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**ELISABETTA GIRELLI**

University of St Andrews

# The traitor as patriot: Guy Burgess, Englishness and camp in *Another Country* and *An Englishman Abroad*

## ABSTRACT

*This article focuses on the representation of the spy Guy Burgess, one of the famous Cambridge ring, in two very successful British heritage films, An Englishman Abroad (John Schlesinger, UK, 1983) and Another Country (Marek Kaniévka, UK, 1984). The article argues that the films rely on popular notions of Englishness as politically safe and non-extremist, thus fabricating a view of the past that misrepresents Burgess in the effort to normalize him. Similarly, stereotypical views of gay men as frivolous and non-ideological are amply exploited in the films' portrayal of their protagonist. Burgess's upper-class English roots are used to package him as part of the heritage experience, while his homosexuality is not only presented as the reason for spying, but it is also constructed as a camp performance, effectively defusing the threat of ideological commitment and political betrayal. The radical, lethal and devoutly Marxist Burgess is thus stripped of his ideology and turned into a safe national icon.*

## KEYWORDS

Guy Burgess  
Englishness  
spies  
homosexuality  
camp  
heritage

A key scene from *Another Country* (Marek Kaniévka, UK, 1984) shows the protagonist, Guy Bennett (Rupert Everett), in a state of distress, holding an intimate conversation with his friend Tommy (Colin Firth). Their talk takes

place in the grounds of an old and stately building, shaded by trees and ornamented by columns and fountains: it is a lyrical setting, a lovingly recreated image of an English public school in the 1930s. The scene takes place an hour and a half into the film: during most of this time, the audience has witnessed the school's brutal persecution of Guy and of other gay students, culminating in a horrific session of corporal punishment in the previous sequence. This disciplinarian action has been accompanied by Guy's exclusion from the school's elite group, the so-called 'Gods'. Now, however, the two friends' conversation brings a hint of imminent change: as Guy bitterly acknowledges his expulsion from the realm of the powerful and the privileged, he states his intention of 'having the last laugh', of excising 'revenge' on a system that has oppressed and rejected him. After this rather vague proclamation, Guy casts aside his previous scorn for Tommy's Marxist beliefs, and expresses the wish that Communism may become reality. This is the film's last English scene: the action then cuts to Moscow in 1983, to a cramped, rather dingy flat, where a wheelchair-bound Guy is telling his memoirs to a foreign journalist.

The final exchange between Guy and Tommy, in the shade of their public school, is a pivotal moment in the narrative: it links the body of the film, which is structured as a long flashback, to the opening scene, which had shown the journalist making her way to Guy's Moscow home. The succession of security checks she had had to go through, the presence of bodyguards around Guy, and the fact that his flat was situated in an imposing-looking building, had clearly established the elderly Englishman as a significant figure in the Soviet Union. The journalist's opening question to Guy – why did he abandon his privileged upper-class life in England – had spelt out to the audience that an act of defection must have taken place. All this is confirmed by Guy and Tommy's last conversation, where the former's stated intention to damage the English establishment is followed by an allusion to Communism.

But this last public-school scene has also other crucial implications: it explains Guy's conversion to Communism as an act of personal defiance, as a reaction to a homophobic system whose repressive authority is guaranteed by the powers that be. Ideological motivations seem conspicuously absent from Guy's thought process. At the same time, while this turning point in his life is narratively framed by a long-awaited articulation of emotion and anger, it is also visually framed by an evocative encapsulation of English cultural identity. It is a grand and serene *mise-en-scène* that, though period-specific, is also timeless: it stands as a visual reference to traditional English ideas of nation, as well as being an instantly recognizable convention of heritage cinema. Throughout the film, this setting has been matched by Guy's appearance: like his fellow-students, he is opulently dressed with the tails, waistcoats and crisp white shirts of the English public-school boy. Only Tommy, the fervent Communist, distinguishes himself for a less dandified dress code, as well as for wearing intellectual-looking glasses; upper-class speech and manners, however, are shared by all. Bearing the visual and performative marks of rarefied national treasures, these characters are played out in a narrative centred on public-school education: this is presented as a cruel rite of passage for the English elite, and it is primarily expressed in the persecution of gay students. However, the depiction of 1930s England as a brutally homophobic place does not preclude the film's gorgeous presentation of that same period: as Richard Dyer has argued, heritage films may construct a gay subjectivity, as the channel for a pleasurable experience of the past, enjoyable despite the protagonist's struggle against a hostile environment. These films 'take a broadly

positive view of homosexuality – which is to say that they take such a view while depicting pasts that did not’ (Dyer 2002: 206) ; in so doing, heritage cinema places homosexuality at the core of its nostalgic discourse, ‘envisaging homosexual men among the attractions of pastness’ (Dyer 2002: 206).

