“Decca” Mitford lived a larger-than-life: born into the British aristocracy—one of the famous (and sometimes infamous) Mitford sisters—she ran away to Spain during the Spanish Civil War with her cousin Esmond Romilly, Winston Churchill’s nephew, then came to America, became a tireless political activist and a member of the Communist Party, and embarked on a brilliant career as a memoirist and muckraking journalist (her funeral-industry exposé, The American Way of Death, became an instant classic). She was a celebrated wit, a charmer, and throughout her life a prolific and passionate writer of letters—now gathered here.

Decca’s correspondence crackles with irreverent humor and mischief, and with acute insight into human behavior (and misbehavior) that attests to her generous experience of the worlds of politics, the arts, journalism, publishing, and high and low society. Here is correspondence with everyone from Katharine Graham and George Jackson, Betty Friedan, Miss Manners, Julie Andrews, Maya Angelou, Harry Truman, and Hillary Rodham Clinton to Decca’s sisters the Duchess of Devonshire and the novelist Nancy Mitford, her parents, her husbands, her children, and her grandchildren.

In a profile of J.K. Rowling, The Daily Telegraph (UK), said, “Her favorite drink is gin and tonic, her least favorite food, trip. Her heroine is Jessica Mitford.”

My Personal Review: “Decca” contains the annotated letters of Jessica Mitford aka Decca Treuhaft, one of the six Mitford daughters and a member of the Communist
Party of the United States. I'm giving the book five stars because Peter Sussman has done an extraordinary (or as Mitford would write, "extraorder") job in selecting, editing, and annotating Mitford's letters cleanly, clearly, and without introducing his own opinions. He should be commended, especially given Mitford's eccentric use of the English language.

On the other hand, her letters are well-written and interesting, but they show Mitford to have been a thoroughly unpleasant person and *much* less intelligent or moral than she comes across in her journalism. I grew to hate her - absolutely detest her - over the course of the book. Here we have a woman who denied that Stalin's victims were telling the truth, who wrote that even if OJ had killed Nicole he deserved to get away with it because other blacks in the past had been railroaded, who thought that child molesters are harmless (going so far as to wave away her own child's molestation as no big deal), who thought drugs and even medicines were horrible despite being an alcoholic herself, and who judged her son's bipolar disorder as a moral failing that was unfortunate mainly because it hurt *her*. Yes, she did show immense bravery as a civil rights worker in the 60s, but the reader is left with the impression that she was involved solely as a reaction against her family's racism and not as a deeply held personal belief. She comes across as being just as narrow-minded and unsympathetic as her sisters Unity and Diana (who were fascists, in the literal political sense). And far from being the sharp, critical journalist I thought she was after reading The American Way Of Death, she turns out to be an unthinking quack enabler whose "muckraking" was intended not to uncover corruption and lies but to destroy anyone with more education than she had - in other words, almost everyone.

Do I recommend this book? Yes, because the editor was sensible enough to let Mitford speak for herself. I'm probably not the only reader to find myself absolutely sickened by Mitford, but the excellent editing allows every reader to make up his or her own mind. Well done, Mr. Sussman.

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