-together as a team, the team members agree to consider themselves as 'soldiers in a war.'

²⁶¹ Ben Fountain, author of *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, in an article commenting on the film director, Ang Lee's, adaptation of his book. *Guardian Review*, Saturday 28 January 2017.

The traditional 'good-war' film approach, used to such dramatic effect by Spielberg in *Saving Private Ryan*, could not be adopted for the more problematic, morally complex themes of OWG. Nor could the participants be defined in such a simplistic manner if the psychological traumas they experienced were to be portrayed with any real accuracy. So the film shows that the mission may have succeeded in killing a number of men 'thought²⁶² to have been responsible for Munich, but the lead character - on whom Spielberg's story revolves - is left emotionally broken, distrustful of his senior officers and isolated from the country on whose behalf he had been operating. Viewers are therefore understandably confused about whether Spielberg's version of the events is either supporting or condemning the Israeli response. In the film's introduction however, the director states that his film it 'is not an argument for non-response²⁶³ but one that is attempting to show that even 'the right response is still one that confronts you with some very difficult issues.'²⁶⁴ The 'right response' to which he refers is not one that he believes is unique to Israel but one that 'Israel shares with the rest of the world.'²⁶⁵ Having therefore discounted the wider ethical dilemma of government-sanctioned assassination - with the rationale that 'we all do it' - and skilfully avoided any direct criticism of Israel in doing so, Spielberg is then free to adopt a far less challenging approach to the complex themes by confining his subject matter to 'why a country feels that its best defence against a certain kind of violence is counter-violence.'²⁶⁶ The underlying

²⁶² Note that 'thought responsible', regarding those who were actually killed in the retributive action, was one of Spielberg's 'indisputable facts.'

²⁶³ *Munich*, dir. by Steven Spielberg, (DreamWorks, Universal Pictures, 2005) [on DVD].

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*

message of his seemingly balanced approach (which is supported by the three 'irrefutable facts' he provides in his Introduction) is that the retributive operations were morally justified, that targeted assassination is a government policy used elsewhere and that OWG was only implemented in direct response to the 'massacre'²⁶⁷ of the Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games.

Despite the extreme polarity of views about Spielberg's film (that it is either too pro-Israel or too anti-Israel) it is an extremely ambivalent interpretation of some very challenging issues. In many respects this is because, in seeking to avoid criticism of bias and attempting to explore each issue, he has allowed every argument to be countered with an opposing, but equally valid, point of view. As a result, the film has not been allowed to develop any explicit educational positions. But, in trying to simplify the complex with short presentations of opinion and counter-opinion, the film is unable to explore any of the issues in any depth and so just ends up tarnishing all of the participants. It is therefore of little surprise that in a world in which the hunt for terrorists has since been labelled as '*a battle between good and evil*', that the lack of clarity in the film - about the morality of the action, the legitimacy of the targets and the perpetuation of a cycle of violence - has led to criticism from liberal and conservative commentators, pro-Israeli lobbyists in the US and even the Israeli government itself.

If *Munich* had intended to provide cinema audiences with a politically balanced view of a complex operation, the earlier 1986 action drama, *Sword*

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*

of *Gideon*, had no such ambitions. The film is, according to its distributors, the 'true story of the men and women who are willing to risk their lives and leave their families to fight the still-raging terrorist war.'²⁶⁸ It is a war, it adds, that drives 'men of peace to commit acts of vengeance.'²⁶⁹ Directed by the English director Michael Anderson, the film portrays the operation as a military-led initiative, carried out by a handful of specially-selected experts. The small, 5-man team is again led by Avner, an officer hand-picked for the mission from an elite airborne unit. Unlike the more ad-hoc composition of the *Munich* team, Chris Bryant's screenplay defines the *Sword of Gideon* mission as a military operation launched and overseen by the Israeli army (albeit 'on a different battlefield.'²⁷⁰) The Anderson/Bryant interpretation of the purpose and methodology of the mission is explicit: OWG wasn't an ill-prepared response by an under-prepared team. It was a carefully-planned and clinically-applied military strike against the enemies of Israel.

Like *Munich*, the underlying doubts about the trustworthiness and integrity of the Mossad are a recurring theme. Unlike *Munich*, the theme of distrust is also extended towards the relationship with Papa, the source of their information. And, although Papa is used to direct the team towards Zwaiter²⁷¹ (as he did in *Munich*) the Papa character then assumes a much less prominent role. This shift from the more mundane (and less cinematic) monetary purchase of information is to introduce the less likely, and far too

²⁶⁸ *Sword of Gideon*, dir. by Michael Anderson, (Alliance Entertainment, CTV Television Network, HBO, Rogers Cablesystems, Société Radio-Canada, Telefilm Canada, 1986) [on DVD].

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*

²⁷¹ Zwaiter in this portrayal is a character shown behaving suspiciously and cowardly whereas, in the *Munich* version, he is shown as a man of culture who bravely tries to reason with his would-be assassins.

coincidental, detection techniques which the team uses to lead them further along their list.²⁷²

Anderson, perhaps best-known for directing the second world war epic, *The Dam Busters* (1955), which was based on the true story of Operation Chastise, has tried to apply the same sort of simplistic good-versus-evil approach to OWG that made his earlier film so successful. He has also tried to use the same underlying principles of *The Dam Busters* narrative (i.e. good triumphing over evil because of the sacrifice of a brave few) and made frequent theatrical adaptations to convince the audience that the mission was a legitimate, seamless and heroic progression which started with a massacre and concluded with a revenge. And, despite any claims towards the film being a true story, its factual credibility is completely undermined by a small insert in the final credits: 'Except to the extent inspired by historical figures and historical events, the characters and events depicted in this motion picture are fictional'.²⁷³

Casting the lead in a film is the first expression of the director's idea. The selection is based on the director's interpretation of the script and the 'politics of finance [which] as often as a director's vision dictate casting'.²⁷⁴ Bauer and Bana (*Sword of Gideon* and *Munich* respectively) were therefore selected because they are marketable to a wider audience and because they conform physically and behaviourally to Anderson's and Spielberg's visions of Avner.

²⁷² The reliance on the coincidental is a technique that Silva also frequently falls back on to support his own wavering storylines.

²⁷³ *Sword of Gideon*, dir. by Michael Anderson.

²⁷⁴ Ken Dancyger, *The Director's Idea: The Path to Great Directing*, (New York, Elsevier, 2006), p. 101.

This is a typical approach to casting for the more traditional Anderson but is in marked contrast to Spielberg's usual practice where 'main characters are often cast for their ordinary look.'²⁷⁵

Bauer is not allowed to undermine the dynamics of the plot nor to complicate the audience's response to his character. Bana however is more complicated and so the audience response is expected to be far more mixed. Spielberg has used complicated lead characters before (such as Amon Goeth in *Schindler's List*) but whenever he has done so he 'has moved away from the romantic character arc so fundamental to the majority of his films.'²⁷⁶ As a result, his version of Avner struggles to find any real cohesion in the problematic storyline.

The audience experiences the narrative through the lead character and, disregarding any complexities of characterisation, it is more likely to establish an emotional relationship with the leading actor if that actor is visually seductive. This physical attractiveness can also be enhanced with the use of emotional engagement and so both directors have portrayed their versions of Avner as loving husbands and fathers (two identity roles they share with Gabriel Allon). This is a critical ploy in fostering engagement with the audience because it articulates 'masculine strength and power through internal, personal and family-oriented values.'²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 254.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 255.

²⁷⁷ Steve Neale, 'Action Adventure as a Hollywood Genre' in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker (London, Routledge, 2004), pp. 71-83 (p. 72).

Like Silva, Anderson and Spielberg have also tried to dramatise the non-fictional coverage of the mission within the constraints of historical accuracy. And again, like Silva, have avoided conveying the impression that the mission was without moral complication. More importantly, all three support the view that targeted assassination is an acceptable government policy. The distinct moral positioning of the two directors is difficult to sustain however because, as the actor Matthieu Kassovitz²⁷⁸ surmises, the story itself has 'no glory, no outcome, just destruction.'²⁷⁹ (Silva, in contrast, can confine the question of morality to the single perspective of Gabriel Allon and can elaborate on his own positioning through Allon's internal reflections and in having him challenge the authority, politics and philosophy of his senior officers.)

The question of legitimacy is perhaps the most significant omission from the two films - perhaps more so in *Munich* because Spielberg believes that he has addressed the issue through his 'indisputable facts'.²⁸⁰ He states, for example, that Meir instructed the assassination teams 'to go after those responsible for killing the athletes' but neither he (nor his Avner for that matter) can attest to the legitimacy of the men who were subsequently killed. His third 'indisputable fact', moreover, includes the caveat that 'a significant number of those who were thought responsible were killed.' The film's scriptwriter, Tony Kushner, also fails to provide the audience with any

²⁷⁸ The actor, Matthieu Kassovitz, plays the *Munich* team's toy-maker/bomb-maker.

