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EDITOR'S NOTE: MLE asked a long-time great American mystery writer, Rex Stout, creator of the sharp-witted Nero Wolfe and former president of the Mystery Writers of America (see page 62), to discuss the craft of suspense writing with a great English newcomer, David Cornwell, alias John Le Carré.

Suppose you have written a book, a novel, and it has been accepted by a publisher, but because you are a government employee it is desirable to use an alias on the title page instead of your own name. How would you pick your pseudonym? Surely with great care and much pondering.

But not David Cornwell. One morning in London, while riding on a bus on his way to work, he saw a name above the door of a little shop and thought it would do as well as any; and when he reached his desk he telephoned his publisher and told him to make it "John Le Carré." Now John Le Carré is a famous name on both sides of the Atlantic. The offhand way David Cornwell hit on it is certainly significant, but as with most significant facts the question is, what does it signify?

After talking with him for an hour or so I have no idea what the answer is. A 32-year-old Welshman, blond and blue-eyed, unobtrusively handsome, of medium height and weight, easy and quick in movement, he is not a man you would expect to be indifferent about his tag. Before taking a post in the British Foreign Service he taught German, French, and Latin for three years in the most prestigious boys' school on earth, Eton. In the Foreign Service he was stationed at the Bonn embassy for more than a year. He resigned from the Foreign Service in March, and now lives in Crete with his wife and three young sons, but will return to England for his sons' schooling.

Questioned on such biographical matters, Mr. Cornwell is courteous and affable, but what brings a gleam to his eyes is discussion of the business of story telling. Talking about *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the story that has made John Le Carré the best-known name in the book world this year, he is utterly

without pose or pretension. He merely accepts the fact that when a book has been called by Graham Greene "the best spy story I have ever read," has sold more than a quarter of a million copies, has topped the New York and London best-seller lists for months, and within a year will have appeared in 12 languages, how it was written is worth talking about, no matter who wrote it. What he said, and his manner and tone, made it manifest that he would equally enjoy discussing *Treasure Island* or *The Three Musketeers*, only he knew more about *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* because he had been there while it was being written. And rewritten.

Question: Did you revise?

Answer: It would be more accurate to say that I rewrote.

Q: As published, it has around 70,000 words. How many words in the first draft?

A: About 120,000.

Q: How many of the sentences as published are the same as they were in the first draft? Half?

A: Oh, no. Very few. Almost none.

Q: Then as you wrote the first draft you were aware, as you wrote a sentence, that it probably wouldn't be printed that way?

A: No, indeed. With each sentence I felt that it was immortal prose, especially the dialogue. But hardly any of the dialogue in the book is as I first wrote it. That's because my strongest point is my critical faculty. As critic I discarded pages and pages which I as writer had thought deathless. I discarded people, too. There were a dozen characters in the first draft that aren't in the book at all.

That was extraordinary. Most novelists revise, more or less, but those who revise extensively always know they are going to, at least subconsciously, and as they do the first draft they are usually not much concerned with their choice of words or their syntax. I was staring at Cornwell-Le Carré; was he pulling my leg? No, he really meant it. Because his job in the Foreign Service filled his days and frequently his evenings, too, at five o'clock in the morning he would get his pen and pad of paper and work on his story for three hours, doing his best to tell it exactly right. Immortal prose. But when it was finished Cornwell the story teller turned it over to Cornwell the critic and editor; and good-by words and sentences and whole pages, and even some characters. Of course, there's a catch: who wrote the new sentences, the story teller or the critic, and who edited *them*? But that made it more extraordinary, not less. I looked into the clear blue eyes and realized that behind them was the brain of a remarkable man.

What an operation! First, give the story teller a free hand and let him spin his yarn in the delusion that it is down for good. Second, let the critic tear it to pieces. Third, make them team up and like it. It sounds impossible, but it certainly worked with *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.

