

Farwell 1

The Anxiety of [Covert] Influence: Frank Wisner and The [Secret] Bond Between English
Literature and American Espionage

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

CHAPTER 1: FRANK WISNER, AMERICAN SPYMASTER

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 3: THE VIRGINIA EDUCATION OF FRANK WISNER

CHAPTER 4: FRANK WISNER SHAPES THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

CHAPTER 5: THE BRAIDED HISTORY OF ESPIONAGE AND LITERATURE

CHAPTER 6 THE LITERARY WISNER

APPENDIX 1: CHIP BOHLEN LETTER TO FRANK WISNER

APPENDIX 2: FRANK WISNER MEMORANDUM RE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

WORKS CITED

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INTRODUCTION:

The bond between twentieth-century English-language literature—writing, publishing, scholarship, education—and intelligence services is strong, but occulted by design. Many of the nearly invisible threads that bind the two together can be explicitly traced in Cold War America through a close reading and examination of the life, career and legacy of University of Virginia English Department alumnus Frank Gardiner Wisner. This thesis draws on an extensive primary source archive of written material from his broad range of contacts—largely unexamined by scholars—and an extensive review of the library of secondary sources on the scholarship, including scholarship from literary scholars, historians, political scientists, government documents, contemporary media and field visits to key locations. This thesis will establish and explain the bond between twentieth century English language literature and American Espionage through the lens of one of its key figures, Frank Wisner. It will accomplish this by:

- 1) Arguing that Frank Wisner’s later approach to covert action and espionage was deeply informed and enabled by his education in Prohibition-era Virginia.¹ Arriving in Virginia to begin his education Wisner was clay to be molded. In the words of his lifelong friend and schoolmate Gordon Gray—a tobacco heir who would later be Secretary of the Army, President of the University of North Carolina, and National Security Adviser to President Eisenhower:

“a small, fragile and dependent personality until he came to school. Since he was so light and small, he had a difficult time in rough-contact sports but became one of the ‘toughest scrappers there. He excelled in academic activities and was the president of his fraternity

¹ Wisner studied in Virginia for eight years, first at the Woodberry Forest school in Orange and then at the University of Virginia’s College of Arts and Sciences and Law School. He arrived in Virginia at sixteen, already a graduate of the high school his timber-wealthy family built in Laurel, Mississippi. This was where the Iowa based Wisner clan settled—in pursuit of the economic opportunities the forests in proximity to New Orleans promised—after the Civil War

in college, president of the student council, Phi Beta Kappa, and held many high-ranking positions”²

2) Demonstrating that the American and broader Anglophone arts and cultural scene during the Cold War was heavily influenced—albeit covertly, and through cut-outs—by the executive branch of the United States Government through Frank Wisner’s Office of Policy Coordination. This was an organization that would later be folded into the broader organizational structure of the Central Intelligence Agency.

3) Using, as a case study, Wisner’s sub-rosa creative efforts near the end of his life to influence publishing through friendship and extensive correspondence with a Scottish-American spy novelist named Helen Highet and her editors at Harcourt Brace. Mrs. Highet published popular thrillers from World War II until the Reagan administration under the pen name Helen MacInnes. Wisner’s methodology, tradecraft and goals in collaborating with Highett casts an illuminating backlight on the broader way the Central Intelligence Agency interacted with and weaponized the literary and higher education spheres of influence during the Cold War—part of what Joseph Nye would describe in 1990 as “Soft Power.”³

Wisner and Highet’s letters describing their work together also provides a critical illustration for the way the spy novel was used as a mechanism of influence, which is just a small piece of the whole puzzle. Wisner took a wide-ranging approach to covert propaganda and intelligence activities. He had a broad purview, supervising, in his own words “thousands of goons,” while also running a weekly dinner party that functioned (the dinners were operational

² Wisner Psychological Summary, Case No 25835, Sheppard Pratt 1958

³ “Political leaders and philosophers have long understood the power of attractive ideas or the ability to set the political agenda and determine the framework of debate in a way that shapes others’ preferences. The ability to affect what other countries want tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions.” Nye, 167

exercises, the expenses reimbursed by CIA) as a salon to get the DC press on board with whatever the line of the week was (Powers, 75). Wisner, at the height of his power, served as a shadow editor, coordinating soft power efforts through the media via relationships with the top echelon of the *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and other popular publications.

There's a lot of paper supporting this claim contained in the large slice of the personal and official correspondence—the lines between the two were awfully blurry in both OSS and CIA—in the Frank Gardiner Wisner archive in the University of Virginia's Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections library. The UVA archive is not the complete picture: it doesn't contain much in the way of Wisner's official cable traffic encrypted and transmitted via the OSS and CIA. That material exists in other archives, much of it still classified. The UVA archive does not contain the transcripts of conversations at clubs and lunches and Sunday night dinners. However, even though the archives are not the complete picture of Wisner's official covert life, there is well developed enough evidence there—in the public archives—to show how Wisner exhibited sway over the Alsop Brothers (popular weekly syndicated correspondents, the “Morning Joe” of the 1950's who worked for the *New York Herald Tribune*, owned by OSS veteran and art-world philanthropist John Hay Whitney), Arthur Sulzberger (*NY Times*), Phil Graham (*Washington Post*)⁴ and a host of other publishers, editors, and writers, as well as academics, university administrators, and business executives—particularly in media and high technology.

⁴ Late one night Wisner, hospitalized with a fever of 106 in November 1956, demanded the nurse bring him a telephone to call Phil Graham so Phil Graham could have Herb Block draw a cartoon about Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to the White House. The nurse initially refused to make the phone call as Wisner was a sick man, but when he told her “You don't know who I am, but I have a very important job. And as part of my job I control thousands of goons. If you don't let me call Mr. Graham [and here the words were drawn out with terrible exactitude] *I'm going to set my goons on you*” (Powers, 76).

Extensive correspondence is evidence of this in the 10.5 cubic feet of material contained in 21 archival boxes. Each archival box contains between 10-12 folders. To put that in perspective: this thesis focuses on the correspondence with and about Helen MacInnes' spy novels. That correspondence takes up two folders, or 0.793% of the total material. The Wisner archive is a gold-mine for future scholarship in English Literature, American Studies, politics or history and the informal power networks that drove policy and culture in the 1950's and 1960's, policy that still ripples with relevance today across multiple fields. Understanding that relevance begins with understanding Frank Wisner's life and career.

CHAPTER 1: FRANK WISNER, AMERICAN SPYMASTER

In the twilight years of his life—which would end by a self-inflicted twenty-gauge shotgun blast to the right temple on October 29, 1964 on the second floor of an antebellum farmhouse on the eastern shore of Maryland—CIA graybeard Frank Wisner turned his attention to influencing two facets of American life: education and literature. It was a logical project for a master spy in semi-retirement. He spent his clandestine life in both the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) trying to influence both spheres overseas for the last twenty years. One of the greatest weapons at his disposal was his lawyerly gift for persuasion through language—spoken words, pamphlets, books, poems, Presidential Findings. At Wisner's memorial service, CIA Director Richard Helms, a former journalist for UPI and longtime OSS and CIA colleague, closed his keynote remarks recalling the departed's literary sensibility:

I have made no reference to Frank's sense of humor and love of language. Yet to his associates they went hand in hand and brightened many a difficult meeting. From his early upbringing and study of the law, Frank developed a genuine affection for style, whether he was telling one of his own Mark Twain-like stories or composing a policy paper for the National Security Council... One of his favorite phrases was "lets find some language" (Frank Wisner Memorial Service, Director of Central Intelligence Remarks Central Intelligence Agency 1965)

Wisner, a University of Virginia trained Wall Street lawyer, was the founder and first director of the "Office of Policy Coordination," a secret organization that worked directly for the National Security Council after World War II. His job, as prescribed by National Security Council Directive 10/2 (June 18, 1948), was to coordinate:

Any covert activities related to: propaganda, economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world. (NSC 10/2, 18 June 1948)

Wisner advocated for and eventually created this kind of capability for the Executive Branch after running covert intelligence collection operations for the Office of Strategic Services during World War II at various levels. Taking leave from his Wall Street white shoe law firm, Carter Ledyard, which counted President Franklin Roosevelt as an alumnus, Wisner heard the whistle of war emanating from Rockefeller Center (which housed the British Security Coordination Committee) and commissioned in the Navy shortly before the United States entered World War II. Wisner's military career began at the District Intelligence Office in the 3rd Naval District. There, he worked at the Post Office's cable censor and as the liaison officer to the National Censorship Branch Intelligence section, tasked with radio and telegram censorship, which really meant reading the mail for counterintelligence purposes (Maier 40). He chafed at the work, but did it in the style Helms recalled, receiving excellent evaluations but later in life describing the censorship job with the pun "being given command of a Cutter" (Box 20 Folder 8 MSS1509).

Lieutenant Turner McBaine—who in civilian life was Standard Oil's lawyer—then got Wisner an assignment with the OSS Station in Cairo, the transfer helped by UVA's Robert Kent Gooch. Wisner was sent to a covert facility in Maryland for spy training and was initiated into the mysteries of the British-inspired intelligence system America was building. The British espionage world was one entwined deeply with British literature and filled with literary officers and spy poets—William Donovan, wartime Director of the OSS, was counseled by MI-6 officer Ian Fleming in the formation of the agency; Roald Dahl was soon to arrive in America as a spy after a short stint as an RAF Aviator in Baghdad and Greece (Maier 41). After Cairo, Wisner was assigned to reorganize espionage operations in wartime Istanbul, and then was sent to Romania after the Soviets took over (the previous government of Romania was allied with the

German Nazis). Part of Wisner's cover was as a liaison officer for the repatriation of American B-24 crews who'd been shot down bombing oil refineries north of Bucharest. This was a cover job he performed with aplomb, commandeering every bus in the city to ferry prisoners of war to a convoy of bombers and cargo planes that would evacuate the POW's to allied territory—the whole project known as "Operation Gunn."

Wisner took the job over from an OSS Officer named 2nd Lt. George Bookbinder, the literary thrust of the war was strong and sometimes even nominative. Wisner, whose Bucharest code name was TYPHOID, also ran a spy on the Romanian General Staff's G-2 (intelligence) section whose code name was TONSILLITIS who fed him excellent material from the Soviets (Romanians had penetrated the Soviet intelligence services). One of his best high-level sources was Teohari Georgescu, Romania's undersecretary of state for national economy; he passed along the message that the Soviets demanded to "control all publicity and propaganda including the press, radio and public spectacles" (Brown)

To counter the Soviets, Wisner would later seek to replicate this method. In Bucharest, on the surface, Wisner was the life of the party. He did card tricks, wowed the Romanian Royal family with his ability to shoot a shotgun accurately over his shoulder (using a small, circular mirror), spun yarns. Under the surface, he was gathering information for the OSS on both the Nazis and the Communist Party. His University of Virginia training—where he scored the highest score on his take home psychology exam senior year, pledged DKE, Captained the Track Team, was tapped for the IMPs, Eli Banana, the 13 Society and, it was learned after his death,

was also tapped as a Seven⁵—was evident in Wisner's method of operation (*Corks and Curls* 1931 p 229).⁶

Wisner's Romanian biographer, who was also the Romanian ambassador to the United States, called it "sprezzatura" a term from Baldassare Castiglione's 1528 *The Book of the Courtier*. It means "a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all art and make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it." The effect of Wisner's "sprezzatura" would soon be felt globally and is still felt today.⁷

Elmer Davis, a CBS journalist who ran the Office of War Information during the Second World War, noted that "the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized." (Staff, Gemf, et al). One of Wisner and the Office of Policy Coordination's first projects was to secure the film rights to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* from the recently departed novelist's estate, and then use those to create an animated version of *Animal Farm* that was conspicuously anti-Stalinist. This project was led by a part time spy novelist and full time OPC officer named E. Howard Hunt, who would later be a key figure in the Watergate scandal (Leab, 59)

⁵ The obituary in the Virginia Law Review (Jan, 1966) notes Wisner's 7 Society Affiliation with a large Seven Society logo under his name

⁶ Wisner's take home psychology exam with a 100% is in his papers relating to the University of Virginia. The 1931 edition of the University of Virginia yearbook *Corks and Curls* lists Frank Gardiner Wisner, Jr as a 4th Year with DKE, Lambda Pi, P.K. Society, First Year Track Team; Captain Varsity Track Team, 1930-31, Fraternity Representative *Corks and Curls*, 1929, Varsity Club, IMP, Eli Banana, and Dean's List. His Seven Society membership was mentioned by Ellis Wisner, was noted on his death announcement in the Alumni news, and is discussed in *The Very Best Men* by Evan Thomas. There are two photographs of Wisner in costume as an IMP in *Photographs of University of Virginia Student Groups*. 1923, call number RG-30/1/1.861

⁷ The life of Frank Wisner is documented in Douglas Waller's recently released biography *The Determined Spy* (Penguin, 2025) released on April 9, 2025; there is also a 2018 biography by George Cristian Maior, a Romanian diplomat, called *America's First Spy: The Tragic Heroism of Frank Wisner*. He is also one of the main subjects of Scott Anderson's *The Quiet Americans: Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War—A Tragedy in Three Acts*, Doubleday, 2020 as well as Gregg Herken's. *The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals In Cold War Washington*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

For a decade, from 1948 until he was hospitalized in a psychiatric facility in Baltimore for six months in 1958, Wisner ran the very well-funded covert action apparatus of the United States without much outside supervision or oversight. This covert action apparatus included secret armies, navies and air corps and the logistical support needed to sustain all of them, run clandestinely through a network of front companies and foundations. As important, in terms of both priority and funding, was the management of the covert propaganda apparatus—a network of publishers, authors, entertainment figures and academics overseas and in the United States that were called “The Mighty Wurlitzer” by Wisner, because—like the organ of the same name—he could use them to play any tune he wanted (“CIA has global media machine”).