²⁷⁹ *Munich*, dir. by Steven Spielberg, (DreamWorks, Universal Pictures, 2005) [on DVD].

²⁸⁰ Spielberg lists the 'three indisputable facts' as (i) Israeli athletes were 'massacred' at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, (ii) Golda Meir made the decision to go after those responsible for killing the athletes, and (iii) a significant number of those who were thought to be responsible were killed.

assurance about the legitimacy of the targets. He refers to those killed as either 'part of a terror network' or as 'political leaders and intellectual leaders' - neither of which would necessarily warrant government-sanctioned assassination.

Despite the moral ambiguity and the clumsy attempts to simplify the complex, *Sword of Gideon* and *Munich* are action-thrillers and audiences of such films expect certain elements of action-thrillers to dominate, i.e. spectacles of violence, fast editing and/or camera movement, sweeping landscapes, heroics by the lead characters, dangerous foes and emotive soundtracks. Some criticism of the overly dramatic interpretations could therefore be levelled against action-thriller audiences themselves for driving an increasing demand for action at the expense of a deeper, more subtle analysis of the sort of questions posed. Genre acuity is, after all, almost as much in demand for a film-goer as a well-told story (or narrative clarity). Those criticisms aside, both directors can still be credited for creating films that position and lift their narratives with the inclusion of documentary-style, opening sequences.²⁸¹ This clever intercutting of fact and fiction elevates the power and the emotional impact of the film and directs the audience from the outset towards its political intent (and is a technique that also underpins the Daniel Silva narratives). If used effectively, the construct can persuade the audience of a different reality. But if the construct fails to disguise the revisions, is disrupted in flow or is symptomatic of a particular style, the reception can be quite different.

²⁸¹ *Munich* includes footage from the 1972 Olympic Games, the first major terrorist attack shown live on television.

Popular action films, like popular thrillers, are sold to prospective audiences with an implied promise of action and film-makers, in responding to this demand, are choosing to supply even more graphic representations of action (including violence) in their products. Decisions about the type and nature of any product are, in a market-driven economy, determined by a small group of individuals 'who are in no direct way responsible to it'.²⁸² And, since the producer wishes to see a return on any investment, the sale of the product is directed by whatever society is thought to be needing and 'by considerations of industrial convenience and likely profit'.²⁸³ The trick, so to speak, for this controlling minority is to anticipate and/or develop the needs of the expectant majority and then to convince the resultant purchasers that they have made a conscious selection. So it is not surprising that selling the *Munich* product to Israel - whose government publicly challenged Spielberg's claim that his film was a 'prayer for peace'²⁸⁴ - required the deployment of a pressure group to counter the fierce criticism it then generated.²⁸⁵

It is likely that that the financial appeal of a mass-market audience just overrode Anderson's and Spielberg's ambitions to make an original or artistic film²⁸⁶ because the tried-and-tested, thrills-and-spills formula of the action

²⁸² Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, (London, Verso, 1980), p. 186.

²⁸³ *ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Andrew Gumbel, *The Independent*, 24 Dec 2005.

²⁸⁵ To counter charges of superficiality and moral ambiguity levelled against his film by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Spielberg retained the services of Eyal Arad (a senior adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon) to organise screenings and to generate more sympathetic opinion. The Director, a generous contributor to Israeli and Jewish causes, also launched a PR campaign that included meetings with numerous Israeli officials and Mossad officers.' (Andrew Gumbel, *The Independent*, 24 Dec 2005)

²⁸⁶ Kevin Macdonald's, Academy Award winning documentary of the 1972 Olympic massacre, *One Day in September* stands out as such an example.

genre has taken precedence in both films over much of their narratives.²⁸⁷ But at the heart of any deliberation about the two OWG films is what is real and what is fake and both directors, despite adopting completely different approaches, have created a construct that has turned the murky, problematic, and complicated story of targeted assassination into a picturesquely imagined world. Much of the content of the two films could therefore be dismissed as light entertainment but the easy dismissal becomes more problematic whenever films are politically reactionary and are mindful of the more popular, visually-dominant cinema in which 'meaning and pleasure are unlikely to be accessed simply through narrative exegesis.'²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ The key elements of which include a handsome, muscular male lead performing dramatic deeds, a violent conflict between two opposing forces and some considerable effort to persuade the audience that a semblance of moral and political balance has been provided. Blurring the distinction between us-and-them, or good-and-bad - whilst still ensuring that any heroic or selfless deeds are only performed by the good characters - is also advantageous. Such techniques, coincidentally, form the core elements of a Gabriel Allon novel.

²⁸⁸ Yvonne Tasker, 'Introduction' in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker (London, Routledge, 2004), pp. 1- 13 (p. 3).

CHAPTER 6

RECONSTRUCTING A JEWISH AVENGER

‘One can’t grieve properly. One can only think of revenge.’²⁸⁹

Consoling tales about defeating evil have always been popular and there have been numerous versions of figures like Gabriel Allon throughout the history of storytelling. Silva’s own protagonist shares the personal characteristics and behavioural traits of many of these figures but, tellingly, his physical role, and the underlying symbolism of that role, are drawn from mythology. On the one hand there is the mysterious stranger, a taciturn-loner who turns up from nowhere, resolves the problem and then disappears again. On the other, the Golem of Prague, a man-made figure from Jewish folklore enlivened by a spiritual blessing and sent out on missions of revenge by his creator. Drawing heavily on these creative sources, Silva has created a literary hybrid, a man-made, semi-mythological being who inflicts prescribed punishments (determined by the state, religious texts or the individual himself) on wrongdoers. This representative figure is therefore free to do things that may not be justifiable (or even possible) to a normal man but are considered proportionate, necessary and permissible in his pursuit of the challenges raised by the author.

Since the publication of his first Gabriel Allon book in 2000, Daniel Silva has placed his protagonist into the murky world of counter-terrorism, international crime and organisational corruption on an annual basis. Sales of new Gabriel

²⁸⁹ Daniel Silva, *The English Spy*, p. 232.

Allon books feature prominently at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list and, with its huge commercial success, the opportunities for his author to comment on the world's geo-political situation have increased significantly. It is somewhat ironic then that, having gained access to the media via the creation of wholly fictitious characters and scenarios, the author's own commentary on the real-world environment has become more coveted. The commercial success of the series has moreover, offered the author far greater access to individuals of influence and expertise and it is this more privileged access, along with the author's allusions to having insider knowledge of the complex and multipolar environments contained in the narratives, that make his commentaries seem even more credible to his readers. But, as Rabbi Loew found when he created his own Golem back in the Sixteenth Century, Silva must also adapt to the natural assertions of his creation and the changing geo-political climate in which he places him. Otherwise he risks it challenging the very principles on which it was created.²⁹⁰

COUNTER-FACTUAL TECHNIQUES

The counter-factual technique used by Silva is commonly used by other popular novelists but few others use it to reinterpret the factual foundations to such an extent or do it with such a distinctly biased viewpoint. The technique itself works most effectively when it is applied in a less overt, more subtle

²⁹⁰ Some versions of the legend record the spiritually-motivated, avenging Golem going on a murderous rampage.

manner but can still be equally effective when the personalities of the literary figures (like Allon) are placed onto a stage normally hidden from view.

Critical readers are, more so than ever, asked to be sceptical about information; to recognise the application of the words, to investigate the meaning of the text and to be conscious of the use of dangerous phraseology. Critical counter-fiction readers must also consider the text within the context of present-day issues and with an understanding of the past. More importantly, they must apply their own knowledge onto the historical illustrations in order to recognise the author's point of view. But readers of best-selling thrillers don't generally read this genre because they want to explore the intricacies of the text; they read it because they want to see the good guy win and the bad guy lose. More than that, they want to see the bad guy get punished. And Silva has responded to this demand by giving his own retributive figure (who can always be relied upon to mete out a punishment appropriate to the crime) a name, a personality, an ethnicity and a nationality. He has, in short, placed a fictitious character into a real, a lost and an imaginary history.

There is an inherent difficulty for any author in choosing to write about real people and then in having them interact with literary characters. The author can minimise some of this difficulty in modelling the character on the real person and then avoiding making any direct reference to that person's life.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Shamron, for example, replicates much of the history, the physical characteristics, and the political positioning of the former intelligence officer, Gen. Rafi Eitan (the lead officer in the 1960 kidnapping of Eichmann - a feat Shamron claims credit for in the Allon novels). Readers would also find it difficult to distinguish between Silva's eastern-European, newspaper mogul Benjamin Stone and the Mirror-group owner, Robert Maxwell (particularly because Maxwell and Stone shared the same watery fate). The inspiration for Ivan Kharkov is also clearly Victor Bout, the Russian arms dealer extradited to the US in 2010.

