

# John le Carre

## Quotes

*Thinking, Literature, Writing, Book, War, People, Spy, Men, Political, Real,  
Mean, Lying, World, Hands, Home, Stories, Believe, Two, Age, Secret*

It's the oldest question of all, George. Who can spy on the spies?

~John le Carre

During the Cold War, we lived in coded times when it wasn't easy and there were shades of grey and ambiguity.

~John le Carre

A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.

~John le Carre

The only reward for love is the experience of loving.

~John le Carre

Let's all pretend to be someone else, and then perhaps we'll find out who we are.

~John le Carre

I think the greatest single enemy is the misuse of information, the perversion of truth in the hands of terribly skillful people.

~John le Carre

The cat sat on the mat is not a story. The cat sat on the other cat's mat is a story.

~John le Carre

I used to think it was clever to confuse comedy with tragedy. Now I wish I could distinguish them.

~John le Carre

Blackmail is more effective than bribery.

~John le Carre

A spy, like a writer, lives outside the mainstream population. He steals his experience through bribes and reconstructs it.

~John le Carre

A good man knows when to sacrifice himself, a bad man survives but loses his soul.

~John le Carre

Love is whatever you can still betray. Betrayal can only happen if you love.

~John le Carre

I had two experiences of criminality: one was my conman father, the other was teaching at Eton

~John le Carre

There is a terrible alienation in the ordinary man between what he is being told and what he secretly believes.

~John le Carre

People are very secretive - secret even from themselves.

~John le Carre

If there is one eternal truth of politics, it is that there are always a dozen good reasons for doing nothing.

~John le Carre

Once you've lived the inside-out world of espionage, you never shed it. It's a mentality, a double standard of existence.

~John le Carre

Completing a book, it's a little like having a baby.

~John le Carre

Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes.

~John le Carre

There is no such thing as a secure writer: every novel is an impossible mountain.

~John le Carre

The fact that you can only do a little is no excuse for doing nothing.

~John le Carre

Everyone who is not happy must be shot.

~John le Carre

There's one thing worse than change and that's the status quo.

~John le Carre

People who've had very unhappy childhoods are pretty good at inventing themselves. If nobody invents you for yourself, nothing is left but to invent yourself for others.

~John le Carre

A good writer can watch a cat pad across the street and know what it is to be pounced upon by a Bengal tiger.

~John le Carre

It struck him as a bit unfair that, at the age of eight, he should have manifested the same sense of solitude that haunted him at forty-three.

~John le Carre

By repetition, each lie becomes an irreversible fact upon which other lies are constructed.

~John le Carre

Writing is like walking in a deserted street. Out of the dust in the street you make a mud pie.

~John le Carre

The monsters of our childhood do not fade away, neither are they ever wholly monstrous.

~John le Carre

The more identities a man has, the more they express the person they conceal.

~John le Carre

Cheats, liars and criminals may resist every blandishment while respectable gentlemen have been moved to appalling treasons by watery cabbage in a departmental canteen.

~John le Carre

Sometimes we have to do a thing in order to find out the reason for it. Sometimes our actions are questions, not answers.

~John le Carre

For decades to come the spy world will continue to be the collective couch where the subconscious of each nation is confessed.

~John le Carre

Ideologies have no heart of their own. They're the whores and angels of our striving selves.

~John le Carre

The pharmaceutical corporations are engaged in the systematic corruption of the medical profession, country by country

~John le Carre

Tyranny is like the electric wiring in an old house. A tyrant dies, the new tyrant takes possession, and all he has to do is drop the switch.

~John le Carre

A committee is an animal with four back legs.

~John le Carre

But I think the real tension lies in the relationship between what you might call the pursuer and his quarry, whether it's the writer or the spy.

~John le Carre

I've never been able to write a book without one very strong character in my rucksack.

~John le Carre

I'm really a library man, or second-hand book man.

~John le Carre

He has the gift of quiet.

~John le Carre

I am still making order out of chaos by reinvention.

~John le Carre

The one thing you can bet is that spying is never over. Spying is like the wiring in this building: It's just a question of who takes it over and switches on the lights. It will go on and on and on.

~John le Carre

All men are born free: just not for long.

~John le Carre

Survival...is an infinite capacity for suspicion.

~John le Carre

The good pupils are often brilliant, and they keep you on your toes and take you to the limits of your knowledge. The worst pupils provide a unique insight into the criminal mind.

~John le Carre

I think bankers will always get away with whatever they can get away with.

~John le Carre

I don't think it is given to any of us to be impertinent to great religions with impunity.

~John le Carre

For better or worse, I've been involved in the description of political conflict.

~John le Carre

Why did I desert Labour? Total bloody disillusionment. The party was a corpse. It had no ideology, it became detached, old, spineless and needed to go.