The literary world was a Cold War battlefield, no less than the worlds of physics, chemistry or aeronautical engineering. The subject of intelligence and literary studies is an emergent one, but one with a strong resonance, a deep well of unexamined information and well-researched scholarship published by excellent university presses. If one’s aperture focuses specifically on areas inside the field of English language and literature, the influence of intelligence agencies is no less visible. Upon even a cursory examination of literary studies, one quickly encounters spies, and the next section of this thesis contains a literary review demonstrating this fact.

The Wisner archive and secondary literature shows even more: the covert action and plans directorate of CIA under the control of Frank Gardiner Wisner unfurled its clandestine tendrils across time and space into many other fields of contemporary study in English literature. For instance, covert efforts to print and distribute dissident literature is a largely unexamined area of bibliographic study. The index-card based covert files on individuals, organizations and events built by J. Edgar Hoover, Norman Pearson, James Angleton and Sherman Kent (among

others) were the forerunner to modern database technology, just as AI's origin is in overhead reconnaissance analysis and data retrieval. CIA's counterintelligence unit was an early pioneer in modern computers and artificial intelligence.

During World War II, literary theorists still studied in English departments had close ties to spies or were themselves spies; Erich Auerbach was an Abwehr Agent in Istanbul, according to declassified Office of Strategic Services Documents, György Lukács was a minister in the dissident Hungarian Nagy government that was supported covertly by American intelligence and crushed by Soviet Tanks in 1956. William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* was one of the foundational texts for Wisner's contemporary James Jesus Angleton's approach to Counterintelligence, and that spy maintained correspondence with a wide network of poets, including Ezra Pound, ee cummings and Wallace Stevens.

This sub-rosa network of intelligence professionals and amateur agents exerted direct influence on American literature. Consider the case of American author Tom Wolfe, the Virginia novelist and new journalist. His doctoral dissertation in American Studies at Yale was supervised by Norman Pearson, one of Angleton's recruiters and an OSS officer and CIA spotter. Wolfe then moved on to the *New York Herald Tribune*, owned by OSS veteran John Hay Whitney, who also coined the term "venture capital," Wolfe published much of his later work in *Rolling Stone*, recruited to the magazine by publisher Jan Wenner. Wenner would later cultivate journalist and filmmaker Mark Boal, whose greatest career success came in the form of a CIA propaganda film called *Zero Dark Thirty*. One could argue that Wolfe's entire literary career was shaped by spies and their enablers.

A brief list of other potential topics for potential scholarship in the archive include Wisner's role in the overseas production of the stage play *Porgy and Bess* (his sister's friend

played a lead role), Wisner's role in promoting fellow Mississippian and future University of Virginia writer-in-residence William Faulkner as a State Department envoy, Wisner's relationship with William Deakin at Oxford, Wisner's influence on secondary and post-secondary education, and Wisner's unheralded status as a formative influence in modern technology. Wisner's work on overhead reconnaissance platforms such as the U-2 spy plane or Corona satellite surveillance system in the analog era led to an information-overload, data storage and data retrieval problem that was solved using the ancestors of today's computer and artificial intelligence technology.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis is based on and informed by not only archival research, but also a very large body of scholarly work. Academics have examined this intersection of power politics and culture for decades, but the topic has gained renewed interest in the last decade. The keyword "espionage" yields just over 4,000 results in the MLA database—with 2452 of those peer reviewed⁸. Book-length work on the topic has been steadily produced by scholars of English literature, American Studies, history and political science over the last few years. Penny von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* from Harvard University Press in 2004 considers the means by which culture was used as a political weapon by examining the role the State Department's deployment of Jazz Musicians in a worldwide concert series. Robin Winks's study of the intersection of Yale and US intelligence, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War 1939-1961*, published in 1987, the same year John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg's *The Spy Story* appeared, which asserted in the introduction that

The Twentieth Century has become in many ways the Age of Clandestinity. One symptom of the pervasiveness of secret operations in our lives is the fact that the spy story has become one of the most popular genres of our time. The secret agent protagonist is now one of our favorite mythical heroes and to study his evolution is the purpose of this book.

So too is the study of a real life secret agent protagonist, intelligence officer Frank Wisner, and the role he played in the evolution of the spy novel, and the reasons for that role.

⁸Sample Journal Article Titles include the following

Galway, Elizabeth A. "To Catch a Spy: Children, Espionage, and the Blurring of Boundaries in First World War Children's Literature." *International Research in Children's Literature*, vol. 17, no. 3, Oct. 2024, pp. 350–63. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2024.0584>.

Regan, Kylie. "The Jolly Coverts': Delillo's *Libra* as Espionage Fiction." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 59, no. 5, 2018, pp. 624–36. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2018.1441122>.

There has yet to be an equivalent of DA Miller's *The Novel and the Police*; the novel and spy craft—in the age of persistent surveillance—remains a rich literary vein to mine. On this subject, broader theory is as compelling as any individual story or narrative. “The Aesthetics of Espionage,” is a Derrida-inspired term defined by Peter Szendy as an allusion to

the figure of the spy simultaneously as a motif or theme in (cinematic, literary and musical) works for art (in short, in “aesthetic” productions in the common usage of the word, but also as a condition of the possibility of listening in general: espionage (the ear of the other) could then be understood also and above all in the sense of what we could call, slightly deflecting the Kant of the Critique of Pure Reason, a “transcendental aesthetic of aurality.” (Szendy)

Szendy continues “The political consequences of this structure extend everywhere today, to the United States as well as France: when we try to hear everything, we do not hear anything.”

Here, Szendy was referring primarily to the American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand “5-Eyes” surveillance program run by the American National Security Agency and the British General Communications Headquarters that scoops up all electronic communications on earth to deposit in a secure facility in Utah—known as Bumblehive and located outside Salt Lake City near a town called Lehi, named for a Book of Mormon prophet—for later exploitation. Seven years after Szendy proposed an “Aesthetic of Espionage” the rise of the use of artificial intelligence and large language text models demonstrates the prescience of this statement.

There are also questions of meta-theory on the historiography of literary theory's twentieth century journey itself: literary theorist Erich Auerbach appears in American intelligence records as a wartime agent of the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service during World War II—a much different explanation for his tenure in Istanbul than he gave in

Mimesis.⁹ Studying the broader intellectual genealogies alongside the texts produced reveals another approach to the aesthetics of Espionage. This is timely: Greg Barnhisel *CODE NAME PURITAN: Norman Holmes Pearson at the Nexus of Poetry, Espionage, and American Power*, came out from the University of Chicago Press in 2024. Of the book, Michael Gorra's writes:

"Charismatic Yale professor and OSS spymaster Norman Holmes Pearson was so good a secret agent that he left few visible traces on his time. But he was a master of soft power, an "odd man out who was deeply in," and his fingerprints are everywhere: on the shaping of the modernist canon, the disciplinary origins of American studies, and even the founding of the CIA. Greg Barnhisel's *Code Name Puritan* shows how it all worked, a finely detailed and provocative account of a life at the center of the American establishment."

Barnhisel, who's *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature and American Cultural Diplomacy* (Columbia University Press 2015) featured a chapter called "Cold Warriors of the Book," alongside Chapters that chronicle CIA/OPC efforts to promote Modernism in general,

⁹ Nowhere in the 50th Anniversary edition of *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach does it mention that the influential literary theorist was in Istanbul during World War II on assignment for German Naval Intelligence. However, buried in a footnote of an American intelligence report from 30 July 1946 is this note:

**AUERBACH, Erich Vm (BE), Istanbul and Murmansk, 1939.
Was paid RM 300 monthly salary as L(BE) Istanbul, 1939.
Representative of Deutsch...[the document then cuts off].**

According to other sections of the report the L(BE) designation indicates Auerbach was a "Leiter Berichterstatter"—L(BE) (head intelligence agent) who was responsible for the agents in his territory and whose duty it was to keep in constant touch with Headquarters and with his Agents." (US Intelligence Report on the German Intelligence Service WWII, Volume 3, page 13. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/519cd819993294098d515d29>)

Auerbach was in Istanbul when Frank Wisner first arrived to clean house at the American OSS Station, then run by a drunk with a loose mouth. Allen Dulles, OSS chief in Switzerland, mentions liaison efforts with anti-Hitler elements of the Nazi intelligence agency known as the Abwehr; post war, a large swath of the Nazi spies would go to work for the Americans after World War II through the Gehlen Organization, run by the successor to Admiral Canaris after Canaris was tried and executed for treason in the sunset of World War II. Wisner was Gehlen's case officer in the post-war period. If Auerbach was running agents for Germany in Istanbul during World War II, as the declassified files suggest, Wisner certainly would have been aware. Auerbach's post world War II trajectory—Penn State in 1947, then Princeton, then Yale—indicates a close relationship to American intelligence post war. This is, I posit, a representation of a problem in critical reality yet to fully examined through formal scholarship: the task now falls to current scholars to understand, as Auerbach himself wrote, "their determining influence upon the representation of reality" in English Departments and on broader literary study and cultural production.

through art, literature and literary magazines. Equally relevant is studying the way some English Departments played a quiet role in the Cold War and subsequent entanglements with the clandestine elements of American government; many of the documents are now declassified, the participants mostly dead (but some, like Wisner, leaving behind a large archive), yet what remains is a functional structure and method of operation. There have been studies in the vein of Mark McGurl's book *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Harvard University Press 2011) that examine critical aspects of clandestine cold war cultural infrastructure.¹⁰

McGurl focuses on the downstream effects of creative writing programs built on the Iowa Writer's Workshop model on broader American literary production. Eric Bennett argues MFA programs were built out with help from CIA. Further connections of note between espionage and the literary establishment in this era include the following: Librarian of Congress and poet Archibald MacLeish ran the "Research and Analysis" branch of the OSS and contributed the preamble of UNESCO's 1945 Constitution, which states "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." An OSS officer used buying rare books in Istanbul for the Yale Library as cover for espionage.¹¹ Graham Greene was a spy for MI-6 during World War II, his boss was the Soviet Mole Harold "Kim" Philby. JD

¹⁰ the recipient of the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism for 2011

