

# Book Review of a Very Limited Edition

by Malcolm Muggeridge

*A very limited edition indeed, published eight years ago—  
whose subject is the C.I.A.—  
yet for reasons unknown not widely noticed until now*

**T**he *Care of Devils* (by Sylvia Press; \$3.95, Beacon Press) first made its appearance in 1958, when it fell about as flat as a novel of its competence and topicality possibly can. This I find somewhat surprising in view of the fact that it provides, with a candor and authenticity I have not come across elsewhere, a blow-by-blow account of the interrogation of a suspected subversive in an American intelligence agency—clearly the C.I.A.—during the ill-omened McCarthy era. Apart from any other consideration, *The Care of Devils* would seem to me to be of major interest as documentation. It contains, for instance, the only first-hand description I have ever read of what it is like to be harnessed to the ridiculous polygraph, or lie-detector machine—a contraption so redolent of the particular imbecility of this age, with its obsessive belief that everything, including ultimately fornication, can be set up and operated mechanically. Considered just as fiction, *The Care of Devils* is no masterpiece, but well above the average of many novels which make a big stir in the women's clubs; as a piece of social history, I found it impressive—vivid, informative, and obviously sincere.

The dust jacket informs us that the authoress, Miss Sylvia Press, was "for many years an American intelligence officer here and abroad." It thus may be assumed that she and her heroine, Ellen Simon, are approximately one and the same person. Her novel obviously would not have been pleasing—in fact, highly distasteful—to the C.I.A. and its then boss, Allen Dulles, whose views on the necessity of confirming that intelligence officers remain "clean as a whistle" by means of regular interrogations, fortified by the use of the polygraph, have been stated publicly. The question naturally arises in one's mind, therefore, as to whether the Agency may not have taken a hand in ensuring that Miss Press's novel was kept off the bookstands. My own consciousness of the ineptitude and incompetence of publishers is such that I require no theory of outside interference to account for the failure of any novel. On the other hand, equally I know from experience that intelligence organizations are capable of any folly. As between the incompetence of publishers and the folly of intelligence organizations, I am neutral, and content myself with stating what seems to me to be incontrovertible—*viz.*, that Miss Press's novel deals with matters of great and, alas, continuing importance, in an interesting and, as far as one can judge, truthful manner, and that nonetheless it seems to have largely escaped the notice of booksellers, book buyers and reviewers alike.

In the last respect at least, I can belatedly try and mend matters. The story begins with the heroine, Ellen, at work in the Washington headquarters of the C.I.A. She is clearly a fairly senior and experienced officer, with an assistant of her own. She has worked overseas, we are given to understand, having been recruited into the Agency in the war years when it was the O.S.S. (Ah, those first O.S.S. arrivals in London! How well I remember them—arriving like *jeunes filles en fleur* straight from a finishing school, all fresh and innocent, to start work in our frowsty old intelligence brothel! All too soon they were ravished and corrupted, becoming indistinguishable from seasoned pros who had been in the game for a quarter of a century and more.) Ellen's current problem is to decide on the bona fides or otherwise of a defector from the Communists—a problem of whose complexity only those who have had to handle it will be aware; the truth being that the great majority of defectors are actuated by interested, rather than idealistic or

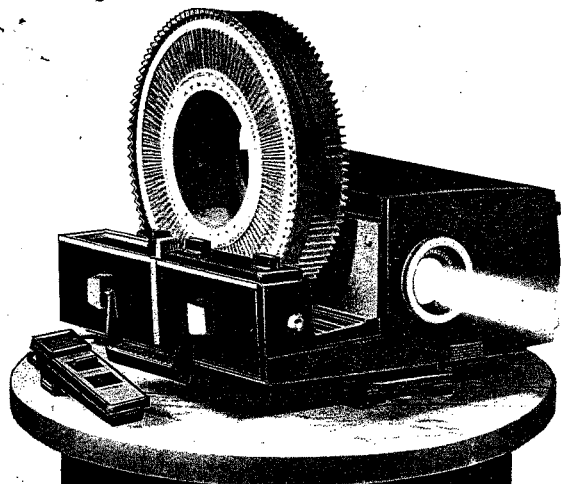


ideological, motives—money, a girl, that sort of thing—so that, as one is uneasily aware, should the balance of advantage swing the other way, they would be liable to redefect, and in that sense cannot ever be regarded as reliable.