In *Another Country*, the narrative centrality of the homosexual theme is exactly paralleled by this nostalgic heritage aesthetics, so much so that the film effectively collapses two discourses into one. A carefully crafted image of Englishness is merged with homosexuality, which is itself specifically constructed as young, beautiful and very camp. The identification of the film’s protagonist with this twofold discourse is complete, and remains totally undisturbed by his radical embrace of Communism: Guy’s implicit decision to become a Soviet spy is plainly the result of his rage and humiliation at having been punished for being gay – punished, ultimately, by being excluded from the Gods, by being denied a place among the national elite. Guy’s defection, therefore, is entirely subordinated to being gay and English, in a class-specific way and culturally specific past.

It is also important to point out that, when Guy tells Tommy he wishes for Communism on earth, he expresses no interest whatsoever in moving to the Soviet Union. Although the film shows Guy in Moscow as being defiantly unrepentant, the very words he uses to reaffirm his decision are replete with the opposite meaning: when the journalist asks him if he misses anything from England, he replies ‘I miss cricket’. This is the film’s last line, and the one audiences are likely to remember: it is not only a reminder of Guy’s national and social origins, but also a recalling of another conversation between him and Tommy, earlier on in the film. Tommy had regretted being unable to play cricket because of his Marxist principles: in a rare moment of agreement, the two friends had defined the game as ‘a fundamental part of the capitalist conspiracy’, having its probable roots in some oppressive feudal practice. Guy’s longing for cricket, therefore, is clearly at odds with the life he has chosen. Moreover, Guy’s appearance in Moscow is that of an embittered old man, still smarting at the memory of his past humiliations, and keeping a Harrods mug on his desk: the overall picture is definitely bound to Guy’s English past.

Guy’s cantankerous mindset in Moscow is one detail that seems consistent with the real-life Guy on whom the protagonist is openly based: that is, Guy Burgess, a member of the Cambridge Spy Ring, who defected to the Soviet Union in 1951. The other members of the ring were Anthony Blunt – who was Burgess’ best friend – John Cairncross, Donald Maclean and Kim Philby. Burgess’s dislike of Russia is amply expanded upon in another, equally successful film, *An Englishman Abroad* (John Schlesinger, UK, 1983), made for television one year before *Another Country*. But the two films are comparable in other ways: they share an approach to Englishness based on nostalgia, and a narrative and performative emphasis on Burgess’s homosexuality. At the same time, both films entirely dismiss a side of Burgess that is not only evident from the available biographical material about him, but is also so relevant to the films’ plot as to make its omission seem quite deliberate: namely, Burgess’s very serious knowledge of Marxist theory, his utter dedication to the Communist cause, and his faith in a coming revolution, all of which were already in place when he decided to become a spy. Regardless of his experiences in Russia, Burgess maintained his Communist beliefs for the rest of his life. Given that Burgess’s Marxism was, to all accounts, the result of a deeply felt but intellectually rigorous process, undertaken by a man of remarkable intelligence, it seems that by dismissing Guy’s ideological credentials, these

films are also belittling an arguably very misguided, but seriously brilliant mind.

The films' dismissal of Burgess the Communist is of course facilitated by their narrative structures, which frame the protagonist on-screen before his career as a Soviet spy (in *Another Country*) and after this career was over (in *An Englishman Abroad*, but also briefly in *Another Country*). However, aside from temporal devices, the films' de-politicization of Burgess is achieved through, and in function of, two specific but here overlapping sets of visual and performative conventions: heritage and camp. This article argues that the films, ostensibly offering a 'truthful' view of the past, actually misrepresent Burgess in the effort to normalize him: they do this by exploiting his national and social origins, as well as his sexual orientation. Guy's upper-class English roots are used to package him as part of the heritage experience, while his homosexuality is not only presented as the reason for spying, but it is also constructed as a camp performance, effectively defusing the threat of ideological commitment and political betrayal. And – one may argue – also defusing the potential subversion of homosexuality itself. The original Guy was an intellectual, committed, and lethal Soviet agent: in *Another Country* and *An Englishman Abroad*, however, his character is so manipulated as to be rendered perfectly safe, and comfortably inserted in a nostalgic, ideology-free English narrative.

*Another Country* is based on the eponymous play by Julian Mitchell, and, as previously mentioned, it is formally arranged as a long flashback, a journey into the past of Guy Bennett. Guy, however, does not relate his story directly to the audience: apart from brief appearances at the beginning and end of the film, he is not allowed a narratorial voice. Instead, the film soon adopts the impersonal, 'objective' style of classic narrative, positioning the gaze on Guy rather than with him: in this way, *Another Country* follows the conventions of heritage discourse, corroborating its implicit accuracy and 'truth'.