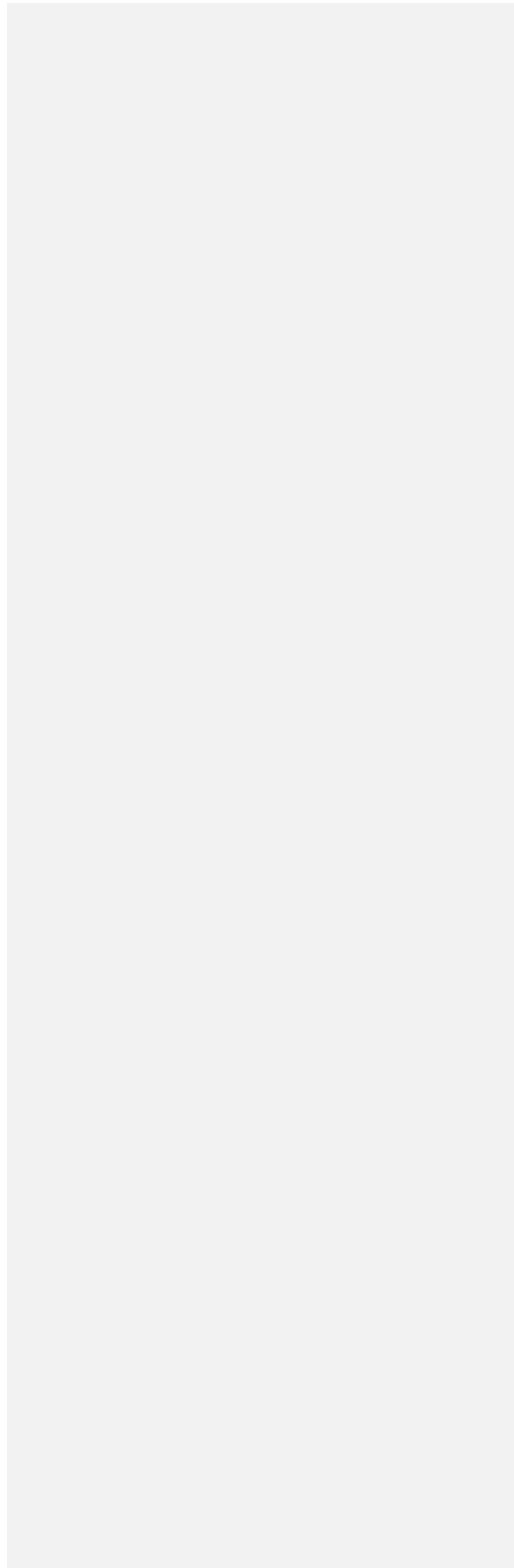
¹¹ "The bulk of the material in the WORLD WAR II COLLECTION was gathered in connection with a project sponsored during the war by the United States Office of Strategic Services. This operation, called the "Yale Library Project" was devised in 1942 and had as its purpose the collection of Axis intelligence through an agent stationed in a neutral country. Joseph T. Curtiss, a professor of English at Yale University, was chosen by the OSS as the agent whose ostensible mission was to collect war propaganda for the Yale Library. He was sent to Turkey in April 1943 and until his departure in September 1945 he not only gathered material for the OSS, but also shipped two tons of war literature back to the United States. These publications were ultimately distributed among a number of interested libraries, including Yale." World War II Collection (MS 688). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/12/resources/4450>

Salinger was an Army Counterintelligence Special Agent During World War II, as was W.E.B Griffin.

The list goes on and on. Espionage and covert action even influenced specific subfields in English literature, such as Critical Bibliography. When his graduate studies were interrupted by World War II, Carlton Hinman was assigned to a cryptologic unit in Washington DC under the command of Fredson Bowers. Hinman got the idea for his eponymous collator from a wartime aerial reconnaissance method of comparing aerial photography from different times—before or after a bombing raid, for example—by overlaying the images on a screen and viewing them for fractions of a second, so that differences in the two images would appear to ‘flicker’ to the observer. That idea became the Hinman Collator, used by Hinman (who would receive his PhD from University of Virginia under his wartime commander Fredson Bowers) to collate Shakespeare’s first folios. Bowers would become chair of the English Department. Today, 82 of Shakespeare’s First Folios share space at the Folger Library in Washington DC with a copy of Ian Fleming’s spy novel *Dr. No* in the rare manuscript room. This is where the role of Frank Wisner as shadow university administrator and Shadow Editor in the twilight of his life becomes compelling.

To date there has been no close study of the exact mechanics of a senior intelligence officer working directly with a novelist to influence a work in progress; journalists and academics have examined the way senior CIA officials worked with filmmakers and musicians, but the novelist as asset and the spymaster as editor remains an elusive topic, one that this thesis will illustrate. First, though, one must understand the literary bent of the CIA officer (in this case Frank Wisner) and how that was influenced by his education in Virginia.

Farwell 19



CHAPTER 3: THE VIRGINIA EDUCATION OF FRANK WISNER

The Woodberry Forest School sits along a bucolic bend of the Rapidan River in Orange, Virginia. This was once the estate of William Madison, brother of American President James Madison. The headmaster's house was designed by Thomas Jefferson and was later fashioned into a school for southern gentleman by a former Confederate officer, Captain Robert Stringfeller Walker.¹² Walker rode with Mosby's Rangers, a guerrilla detachment of Virginia Cavalry that was among the last Confederate units to disband, and only after the Army of Northern Virginia surrendered to US Grant at Appomattox. Mosby's Rangers included child soldiers as young as 16. As recently as 2015, the Central Intelligence Agency sent officers on a "staff ride" to learn the lessons of Mosby's partisan warfare; the staff ride handbook notes that "In World War II, the Office of Strategic Services studies Mosby and his methods, and his tactics and lessons learned remain a current focus of research and study by US Special Forces and Special Operations Forces."¹³

After the Civil War, when he worked as a lawyer for the Southern Pacific Railroad in California Colonel Mosby mentored a young man named George Patton in horsemanship and cavalry tactics; Patton would grow into a general who would—like Mosby—wear ivory handled Colt Revolvers leading the Third Army in World War II. Winston Churchill wrote in "The River War" he was also influenced as a Cavalryman by Mosby's use of pistols in Cavalry raids, charging a Dervish line in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan with a German Mauser pistol. Wisner was educated at a school founded by influential veterans of covert action in the Confederate Model. The Woodberry Forest school, a legacy of Mosby's Rangers, would be a critical first medium for

¹² Site Visit to the Woodberry Forest School, Spring 2024

¹³ MOSBY'S RANGERS: LESSONS IN INTELLIGENCE AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS LESSONS LEARNED AND HISTORY RIDE | CIA FOIA (foia.cia.gov) <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/06500908>

Wisner's growth; it was there that Wisner first met Gordon Gray, the tobacco company heir. Gray, as Secretary of the Army under Truman, would order West Point to swap out the portrait of Colonel Robert E. Lee in United States Army blue for a portrait of General Robert E. Lee in Confederate Army gray that would remain in the dining hall—where West Point cadets take three meals a day—until the Obama administration. As National Security Adviser he would advise Wisner to enter a six-month course of inpatient treatment at The Sheppard Pratt Institute in Baltimore, while co-owning an Orchid shop favored by James Angleton.

After Woodberry Forest, Wisner enrolled at UVA in 1927. The University of Virginia that Frank Wisner attended in the late 1920's and early 1930's was a starkly different institution than its current incarnation. One metric alone—enrollment—demonstrates this. When Wisner was an undergraduate in 1929 there were 2,200 students. As of 2024, there were 25,944 students at the University of Virginia.¹⁴ The school was nearly all male—women were admitted to graduate and professional schools—nearly all white, mostly southern, mostly rich, clad in coat and tie, among them the grandsons and great grandsons of the Confederacy's most prominent citizens. The President of the school when Wisner arrived was Edwin Alderman, who wrote the Ku Klux Klan a public thank-you in the University newspaper after the local Klavern donated money for the construction of Memorial Gym—the 'Memorial' in the name was for the Civil War.¹⁵ By the 1920's and 1930's the University of Virginia was a world-wide leader in the field of eugenics, and the school would be criticized in years immediately following Wisner's graduation by the *New York Times* for nearly sending a delegate to a celebration of the

¹⁴ University of Virginia enrollment statistics for the 1920's and 1930's can be found at https://uvamagazine.org/articles/serpentine_timeline and for 2024 those numbers are available at <https://admission.virginia.edu/admission/statistics>

¹⁵ Ku Klux Klan Gives a Thousand Dollars to Gymnasium Fund: Pledge Received This Week From Virginia Realm, President Alderman Issues Easter Appeal for Funds, 1921 (Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, Folio Broadside, 1921 K84)

University of Heidelberg in Nazi Germany in 1936. *The Richmond Times Dispatch* declared in print that President John Lloyd Newcomb (who became President in 1931, the same year Wisner enrolled in Law School) should refuse the invitation “in such unmistakable terms the whole world will listen” (Norwood, 145).

From 1931-1941, the University of Virginia hosted the Institute of Public Affairs roundtables, described by Stephen H Norwood in *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower* as “a respectful hearing for Nazi Germany's apologists” (Norwood, Chapter 5). The Institute was run by University of Virginia professor Robert Kent Gooch, a football star and Rhodes Scholar (Norwood 148). There is one brochure from the Institute in the Frank Wisner collection, tucked in a folder alongside the programs from his college graduation in 1931 and his law school graduation in 1934. This is the version of the University of Virginia that played a key role in shaping Frank Wisner’s intellect and character and, I argue, fundamentally affected the way he later sought to influence foreign policy. A triple major—English, Psychology and Philosophy—Wisner was also an excellent art student, teaching art classes at the University before enrolling in law school in 1931.

He attended classes in Clark Hall and earned a law degree in 1934, while also picking up an award from UVA’s Raven Society. The award was a metal bust of Edgar Allan Poe’s head. That bust would be shown along with his intelligence medals and Order of the British Empire in CIA’s memorial display, illustrating his lifelong affection to the University of Virginia. Wisner’s time at the helm of the covert action apparatus of the United States twenty years later was not just influenced by his time in the classroom in Charlottesville, but also by the extracurricular activities the formerly gangly, small-framed child from Mississippi engaged in while at UVA. His letters home about being admitted to the secret societies, travel with the track team, his

personal reading list, fraternity engagements and work in the psychology lab while dabbling in art are all, read through the lens of the elder Wisner encountered later in this thesis, the broad training for his later career as spy, covert operator, media manipulator and literary muse (Chisholm Foundation Collection MSS 16333).

Wisner ran on the track team and served as its Captain. He pledged Delta Kappa Epsilon and became its yearbook liaison and President. He was, as previously described, in multiple collegiate societies including the Eli Banana Society, the IMP Society, and the Thirteen Society and the Seven Society. The latter association he kept a closely guarded secret, even from his family. His son Ellis told me the first time he had any inkling his father was a Seven was graveside at Arlington National Cemetery in Section 6, which overlooks the mansion formerly owned by Robert E. Lee's family. After Frank Wisner's 1965 suicide, the Sevens honored their fallen colleague with a large wreath made of black magnolias that appeared near Wisner's final resting place overnight (Waller, 541). This was an incredible feat of covert action, considering that Arlington National Cemetery is closed at night and patrolled by the United States Army's Old Guard from the adjacent Fort Myer.¹⁶

The track team transformation—the slight teenager with the Mississippi accent becomes the athletic superstar—speaks to Wisner's endurance, focus and grit; to some extent so does his successful pledging of DKE, which also provides a clue to the young Wisner's social status. Yet it was the secret societies—formed in Virginia when the memory of the American Civil War was as fresh as contemporary memory of Vietnam and the civil rights movement—that provided Wisner with the best training for his future career. He wrote back to his family on January 17, 1930, after being tapped for the 13 Society four days before.

¹⁶ Interview with Ellis Wisner, Fall 2024 at his residence in Bethesda, Maryland

The '13' Society extended bids to both of us. This organization does not accomplish much of anything but it is only in the 4th year and supposedly the highest non-secret one of the lot. Unlike all the others it does not have rival or competing societies but stands alone at the top (?) of the list. No one knows exactly what the thirteen members are supposed to represent—perhaps the nearest approximation would be, the thirteen most influential representative men in the University, and as such quite an honor. (MSS 16333, Box 1, Folder 1930)

Both the IMPs and the Sevens mandated the use of code names, or what Wisner would later know in his OSS and CIA career as Cryptonyms (Wisner would use the Cryptonym TYPHOID as an OSS officer in Romania and Harold S. Whiting as a high-ranking CIA officer). Both societies used a blend of very public group theatricality and individual anonymity to increase their mystique around grounds. The IMPs were a raucous semi-open secret society; they threw massive balls once a year, wearing soft caps with devil horns attached, carrying pitchforks while wearing garish robes and consuming cup after cup of very alcoholic punch. This would prove excellent training for intelligence officer Wisner's most fruitful operational environments—the high society cocktail party, the dinner party, the hard drinking private club—he used in both his intelligence work and social life. (IMP Society Papers, CA 1920 Folder 9304)

The Sevens operated through a theatrical openness as a society, with a strict secrecy around membership. No one knew *who* was a Seven, but they knew the society existed through both its authorized graffiti around Grounds, pen and paper correspondence (signed with astrological symbols), and philanthropic donations, always with a repeating numeral “7” in the amount given (\$777.77, for instance).

World War II found Sevens in roles of prominence and power in the American government; Edward Stettinius Jr was administrator of the Lend-Lease program (publishing a book *Lend-Lease, Weapon for Victory* printed by Macmillan in early 1944) and later Secretary of State. Admiral William ‘Bull’ Halsey was Commander of the Third Fleet, and Wisner was fast

becoming one of the OSS's most valuable intelligence officers, the man sent to un-tangle and reorganize troubled stations.