Ellen is convinced—as it turns out, rightly—that her man is a phony, a point which crops up several times in the course of the narrative. The suggestion seems to be that Ellen's discovery of the man's phoniness is a point against her rather than for her; almost as though her superiors had a stake in his genuineness, resented his exposure, and took out their annoyance on Ellen. In the conditions of panic created by McCarthy in government agencies this is perfectly possible, especially if the defector in question had been somehow sponsored by the Wisconsin Senator's ribald entourage. Such situations, in any case, are all too liable to arise in intelligence organizations the world over, all of them being abnormally subject to internecine conflict. I know of a case in the war of a very valuable source of information remaining unused because the man who turned it up happened to be personally disliked by a senior officer at headquarters. Again, there is the case of Cicero, the British Ambassador in Ankara's valet, who extracted from the Embassy safe the full plans and order of battle for the invasion of France and sold them, as it turned out for counterfeit money, to the Abwehr. Himmler was so furious at a rival organization's pulling off this coup that he arranged for the documents to be pigeonholed and never passed to the military. I often used to reflect, when I was an intelligence officer, that if only we could concentrate on the enemy the insensate hatred we directed at one another, the war would be won in no time.

While still grappling with the problem of the defector, Ellen is called away to the Internal Security Department, where, to her amazement and chagrin, she discovers that she is a suspect herself. Then there begins a long, exhausting and distressing process of interrogation, day after day, week after week, in which the whole of Ellen's life, her love affairs, her friendships, every tiny detail and nuance of her private existence are gone into by her two clottish interrogators. The interest and suspense are well maintained, as is the sense, almost overwhelming at times, of the unspeakable disgustingness of the whole procedure. Ellen, of course, as soon as she realized what was afoot, should have slapped her interrogators in the face for their impertinent curiosity, scattered their precious dossiers about the floor, and otherwise manifested her contempt for them and all their ridiculous, dog-eared tricks—the light shining in her face, the dark mentions of knowing more than they say, the elaborately staged confrontation, etc., etc. Then, with a sigh of relief, she should have got herself a job as a bartender or call girl, something nice and wholesome and fresh, and lived happily ever after. In America and the countries of the West we can still do this; in the U.S.S.R., they cannot. It is one of the few remaining dividends of what we like to call our free way of life.

Actually, Ellen does nothing of the sort. Racked by anxiety, sleepless, distracted, she endures the humiliating procedure, tries desperately to prove her innocence—though without knowing what she is being accused of—searches through old papers and letters, goes over and over in her mind just what happened on such an occasion, what was said, who was present. She is a willing victim, and could not really be expected to be otherwise. (Continued on page 158)



No slide projector  
ever looked like  
this before . . .  
or did as much

It's the dramatically successful Sawyer's.

Shows 100 slides uninterrupted with  
circular tray. Takes regular trays, too.  
Can even show up to 40 slides  
automatically without a tray.

Shows 35mm slides, Super Slides, and  
slides from instant cartridge cameras.

No other projector, at any price, does  
so much, so well.

From less than \$55. Fully automatic  
Rotomatic® projector shown,  
less than \$123.

