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# SINGLE SPIES

An Englishman Abroad  
A Question of Attribution

A Double-Bill  
by Alan Bennett

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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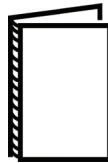


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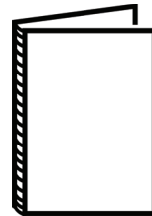
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Bennett was born in Leeds in 1934. After studying at Oxford University he collaborated as a writer and performer with Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller and Peter Cook in *Beyond the Fringe* in 1960 at the Edinburgh Festival.

He then turned to writing full time and produced his first stage play *Forty Years On* in 1968. His other plays include *Getting On*, *Habeas Corpus*, *The Old Country*, *The Lady in the Van*, *The Madness of George III* (together with the Oscar-nominated screenplay *The Madness of King George*), an adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and *The History Boys*. As well as many television plays such as *A Day Out*, *Sunset Across the Bay*, *A Woman of No Importance* and the series of monologues *Talking Heads* and *Talking Heads II*.

## **SINGLE SPIES**

First performed at the Royal National Theatre, London, on 1st December 1988 with the following cast:

### **An Englishman Abroad**

<b>CORAL</b>	Prunella Scales
<b>BURGESS</b>	Simon Callow
<b>TOLYA</b>	Paul Brightwell
<b>TAILOR</b>	Alan Bennett
<b>SHOP ASSISTANT</b>	Edward Halsted

Directed by Alan Bennett  
Designed by Bruno Santini

### **A Question of Attribution**

<b>BLUNT</b>	Alan Bennett
<b>RESTORER</b>	David Terence
<b>CHUBB</b>	Simon Callow
<b>PHILLIPS</b>	Crispin Redman
<b>COLIN</b>	Brett Fancy
<b>HMQ</b>	Prunella Scales

Directed by Simon Callow  
Designed by Bruno Santini  
Music by Dominic Muldowney

*Single Spies*, a Royal National Theatre Production, was first produced at the Royal National Theatre in December 1988 and then presented at the Queen's Theatre by Independent Theatrical Productions Ltd and Christopher Malcolm for Viva Productions Ltd.



**AN  
ENGLISHMAN  
ABROAD**

## **CHARACTERS**

**CORAL**

**BURGESS**

**TOLYA**

**TAILOR**

**SHOP ASSISTANT**

The action of the play takes place in Burgess's flat in Moscow

Time - 1958

*A projection screen hides the set. Right of the screen is a bentwood chair. The screen glows red and projected on it is the head of Stalin as we hear a record of Jack Buchanan singing “WHO STOLE MY HEART AWAY?”*

*The song fades as CORAL BROWNE enters right. She is a striking woman, tall and elegant, and carrying a luxurious fur coat. She looks up at the screen then speaks.*

**CORAL** Stalin died in nineteen fifty-three. *(She hangs her coat over the back of the chair)* I was in *Affairs of State* at the time, a light comedy that had a decent run at the Cambridge. Stalin had a decent run too, though I’d never been a fan of the old boy, even during the war when he was all the rage. It wasn’t so much the cult of personality that put me off (being in the theatre I’m no stranger to that); it was the moustache. One smiles, but more judgements than people care to admit are grounded in such trivialities, and when you’re just a fool of an actress like me you don’t mind coming out with it. After Uncle Joe’s death they played with the understudies for a bit, then brought in a cast of unknowns in something called *The Thaw*. Soviet experts in the West (what nowadays would be called “experienced Kremlin-watchers”) thought that this show was going to run and run, predicting—poor loves—that the Iron Curtain was about to go up and stay up. Ah well. *(She sits on the chair)* Incidentally, don’t let any of this deceive you into thinking I took any sort of interest in Soviet affairs. *(She takes gloves from her bag and puts them on)* Actresses are excused newspapers much as delicate boys used to be excused games; the only paper I see regularly is *The Stage*, and its coverage of the comings and goings in the Politburo is, to say the least, cursory. Still, there were repercussions, even on me. When peace breaks out suddenly, as it did then, culture is first on the menu,

actors and musicians sent in ahead of the statesmen like the infantry before the tanks. We had the Red Army Choir; they got the Stratford Memorial Theatre in *Hamlet*. Michael Redgrave was the eponymous prince, and notwithstanding I was scarcely five minutes older than he was, I played his mother.