The secret society methods of operation would seem to influence Wisner's later approach to covert action and also inform his later goal and method to remake the University of Virginia. An occulted board doling out anonymous cash to sway or influence the public by sponsoring worthy causes for a specific policy goal on behalf of a Presidential administration—that's a statement that both describes the Seven Society's role in UVA—with the University President as the executive in question—and the Office of Policy Coordination's role in the USA with the United States President as the executive.

CHAPTER 4: FRANK WISNER SHAPES THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

The anonymity that gave Wisner much of his power would also, ironically, prove to be the main impediment to his late in life ambition to serve as the President of the University of Virginia. His passion for anonymity meant there was no viable political constituency for him in Virginia, so he would shift focus to installing the Atomic Energy Commission Chair and ally in internecine executive branch political struggles Admiral Leo Strauss as UVA President. Wisner cultivated a circle of influential southern politicians and business executives with influence over the University of Virginia on proposed changes to UVA that would make it a closer partner of the national security state. Strauss was unable to take the post, as he was sitting for Secretary of Commerce, as dramatized by Robert Downey Junior in the film *Oppenheimer*. Some of Wisner's ideas would later be implemented under Edgar Shannon. (MSS 15049 Box 10)

When looking at the effect of this covert part of the Cold War, we should not just consider as texts written documents, books, and agent communications: we should also consider institutions themselves texts; by applying this approach to Frank Wisner's quest to remake the University of Virginia yields interesting results. Shortly before his first psychiatric hospitalization in 1958, Wisner considered retiring from CIA to become the President of the University of Virginia upon hearing the news of Colgate Darden's departure. An August letter from former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Chip Bohlen, handwritten, advised him against this course of action.¹⁷ Wisner heeded Bohlen's advice and instead concentrated on installing a proxy President the way he would have at CIA. His first choice was Admiral Lewis Strauss of the Atomic Energy Commission. As CIA's liaison to AEC, Frank Wisner knew Strauss quite well. Wisner developed an intense interest in universities as covert Cold War battlegrounds from the

¹⁷ This letter is transcribed and reprinted in the appendix

American involvement in Italian post-war elections and the Hungarian Revolution.¹⁸ Frank Wisner—just before his first psychiatric hospitalization—circulated his ideas for re-structuring UVA, which at that time was three thousand undergraduates, a law school and a small medical school to prominent UVA alumni and other power-brokers in Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland.¹⁹

The subject of the memorandum was: “University of Virginia; considerations involved in the selection of the new President.” When compared to the history of the University of Virginia from 1959-1975 it provides clear evidence Frank Wisner and CIA were involved in the post-World War II re-making of Thomas Jefferson’s university (MSS 15409). Many changes, reforms and additions suggested by Wisner in this memo for his preferred candidate for UVA’s Presidency—Admiral Lewis Strauss—to enact came true under the tenure of Edgar Shannon. At the time of his selection as President, a professor in the University of Virginia’s English Department, a Navy veteran and post-war Rhodes Scholar, where he was classmates with a future Director of Central Intelligence, Stansfield Turner. Wisner writes in the memorandum

We will use persuasion, example, and money to improve vastly the quality and the reputation of the professional and instructional staff of the University. We will return to the ideas and ideals of Jefferson, who proclaimed that he would found a new kind of University in this land and that he would personally select and bring to its halls of teaching the very finest professors and instructors available anywhere in the world

¹⁸ In the Wisner archives (MSS 15049 Box 2, Folder 4) there’s a folder with a Memorandum on a research project on Communism in Italy with Considerations on effective “counteraction” that says: “To understand the growing influence of Marxism in Italy one must also bear other factors in mind. Two of these are particularly serious. A). Infiltration of Marxist ideas into the Universities and schools.” Wisner highlights the following passages “in some faculties, indeed, the influence of the communist party has spread so steadily that in certain cases it has become difficult for a noncommunist student to continue his studies. In Rome University alone, there are no less than 130 known Marxist professors” “it is thought that seventy percent of all philosophy and history masters in the secondary schools may have Marxist affiliations.”¹⁹ “it is essential, therefore, that research should be accompanied by practical action to improve existing cultural organizations and to mould public opinion.

¹⁹ John S. Graham, John Carlyle Herbert, Gordon Gray, William Zimmer, Benjamin Franklin, Walter Robertson, William Boxley and Phil Graham. Wisner was also talking about the concept with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Allen Dulles, along with “four other officers of the Central Intelligence Agency”

If Mr. Strauss were to become the President, he and I together, and just the two of us, know all the foundations there are, and we could and would tap all of them and be certain of landing a few. We would get the Duponts, of which there are shoals, to set up a new foundation if necessary,” Wisner wrote.

My concept would be to do a kind of MIT-Killian concept in reverse; i.e. whereas Killian has brought the humanities to MIT and successfully demonstrated the essentiality of the intermarriage and cross-fertilization of the humanities with the sciences, I would propose that the same sort of thing be done at Charlottesville, but with the weight placed on the other foot—let the humanities lead, but let the study of science come a close second; and above all, let the two walk hand in hand together”

Wisner’s ideas for the University of Virginia took on traction. CIA dispatched a team to survey the libraries of Virginia shortly after the memorandum and Wisner’s discussions with the senior CIA personnel.²⁰ UVA’s informational webpage about Edgar Shannon’s tenure notes:

In his pursuit of academic distinction for the University, Edgar Shannon sought eminent scholars and high-achieving students. With the establishment of the Center for Advanced Studies in the Sciences along with state legislation enacted during Mr. Darden’s governorship, legislation that enabled the establishment of the Eminent Scholars Fund (in which the state would match private donations), Mr. Shannon was able to attract well-known and respected faculty to the University.²¹

The Eminent Scholars fund is a variation on a theme Wisner raises in his memorandum on the University of Virginia in 1958. Wisner also proposed tapping the NSF and NIH for grants, which Shannon did. The informational website on Shannon notes this exact playbook was followed through during his administration. According to the University of Virginia:

This hiring activity, a faculty raise approved by Governor Lindsay Almond Jr., a National Science Foundation grant for \$5 million, and a National Institute of Health

²⁰ That July, CIA sent officers whose purpose was “to determine what library facilities are available in nearby Virginia to supplement the Vital Material Collection in the event of an emergency.” CIA officers visited Culpepper’s public library, the University of Virginia Library and Charlottesville’s Public Library, before moving on to survey libraries in Lexington, Lynchburg, Richmond, Ashland and Fredericksburg. By far, UVA’s library was the most impressive to CIA. “The library is a four story building with two floors below ground level, and contains about 825,000 volumes” the survey noted. “The collection of English language material in this library is excellent.” The survey noted the University Library is a US Government document repository and received most government documents, and that it “has the only collection of foreign language publications worth noting,” including the only set of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. Visits were made to the JAG school and Law Library as well, where the JAG School collection was pronounced “not adequate,” forcing most of the JAG officers to use the “fine law library.” Of the libraries visited, the University of Virginia library, by far, would be of most value to the Agency in time of emergency.” (Report of a Visit to Libraries in Nearby Virginia)

²¹ Edgar F Shannon Jr <https://www.virginia.edu/aboutuva/presidents/shannon/>

grant for \$2 million that Mr. Shannon funneled into faculty development, significantly raised the profile of the University's faculty.

In a memorable passage, Wisner described his wish and methods for gathering more eminent faculty at UVA:

We will use coaxing, cajoling, bribes, entrapment, seduction, alienation of affections, criminal conversations and rape (as in Sabines) to lure or if need be carry off the human treasure of which the University's intellectual larder has been growing increasingly bare over the last fifteen years... And we will use a new and specially-created President's Fund to be established and operated according to the principles and regulations set forth below) to raise the salary levels across the boards to something commensurate with our better competition for professors and instructors, and if this should not prove legally or politically feasible despite our full-blooded effort to make it so, we will have recourse to other means, e.g. by the substantial enhancement of professors' perquisites on a case-by-case and as-needs-may-be basis, including better housing, better schooling for their children, club memberships with paid-up dues, trips to foreign countries on vacations or for study, etc. etc.; or we will establish ourselves a series of special chairs, properly endowed or otherwise supported and sustained—and for such length of time as may be necessary to hook and hold our prime trout, etc. (Wisner UVA Memorandum, 4)

The University of Virginia's own material on the tenure of Edgar Shannon also shows that Wisner's ideas on endowed chairs were enacted during that time.

When Mr. Shannon came into office in 1959, there were thirteen endowed chairs; by the time he stepped down in 1974 the University had nearly one hundred. Student and faculty recruitment were important to Mr. Shannon, especially given the University's mission to increase access to public higher education and to increase its research capability. In 1993, Mr. Shannon explained to Lisa Guernsey, a University of Virginia student who was interviewing him as part of an oral history project, "To fulfill our responsibility as the major research university and graduate university in the state we simply had to expand and actually we made a long-range plan and projection. When I started we were 4200. . . We were up to about 14,500 when I left the presidency. We had a little more than tripled in size."

The Woodberry Forest School and the University of Virginia were both institutions that shaped the mind and character of young Frank Wisner, ones he maintained a lifelong interest in and loyalty to. By examining the way those institutions functioned at the time, a clearer picture of the environment that shaped Frank Wisner comes through. This illustrates the importance of

those institutions for Intelligence agencies; they first mold the rough human clay from which CIA later recruits, further trains, glazes and fires. Now that there's an outline of Wisner's educational influence and passion for literature, the next logical topic to examine the intersection of espionage and literature throughout history, as well as the formative influence of education and literature on another important intelligence officer and poet named James Angleton—Angleton has been studied much more than Frank Wisner, and his story further illuminates the topic.

CHAPTER 5: THE BRAIDED HISTORY OF ESPIONAGE AND LITERATURE

The study of world literature is also the study of spies and spycraft. The earliest written documents, the Tablets of Tel-El-Amarna, recorded the conquests of Thutmose I and contained the logs of a frontier official stationed in a town on the Palestinian border. They're considered the first form of diplomatic correspondence. They are also, read differently, the first examples of counter-intelligence reports—the frontier border official's job was to inspect the cargo of travelers and seek out smugglers and potential spies. The earliest example of poetry is a poem praising the valor of the young Pharaoh in battle. Vestiges of the time the Egyptian leader T'Hity captured Joppa by sending his best warriors into town concealed in panniers carried by donkeys were passed down by oral tradition, eventually becoming the Arabian nights tale "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves." (Dvornik, 1-12)

The study of English literature is also the study of spies and spycraft: King Alfred's incognito sojourn into the Somerset Levels in 878 during the Viking invasions is a story of covert action. John Dee, advisor and court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth, influential book collector and librarian, popularizer of the term "British Empire" exchanged secret messages from Queen Elizabeth (signed not with the Royal seal but signed back and forth to the inscription 007) while producing *Monad Hieroglyphica* (1564). Peter J. Forshaw notes "Nothing, however, is ever simple with Dee, for it quickly becomes apparent that his hieroglyphic Monad...is a poly-semous text, to be read on more than one level" (Forshaw). This is also the case with English literature ties to spies. Upon his death in 1609, many of Dee's books wound up in the library of Sir Robert Cotton, who was in the process of assembling one of the finest libraries in the world. Among the English dramatists, Christopher Marlowe was also rumored to be a spy—intelligencer was the

term—for Queen Elizabeth. The tradition crossed the Atlantic and planted its seeds in Virginia at Jamestown.

The study of American literature is also the study of spies and spycraft; the American Revolution really began with a “Committee of Correspondence,” and a network of printing presses; the bullets that flew at Bunker Hill were backed by paper. George Washington is considered the first intelligence case officer in American history, running a network of spies in New York known as the Culper Gang. The Declaration of Independence was covertly written by cipher enthusiast Thomas Jefferson at 702 Market Street in Philadelphia. Post revolution it was translated into five languages and printed by Peter Miller, a member of the Zionotic Brotherhood and Seventh-Day Baptist at the Ephrata Cloister, which also printed continental script currency for the Revolution.

Richard Helms notes in his memoir *A Look Over My Shoulder* that Benjamin Franklin ran covert action campaigns during the American Revolution; in one, he forged a letter from Frederick II of Hesse Kassel to King George III, in which Frederick urged the British to make more aggressive use of Hessian mercenaries so Frederick could claim their death bonuses. Helms called this a “well targeted, inexpensive, self-contained covert action” that caused five thousand of the thirty thousand British aligned Hessian mercenaries to desert (Helms 109). After the Revolution, James Fenimore Cooper wrote two espionage novels in the early 1800s—*The Spy* in 1821 and *The Bravo* in 1831. Meanwhile, Edgar Allan Poe’s stories and novels paved the way for detective fiction, which paved the way for the spy novel, which was then crafted into a distinctly American literary form.