~John le Carre

When the world is destroyed, it will be destroyed not by its madmen but by the sanity of its experts and the superior ignorance of its bureaucrats.

~John le Carre

Unfortunately it is the weak who destroy the strong.

~John le Carre

Without a pen in my hand I can't think.

~John le Carre

I think that all writers feel alienated. ... I know that I do. ... I still feel, as I think most creative people do, absolutely isolated.

~John le Carre

Give a man a car of his own and he leaves humility and common sense behind him in the garage.

~John le Carre

A lot of people see doubt as legitimate philosophical posture. They think of themselves in the middle, whereas of course really, they're nowhere.

~John le Carre

Elections are a Western jerk-off.

~John le Carre

...also took for granted that secret services were the only real measure of a nation's political health, the only real expression of its subconscious.

~John le Carre

The world of spying is my genre. My struggle is to demystify, to de-romanticise the spook world, but at the same time harness it as a good story.

~John le Carre

In every operation there is an above the line and a below the line. Above the line is what you do by the book. Below the line is how you do the job.

~John le Carre

It is also the pardonable vanity of lonely people everywhere to assume that they have no counterparts.

~John le Carre

Power expands through the distribution of secrecy.

~John le Carre



A good writer is an expert on nothing except himself. And on that subject, if he is wise, he holds his tongue.

~John le Carre

Yet it's not for want of future that I'm here, he thought. It's for want of a present.

~John le Carre

No problem exists in isolation, one must first reduce it to its basic components, then tackle each component in turn.

~John le Carre

Smiley was soaked to the skin and God as a punishment had removed all taxis from the face of London.

~John le Carre

You should have died when I killed you.

~John le Carre

Treason is very much a matter of habit, Smiley decided.

~John le Carre

Love means having something to betray.

~John le Carre

As our Governments spin, lie and lose their credibility, the electorate simply shrugs and looks the other way.

~John le Carre

After all, if you make your enemy look like a fool, you lose the justification for engaging him.

~John le Carre

There are some subjects that can only be tackled in fiction.

~John le Carre

A dead man is the worst enemy alive, I thought. You can't alter his power over you. You can't alter what you love or owe. And it's too late to ask him for his absolution. He has beaten you all ways.

~John le Carre

I think that where I've watched a movie go wrong, it's usually because the dread committee has been interfering with it.

~John le Carre

Each my book feels like my last book. And then I think, like a dedicated alcoholic, that one more won't do me any harm.

~John le Carre

Thank heaven, though, one of the few mistakes I haven't made is to talk about the unwritten book.

~John le Carre

In the hands of politicians grand designs achieve nothing but new forms of the old misery.

~John le Carre

There will be no war, but in the pursuit of principle no stone will be left standing.

~John le Carre

When a problem threatens to engulf you, there's nothing like irrelevant detail to keep your head above water.

~John le Carre

There is a big difference between fighting the cold war and fighting radical Islam. The rules have changed and we haven't.

~John le Carre

What else has a journalist to do these days, after all, but report life's miseries?

~John le Carre

I worked for MI6 in the Sixties, during the great witch-hunts, when the shared paranoia of the Cold War gripped the services.

~John le Carre

Home's where you go when you run out of homes.

~John le Carre

[My novels] introduce levels of intelligence ... moral doubt [and] self-doubt, which may not pertain [to real-world espionage].

~John le Carre

The Cold War was over long before it was officially declared dead.

~John le Carre

If you see the world as gloomily as I see it, the only thing to do is laugh or shoot yourself.

~John le Carre

It's a principle of mine to come into the story as late as possible, and to tell it as fast as you can.

~John le Carre

People like you should be stopped, Mr. Woodrow,' she mused aloud, with a puzzled shake of her wise head. 'You think you're solving the world's problems but actually you're the problem.

~John le Carre

My definition of a decent society is one that first of all takes care of its losers, and protects its weak.

~John le Carre

I mean, I'm in the business of storytelling, not message making.

~John le Carre

We lie to one another every day, in the sweetest way, often unconsciously. We dress ourselves and compose ourselves in order to present ourselves to one another.

~John le Carre

There are moments which are made up of too much stuff for them to be lived at the time they occur.

~John le Carre

I can't think of anybody worse to live with.

~John le Carre

The things that are done in the name of the shareholder are, to me, as terrifying as the things that are done - dare I say it - in the name of God.

~John le Carre

But there is a big difference in working for the West and working for a totalitarian state.

~John le Carre

When you're my age, you have the feeling sometimes that you're seeing the show come round again.

~John le Carre

I've always had difficulties with female characters.

~John le Carre

Jesus Christ only had twelve, you know, and one of them was a double.

~John le Carre

By the age of 9 or 10, I knew that I had to cut my own cloth and make my own way.

~John le Carre

It's easy to forget what intelligence consists of: luck and speculation. Here and there a windfall, here and there a scoop.

~John le Carre

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