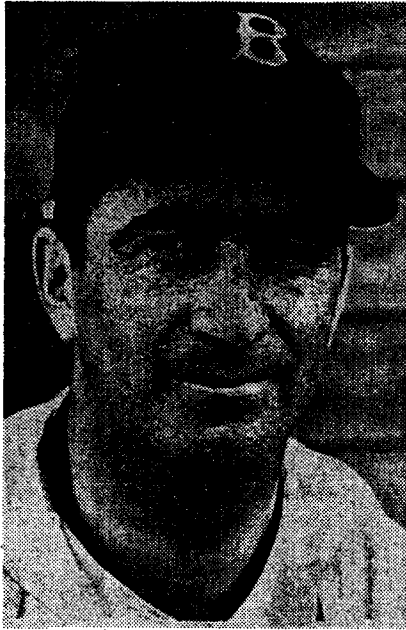




## Yardley



**Boston Red Sox Moe Berg in 1939**

himself no Nazi, was presumed to be the mastermind of Germany's effort to create a workable nuclear bomb.

Berg, whose previous business address had been Fenway Park, now found himself with travel orders, signed by Donovan himself, permitting passage to London, Portugal, Algiers and Italy. His assignment was to find out "which German and Italian scientists were alive, where they were located and what their travel plans were," to "learn what he could about German nuclear weapons" and to produce "a status report on the supply of rare metals in countries throughout Europe." For a time the possibility of kidnapping Heisenberg was seriously considered; in 1944, Berg was told to attend a lecture by Heisenberg in Zurich and, according to a fellow OSS operator, "If anything Heisenberg said convinced him the Germans were close to a bomb, then his job was to shoot him—right there in the auditorium."

It never came to that. Heisenberg's speech was innocuous and no shots were

fired. By war's end the Allies discovered that "Heisenberg's bomb never existed," as a result of which, Dawidoff writes, "a callous man might have dismissed Berg's work as a wild goose chase." Dawidoff believes that Berg knew this and that it helps explain why he refused to accept the Medal of Freedom awarded him after the war. This was a pity, for Berg's performance had in fact been exemplary, both resourceful and courageous, and he deserved his country's gratitude.

It is at this point that Berg's life took a troubling turn. With the dissolution of the OSS and the rise of the CIA, Berg's world of romantic espionage was over. He tried a few assignments for the CIA, but was temperamentally unsuited to its bureaucratic style. "Unleashed from his moorings," Dawidoff writes, "he wandered aimlessly, unburdened by appointment, salary or obligation. This talented man who could have supported himself in so many ways chose instead to become a vagabond, living on wit and charm and the kindness of friends." His immense charm was all that he needed:

"Berg discovered that friends would happily supply him with lodging, meals, clean underwear, suits and even pocket money just because they liked to be around him. For most of his last 25 years, Berg permitted all sorts of people that pleasure and came to believe that he was doing them the favor."

The story of these years occupies the last third of Dawidoff's biography. This may be more than the period deserves, yet in describing it at length Dawidoff underscores the sense of disappointment and waste that Berg simply cannot escape. It may also be true that Dawidoff is correct to argue that Berg's was a life of such originality that it must be judged worthwhile—on Berg's terms if not on ours—but the portrait he paints of a man utterly alone is a sad one indeed.

Dawidoff paints it very well. He has done heroic research, much of it in unlit corners, and he avoids the temptation of rehashing it to excess. For the most part he also eschews the temptations of amateur psychoanalysis; when he does succumb, it is mostly to revealing effect. Moe Berg doubtless will forever remain a mystery, but Dawidoff has brought the mystery to life. ■