Literary arts and espionage trade craft²² have long been inseparable, but by the nature of the craft the reciprocal nature of their relationship remains occulted. Where does fiction end and fact begin? Few fictions have the way of working themselves into the real world that spy fictions do. Robert Condon, author of *Six Days of the Condor*, claimed CIA told him KGB set up an open source literature analysis unit after reading the plot of the debut novel from the 24 year old author and Capitol Hill Aide. Novelist Tom Clancy was discovered by a UVA English Alumnae named Deborah Grosvenor when she was the acquisitions editor of the Naval Institute Press, Clancy's novel was the first fiction they ever published (Neff, "Poise, Tenacity, and Clancy"). Clancy spent most of September 11, 2001 on television explaining the terrorist attacks because he used a similar plot device in his 1996 thriller *Debt of Honor*.

The era of World War II and the immediate post-cold war era where we can see the strongest confluence of the two worlds, espionage and literature; the records remain, the participants have passed on, many documents are now declassified. This is the era examined in this thesis through a close reading of the careers and ambitions of two American spymasters, Frank Gardiner Wisner and James Jesus Angleton.

Of the two, Angleton is and was the better-known. A poet, he edited the Yale literary magazine *Furioso*; an impressive accomplishment for an undergraduate who corresponded with and published E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and TS Eliot. He was also a literary theorist who's worldview and operational methods were shaped by William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and his training in New Criticism by Maynard Mack, a counter-intelligence officer who recruited scholars of poetry and poets into spy-catching for OSS and CIA. Angleton also has, by now, become a literary and cultural figure: there are chain smoking

²² Richard Helms credits Allen Dulles with coining this term

characters based on him in Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost*, Robert Littell's *The Company*, the television series the *X-Files*, the film *The Good Shepherd*.

Less has been written about Frank Gardiner Wisner, Angleton's contemporary. Wisner's papers reside in University of Virginia's Special Collections, and contain a massive amount of compelling information. Both Angleton and Wisner learned the craft of intelligence while young military officers in the Office of Strategic Services, yet from an early age were both demonstrated a very literary and artistic bent—Wisner was a talented artist and storyteller, Angleton a poet who's Yale literary journal *Furioso* attracted top flight talent—and the evidence shows that this literary-ness influenced their approach to spying and also their approach to broader policy in support of that.

The two men had different skillsets and different career portfolios. Close reading Frank Wisner's career illuminates the role American "covert action" played in the recent history of literature and worldwide publishing, while close reading James Angleton's career illuminates the importance of literature and literary types—librarians, professors, deans, writers, booksellers, bibliographers, poets, theorists—in the "espionage" realm.

Some definitional terms are now necessary. CIA defines "intelligence" as "the knowledge derived from a cyclical processing of information" – that is, information that has been gathered through overt or covert means, analyzed and processed. CIA defines "covert action" as "a clandestine operation designed to influence foreign governments, events, organizations or persons in support of United States foreign policy; it may include political, economic, propaganda or paramilitary activities.

Covert action is referred to in Executive Order No. 12036 as *special activities*. CIA defines espionage as "intelligence activity directed toward the acquisition of information through

clandestine means and proscribed by the laws of the country in which it is committed.” CIA further defines “foreign counterintelligence” as “Intelligence activity, with its resultant product, intended to detect, counteract, and/or prevent espionage and other clandestine intelligence activities, sabotage, international terrorist activities or assassinations conducted for or on behalf of foreign powers.” (Glossary of Intelligence Terms and Definitions)

Terms are important to define that way, because that is how Frank Wisner, a UVA-trained lawyer, would have engaged with them as he built a sprawling apparatus of front organizations and agents. This covert action apparatus included journalists, authors, writers, academics and students, not all of whom were “read in” on their status as agents of American statecraft. Hugh Wilford amply explains and documents much of this in *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Harvard University Press 2009).

At the same time, Wisner’s contemporary James Angleton, a poet trained at Yale, built out CIA’s counterintelligence operations on literary lines—maintaining a vast system of counterintelligence index cards. Angleton’s filing techniques were based on the filing and index system Wilmarth S Lewis, who taught a Graduate course on the management of historical material at Yale, developed for organizing the papers of Horace Walpole at the Farmington, Connecticut Walpole Library. Angleton used literary cover for some his counterintelligence operations covered in those files. One index card would contain the data for Louise Page Morris, a Tobacco heiress who worked for Angleton on difficult assignments that involved travel. Her official cover was working at the Gompers Research Library at 406 E 58th Street in New York City, a “small, usually empty reading room paid for and stocked with books from Angleton’s budget.” (Holzman, 130)

Angleton ran a secret (and illegal) program of postal surveillance that ran from 1952-1973 called HTLINGUAL that would later be criticized by the United States President's Commission on CIA Activities within the United States—aka the Rockefeller Commission—that included among its commissioners University of Virginia's recently retired President, Edgar Shannon.²³ There was tension between Wisner and Angleton's programs in the early days of CIA, but that didn't seem to affect their personal relationship which in personal correspondence seemed friendly, respectful, and a bit distant. The two men did not attend each other's parties—though Angleton sometimes covertly wired Wisner's parties for counter-intelligence purposes—but Wisner recommended Angleton for membership in the F Street Club. Following the Bay of Pigs, Angleton wrote Wisner a cordial letter—in tiny scrawl—referencing their mutual friend, tobacco heir and DC power player Gordon Gray, who'd become part owner of an Orchid Greenhouse in Northern Virginia. Gray, who served as the Secretary of the Army and the President of the University of North Carolina, would also be part of Wisner's brain trust on re-organizing the University of Virginia in the late 1950's, which is explored in more detail later in this manuscript.

Angleton was openly and strongly critical of General Walter Bedell Smith's administration and claimed that Smith had been hoodwinked by the psychological warfare experts like Frank Wisner. Smith forgot espionage & counterespionage operations and devoted his time and attention to psychological warfare projects, many of which failed miserably. (Holzman, 135)

Though they may have not always approved of each other's operations or methods, what is striking with Wisner and Angleton is that their broader methods within their respective spheres of influence—relying on literary techniques as cover, as a mechanism to spy or covertly

²³ United States Commission on CIA Activities within the United States, and Rockefeller, Nelson A. (Nelson Aldrich). *Report to the President*. U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1975. HT/Lingual is discussed in Chapter 9 of the Report.

influence—were similar. If Frank Wisner's Mighty Wurlitzer and the deception operations run by James Angleton—staffed by men from the finest literary tradition and intensely focused on publishing material supportive of American foreign policy while also being unattributable to American secret agents—wrote the first draft of modern history, then it requires a literary scholar with a historical bent, not a historian, to untangle that record. Given that James Angleton's counterintelligence schemes and analysis efforts relied on poets and those trained in poetic criticism and analysis, then it also falls to a scholar of poetry to decode them. Perhaps this is why the best and most innovative scholarship on CIA's covert influence on American culture comes from departments outside of History or Politics.

CHAPTER 6 THE LITERARY WISNER

Wisner's love of language, spoken of at his memorial service by CIA Director Helms, also encompassed a love of literature—his collegiate letters home note the Willa Cather novels he read in his spare time while also reminding his parents to renew his subscriptions to magazines and literary journals—and reinforces the contention the early CIA was molded by men molded by literature who were continually engaging with it throughout their careers. There is, I argue, a way to directly study power by considering the literature that moves powerful people.

Consider the imperial afterlife of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*—the novel of the great game of espionage set in British Colonial India. Allen Dulles kept a well-thumbed copy near his desk at CIA; Frank Wisner read it to his children (one of whom would become the American ambassador to India), the highest-ranking British intelligence defector to the Soviet Union was Harold "Kim" Philby, and the CIA officer who took credit for the Iranian coup of 1953 was Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt. These were clear examples of men for whom literary inspiration could inspire real world action.

Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf's husband, once said, after being an imperial civil servant in Ceylon, "I could later never make up my mind whether Kipling had moulded his characters accurately in the image of Anglo-Indian society or whether we were moulding our characters accurately in the image of a Kipling story." Similarly, Jesse Oak Taylor notes that "Kipling's work holds out the possibility not only to depict, but also to create the empire and the men who ruled it" (Taylor, *ELT* 52;1). In sniper/observer training, the United States Marine Corps still uses "Kim's game," a memory game (*Jungle Training Pushes Marines to Their Limits*).

The effect on literature and on universities at the center of that study of literature by men who could quote *Kim* should not be overlooked, nor should the broader politics of the feedback loop between literature and spies in the twentieth century which still largely remains in the shadows. By examining the methodology (through the Helen MacInnes case study) of how the espionage and covert action world operated through the publishing world and academy using the competing lenses of Frank Wisner and James Angleton, I argue for the continued importance of understanding the braided history of espionage and literature, as well as the utility of using power politics as a lens to understand why art, culture, literature and education were all weapons in the cold war and beyond.

Wisner's "post CIA" (he remained a contract employee) career was busy; in addition to land deals, business consultancies, and lawyerly work, Frank also led a vibrant literary life. While hospitalized—either convalescing from his bouts of hepatitis in the late 1950's or while psychiatrically committed to the Sheppard Pratt institute in Baltimore—Wisner read fiction and nonfiction voraciously and exchanged books with a wide circle of friends and associates throughout his life.

A few conspicuous examples emerge from just one folder of correspondence in the voluminous archives. Joseph A Frank of the Ford Motor Company thanked Wisner for a copy of *The Foreign Office*; Wisner thanked Frank for a copy of *The Economist Diary*. In January of 1957, Wisner wrote to CIA subordinate Desmond Fitzgerald and his wife Barbara that "your books arrived at a time when I needed cheering up and provided an excellent tonic. I trust you will not disapprove my action in having exchanged the crossword puzzle for another current Japanese novel entitled "Snow Country" which was enticingly reviewed in the *New York Times* book review section a week ago." He wrote Ethel Fowler around the same time to thank her for

“the very entertaining book *The Big Thaw*.” The next June, he received a letter from William C Foster of the Olin Mathieson Chemical corporation, thanking him for his “thoughtfulness in sending me the Orwell book” (MSS 15049 Box 4 Folder 7).²⁴

It is no wonder that in retirement he took it upon himself to cultivate a relationship with one of the most popular spy novelists of the day, Helen MacInnes. This was the maiden and writerly pen-name for Helen MacInnes Highet, a Scottish-American Librarian with an intelligence background who was married to a Classics professor at Columbia named Gilbert Highet. Her career was entwined with Gilbert’s, and Gilbert’s prior service as a spy for the United Kingdom was part of the appeal of working with MacInnes.

Gilbert Highet, by the time of Wisner’s work with his wife, was a Scottish American (awarded citizenship in 1951), and a former officer with the British Special Operations Executive who’d traveled extensively in Germany before World War II and become attuned to the Nazi threat. When War came to the United Kingdom, Highet—who’d been recruited to Columbia University as a Professor in 1937—took a leave of absence to join the British secret services.

In a journal article their son recalled asking about the father’s activities when he was a small child during the war. The scholar-turned-spy told his son he was in supply where he “spent most of his day at a small desk in Rockefeller Center in New York City staring at a board on the wall listing shipments of ‘Tungsten and Wolfram,’” but was “in fact deeply engaged in a joint sub rosa Anglo American counterintelligence operation run out of Rockefeller center by the Canadian Intelligence Operative Sir William Stephenson, the ‘Intrepid’ of public fame.” (Highet)

²⁴ Frank to Wisner, 6 July 1955; Wisner to Frank, 5 January 1953; Wisner to Fitzgerald, 15 Jan 1957. Wisner to Fowler 15 January 1957

Gilbert Highet became part of “a small brain trust” of “bright young Oxford dons and their friends, together with cosmopolitan young Britons who had traveled extensively before the war.” According to his son Keith Highet, among this set was Ian Fleming, who would later create the 007 novel series. When Fleming visited a friend named Ivor Bryce in the Bahamas he found a copy of a *Birds of the West Indies* on his nightstand. The Macmillan publication was written by an ornithologist named James Bond. Highet’s initial job in the SOE was preparing “psychological profiles of Hitler, Goebbels, Goering and Himmler which sought to rationalize and predict their behavior in terms of their education, background and past careers.”