Also extraordinary was his justification, on esthetic grounds, of the ending of the story. To report it I would have to disclose the ending, which I mustn't do; but it is remarkable that he stuck strictly to the point, justifying not himself but the esthetic imperative of the plot and characters. His concern was the art of story telling, not himself at all. If that wasn't unique it was close to it.

So an attractive young man who once taught language at Eton has it made; and with what? A ball-point pen and a pad of paper. Most people who try their hands at the art of story telling don't know how and never will, and of the few people who do know how and try to make a living at it, most find that it is extremely hard going. It isn't often that with only a pen and a pad of paper a fellow

can manage to quit his job, take his wife and children to a villa on the storied isle of Crete, and spend his days swimming in the Mediterranean and poking around in the relics of the Minoans. Cornwell-Le Carré has certainly come in from the cold, and I wish him well with all my heart.

For more about John Le Carré and his two earlier suspense novels, see "Catch Up With," page 12.

MAN WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD BY REX STOUT



DUANE MICHALS

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MYSTERY writer! The spy: bewitcher Tippy Walker—she's down front, spyglassing left, right, and top. Tippy, the delight of delights in *The World of Henry Orient* and just about the happiest hop-skip-and-jumper to land starrily on the motion picture screen, dearly loves a mystery, but even more a mystery-story writer. So, we took her where she could find the most—the Annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner, given by the Mystery Writers of America to celebrate its 19th anniversary. 550 canny clue connoisseurs make up M.W.A.'s membership—their slogan: "Crime does not pay—enough." Hard to believe this year when crime novels and novels of detection stand high on best-seller lists. At the dinner, M.W.A. presented "Edgars," statuettes of Edgar Allan Poe, to 1964 winners; gave scrolls to nominees; bestowed "Ravens" on winners in the "non-writing field." Tippy was photographed with 22 doers of whodunits. Standing, from left to right: David Loth, *Crime Lab* is his most recent; Herbert Brean, his *Wilders Walk Away* is a masterpiece; Clayton Rawson, Managing Ed. of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*; Hilary Waugh, latest—*The Missing Man*; Lawrence Treat, *Big Shot's* his best known; Edward D. Radin, M.W.A. President (he's holding an Edgar), his *Lizzie Borden: The Untold Story* is definitive; James Reach, *The Innocent One*; Frederic Dannay, half of Ellery Queen; Cornelius Hirschberg, '64 Edgar winner for best first mystery novel—*Florentine Finish*; Bart Spicer, *Act of Anger*; Hugh Pentecost, most recent is *Only the Rich Die Young*; Brett Halliday, Mike Shane's his boy; Henry Klinger, holding scroll, is the author of *Essence of Murder*. Seated, from left to right: Harold Q. Masur, most recent *Make a Killing*; Stanton Forbes, *The Terrors of the Earth*; Dorothy Salisbury Davis, holds *Raven*, wrote *Black Sheep, White Lamb*; **Rex Stout** (see page 65); Hans Stefan Santesson, editor of the *Saint Mystery Magazine* and winner of the Edgar for the best mystery criticism; Phyllis A. Whitney, '64 Edgar winner for best juvenile mystery novel, *Mystery of the Hidden Hand*. On floor, from left: Howard Haycraft, his *The Art of the Mystery Story* establishes him as the mystery's ranking historian-critic; Gerold Frank, his *The Deed* is '64 Edgar winner in the fact-crime category; Stephen Marlowe, his latest, *Drumbeat—Berlin*. As Tip remarked, peering through her telescope at these 22: "What a lot of gore!"—LEO LERMAN

New plot for knits, hinging on this device: innocent bits of crochet babying an otherwise knowing dress. Here (spied four times on Tippy), a jade-green slink, its scoop neck and armholes rimmed with crochet. By Youth Guild; double-knit wool, 5–15, \$30. At Peck & Peck, all stores; Sakowitz, Houston; Frederick & Nelson, Seattle. The shoes, white grosgrain partnering green kid-skin, by La Piuma; \$17, at Gimbels, New York. Telescope, F.A.O. Schwarz