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Ian Fleming's Soviet rival: Roman Kim and Soviet spy fiction during the early Cold War

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the life of Roman Kim (1899–1967), an ethnic Korean Soviet counterintelligence officer, and highlights his contribution to the Soviet spy fiction genre during the Cold War. Kim was born in Vladivostok and educated in Japan. He was recruited by the VChK in the early 1920s and was involved in a variety of Soviet counterintelligence operations directed against Japan. Arrested and tortured during the Great Purge, he was the only Soviet Japanese intelligence expert to survive. Kim was released after the end of WWII and reinvented himself as a writer of spy fiction, arguing that the Soviet Union must score victories against the West on the literary front. The article examines Kim's impact on the literary Cold War by analyzing his most significant spy fiction works, none of which have been translated into English, and chronicles his influence on the later generation of Soviet spy fiction writers, such as Yulian Semyonov and Vasily Ardamatsky, much better known in Russia and in the West.

"The spy thriller is a very effective weapon in the psychological war; the sphere of its influence and the power of its impact are truly great. I don't understand one thing: why do Soviet detective writers not respond to Fleming and his colleagues? Why do they give up the book markets of foreign countries without a fight?" Roman Kim, *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* (1963)[1]

Introduction

Although none of his spy fiction was ever translated into English and he was therefore little known in the West, Roman Kim was the most influent Soviet spy fiction writer in the early Cold War period. Kim was born to ethnic Korean parents on the periphery of the Russian Empire and educated in Japan. He rose in the Soviet state security hierarchy in the 1920s and the 1930s but was imprisoned during the Great Purge of 1937–1938 and came within a hair's breadth of being shot. After spending more than eight years in prison, Kim re-invented himself as a writer of spy fiction in the late 1940s. His work strongly influenced the younger generation of Soviet spy and mystery fiction writers, such as Yulian Semyonov, Vasily Ardamatsky, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, whose novels were translated into English and became well-known internationally. For instance, Kim's recollections of his intelligence work in the Soviet Far East inspired Semyonov to create a Soviet undercover intelligence operative, Maksim Isayev, who impersonated the SS officer Max Otto von Stierlitz in Semyonov's popular novel *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (1969). In the early 1970s, this novel became the basis for an even more popular Soviet TV series. The popularity of Stierlitz in the Soviet Union and in today's Russia has rivaled that of James Bond in the West.[2] However, while Semyonov attained international fame, Kim and his works fell into oblivion beyond Russia's borders. Therefore, one of the aims of this article is to articulate Kim's unique literary voice and introduce the most important elements of his fiction to the English-reading audience.

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Generally speaking, Kim's spy fiction narratives were complex and idiosyncratic. Based on his vast erudition, knowledge of several languages, and familiarity with both Western and Eastern cultural traditions, Kim created the wide variety of characters and literary plots that spanned the entire world. He had a special liking for classic British detective fiction which he wanted to recreate within the Soviet context and infuse with what he defined as Soviet values.[3] Kim emphasized the difference between his spy novels and Western spy fiction which he saw as extolling violence, sex, and commercialism. As will be seen in a later section, Kim compared the works of several American spy and detective novelists to 'orgies of whiskey and blood'.[4]

Kim's overall literary goal was to provide a Soviet alternative to Western spy narratives. His politics reflected the foreign policy line of the Soviet leadership and changed accordingly. In the novels published before the death of Stalin in 1953, Kim is aggressively anti-American even to the point of depicting U.S. military and intelligence officers as the Cold War heirs of Hitler's SS. However, with the relative opening of the Soviet Union to the outside world in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kim's approach to the West also became more nuanced and pluralistic. As a member of the prestigious Soviet Writers' Union, Kim got a chance to visit both Great Britain and the U.S. in the early 1960s. His British and American characters became more three-dimensional and some were even shown to express pro-Soviet sentiments. In other words, Kim began conceiving of a world where antagonisms between the intelligence agencies of the capitalist West and the communist Soviet Union could be significantly diminished, though certain rogue elements might still attempt to keep provoking the tensions. However, the development of the less confrontational orientation in Kim's fiction was cut short by his death at the age of 67 in 1967.

Unfortunately for Kim, it was only when he was already terminally ill that the KGB leadership became interested in actively shaping the public image of its officers and operations both domestically and internationally. The KGB chairman Yuri Andropov, who was appointed in May 1967, explicitly sought talented writers to create positive, even hagiographic narratives about the work of Soviet intelligence. He also had the KGB personnel assist in the creation and dissemination of these narratives into popular culture via mass media (books, TV series, films). It turned out that the most important among the writers favored by Andropov were Kim's protégés, Semyonov and Ardamatsky.

The centralized Soviet publishing company, *Progress Publishers*, was tasked to translate Semyonov's and Ardamatsky's novels into English and distribute them internationally. Formed in 1963 as the result of the merger of the Publishing House of Literature in Foreign Languages and the Publishing House of Foreign Literature, *Progress Publishers* translated thousands of Soviet titles into dozens of foreign languages while at the same time translating foreign titles into Russian and other languages of the Soviet Union. According to Rossen Djagalov, *Progress Publishers* was known in the West for the 'cheap, high quality editions of Marxist texts'.[5] However, its Soviet literature translation section was actually larger than the section devoted to Marxism and, for example, 404 literary titles were translated in 1981.[6] Ardamatsky's signature spy novel *Saturn Is Almost Invisible* was translated and published in English in 1967 and Semyonov's *Seventeen Moments of Spring* in 1972. It remains unclear as to why *Progress Publishers* never translated any of Kim's works into English. As discussed later in the article, this might have something to do with the controversial twists and turns of Kim's counterintelligence career explored in the following section.