The dialogue used to portray these figures (which includes commentary on their values and beliefs), along with the imagined environments in which they are placed, doesn't then need to be an exact replica of that person. It merely needs to provide enough clues for the reader to make an informed assumption about who they may be. As such, Silva can neatly sidestep any accusations of falsification or betrayal simply because he hasn't actually copied a life, he has merely 'bent the light to vary the act.'²⁹²

Reality only exists in the mind of the reader and influencing that mind (as O'Brien knew only too well when he interrogated Winston Smith in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) allows the author to dictate how we, as readers of the presented truth, interpret the proffered reality. Most readers require a convincing argument to be persuaded towards an author's point of view and so may well question why the accuracy of an historic event really matters if an imaginary figure has just been added to it. But making a revision to an historic event, however slight, creates an alternative record of that event and promotes a ready acceptance of an alternative viewpoint. And there is little doubt that promoting such a view, in whatever cultural form, is influential to a later understanding - particularly if that view is also being presented as a recommended course of action to some very real, present-day threats.

THE WRITING TECHNIQUE

As noted, the Gabriel Allon novels can be categorised into a number of different literary genres; the spy novel, the detective novel, the suspense

²⁹² Don De Lillo, *Libra* (London, Penguin Books, 2006), p.34.

novel and the thriller. Each book contains an element of each form but *A Death in Vienna* marked Silva's intention to move away from the more mixed literary influences and to place greater emphasis on the thriller. Various technical elements are required to categorise a novel as a thriller and Silva's clever use of them indicates how successful this transition has been.²⁹³

Thrillers also tend to tell the readers what the characters themselves don't know and this is particularly important if the author wishes to sustain interest in a long-running series because it can build a relationship based on the reader's own concerns for the character's welfare. It can also increase the plot's tensions as the various forces converge.

Alongside the basic elements of the thriller, Silva also uses three other literary techniques in his novels: compare-and-contrast, art restoration as a motif and the multiple perspective. Of most prominence in the series, and the hallmark of the Allon novel, is that they are one-part art and one-part intrigue. In structural terms, and to support the counter-terrorist's nomadic lifestyle, the occupation of a high-profile art-restorer is ideally suited to a global drifter. It also has the added advantage of providing access to prominent and influential figures. The independence (financial and geographical) of the profession also allows the protagonist to make an objective decision towards his active participation in the intrigue. The act of persuasion therefore

²⁹³ These elements include a race against time, a devious villain whose cleverness makes the chances of thwarting him unlikely, frequent references to the villain's thought processes, an imminent threat and, most crucially, some cliff-hanging chapter endings. A thought-provoking prologue, often posing a simple question and then not disclosing the answer until near to the book's conclusion, is also a popular technique and it is not unusual to include a scene-setting episode which summons the uniquely qualified, but reluctant, protagonist into the action.

requires the instigator to set out, in simple detail, the nature and the extent of the threat.

The actual mechanics of the restoration process, and the workings of global art market²⁹⁴, also feature prominently in the series but it is the techniques of art restoration itself, used as a recurring metaphor, which dominate much of the narrative and are used to describe the physical environment of the novel (where the exterior appearance may be a distortion of the reality) and Gabriel's innate ability to restore broken people.

Another favoured Silva technique is the multiple perspective which he deploys whenever a group of strangers assemble. These people don't really understand what they are seeing but are permitted to speculate wildly and to express a variety of colloquial or stereotypical opinions. One of the group will then voice a particularly fanciful opinion that is, unbeknown to the rest of the group, the most valid. In a similar way, Silva often provides descriptions of the characters through a third-person viewpoint. This allows him to adapt the perspective of the storyline and to provide the character with the authority to express either an authoritative or an uninformed view. Of particularly powerful and dramatic effect is Gabriel's mother's first-person testimony of her time in Auschwitz which Silva uses to try to explain the complex personality of his protagonist and the rationale of his cause. The author also uses the third-person technique to examine the psychological make-up of the other main characters and to force the reader to question whether their original opinions remain valid. So Allon's personal vendetta against Tariq (in

²⁹⁴ The first book of the Allon series, *The Kill Artist*, for example, is divided into three sections: Acquisition, Assessment and Restoration.

The Kill Artist) introduces the brutality of the terrorist ('blowing up my [Allon's] wife and son right before my eyes'²⁹⁵) but, in true Silva style, links it to the protagonist's earlier murder of Tariq's brother, Mahmoud (a member of Black September who Allon woke from sleep so that 'he wouldn't die a peaceful death.'²⁹⁶) Allon is initially convinced that 'he [Tariq] had made a mistake',²⁹⁷ but comes to realise that he and the terrorist share many of the same characteristics: 'He's careful, deliberate. He's the perfect predator.'²⁹⁸ They also share the same levels of ruthlessness: 'From one professional to another, it was an exquisite piece of work'²⁹⁹ Allon says somewhat dispassionately about the car-bombing of his wife and child.

The third-person technique is also used by Silva to counter any concerns the reader might have about the protagonist's callousness. In *The Messenger*, for example, the Pope's private secretary, a senior figure in the Church's hierarchy, tells Allon: 'We are not so different you and I. We've both given our lives over to higher powers. For me, it's the Church. For you, it's your people ... And the land.'³⁰⁰ The technique, albeit using a spiritual metaphor for a political point, challenges the reader to review any early impressions of the two characters and to reconsider them within the context of a higher calling. The technique is adapted slightly, but used just as effectively, in the dialogues that Shamron and Allon share where the more extreme philosophies aired by Shamron are tempered with Allon's more moderate

²⁹⁵Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 192.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰⁰ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 32.

approach. In these situations however, the technique is not used to invite an exploration of personal characteristics but to recognise, and to consider, the alternative points of view.

Casual references to real characters, dates and events also dominate Silva's novels and act as clues to guide the reader towards the influences that underpin the storylines. A second reading of the book may make these clues more pertinent but the reader must still have some knowledge of the historical or political background to recognise their true significance. So *A Death in Vienna* may, on first reading, appear to be concerned with the horrors of the Holocaust (and the related crimes of the Nazis and the Austrians), but it also makes telling comment on increasing levels of anti-Semitism and the US government's recruitment of ex-Nazis following the Second World War.³⁰¹

It is notable though that any criticism of the internal politics of a bureaucracy are tempered whenever they are applied to the US or Israeli security services. The inevitable administrative difficulties in managing large, monolithic organisations are also ignored in order to avoid relegating his action-hero to the mundanity of organisational management. The clumsy machinations of Shamron to manipulate his chosen successor into a senior, organisational role may therefore dominate the early books of the series but by the seventeenth (*House of Spies*) Allon 'the prince of fire, the angel of vengeance, the chosen son of Ari Shamron, had finally assumed his rightful

³⁰¹ The techniques used by Silva to justify the realpolitik approach of his own government are not particularly credible in this instance having been aired in a book that is fiercely critical of the working relationships between Nazi leaders and other governments and institutions in the 1930s and 40s.

place as chief of Israel's secret intelligence service'³⁰² (ignoring the fact that he lacks any experience in politics, management or international relations). The already implausible storyline becomes even more so when the new appointee elects to divide the role into two: Allon will assume overall responsibility for operations, whilst his long-term rival, Uzi Navot, will assume responsibility for the administrative function. As improbable as the imagined scenario might be – two chiefs with conflicting priorities and ambitions – the joint management structure neatly separates Allon from the physical action whilst still ensuring that he remains in direct control of the derring-do. Previously peripheral characters can then also be developed to fill in the gaps of his former, more active role - hence the focus in the later books on the restoration of Christopher Keller from assassin to reformed counter-terrorist agent. The literary life cycle (Allon into his wily, strategic predecessor and Keller into the action-hero Allon of the two previous decades) is thus complete. Crucially for Silva, the farfetched storyline also provides him with the opportunity to make comment on the whole-picture perspective in future Allon books rather than just the single-person perspective of his earlier novels.³⁰³

Ignoring the implausibility of Silva's succession planning, it is nevertheless instructive that the process itself can be seen to typify the author's tendency to comment on internal politics in order to discredit selected (fictional) individuals and to criticise any perceived distancing of the organisation from

³⁰² Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p.4.

³⁰³ Keller's unlikely progression is rationalised by the author through his use of the shifting perspective: 'Sounds like the stuff of a spy novel,' Keller says when challenged about his past. 'Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction' replies his accuser. Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 367.

its primary function.³⁰⁴ It is also noticeable that Silva fails to make any reference to the complexities of Israeli political, cultural or social life. His readers will therefore be unaware of the tensions between secular and orthodox Israelis or the racial tensions resulting from the country absorbing such huge numbers of immigrants. The economy, unemployment, Operation Peace for Galilee and settlement building are also subjects that have been avoided despite them all forming a major part of Israeli political debate.