He then worked on Latin American issues before being reassigned to a freezing Quonset hut at a secret Canadian training facility near Lake Ontario working on a classified report called *The Secret History of British Intelligence in the Americas, 1940-1945*; Highet wrote the first draft, which deemed too dry and was then polished with a rewrite by Roald Dahl. The future *Big Friendly Giant*, *Witches* and *James and the Giant Peach* author was an injured RAF aviator finishing out his term of service as a British Intelligence officer tasked with various information operations that ranged from sleeping with Connecticut Representative Clare Boothe Luce to keep the Congresswoman on the British side to writing pro-British propaganda for the *Saturday Evening Post* (Conant 116). Following the completion of *The Secret History* Highet was reassigned to the BAOR, the British Army of the Rhine, tasked with administering occupied Germany post-war.

This was where Highet told his son he got the idea for his book *The Classical Tradition*, which argues “why classical studies remain important today, why one can only fully understand Western literature and art if one also understands the background from which they emerged and if one perceives how that classical background has been adapted and incorporated into the art

and our thinking of today.” Highet’s son would cite this as the inspiration Highet would use to pioneer his famous “Great Books” course at Columbia. (Highet)

All the while, his wife Helen was raising a child in the United States, initially in New York City, then, after Highet learned the broad strokes of the Nazi Atomic weapons project, he moved his family out of the blast radius of New York City, first to Princeton, New Jersey and then to Woods Hole, Massachusetts. All the while, Helen was incorporating her prior travels and scholarly collaborations with her husband (they’d worked on monographs about the work of Frederick Engels and on the Sexual Practices of Ancient Rome) into her thriller novels.

She published *Above Suspicion* in 1941. The book followed a young Oxford Don and his wife, preparing for a continental vacation, approached by a Foreign Office man to serve as messengers for the foreign office to a secret agent gone missing, “their qualifications next to nothing except for Richard’s superb memory and the fact that they look so very innocent.” The book was a hit, and adapted into a 1943 film starring Joan Crawford and Fred MacMurray. The *New York Times* described it as “Hide and seek with death—in the shadows of terror” (MacInnes, *Above Suspicion*). She followed this up with *Assignment in Brittany* in 1942, also made into a film, *The Unconquerable*, 1944, and *Horizon*, 1945, and seven more novels²⁵ before *The Venetian Affair* (1963), which was also made into a film.

“Novel writing is very intense business for me,” she would tell Frank Wisner on 18 June 1964, after publishing a novel every two or three years for the previous twenty. “With editing by

²⁵ *Friends and Lovers* (1947)
Rest and Be Thankful (1949)
Neither Five Nor Three (1951)
I and My True Love (1953)
Pray for a Brave Heart (1955)
North from Rome (1958)
Decision at Delphi (1960)
The Venetian Affair (1963),

me (I usually find I reduce my original manuscript by almost two thirds of the total pages written) before it even gets typed out and read by Julian²⁶. It is a slow, patient business, this” (MSS 15049-a Box 7 Folder 10).

“There’s a Spy Between the Covers” declared the headline to a June 7, 1964 New York Times Style section article featuring a photograph of Scottish-American spy novelist Helen MacInnes between photographs of John Le Carre and Ian Fleming. “Close observers of the best seller list on page 8 have noticed an unprecedented phenomenon in recent months: the persistence in the top sales brackets of three novels of espionage—John Le Carre’s “The Spy Who Came in from the Cold,” Helen MacInnes’s “The Venetian Affair,” and (until quite recently) Ian Fleming’s “On Her Majesty’s Secret Service.” (New York Times 1964)

The Venetian Affair sold well—80,000 copies reported in that article, still selling briskly at the rate of 1000 a week. *The New York Times* review traces the advent of the spy novel’s moment in the English-speaking book publishing world a year after the Kennedy Assassination. “It was in the late 1930’s, with the people of America becoming more and more aware of their implications, that the spy novel came of age. First there was Eric Ambler with “Background to Danger” (1937). Then Graham Greene with “The Confidential Agent” (1939); and it became apparent that a spy novel could be as well written and as meaningful as any other form of fiction”

Doris Thompson, owner of the Francis Scott Key bookshop in Washington, DC, was a node for many sales of *The Venetian Affair*. One of Thompson’s regular customers was Frank Gardiner Wisner, who’d run covert operations for CIA in the 1950’s before suffering a nervous

²⁶ Julian Muller, the editor at Harcourt Brace

breakdown in 1958, which led to an involuntary commitment and six-month stay in the Shepperd Pratt Psychiatric hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. After the breakdown Wisner was diagnosed as manic depressive and given a less strenuous job as CIA's Chief of Station London, where he attempted to organize a coup in Equatorial Guinea. His record on coups was mixed; he was in charge of the Arbenz coup in Guatemala and Operation Ajax in Iran, in which Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt, a grandson of FDR, took credit for installing the Shah of Iran. Hungary and Indonesia hadn't gone so well, becoming covert action disasters. Wisner, now in semi-retirement and working as a consultant for CIA, was enamored with Helen MacInnes' novel *The Venetian Affair*. Kirkus described the book as:

"a story that probes the basics of brain-washing (whether the subjects be American, English, French or what have you); of the traps laid so that there is no turning back, of the ruthless, cold-blooded machinations, extending the reach far beyond the center. At the close, as the counter intelligence forces succeed in meeting the Communist plotters on their own ground, the threads are drawn together, and what has seemed at times hopelessly involved and perhaps over-detailed, comes into focus. Just what the goal of the Communist plot might be seems of minor significance in the revelation of the Master Mind, his aliases stripped, his web destroyed." (Kirkus)

On January 13, 1964, Julian P. Muller, an editor at Harcourt, Brace and World, wrote to Doris Thompson, owner of the Francis Scott Key book shop in Washington DC. Muller was, at the time, editing the novels of Helen MacInnes, a Scottish librarian married to a classics professor at Columbia who was also a former British spy. Thompson, who's customer was Wisner, passed along compliments from the CIA spymaster. Wisner was sending the book out as Christmas gifts, with a letter tucked in as his review.

"You can't imagine how much the Wisner comment meant to Helen MacInnes," Muller wrote, "Literary commendations she has enough to burn, but an accolade approving her thematic purpose and political acumen from so advised and distinguished a source is unique. She was

literally thrilled, Doris, and I cannot thank you enough. Will you also express my deep and sincere thanks to Mr. Wisner and tell him how enormously he has pleased this author.”

At the time, and given the nature of his work, Frank Wisner was an anonymous figure—albeit one who’d wielded extraordinary power and influence over his decades in government—and his name wouldn’t become widely known until his suicide in 1965. Muller, the editor at Harcourt Brace, wanted him to know his identity was safe.²⁷

With that letter, a brief but fruitful literary friendship was born between Mrs. Helen Highet (AKA Helen MacInnes) and Mr. Frank Gardiner Wisner (AKA TYPHOID, AKA Harold S. Whiting). Helen Highet, a week later on 18 January 1964, wrote to Wisner, grateful to him that he saw her book as what she intended.

During the last few years I have sometimes wondered if the English (judging by their newspapers and magazines) had really lost that old, thoroughly practical, and most knowledgeable manner in looking at the Russians. From the contents of this small book, I can see that they know where everyone stands. I blame some of the English writers for this uneasy feeling I had; the Graham Greene’s and the LeCarre’s seem really bent on building up an image of “It’s all so awful, or so meaningless, why bother especially as it doesn’t matter in the end.

Wisner, the old spymaster, immediately spotted an asset for cultivation; this was his profession, his training and his temperament. He arranged for a Mr. & Mrs. Highet to visit Washington, DC later that spring. The visit went well. On Wednesday, May 28 1964, Doris Thompson, owner of the Francis Scott Key bookshop, wrote Frank Wisner a thank-you note with extraordinarily precise handwriting partially describing the meeting in glowing terms.²⁸

²⁷ “Will you also assure Mr. Wisner that his identity has been entirely protected, no one here knows the author of the comment except for me and no copies of the comment are on file. Indeed, to be can be certain of that, I am returning the original to you herewith. I might tell you that I was terribly tempted to show this to Bill Jovanovich but not having your permission to do so I successfully resisted.” Muller wrote.

²⁸ I cannot allow the clock to turn to another day without thanking you for this day—it has been wonderful—the most interesting—I’m still spinning with fascination and admiration—mostly for your talent for coping with

Helen Highet—pen name MacInnes—agreed, writing to Wisner on 28 May 1964, thanking him for a “most interesting day.”²⁹ In a letter to Doris Thompson, she elaborated on her feelings:

Dear Doris,

We can't thank you enough for being so kind to us, yesterday. We had a wonderful time with you. Everyone was so kind & your friends are charming one and all. We were terrifically impressed by Mr. Wisner—a really brilliant mind and (apart from all that) delightful to meet. I've dropped Mr. Wisner a thank you note...I'll send some more material to Mr. Wisner. All in all, a day to remember.

On 5 June, 1964, MacInnes again wrote to Wisner:

Your letter and the Kirst book arrived today, and thank you for both. You are most thoughtful, and I am in your debt (The Orlov, by the way, is of immense interest to me. Although some techniques & tactics change, the basic things remain. And so his *Handbook of Intelligence and Guerrilla Warfare* is a classic.)

I wrote Mr. Hoover & Mr. Smethhurst³⁰ on the day following our Washington visit, I'm delighted to have the other two names from you, I will follow up with them. I asked Julian to send (with my compliments) *The Venetian Affair* to both Mr. Hoover and Mr. Smethhurst. I'll check with him on Monday by phone to make sure Harcourt, Brace sent the novels off.

Mr. Hoover, is, of course J. Edgar Hoover—longtime Director of the FBI; the Bureau had a keen interest in literary affairs, as Washington University professor of English and African American Studies William J. Maxwell masterfully recounts in *F.B. Eyes: How J Edgar Hoover's*

personalities. It was meaningful to watch and a great privilege to have been a part of this meeting between you and Helen and Gilbert—I am sure that many books in the future written by Helen will be largely due to your ideas and inspiration—need I say more? (Box 7 Folder 10)

²⁹ Dear Mr Wisner, How very kind you were to welcome me charmingly to Washington. Thank you once more for a most interesting day, and for arranging everything so beautifully. I do hope it won't be too long before we all meet again. Here is the little analysis which I promised you. There is no need to return this, as I have another copy.

All good wishes, and my warmest thanks for your interest. Your praise of the novel has been the greatest possible encouragement to a writer who has had her share of brickbats!

Sincerely & gratefully yours,
Helen Highet

³⁰ Richard Smethurst was a classics professor at the University of Pittsburgh who'd worked in Japan during Army days.

Ghostwriters Framed African American Literature. MacInnes spends the rest of the letter discussing her next novel, “the story will be contemporary—mine always are, it seems—but the characters have often a connection with past events and I have an idea for some characters in this new novel which hinges their pasts (in Nazi Germany) into present day action.”

This topic was interesting enough to Wisner that by December he came up with a way that MacInnes could incorporate it into a novel about a shadowy clandestine organization of Nazis who got away:

During my recent visits to London, Paris and Spain, I had the opportunity of discussing the matter of the possible survival and present whereabouts of Martin Bormann” Wisner writes, “[it] is my understanding that you may be thinking of doing your next book on some aspect of the Nazi era in Germany, and if so these notes may be of some interest and use to you. As indicated toward the conclusion of my notes, I feel that there is a strong current interest regarding the continuing organization (secret) and activities (malevolent) of the very sizable bunch of former Nazi officials and SS types who got away. ((Dec 17, 1964)

The literary relationship continued. Wisner reviewed the manuscript of MacInnes 'new novel for Julian Muller at Harcourt, Brace and World. “I am so favorably impressed by the book even in the rough-first-draft form that it is with considerable diffidence that I undertake any comments which might be regarded by either you or Helen as adversely critical.” Wisner wrote, continuing, “However, I am emboldened to attempt a few recommendations and suggestions (mainly of a “technical” nature).” Fourteen pages of notes, single spaced, followed.

In a section headlined II: Preliminary Musings, Wisner further outlines his editorial method and intentions: “As indicated above, the substantive recommendations which I will make are mainly of a technical (in the sense of trade-craft) diplomatic and historical nature, and are thus derived from the body of specialized knowledge which, for my sins, I happen to possess” (Box 7 Folder 10)

Wisner's notes include commentary that CIA would not work so complicated a joint-intelligence operation as outlined in the book; the way operations were run after approval from headquarters—"the boys in the field take over and assume full responsibility." Wisner was, in both written and oral communication, occasionally logorrheic. His prose was always purple and filled with lawyerly words and phrases. After a couple of drinks, General Lucian Truscott, CIA's senior official in Germany with a direct line to CIA Director Walter Bedell Smith chastised Wisner in 1952 "Why can't you write in plain English?" (Kisatsky)

The Harcourt Brace editor must have wondered this himself. Wisner's exegesis of the liaison relationships and administration of field operations takes nearly two pages. Wisner then writes a paragraph about Richard Sorge, a Soviet spy in Japan during World War II who is a character in MacInnes' book, and the fact that Bill Deakin—an Oxford Don at St. Antony's college, friend of Wisner and former Special Operations Executive commando—is working on a book about Sorge with Wisner's help.