*An Englishman Abroad* makes even stronger claims to authority: adapted from a play by Alan Bennett, it is based on the factual encounter between Guy Burgess and the actress Coral Browne, which took place in Moscow in 1958. Browne not only supplied Bennett with her recollections of Burgess, but, 25 years after meeting the spy, she also played herself in *An Englishman Abroad*, opposite Alan Bates playing Burgess. Script and dialogue are based on her first-hand account. Although the film is set in the 1950s, it is underpinned by the tenets of British heritage cinema: a structure of feeling based on nostalgia, with a quaint, idealized England as its object. In fact, nostalgia motivates the film: it is the emotion driving the homesick Burgess to approach Coral Browne, and to ask her to buy and send him a bespoke suit from his London tailor. The exiled Burgess in the film is defined by nostalgia: he lives in the past, pining for an England constructed out of memories, literary references, and sartorial style. The suit he desires is not just a function of his vanity or, as will be discussed later, of his camp identity: it is also a fetish, the symbol of a vision of England that Guy, throughout the film, superimposes on the harsh reality of life in Moscow. Although we do see Coral Browne back in London, exterior shots of England are totally missing from *An Englishman Abroad*: unlike in *Another Country*, Englishness here is solely manifested through costume, performance and memory. National identity is signified by the interior scenes at Guy's English tailor and shoemaker; by the stage sequences of *Hamlet*, performed by an English cast in Moscow; above all, Englishness is expressed through Guy's constant recall of it. But what is it exactly, this vision which he recalls? The film's opening sequence offers the first clue, by providing one of

Burgess's first lines: while attending the *Hamlet* performance, he comments 'What pleasure, in this day and age, is to hear the language so beautifully spoken!'. Shortly afterwards, he tries to gain access to the actors' changing rooms, protesting to the theatre attendant: 'I was at Cambridge with Hamlet!'. Burgess's traditional, public-school, Oxbridge origins are reiterated throughout the film: apart from wearing an Eton tie, deteriorated through constant use, he also obsessively enquires about the famous people he was a student with. 'Do you know Auden?' he keeps asking Coral Browne, despite her initial negative answer; 'How is Cyril Connolly?' he wistfully asks her, in vain. Guy's concept of England is inextricably tied to the nation's canonical tradition: as the film progresses, the protagonist is heard quoting from Shakespeare, Tennyson and Tristram Shandy; he is shown playing compulsively a Jack Buchanan song from the 1930s, 'Who Stole My Heart Away' (which, incidentally, is also sung by Guy Bennett in *Another Country*); and, perhaps most strikingly of all, he is seen performing a Gilbert and Sullivan number at the piano, accompanied by his Russian lover at the balalaika. When pressed by Coral Browne to say what he misses most from his native country, he lists his London club – the Reform Club – the streets of London, and the English countryside. Most telling of all is Guy's own summing up of England's qualities: he defines the place as 'little, timid, tasteful, nice'. When Browne tells him that London is changing, he gets angry for the only time in the film: 'it doesn't need changing!'. The tenacity with which Burgess clings to his conservative vision of England achieves two effects: it testifies to his belonging to it, and it endows his character with a sense of safety and cosiness, emphasized by his friendliness and melancholic charm. The resulting portrayal is incompatible with the hard realities of the Soviet secret service, which played such a huge part in his life: it is difficult, not to say impossible, to imagine the protagonist of *An Englishman Abroad* ruthlessly consigning British agents to their deaths. Yet this is precisely what Guy Burgess did: he was at some point the contact between Kim Philby and the KGB, informing the former of the names of newly appointed British agents, and of the details of their arrival in the Soviet Union (Modin 1994: 194–95). Most of these agents were duly captured, and would have been either imprisoned or executed. Likewise, the real Burgess showed the utmost coolness in regards to his own life: by being an active Soviet agent during WWII, he risked execution if discovered. In *An Englishman Abroad*, however, Guy describes himself as 'a coward'.