A career in counterintelligence

Roman Kim was born in Vladivostok in August 1899.[7] His parents were wealthy Koreans who emigrated to the Russian Empire after the Japanese intervention into the Korean affairs in the 1890s. His father Nikolay (Kim Pen Khak) was a merchant known for organizing lavish parties for the city elite, including the foreign diplomats posted to Vladivostok. Kim grew up in this cosmopolitan atmosphere permeated with political gossip and intrigue. This may explain his talent for foreign languages (Japanese, Chinese, English, French) and his ability to transform his identity at will. Thanks

in part to his father's friendship with the Japanese diplomat Watanabe Rie (who may have doubled as the Japanese chief intelligence officer in Vladivostok), Kim was sent to Japan at the age of seven to receive his education. He attended some of the most prestigious Japanese schools for the next ten years.

Kim returned to Vladivostok in 1916.[8] After graduating from the Vladivostok High School the following year, he was drafted by the anti-Bolshevik White Army led by Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak which held sway in the Russian Far East at that time. As a person fluent in Japanese, Kim was assigned to a local military intelligence unit. He avoided being sent to the frontline by claiming that he was a Japanese citizen. This claim would come to haunt him in the NKVD torture chambers 20 years later when he was accused of being a Japanese spy.

Released from military service, Kim began working as a journalist in Vladivostok in 1919 In those months, the political situation in the city and the surrounding region was extremely volatile and control went back and forth between the anti-Bolshevik and the pro-Bolshevik forces several times. The situation did not stabilize until October 1922 when the Red Army took over Vladivostok and put an end to the civil war in the Russian Far East.

It is not clear when exactly Kim began working for the Soviet state security service. Kim's biographer Aleksandr Kulanov found a 1923 document signed by the VChK/OGPU chairman Felix Dzerzhinsky approving Kim's employment in the counterintelligence branch. There are some indications, however, that Kim's undercover work for the Soviets began much earlier, already in 1921 when Vladivostok was still controlled by the anti-Bolshevik militia.[9] Soon after the city's takeover by the Red Army, Kim was ordered by the OGPU to move to Moscow to take part in the emerging Soviet counterintelligence effort against Japanese nationals there. His work intensified after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Japan in 1925.

In Moscow, Kim's cover was that of a professor of Japanese literature at the prestigious Institute for Eastern Studies, while also being employed as a translator in the 5th (Eastern) section of the Counterintelligence Department (KRO).[10] At that time, the KRO's chief was Artur Artuzov (Fraucci) who was instrumental in planning Operation Trust, one of the most successful deception operations in the history of Soviet counterintelligence, directed against the White Russian émigré circles in Europe and their allies in Western European intelligence services.[11] Kim worked closely with Artuzov and other well-known Chekist leaders.

In 1927, Kim was transferred to another department of the OGPU, the Special Department, and tasked to assist in the efforts to crack Japanese cipher communications. At the same time, however, he remained active in counterintelligence/deception operations against Japanese military attachés in Moscow. According to Kim's biographer Ivan Prosvetov, these operations were so successful that imperial Japan never had an accurate assessment of the Soviet military strength in the 1920s and 1930s.[12] Kim's counterintelligence work received high praise from his superiors and he was awarded the prestigious order of the Red Star in June 1936.[13]

Though very much involved in Soviet counterintelligence and codebreaking operations, Kim also did not lose track of the literary affairs. During this period, he published several short stories influenced by the famed Japanese writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa and was asked to contribute a lengthy glossary to *The Origins of the Japanese Sun*, a Japan travelogue by Boris Pilnyak, one of the most innovative Soviet writers of the 1920s and the early 1930s.[14]

The most dramatic downturn in Kim's life took place less than a year after his highest career triumph marked by the Red Star decoration. On 2 April 1937, Kim was arrested by his NKVD colleagues and accused of treason and espionage on behalf of Japan.[15] He was then brutally tortured to extract his confession.[16] This led Kim to take a desperate, paradoxical step. He told his interrogators that he was not just an ordinary Japanese spy, but the Japanese station chief in the Soviet Union and an illegitimate son of the former Japanese foreign minister. Nothing could be further from the truth, and yet it was this outrageous lie that saved his life. He was set aside as a particularly valuable captive. By contrast, all the other counterintelligence officers from his unit, all of his superiors, and even the NKVD officer who had signed his arrest order, were shot.

After Lavrenty Beria replaced Nikolay Yezhov as the NKVD chief in 1938, the conditions of some imprisoned former NKVD officers improved and Kim was one of them. During World War II, while still in prison, Kim was tasked to translate covertly acquired Japanese diplomatic and military documents and analyze Japanese foreign policy moves. He was also able to retract the (false) confession he had made under duress in 1937. However, he was not released until December 1945.

A career in literature

According to Kim's biographers Prosvetov and Kulanov, though Kim was still occasionally consulted by Soviet foreign intelligence service on Japanese affairs, he increasingly turned to literary activities during the post-war period. Given his erudition and language proficiency, Kim clearly perceived the deficiencies in the Soviet international reputation in the field of literature at that time. He also understood the political and cultural advantages that the Soviet adversaries, such as the U.K. and the U.S., derived from their superior global literary influences. As a result, he began a close study of the British and American literary outputs, while trying to devise ways to counteract and outdo them. In other words, he tried to transfer and apply his counterintelligence skills to a new field.

The first articulation of this project was Kim's lecture on British and American detective fiction, which he delivered at the meeting of the Writers' Union in May 1947.[17] In the lecture, Kim displayed his vast knowledge of the history of the detective story. He traced its origin to the American writer Edgar Allan Poe and described how Poe's literary techniques based on 'clear thought' and a 'logical approach' to uncovering secrets were taken up by Western European detective writers, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Georges Simenon. Kim praised their stories for teaching readers how to think logically, how to understand human motivation, and how to develop observation skills. At the same time, he emphasized that mid-20th century American detective fiction had taken a very different path. Having reviewed the writings of Ellery Queen, Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich, Craig Rice, and Raymond Chandler, Kim argued that they all hinged on a sensationalist approach geared to arouse the readers' negative emotions: fear, terror, shock, and awe, in other words, the worst aspects of human nature. Such an approach looked down on the earlier generations of detective writers as constrained by 'too much thinking [and] too few corpses' and tried to do the opposite.[18] According to Kim, this made most of American detective stories seem like orgies of 'whiskey and blood'.[19] Kim claimed that such stories, together with the radio programs and films of similar nature, infused popular culture with anti-humanist, irrational, and decadent attitudes and values. He called on Soviet writers to create a credible, humanist alternative.

