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THE KHRUSHCHEV PAPERS

It was never safe for a reader to judge a book by its cover. Now you can't even be sure of the author, at least if he is purported to be a former Soviet premier like Nikita S. Khrushchev. His alleged memoirs are being published by Life magazine in a swirl of controversy.

Time Inc., which publishes Life, has refused to say where it obtained the Khrushchev material, which it calls his authentic reminiscences. Before their publication, Khrushchev denounced them as a "falsification." So did Svetlana, the emigre daughter of Khrushchev's old buddy, Stalin, after she read the first installment.

In the absence of any convincing proof of authorship, some Western students of Kremlin psychology have advanced an involved theory that the memoirs really were produced by KGB, the Soviet secret police. The idea is that their publication in the West would discredit Khrushchev and those of his men still in positions of power. It would also, so runs this theory, help destroy the reputations of all other Russian writers whose works are published clandestinely in the West.

As if possibly stung by an arrow that struck too close to home, Izvestia, the Soviet government newspaper, countered this theory with the contention that the fraudulent memoirs were fabricated by KGB's American counterpart, the Central Intelligence Agency.

If he were still alive, this would be the moment for Ian Fleming to appear on the scene, brush aside the KGB and CIA as contenders for the honors of authorship, and claim them for his own creation, James Bond. If you are going to have a ghost writer for Khrushchev, you might as well use a superspy who could also write.

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