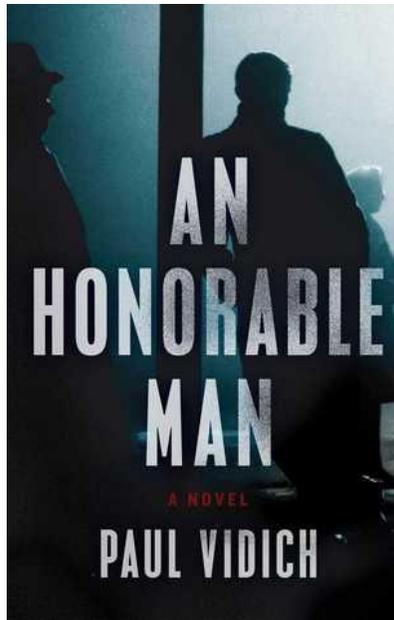


An Honorable Man

By Rod Fraser



AN HONORABLE MAN is an interesting spy story—albeit a first effort by its author, Paul Vidich. It was published when Vidich was sixty-six years of age. In my mind, this notes him as one of the 'late bloomers' of literature, along with Frank McCourt (age 66) and Raymond Chandler (age 51).

Of course, even Joseph Conrad had a full life as a mariner before publishing his first novel when he was thirty-eight years of age. And Millard Kaufman

probably wins the 'derby.' His first novel was published when he was ninety.

In so many ways, this is not surprising. People need life experience to write intelligent fiction and this does not come to most of us without the passage of years. As Vidich confides in an interview, "As a young man, I was too full of ambition, too impatient, too dishonest. When I did start to write more seriously, I was able to look back at a life—my life. I had lived a lot, and that helped give me perspective."

PAUL VIDICH RECEIVED an undergraduate degree from Wesleyan University and a MBA from the Wharton School. In his early years he had hoped to be a writer, but after he became a father, he focused on his business career, becoming a successful executive in the entertainment business.

At the age of 56, Vidich retired, enrolled in a MFA program at Rutgers and turned his mind to the world of letters. After *An Honorable Man* was published in 2016, his second novel—*The Good Assassin*—followed shortly thereafter in 2017.

AN HONORABLE MAN is an old-school spy novel set in Washington in the mid-1950s, at a time when Stalin's death had left a serious power vacuum in the Soviet Union. The 'Red Scare' was spreading fear

and concern throughout America, and the House Committee on Un-American activities was busy conducting its infamous hearings. The Cold War was being fought in earnest.

The intelligence agencies of the United States and Soviet Union were conducting undercover operations around the world, stealing state secrets, assassinating agents and hoping to undermine the morale and military capabilities of the other side.

THE NOVEL BEGINS with the revelation that a number of American undercover operations have been compromised and agents killed over the past year or so. The director of the CIA is convinced there is a 'mole' in their midst—code-named 'Protocol'.

A group of four senior operatives are charged with the responsibility for finding this traitor and they have drawn up a list of 20 possible candidates.

One of the four, George Mueller, is selected to find the mole. Mueller is experienced, a graduate of Yale, trusted by the director and has run operations in Eastern Europe in the past (including those in the war years). He is the perfect man for the job, except he is burnt out and uninterested. He wants to leave the agency and retire to a teaching position he has been promised.

The director persuades Mueller to stay on and see the job through. He is concerned the government will find out just how thoroughly Protocol has compromised CIA operations and he is desperate to avoid that embarrassment.

To keep the operation secret, Mueller is instructed to avoid cooperation with the FBI and find Protocol on his own. The plan is to approach a particular Soviet agent and attempt to persuade him—with money or by blackmail—to disclose the name of the double-agent.

But in the world of espionage, it is seldom clear whom to trust. Mueller becomes a suspect in the course of his own investigation and his future is placed in jeopardy. He must now catch Protocol or face the possibility of dismissal, disgrace or worse.

MANY WILL COMPARE this spy novel favourably to those written by John LeCarré. I agree with this assessment—all the more so when I read an interview given by Vidich, in which he said, "I greatly admire John Le Carré for his ability to disguise his literary works as spy novels." Quite so.

One of the charms of *An Honorable Man* is its compact size. It is only 278 pages. This is achieved by including only the material that is critical to develop the characters and move the plot along. It's a pity that more authors don't try to write a book of

this manageable size.

And finally I would like to comment on the mood of the book. The clothing, cigarettes, pipes, ash trays, culture of drinking, conversational patter and atmosphere—all have the feel of the early 1950s. Since I still have childhood memories of that period, I was pleased to be transported back in time. I hope that younger readers might use their imagination to do the same.

This is a wonderful book and I recommend you give it a try.

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