Kim emphasized that in order to withstand the U.S. cultural offensive and roll back its already notable gains in Europe and Asia, Soviet writers should pick up and unfurl the banner of classic detective fiction abandoned by American writers. They should depict the 'victory of reason and logic' and prioritize the values of social justice, fairness, patriotism and altruism rather than personal ambition, material benefits, and profit-making.[20] He recommended that particular attention be paid to youth adventure fiction because this age group was the most susceptible to being affected by American cultural products. For instance, Kim suggested that an entire adventure subgenre could be derived from Russian and Soviet expeditions to Central Asia.

Kim also made a reference to the Hollywood film industry and the 1946 spy film *Cloak and Dagger* directed by Fritz Lang and starring Gary Cooper, which was produced to popularize the work of the U.S. wartime intelligence agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).[21] He argued that Soviet film industry should take the same approach and promote the successful exploits of Soviet foreign intelligence officers globally. Indeed, the Soviet Union did make a cinematic response to Lang's *Cloak and Dagger*: the 1947 film *Podvig razvedchika [Intelligence Officer's Feat]* loosely based on the daring missions of Soviet deep cover operative Nikolay Kuznetsov who impersonated a German officer in the Nazi-occupied Ukraine. However, the film's international appeal seems to have been modest, and it never became an important cultural marker outside the Soviet Union. In addition, the books of classic detective fiction Kim praised in his lecture were not translated into Russian language until the 1960s.

In the year after his lecture at the Writer's Union, Kim continued to unfold his explicit critique of American detective and spy fiction in the parody entitled 'The Journey to the American Parnassus'. The text was later turned into a radio broadcast by the Soviet State Radio.[22] It told the story of an American WWII veteran and farmer John Hicks (sic!) visiting an imaginary 'special district' presented as a site for the mass production of U.S. popular culture. Kim depicted Hicks as a no-nonsense ordinary person who was shocked by the psychologically and ideologically manipulative practices employed to produce American mass-oriented literature and films. For instance, Kim had Hicks witness how the works of classical literature were dumbed down and utilized to amplify the political concerns of the day. For instance, the plot of the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* was transformed into an anti-Soviet political thriller in which the grandmother was replaced by an elderly professor, the creator of a ballistic missile, and the wolf was the diplomat of an enemy (Soviet) state. Kim's point was that by emphasizing aggressive Soviet behavior and even their invasion plans against the West, these novels served to propagate the sense of general fear and anxiety in the U.S. population and make it easier to gain support for the increase of the U.S. military and intelligence budgets.[23]

Using Hicks as a literary alter ego, Kim also zeroed in on another significant genre of American pop literature: murder mystery stories. Kim had one of Hicks' interlocutors proclaim that by sensationalizing violent crime and sexuality, murder mystery stories were designed to offer immediate gratification and emotional excitement, which led to the increase of sales and corporate profits. In other words, Kim tried to link cultural deterioration and moral impoverishment reflected in these stories to the workings of capitalism. While he did not mention either Marx or Lenin in the text, it was clear that he was trying to build up support for the Soviet socialist alternative. He did the same in his subsequently written spy fiction.

Spy fiction

Kim's first full-fledged spy novel had as its subject matter the first major post-WWII conflict between the communist East and the capitalist West, the war on the Korean peninsula. His Korean heritage, counterintelligence training, and literary erudition made him the ideal candidate to present the Korean events in the literary format aligned with the Soviet geostrategic and foreign policy interests. His novel entitled *A Manuscript Found in Sunchon* (1951) uses the centuries-old literary technique of 'a found manuscript' in order to allow the author to distance himself from the main protagonist.[24] Indeed, the manuscript is presented as the journal of a Japanese counterintelligence officer who is assisting the U.S. military forces in Korea. Kim's goal in the novel is to portray direct though covert post-WWII collaboration between the U.S. military and intelligence forces in Asia and the former officers of the Japanese Imperial Army who had taken part in the WWII war crimes against Chinese and Korean civilians.[25]

The novel's main Japanese protagonist is never given a full name but is condescendingly nicknamed 'Philopon' derived from his addiction to the drug of the same name (a variant of methamphetamine). In his journal, Kim has Philopon state that the Americans were as devious and as brutal in their Korean War intervention as were Imperial Japanese during WWII. The journal describes in graphic detail the violence that the U.S. military employed not only against the North Korean communist forces, but also against ordinary Korean civilians, including children.[26] In fact, all American characters in Kim's novel are depicted in an unredeemably negative way as the literal resurrection of the German SS.[27] In contrast to the Americans and the Japanese, Kim presents the North Korean Communists as courageous, humanistic, loyal, and patriotic. They are the novel's most significant positive heroes. In this context, one of the North Korean commanders is quoted as saying: 'We Koreans fulfilled our duty before humanity. We are strong in spirit because we have the great camp of peace behind us'.[28]

Kim's novel replicated Soviet geopolitical and ideological agenda in literary form. It is therefore hardly surprising that it received accolades from Soviet press. *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, reviewed it in July 1951. The review was written by Sergey Borzenko, a well-

known Soviet war correspondent and the recipient of the most prestigious Soviet decoration, the Hero of the Soviet Union. He had nothing but praise for Kim's talent and he emphasized Kim's skills in presenting the 'collusion between American imperialists and Japanese militarists' for the Soviet audience in the easy-to-read novelistic fashion.[29] In order to project its political message internationally, the novel was translated into Japanese and published in Japan where it was warmly received by the Japanese Communist Party and its intellectual fellow-travelers.[30] It is puzzling, however, that it was not translated into English or any other European language. The enigma is all the greater considering the gushing review in the *Pravda*. Not being available in English limited the novel's influence in the global arena and significantly downgraded its value in the literary Cold War.

