

A VERY BRITISH ENDING by Edward Wilson
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I do not usually read political novels, as it is not a subject that particularly interests me. However, after having the good fortune to meet and chat to Edward Wilson at Deal Noir last April, I decided to give his book a try. I was pleasantly surprised to find myself totally engrossed.

The main protagonist in the story is William Catesby, a member of the Secret Intelligence Service and MI6 top spy. Haunted by an SS atrocity at Oradour-sur-Glane in 1943, Catesby later catches up with the Nazi responsible for the massacre and secretly kills him in the ruins of a U-boat bunker. When the German turns out to be a CIA asset, being rat-lined by them to South America, Catesby finds himself on their hit list.

However, it transpires he is not the only object of America's displeasure. As a young cabinet minister, Harold Wilson sells Rolls Royce engines to the Russian government and is promptly labelled by certain members of the CIA as a spy for Russia. The CIA never welcomed Wilson as leader of the Labour Party and when he eventually becomes Prime Minister, and refuses to send troops to Vietnam, they begin a smear campaign against him.

While paranoia over 'Reds under the bed' continues in the UK, and suspicion over communist infiltration of the government runs amok, Harold Macmillan is alleged to have said: "*The government could save a lot of money by simply sending cabinet minutes and other secrets directly to Moscow and cutting out the middlemen.*"

As Catesby and Wilson's fates become ever more closely entwined, Catesby and his boss, Henry Bone, also find themselves pitted against a group of British plotters in high places, who are hell bent on overthrowing the Prime Minister by executing a *coup d'état*.

Described as the *Wolf Hall* of power games in modern Britain, *A Very British Ending* highlights the dark side of the Secret State on both sides of the Atlantic.

Edward Wilson has cleverly mixed fact with fiction in this novel, resulting in an intriguing political thriller. Although capable of ruthless acts, his main character, William Catesby, proves to have a vulnerable side. With his growing distaste of the career he has chosen to follow, along with his dysfunctional marriage, it is clear that Catesby is a reluctant secret service officer. His biggest desire is to have the security of a family and love, together with endless summers in Suffolk and France. However, despite being unable to fulfil either, he also knows exactly where his loyalty lies.

As with all good political fiction, this book offers an eye-opening 'behind the scenes' look at the way government and the security services operate, which is, at the same time, fascinating and disturbing. The reader learns so much more about how the world really works and the machinations of those in charge of us.

While I thoroughly enjoyed this novel – especially as I am old enough to remember the period covered – I did become confused with all the code names in the CIA log

entries, both in terms of their meaning and the characters referred to. As a result, I ended up skipping over them and just reading the messages at face value.

However, despite this, it did not spoil the overall thread of the story, or my enjoyment of it. *A Very British Ending* is a book well worth reading, and I would definitely recommend it.

Born in Baltimore but now a British citizen living in Suffolk, Edward Wilson has won much critical acclaim for his novels, focusing on espionage and the Cold War. His experience as a US Army Special Forces officer in Vietnam, lecturer and expat lends inside knowledge and authenticity to his stories.