According to most people who met Guy Burgess – including of course Coral Browne – he could indeed be a most charming person, capable of inspiring affection and lasting friendship. What this article argues is not that *An Englishman Abroad* is 'lying', nor, indeed, that everything in *Another Country* is pure fabrication: the point is rather to notice that even when there is no direct manipulation, the films select certain representations of Burgess, at the total expense of the other available ones. Like *Another Country*, *An Englishman Abroad* presents its protagonist in 'objective' fashion: in most scenes, audience positioning is achieved not through Burgess, but through Coral Browne: it is primarily through her gaze, her comments and her actions, that the audience 'understands' Burgess. Browne's eyes, literally fixed on Burgess when they are together, clearly express interest, sympathy and great pity. Her comments on Burgess emphasize this: she thinks he has 'bags of charms', but she also tells him that she feels sorry for him; her actions speak for themselves, as she goes to significant trouble to visit him in his Moscow flat, and then to purchase all the items on Guy's shopping list. When a particular tailor refuses to make

pyjamas for 'the traitor', she rises in Burgess's defence, telling the man: 'when I see people like you I understand why he did it!'. The film's aura of accuracy may be seen as guaranteed by Browne's direct knowledge of Burgess, not to mention by her presence on the screen. But the point is that by showing Burgess as he appeared to Coral Browne, the film represents him as a likeable loser, defeated by events, terribly homesick and terribly English: though probably a faithful reproduction of Browne's experience of Burgess, this failed, post-spying image becomes his final and total portrait. The strength of this representation is reinforced by the remarkable physical likeness between Alan Bates and Guy Burgess, as he was in the late 1950s.

By taking as their subject a real-life figure, the films discussed here manage, inevitably, to insert some accurate facts in their construction of Burgess: his literary tendencies, for example, so emphasized in *An Englishman Abroad*, were certainly true. An often-repeated anecdote tells how Burgess defected to the Soviet Union carrying a heavy book with him, *The Collected Works of Jane Austen*; when asked why, he replied 'I never travel without it' (Driberg 1956: 95). On his arrival in Russia, Burgess was instructed to change his name: in homage to George Eliot, he decided to call himself Jim Andreyevitch Eliot (Cecil 1989: 165). Similarly, the film's construction of Burgess as a physically vain but intensely sloppy man, seems entirely justified: many people have commented on Guy's ambivalent relationship with his own clothes and appearance. Yuri Modin, his main KGB contact in England, has thus described him: 'he looked like a tramp at close quarters, even though his clothes came from the best tailor in London', and he has specified: 'his shoes fascinated me: I never saw such unbelievably shiny shoes, before or since' (1994: 194–95). There also seems to be little doubt that the young Burgess was a beautiful and promiscuous creature, just like the fictional Guy Bennett in *Another Country*; like him, Burgess was also very open about his sexuality, an unusual attitude in an age of institutionalized homophobia (Carter 2001: 77). Despite these correspondences, however, *Another Country* largely re-invents Burgess as a hopelessly frivolous man, uninterested in intellectual pursuits, and exclusively devoted to sexual adventures, social climbing and looking good. This representation is strengthened by the opposition between Guy and Tommy, his Communist friend, who is also, interestingly, the only heterosexual member of the group. Tommy is also the only public-school boy in the film actually doing any studying; while he is crudely stereotyped as a Marxist intellectual – po-faced, with glasses, constantly reading serious books, refusing to play sports – Guy and the others are equally reduced to little more than caricatures. The contrast between these two factions is outlined at the beginning of the film: after having both attended the school's WWI memorial service, Tommy and Guy exchange opinions. The former has clearly been thinking during the service, and now makes a reasoned attack on the political class who sent so many young men to their deaths, concluding by berating the system and invoking the Russian revolution; Guy, instead, has spent the whole time studying the waistcoats worn by the elite students, the Gods, and he now explains that he wants to be part of this group in order to wear 'more outrageously coloured waistcoats than anyone else'. The film progresses in the same vein, showing Guy desperate to join the Gods, despite their practical and symbolic association with a hierarchical system based on repression; it is difficult for the audience not to agree with Tommy, when he declares that had Lenin met Guy, he would have described him as 'a sycophant in the service of the bourgeoisie'. This lack of political awareness is matched by a lack of