From his retirement in 1962 until his death Wisner never really left CIA—he knew too much, was owed too much by too many people, had done too many favors over the years—and though his jobs shifted, he remained on as contract employee, a consultant. Interestingly, James Angleton would replicate this employment pattern a decade after Wisner. After Angleton's public resignation from CIA on Christmas Eve 1974, he was quietly rehired as a consultant, doing the exact same thing he did before—counterintelligence. One way of framing Wisner's 1962-1965 publicly-post CIA foray into literary affairs—including the manuscript review of the Helen MacInnes spy novels a venture that consumed a solid portion of his working days in the that period—is that in retirement he continued playing a different "Mighty Wurlitzer," using the skills and contacts he built up in CIA, for the benefit of both himself and CIA—working on books with

Bill Deakin, Allen Dulles, Helen MacInnes, meeting with reporters, writing articles and reviews defending or promoting CIA.

It was a full-scale enterprise—E. Howard Hunt began ghost-writing early drafts of Allen Dulles' *The Craft of Intelligence* in 1959—by 1964, he was sent to Spain as a Non Official Cover officer tasked with writing a spy novel featuring a character who could be America's answer to James Bond. This resulted in the Peter Ward series, which Hunt published initially under the pen name David St. John. Wisner originally sought Hunt's assistance with the same material he later presented to Highet, but Hunt demurred—family considerations took priority, and one of Hunt's daughters was very ill.

When Wisner was in charge of OPC/CIA's propaganda apparatus, the target audience was foreign. His literary turn after leaving CIA was for persuading a different audience—the American citizen, and the American policymaker, and the American lawmaker—who'd given CIA a great deal of respect and latitude in the 1950's. The enemy was still the same, however—the Soviet Communist propaganda apparatus.

"It is self-evident that both books should benefit and get an extra lift from the Soviet campaign to canonize Sorge and the "saturation raids" of the public prints (Free World as well as their own) which they have been mounting in furtherance of this objective since August of 1964," Wisner writes. Then his objectives in helping with both books become clear—though he's retired, spies are once in never out, and Wisner is running an influence operation against the Soviets. "It is less immediately evident, although non the less true in my view, that both books will serve a further significant and altogether unanticipated purpose, in adding useful perspectives and restoring some measure of balance to the all-too-serene and saintly image of Sorge which is being sedulously synthesized for public consumption by the Soviets and by

tossing a wrench (spanner) to the attempt which the Russians seem clearly to be organizing to siphon off from the West all available material about Sorge, to bolster the new legend.”

Wisner considers this along with thoughts on Morrie West and Vietnam in the memorandum’s *Section G: When is a Buddhist not a Buddhist?* “At page 40 Helen has included and accurate and much needed warning about certain Buddhists who are not all that they appear to be...” Wisner notes manuscript. He then provides his impression—not favorable—of the Mahayana Buddhists, calling them “not only militant and highly political but also strongly influenced (and in the case of certain “pagodas”, controlled) by the Communists.”

Wisner is insistent on another specific point: MacInnes should attack Graham Greene harder: “I have no suggestion to make in regards to this passage, except that it is so eminently justified and in order as to warrant a little bit of additional strengthening. You will recall that Helen did something of the sort in “The Venetian Affair” when she cut Graham Greene down to size.”³¹ (Page 10, March 1965 Memo)

Post-Bay of Pigs and Kennedy Assassination, CIA was in a defensive crouch against a newly suspicious American public. The public still read novels. The question was, what kind would they read? Wisner had no truck for contemporary novelists who expressed skepticism about covert American intervention overseas, especially Graham Greene. However, the grudge may have also been personal. Graham Greene was a former MI6 officer once supervised by Harold “Kim” Philby during World War II; Philby’s defection to the Soviets in 1963 was still fresh in the mind of his former colleagues—Wisner and Angleton among them.

³¹ “Although this and many other truths were left out of his upcoming novel called “The Ambassador” (which I consider to be a monumental mischief-maker, on the order of “The Quiet American”—only more so.) Egged on by our own journalism, we made a pack of trouble for ourselves in having been so highly uncritical of, and overly concerned, for the “religious freedom of a particularly articulate segment of such “Buddhists.” Wisner continues, his disdain for Philby clear.

Wisner was also interested in a former Gestapo general named Heinrich Muller; "He, like Martin Bormann, has never been found of confidently accounted for and also because he is generally believed to have gone over to the Russians on or shortly after the German collapse in 1945. Mueller, like Bormann and the other 'big Nazi and SS fish 'who got away,' keeps popping up in current news reports and articles." On February 11, 1965, Wisner sent MacInnes another letter—addressed to Mrs. Gilbert Highet, 535 Park Avenue—with material following up their meeting earlier that week; he returned a clipping from Publisher's Weekly, and passed along excerpts from a confidential letter from a "Very knowledgeable English journalist in Bonn," about "the current clandestine activities and secret background of some of the Nazi officials and SS big fish who got away."

Wisner sent along notes about the Communist connections of certain Nazi officials. "I should think that Gilbert [Helen's husband, chair of the Classics department at Columbia, and wartime Special Operations Executive veteran] would be fascinated by the numerous references in the Schellenberg material to the pro Soviet inclinations and communist connections of his "old chum" Colonel Nicolai, as well as the "suggestion of an early and sinister relationship between Nicolai and Gestapo Mueller."

Finally, Wisner passed along some primary materials. "As pure lagniappe, and because of your past preoccupation with communist propaganda methods and techniques—I am tossing in a brochure of Korean origin on the subject of communist forgery and counterfeiting which was prepared for the information and enlightenment of the member nations of the Universal Postal Union. This brochure, which you may retain, I found very interesting and well done. The

principal impression is that of the massiveness, i.e., sheer volume of this propaganda offensive against the Republic of Korea.”

Frank Wisner wrote to Julian Muller on May 28, 1964 that “as the result of my intervention with The Bureau³² but more especially because of Helen’s own reputation, she and her husband were accorded full VIP treatment there” (MSS 15049-a Box 7 Folder 10)

Highet further describes this visit in a letter to Wisner, handwritten in neat script in Blue ink on thin grey stationery, telling the retired spymaster she asked Muller at Harcourt Brace to send “with my compliments” copies of *The Venetian Affair* to Mr. Hoover & Mr. Smethhurst, along with Mr. Papich and Mr. DeLoach.” At this time, Highet was a high profile novelist of thrillers, on par with a contemporary thriller writer like Vince Flynn or Gillian Flynn, though her spy novels have largely been forgotten now, even as people continue to read her contemporaries Graham Greene and Ian Fleming. Wisner would also write separately to Papich about Highet’s visit.

She then describes her plans to start on a new novel. Wisner, reading the letter, underlines in red pencil this line: “and I have an idea for some characters in this novel with things in their past (in Nazi Germany) into present day action.” Wisner had complimentary ideas; in retirement he got obsessed with the rumors that top Nazi officials listed as dead after the war were actually alive and well and living in South America or the Soviet Union. Months later, he was still thinking about it, sending Highet a letter describing a trip to Spain where he “had the opportunity of discussing the possible survival and present whereabouts of Martin Bormann.” Wisner was also interested in the fate of Gestapo Chief Heinrich Muller, who’d disappeared from the Fuhrerbunker; Wisner thought he might be working now for the KGB, based on the testimony of

³² The Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Wisner conspicuously capitalizes the T in the definite article

the deputy chief of Polish Military Counterintelligence, Lt. Col. Michael Goleniewski, who'd defected to the United States in 1961. The Polish officer asserted the Soviets picked up Muller and took him to Moscow. Wisner wrote:

"I also enclose a copy of Allen Dulles' very recent review of Professor Barghoorn's book on the subject of Soviet foreign propaganda—another topic which you and I have discussed. Third, a semi-confidential booklet which I picked up in London & which includes a number of relatively recent case histories of persons who, largely through their own naïveté and other weaknesses, became the victims of Soviet intelligence operations. My thought in sending you this booklet is that you might find one or more of the case histories of interest—since I am very aware that you are very thorough in your research and generally follow the practice of basing your plots on the true historical situations."

Wisner notes that the booklet is a semi-confidential publication and he would like the copy back when MacInnes is finished with it. On April 1, 1965 Wisner provided Harcourt Brace editor Julian Muller "Suggestions for certain minor textual corrections and changes in Helen MacInness novel" with twenty-nine bullet pointed editorial suggestions.

4. Page 41—Second paragraph—strike out "had", where it appears twice in a row.
5. Pages 57, 59—In the other memorandum I am making a recommendation for a substantive change regarding the code-breaking business - - because of the improbability of this sequence).
- Some are interesting from the point of view of score-settling or public perception shaping;
13. Page 171—an excellent and little understood point is well made on this page.

The passage on page 171 of the *Venetian Affair* Wisner quotes says "Rumors and oral allegations about such matters are a dime a dozen but once the charges are made or repeated in the public prints, they become very awkward and are difficult to ignore. It is unfortunate that some journalists do not appreciate the fact that a careless statement on their part can destroy the entire career of an able intelligence officer" (*Venetian Affair*, 171). In the wake of the Bay of Pigs, the Kim Philby defection, the firing of Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, the Kennedy assassination, on top of the crushing of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and the Sheppard Pratt hospitalization of 1958 it is understandable that passage would resonate with Wisner.

Wisner was cross with a couple journalists and writers at this point in his life. As he continued his suggestions, his deeper intentions in shaping the manuscript emerge. Now, despite having been the subject of numerous FBI investigations himself when running the OPC (J. Edgar Hoover once dismissed the organization as “Wisner’s bunch of weirdos”) Wisner was now working hand in glove with the FBI (Letter to Sam Papich from Sherfield re Results of Investigations). J. Edgar Hoover knew how to market his Bureau, and Wisner was lifting their playbook in supplying key technical advice and plot points to novelists—advice that would cast the organs of the United States Government, the FBI, CIA, etc—as heroes.

17. Page 190—First paragraph—I think Helen’s friends and recent hosts at the FBI would be very pleased if Partridge could be in the context of this paragraph make one brief additional sentence alluding to the fact that the FBI has a rich and varied collection of these devices of concealment as a result of the numerous espionage cases which it has broken. I think this point worth your mentioning to Helen and it could be brought in here or at the top of page 191.

Wisner, late in life, sought to influence Helen MacInnes Highet’s ‘intense business’. He read her novel *The Venetian Affair* and pressed it on multiple friends, colleagues, acquaintances, before seeking a meeting, and suggesting some plot points for future novels. The narrative points he suggested—and the background material Wisner gave Highet to shape the story—wound up as a key parts of the plot of MacInnes’s 1968 novel *The Salzburg Connection*. The novel was dedicated “To Gilbert, always” (*Salzburg Connection*).

The New York Times review called it a “fascinating exercise in wide-screen spymanship” before it noted “Events of recent years have provoked an inundation of this type of fiction, but relatively little has found its way to the bestseller lists. The novels of Helen MacInnes appear there, almost routinely. Their appeal, I think, lies in the author’s unfailing eye for vivid backgrounds, in her deft control of complex story lines; in her clean-cut presentation of each

important member of her casts. These combined qualities have given her fiction a kind of grandeur...a romantic overtone suggesting knights in mortal combat."