A notable and necessary strength of Silva's writing technique is his regard for succession planning - or ensuring that the time-driven narratives reflect the natural process of ageing and that the younger (replacement) characters are developed along a narrative arc that serves to prolong the underlying messages. This difficult-to-manage process requires the author to maintain the ongoing presence of the primary characters, to develop characters from earlier books and to introduce new characters who can lend weight to the Silva storylines. The success of this continuing regeneration of like-minded personnel relies on Silva's skill as an author in developing credible working and personal relationships between them all. These relationships are influenced by the characters' history and the changing, geo-political environment in which they are being placed (dominated in Silva literature by Israel's relationships with the US and, to a lesser extent, Israel's relationship with selected European countries). The difficulty for an author is that the political environment tends to become more prominent, and more difficult to sustain, with each successive novel. With Daniel Silva, for example, his early

³⁰⁴ This approach is in marked contrast to Le Carre's who used the organisational intrigues as a method through which to criticise the organisation's operational function and its organisational remit.

Allon books directed the reader's sympathies towards a pro-Israeli position and so his later books needed to be cognisant of Allon's/Israel's fictional past and any notable events from Israel's real-life, recent history. Establishing such clear positioning then makes it very difficult for the author to continue to make any objective comment on Israeli policies or organisations. This means that Avner and Ephraim's fractious working relationship (broken irreversibly with accusations of disloyalty, cheating and betrayal) has had to be replaced for Allon and Shamron with one that mimics much of the complex and deep relationship that Ian Fleming used between M and Bond, i.e. the symbolic father-figure sending out his challenging but highly-gifted son. Allon, like Bond, is as a consequence 'powerless to push back'³⁰⁵ against such a dominant figure but, whenever he does, it results in battles that were 'the stuff of office lore.'³⁰⁶ The battles were not however, the normal politicking of a bureaucracy nor an attempt to impose a role on a subordinate by an ambitious boss. They were instead the seeds on which Silva can start to nurture the foundations of a close familial relationship between his two key characters. This relationship has two advantages for Silva: it detaches Allon from the mundanity of the intelligence service's bureaucracy (his authority to act is derived from Shamron's own high-level access to key figures) and it prepares the reader to accept the later, highly improbable shift in the mantle of responsibility from Shamron to his chosen successor. The shift itself also signals two key events in the Allon series: (i) a recognition that Shamron as a major figure in the series is now fading into the background (somewhat

³⁰⁵ Daniel Silva, *A Death in Vienna*, p. 28.

³⁰⁶ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 179.

inevitably as he has had to battle age and illness since 2000), and (ii) an abrupt change of direction for the protagonist, who in the fourteenth book of the series, *The Heist* (2014), steps back from the physical action and assumes a more strategically-focused planning role that better reflects his senior years.³⁰⁷

The father-son, fractious-loving interdependence, like the revenge motif, is referenced repeatedly throughout the series ('the Sabra warrior who had pulled Gabriel from the womb of the Betsal'el School of Art thirty years earlier'³⁰⁸) and reaches its ultimate conclusion with the acknowledgement that the newly-appointed Head of Israel's security service (an appointment engineered by Shamron through 15 earlier novels) had become an exact replica of his younger self by the sixteenth. 'You *are* me'³⁰⁹ Shamron tells Allon on the day of his protégé's appointment. And, in case the reader may have overlooked Silva's quasi-religious narrative in his first fifteen books, Shamron also confesses to the succession being an inevitable part of a great plan. 'Whose plan?' asks Allon. 'Maybe it was mine, maybe it was God's. We are on the same side when it comes to you, God and me. We are accomplices.'³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ The relationship between Silva, Shamron and Allon extends beyond literary succession planning. Shamron had already appeared in one of Silva's earlier novels (*The Mark of the Assassin*), but in this book, he is a far less sympathetic character than the one who dominates the later Allon novels – most notably in his views towards a Greater Israel, i.e. one that doesn't include any Palestinian land claims.

³⁰⁸ Daniel Silva, *The English Assassin*, p. 372.

³⁰⁹ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, p. 512.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*

CRITICISM

The technical aspects of thriller writing are well-handled by Silva but conversations between the characters often become clumsy whenever he uses them to provide information via the dialogue. Filling-in-the-knowledge gaps in this way reduces the overall credibility of the characters and disrupts the narrative flow. The dialogue is also prone to slip into caricature whenever the bad guys are talking and, in many instances, their personal frailties are exposed in such a stark manner (i.e. psychopathy, fanaticism, amorality and avarice) that the author could be accused of racial stereotyping. In a similar manner, Silva often supports the dialogue and the thought processes of the 'us' representatives with truth and logic (implying that they are trustworthy and insightful) whilst the 'them' characters frequently voice falsehoods and unsound reasoning. Most critically, the textual flow is constantly disrupted from including so many asides – whether outlining some political positioning, detailing the background of a new or recurring character, or just providing some relevant factual details. *Moscow Rules* and its sequel, *The Defector*, for example, struggle to maintain any regular pacing - and lack any real exploration of the moral complexities raised - simply because the ancillary themes are allowed such dominance. *Moscow Rules*, in particular, includes a great deal of critical, but unnecessary, comment on modern day Russia whilst its sequel is hindered by the inclusion of so much background information on the reappearing characters. Readers of earlier books in the Allon series will also be able to pick out some of the phraseology that Silva always uses to describe his main characters and, in doing so, will become more aware of the novels' inconsistent pacing. In Silva's defence though, this

sort of textual disruption is somewhat inevitable whenever an author wishes to construct each book from a series as a stand-alone novel. Even more so when each book is also designed to be read out of sequence.

COINCIDENCE

The partial suspension of disbelief is a fundamental part of enjoying a thriller and is frequently used by an author to add support to a plot that may be losing direction, appears increasingly implausible or is just far too reliant on coincidence. This may be an accepted behavioural pattern for the thriller writer generally but there is much to suggest that, without the inclusion of several fortuitous and implausible connections, many of the storylines of the Gabriel Allon novels just wouldn't hold together. Members of the Catholic faith will be particularly uncomfortable in reading about the Pontiff's positioning towards the Jewish faith in *The Confessor*, but even here the implausibility of that storyline is overshadowed by the author's reliance on the coincidental to drive the plot.³¹¹ *The English Girl* is similarly reliant on a single coincidence.³¹² Even the author himself concedes to an unhealthy reliance on the coincidental and the implausible in commenting (in the sixteenth book of the series) on the unlikely development of an assassin to chief of Israel's secret intelligence service: 'It is an outcome I never could have imagined.'³¹³

³¹¹ The plot is wholly reliant on the Pope (as a child) being present at a key strategy meeting between the Vatican and the Nazis. Without this presence, the storyline could not have developed.

³¹² The investigating protagonist is in the victim's house at the same time as a Russian. Again, without the Russian's presence, the whole theme of the novel (an attack on the ambitions of new Russia) would have been lost.

³¹³ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, p. 525.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

The author deploys the shifting-perspective technique in his very first Allon novel when the 11-year old boy (Timothy Peel) describes (in a comment appropriate to the child's age) the arrival of the 'stranger.'³¹⁴ The boy is 'well-schooled in the art of human observation and investigation'³¹⁵ and, with little to occupy his time, determines 'to find out exactly who the stranger was and what he was doing in Cornwall.'³¹⁶ His obsessive reconnaissance and his unrestrained enthusiasm for his quarry allow him access to the character that would normally only be available to an omniscient narrator. So the reader learns from Peel that the stranger is 'a man of great concentration ... a man of great mental endurance.'³¹⁷ He is also 'compact and hard, the kind of man you would quickly regret picking a fight with.'³¹⁸ The reader also learns that the stranger speaks English with a slight accent, that he is skilled in repairing 'old objects'³¹⁹ and that he maintains his lean physique in 'pounding'³²⁰ the footpaths of the Cornish hills. The first clue towards his protagonist's future role is also provided by the youngster who records seeing him standing 'like a silent sentinel.'³²¹ The boy's deceptively accurate assessment of the protagonist has therefore provided the reader with a seemingly objective view of the fictional character's personality and his role as a covert protector, It has also given a child's, untainted view of his impressive physical abilities.

³¹⁴ Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist*, p. 7.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*

³¹⁶ *ibid.*

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 8.

³¹⁸ *ibid.*

³¹⁹ *ibid.*

³²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 11.

³²¹ *ibid.*

We can also deduce, from the boy's later role as an unpaid 'helper'³²², that Allon inspires a sense of loyalty in others.³²³

THE JEWISH-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

There is much in the Allon series to suggest that it revolves around Silva's interpretation of the Jewish figure as a universal man. As such his protagonist can be seen to be symbolic of the tragic experiences of man (transcending race and culture) and the 'embrace of suffering'³²⁴ inherent in Jewish American fiction.³²⁵ The literary status of Allon, an international hybrid with an unwavering commitment to the welfare of his state and his religion, can also draw upon the unconventional insider/outsider perspective, a technique 'designed to appeal both to America's deep-seated individualism and its equally strong need for a powerful state in a world where enemies might be anywhere.'³²⁶ The perspective is beneficial to Silva because it avoids him having to make critical comment on US cultural and political life and also allows him the flexibility to portray his protagonist as a pseudo US counter-terrorist without having to make any significant changes to the texts.