*The lights cross-fade as:*

*Guy BURGESS enters left. He is in his early fifties, a man who has once been handsome but is now running to seed. His suit is well-cut but shabby, the knees of the trousers darned and darned again. He stands downstage left, smoking.*

**BURGESS** Hearing that Stalin had died one cheered up no end. It wasn't just that I was glad to see the back of the old bugger, though I was, but for the first time since I'd come to Moscow in nineteen fifty-one I found I'd something to do. Death always means work for somebody, and one was suddenly very busy reading the papers, monitoring news broadcasts, collating and analysing Western reactions to the Marshal's somewhat overdue departure. However, in no time at all they had him tucked in beside Lenin on Red Square, and life returned to what I had come to regard as normal. Doing *The Times* crossword, the *Statesman* competition, reading Trollope and Jane Austen. A gentleman of leisure. Of course the most accomplished exiles are and always have been the Russians. They're tutors in it practically. So, in a sense, we had come to the right place. What made it harder to bear was that no-one in what one couldn't help thinking of as the outside world actually knew we were here. For the first few years of our sojourn we were kept very much under wraps—no letters, no phone calls, nothing. It made Greta Garbo look gregarious. (*Stealthily looking round*) I say "we", meaning my colleague Maclean, with some diffidence. It's dispiriting to find oneself yoked permanently to someone who was never meant to be more than a travelling companion (besides having been a fellow-travelling companion, of

course). Now it was “we”, handcuffed together in the same personal pronoun. Quarantine or honeymoon, our period of probation ended when we were revealed to the world’s press in Moscow in nineteen fifty-six. After that, though we never exactly hit the cocktail party circuit and still had to mind our p’s and q’s, there was less—shall we say—skulking.

**BURGESS** *exits left, as the lights cross-fade to CORAL.*

*During the next speech, he goes into the kitchen area of the flat, taking off his jacket and putting it over a chair.*

**CORAL** Dissolve to my dressing-room in the Moscow Art Theatre one night after the performance. I am sitting there, applying the paint-stripper, when I hear a commotion next door. Suddenly Hamlet bursts in. Someone is being sick in his dressing-room, would I assist. (*She rises*) Now vomiting is not childbirth. If one is having a baby a helping hand is not unwelcome. If one is having a puke, one is best left alone to get on with it. Remembering always that nausea requires patience. One of the few lessons I have learned in life is that when one is sick it is always in threes. Judging by the state of the carpet this was a lesson this particular gentleman had yet to learn. When his face came out of the basin I found I knew it, though not by name. (*She puts on her coat*) The moment for introductions was long since past and Redgrave did not make them. I cleaned the man up, noting that he was English, he was upper class, and he was drunk. It was only later that night when a note was slipped under my door at the hotel that I found out he was also Guy Burgess. (*She takes a note from her coat pocket*) “Bring a tape measure.” Bring a tape measure?

*She exits right.*

*The motif of Stalin has faded from the screen and as we hear BURGESS singing the screen rises to reveal his very untidy flat. There is an easy chair, a sofa and a small table, several bookshelves filled to overflowing with books and papers (the books plainly English) and*

*at the rear of the flat a kitchenette. Through an alcove is a double bed, unmade and the sheets unwashed, and left is a pianola.*

**BURGESS** *is staring at the mirror in the kitchenette.*

**BURGESS** (*singing*)

OH GOD OUR HELP IN AGES PAST  
OUR HOPES FOR YEARS TO COME,  
OUR SHELTER FROM THE STORMY BLAST  
AND OUR ETERNAL HOME.

**BURGESS** *wanders in, shaving. He moves downstage to the table and takes a drink.*

BEFORE THE HILLS IN ORDER STOOD  
OR EARTH RECEIVED HER FRAME

*The doorbell rings. BURGESS reacts to the bell, putting his razor on the table, wiping soap off his face, throwing the towel and soap on the sofa, putting on his jacket and tying his tie, as...*

FROM EVERLASTING THOU ARE GOD—  
(*speaking*) It's open.

THROUGH ENDLESS YEARS THE SAME.

**BURGESS** *hurriedly clears some dirty clothes from a chair and as an afterthought flings the heaped contents of an ashtray under the sofa, as...*

**CORAL** *enters through the hallway upstage right.*

(*to CORAL*) Hallo.

**CORAL** (*puffed*) The stairs!

**BURGESS** I know. I'm sorry. Recover. What a splendid coat. Let me take it. (*He helps her off with her coat. He buries his face in the grand fur coat before dropping it, pretty unceremoniously, on the sofa*) Mmm. Have a drink.

CORAL Please.

BURGESS I've just been tidying up. (*He sweeps some stuff to the floor and removes his soap and towel*)

CORAL (*taking the soap*) One moment. My soap. This is my soap.

BURGESS It is. It is. Palmolive: for that schoolgirl complexion.

CORAL So it was you who took my cigarettes? (*She puts the soap back on the table*)

BURGESS One wasn't well.

*He hands her a glass, which she surreptitiously cleans on her skirt. He pours her a drink.*

CORAL My Scotch?

BURGESS (*smiling*) One should have asked.

CORAL You even took my face powder.

BURGESS I know. One is such a coward. Still. You came. I thought you'd chuck. (*He raises his glass in a toast*)

CORAL I nearly did. I seem to have trekked half-way across Moscow. Is there something in the Communist Manifesto against taxis? One never sees any. And that woman on the door downstairs!

BURGESS I know. How did you get past her?

CORAL (*sitting on the arm of the chair*) I gave her my lipstick.

BURGESS I can't think what she'll do with it. I'm always struck by her pronounced resemblance to the late Ernest Bevin. They could be sisters.

*There is a pause. They both drink.*

CORAL Did you enjoy the play?

BURGESS What play?

CORAL Our play. *Hamlet*.

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