

fiction



SPOOKED

PETER WARNER'S NOVEL TAKES ON COLD WAR SPY GAMES

by Nancie Clare

Would you know a spy if you met one? It's a question that author Peter Warner (ARTS '64) first confronted decades ago after an unassuming friend revealed, during a casual stroll through Frankfurt, that he'd been stationed there with the CIA starting in 1949. "He's a very brilliant man, an editor and novelist who, as a child, was a piano prodigy," Warner recalls. "For all those reasons, he seemed to be the most unlikely spy." But then Warner realized, it was precisely because of those qualities that his pal "could hide in plain sight."

In that moment the idea for Warner's sly new novel began to germinate. *The Mole: The Cold War Memoir of Winston Bates* (Thomas Dunne) follows the titular Bates, a failed poet languishing in post-WWII Paris when he is recruited by his motherland, Canada, to spy

on the United States. Bates moves to Washington, D.C., becomes an American citizen, and ascends the ranks of a shadowy boys' club of intrigue and espionage.

Crafted as a memoir complete with archival photos, footnotes, and an index, *The Mole* serves as an alternative history, in which "events stay the same, but the reasons things happen is changed," Warner says. Bates throws back martinis and hurls gossip with key historical figures, from superlawyer Roy Cohn to President John F. Kennedy on his inauguration night. And because of his access to power, the accidental agent, often haplessly, meddles in such monumental events as the Suez Canal crisis, the U-2 spy plane incident, and the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

One of the book's most intriguing ironies is that Bates, who is told when he's recruited that he will be watched and contacted only when necessary, is unclear

THE AUTHOR'S SECOND NOVEL PRESUPPOSES (CORRECTLY) THAT ALLIES SPY ON ONE ANOTHER.

of what to do with the intel he gathers. He knows that he's working for the Canadians, and \$500 shows up in a bank account every month, but that's about as far as his James Bond playbook goes.

Not that our protagonist is overly concerned. "He's doing it for himself," Warner explains. "He has almost no political ideology. He has plenty of opinions, but you can't say he's left wing or right wing. Nor is he motivated by a patriotic love of Canada."

Our easygoing neighbor to the north has been of interest to Warner for nearly half a century. "Because of my age, I could have been Canadian," Warner says. "I was vulnerable to the draft during the Vietnam War and, like many people, had a sense of, 'Okay, if it comes to that, shall I go there?'" Warner, whose father earned his PhD at NYU and taught biochemistry at the medical school, escaped the fate of trading his greenbacks for loonies. Still, he thought, What if my life had taken that turn?

The question of selfness is also prevalent in *The Mole*. "Bates is half-Jewish, half-Christian, half-Canadian, half-American, and somewhat sexually ambiguous," Warner notes. "So that was another reason for featuring Canada. [Canadians'] idea of identity has always been a slightly fraught issue."

Warner began researching and fitfully writing the novel in the 1980s, while president of Thames and Hudson, the illustrated book publishing company. He finished only after retiring, so the fact that the topic of friends *without* privacy benefits has dominated recent headlines (think Barack Obama and Angela Merkel) is a happy coincidence. "I didn't plan it," Warner says with a laugh. "It all happened quite by chance, considering how long ago I started this book. But I've always assumed that allies spy on each other." ■

PHOTO © NOOM KITAVARAK

reference

A Reading From *The Book of Jezebel*

Embedded in the press release for this two-and-a-half-pound behemoth is the phrase "broad influence"—a copywriter's sly pun or unconscious double entendre. Either way, it's true, because the website that spawned this encyclopedia volume, printed by Grand Central Publishing, is inarguably among the most significant platforms for feminist debate of our time. That has everything to do with founding editor Anna

Holmes (CAS '95), who, from the first posts in 2007, deftly balanced political and pop cultural content, scrutinizing how women are represented in Washington, Hollywood, and beyond. Empirically and subjectively, more than 1,000 XX-friendly topics are covered in this magnum opus, ranging from "legitimate rape" to "Lemon, Liz."

Singularly encapsulating both the tome's genius and the blog's power is the entry "Baio, Scott." When screen grabs of

Chachi's far right tweets—opining on abortion, welfare, and immigration—appeared on Jezebel.com, it unleashed a blitzkrieg of negative comments that had Baio retorting "adopt another cat or butt lick someone else." His response seems downright magnanimous compared to his wife's two cents, which garnered headlines nationwide, elicited a denunciation from GLAAD, and inspired meaningful discourse on the intersection of homophobia, First Amendment rights, celebrity, and social media. The blog, book, and brand prove that what initially seems prosaic can, indeed, result in broad influence.

—Helly Guerre

Here are two more A to Z (or rather, A and Z) entries from *The Book of Jezebel: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Lady Things*:

ADDERALL

Miracle drug used to treat ADHD and narcolepsy that enables users to sit at their desks getting Tiger Mom-approved quantities of work accomplished and losing five to 10 pounds *at the same time*. (So long as they don't mind the accompanying hand tremors, dramatic gum erosion, sometime compulsion to masturbate, occasional bloody shits, hopeless addiction, and moderate-to-severe acne eruptions on highly improbable areas of the body, like eyelids.)