There is also much in Silva's literature to suggest that it carries the dedicated and zealous philosophy of a convert and one who views Israel primarily through a religious and historical context. He does, for example, maintain

³²² *ibid.*

³²³ In contrast, his antagonist in the novel, Tariq, murders his own helper, Achmed.

³²⁴ Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940*, p. 95.

³²⁵ Note how the 'lost soul ... a broken and bitter man' from the first book had since been 'restored' by the sixteenth. The author has thus used the art metaphor to describe the highly improbable development of his protagonist albeit, one could argue, without the subtlety of an artist's brush.

³²⁶ Martin Priestman, *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present* (Devon, Northcote, 2013), p. 50.

that there is an organised campaign, driven by the Palestinian leadership, to delegitimise the state of Israel via 'Temple-Denial'.³²⁷ So he has used the twelfth book in his Allon series (*The Fallen Angel* (2012)) to counter the claim and to respond to what he sees as increasing levels of global anti-Semitism. In this book he also incorporates his own political viewpoint into the thriller's structural form and then welds the two together with some very believable counter-fiction.³²⁸ The archaeologist's slow walk through the remains, furthermore, in which he comments (through the perspective of an expert) on the wonders of the discovery serves three purposes: as political and religious propaganda, to heighten the tension of the storyline and to emphasise the sheer enormity of the history-challenging find.

THE PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVE

Critics tend to condemn the speculation, detail and nuance of counter-factual novels on the basis that they are nearly always a reminder that history is examined from the victor's perspective. Collective and popular history, it is argued, is more accurately depicted if it is transmitted through the experiences of the ordinary man or the victim. Reference has already been made to the single-minded perspective of the 'bad-guys' in Silva fiction (and his preference for articulating the voice of the victors) but mention should also be made to the author's positioning towards the Palestinians. The inclusion, for example, of Yusef al-Tawfiki in *The Kill Artist*, introduces a very

³²⁷ The denial argument, or so its supporters believe, is that if there is no historical evidence to support the existence of Solomon's Temple on the Temple Mount, then there is no legitimate reason why the Jews should be in Israel today.

³²⁸ This includes the discovery of physical evidence supporting the previous existence of the temple.

powerful plea for the Palestinian cause but Yusef's eloquent testimony is completely undermined when the reader then discovers that he is an undercover Israeli agent. His emotive appeals, moreover, are delivered to a character who compares the fate of the Palestinian people with those of her Jewish grandparents in 1940s occupied France (a clever adaptation of Silva's familiar compare-and-contrast technique³²⁹).

The interpretation of history by those who lived through it is inevitably different to the history produced by a non-participant some years later, but close reading of Silva's texts will still show that they lack much empathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people or the experiences of their oppression. There is also much in his narratives to indicate that Silva is critical of the Palestinian leadership's rejection of the Oslo Peace Accords but again, there is little to suggest that he is aware that many Palestinians looked on in horror when their leadership contemplated surrendering their sovereignty for the prospect of a nominal and fictitious autonomy.

THE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

The female perspective in the Gabriel Allon series is similarly one-sided. There are some very strong female characters in the texts³³⁰ but these characters are only allowed to develop through their relationship with the protagonist – tacitly supporting the assumption that a woman's primary

³²⁹ On this occasion, the technique has been enhanced with the addition of the counter-factual.

³³⁰ Elena Kharkov, Sarah Bancroft, Anna Rolfe, Natalie Mizrahi, Nadia al-Bakari, Jihan Nawaz, Olivia Watson and Chiara Zolli for example.

emotional drives are only directed towards men.³³¹ Any efforts to make them more three-dimensional - by affording them their own viewpoint for example - are then overridden by their physical and emotional reliance on the hero.³³² Some of them, like the very courageous Syrian, Jihan Nawaz in *The Heist*, also need to be converted from a pro-Arab view of Israel to a far more palatable view of the Jewish position in order to participate in the plot. It is however the strong, female characters who force the protagonist into recognising that pursuing revenge will only corrupt the character of the person who pursues it. And it is also the women who try to persuade him towards a higher concept of justice.

What Silva's fiction fails to do is to recognise the true humanity of women and, despite creating some strong female characters, the texts only examine the complexity of their inner lives through the feelings they have for Allon. It is also noticeable that all of the women are exploited by the author and the male characters for their usefulness but are quickly discarded when they are no longer needed. So it is with some irony that the role of women in Silva's storylines is really only a cosmetic one (with the women themselves demoted to the part of plot-filler and love interest) even though their existence in the narrative provides the most rational and reasoned responses to the themes that he presents.

³³¹ It is also noticeable that all eight women possess courage, intelligence and confidence but are also physically beautiful.

³³² It should also be noted that the two leading male figures, Allon and Keller, adopt the more traditional, protective approach to how these strong and assertive women should be treated and are therefore at their most vengeful whenever a woman has been mistreated.

HEROISM

A recurring theme in the Gabriel Allon series is the question of heroism. What personal qualities, for example, are displayed by the characters that represent heroic traits? And, more specifically, what pattern of behaviour does the protagonist exhibit that qualify him to be recognised as a hero by his compatriots and by his author?

The lack of a single type of enemy demands a huge number of skills from any potential hero if he is to achieve successive victories. Gabriel Allon is therefore provided with a multitude of personal attributes that have equipped him to deal with situations that other men cannot. And he uses these attributes - along with his skills, experiences and values - to such an effect that no situation can possibly defeat him. He also applies them so frequently, and in such a stark manner, that the reader cannot avoid but be persuaded towards accepting his semi-mythological status.

There is no doubt that during the course of the eighteen novels, the protagonist has performed a huge number of heroic feats – if a heroic feat can be measured via martial achievement, physical endurance and an acceptance of risk to life. But if moral certainty is the primary component of heroism, the assessment becomes a little more complicated.

Reference has already been made to the two occasions on which Allon displays unnecessary cruelty but there are also other examples where operational necessity apparently overrides any semblance of morality (or

legality for that matter). In *The Secret Servant*³³³, Allon's moral ambiguity comes to the fore when he threatens to torture an innocent man unless he discloses information. A similar disregard for the innocent also occurs in *The Confessor* when Allon shoots six Carabinieri dead just to facilitate his escape. Neither Allon, nor his author, appear to be conscious of any evident ambiguities however between the behaviour contained in the narrative and the concept of true heroism - although Allon does concede to 'a profound sense of despair'³³⁴ after his Carabinieri transgressions. But this feeling of despair fails to recognise that he has failed to adhere to any reasonable standard of proportionality or that he has appeared to undermine the very values that his author has designed him to defend. This sense of despair re-occurs later in the novel when Allon tries to justify his violence through the author's favoured compare-and-contrast technique: 'I crossed a line. But then we've all crossed a line. The Americans crossed a line after 9/11, and now they're trying to find their way back to the other side.'³³⁵ This is a repeat of the technique (to base the justification on the exceptional nature of the circumstances) that Silva used to explain the US government's recruitment of Nazis after the Second World War and is used here as an indirect criticism of rendition. The juxtaposition of the 'line crossing' with 'finding their way back' however, is not sufficiently critical of the practises to be read as a condemnation - it is merely highlighting that, in the author's opinion,

³³³ The book is also notable for comparing the operational efficiency of Israeli intelligence with a less efficient UK service and in portraying the Israeli operatives as courageous, experienced and physically super-human, whilst simultaneously criticising the British for lacking the necessary qualifications to counter terrorism. It also paints a picture of the UK's security apparatus as being riven with internal squabbling.

³³⁴ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 305.

³³⁵ Daniel Silva, *The Secret Servant*, p. 403.

realpolitik (which includes the use of torture) must occasionally take operational precedence. The direction of Silva's Allon narratives furthermore, tend to imply that such legal concessions should always be offered to the security services ('who lived by a different set of rules to their countrymen'³³⁶) whenever the circumstances indicate that this approach may be operationally beneficial.

Whatever the interpretation of the author's intent, what can be inferred from the text is that threats from terrorism can only be contained if the public allows the curtailment, or abolition, of some of their freedoms. So Allon's apparently simple statement about 'line crossing' is in fact riddled with political intent and hidden moral complications (and the author is using the apparent simplicity of the dialogue to promote an argument in favour of extending the current parameters of legality.³³⁷) And why, the text asks, would any citizen want to stifle the efforts of the 'secret brotherhood'³³⁸ who are, on our behalf, doing 'the unpleasant chores no one else was willing to do.'³³⁹ It is therefore with some irony that Silva's frequent deployment of violence to achieve his preferred resolution often veers towards the pathological rather than the ideological and, in many instances, his hero can be seen as being more akin to a psychotic killer than the ideological figure Silva wants him to be. Presenting numerous scenarios in which it *could* be argued that it is morally justifiable for his protagonist to employ torture (i.e. to

³³⁶ Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 31.