intellectual zeal: although Guy occasionally reads aloud languorous poetry, he recoils from anything more strenuous. In one telling scene, he picks up one of Tommy's books, only to soon cast it aside and whine: '*Das Kapital* is difficult!'. Such a character has clearly little in common with the real Guy Burgess. Burgess was not only an extremely bright student, but he was also intellectually inclined, with a passion for Victorian literature and a keen interest in history; while at Eton, he won both the Rosebery and the Gladstone prizes for history, as well as a scholarship for Trinity College, in Cambridge. Once at Trinity, Burgess was singled out as a promising researcher by celebrated historians such as G. M. Trevelyan and Steven Runciman; in 1933, he began working on a Ph.D. thesis on 'The bourgeois revolution in seventeenth-century England', which he later abandoned in favour of a study of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Burgess's biographers always stress the fact that Burgess never completed any of his academic projects, presenting this as a symptom of a fundamental lack of direction; the possible truth of this assumption, however, does not alter the evidence of Burgess's intellectual abilities and interests. Moreover, it would seem that his ultimate academic failure was greatly due to his channelling of mental and physical energy into a new sphere: political activism. Burgess joined the Trinity Communist cell in the autumn of 1933; unlike the protagonist of *Another Country*, he embraced Communism through a gradual process of intellectual acquisition and social awareness, in the context of the very troubled landscape of 1930s Europe. The film moves the action forward, by having Guy attending public-school in the 1930s, rather than in the 1920s, and anticipates his Communist conversion to his pre-university days; in so doing, *Another Country* not only infantilizes Burgess's choice, but it also presents it as unaccountably separated from the rise of Fascism and Nazism, or from the rampant unemployment and strikes characterizing 1930s England. What really happened was very different. Burgess has claimed that he was a Socialist while still at Eton; he was certainly reading Marxist theory when he arrived at Cambridge in 1930, although he did not then appreciate the Communist Party. His conversion seems to have been a slow-burning process, fuelled by the increasingly bleak developments in Italy and Germany: like many of his fellow-students, he came to the conclusion that Communism was the only obvious defence against Mussolini and Hitler. Domestic events played an equally important part: in 1933, Britain was in the grip of a severe economic depression, with unemployment reaching a peak of nearly three million. Whole sections of the population were suffering from malnutrition. The British government's response to this national crisis was to cut unemployment benefit and to introduce the Means Test; to many people in Britain, the authorities appeared as unconcerned by this economic emergency as they were by the rise of foreign right-wing dictatorships. In February 1933, the Hunger Marchers arrived in Cambridge, on their way to London. The Marchers were unemployed, virtually starving workers who were walking from the north-east of England to Westminster, to ask the government for some action; many were middle aged or elderly. When they passed through Cambridge they were given a reception by a student delegation, which included Burgess. The overall political climate was apt to galvanize anyone with latent Marxist sympathies, and it certainly galvanized Burgess, who further neglected his studies by helping organize various strikes in Cambridge: the bus drivers' strike, the sewage workers' strike and, most famously, the strike of the Trinity College waiters, which was ultimately successful. People who remember Burgess in those years have remarked on the obsessive enthusiasm with which he embraced

Communism; politics became his main interest, and by October 1933 he was giving talks on Marxist interpretations of history at the Trinity History Society (Carter 2001: 101–52).

If now one goes back to *Another Country*, the film appears remarkable for its total avoidance of contemporary political events, and for the sheltering of its protagonist from external circumstances. Though explicitly set in a bygone era, the narrative unfolds self-sufficiently, framed by a generic English pastness that is expressed partly through *mise-en-scène*, and partly through obsolete practices of social repression. This independence from specific political contexts is consistent with the tenets of heritage cinema, which tends to focus on social mores: although often critical of the same world they visually glorify, heritage films limit themselves to criticize a 'private' society, whose problems are articulated through personal relationships. Narrative motivation is usually provided by the protagonists' struggle to overcome social obstacles, in order to achieve personal freedom in their emotional and sexual lives; this freedom is not linked to political or ideological choices. Guy's Marxist conversion in *Another Country* is perfectly aligned with heritage discourse: it is fuelled by emotion and by the need for self-expression, and despite its momentous consequences, it is a rebellion without revolution. The missing revolutionary ingredient is ideological commitment. In most British heritage films, revolt against the system is manifested by inappropriate outbursts of emotion, by eccentric behaviour, or by eloping with an Italian: all actions likely to embarrass the Establishment, but not to fatally damage it. Guy Burgess's Communism was of the most radical variety possible, but the film manages to neutralize it by denying its ideological foundations: stripped of truly subversive connotations, Guy's embrace of Soviet Marxism is reduced to little more than an embarrassment. This is the only way Burgess's actions can be made sense of, if the Cambridge Spies are to be reclaimed as part of the narrow heritage discourse. The process is facilitated in *Another Country* by the film's portrayal of Tommy: although he carries the visible signs of intellectual awareness – namely books and glasses – Guy's Communist friend is ultimately difficult to take seriously. Indeed, the film's mocking representation of intellectualism relegates Marxism to the periphery of narrative interest: politics and ideology remain exceedingly dull till the end, while the audience's attention is drawn to frivolous butterflies such as Guy. Communism is just the latter's available route to get back at the system, which is attacked for purely personal reasons: the only cause Guy Bennett is devoted to is his own, the liberation and vindication of his true self. In this respect, the protagonist of *Another Country* is not unlike the heroine of *A Room With A View* (James Ivory, UK, 1986), Lucy Honeychurch (Helena Bonham-Carter), or the hero of *Maurice* (James Ivory, UK, 1987), Maurice Hall (James Wilby). These two heritage protagonists also struggle against oppressive environments, finally defying them by either marrying an eccentric, socially inferior Italophile, in Lucy's case, or by eloping with a gay and even more socially inferior lover, as Maurice does. The crossing of boundaries in these films is therefore social and sexual, but never political; in this way, transgression is contained within the proscribed limits of a specific vision of Englishness. It is a vision notable for its lack of an ideological dimension, and it is appropriately linked to the 'heritage' category, as it rests on popular, well-established English identifications. The writer E. M. Forster, speaking at an international conference in 1935, chose as his topic 'Liberty in England': he explained that if the English people were still championing democracy and freedom, in the face of the rise of Nazi-Fascism,

