Our discussion about this novel opened with the observation that le Carré has not received the critical acclaim that his writing deserves and we agreed that his work is high-class and compelling. *The Night Manager* is written in his usual spy-thriller mode, with lots of double-dealing and intrigue.

We all found the plot fairly complicated, but le Carré is a master of characterisation, and the colourful dialogue and action-packed plot carry the reader along. It was noted that, although written in the 1980s, the novel still held up in terms of suspense. We agreed that Pine is a fascinating character, with his innumerable skills (languages, cooking, climbing, sailing etc), guilt about aspects of his past and a ruthlessness that matches that of Roper, the arms dealer he is hired to trap. His character is only slowly revealed as we learn of his time in the army, an incident that occurred during the Troubles in Northern Ireland that still haunts him, and his feeling of betrayal by the intelligence services when he passed on to them the first proof of illegal arms-dealing by Roper, known to the intelligence services as “the worst man in the world”.

Other characters who are well drawn include Roper’s main “sidekick”, Corcoran, aka Corky, the blunt Yorkshireman, Burr, who recruits Pine and, of course, Roper’s girlfriend, Jed.

The plot ranges across many parts of the globe, and all are vividly painted by the author. Our discussion about the book concluded with a recommendation to read more of le Carré’s work, especially as he has, in more recent novels, portrayed other murky worlds such as that of the major pharmaceutical companies and their dubious practices in *The Constant Gardener*.

After discussing the novel we then compared it with the TV adaptation shown as we were reading it, and which has several major differences from the book. Some changes were deliberately chosen to make the plot more relevant to today, some were due to financial constraints, and some to circumstances beyond the programme-makers’ control. The original plot involved the illegal purchase and sale of arms and drugs in Central and South America, but was updated to the illegal selling of heavy weaponry to various factions in the current Middle Eastern crisis. In order to remain within the (already hugely costly) budget, the exotic locations in the Bahamas and on Roper’s luxury yacht were replaced with several stunning villas, beaches and hotels in Majorca.

In the TV adaptation, Burr is transformed into a female spy-master, Angela Burr. We agreed that the inclusion of a powerful female character was essential for today’s viewers, who would not be happy to see all power in the hands of white, middle class men. However, her pregnancy was not part of the plan! Olivia Coleman, chosen to play Burr, announced just five weeks before shooting began that she was pregnant, but Bier was keen to continue with her; she felt that a “combination of strength and vulnerability adds to a character”. Most of the screen characters reflect perfectly those in the book, apart from Roper’s girlfriend Jed; the TV version’s blonde American, who is the mother of a young son left behind with his grandmother, is also, perhaps, a more modern interpretation of le Carré’s horse-loving “equestrienne”, a Sloane-ranger figure with long, chestnut locks and “an IQ of 55 on a sunny day” in Pine’s sardonic assessment.