³³⁷ The CIA representative figure Adrian Carter, for example, 'had been able to tell himself, and his critics, that for all his many sins [the black sites, the renditions, the enhanced interrogation methods, i.e. torture] he had managed to protect the American homeland from a second terror spectacular.' Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 163.

³³⁸ Daniel Silva, *The English Girl*, p. 34.

³³⁹ *ibid.*

save innocent lives³⁴⁰) does not detract from the fact that Silva's supposed hero literally gets away with murder.

As an author Silva can be seen to be the product of a system of thought that ranks the value of life according to race, religion, gender, physical appearance and physical ability, and he uses this ranking to advance a simplistic interpretation of natural justice. As a result, the form of justice he advocates always leaves the Israeli/Jewish/male/handsome protagonist as the physical, legal and moral victor. It also restricts his protagonist to the pursuit of a single aim: to render his definition of natural justice against any being that threatens Jews, Israelis and citizens of the first-world. The concept appears simple but is again complicated by the fact that justice is a human creation and must, by its very nature, contain human flaws. And whilst every human (including a hero) must also have flaws, Gabriel Allon is burdened with just two (guilt and remorse) and can therefore pursue his spiritually-motivated causes without the restrictions which inhibit the functioning of a normal man. There is also a significant difference between the judgement of God, man's interpretation of that judgement and man's own version of it which, in a sense, has simply been constructed to reflect the needs of a society. As such, the protagonist's own concept of natural justice is developed towards a philosophy which incorporates personal remorse within

³⁴⁰ The torture scene in *The Secret Servant*, for example, includes a description of Allon ordering his deputy (the 'Angel of Destruction' Mikhail) to pull a wounded man from a vehicle by his broken leg. Allon's fiancée, Chiara, being 'unable to bear the sight' of him shooting his victim repeatedly in the leg (on UK soil) walks away. Daniel Silva, *The Secret Servant*, p. 392. The same brutal methods are also employed by his protégé Keller in *House of Spies* in which Keller shoots a dying man 4 times in the legs, beats another 'mercilessly' with a hammer and kills three French criminals – who he then redefines as terrorists. 'Let's not pretend to be troubled by my methods, Graham. We're beyond all that' he says after being challenged by his MI6 controller. Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 84.

US, Israeli and Jewish cultural influences. This is a radically different concept from the higher philosophical and spiritual ideals to which his author aspires.

Another repeated theme in the series is atonement and, like the concepts of heroism and justice, it too struggles to provide any straightforward definition of its meaning. Gabriel Allon is driven and motivated by his need to atone for the attack on his family but many of the other figures (central and peripheral to the storylines) use the act of atonement as the cause for a sudden volte-face. The abrupt turnaround may bolster the wavering storyline but the actions themselves (extraordinary acts of selfless courage which neither background nor personality suggest are likely) seem to transfer responsibility for the plot's flaws onto the characters themselves. *The English Assassin* is perhaps the most vivid example of this.³⁴¹ Similarly, in *Moscow Rules*, the FSB Colonel who captures Allon must have a sudden and dramatic change of heart to then release him. The abrupt conversion is highly improbable but, had it not occurred, Gabriel Allon would have remained in captivity. The same unlikely change-of-heart also occurs with the wife of the novel's villain but what provokes her sudden betrayal is not made clear. Had she not had such an extreme philosophical repositioning though, the plot could not have progressed. The two storylines therefore rely on some unlikely incidents, some fortuitous timing and some abrupt repositioning to maintain their flow. Any real exploration of atonement and its consequences on human

³⁴¹ In the book, many of the leading characters act suddenly out of character to atone for the crimes committed by family members against the Jews during World War II. Governments and organisations may not seek atonement for their past crimes, Silva appears to be saying, but the descendants of the individuals who perpetrated those crimes are attempting to offset some of their guilt with displays of exceptional benevolence.

behaviour however, are only considered through the improbable redirections of the plot.

THE PROPAGANDIST

The apparent simplicity of the Gabriel Allon novels tends to disguise the complex and challenging themes that the author presents. It also asks whether the books should be read differently to any other popular thrillers, spy novels or tales of intrigue. Does Silva's adoption of an ideological position on government-sanctioned killing, for example, simply respond to his readers' own philosophies or is the reader being influenced to an unknown extent by the bias of the narrative?

One of the key tenets of humankind is the sanctity of human life and this instils in many a deep-seated aversion to any form of killing. Convincing the reader of fiction to suspend their conscience - and to accept that the death of a person with whom they had no personal conflict was justifiable - is nevertheless complicated for the author by the fact that descriptions of real killings also tend towards the 'contradictory, consolatory and often fantastical.'³⁴² Accounts of real killings, furthermore, are just as likely to enter into the post-event imagination as Silva's own and will often share his tendency towards 'interpreting, elaborating and restructuring.'³⁴³ Like the Allon novels, the historic events can also be constructed into a semi-fictitious state and into one in which fantasy has assumed greater dominance in the

³⁴² Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, (London, Granta Books, 1999), p. 10.

³⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 11.

human experience.³⁴⁴ Any elaborations and revisions, nonetheless, change the texts into something they are not which, in Silva's case, include remedies to crimes from the past, neat solutions to the perceived injustices of the present and hard-line comment on the future global-political environment. *The Kill Artist*, for example, was written in a time when a peace settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis looked increasingly likely and so Silva created a renegade Palestinian villain who sought to undermine it by killing the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. *The Prince of Fire*, in contrast, expresses a notable turnaround in the author's view of Arafat.³⁴⁵

Stories about the potential shooting of a real-life politician are a recognised sub-genre of suspense fiction and thrillers. A fascinating aspect of such a narrative is that it is often inspired by real attacks and so encourages the reader to be complicit in an unlawful activity. The author must therefore convince the reader to accept the change in the path of history to accommodate the suspense of the novel. (But even the most committed of Arafat opponents would struggle to accept an ending that concludes with his death.)

There is, as noted, a distinct bias towards the Israeli position in the Allon series. This bias is, to a large extent, underpinned by the author's selection of only those settings which allow him to make comment on specific geo-

³⁴⁴ To avoid the same criticisms that may be levelled at a fictional combatant (i.e. behaving heroically rather than atrociously) and to promote the virtues of participating in combat (i.e. controlled aggression, honour and fearlessness)

³⁴⁵ In the five years between the two publishing dates, the Palestinian leader is transformed from a courageous peacemaker into a treacherous, would-be saboteur of the peace-making process.

political positions.³⁴⁶ Historic crimes receive the same politically-motivated critique. Such examples include the behaviour of the Swiss during World War Two and the Vatican's failure to voice any opposition to the crimes of the Holocaust. As critical as the author is of these historic failings in *The Confessor* though, he avoids any criticism of the organisations themselves and instead directs his ire at some fictitious sub-elements embedded within them. He also avoids attributing any words or actions to Pope Pius XII despite remarking, in the Author's Notes, that the Pontiff failed to speak out 'in the face of the annihilation of Europe's Jews.'³⁴⁷ Silva is similarly critical of the Church in offering sanctuary to fleeing Nazis after the fall of the Third Reich, its failure to excommunicate any Nazi leaders and, more than fifty years after the end of the war, its continuing refusal to allow historians to access its repository of Secret Archives. There are two possible reasons why Silva has avoided addressing these issues directly. The first is out of respect for the religion. The second (more cynical view) is that a political attack, rather than a spiritual one, is less commercially damaging to book sales.

There is further criticism of the Catholic Church though in *A Death in Vienna*. In this book, Silva comments on the support the Church allegedly gave to many fleeing Nazis after the war's end. Unusually for Silva it also criticises some elements of the US government for their recruitment of ex-Nazis.³⁴⁸

Not unusually, the author deploys one-part realpolitik rationale and one-part

³⁴⁶ The approach is not confined to single novels or to particular historical events: Shamron's shift from an outright opponent of the two-state solution, his slow recognition of the political pressure to reach settlement and, finally, his grudging acceptance of the strategic need to reach settlement, also typifies this positioning and, with a nod to the counter-factual, provides a relatively accurate description of the peace process since the 1980s.

³⁴⁷ Daniel Silva, *The Confessor*, p. 395.

