

# The Salzburg Connection Short Guide

## The Salzburg Connection by Helen MacInnes

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## Characters

Bill Matthison is a typical MacInnes hero. A good-looking, intelligent American attorney in his early thirties, he is kind, gentle and lonely. He is ready for adventure, and he is ready to fall in love. On a seemingly ordinary legal assignment, he becomes involved with a murder victim's widow and a glamorous intelligence agent. He is mistaken for an intelligence agent himself, but with the help of genuine intelligence agents, his own quick-wittedness, and reserves of strength he did not know he possessed, he is able to protect his country, and win the woman he has grown to love. She is the attractive, wealthy, and resourceful Lynn Conway.

The Salzburg Connection contains interesting minor characters too. Elissa Lang, a Communist agent, is truly attracted to Matthison. Richard Bryant is an excellent amateur operative whose luck runs out on him. His wife, Anna Bryant, is a sympathetic victim of the conflicts between governments.

Zauner is an Austrian intelligence agent who has been forced to make a terrible choice and has suffered the consequence of his actions.



## Social Concerns

Possibly because she reached maturity in the 1930s when liberal values were so endangered, MacInnes was an implacable foe of political extremists.

In this novel, and in most of her early work, the villains are Nazis, but she also condemns Chinese Communists and those who would give aid and comfort to the Soviet Union. In an interview she said, "I'm against totalitarians in general — national or religious, extremists of the right or left. If I can be labeled anything, I am a Jeffersonian Democrat."

Her villains, even if they permit themselves some doubts, ultimately believe in their own goal, the destruction of freedom. Freedom is protected by American intelligence agents and their allies who never have doubts of the righteousness of their governments and their cause. These well-trained professionals are aided by intelligent amateurs who love their country and its ideals. MacInnes demonstrates her belief in the worth of the individual by showing how even the untrained citizen who is able and intelligent can help win the fight for freedom. She makes clear, too, that freedom always has its enemies and must be guarded constantly. Complacency, she makes clear to her readers, is dangerous.



# Techniques

MacInnes relies on sympathetic characters to entice her readers to follow her rather convoluted plots. Critics note that she is particularly good at feeding her readers information bit by bit, keeping their attention and whetting their interest. Her information is based on careful research and is said to be wholly accurate. Just as certain information is withheld from the readers, it takes a while before the main characters are able to distinguish their friends from their enemies. Meanwhile the reader worries about them until they learn to protect themselves and each other.

There is some violence, but it is not described graphically. Readers hear the explosions, but do not get too close a look at the bodies. The hero and the heroine are in danger, but they are never hurt. However, minor characters for whom the reader has come to care, do get hurt, even killed, generally through their own foolishness in not following the instructions of the hero or his allies.

Although there is a good deal of romantic activity in this novel, there is little sexual activity. MacInnes carefully establishes the fact that because Bill has had too many merely sexual encounters before the novel begins, he is thrilled at finding a woman with whom he has intellectual and spiritual affinity as well as a physical relationship.

MacInnes reserves her most graphic descriptions for the scenery. She describes a view of Salzburg from the castle: "On the black curve of river, the reflected gleam from the river was rippled by the strong currents." And if one walks down to the city from the castle, rather than taking the funicular, "it is always fun to see the domes and towers coming up to meet you."

MacInnes's novels join the conventional romantic navel with the adventure story of the espionage variety. She has taken love stories which might have been written by Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth or any number of minor but popular novelists and furnished them with the machinery of the thriller — airplanes, hidden microphones, revolvers. The idea of having the hero or heroine fall in love with the villain, before he or she understands the situation, may remind the reader of Jane Austen's novels in which such a situation often occurs.

As mysteries, her novels are reminiscent of those of Agatha Christie and Mary Roberts Rinehart in their substitution of romance and well-crafted writing for graphic depictions of violence. As adventure stories they owe something to Rudyard Kipling and Jack London, but MacInnes's heroes tend to be less ruggedly masculine and more sensitive and intelligent than the heroes created by those authors.

Politically, MacInnes's novels have been compared to those of Rebecca West and Arthur Koestler whose devotion to democratic principles and hatred of totalitarianism she shares.

# Themes

MacInnes has one principle theme: Liberty is always in danger. In this novel, Nazis wish to destabilize Western governments in order to ultimately regain power. They will stop at nothing to carry out their goals; the individual means nothing to them. They will murder, or commit any other crime, to achieve their goals because they believe fanatically in the destruction of individual liberties and the desirability of an "orderly" world under their control.

Another thread animating this novel is the possibility and the desirability of romantic love. One's true love may be difficult to identify at first; he or she may seem rather innocuous, while the person one thinks he or she loves may prove to be an enemy agent. However, all difficulties are resolved by the end of the novel and the reader is assured that the hero and heroine, despite the dangers they suffer, will marry and live happily ever after.