Importantly, however, the novel made a very positive impression on some young Soviet writers who were fated to become much better known internationally than Kim. For instance, Arkady Strugatsky, who later became a world-famous mystery fiction writer, wrote to his brother and co-author Boris that Kim's novel was 'great stuff'.[31] What excited Strugatsky, who at that time served in a Soviet military intelligence unit as a translator, was Kim's ability to narrate the story from the point of the anti-hero and yet make it conform to the Soviet literary dogma of Socialist Realism. As an intelligence officer, Strugatsky realized that, told from this perspective, the narrative becomes much more credible and persuasive to the reader.

Buoyed by the success of *A Manuscript Found in Sunchon*, Kim immediately began writing his second novel *The Girl from Hiroshima*.[32] This novel focused on the life of Sumiko, a young girl badly hurt in the Hiroshima nuclear bomb explosion. Faced with the negative experiences of the U.S. political, economic, military, and intelligence presence in Japan, she becomes a committed Communist radical. Just as in the previous novel, here again Kim's representational frame is grounded in the beliefs and values affirming the Soviet socialist system. The spy dimension is present in Sumiko's undercover activities in which, though an amateur, she outsmarts more experienced Japanese and American professionals. What makes the novel innovative in the genre of mid-20th century spy fiction, while also reflecting the official Soviet emphasis on gender equality, is that the main protagonist is a woman. However, this pioneering aspect seems not to have helped the novel's popularity among Soviet readers. The Soviet press did not cover it as much as Kim's first novel. At the same time, *The Girl from Hiroshima* did enhance Kim's public prominence as an expert on Japanese affairs and he was chosen to translate Nikita Khrushchev's interview with one of the major Japanese newspapers in June 1957.[33] There is no publicly available record that the novel was translated into any foreign language. While *A Manuscript Found in Sunchon* went through five Russian editions, *The Girl from Hiroshima* seems never to have been published again. Clearly, its international impact was nil.

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, Kim expanded his literary focus from Korea and Japan to include not only other countries in Asia but also Europe and the United States. As a member of the Writers' Union delegations, he got the chance to travel outside the Soviet Union. He first visited China and the trip resulted in a novella titled *The Special Agent* published in 1959.[34] In a certain sense, this novella was making good on his promise to create the Soviet equivalent of a classic British detective tale. The trigger for the plot is a mysterious murder in a Hong Kong hotel (which, as it eventually turns out, was faked) and the novella brings together various foreign intelligence players. The main protagonist is a young Chinese man Yan Le-sian who gets drawn into the Chinese Communist intelligence service and hinders the planned Western invasion of Tibet. In the novella, Kim demonstrates his familiarity with the conventions of contemporary Western spy fiction and even mentions the famed British spy fiction writer Eric Ambler by name. As a particular jab at Ambler's anti-Soviet Cold War writings, Kim's protagonist notes that Ambler just published a new novel titled *The Secret of Red Dwarfs* about the 'subversive activities of the micro-pigmy saboteurs which came into the U.S. from one non-Atlantic state'.[35] However, there is little probability that Amber ever learned that Kim had made fun of his work because *The Special Agent* was never translated into English. Once again, it seems that the Soviets lost an opportunity to score a point in the literary Cold War.

After the publication of *The Special Agent*, Kim turned to Europe and the United States as the settings for his plots. His first novella based in Europe was enigmatically titled *A Cobra under the Pillow* and was published in 1960 shortly after Kim's visit to Great Britain (though documentary evidence shows that it was largely completed before the trip).[36] Kim traveled there as a member of the Writers' Union and this was his first trip to the West during the Cold War. However, the novella was set in the middle of World War II and the main characters are two British counterintelligence officers Ames and Pembroke who are involved in deception operations against the Nazi Germany. More specifically, their task is to convince Hitler that the Allies will not land in Sicily but in Sardinia or Greece.[37] In the course of their activities in Casablanca, they befriend a TASS journalist Mukhin whom they suspect of being a Soviet spy but they are unable to prove it.[38] In the end, they decide to plant a falsified document in Mukhin's hotel room linking him to the German intelligence in order to get him arrested. However, Ames and Pembroke's mission fails because Mukhin anticipated their move and left a realistic-looking cobra toy under the pillow, which frightened them and made them leave his hotel room in a hurry.

Though Ames and Pembroke work together against Mukhin, Kim took care to depict the differences in their general attitude to the Soviet Union, especially regarding the post-war period. While Pembroke believed in the possibility of the relations of 'mutual honesty and trust' after the war, Ames remained deeply distrustful of the Soviets, fully expecting what later came to be called the Cold War.[39] And, when in one memorable scene, Mukhin tried to test his counterparts by paraphrasing the 1941 statement of then-Senator Harry S. Truman about the U.S. assisting both the Soviets and the Germans to kill more of each other, Kim had Pembroke reject and Ames approve of Truman's point of view.[40]

The fact that Kim had two members of the same adversarial service disagree on the view of the Soviet Union shows that he tried to move away from the propagandistically simplified depictions of Western intelligence found in his previous novels and make his spy fiction more nuanced and complex. What he was essentially telling his Soviet readers was that not all British counterintelligence officers were intransigent Russophobes. Some of them, such as Pembroke for example, were potential friends of the Soviets. This pluralistic approach becomes even more pronounced in Kim's subsequent novels. Still, this does not mean Kim abandoned his overall aim of telling the Soviet version of important historical events and portraying the Soviet Communist regime in the most benign light. It is just that his method of doing so became more refined in the manner that he thought was more likely to elicit positive reception in the West.

In that context, it is interesting to note that Kim's next literary works, the novel *Burn After Reading* (1962) and the novella *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* (1963), are actually set in the U.S. They were written after Kim visited the major U.S. cities on the East Coast with a delegation of the Writers' Union in 1961. Before going on the trip, Kim made a firm decision 'to collect as much material as possible, because the writer [and the spy] needs the details of everyday life: how the milk is delivered in the morning, how the mailmen carry their bags, what names are given to cats and dogs . . . '[41] However, the plot of *Burn After Reading* does not take place in the early 1960s, but 20 years earlier: in the months preceding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. It tells the story of the U.S. strategic intelligence failure to warn about the attack though it had successfully cracked the cipher of the Japanese diplomatic communications. Although he does not use the term, Kim highlights what in contemporary psychology is referred to 'the groupthink' as the main reason for the catastrophically faulty interpretation of Japanese intentions and capabilities.