The New York Times reviewer had no way of knowing just how right he was. Wisner's original recruiting call for the OPC spies was to join a sort of modern crusade against Communism. William Colby, an OSS and OPC veteran who'd risen to CIA Director after Richard Helms was fired for his role in Watergate and then fired James Angleton following the revelation of HT/LINGUAL, the illegal mail surveillance program, noted in his memoir:

In June 1948 the National Security Council issued directive No 10/2 authorizing the CIA to undertake secret political and paramilitary operations. A special unit, euphemistically entitled the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), was set up to carry them out, under the direction of the Secretaries of State and Defense with the Director of CIA. And Frank Wisner, the intense New York lawyer who'd seen Soviet tactics at first hand for the OSS in Rumania, was named to head it. Wisner landed like a dynamo, read all the intelligence and set out to form a clandestine force world wide. By hard work and brilliance, and by reaching widely for similarly activist OSS alumni, he started it operating in the atmosphere of an order of Knights Templars, to save Western freedom from Communist Darkness—and from war. (Colby, 73)

The letters between Wisner and Highet—and the subsequent tone and tenor of *The Salzburg Connection*, shows that he held on to that intensity until the end of his life and was able to pass it along to the public through the popular literature of his day; the anxiety lies in how the legacy and influence of a man who died by self-inflicted gunshot wound after years of manic-depression lingers today. Helen Highet stopped publishing upon her death in 1984. That same year, an insurance salesman from the eastern shore of Maryland named Tom Clancy took up her torch with *The Hunt for Red October*. The novel would have never been published without a UVA English graduate named Deborah Grosvenor, who acquired it for the Naval Institute Press. Though he's been dead since 2013, ghostwritten novels still appear under Tom Clancy's name. This is just a small bit of the protoplasm remaining of Frank Wisner's spectral literary legacy, a

legacy that was both shaped by the University of Virginia and one that would shape the university in ways unexamined until now.

APPENDIX 1: CHIP BOHLEN LETTER TO FRANK WISNER

Box 20, Folder 12 7 August 1958 Letter from Chip Bohlen
Dear Wis

Excuse this handwriting but I thought I could report to you more completely this way than by phone.

Tennant Bryan responded he had heard Strauss was being mentioned, and he made no further comment on that. He then said, on his own notion, that "I hear that FW is very interested in getting the job and is most anxious to have it." I replied that I had only heard the Strauss rumor and had no idea FW was in any way involved. He then concluded that some 75 names had been suggested, and that he thought someone with educational experience would be chosen. He said FW was unknown in Virginia because his work required him to have "a passion for anonymity"

My own view, after sleeping on it overnight, is as follows.

- 1) This would not at this time be a good job for you because of the ratty nature of the present political machine—which no one in this job could possibly avoid or overcome
2. That it is an entirely good thing to be "considered" for the job.
3. That it is not a good thing to permit any impression of wanting it. Ergo, I would be sure that Bryant and others who may be pressing your case are discouraged by you. I would recommend that Strauss, Bryant, et al be told that you wouldn't take it on a silver platter but would—given a congenial President—be interested in the Board of Visitors. And I suppose AWD (Allen Welsh Dulles) should be made aware of this, if he isn't already.

If I may proceed by personal parable: all last fall, this winter and spring I was engaged in negotiations for what seemed to me a desirable newspaper and TV company. We finally didn't get it. But as a result of preparing to bid on it we did a lot of useful work examining our present situation.

We are now about to expand our plants here and in Jacksonville—rather than buying new things. This, I am convinced, is the wisest course of action. But, and this is the moral, we needed the enforced study caused by the other opportunity in order to set our course right.

So while I am against the Charlottesville thing at present, I believe it ought to be a good catalyst to make you do some thinking about your own course. I am not damn fool enough to have any ideas or answers, I can only recommend the procedure of self contemplation.

Our love to Polly and You

CB"

APPENDIX 2: FRANK WISNER MEMORANDUM RE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

ROUGH DRAFT 8 AUGUST 1958

MEMORANDUM OF POINTS FOR DISCUSSION
WITH MR. LEWIS STRAUSS ON THE WEEK-
END OF 9-10 AUGUST, 1958.

SUBJECT: University of Virginia; considerations involved in the selection of the new President.

I. Examine again with Admiral Strauss his reasons for resisting my suggestion that he accept the candidacy himself and authorize me and others to propose his candidacy as vigorously as we possibly can. Admiral Strauss has informed me on two occasions that this issue is “in the crucible as of now” and that time “is of the essence” for the reason that those persons primarily responsible for the selection of the new President to succeed Governor Colgate Darden, who has publicly announced his intention to retire, are at this moment in the process of arriving at their conclusions. It continues to be my own view—and I have urged this upon a limited number of persons of my own confidence—all of whom are presently or potentially keenly interested in the welfare of the University of Virginia and in the possibility of returning the University to the path envisioned for it by its founder, Thomas Jefferson — that Mr. Strauss himself should stand for the presidency and should authorize me and others to promote his candidacy. I have state to Mr. Strauss and to the others with whom I have discussed this, that if he were to stand for the presidency and if it should come to pass that he should become the President of the University of Virginia, not only I, but many others, would be only too happy to serve as members of the Board of Visitors or in such other capacity or capacities as he might designate. I have discussed this matter in the foregoing sense with several persons, including the following who are mentioned in the order in which I have spoken with them*:

John S. Graham
John Carlyle Herbert Bryant
Gordon Gray
William Zimmer
Benjamin Franklin DeFord
Walter Robertson
William Boxley
Philip Graham

*The above mentioned individuals are, of course, apart from my own Chief, Mr. Allen W. Dulles, to whom I mentioned this matter on the morning following the occasion on which Mr. Strauss first broached the subject to me, — the morning of 23 July; and I have also discussed this matter to some extent in strict confidence with four other officers of the Central Intelligence Agency.

II. For the reasons summarized below and others besides, it seems to me that the present situation, if forcefully and effectively seized upon, offers the best, if not in fact the last, clear opportunity to restore the University of Virginia to its proper heritage, and moreover, to take it onward and upward from there to become one of the principal centers of education and enlightenment in the United States, if not in the world. If Mr. Strauss were to become the President, he and I together, and just the two of us, know all the foundations there are, and we

could and would tap all of them and be certain of landing a few. We would get the Duponts, of which there are shoals, to set up a new foundation if necessary to get back into their old form. We would establish honorary degrees for merit—no cheap stuff (or bust ourselves trying) and would advertise and use these for real awards of merit—no cheap stuff; also to attract good and appealing speakers for important occasions; also to entice potential professorial material, e.g., George Kennan, Sam Reber, Bill Jackson, (who was not so long ago flirting with the scholastic life), C. Thayer, Chip Bohlen, Tommy Thompson and a host of others (Law—C. Oliver; Medicine—H. Rusk), including persons eminent in the fields of Art, Sculpture and Dramatics.

III. Then we could open up a new line or two—a very special course (not a school) of journalism, not so much to teach or prepare people to be journalists, but to teach many of the brighter and more promising students what to expect from and how to cope with the press in both government and private business. To this would be admitted only seniors of demonstrated interest and real promise; and we would get us a Professor (W. Deuel) and an associate and understudy—but this would be run as a seminar course, for credit of course, and the guts of it would be the numerous press men and deans and professors of other schools of journalism. Then we would also have a few other things to chip in ourselves, from time to time—vide my paper (i.e., letter) to Wigglesworth and the many excellent responses from people such as Wigglesworth himself, Stewart Alsop, Cyrus Sulzberger, R.A. Lovett, Chris Herter, Gordon Gray (himself a publisher), etc., and others yet to come.* AND we would use this in a real and sincere effort—outside of government and secure from the slings and arrows of political fortune with all the petty charges and insinuations of axe-grinding and attempts to muzzle the press and curb its sacred liberties which are increasingly operating to the serious detriment of our national welfare and the significant discouragement and despair of public servants of great merit, past, present and future.

*Philip Graham—his story about Forrestal and the leak that finished the last serious attempt in Washington to enlist the assistance of the publishers in the interest of national security. Recalling that it was a Cowles leak to a Cowles writer which then appeared in such distorted and alarmist form as to win for the writer the coveted Raymond Clapper award and to wring from President Truman at the time he bestowed it the remark that he never before in his life had he participated in or ever heard of a similar award — vis., a high award given for a story and based upon “facts” which never happened, and which was demonstrably contrary to history.

Also, Phil Graham’s proposal about a survey—to be conducted on a non-governmental and privately sponsored (preferably by the press—publishers and leading practitioners themselves included) basis—of a series of press situations. Phil felt sure that this would be the most profitable approach, if it could be given good guidance and not be allowed to run up blind alleys and meander all over the meadow as was the case with the so-called survey conducted by Robert Hutchins a few years ago, to the enormous disgust and contempt of so many people who had permitted themselves to hope for better things, etc., etc. Phil himself would help and Mr. Meyer would probably put up some dough, but if not, Gordon Gray would surely take an interest and so would Bobby Cutler—and the two of them could readily be recruited to both raise money and to give of their own and other people’s time and interest. This would be a ten-strike in itself, but it would also give real meaning and vitality to our course in journalism and would be non-competitive with what is being done by the established schools of journalism, and it would provide a framework or hat-rack upon which could be hung the requirement of papers and

lectures from deans of schools of journalism; public servants confronted with the day-to-day problems involved in dealing with and establishing a tolerable modus vivendi with the free, jealous and competitive U.S. press; and last but by no means least, the journalists and publishers themselves.

IV. We would take up again the vision of Thomas Jefferson for his University and of which accomplishment he was so justly proud as to cause to be inscribed upon the headstone of his simple grave at Monticello just these three accomplishments, which of all his great works he held most dear and by which he desired to be chiefly remembered by posterity:

“Author of the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberties, Author of the Declaration of Independence and Founder of the University of Virginia.”

We will use persuasion, example, and money to improve vastly the quality and the reputation of the professorial and instructional staff of the University. We will return to the ideas and ideals of Jefferson, who proclaimed that he would found a new kind of University in this land and that he would personally select and bring to its halls of teaching the very finest professors and instructors available anywhere in the world, and he set himself to do this but never had the time or the energy or amount of freedom from other pressing pursuits and cares to realize completely—or even more than partially—his bold design.

And we will use coaxing, cajoling, bribes, entrapment, seduction, alienation of affections, criminal conversation and rape (as in Sabines) to lure or if need be carry off the human treasure of which the University’s intellectual larder has been growing increasingly bare over the past fifteen years. As the “old masters” have died off, or grown too aged and infirm to continue their work, there has not been a sufficient or even comparable replacement of these old lamps of wisdom with new material of equal or approximate brilliance—and all too often the course of least resistance, i.e. least imagination and least effort—has been the order of the time, to the great detriment of the University’s standing and a good name in the State of Virginia, throughout the United States and elsewhere in the world, where in earlier days the reputation of the University of Virginia was lofty indeed and her name was held in almost universal respect.

V. And we will use a new and specially-created President’s Fund (to be established and operated according to the principles and regulations set below) to raise the salary levels across the boards to something commensurate with our better competition for professors and instructors, and if this should not prove legally or politically feasible despite our full-blooded effort to make it so, we will have recourse to other means, e.g. by the substantial enhancement of professors perquisites on a case-by-case and as-needs-may-be basis, including better housing, better schooling for their children, club memberships with paid-up dues, trips to foreign countries on vacations or for study, etc., etc.; or we will establish ourselves a series of special chairs, properly endowed or otherwise supported or sustained—and for such length of time as may be necessary to hook and hold our prime trout, etc.

VI. We will deal with the problem of out-of-state students as we have discussed—this is really too simple and I have never been able to understand why it has been regarded as such a bogey.

VII. I would propose that Mr. Strauss and I pay visits prior to the inauguration ceremonies to the presidents of the four or five leading State educational institutions, in approximately the following order of priority: Washing and Lee (if President Gaines is still there, he is an old personal friend); VMI; VPI; William and Mary; and the University of Richmond; and that these visits be paid during this period when it is still possible to do so informally and without the fanfare or the questions of prerogatives and precedences which would arise at a later occasion. The thought here is that from time immemorial the other leading educational institutions of Virginia and the heads thereof have considered the University of Virginia and the President thereof is (are) remote, arrogant and difficult to deal with. The same is true of the student bodies of the other colleges and universities in Virginia, and naturally the same holds for the alumni of these institutions, many of whom are important factors of life in the politics and in the general community of the Commonwealth. Such a series of visitations, would, in my opinion, do the greatest amount of good and would accomplish more than anything else I can think of at the outset to encourage the others to believe that the Universities, and more especially the new President, is interested in them and their welfare and by the same token that it would probably have the result of eliminating a great deal of unnecessary friction and jealousy of the sort which has plagued relationships in the past and made matters difficult for all preceeding presidents of the University.

VIII. I have thoughts which I should like to develop orally in extense concerning programs for the Engineering School, the Law School and the Medical School at the University—bearing in mind the extreme importance, as repeatedly acknowledged by President Eisenhower and others, of raising the educational standards of the United States, and particularly in the areas of [redacted] and applied sciences. In general, my concept would be to do a kind of MIT-Killian concept in reverse; i.e., whereas Killian has brought the humanities to MIT and successfully demonstrated the essentiality of the intermarriage and cross fertilization of the humanities with the sciences, I would propose that the same sort of thing be done at Charlottesville, but with the weight placed on the other foot—let the humanities lead, but let the study of science come a close second and above all, let the two walk hand in hand together.

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