**SAWYER'S**

Makers of View-Master Products, Portland, Oregon 97207

know the one thing worth knowing. Each man has to decide for himself if that's enough. If not, there are any number of chasms and holes he can jump into. I've told you everything, so from here it's up to you. I'm leaving now. If you want me again, I'll be in there. Anyone can tell you

where to find me." He turned and walked stolidly toward the archway. David continued to stare down at the computer. It was nothing to love, and nothing to hate. He stood alone, until the last loss of expectation moved him back into the human traffic. #

BOOK REVIEW OF A VERY LIMITED EDITION

(Continued from page 94) After all, she is in the métier. She has lost her right to protest because she has participated in subjecting others to similar treatment. She, too, has framed the idiot questions, done the idiot research, taken the unpardonable liberty of violating that essential integrity of the person whose safeguarding is the basis of all civilization. The savage is vulnerable to the tribe; the civilized man may proudly claim that as long as he obeys certain specified and known laws, whose contravention carries certain equally specified penalties, his life is his own. The moment the state allows probing fingers to be intruded there, then barbarism has set in.

Poor Ellen has relinquished her own rights by virtue of her occupation. She has touched pitch, and now is being tarred herself. There she sits, relentlessly questioned by two fellow Americans about all sorts of matters which have nothing whatever to do with them, or with the C.I.A., or the United States Government; matters which pertain to herself alone, and can be broached only in the intimacy of love or the ecstasy of faith—in bed or in the confessional. It is terrible to think of such things going on in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial—procedures and practices which are a denial of everything that our history, our religion, our literature and our traditions are supposed to cherish.

People forget that it has all happened so recently. I can just remember my father, before the 1914-18 war, going abroad. For money he had golden sovereigns which were acceptable everywhere; he did not need to take with him a single document. The only country where passports were required was—how significant—Russia. In what is often regarded now as the unenlightened nineteenth century, anyone could come to England who wanted to. To quote the opening sentences of A. J. P. Taylor's brilliant volume in *The Oxford History of England (English History 1914-1945)*:

"Until August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman. He could live where he liked and how he liked and as he liked. He had no official number or identity card. He could travel abroad or leave his country forever without a passport or any sort of official permission. He could exchange his money for any other money without restriction or limit. He could buy goods from any country in the world on the same terms as he bought goods at home. For that matter, a foreigner could spend his life in this country without permit and without informing the police."

London was full of subversives of every sort and description—anarchists, Communists, crackpots, Karl Marx in person—all busily plotting the overthrow of our and every other government in the world. At the same time, the United States was growing into the richest and most powerful nation on earth by similarly allowing everyone who had a mind to cross the Atlantic to come to New York and try their luck. Did people in those days wake up trembling lest subversives had got into the Home Office, or some diplomat of ours be contemplating defecting to another country? Not at all. Everything suggests that they slept in their beds a good deal more quietly than we do, though M.I.5 consisted then of at most seven elderly retired officers from the Indian Army, whereas today it is numbered in hundreds and the Secret Service in thousands, and both organizations together, at a rough estimate, cost the taxpayer about the equivalent of the total defense budget in the days of Gladstone. As for America—what the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. dispose of in the way of manpower and public money, God alone knows, but it must be astronomical.

At the end of her ordeal Miss Press's heroine is fired as a security risk. Instead of having a great ball to celebrate this blessed release, she manages to get admitted to the head man—presumably Dulles—and begs him at least to tell her what she has been found guilty of. He murmurs something about "lack of candor," but it is obvious that he has not read the report of her interrogation, and that she is in some sort a sacrificial victim offered up to appease Senator McCarthy and his Un-American Activities Committee. Cut off from all hope of redress within the C.I.A., she settles down to write her own version of the affair. The result is *The Care of Devils*. Incidentally, I should point out that in England she would have been denied even this recourse. With our usual cunning we have devised a splendid instrument for shutting everybody up without expense or the risk of public scandal. This is the Official Secrets Act, which requires every employee in Defense and Intelligence Departments to give an undertaking that he will not disclose any information which comes to him in the course of his duties upon pain of a fine and/or a term of imprisonment. Thus, if Miss Press had worked for British Intelligence she would have been required to submit the manuscript of *The Care of Devils* to the department she worked for before it could be legally published. There, we may be sure, it would have come to rest.