³⁴⁸ Allegedly recruited by the Americans for their knowledge of rocket technology and their contribution towards anti-communist spying networks.

condemnation of rogue elements within the government. He also provides an outline of the volatile, geo-political environment at the war's end and, to atone for the sins of their predecessors, ensures that the current US administration plays an active part in bringing the book's ex-Nazi villain to justice.³⁴⁹

In *The English Girl*, Silva is critical of fictional figures within the British political system but, unusually, is equally damning in his criticisms of the representative political body. The novel is ostensibly about the British PM's affair with a party functionary (a Russian-born sleeper agent) but underlying the description of the kidnapping, and the subsequent rescue, is an indirect attack on the nefarious practices of modern-day Russia. (The difficulties that the UK government found itself in were, nevertheless, resolved by the input of a 'foreign intelligence operative.'³⁵⁰) But the book is notable in Silva fiction because it ridicules prominent members of the UK government and, in doing so, displays a touch of hypocritical judgement. In the Author's Notes, for example, Silva comments that London may be an important hub of Russian intelligence activity but 'the United States remains the primary focus of Moscow Center.'³⁵¹ Why, therefore, did Silva choose London as the novel's setting? Perhaps to criticise Europe's reliance on Gazprom natural-gas supplies or to warn European consumers of the company's support for Putin's, nationalistic United-Russia party? Or perhaps to warn of the Russian

³⁴⁹ It is also the reason why Silva includes the former CIA Director, Richard Helms' quote in the elegy: 'We're not in the Boy Scouts. If we'd wanted to be in the Boy Scouts, we would have joined the Boy Scouts.'

³⁵⁰ Daniel Silva, *The English Girl*, p. 503.

³⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 523. The FBI provided ample evidence of this when, in June 2010, it arrested ten Russian sleeper-agents who had all been living in the US under non-official, illegal cover. The most notorious of these was Anna Chapman on whom Silva's Madeline Hart is based.

company's pursuit of European-based energy corporations and its ambitions to become a global, and increasingly influential, energy power? Or perhaps just because the author fails to see the hypocrisy of an American telling European consumers to be less reliant on Russian natural gas when his own country is the world's single-largest gas consumer? Or perhaps, even more cynically, did the author just choose to disparage the UK Government because he was fearful of the commercial and reputational implications of doing it to his own?

Silva's own feelings towards what he sees as a Europe increasingly dominated by Muslims³⁵² may have also been a factor in his choice of the London setting because the author, with his US cultural influences to the fore, is fearful of the effects that any such influence will have on European/US relations. Accordingly, the texts highlight the concerns many Americans have towards the emergence of Islamic extremism in the UK (where supporters of terrorism 'openly walked the streets of London'³⁵³) and criticises the UK government's apparent support for a policy of appeasement which directs the 'gathering storm *outward*, toward the secular Arab regimes, America and, of course, Israel.'³⁵⁴ Silva uses his compare-and-contrast technique with particularly powerful effect in then equating London's supposedly self-inflicted vulnerabilities with Israel's own war-without-end.³⁵⁵

³⁵² In *House of Spies*, Birmingham is described as 'a heavily Muslim city in the British West Midlands that has produced numerous terrorists and plots.' Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 490.

³⁵³ *ibid.* p. 492.

³⁵⁴ Daniel Silva, *The Secret Servant*, p. 58.

³⁵⁵ *ibid.* Silva comments in *The Secret Servant*: 'Gabriel knew that the crisis now facing Britain was many years in the making and, to a large degree, self-inflicted British governments both Labour and Tory had thrown open their doors to the world's most hardened holy warriors ... and unwittingly allowed itself to be the primary incubator of a violent ideology that sought to destroy everything for which it once had stood.'

But it is in *The English Girl*, in which he clarifies his position towards the hindrances and the solutions to the UK's problems: '... after the bombings in 2007, when we [the UK Security Services] finally came to our senses and started pulling Islamic radicals off the streets ... the days when the leftists and the media insisted we do something about the terrorists in our midst.'³⁵⁶

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also very firmly in Silva's critical sights. In *The Messenger*, for example, the main plot revolves around the attempts to thwart a terrorist attack on the Vatican. The sub-plot though, is an exposé of the alleged Saudi role in funding global terrorism - hence there being no sympathetic Saudi characters in the text. And, as before, the author is careful to sanitise his criticism of the US government's relationship with the House of Saud by focussing his critique on make-believe US politicians who exert undue political influence on behalf of Saudi pressure groups (i.e. distinguishing between the individual and the organisation again). Silva's final condemnation of Saudi influence is then presented through the protagonist's emotive plea to the US Senate Committee. But any positive results from such a plea - less US reliance on Saudi oil and Saudi funding – cannot be delivered in the real world and so the author must confine himself to delivering idealised and naïve recommendations that will not, even in his fictional world, endanger US energy supplies.

One identifiable individual who doesn't escape from Silva's wrath is ex-President Obama. In *The English Spy* he is particularly scathing of the President's record; accusing him of failing to contain Putin's aggressive

³⁵⁶ Daniel Silva, *The English Girl*, p. 41.

foreign policy, failing to reduce the volatility of the global environment and failing to maintain strong and strategic relationships with close allies. The attacks on the ex-President may imply that this counters the suggestion that Silva avoids attacking identifiable US organisations and officials, but the attacks need to be mindful of Silva's own political beliefs and his friendship with ex-President, George W Bush (who appointed him to the prestigious United States Holocaust Memorial Council in 2009).

In a final comment on Silva's use of fiction to propagate his political views, it should be noted that the literary characters who support Allon's own political views also participate in the same brutal, counter-terrorist environment. There is legitimacy to their views, Silva is therefore saying, because they understand the reality of the environment, the necessity of swift action and the nature of front-line combat.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

There is no moral ... It's just what we do. And then we try to forget.³⁵⁷

According to the Head of the UK's Secret Intelligence Service, terrorism is 'the most obvious threat faced by modern Britain.'³⁵⁸ Any knowledge of history would suggest that this is something of an exaggeration - particularly when considered against the crises of the past³⁵⁹ - but the comments, from the modern-day 'C', typify the sort of language that is now being used to breed a febrile and unfocused fear in the general populace. But however bleak the contemporary picture may appear, history tells us that things have often been much worse. What seems to differ though between our ancestors more stoical acceptance of the challenges of existence and our more informed fears towards the future, is the greater exploitation of those fears by politicians, corporations and popular cultural figures - all of whom can gain considerable advantage (and/or financial gain) from exaggerating the potential scale of the upheaval.³⁶⁰ What is also new is not the attempts to misguide or deceive, but the public's response to it: a tendency towards the growing dominance of emotional resonance over fact and evidence and the replacement of subjective reasoning and verification with politically-motivated narrative. The response is even more confused in literary fiction which, by its

³⁵⁷ Daniel Silva, *The Black Widow*, p. 495.

³⁵⁸ Alex Younger, *Remarks by the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service*: <<https://www.sis.gov.uk/media/1155/cs-public-speech-8-december-2016-final.doc> [accessed 16 Jan 2017].

³⁵⁹ i.e. wars, financial crises, political inertia, political instability, widespread public discontent, disease, pollution, extreme weather patterns, etc.

³⁶⁰ 'The global war has been very profitable for a lot of people in this town', Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 166.

very nature, combines elements of reality with an author's imagination in its construct.

Some literature can be used as a reliable source of knowledge and can foster a simultaneous consideration of the fictional narrative with the selected facts. It can also persuade the reader that what has been presented has been done so in order to underpin the true meaning of the text. Other forms of literature, and Silva's Gabriel Allon novels would fall into this category, distort the non-fictional to such an extent that the construct corrupts the reader's understanding of the presented facts. As a result, the fuller versions of the events become overshadowed by the stories that are being told to millions of readers and which, over time and through repetition, harden into legends and fables. These distillations are then repeated so often that they can eventually appear as facts to the casual reader and can make the author's normal caveats regarding coincidental likenesses somewhat redundant.³⁶¹

The sentences that form Silva's fiction are of course false but the works themselves still contain many true statements and challenging perspectives.³⁶² And he may not assert that the protagonist and his allies can provide all of the answers to the questions that he raises but he is,

³⁶¹ The Author's Note from *The Kill Artist* reads: '*The Kill Artist* is a work of fiction and should be construed as nothing but. All characters, locales and incidents portrayed in the novel are products of the author's imagination or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. However, in order to add verisimilitude to the story and the characters, I have drawn from real episodes in the secret war between Israeli intelligence and the Palestinian guerrillas.'

³⁶² One notable truth from the Allon literature is that the innocents often have their lives destroyed after coming into contact with the players of the 'great game' whilst the players themselves - distanced from the consequences of their actions - usually survive and prosper.

nonetheless, describing the sort of responses that accord with his own political beliefs. The responses, furthermore, are implemented by a fictional character who represents a distinct political philosophy and who is illustrative of a certain type of man (and one whose patriotic ideals are reinforced through the systematic exaggeration of external threats).

In Silva's fiction, the reader is presented with a clear black-and-white picture that avoids any reference to the grey in-betweens. Real life is not as simple, there is rarely a right and a wrong. The good guys don't always win and the bad guys don't always get punished. The answers to the questions that Silva raises cannot be solved as easily as his fiction suggests and attempting to define them into a good-versus-bad concept removes any effort on the reader's part to confront the multi-faceted complexities of the text with intelligent reasoning. The corrosive and self-serving effects of the narratives may not, it is true, withstand closer scrutiny but because the books are defined as popular, page-turning fiction they are not usually subjected to such scrutiny.

