



Rainy Street Stories: Reflections on Secret Wars, Espionage and Terrorism. By John William Davis, Huntsville, Alabama, Red Bike Publishing, 2013.

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***Rainy Street Stories: Reflections on Secret Wars, Espionage and Terrorism.* By John William Davis, Huntsville, Alabama, Red Bike Publishing, 2013, ISBN 978-1-936800-10-0, Pp. 169, hardcover, \$24.18, softcover, \$15.40**

This is an unusual and fascinating approach to the secret world of the professionals who carry on the work of intelligence and counterintelligence. John W. Davis has touched on a number of areas in his collection of stories, poems, and essays which deal with tradecraft, history, morality, and philosophy. Davis served as an Army Officer and as a Federal Civil Servant. He lived overseas and traveled extensively. In addition to dealing with terrorism and espionage as a counterintelligence officer, Davis has served as a linguist and a combat arms instructor. Over the course of his life and professional endeavors John William Davis has found himself in a position to experience more in life than most people. He also has obviously had the insight to see connections through history, and the personality to encourage people of different ages, backgrounds, and cultures to share their own life journeys. On the company web site, Red Bike Publishing is described as a niche company. Although the publisher has a number of offerings in the same general theme as *Rainy Street Stories*, it is unlikely another author has been able to give voice to the inner thoughts and conflicts of service with quite the same impact as Davis. As becomes evident in reading the collection of relatively short, but powerful selections, the pieces were written at different periods in time and show the deep thought that Davis put into each of his reflections.

This is not a spy thriller although individuals with a background in the author's world will recognize some brief reflections as tradecraft style episodes which may not be as apparent to the uninitiated reader. The purpose of these brief episodes is to highlight thoughts and emotions, not to describe in great detail the mechanics of a clandestine world. For example, "Pawns" deals with the required professional detachment to handle assets. In a somber manner the author reminds agents of the reasons why we must not fall in love with our sources. "Incident" briefly describes the sad consequences of trusting too much in the opposition. "All Ears" takes more space to give an excellent description of how collectors work in today's intelligence community. The available technology makes even more imperative the reasons why anyone with access to any sensitive information must always be alert and aware.

"Deception Magic" is one of the longer entries and uses a review of the principles of a magician's art and prominent historical examples to illustrate why any person who does not observe closely, then draw the correct conclusions from the observations, may be fooled as completely as a magician's audience; but with much more serious long term consequences. "Magic People" is a grim illustration

of this on a more recent level during the Cold War. Touching on one controversy from the War on Terror is the essay, “Torture Breaks Everyone...Including the Torturers.” In this example of the conflicts involving both duty and conscience in the clandestine world, the author looks at WWII examples. The apparently very successful interrogation techniques used in WWII are compared to the highly controversial approach used in the War on Terror. Davis emphasizes the impact different approaches have on the “good guys,” not only the consequences suffered by the “bad guys.”

The reflections are not really grouped by subject matter. The author and his family traveled extensively while abroad and a number of reflections deal with thoughts on the scenes and the people encountered in these journeys. “Remember Z-1557” describes a tour of one of the Nazi concentration camp sites at Flossenbug, and the impact it had on an older couple. The wife had survived the WWII camp at Flossenbug and all the horrific memories. The site has been turned into a park-like atmosphere, and the man and wife feared it was too easy to forget the death and misery. The happy park atmosphere only served to minimize the inhumanity of what had happened on that ground.

“Language and Propaganda” also deals with WWII history in describing the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, specifically in their skilled use of language and religious teachings and tradition to subtly draw people into the evil web. Thinking about this approach for general popular support reminds one of the terrorists’ attempts to tie their activities in our time to the religion of Islam and a “Holy” war. In a more uplifting essay on “God’s Grace and Schindler” Davis does a truly excellent job of illustrating how a human being with major flaws can rise in certain circumstances to fill a truly heroic role. Oscar Schindler’s story became well known following the Stephen Spielberg movie, *Schindler’s List*. This description is a reminder of how all human beings have some worth.

Certain works in this volume deal with much more recent events. “I Know Karate” is a heartfelt reflection on the murder of innocent children in the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting. The author points to some attitudes that allow such atrocities to develop in our current society. On a different note, the essay “Spy Conference” concerning an annual convention of professionals in Raleigh, North Carolina, is interesting for a number of reasons. The fact that such an annual convention even takes place may surprise many readers, even those professionals who live and work in the shadowy world of John William Davis. The descriptions of the easy exchanges which take place among participants is also surprising. “Veteran’s Day Reflection” is a timeless reminder of the debt we owe both our veterans and their families. It is not possible to spend too much time remembering the sacrifices of those who went before and those who serve

today. The families of those who took the oath to serve also are owed a debt by all of us, even though family members are not always recognized.

Pulitzer Prize winner Joey Kennedy is quoted on the front of the dust jacket for *Rainy Street Stories* describing the overall tone of the collected works as “that feeling of film noir.” That is an excellent and accurate description. It is probably impossible to accurately depict a collection of reflections after a career such as that of author John William Davis without delving into the dark and murky aspects of human existence. However, in the sixty-six reflections in this book the author has chosen to include some that do offer hope for the basic humanity of mankind. One uplifting reflection is titled “Dresden Arises” and deals with the WWII firebombing and destruction of Dresden, Germany. Davis paints a very hopeful picture of the reconstruction of the beauty and peace of the old city.

“Krakow’s Memorials” is a vivid description of a visit to a church literally built one stone at a time while the people lived under Communist domination. The description of Davis’ encounter with a young Irishman during this trip is inspirational. Reading this story it is easy to understand why the author chose to end this reflection with the words, “Whenever I’m lost, I’ll go to a church” (69). The last rainy street story or reflection in this collection is titled “Sarajevo Tale.” This is a powerful story of a man’s journey from despair to hope for the future. The message of humanity and hope in this story truly balances some of the darker side of many of the stories from the rainy streets.

A volume of 169 pages seems like an easy read. In this case it is not difficult to read each offering, some are less than a full page in length. The time consuming part for the discerning reader is in analyzing carefully the entries, and determining the impact on the reader’s personal philosophy and experience. All readers may not agree with all of John William Davis’ offerings, but those who think carefully about the reflections will be enriched by the effort. Neither spy thriller nor tradecraft handbook, this small volume is a valuable asset to professional and personal growth.

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