was not because they embraced a specific political creed, but because 'in England dictatorship is still supposed to be ungentlemanly, and massacres of Jews in bad form, and private armies figures of fun' (Forster 1945: 64). In Forster's critical view, Englishness conflated good manners with good ethics, but was incompatible with ideology. *Another Country* offers a similar view: apart from Tommy, the token intellectual, the film is not only free from ideology, but virtually free from ideas. Emotions, impulses and traditions are the fabric of the film's discourse.

Interestingly, Forster's opinion of his countrymen is echoed by Burgess in *An Englishman Abroad*: he tells Coral Browne that 'the average Englishman is not interested in ideas – say what you like about political theory, no-one will listen'. When she asks him why he became a Soviet spy, he replies: 'at the time, it seemed the right thing to do'; he does not, however, give any explanation as to why it seemed the right thing to do. In this way, a secondary layer of meaning creeps into the narrative, the hint of another side to the story of its protagonist; but it is a side disavowed by the film, submerged or even denied by its representation of Burgess as the archetypal Englishman. The end of *An Englishman Abroad* leaves no doubt as to the relation of Burgess with Russia: the last sequence sees him attired in his new, English-made clothes, parading triumphantly through the streets of Moscow. As he walks, the non-diegetic soundtrack erupts in the lyrics of Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*:

for he might have been a Russian, or French, or Turk, or Prussian, or perhaps Italian – but in spite of all temptations to belong to other nations, he remains an Englishman! For he is an Englishman, and he himself hath said it, and it's greatly to his credit, that he is an Englishman.

This ultimate confirmation of English identity carries, by Burgess's own admission in the film, an incompatibility with political theory. Again, this article is not arguing that the real Burgess ever rejected his national roots: on the contrary, there is every evidence that he loved England, considered himself English, and missed his country terribly once he defected. But this is precisely the point: that conventional representations of Englishness cannot contain both sides of Burgess's identity – the Englishman and the radical ideologue.

Both *Another Country* and *An Englishman Abroad* emphasize the fact that Burgess was gay, giving his sexuality a prominent place in narrative and performative terms; both films construct their protagonist along decidedly camp lines, equating his sexual orientation with a precise set of conventions. Before looking at the specific implications of camp aesthetics, it is important to notice that homosexuality provides a strong motivation in the films: in *Another Country*, Guy is driven to spying because of the consequences of being gay in an oppressive society. In *An Englishman Abroad*, the plot is sustained by Guy's need for a new suit: not just any suit, though, but one sold in Jermyn Street, an address long associated with gay culture. The Turkish Bath in Jermyn Street was a well-known gay cruising place; the area behind the street used to be a pick-up spot for Guardsmen; above all, Jermyn Street is redolent of high-class menswear, with its ambiguous aura of male grooming and male complicity, all the more significant in 1950s Britain.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the scenes taking place in Jermyn Street, which see Coral Browne dealing with tailors and salesmen, are saturated with camp overtones and innuendoes. When she tells a shoemaker that 'mum's the word' in regards to her purchases for Burgess, he replies: 'mum is always the word here,

1. I am very grateful to Professor Richard Dyer, who has supplied me with this information on the place of Jermyn Street in gay history.

