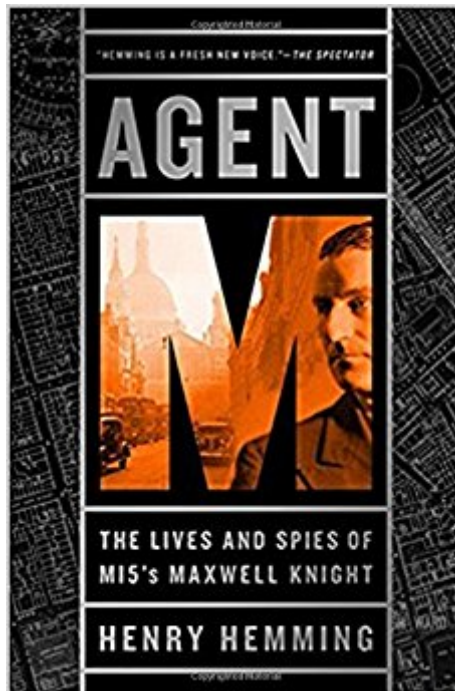




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Agent M: The Lives And Spies Of MI5's Maxwell Knight



Synopsis

Spying is the art of knowing who to trust--and who to betray. Maxwell Knight was perhaps the greatest spymaster in history, rumored to be the real-life inspiration for the James Bond character "M." He did more than anyone in his era to combat the rising threat of fascism in Britain during World War II, in spite of his own history inside this movement. He was also truly eccentric--a thrice-married jazz aficionado who kept a menagerie of exotic pets--and almost totally unqualified for espionage. Yet he had a gift for turning practically anyone into a fearless secret agent. Knight's work revolutionized British intelligence, pioneering the use of female agents, among other accomplishments. In telling Knight's remarkable story, *Agent M* also reveals for the first time in print the names and stories of some of the men and women recruited by Knight, on behalf of MI5, who were asked to infiltrate the country's most dangerous political organizations. Drawing on a vast array of original sources, *Agent M* reveals not only the story of one of the world's greatest intelligence operators, but the sacrifices and courage required to confront fascism during a nation's darkest time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The dramatic story of the remarkable British spymaster...Many spy stories are page-turners, but [Henry Hemming] proves that the story of one man can be equally thrilling. Hemming has uncovered a man determined not to be known and in so doing, has provided us with delightful reading." -Kirkus Reviews "Espionage writing at its best." -Charles Cumming, author of *A Divided Spy* "Crammed with cracking stories and founded on sound research, Henry Hemming's biography of Maxwell Knight-'M'-stands comparison with the bestselling books of Ben Macintyre." -Adam Sisman, author

of John Le Carré "I raced through Henry Hemming's book, constantly having to remind myself that it wasn't a work of fiction. It really has everything you'd want from a great espionage story: incredible agents risking their lives; the highest possible stakes, with the safety of the world hanging in the balance; and at its heart a complicated, mercurial spy master in Maxwell Knight spinning an ever more intricate web." -Matt Charman, Oscar-nominated screenwriter of *Bridge of Spies* "Absolute proof that assiduous digging in the archives can produce scoops. This is intelligence research at its best, especially in the identification of hitherto anonymous agents. Definitely a great contribution to the literature." - Nigel West, author of *MI5* "This in-depth introduction illuminates a largely forgotten man of antidemocratic tendencies who played a key role in keeping Britain secure and democratic for much of the interwar and early postwar periods." •Publishers Weekly

Henry Hemming is the author of five previous works of nonfiction, including most recently *The Ingenious Mr. Pyke*. He has written for the *Economist*, *FT Magazine*, and the *Washington Post*, and his books have been featured in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and other places. He lives in London with his wife and daughter.

Henry Hemming introduces us to Maxwell Knight a jazz playing naturalist with his own private menagerie who turns out to be a great talent spotter and spy runner for MI5. He is the model for Ian Fleming's M. He marries three times, but none of them were consummated. In other words he was quite the quirky guy. Hemming's biography largely focuses on the 1920s and 1930s where Knight is recruited into a private spying operation that infiltrates the British fascists. Knight is well suited for this because he is largely sympathetic to their goals and was a firm anti-communist. There he meets William Joyce who would go on to become the pro-Nazi broadcaster Lord Haw-Haw in the 1940's. When Knight formally joins MI5 his main focus is on Soviet espionage and its handmaiden the British Communist Party. There he pioneers the use of female agents and with the great work of Olga Gray he breaks a major Soviet spy ring that infiltrated the naval armaments industry. He stays focused on the Soviets until Italy invaded Ethiopia and then, and only then, does he wake up to the threat of fascism. Hemming focuses on Knight's successes, but Knight, despite suspecting Anthony Blunt, he completely misses the notorious Cambridge Five spy ring. He comes close to detecting the Soviet infiltration of the British nuclear program, but objectively he fails. Hemming offers us great insight into the operations of MI5 and the life of one of its best agents. For those interested in this topic, though a bit long, his book is well worth the read.

A fascinating study of the real-life M of James Bond fame.

Great story of the real thing

Great

Interesting from first page to the last. Captivating history with current parallels. A must read lesson to prevent the destruction of democracy by current adversaries.

A lot of speculation about agent M. It's interesting but, I thought, a bit slow.

I've read many espionage accounts and this equals any of them.

Well written. Enjoyed reading.

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