Groupthink was defined by Yale psychologist Irving Janis in the 1970s as a particular case of the group dynamic defined by 'closed-mindedness, stereotyping opposing views, rationalizing warnings, and illusions of invulnerability'.[42] *Burn After Reading* points to the dominant groupthink in the U.S. military and intelligence circles in the late 1930s and early 1940s as that of anti-Communist Russophobia. In the novel, the groupthink is exemplified by the attitude and behavior of the chief of the U.S. Navy decrypting unit, Lt. Col. Donahue.[43] Donahue openly expresses the opinion that Japan is preferrable as an ally to the U.S. than the Soviet Union. Kim has Donahue state that, if Japan

attacked the Soviet Union, which he expected to happen, the U.S. could seize the Soviet Kamchatka and Yakutia and establish a sphere of influence in the resource-rich Siberia.[44] In addition, Donahue is quick to accuse those who disagree with him and expect Japan to attack the U.S of the lack of patriotism and covert Communist sympathies: 'What a fine company I found myself in! Not [the company] of Navy officers, but of armchair demagogues from Greenwich Village'.[45] In Kim's *Burn After Reading*, it is this anti-Soviet attitude that shapes intelligence reports delivered to the decision-makers in Washington, DC, distorting their perception of where the main threat to the U.S. national security lies.

Just as in *A Cobra under the Pillow* Kim contrasted Ames and Pembroke, in *Burn After Reading*, he created the character of Senior Lt. Nicholas White as a counterweight to Donahue.[46]In Kim's narrative, White perceives the danger of anti-Communist groupthink leading to strategic blindness and the inaccurate interpretation of the intercepted Japanese diplomatic cables.[47] However, notwithstanding his efforts, White fails to break through the rigidity of the groupthink in Washington, DC and the attack on Pearl Harbor takes place. Kim's message was that anti-Communist Russophobia seriously harmed the U.S. national security. In other words, his novel can be read as the literary reflection of Soviet foreign policy statements at that time. As the confirmation of the official stamp of approval, the second edition of *Burn After Reading* was published by the Soviet Ministry of Defense in 1963 with a print run of 200,000 copies.[48] However, considering that there was no English translation, the novel's impact on the international community with the aim of garnering support for pro-Soviet policies was minimal.

The same failure to connect to the world outside the Soviet borders also marked Kim's other literary work based in the U.S., his novella *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* More of a detective mystery than a tale of espionage, this novella set in the U.S. of the early 1960s contains Kim's most explicitly stated rationale for why the Soviet government should provide funds for translating and distributing Soviet spy and detective fiction to the Western and Third World audiences on a mass scale. In the novella, Kim depicts how Soviet adversaries use the interconnected networks of intelligence agencies, publishing companies, and not-for-profit foundations and organizations to promote their anti-Soviet geopolitical and ideological agendas. He chronicles the efforts of the imaginary Killoran Foundation (modeled on the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations) administered by a former U.S. military intelligence officer referred to as 'O'. To recruit not only anti-Communist social scientists (some of whom are former Nazis), but also other individuals whose metaphysical viewpoints conflict with the dialectical materialism of Marxism (spiritualists, astrologers, etc.). The stated goal of the Foundation is to create a united ideological and political front and target the Soviet population and the Soviet allies around the world with the view of changing their political views and geopolitical alliances.[49] The Foundation also seeks to recruit spy fiction writers as one of the novella's protagonists, the writer Hilary T., who comes closest to being a kind of Kim's American alter-ego, reveals in a lengthy monologue:

> I think of the production of scribblers like [Ian] Fleming and [Edward S.] Aarons . . . Their descriptions of the evil deeds of the Red spies are pushed into the book markets of Europe, Latin America, Asia, Near and Middle East, [and] Africa in an organized manner. And millions of readers of all ages are swallowing them up. They are written in such a way that it is difficult to put them down. They gradually form the images of the intelligence officers from the countries behind the "Iron Curtain" in the readers' consciousness, convincing them that all that is written in those entertaining books is true and that the countries of the Communist bloc indeed send killers to all corners of the globe, such as Dr. No, Grant, Colonel Vasiliev . . . And the readers of many countries willy-nilly start to believe in the mythical expansionism of the Red regimes.[50]

This is precisely why Kim emphasized the necessity of Soviet writers' engagement in the spy fiction field. *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* demonstrates that he approached his own spy fiction as a means of countering the message of the 'expansionism of the Red regimes' formulated by Ian Fleming, Edward Aarons, and other writers who wrote from the anti-Soviet perspective. He wanted to engage in the global struggle for the heart and minds with Western spy fiction writers because he knew well that, as a character from his novella states, 'ideas are stronger than intercontinental missiles'.[51] And yet,

Kim's novella *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* was not selected for translation into a Western European language. The statement from the novella turned out to be prophetic regarding its own fate. Commenting on a recently published anti-Communist spy novel, one of the characters said: 'That was a very solid shot by the West. The East did not respond with any book'.[52] *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* could have been that response.

