

Mr. David Ignatius  
The Washington Post  
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Dear Mr. Ignatius,

Reading your review of "Double Lives" reminds me of your interest in ~~was~~ how things were in those days of which this reincarnation of Martin Dies fantasizes.

He has as Stalinists some of that era's strongest anti-Stalinists and some who were endlessly criticized by them.

The Stalinists hated the anarchists, which is what Sacco and Vanzetti were. Felix Frankfurter, who was strongly <sup>G</sup>anti-Communist, was a ~~tax~~ leader of their defense. That committee's information officer was the Gardner Jackson you quote Koch as saying, "may well have guided (Dorothy) Parker toward what seems to have been her secret membership in the Communist Party." I knew "Pat" Jackson very well. He was as anti-Communist ~~and~~ as any liberal I ever knew. And when I knew him he was a legislative representative for one of the strongest anti-Communists of that era, John L. Lewis.

Dos Passos and Gide were constantly criticized by the Communists.

There was no "literary cult associated with the Spanish Civil War," which was actually a fascist revolution against a democratically elected government. Those who supported the legal, elected government covered the political spectrum and were anti-fascists, not pro-Stalinists, which a few may have been among literary figures, <sup>but</sup> ~~but~~ <sup>not</sup> most. And was being an anti-fascist "a cultural obsession(s) of that era"?

I never knew Moura Budberg but I understand she was of the nobility, a baroness. She reportedly was also the mistress of all the great men of that era she could take to bed. A friend of mine who knew them both told me that she was J. Arthur Rank's brains. Does hot pants by a woman of the <sup>N</sup>nobility make her a spy? For the Communists?

From your listing of them it appears that the sick-in-the-head Koch was not so sick he did not restrict his slanders to those safely dead.

For some, I suppose, the Cold War will never end.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg

# The Romance of the Left

**DOUBLE LIVES**  
**Spies and Writers in the**  
**Secret Soviet War of Ideas**  
**Against the West**

By Stephen Koch  
Free Press, 419 pp. \$24.95

By David Ignatius

**I**N *DOUBLE LIVES*, Stephen Koch tackles one of the darker subjects of modern cultural history: the romance of intellectuals in Europe and America with the communist left in the 1920s and '30s. The novelty of his book is that he attempts to tell this tale as a spy story—alleging that some of the most prominent literary figures of the century were dupes of Stalin's espionage network.

Among the names woven through Koch's account are Bertolt Brecht, Andre Gide, Lillian Hellman, Ernest Hemingway, Andre Malraux, Dorothy Parker and John Dos Passos. He argues that all of them—to greater and lesser degrees, wittingly or unwittingly—were used by the communist apparatus to create a cultural environment in the West that would enhance Soviet interests.

Koch also seeks to undermine the moral justification offered by the communist intellectuals—that they were the only political force that stood against fascism in Europe. Koch argues that Hitler and Stalin were actually colluding as early as the Reichstag Fire trial in 1933, and that Stalin supported the Republicans in Spain only to better put himself in the position of selling them out. The intellectuals of the Left, he contends, were all used in a cynical campaign of lies.

This is an ambitious task, to say the least—this sort of cultural history as conspiracy theory—and for all its valuable insights, *Double Lives* suffers from the problem with conspiracy theories generally: The investigative details necessary to make the story convincing are too often simply confusing. Also unconvincing is Koch's thriller-style writing, which on occasion would embarrass even a tub-thumper like Robert Ludlum.

Koch is at his best in raising the larger question of how intellectual snobbery and trendiness shaped cultural life in the interwar period. Where did the "received ideas" of that time, the ideas that all "right-thinking" and "progressive" people believed, actually come from? Why did intellectuals rally so automatically to the "adversary culture" that sought to subvert the institutions of bourgeois Europe that gave them their freedom? Koch's answer is that to a surprising extent, the received ideas of the left were secretly generated by Stalin's propaganda machine.

Koch presents some devastating evidence of the gullibility (and worse) of the left intellectuals of the 1930s. He notes that, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League immediately renamed itself the Hollywood League for Democratic Action. And he quotes Lillian Hellman's comment at the time of the Soviet invasion of Finland: "I don't believe in that fine, lovable little Red-weezy about. I've been there, and it looks like a pro-Nazi little republie to me."

