

FOREWORD

If I was asked by my great-grandchild to name the best book depicting the life in the Cold War years of, in that order, a gentleman-adventurer-foreign correspondent – values, manners, political and social prejudices, not to mention dress, drinks and ways with women – my choice unquestionably would be *The Man Who Knew Everything* by Tom Stacey who, in order to paint an authentic picture, had only to look into the mirror, or, better still, search his own soul. For Tom Stacey, who has been a friend of mine for sixty or more years, was, and in my memory very much still is, the very embodiment of that genre of wild card journalist – at once anarchic and conventional; subversive and patriotic, seedy and stylish – which he catches so memorably in Granville Jones, the hero, or anti-hero, of this tale, worthy of Conrad and Buchan.

Such characters are now, sad to say, an extinct species; there is little glamour left in contemporary journalism. Today's embedded war correspondents are almost as much under military discipline as private soldiers. As for foreign correspondents glued to their laptops, they too tend increasingly to be at the beck and call of corporate managers back in London interested only in the bottom line. Instead, overpaid celebrity TV journalists have taken their place. Alas, nothing chivalric about them.

Which is precisely why the reappearance of this book, first published (as *Deadline*) in the 1980s, is so important. For just as John le Carré chronicled for all time the Cold War life of the spy, as it really was, so Tom Stacey, in *Deadline*, does the same, in equally vivid prose, for the foreign correspondent, the only difference being that whereas le Carré, a little uncharitably, highlights the dark side, Stacey very romantically gilds the lily. Only in one respect do I think my old friend goes over the top and this is when he implies that for the journalist, meeting a deadline is somehow or other a sacred duty, on a par with the importance given by Graham Greene in his novels to his hero's Roman Catholicism. Of course journalists want to be

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first with the news, just as a jockey wants to be first past the winning post. But there is nothing mystical or mumbo-jumboish about that; just the old Adam of a competitive spirit.

It is also sad that Stacey should feel the need to introduce a major love interest to the novel. In my recollection femmes fatales, or femmes anything else, played a very minor role in old Fleet Street. Alcohol, not women, the bottle rather than the bed, were what kept us going. Indeed women, in the form of wives and mistresses – not to mention debts, domesticity and every other kind of drudgery – were what most of us were escaping from. I don't think that my old friend quite does justice to the all-importance of freedom to the old time journalist he so lovingly describes; freedom from roots, freedom from office life, freedom from boredom, freedom from the constraints and conformities of belonging to any one community, and above all, freedom from the scholarly disciplines which require respect for the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

These small cavils aside, let me wholeheartedly praise this marvellously readable old classic. For my generation it is a heart-warming trip down memory lane, to a period, not so long ago, when English journalists, like English politicians and soldiers, could still make history. For the younger generation, however, it is something even more precious: the best glimpse they are likely to have of an age that has vanished for ever.

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