Kim published only more novel before his death in May 1967. This novel, titled *The School for Ghosts* (1965), tells the story of a Western-funded school for 'qualified specialists of subversive warfare' against the Communist regimes located in an unnamed African country (perhaps Ethiopia or Eritrea).[53] As in *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?*, in this novel Kim meditates on the role of Western spy fiction in the Cold War. He has the chief administrator of the School describe the three 'positive functions' of spy fiction from a Western perspective.[54] The first two functions are already familiar from *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?*: the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about the Soviet Union and its intelligence services, and the glorification of Soviet adversaries. The third, however, belongs to the realm of conspiracy theory and it is unclear why Kim included it. There is no reason to believe that he actually believed it to be an accurate portrayal of reality. Namely, Kim has the administrator of the School state that there exists an international conspiratorial organization – the Order of Invisible Deeds – and that the third function of spy fiction is to formulate the ethos of its members (the 'ghosts') and attract potential new recruits. In his words,

> We are behind the scenes of politics, while the public only sees the heads of governments, ministers, generals. The newspapers write about them, their voices are on the radio, historians write about their deeds, while our fate is total anonymity. Remember the words from Kipling's *Kim*: 'We of the Game are beyond protection. If we die, we die. Our names are blotted from the book.'[55] We are the beings who have zero being, we live in the dimension U – that Chinese word means Nothing … We must believe only in the U. No romance, no emotions, no ideals, no patriotism, no moral codex, no holy principles – those are all trifles. For us, there is only the Deed – the fight against the Enemy, who we must defeat at any cost, even at the cost of turning the whole world into a gigantic U … . That is our philosophy. In order to assimilate that philosophy, the first step is to imbibe the worldview and philosophy of James Bond, Sam Durrell, Paul Gonce, Jacques Breval, Chet Drum, Hugh Norm, and similar popular heroes of spy novels. The writers of these novels articulate our philosophy.[56]

Considering how strange this conspiratorial narrative sounds in a novel by the writer who prided himself on the realistic depictions of espionage, it is likely that Kim planned to debunk it more explicitly in his future works. Unfortunately, he died before being able to do so. Just like his previous novels, *The School for Ghosts* was not translated into English.

The legacy

Notwithstanding his literary talent and erudition, the impact of Kim's spy fiction on the literary Cold War was limited because his books were rarely translated into Western languages and not a single one was translated into English. Only his first novel *A Manuscript Found in Sunchon*, the most stridently ideological of them all, was published widely on the other side of the Iron Curtain (France, Italy, Sweden, Mexico, Argentina, Japan, etc.).[57] The translations of the others were confined to the languages of the countries of the Eastern Bloc (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia).

One of the reasons for this might have been that Kim was not completely trusted by the KGB. His past as a young officer in the anti-Bolshevik White Guards and his long imprisonment as a Japanese spy (though he was formally rehabilitated in both cases) must have created a lingering suspicion in the minds of some top KGB officials. According to Soviet dissident and later Israeli writer Mikhail Heifetz, Kim was aware of this implicit prejudice against him and communicated his irritation to his acquaintances.[58] As pointed out earlier, he died before Yuri Andropov, as the new chairman of the KGB, implemented significant changes in the way the KGB interacted with the Soviet literary and cultural figures.

It turned out that the most significant and talented among these writers were Kim's protégés Yulian Semyonov and Vasily Ardamatsky. As noted in Introduction, their novels were widely translated and distributed in the English-speaking countries, including the U.S. In terms of his ubiquity and popularity in the present-day Russian popular culture, many scholars consider Semyonov's creation, Soviet undercover intelligence officer Max Otto von Stierlitz, to be the Russian equivalent of James Bond.

Yet, according to Semyonov himself, there would have been no Stierlitz had not it been for Kim's assistance. Semyonov's first spy novel featuring the exploits of Stierlitz (under a different cover name) *No Password Necessary* (1965) was set in the Japanese-occupied Vladivostok in the early 1920s and based on Kim's sharing with Semyonov his personal experiences of being an undercover Soviet intelligence agent in the city at that time.[59] The novel quickly became very popular and was turned into a film which premiered in November 1967 (several months after Kim's death). According to Semyonov's daughter Olga, the novel and the film attracted the attention of Andropov and motivated him to meet with Semyonov and offer him KGB's logistical assistance for his spy fiction writing, including archival information for the manuscript which became *Seventeen Moments of Spring*.[60] In his later writing career, under the guidance of Andropov, Semyonov wrote several novels based on real-world operations of Soviet intelligence and acquired the nickname 'Lubyanka's nightingale'.[61] However, without Kim's willingness to help out a younger colleague by sharing his experiences, Semyonov might never have attracted Lubyanka's attention.

Not much different was the literary career of Kim's other protégé Vasily Ardamatsky who wrote about Soviet World War II intelligence officers acting as double agents within the Nazi ranks. His best-known novel, translated into English as *Saturn is Almost Invisible*,[62] focused on the Nazi training camp called 'Saturn' infiltrated by the Soviets and was later turned into a very successful movie. Ardamatsky was so grateful to Kim for his guidance and encouragement that he edited a posthumous volume of Kim's short stories and contributed an enthusiastic introduction titled 'Meetings with Kim'.[63]

Just like in the case of Semyonov, the KGB granted Ardamatsky access to some of its secret files in order to create spy fiction narratives that popularized the work of Soviet intelligence and counter-intelligence operatives. For instance, Ardamatsky's novel *Retribution* (1967) was about the early Soviet counterintelligence operation *Syndicate-2* which led to the capture of Boris Savinkov, one of the best known Russian anti-Bolshevik figures. *Retribution* served as a screenplay for two popular films, *Collapse* in 1968 and *Syndicate-2* in 1983.[64] In addition, both Semyonov and Ardamatsky were the recipients of the annual KGB award for arts and literature established in 1978, more than 10 years after Kim's death.[65] It is interesting to speculate whether Kim himself would have been given this award had he lived longer.

Moreover, according to the recollections of well-known Soviet literary figures, Kim turned out to be an important influence on several other Soviet writers of spy, detective, and mystery prose, such as the already mentioned brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. For instance, it is known from their correspondence that Kim personally lobbied for their membership in the Writers' Union, which meant official recognition and stipend from the Soviet state. He was not discouraged by the opposition of the more rigidly ideological members who held powerful positions in the Union. The process took more than three years but Kim's efforts bore fruit in the end.[66] As a sign of gratitude, it is likely that the brothers created the character Kim in their metaphysical science fiction novel *Snail on the Slope* (1966) based on him.[67]

In addition, Kim gave frequent lectures on various subjects concerning contemporary Western fiction at the Writers' Union. As Ardamatsky wrote later, Kim's lecture on Western adventure stories in the early 1960s included the close reading of more than a dozen of newly published U.S. and British novels.[68] Kim's vast erudition, so uncommon during the early Cold War period in the Soviet Union, combined with his vast experience of intelligence and counterintelligence work, profoundly impressed his younger colleagues and made a lasting positive impact on their fictional narratives. His role as a pedagogue and an educator on intelligence matters is probably the most important part of his literary legacy.