The question naturally arises as to whether Ellen was guilty. Had she, in fact, done anything wrong? In the

For information on the stores selling fashions shown in this issue on pages 132 through 139, turn to the page facing the third cover.

novel, she is constantly putting just this question to herself. It is a perfect Kafka situation; she is accused of nothing, yet is tormented alternately by a sense of guilt and of outraged innocence. Her whole moral fabric is corroded away. If she is guilty she must keep away from her friends lest she contaminate them. Anyway, who are her friends? Has she got any? If so, are they accomplices? Or secret enemies who will be brought out to accuse her? With the most extraordinary prophetic vision, in his novel *The Trial* Kafka foresees that this is going to become the human condition—to be accused of an unknown crime; to be investigated, interrogated, kept under surveillance, pressed to confess, even confessing, perhaps at last executed. Guilty or not guilty? Who can say? Since there is no crime. Only guilt.

Insofar as there was any cogent thought in the sick and vacuous minds of Ellen's interrogators, it was, presumably, that the man—Steve Lasker, with whom Ellen had had a love affair and been on a trip to Mexico—had some sort of bad security record which contaminated her. Let us assume the worst—that Lasker had been a Soviet agent, that Ellen in retrospect had vague suspicions of him, and that, because he had been her lover, consciously or unconsciously she wanted to shield him, and so was sometimes evasive and less than candid in answering questions about their relationship. Is this really so very reprehensible? It is, in any case, a matter which could have been settled honestly and honorably in five minutes by just putting the point to Ellen. This was never done. It was skirted round, hinted at, touched upon, but never put. Right up to the end, and afterward, she had no means of knowing what, if anything, they had against Lasker. Nor, rather surprisingly, did she apparently make any effort, then or subsequently, to seek out Lasker and have it out with him. The central character in the melodrama is never brought onto the stage, perhaps because, if he were to be, the melodrama would turn into farce—which, in a sort of way, Ellen wanted no more than her interrogators did.

It will surely strike future historians as strange that we, who talk endlessly about freedom, who have drenched the world in blood and destruction to liberate so-called captive peoples, who look with a baleful eye at the nightmare of Stalin's purges, should yet see fit, in the alleged interest of security, to subvert our own ostensibly prized liberties. In the eyes of posterity it will inevitably seem that, in safeguarding our freedom, we destroyed it; that the vast clandestine apparatus we built up to probe our enemies' resources and intentions only served in the end to confuse our own purposes; that the practice of deceiving others for the good of the

state led infallibly to our deceiving ourselves, and that the vast army of Intelligence personnel built up to execute these purposes were soon caught up in the web of their own sick fantasies, with disastrous consequences to them and us.

Miss Press's novel is an excellent antidote to the Bond books, which delight Intelligence pros, as they dazzle the general public, by making an intrinsically sinister and sordid activity seem glamorous, exciting and

honorable. *The Care of Devils* has precisely the opposite effect. Through the characterization of her heroine, herself in the web, and through the manner of her ejection from it, Miss Press shows how an organization like

the C.I.A. really works and what it is about.

*The Care of Devils* will assuredly not please the pros. From their point of view it has the truly appalling disability of being true. #

# Fortrel: for the good life.

lightweight  
hopsack...

with a  
natural flair  
for neatness



**COLLEGE HALL** gives the natural shoulder suit new style and new ease of care. Fortrel in the fabric shrugs off wrinkles and adds long-lasting wear. Light-weight hopsack of Fortrel polyester and Zantrel 700 rayon from Burlington Men's Wear in 5 fashionable colors. Also available in a poplin weave. At Boyd's, St. Louis; Farnsworth-Reed, Ltd., Washington, D.C.; Macy's Missouri-Kansas, Kansas City; John Wanamaker, Philadelphia. Celanese® Fortrel® is a trademark of Fiber Industries, Inc.

**CELANESE FORTREL**  
A CONTEMPORARY FASHION FIBER

#### WHERE-TO-BUY-IT?

If you'd like to know where to buy, in your area, the products advertised in this issue, please turn to page facing third cover.