Madam: Moscow or Maidenhead, mum is always the word'. The play between Burgess the defector and Burgess the homosexual is made explicit in an earlier scene in the film, when Coral Browne compares spying for the Soviet Union with cruising in public toilets: she tells Burgess that she does not see his activity as a secret agent as being any worse than getting caught in a public lavatory, as it often happens to her fellow-actors. As the film's guiding subjectivity, Browne here sanctions the equation between the persecution and vilification of Soviet spies with that of gay men; in so doing, she precedes the discourse at the basis of *Another Country*, which posits such a close relation between homosexuality and spying as leaving almost no distance between them. Through their revisionist stance, the films depict Burgess's sexuality in unqualifiedly positive terms; nevertheless, the link between gay and spy identities finds a parallel in popular views of the Cambridge Spies, which are hostile and homophobic. Andrew Sinclair expresses a common perception when he states: 'homosexuality did not turn a Cambridge intellectual towards the clandestinity and hidden power game of Communism, but it helped' (1986: 41). John Fisher, in his book on Burgess and Maclean, comments on the 'positive vetting' required to eliminate spies from the British government: 'to get to know and report any serious failings such as drunkenness, financial instability, addiction to drugs, untruthfulness, homosexuality' (Fisher 1977: 235). Robert Cecil, after mentioning Maclean's alleged repressed homosexuality, reflects on how the defection of Burgess and Maclean 'finally drove home the lesson that a deviation in one direction may indicate deviation in another' (Cecil 1989: 110–11). An especially remarkable point here is the effort to homosexualize Maclean, a married man, and father of three children; the doubts regards his sexuality rest entirely on the opinion of a psychiatrist, who treated him for a nervous breakdown in 1950. There is not a shred of evidence confirming the doctor's 'diagnosis', but even if there was, its relevance to issues of ideology and betrayal is non-existent. Yet the notion that the Cambridge Spies were essentially a secret gay organization has been strenuously put forward; Andrew Sinclair describes Maclean as 'bisexual', and declares: 'homosexuality, indeed, reinforced the closeness of the Communist conspiracy' (Sinclair 1986: 40–41). But the most clamorous attempt to insert the Spies in a gay narrative concerns Kim Philby. Philby was, to all accounts, rampantly heterosexual, with the reputation of a womanizer: he married several times, and had a notorious affair with Maclean's wife, who left her husband for him. The temptation to see Philby as a closet homosexual, however, has proved irresistible to many, including the spy-obsessed author John Le Carré, who confidently proclaimed in an interview: '[Philby] hid his homosexuality'. To the question 'did you know Philby?' he replied 'never, and I always detested him' (Biagi 2000). Incidentally, the fifth Cambridge Spy, John Cairncross, was also heterosexual, and had a varied love life, spending his last years in happy cohabitation with a much younger woman. Why should the Spies' sexuality be of any interest to their critics, as well as to their defenders? Considering the Spies' detractors first, I would argue that notions of gay men as essentially deviant and alien provide a reassuring explanation for the Spies' very existence. By linking political betrayal to something perceived as an aberration, the Spies' inherent threat can be confined to a sphere that is comfortably 'other'. The leap from homosexual to enemy agent is implicitly supported by the idea of gay men as leading a double life: the resulting image is underpinned by a discourse of deceit and performance, aided by the popular association of homosexuality with camp. As Jack Babuscio has written, camp is

linked to 'the notion of life-as-theatre, being versus role-playing, reality and appearance' and to 'a heightened awareness and appreciation for disguise' (1977: 40–57). In this respect, it is interesting to compare representations of the Cambridge spies with those of 'good' spies, that is to say with spies working for 'us' rather than for 'them': these are exemplified by James Bond, a champion of heterosexual virility, whose skills at disguise and role-playing are meant to serve the 'truth', and not to enhance a lie.

A different operation takes place in *Another Country* and *An Englishman Abroad*. Here homosexuality is again centralized, but rather than assist the distancing of the protagonist from the 'norm', it achieves the opposite effect: camp functions this time as a means to defuse ideology, within the boundaries of a sympathetic representation. The films are thus able to reclaim Burgess by camping up his sexuality and then use it as a normalizing factor, just as his English roots are given the heritage treatment, to prove his ultimate harmlessness and belonging. Represented as an endearing and frivolous queen, the protagonist is stripped of threatening connotations, and placed in a dominant national narrative that negates ideology, but includes homosexuality. Burgess's resulting portrayal also fits certain expectations of what English upper-class men should do and be like: not do very much at all, be frivolous and unintellectual, and have a propensity for liking boys. To understand how Burgess the homosexual becomes an ideology-free character, it is necessary to consider some of the implications of camp. Although the subject of an ongoing debate, the concept of camp has been given some basic definition by cultural historians: in its essence, it has been seen as constituted by 'irony, aestheticism, theatricality and humour' (Babuscio 2004: 122). For the purpose of this analysis, aestheticism and theatricality are keywords: they point to a privileging of style over substance, and to a preoccupation with performance. Indeed, Richard Dyer explains camp as 'a way of prising the form of something away from its content, of revelling in the style while dismissing the content as trivial' (2002: 52); Jack Babuscio talks of the 'theatricalisation of experience', specifying 'what the character conveys tends to be less important than how or why it is conveyed' (2004: 126). To apply these definitions to the films under discussion is to immediately see how their representation of Guy Burgess relies on his camp portrayal to trivialize his ideology. The protagonist of *Another Country* is a vain, frivolous creature, who prefers fashion to history lessons, and who is ready to join systems of oppression on the strength of their stylish waistcoats; such a character could never be expected to read *Das Kapital*, and his constitutional disinclination to do so is already implicit in his looks and mannerism. That is why Guy's association with Tommy the Marxist is one of friendship, as opposed to kinship: they are divided by camp, by a diametrically opposed attitude towards style and content. Guy's deeper affinity is with the beautiful James (Cary Elwes), the young man he is infatuated with; in a broader sense, Guy is 'naturally' linked to the other gay students, all languid and fashion conscious, all equally uninterested in intellectual pursuits, let alone political theory. The film constructs gay identity as synonymous with camp, and thus drastically reduces its possibilities; the addition to this of heritage aesthetics completes the elision of Burgess's ideological side. As for *An Englishman Abroad*, one could say that camp aestheticism motivates the narrative: without Burgess's longing for the perfect Jermyn Street suit there would be no film. But camp defines the film's protagonist in other ways too: his preoccupation with his appearance goes beyond the desire for new clothes, as when he steals face powder from Coral Browne's dressing room, in

