

## A letter from John LeCarré

Oct 18, 2011 04:23

### Cinema North West Adaptation Festival 2011

Dear Friends,

Thank you for giving time to the screen versions of my novels. I'm sorry I can't be with you but thanks not least to the success of Tinker Tailor, I've become a bit of a moving target. Now I have to tell you, you are in for a mixed bag. In principle, unlike some writers, I like my work to be adapted. The first and most obvious reason is that film and television reach an audience few writers can dream of. A whole lot of people go through life without reading a single novel, others might not think of reading my work if they hadn't first seen it on the screen.

The second reason is more personal. I find it thrilling when a skilled film-maker is inspired by my work to translate it into his own medium. He takes the germ of the idea, and the characters, and the story, and lets it infect him. He assembles his army of technicians and artists and players, and sets out on his march. And now and then, something wonderful happens. We don't get the film of the book. We get the film of the film. We get the miracle of a full realisation in a different, sovereign art form with its own disciplines and values.

The average reader addressing a full-length novel will give it his creative attention for as much as fifteen or maybe even thirty hours. The same person sitting in the audience at the cinema needs a good reason why the story is not realised for him in two. The art of telling stories in pictures is plain - as the Russians say - to a hedgehog. You never speak it if you can show it. Words give way to images. So in that sense, the novel and the film are from the start at odds with one another.

I have been very lucky, and also at times deeply disappointed with the translation of my work from book to film. You will choose for yourselves the high points and the low. For me, the landscape is pretty clear. There are four peaks, some foot-hills, and some pretty awful wasteland. My peaks, in chronological order, are The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, the television adaptations of Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy and Smiley's People, The Constant Gardener, and the recently released movie of Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy.

Of all of them, I suspect that the last will endure, despite its seeming complexity, as the most artistically satisfying, the most accomplished and the most daring. But this isn't a beauty contest. It's your choice, not mine. And if other adaptations of my work please you more than they do me, I can only be happy. Each production, whatever its merits, has received the devoted attention of gifted artists and technicians who have given their hearts to the project. And it's more than possible that, where an adaptation has failed, the original novel has failed the adaptation.

Thank you again for being here. I wish you a lot of pleasure, and a lot of boisterous argument.

John le Carré, October 2011.



# ADAPTATION

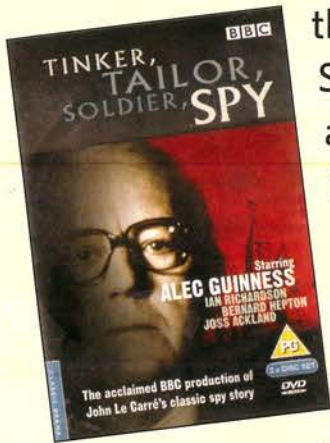
Jo Lewis

**Adaptation**, the only festival of cinema and literature in Ireland or Britain took place in Dromahair for its sixth year this October.

This year the organisers: Cinema North West chose to celebrate the work of John le Carré and the many screen versions of his best-selling novels. With



the recent release of the highly acclaimed new 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy' movie bringing le Carré to a whole new audience, this was a highly pertinent choice for this year's film festival.



The Adaptation weekend was a retrospective of rare television, feature films and talks by writers and directors. Showcasing six le Carré adaptations this festival provided unique insights into the process of adaptation. The weekend began with a unique presentation by **John Irvin, Director**

of the **BBC TV** adaptation of 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy', and was followed by a packed schedule of talks, events and screenings. A highlight on Saturday was the showing of 'The Russia House', followed by a talk from **Jeremy Howe, head of drama for BBC Radio 4** who gave a fascinating account of the story behind making 'The Complete Smiley' series, and the character that is central to le Carré's work.

Continuing the Cold War theme and Cinema North West's commitment to linking in with the local community, a panel of expat Germans were invited to relate their real-life experiences of growing up in both East and West Germany. This provided a fascinating discussion and a very real context for the rest of the screenings.

A hugely successful weekend with a great mix of screenings, workshops, discussions and a unique opportunity to meet and mix with the key players in the making of le Carré adaptations. We look forward to next year.

[www.cinemanorthwest.ie](http://www.cinemanorthwest.ie)

