

CIA Spied on Spook Author

After Victor Marchetti published *The Rope Dancer*, an unflattering *roman à clef* about the CIA, agency officials, we now learn, ran a secret surveillance operation against the author. Beginning in 1972, the author—himself a former CIA official—was assigned the code name "Butane." He was shadowed, his mail was opened, and his tax forms were reviewed. According to documents recently released to Marchetti, the CIA's office of security freaked when it obtained a copy of a proposal he had submitted to Doubleday for the book *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*.

Realizing that Marchetti was ready to leak classified material, the agency was desperate to discover "whether he was in contact with or subject to an operation conducted by a foreign intelligence agency." After Project Butane came up blank, the CIA turned the case over to the FBI. "Mr. Marchetti may well feel under mounting pressure and become increasingly disenchanted with the agency and the United States government," the security office memoed J. Edgar Hoover in April 1972. "Under such circumstances he could be the target of a recruitment attempt by the opposition, and it is not entirely inconceivable that he might choose to defect."

Before Marchetti exposed

the agency's wicked ways in *Cult*, his former colleagues were apparently reluctant to denounce him. "A variety of sources portray Butane as a flamboyant, aggressive, egocentric individual," stated a CIA "personality sketch" from 1972. "He undoubtedly possesses a certain degree of charm and personality, and would appear to be a gregarious, socially oriented individual who strives to develop and cultivate persons of rank." But in 1974, the year *Cult* was published, the agency rewrote its analysis, insisting that Marchetti was actually a political conservative motivated solely by revenge for failure to be promoted. In retrospect, Marchetti was now "a very aggressive, self-centered, selfish and opportunistic individual. . . . Although he was the [deleted] successful office politician, apparently [deleted] suave, [deleted] come on strong as rather crude loudmouth. Marchetti possessed a facility for antagonizing his peers with overbearing, almost arrogant mannerisms."

Today Marchetti seems amused by Project Butane. "I laughed when I read those papers," he says. "The agency is so paranoid that it assumes that an inside critic like me may be a traitor. If they hated *The Rope Dancer* and *The Cult*, wait till they read the novel I'm writing now."



Secret file photo: The CIA catches ex-agency officer Victor Marchetti (left, in glasses) with former Timesman Ben Welles.