*Double Lives* is structured loosely—very loosely, unfortunately—around the story of the Comintern's leading propagandist, Willi Munzenberg. He is indeed a fascinating subject for biography: While in his mid-twenties, Munzenberg worked with Lenin and Trotsky during their pre-revolutionary days in Switzerland; he went on to become a leading communist publisher and Reichstag member in Weimar Germany before fleeing to France in 1933; from Paris, he directed what Koch says was a network of front groups, book clubs and

literary salons all secretly dedicated to the greater glory of Joseph Stalin.

Adding to the Munzenberg intrigue is the riddle of his death. Like so many of the early Leninists, he became a target of Stalin's secret service following the Purge Trials that began in 1935. He finally made a decisive break with Moscow after the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939 and fled Paris a few months later as the Nazis were preparing to march in. He was trying to escape to Switzerland in October 1940 when he was found dead, with a noose around his neck, in a forest in southeastern France—an apparent suicide, but Koch suspects he was a victim of Stalin's assassins.

According to Koch, Munzenberg's hand is evident in many of the great cultural obsessions of the period: the Sacco-Vanzetti trial, the Scottsboro Boys, European pacifism, the French avant-garde, the literary cult associated with the Spanish Civil War. He also links Munzenberg to the notorious Soviet spy rings: the Cambridge circle of Philby, Burgess, Maclean and Blunt; and the American network that allegedly included Whittaker Chambers, Alger Hiss and Noel Field.

*Double Lives* might have succeeded better if Koch had stuck more closely to the story of Munzenberg's life. Instead, the book jumps back and forth maddeningly between Munzenberg, an operative from Prague named Otto Katz, and various obscure Hungarians. The problem here is that the evidence of real espionage tends to involve the bit players—not the literary giants who are woven through the book. The effect is a bit like a parody of Shakespeare in which kings and gravediggers are constantly racing on and offstage so quickly that the audience forgets who did what.

Koch's book is also weakened by what might be called the ahai reflex. He is so eager to gather his evidence against Stalin's henchmen that his prose style occasionally overheats, producing Mickey Spillanesque paragraphs like these: "So it seemed. Except that

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From left: H.G. Wells, Maxim Gorky, and Moura Budberg, the spy both writers loved

nothing was as it seemed." "Who indeed?" "Not altogether so." "And yet, and yet . . ."

A more serious problem is Koch's tendency to overreach his sources. He is so intent on weaving his conspiracy theory that he gets impatient with the still-inconclusive historical record. Thus his repeated use of phrases like "may well" or "seems plain" or "almost certainly" to strongly suggest something he can't prove.

**I**N MAKING his case against the writer Dorothy Parker, for example, he says of a leftist named Gardner Jackson: "It may well have been he who guided Parker toward what seems to have been her secret membership in the Communist party."

One particularly annoying use of this "may well" business involves an American journalist named Vincent Sheean, whom Koch links to Communist efforts to manipulate the writer Sinclair Lewis and his journalist wife, Dorothy Thompson. He writes: "Sheean was a fellow traveller very much mixed up in the Munzen-

berg operation. He was certainly an instrument of its manipulations of Lewis and Thompson, although the precise state of his innocence then or later is hard to gauge."

The suspicion that Koch is talking through his hat is reinforced a paragraph later when he writes: "Sheean may have been more or less innocent."

Evidence-wise, that is more or less outrageous. And passages like these make the reader suspicious about Koch's more important arguments, such as his account of how Ernest Hemingway was manipulated by Comintern agents in Spain during the Civil War.

A final problem with *Double Lives* is that by focusing on the perfidy of the Communists and their fellow travelers, Koch cuts short his examination of why intellectuals are so easily led in the first place. Intellectual faddism is an almost constant feature of modern life, on the right as well as the left. Received ideas, from "supply-side economics" to "politically correct" speech codes, are spouted everyday by people who should know better. Unfortunately, we can't blame Stalin for our folly. ■