The Fuchs Case

Klaus Fuchs. The Man Who Stole the Atomic Bomb. NORMAN MOSS. Grafton (Collins), London, and St. Martin's, New York, 1987. 216 pp. + plates. $15.95.

Klaus Fuchs, Atom Spy. ROBERT CHADWELL WILLIAMS. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1987. x, 267 pp., illus., + plates. $25.

At the end of January 1950, a senior British atomic scientist appended his signature to an unusual document. It was a confession that from early 1942 until the spring of 1949 he had conveyed information about atomic research to agents of the Soviet Union. On 2 February the man, Klaus Fuchs, was arrested on the direct orders of the British Attorney-General, charged with violating the Official Secrets Act, tried, and, in view of his confession, quickly sentenced to 14 years in prison.

To put it mildly, the case created a scandal. It did more. It terminated negotiations for an Anglo-American weapons enterprise. In the United States it left a residue of suspicion of British security methods and affected scientific relations between the two countries for years. For Fuchs had been the genuine article: a top-level scientist with access to the innermost secrets of the Manhattan Project during the war and with useful knowledge of the prospects for the hydrogen bomb, not to mention the development of British weaponry after 1945. All this he had turned over to the Russians.

The subject has attracted attention in virtually every book dealing with Los Alamos, including a sober and sensible summary by the British official historian of atomic energy, Margaret Gowing, in her *Independence and Deterrence*; but the lapse of time and official secrecy, as well as the inherent drama of the subject, made it inevitable that Fuchs would become the focus of a book. The present publishing season has produced two.

Much of the material in Norman Moss's and Robert Chadwell Williams's books is the same. Both books work over Fuch's conversion from social democracy to communism in the face of the rise of Hitler; his left-leaning family; his adventures in exile in the 1930s in Britain, where he came into contact with agents of Soviet intelligence; his internment as an enemy alien in 1940; and his subsequent release back into his laboratory from a Canadian internment camp. The books even highlight the same things: the drama of Fuchs's confession and the confession itself, which both books reprint as an appendix. This is not to say that the books are interchangeable. They start from different premises and use different techniques to answer what is, essentially, the same question: how did Fuchs come to commit his acts of betrayal, and why, since he had been a known member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) before he fled Hitler in 1933, was he not detected earlier?

Moss takes the psychological line, whereas Williams prefers the broad sweep of historical context (and it would seem that he is well equipped to provide it, with a massive bibliography and documentary research in three countries). Moss does less well on context, relying extensively on interviews he conducted while working up a BBC radio program on the Fuchs case. Moss is the better writer, as one would expect of a well-published journalist, and he has the advantage of greater familiarity with British life and nomenclature. To take one minor example, he correctly identifies Harold Laski as "chairman" of the Labour Party, rather than as "leader," as does Williams (p. 59)—a slip that would have surprised Clement Attlee (correctly identified as leader in a photo caption elsewhere in the Williams book). He does better on Fuchs's arraignment as well, adding the prosecutor's assurance to the magistrate that Fuchs on his salary could well afford counsel—another detail, but one that alters the impression left by Williams. The two books contradict one another as to whether Fuchs had a privately retained or a court-appointed lawyer at his preliminary hearing; I am inclined to accept Moss's version.

It is too bad that Williams, who has accumulated so much information, much of it new, should commit so many minor errors. There is, for example, no such newspaper as the *Ottawa Gazette* (p. 233; *The Gazette* lives in Montreal). Hindenburg was a field marshal, not a general, when he was elected president of Germany (p. 15); Frederick Hoyer Millar was not British "ambassador" to Washington in 1950, but minister (p. 136); Lewis Strauss was not AEC chairman in 1948 (p. 97); *The Ensign* hardly counts as "a leading Canadian Catholic weekly journal of opinion" unless one applies very odd categories (p. 146). One begins to wonder what the editors at Harvard University Press do when they vet a book for publication.

There are also problems in both books with the hypothetical reconstruction of Fuchs's state of mind. Moss speculates that the scientist's "dry, racking coughs" were "a price exacted by his unconscious for his betrayal" (p. 124), and Williams conjectures that Fuchs did not know the difference between "right" and "*Recht*" (pp. 133–34). Maybe; but again maybe not. Historians use psychology at their peril, especially when ideology is blended in. The result is frequently unconvincing, as it is in these two books.

The Williams book is certainly scholarly, but the author does not convince the reader that he has done well to devote whole sections of it to Philby and the four or five other men who populate current British spy literature. A footnote, or at most a couple of paragraphs, would have sufficed. Nor, ultimately, does he persuade the reader that Fuchs belongs in the pantheon of victims of Stalinism in eastern Europe, Traicho Kostov, László Rajk, and their ilk. When Williams argues that "in 1949 Fuchs could have faced prison or worse in East Germany" (p. 174) the mind reluctantly boggles. It is much more likely that he would have shared a privileged exile in Russia with his fellow atomic scientist Bruno Pontecorvo, who defected soon after the Fuchs affair.

Readers searching for a straightforward and on the whole persuasive account of the Fuchs case should prefer Moss; those searching for the "big explanations" that characterize so much of the literature of espionage (and, alas, of modern historiography) should direct themselves to Williams.

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Models of Food-Finding

Foraging Theory. DAVID W. STEPHENS and JOHN R. KREBS. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1987. xiv, 247 pp., illus. $40; paper, $14.50. Monographs in Behavior and Ecology.

Foraging theory (or optimal foraging theory, as it is commonly called) attempts to understand and predict the ways in which animals obtain food. It does this through first considering the function of the foraging process (to obtain energy while avoiding predators) and then hypothesizing that the animal will maximize or minimize some outcome of this process (for example maximize the net rate of energy gain during foraging). This book shows how the result-