Conclusion

Kim proved unsuccessful in outdoing Western spy fiction writers, such as Ian Fleming, on the global literary market and thus could not meaningfully affect the outcome of the literary Cold War. However, analyzing his literary output is important in order to understand the concerns and themes of later Soviet spy fiction writers, such as Semyonov and Ardamatsky, who faced the West on a more level playing field due to the logistical and financial sponsorship by the institutions of the Soviet state, including Andropov's KGB.

Perhaps because of his inability to make an international impact, Kim grew despondent in his final months and confessed to Ardamatsky that it would have been easier to bear his terminal illness, if he knew that 'people would read [his] books for at least another dozen years'.[69] Kim's skepticism about the fate of his work turned out to be groundless, however. In today's Russia, he is far from forgotten. In fact, several of his spy novellas were reprinted as recently as 2019.[70]

Moreover, it is possible that Kim's spy fiction might still make into the English language international book market. In recent years, especially since Vladimir Putin became the president, there has been a dramatic increase of books related to intelligence matters, both fiction and nonfiction, in Russia.[71] Given the current geopolitical climate of the resurgence of the U.S-Russia tensions, it seems likely that Russia's state-sponsored publishers, including those associated with the Ministry of Defense and the security and intelligence agencies, such as the FSB and the SVR, will follow in the steps of Soviet *Progress Publishers* and invest in the translation and distribution of some of these books abroad in order to promote the narratives of the corruption of the West and the Russian strength and ingenuity. In this context, Soviet and Russian spy fiction, including Kim's novels, might yet turned out to be 'a very effective weapon in the psychological war' for asserting greater global influence.

Notes

1. This statement is made by Hilary T., one of the main characters in Roman Kim's early 1960s novella *Kto ukral Punnakana? [Who Kidnapped Punnakan?]*, 104 (in the e-book). The literal translation of the title is "Who Stole Punnakan," but I opted for a more context-grounded translation. All translations from Russian language, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
2. De Keghel, "*Seventeen Moments of Spring*, a Soviet James Bond Series? Official Discourse, Folklore, and Cold War Culture in Late Socialism." Nepomnyashchy, "The Blockbuster Miniseries on Soviet TV." Dwyer, "Masculinities and Anxieties in the Post-Soviet *Boevik* Novel."
3. It is plausible to suppose that Kim's predilection for classic British detective stories derived at least in part from the rationale well-articulated by the famous Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. According to Borges, classic detective stories play the role of "safeguarding order in an era of disorder," both on the level of form and the level of content. They always have "a beginning, middle, and end' and in them "everything is intellectual, everything is calm, there is no violence, and not too much bloodshed." See Borges, "The Detective Story," 499. Interestingly, both Kim and Borges were born in the same month of the same year.
4. Prosvetov, *Kresniy otets' Shtirlitsa [The 'Godfather' of Stierlitz]*, 221.
5. Djagalov, "Progress Publishers: A Short History," 84–86.
6. Ibid.
7. In the last five years, two Russian language biographies of Roman Kim have been published. Prosvetov's *'Kresniy otets' Shtirlitsa [The 'Godfather' of Stierlitz]* and Kulanov's *Roman Kim*. Kulanov also included a chapter on Kim in his study of the Soviet scholars of Japan, *V teni Voshodyashchego solntsa [In the Shadow of the Rising Sun]*. The condensed version of this chapter was translated into English by Kees Boterbloem as "Roman Kim: The Ninja from the Lubyanka."
8. There are at least two mutually contradictory versions as to why he returned, having to do with personal and family issues. Prosvetov, 19–20 (in the e-book).
9. Prosvetov, 36 (in the e-book); Kulanov, 131–132, 140 (in the e-book). For Dzerzhinsky's note, see Kulanov, 528 (in the e-book). After the formation of the Soviet Union in December 1922, the Soviet state security apparatus was restructured in a new organizational formation – the OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate) – headed by the VChK-a chief, Felix Dzerzhinsky.
10. Prosvetov, 50 (in the e-book).
11. Gasparyan, *Operatsiya 'Trest'. Sovetskaya razvedki protiv russkoy emigratsiyi. 1921–1937 [Operation Trust. Soviet Intelligence against Russian Émigrés. 1921–1937]*.