an attempt to revive his fading looks. Burgess's sadness and homesickness in Russia is articulated through a deep need for shallow pleasures: when trying to explain his loneliness, Burgess refers to the lack of 'gossip' in Moscow, berating the 'comrades' for their scarce interest in it. He also rejects the idea of socializing with Donald Maclean on the grounds that he is 'too serious'.

Burgess's strategy to deal with his situation is to focus on surface rather than on substance: if only he could get a new suit, if only he could have a good gossip, he would not be so desolate. These desires and frustrations are invariably expressed with self-deprecating humour and wit, making light of an already light matter that, however, belies a most serious predicament. This is typical camp tactics: as Richard Dyer observes, 'it's a form of self-defence' [...] particularly in the past – the fact that gay men could so sharply and brightly make fun of themselves meant that the real awfulness of their situation could be kept at bay' (2002: 49). In *An Englishman Abroad*, Burgess's behaviour certainly elicits sympathy from the audience, who remain under no illusion about the protagonist's plight: at the same time, however, the magnification of triviality in the film defines its protagonist, making him incompatible with the rigour and severity required by whole-hearted ideological commitment. The same process takes place in *Another Country*. This relegation of gay men to the margins of political history is consistent with conventional views of homosexuality, which are also dependent on the strength of camp associations. According to Richard Dyer, the professions traditionally linked to gay men are all about style rather than content: hairdressing, fashion design, interior decoration, ballet and so on: this has reinforced 'the image of gay men as decadent, marginal, frivolous – above all, not involved in the real production of wealth [...] just sterile parasites on the edge' (2002: 52). Likewise, gay men have not been seen as involved in the real production of ideology, and of those policies and operations having a factual impact on history, which underpin ideologies and their application. At this point, a reasonable objection would be to argue that camp is potentially a subversive element, as it disrupts conventional standards of masculinity: this is true, however, only if the context in which camp takes place is ripe to be subverted by it. When gay men are actually expected to be camp, and when camp is linked a priori with a set of essentially negative, diminishing traits, any potential subversion is neutralized from the start. A camp James Bond would indeed be subversive: a camp Guy Burgess is not. In the two films discussed here, camp helps to achieve the normalization of the protagonist, facilitating the dismissal of his radical ideology, which was extreme both in theory and practice. Once again, this article does not contend that the real Guy Burgess was not, or could not, be camp; the real issue lies elsewhere. What matters is that by letting camp dominate his representation, the films distort Burgess's image, making it compatible with the safe national narratives of heritage cinema. This is achieved not through camp itself, but through its established associations and implications. As to why there should be a need to reclaim Guy Burgess as part of a cherished English tradition, this article can only suggest the need for further study, and for research on the key issues of English identity and English politics.

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### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Elisabetta Girelli is a Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of St Andrews. She is the author of *Beauty and the Beast: Italianness in British Cinema*, and of various articles on British and European cinema. She is currently writing a monograph on the actor Montgomery Clift.

Contact: University of St Andrews, Department of Film Studies, 99 North Street, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9AD, UK.  
E-mail: [eg51@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:eg51@st-andrews.ac.uk)

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# Choreographic Practices

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## Editors

**Vida L. Midgelow**

[vida.midgelow@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:vida.midgelow@northampton.ac.uk)

**Jane M. Bacon**

[jane.bacon@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:jane.bacon@northampton.ac.uk)

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