MacInnes also shows the reader what a beautiful and interesting world this is. This novel centers around the vicinity of Salzburg, the magnificent Austrian forests, lakes and mountains, as well as Salzburg itself, with its castle, picturesque monuments and old, narrow streets. Perhaps MacInnes is telling the reader that such a world must be saved from those who would destroy it.

# Adaptations

The Salzburg Connection was filmed in 1972 and by most accounts was judged an inferior production. Barry Newman plays an American lawyer on vacation who gets mixed up with Nazi spies, double agents, and a pretty girl (Anna Karina). Other films made from MacInnes novels include *Above Suspicion* (1943); *Assignment in Brittany* (1943); and *Venetian Affair* (1966).



## Related Titles

In *North from Rome* (1958), Bill Lammiter, a young playwright, becomes involved with a group of equally young Italians fighting a ring of narcotics dealers. His adventures begin when he helps a beautiful young lady escape from kidnappers. She turns out to be the sister of a young Italian aristocrat who has died of a drug overdose, and she is trying to trap the members of the gang who supplied him with drugs. The leader of the gang, Luigi, a count, turns out to be the fiance of Eleanor, Lammiter's former fiancée with whom he is still in love. Still worse, his drug activities are a pretext; he is a Communist agent really interested in engineering the Communist takeover of Italy and eventually the free world. Bill has a rendezvous with a former secret agent who is investigating the ring on his own, but the agent is murdered.

Luckily, the Italian government in the person of Giuseppe, a policeman disguised as a chauffeur, and Bevilacqua, a detective, have been attempting to monitor the situation. When Eleanor is kidnapped by Luigi, Bill and Giuseppe follow. Rosana, the woman Bill aided initially, has been able to reach Eleanor, who is being held prisoner in a Renaissance palace. Eleanor manages to escape and Luigi, knowing he will be captured, shoots himself. But Eleanor and Bill still must identify Evans, the leader of the plot to turn Italy Communist. After one more murder, of a leftist British journalist, and with little help from the professional intelligence agents of Great Britain and the United States, Eleanor does identify Evans and he is captured.

By this point, Eleanor realizes that it is Bill whom she loves. They will return to the United States to be married.

With them, the reader has toured Rome's piazzas and seen its fountains; he has visited the Via Veneto, the Spanish Steps, even the American Express office. He has also enjoyed the countryside and the small towns north of Rome, since it is not until everyone has reached Perugia that the malefactors are apprehended.

On the way, the reader has met Italian peasants and aristocrats as well as young American tourists. This gives MacInnes the opportunity to explain the customs of the peasants, the aristocrats and the tourists. Although the plot is fictional, of course, drug use among the Italian aristocracy and deaths from drug overdoses were often mentioned in the newspapers in the late 1950s.

*Decision at Delphi* (1960) focuses on Greek scenery and Greek guerrillas. A very nice American young man becomes involved with them, but after a murder, a kidnapping and other mysterious goings on, the situation is resolved.

*The Venetian Affair* (1963) affords the reader a tour of Venice; *Message from Malaga* (1971) takes the reader on a tour of Spain. *The Hidden Target* (1981) focuses on terrorist activity from Germany and the Netherlands to Iran, India, and Washington, D.C. In this novel, Robert Renwick establishes a company to fight international terrorism and he saves Nina from Erik, an anarchist who has his doubts about Communists but serves





their cause in order to strengthen his own. When the novel begins, he seems more than a standard villain because he almost falls in love with Nina, but he does not allow himself to do so.

Instead, he persuades her and a group of other innocent young people to travel across Greece to the Near East in a camper. He expects them to camouflage his establishment of a terrorist network. To keep them docile his fellow agents manage to get some of the young people addicted to narcotics.

The reader is concerned about Nina, but she is never in real danger. She is trailed by helpful Greek agents and although she is kidnapped at one point, the worst thing she is forced to do is to walk through the red-light district of Bombay.

Meanwhile, in Washington, her father's house has been invaded by an interior decorator who had been Robert's lover until he found out she is an agent for the "other side." Her goal is to use Nina's father to get access to the President in order to assassinate him.

Robert, of course, must prevent her from doing this.

The novel *Friends and Lovers* (1947) is a simple love story rather than an espionage novel and *Rest and Be Thankful* (1949) is a romantic novel combined with a parody of New York literary society. In *Rest and Be Thankful*, MacInnes attacks the left-leaning intellectuals who support what she considers to be the unintelligible in art and the unintelligent in politics. Two wealthy ladies buy a ranch and turn it into a writers' colony. Two uninvited critics turn up and make nuisances of themselves. One of the women falls in love with the former owner of the ranch and everything ends well. The locale of this book is Wyoming; MacInnes convinces the reader that it is worthwhile to put up with any inconvenience to enjoy the magnificence of its scenery and the friendliness of its people.



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