12. These operations are still classified. Prosvetov relied on the account communicated to him by a veteran of the KGB Second Chief Directorate (counterintelligence) who wanted to remain anonymous, 63, 66, 71–72 (in the e-book).
13. "Postanovleniye TsIK SSSR ot 03.06.1936 [Resolution of the TsIK USSR from 3 June 1936]."
14. Kim, "Nogy k zmeye (glossy) [Legs to a Snake (a glossary)]."
15. Prosvetov, 98–100 (in the e-book).
16. Typical NKVD torture included the around-the-clock ("assembly-line") interrogations lasting for days. The person interrogated was not allowed even a moment's respite from questioning and some prisoners were forced to stand on their feet for hours and even days. See the eyewitness accounts quoted in Prosvetov, 105–106 (in the e-book).
17. Kim, "The Report" in Prosvetov, 214–224 (in the e-book).
18. Ibid., 218 (in the e-book).
19. Ibid., 221 (in the e-book).
20. Ibid., 223 (in the e-book).
21. Ibid., 222–223 (in the e-book).
22. "Radio Broadcast." The quotes cited in my discussion of the text are drawn from the broadcast.
23. Hicks comes across a group of unemployed writers waiting in line to get their manuscripts reviewed when one of them suddenly exclaims in frustration: "I've got anti-Soviet novels. I should get a priority treatment."
24. According to the well-known U.S. writer E. L. Doctorow, this convention, which goes back to the origins of modern European literature (Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*), is also employed to "as a means of gaining authority for the narrative." Doctorow, "False Documents," 155.
25. Roman Kim, *Tetrad' naydennaya v Sunchone [The Notebook Found in Sunchon]*. The fact that the publisher of this novel was the Soviet Ministry of Defense indicates its perceived strategic significance.
26. The main American protagonist, U.S. military intelligence officer Harshberger (sic!) is shown brutally shooting three underage Korean girls while commenting "For … [a derogatory ethnic slur], gender and age serve as camouflage," Kim, *The Notebook*, 416 (in the e-book).
27. An unnamed North Korean communist commander is quoted as saying: ' … the German SS officer was destroyed but was resurrected in the form of the American fascist Harshberger,' ibid., 433 (in the e-book).
28. Ibid.
29. The *Pravda* review is quoted in Prosvetov, 155 (in the e-book).
30. Kulanov, 385 (in the e-book).
31. Quoted in Prosvetov, 3 (in the e-book). See also Bondarenko and Kurilsky. *Neizvestniye Strugatskiye. Pisma. Rabochiye dnevniki. 1942–1962 [The Unknown Strugatsky. Letters. Diaries. 1942–1962*], 189 (in the e-book). Arkady Strugatsky participated in the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal as a translator from Japanese.
32. Kim, *Devushka iz Hirosimi [The Girl from Hiroshima]*.
33. Prosvetov, 157 (in the e-book).
34. Kim, *Agent osobogo naznacheniya [The Special Agent]*.
35. Ibid., 145 (in the e-book).
36. Kim, *Kobra pod podushkoy [A Cobra under the Pillow]*.
37. Kim's plot resembles that of Ewen Montagu's account of Operation Mincemeat in *The Man Who ever Was*. Chances are that Kim was aware of Montagu's non-fiction account and perhaps wanted to provide a Soviet perspective on the same events. I am grateful to Mark Stout for pointing Montagu's book to me.
38. The reader never learns Mukhin's first name. His last name is derived from the Russian word *mukha* which means a fly. Kim likely chose it on purpose since it is well-known how annoying flies can be and Mukhin created a lot of annoyance to the British counterintelligence in the novella.
39. Kim, *Cobra*, 92 (in the e-book).
40. Ibid., 91–93 (in the e-book). Truman's full statement was as follows: "f we see that Germany is winning the war, we ought to help Russia and if that Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and in that way let them kill as many as possible … " Quoted in Whitman, "Obituary: Harry S. Truman: Decisive President."
41. Quoted in Kulanov, 399 (in the e-book).
42. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*. As one of Kim's characters put it: "When you begin to suspect someone of something and passionately want your suspicions to be confirmed, the active work of the "creative imagination" kicks in without needing any factual basis: it constructs facts by itself, it "creates" them." Roman Kim, *Po prochteniy szhech. [Burn After Reading*], 208–209 (in the e-book).
43. Kim's presentation of the actual rank structure in the U.S. military is often inaccurate. It is unclear whether this was intentional to make it appear similar to the Soviet military or due to a misunderstanding.
44. Ibid., 19 (in the e-book).
45. Ibid., 183–185 (in the e-book).
46. The senior lieutenant is not the actual rank in the U.S. Navy.

47. Kim even includes a reference to the real event of a Japanese weather report with the words 'north wind' misinterpreted as signaling the attack on the Soviet Union due to what he portrays as Russophobia. Kim, *Burn After Reading*, 153 (in the e-book). See Safford, US Navy, "Statement Regarding Winds Message." I am grateful to Mark Stout for this reference.
48. Kulanov, 410 (in the e-book).
49. Kim, *Who Kidnapped Punnakan?*, 83–90 (in the e-book).
50. Ibid., 104 (in the e-book).
51. Ibid., 95 (in the e-book).
52. Ibid., 105 (in the e-book).
53. Prosvetov, 173 (in the e-book). Kim visited Ethiopia in 1958 as a member of the Writers' Union delegation and, apparently, again in 1963. Kulanov, 394, 408 (in the e-book).
54. Kim, *Shkola prizrakov [The School for Ghosts]*, 35 (in the e-book).
55. Kipling, *Kim*, 231 (in the e-book).
56. Kim, *The School*, 37–38 (in the e-book).
57. Prosvetov, 176 (in the e-book).
58. Heifetz, *Sovetskaya Zhizn': Opyt i Mysli [The Soviet Life: Experience and Reflections]*.
59. Prosvetov, 35 (in the e-book).
60. Quoted in Prosvetov, 170 (in the e-book). The similar story was told by Semyonov to the U.S. journalist David Remnick in 1989. See Remnick. "Moscow's Mysterious Master of Intrigue."
61. Fischer, "Lubyanka's Nightingale and the Novel That Exposed CIA Operation TRIGON."
62. Ardamatsky, *Saturn Is Almost Invisible*. The Russian edition was published in 1963.
63. Ardamatsky, "Vstrechi s Kimom [Meetings with Kim]."
64. Ardamatsky, *Vozmezdiye [Retribution]*.
65. Kovacevic, "The FSB Literati."
66. Prosvetov, 169 (in the e-book). See also Bondarenko and Kuril'sky. *Neizvestniye Strugatskiye. Pis'ma. Rabochiye dnevniki. 1963–1966 [The Unknown Strugatsky. Letters. Diaries. 1963–1966*], 151, 160, 194 (in the e-book).
67. Bondarenko and Kuril'sky, *Neizvestniye Strugatskiye. 1942–1962. [The Unknown Strugatsky. 1942–1962]*, 402 (in the e-book); Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Snail on the Slope.*
68. Ardamatsky, "Vstrechi s Kimom [Meetings with Kim]," 359 (in the e-book).
69. Ibid., 361 (in the e-book).
70. This volume included four novellas: *The Special Agent, A Cobra under the Pillow, Who Kidnapped Punnakan?* and *The School for Ghosts*. It was published by a publisher in the Russian city of Ryazan.
71. Kovacevic, "The Russian Book Publishers and the Positive Image of Soviet-Era State Security and Intelligence Services."

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