A strong and convincing narrative demands an educated and objective approach to the moral complexities it raises. It allows each 'side' an equal opportunity to support their various viewpoints and supports the reader in reaching an informed analysis of the presented outcomes. It does not demonise the 'enemies' in an infantile manner (or even try to persuade that it is acceptable to classify particular social groups as 'enemies') but encourages the reader to try to make sense of the conflict, to recognise the

grievances of all parties and to distinguish between the reality of the world and its fictional representation.

As film-goers we often watch films knowing that the production has been based on a true story or a real-life event, but we rarely take the time to question the proportion of the real with the imaginary or the effects of the director's adaptations on the final cinematic experience. In literary fiction we are confronted with the same conundrum³⁶³ but again, we rarely question what effect the author's adaptations to the real, or claims towards the coincidental, have had on our understanding. In counter-factual fiction the confusion becomes even more pronounced because the technique describes the reality that might have been if the path of history had taken a different course - and 'this is how the lost history becomes the free weave of fiction.'³⁶⁴ Silva's version of the history of the birth of Israel, and the subsequent political and racial challenges it engendered, will inevitably differ from the stories of those who lived through the same period and who may even support the same political viewpoint. It will also differ from the stories produced by writers whose sympathies are directed towards the other 'side' and whose selection of the factual record will be determined by their intentions for their own fictional construct. Accusations of bias - by whichever political group - are inevitable whenever an author describes emotive or contentious issues. The bias becomes far starker however, whenever an author uses a stereotypical figure like Gabriel Allon as the instrument with which to address the fears of a western-centric society and with one whose

³⁶³ Albeit without the concessions we willingly offer to the film-makers in our demand for a more dramatic and intensive visual image.

³⁶⁴ Don DeLillo, *Libra* (London, Penguin Books, 2006), p. vii.

behaviour is always contextualised, if not justified, within the shadow of the *Shoah*. In such circumstances, the casual reader may not recognise the political undercurrents contained in the text but, in continuing to follow the adventures of the fictional hero, the reader becomes more receptive to the solutions proposed (albeit in an imaginary, but seemingly realistic, environment). The reader may also learn to accept the author's notion that the hero always triumphs against the forces of evil simply because he is a semi-mythical being and has been exempted from the constraints of the human forms of justice. The expectations that such a figure exists however, and will be willing and qualified to confront all of our many fears, is one that is best left in childhood.

Stories which tend to exaggerate the good faith of the majority and the bad faith of the minority have always been a popular form of entertainment. (Even more so whenever they are known to portray the triumphs of the good over the threats of the bad.) But can the reader always recognise if the selection of the threat - and the methodology used to combat it - adopts a positivist, conservative ideology which defines success as a situation that always favours Israeli and US interests?

Supporters of Silva would no doubt argue that he is just a popular writer who has made no overt attempt to rewrite history or to provide any factual answers to the questions that he raises. He has simply created a man 'who stands in the blank space'³⁶⁵ and offers his readers the opportunity to fill in the blank spaces that surround him. And, in focusing on the 'us' side of the

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*

argument - and avoiding sympathetic reference to the root causes of the historical traumas – he is merely providing one perspective of the rarefied and dangerous atmosphere in which his characters are forced to operate.³⁶⁶ There is also some validity in the argument that, in having to retain his focus on a single character, Silva cannot now abandon his efforts to contextualise the global-political situation within the confines of his own protagonist's perspective.³⁶⁷ And, in outlining his protagonist's own inner turmoil – particularly between self and cause – it also could be argued that the author is attempting to provide some form of balance to the discourse and to provide some justification for the extreme, but apparently necessary, violence. Readers of espionage fiction who have been exposed to updated and similarly implausible versions of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels would no doubt also support the view that Silva's 'angel of death'³⁶⁸ is just a similarly updated version of the same type of make-believe. Such a view, though, is only partially correct because, although conceding the point that Gabriel Allon is make-believe, he has also been purposefully designed with an overriding retributory function. This function is deployed to pursue a subjective form of justice (which is legitimised through the values of a moral and spiritual cause) and, although he has been unwavering in his dedication to that cause, he cannot be seen to aspire to the lofty ideals of his creator because he commits the most horrendous crime (murder) and does so

³⁶⁶ Despite peddling the myth that the war on terror is thrilling and exciting, rather than brutal and destructive.

³⁶⁷ Hence the reference to the financial losses incurred by Keller as a result of 'this Brexit nonsense.' Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, p. 54.

³⁶⁸ Daniel Silva, *The Secret Servant*, p. 348.

without the authority of any outside power.³⁶⁹ The justice he is trying to attain, furthermore, is an undefinable concept. So, there may be many expressions of him trying to pursue a subjective form of man-made justice but, in describing the pursuit of his own form of justice, the author also has to provide his protagonist *and* his reader with an argument in support of its legitimacy – whether in the Author’s Note, the Acknowledgements or the narrative itself.

Each Allon book presents a dangerous environment in which the absorbingly diverse ensemble of characters is faced with a recognisable enemy. The absence of a single enemy though implies that the world still has need of the analytical and physical attributes of a super-human being to defend it. Silva’s fiction has given this being a name, a personality and a nationality. The narratives however, fail to provide any clear focus on what his hero is actually defending the world against because the value of his success is measured within the parameters of a global, hierarchical structure dominated by the US. They also suggest that the author himself has little grasp of the moral murkiness of the novel’s environments and so he must fall back on a literary technique which encourages patriotism through the systematic exaggeration of what appears to be an external threat (or the ‘new normal’³⁷⁰ as he refers to it). In this manner he also extends the protagonist’s function through the adoption of the characteristics of an insider/outsider hybrid. (The revision allows Allon to perform feats as a universal man (or a first-world

³⁶⁹ Gabriel Allon’s code of honour, it should be noted, permits torture, killing and the use of excessive violence for personal expediency.

³⁷⁰ A ‘real-world’ environment in which ‘blood will flow’ unless the West quickly adapts its policies to counter the threats posed by ‘ISIS and its inevitable offspring.’ Daniel Silva, *House of Spies*, Author’s Note, p. 524.

figure) who is unconstrained by either the limits of geography or nationality.) But if the popular heroic figure is recognised as a western-centric figure, who can rationalise and justify his more extreme behaviour in confronting the given threats, will the first-world reader then become more accommodating towards any legislative moves that permit such behaviour? Does the reading itself, moreover, encourage support for the erosion of a publicly-accountable response and the greater acceptance of an autocratic decision-making process that sidesteps any formal judicial processes?

Fictions placed within an environment in which good and evil are so clearly defined will inevitably enjoy popularity in a post-truth world – particularly if, like the Gabriel Allon series, they allow the reader to access and consider imagined parts of a dangerous world that, following the reader's pace exactly, will reach conclusions that accommodate most of the reader's own beliefs. More so if the narratives follow the familiar Silva motif of describing the conflicts with clearly defined good-and-bad combatants rather than just combatants.

What makes the Allon series so successful is its simplicity: it scares the reader with a plausible threat and then ensures that everything is back to the way it was by the book's end. The books, in short, provide a simple, uncomplicated resolution to the challenges facing the complex, multi-polar and opaque international order and offer the sort of neat solutions that readers will rarely get to witness in real life. As escapist and as entertaining as the literature may be, its overriding problem is that the definition of the threat, the enemy and the terrorist is the author's own. And, whilst the reader

can separate the fictional from the real in most instances, it is not always possible (sub-consciously at least) to distinguish between the two. The narratives do not stimulate interpretation but they do create an imaginary environment in which the disproportionate use of violence appears to be legitimised. If, furthermore, the 'baddie' is similar to a real-life figure (or a representative of a racial group) then the reading becomes even more problematic because the reader must consciously avoid linking the semi-fictitious figure to the one who appears in the conscious thought. At best, the reading experience has confused. At worst, it has implanted a thought in the reader's consciousness that bears little resemblance to the truth.

It is not possible to measure the persuasive influences of Silva's literature with any real accuracy. Nor is it possible to determine how many of his many readers interpret his texts according to his signals. It is however possible to state that - even with the dominance of the counter-factual in his literature - a Silva novel is still a work of fiction. And if Silva readers fear any occurrence of a sub-conscious influence whenever they recognise any characters, situations or environments from their own world that bear a remarkable similarity to Silva's imaginary one, they should remind themselves of a comment made by another popular thriller-writer, Lee Child.³⁷¹ The author of the multi-million selling Jack Reacher books was once asked how his protagonist had managed to retain his impressive physique over so many years of physical inactivity. Child responded that he thought that Reacher had undertaken regular periods of intensive exercise throughout the 21-book

³⁷¹ During an interview at the Cheltenham Literature Festival, October 2011.

series. His questioner, clearly an avid and close reader of the books, challenged Child's comment with an outline of Reacher's sedentary lifestyle, his disregard for physical exercise and his penchant for fast-food. The amused author took a moment before replying, 'he's not real, you know. I just made him up.'

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