Book Reviews


Reviewed by John Earl Haynes, Library of Congress

Based on documents from the archive of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), *The Haunted Wood* provides highly valuable information about Soviet espionage in the 1930s and 1940s. Some of the information is entirely unexpected, such as the revelation that U.S. Representative Samuel Dickstein was bribed by Soviet intelligence operatives in the late 1930s. Most of the spies discussed, however, are familiar names to those steeped in the controversies over Communism and espionage in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This does not in any way diminish the value of the book. Many historians writing in the last several decades believed that the suspected spies were actually innocent, the martyred victims of a ghastly McCarthyist nightmare. Weinstein’s and Vassiliev’s book will help dispel that myth.

In late 1945 Elizabeth Bentley, who had worked for a predecessor of the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB), told the FBI of several dozen U.S. government employees who had provided information to Soviet intelligence. Most were mid-level officials, but several were highly placed: Harry White, the influential assistant secretary of the Treasury; Lauchlin Currie, one of Franklin Roosevelt’s senior assistants; and Duncan Lee, an aide to the head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency). Although some historians believed Bentley’s accusations, numerous others dismissed them as unfounded, deriding Bentley as “the blond spy queen.” Weinstein’s and Vassiliev’s documents confirm that those she named were in fact spies.

A number of historians, including some of prominence, have also refused to believe that Laurence Duggan, the head of the State Department’s Division of the American Republics in the late 1930s and early 1940s, was a Soviet spy. Duggan fell to his death from his office window in 1948, nine days after the FBI had questioned him about his ties to Soviet intelligence. Some scholars have depicted Duggan’s death as a tragedy—an innocent civil servant driven to suicide by paranoid anti-Communists. Weinstein and Vassiliev show that Duggan had indeed been a spy in the 1930s and early 1940s. Soviet intelligence officials lost contact with him at the end of World War II but attempted to reestablish links in 1948. By sheer coincidence they contacted him four days after the FBI interview, which suggests that his suicide reflected both his fear of FBI exposure and his apprehension that the Soviet Union would pressure him to continue his espionage activities.

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The Haunted Wood provides interesting new information about a number of other espionage cases. It shows, for example, that Alger Hiss’s spying continued into the 1940s; it details the KGB’s success in developing sources within the OSS; and it describes the extensive cooperation of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) with Soviet espionage. The book also furnishes needed additional documentation about the espionage of Julius Rosenberg and his network of engineers working in military electronics and aviation; the Soviet Union’s nuclear spies, including young Communists Theodore Hall and David Greenglass; the wealthy socialites Martha and Alfred Stern; and other matters.

Many histories of the 1940s and early 1950s are predicated on three assumptions: that Soviet espionage was neither extensive nor serious, that the CPUSA did not significantly aid Soviet espionage, and that no senior government officials betrayed the United States. The Haunted Wood adds mightily to the growing evidence that all three of these assumptions are mistaken. As a result, the historical context of postwar anti-Communism in the United States must be rewritten. Diplomatic history is also affected. By the end of the 1940s leading American policy makers had learned of the astounding breadth of the Soviet espionage network. This awareness inevitably colored their perception of Soviet intentions.

According to Weinstein, his publisher paid the association of retired KGB officers for exclusive access to the otherwise closed archive of the SVR in Yasenovo, just outside Moscow. Alexander Vassiliev, a retired KGB officer turned journalist, had access to certain materials from the archive and prepared summaries and transcripts of selected documents. Russian Foreign Intelligence Service officials reviewed his materials and decided what to release. Weinstein’s decision to rely almost exclusively on this unique material underscores the richness of what he received, but the selective nature of the documentation resulted in an episodic narrative with minimal background. This will not bother those well-versed in the field, but non-specialists may miss the absence of context.

The unconventional provenance of the KGB material used in The Haunted Wood will cause some to question its reliability. The authors make little effort to integrate this new documentation with the large mass of evidence from other sources that are now available, including files from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation released under the Freedom of Information Act, the testimonies of a wide variety of witnesses in court proceedings and congressional committee hearings, and the large volume of intelligence-related material in certain Moscow archives that, unlike the SVR archive, are accessible to researchers. Finally, starting in 1995, the U.S. National Security Agency declassified the Venona documents, deciphered cable traffic from 1940 to 1948 between Soviet intelligence stations around the world and their superiors in Moscow. (Weinstein and Vassiliev bring Venona into The Haunted Wood in a limited fashion.) The corroboration between other sources I have consulted and the KGB material in The Haunted Wood is nearly total, providing assurance of its authenticity.

Based as it is on KGB material, The Haunted Wood has only limited information about Soviet military intelligence (GRU), and nothing about Soviet naval intelligence (Naval GRU). The GRU’s American activities, although not as extensive as those of the
KGB, were still of impressive size, and even the tiny Naval GRU recruited a dozen American sources, several of good quality.

One wishes that more attention had been put into the editing of *The Haunted Wood*. Some of the names transliterated from KGB documents will confuse the unwise: the name “Dolliway” found in a 1937 KGB document is, judging from its context, probably Louis Dolivet, who became a prominent Popular Front spokesman in the U.S. in the 1940s, and “Franklin Zelman” is likely a garbled name for an American Communist whose correct name was Zalmond Franklin. Such blemishes aside, *The Haunted Wood* is a major addition to scholarly knowledge, featuring information that cannot be found elsewhere. It belongs on the shelf of any serious student of the early Cold War.

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Reviewed by James G. Hershberg, Cold War International History Project

For many Americans, especially those who were not alive in the 1950s, that decade beckons as a halcyon era of innocence and affluence. From *Happy Days* to *American Graffiti* to *Grease*, popular culture, especially as portrayed in television and movies, has helped ingrain 1950s mythology by fostering the warm and fuzzy image of a time when the war was over, the country was booming, and almost everyone liked Ike, loved Lucy, and left it to Beaver.

Some people did, however, question this mythology and rebel against the pervasive Cold War conformity. Margot A. Henriksen, studying what she calls the “culture of dissent” that foreshadowed the angry 1960s, takes up the cause of the dissenters. From Hollywood noir movies to slyly subversive science fiction epics to the novels and essays of self-conscious hipsters and beat writers (Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Mailer), artists and creators of popular culture articulated the angst and anxiety of a supposedly placid age. They exposed the fears brought about by menaces like Communism, nuclear bombs, World War III, and McCarthyism, which hovered around the edges of, and sporadically threatened to shatter entirely, an American dream that seemed to assure material comforts and spiritual and national security.

While it was impossible to miss the explosion of dissent that accompanied the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of the mid-1960s—an era whose opening Henriksen symbolically dates to Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 anti-nuclear black comedy, *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*—she contends that scholars and other commentators have failed to appreciate the important antecedents of that rebellious decade. By tracing and dissecting the key literary, cinematic, theatrical, musical, and other influences that raised or voiced doubts about American Cold War and nuclear policies in the late 1940s and the 1950s, or even gave vent to or nurtured emotions and apprehensions that ran counter to the period’s re-