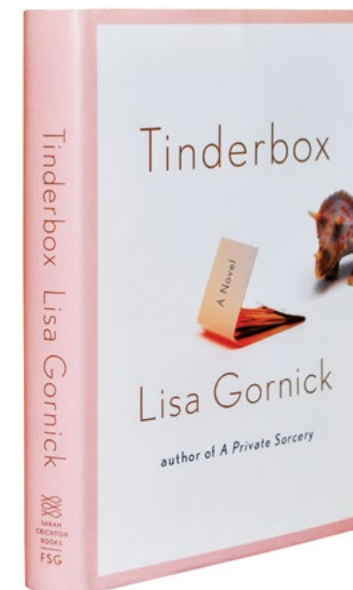
ZYGOTE

Too young to be a slut, so way more entitled to civil rights than you are.

—Nicole Pezold

bibliofile

TINDERBOX (SARAH CRICHTON BOOKS/FSG) LISA GORNICK GSAS '97



In Lisa Gornick's second novel, a town house on Manhattan's Upper West Side combusts when the festering dysfunctions of one family are finally exposed. Dr. Myra Gold, a placid psychotherapist, warily opens her home to her grown son, Adam, a sometime filmmaker of B Westerns, his overworked dermatologist wife, Rachida, and their precocious 6-year-old son, Omar. Add to the kindling Myra's dutiful, binge-eating daughter, Caro, and Eva, the Peruvian maid drawn to Judaism in an effort to assuage a childhood of abuse. All that's needed are the inevitable human sparks: misunderstanding, fear, pride, neglect, and betrayals—both small and large. A psychoanalyst herself, Gornick ably realizes her characters' inner lives in their untidy quest to love themselves and one another. But not all conflagrations leave lasting harm; like a controlled burn, this one clears the brush for a fresh start.



ANNA HOLMES WONDS WHY THE P IN "PATRIARCHY" SHOULDN'T BE AN M.

PHOTO © ANNA WOLF



■ illustration

# CARTOON CUT UP



In this era of celebrity chefs, genetically modified crops, and proposed 16-ounce soda bans, food is arguably more central to American culture—and more politicized—than ever

before. No art form comments on this phenomenon as immediately as the editorial cartoon. In *Eat Drink Vote: An Illustrated Guide to Food Politics* (Rodale), Marion Nestle, Paulette Goddard Profes-

sor in Steinhardt's department of nutrition, food studies, and public health, has amassed hundreds of contemporary cartoons that any future anthropologist studying our bewildering society would be hap-

py to discover. The best of them, such as this panel by Dan Piraro, viscerally convey the challenges we all face as we try to do right by our bodies and our planet.

—Ali Bahrapour

■ nonfiction

# VOICE OF AMERICA— AND PAKISTAN

JOURNALIST SHAHAN MUFTI EXPLAINS HIS TWO HOMES TO EACH OTHER

by Nancy Bilyeau

Behind every book is a personal story, but few authors have one as rich and far-reaching as Shahan Mufti, who since childhood has shuttled between Pakistan and the United States, and, since 2007, covered the former as a war correspondent. His debut book, *The Faithful Scribe: A Story of Islam, Pakistan, Family, and War* (Other Press), is part memoir, part social studies lesson.

It begins in Lahore in 1971, with his parents' arranged marriage. On the eve of the wedding, India joined the war that would divide Bangladesh from Pakistan, and distant explosions sounded off during the festivities. From this joyous and violent occasion, Mufti (GSAS '09) weaves together his family's and nation's stories, laying out the recent past—such as Pakistan's 1956 founding as the first Islamic Republic—and the ancient dynasties that continue to impress upon the region. (One of Mufti's more fascinating discoveries is a family tree written by an ancestor who traces his clan back 14 centuries to the inner circle of Muhammad.) The result is an insightful, suspenseful read that asks hard questions of both Pakistan and the United States, and has won him high praise: *The New Yorker* singled out his "talent for

explaining the political through the personal."

Mufti, who has written for *Harper's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The New York Times Magazine*, as well as this magazine, and teaches journalism at the University of Richmond, recently spoke with us.

**DID YOU EVER CONSIDER WRITING THIS BOOK WITHOUT INSERTING YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY?**

Actually, the family did come later. I knew I had a certain perspective on this that not everybody shared, which was being between



MUFTI'S MEMOIR ADDRESSES THE OFT-ASKED QUESTION: WHY IS PAKISTAN SUCH A QUAGMIRE?

these two worlds, Pakistan and the U.S. As a narrative journalist, I did feel strongly that I needed characters to tell the story. But I didn't think at first that the characters would be my family members.

**WHAT WAS THEIR REACTION TO THE BOOK?**

My parents read it. Everyone is pleased. I haven't alienated anybody, which was difficult, because I was trying to be very truthful about what I thought. Not everyone in my family in Pakistan can read English—I hope it is translated one day. It would be interesting to see the reaction there to the book. The stuff I've laid out is not necessarily stuff that has been said in Pakistan.

**WERE YOU DRIVEN BY A SENSE OF URGENCY TO TELL THE STORY NOW?**

I was frustrated as a writer, because there are huge problems with the way war is covered. The humanness of war is very hard to capture. We have so much information as Americans about the war—just look at WikiLeaks—and we have no understanding of what war is, still. I think it was that desire to translate the reality and the understanding of war and this other place that is so large in our imagination—*Pakistan*—and it wasn't just giving information about who's the new leader of the new militant group. That is not going to lead us to peace or to anywhere useful even. What is going to lead us [someplace useful] is understanding.

**ARE YOU HOPEFUL THAT READING YOUR BOOK WILL LEAD TO GREATER UNDERSTANDING?**

Of all these Muslim countries, Pakistan is the one that America should be able to understand pretty well. [It's] a country that began in idealism and came out of a colonial period, [with] an Islamic Constitution written in English by Anglophiles. This shouldn't be the hardest country to crack. ■