

FARAGO LÁSZLÓ

1972

Spy story or not?

Richard Hanser's review of *The Game of the Foxes* in *Book World* (January 16) is a total misrepresentation, leading me to the conclusion that your reviewer had an only perfunctory communion with my book. If he had read it as thoroughly as critics are supposed, he would have found that my book is not the story of Nazi espionage but of the relentless bout between the German and Allied secret services in World War II—a struggle, indeed, that produced a phenomenal victory: the Anglo-American triumph on D-Day in Normandy that would not have been possible without the contribution of spies.

Revealing this remarkable feat for the first time from the hitherto secret maze of newly discovered German and Allied documents, my book, far from being an anachronistic account of wayward, stale secret agents, is a documentary of important history...

Moreover, had he read my book carefully, Mr. Hanser would not have made the flip-pant and malignant remark that I described the alleged successes of "Nazi espionage" with what he called "misplaced enthusiasm." The malicious innuendo behind this sneer—unfounded as it is, for my book details, not the successes but the dismal failure of German espionage—I resent and reject with the contempt Mr. Hanser's review so amply deserves.

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RICHARD HANSER replies:

Far from being perfunctory, my communion with Mr. Farago's book was interminable, or seemed so. But his letter makes me wonder how thoroughly he has read it himself.

If Mr. Farago will consult the jacket copy on his own book, and also the publicity issued by his publisher, he will discover that they describe the content and theme of his book just as I did. The whole back cover of *Game* is given over to a listing of ten highlights which, presumably, the publisher and his promotion staff consider the most powerful and characteristic passages in the book. All ten involve aspects of German espionage in America and Britain. There is no mention at all of D-Day and Normandy.

In fact, the reader has waded through 595 pages before the subject of the Normandy invasion comes up. And when it does, only about 16 pages are devoted to the tricks and ruses by which Allied Intelligence sought to mislead the Germans as to where the invasion would come. No one doubts that these tricks and ruses contributed to

the success of Operation Overlord, but that they were as decisive as Mr. Farago contends is highly debatable. At any rate, he is certainly not, as he claims, the first to tell the story. (Last year the British writer Sefton Delmer published a whole book on the subject.)

As for enthusiasm, or the absence of it, consider a few samples of the Farago style:

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Right off, on p. 18, a German agent called Lonkowski is glowingly described in a paragraph that ends: "He was indeed the perfect spy." Nobody is perfect at anything but Ladislav Farago readily finds not one, but two, Germans who are perfect at spying. On p. 492 we have "A.2011"—"my favorite German spy of World War II, because he seemed to be that rare specimen—the perfect secret agent."

But one has to go back to the Rover Boys, or perhaps to the Bobbsey Twins, to match the language that Mr. Farago lavishes in Chapter 45 on an agent named Kraemer. The operations of this Teutonic non-such were "breathhtaking." They were also "unique" in their "enormous industry and ingenuity." The marvel of Karl-Heinz Kraemer as a person reduces Mr. Farago to sheer spluttering: "Terribly good-looking—a blue-eyed giant with the pink complexion of a baby—enormously attractive . . . oozed cheer and charm . . ." If Ian Fleming had known him, says Mr. Farago, he could have been the model for James Bond, except that Karl-Heinz "abhorred violence." Kraemer was "the neatest, nattiest, most fastidious buccaneer of them all."

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Gush of that sort would be embarrassing if it weren't so funny. But perhaps the most egregious example of our author as volunteer cheer leader for the opposing team occurs on p. 625. Here he is describing how German agents cracked a two-part signal that could have betrayed the Normandy landings. Mr. Farago writes: "I undertook a special search for the actual documents which I hoped would bear out this remarkable exploit . . ." [Italics added] Mr. Farago was pulling in advance for that story to be true, where a serious historian would have sifted the facts for the truth.

There is, of course, no implication in any of this that Mr. Farago had, or has, any pro-German sympathies. It is wholly a matter of tone, approach, and style, all three of which I found deplorable in *The Game of Foxes*.

There are a number of minor inaccuracies in the book which I didn't mention in my review. But I suggest that what Mr. Farago calls "Mark Twain's famous quip" be given back to its rightful owner in any future

edition. It was Irvin Cobb who said, "I hope it's nothing trivial."

