

THE  
COMMENTARY  
CLASSICS

BOOK Nº 3

**Commentary**

**THE BEST  
OF THE**

**1960s**



**Commentary**

# The Best of the 60s



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# Writing American Fiction

By Philip Roth

**S**EVERAL winters back, while I was living in Chicago, the city was shocked and mystified by the death of two teenage girls. So far as I know the populace is mystified still; as for the shock, Chicago is Chicago, and one week's dismemberment fades into the next's. The victims this particular year were sisters. They went off one December night to see an Elvis Presley movie, for the sixth or seventh time we are told, and never came home. Ten days passed and fifteen and twenty, and then the whole bleak city, every street and alley, was being searched for the missing Grimes girls, Pattie and Babs. A girl friend had seen them at the movie, a group of boys had had a glimpse of them afterwards getting into a black Buick; another group said a green Chevy, and so on and so forth, until one day the snow melted and the unclothed bodies of the two girls were discovered in a roadside ditch in a forest preserve on the West Side of Chicago. The coroner said he didn't know the cause of death and then the newspapers took over. One paper, I forget which one, ran a drawing of the girls on the back page, in bobby socks and levis and babushkas: Pattie and Babs a foot tall, and in four colors, like Dixie Dugan on Sundays. The mother of

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PHILIP ROTH *is a novelist whose first published collection, Goodbye, Columbus, won a National Book Award for Fiction in 1960 and contained several stories that appeared originally in COMMENTARY. This essay was read at Stanford University under the auspices of a symposium hosted by Esquire on current writers in America.*

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the two girls wept herself right into the arms of a local newspaper lady, who apparently set up her typewriter on the Grimes's front porch and turned out a column a day, telling us that these had been good girls, hardworking girls, average girls, churchgoing girls, et cetera. Late in the evening one could watch television interviews featuring schoolmates and friends of the Grimes sisters: The teenage girls look around, dying to giggle; the boys stiffen in their leather jackets. "Yeah, I knew Babs, yeah she was all right, yeah, she was popular..." On and on until at last comes a confession. A Skid Row bum of thirty-five or so, a dishwasher, a prowler, a no-good named Benny Bedwell, admits to killing both girls, after he and a pal had cohabited with them for several weeks in various flea-bitten hotels. Hearing the news, the mother weeps and cries and tells the newspaper lady that the man is a liar—her girls, she insists now, were murdered the night they went off to the movie. The coroner continues to maintain (with rumblings from the press) that the girls show no signs of having had sexual intercourse.

Meanwhile, everybody in Chicago is buying four papers a day, and Benny Bedwell, having supplied the police with an hour-by-hour chronicle of his adventures, is tossed in jail. Two nuns, teachers of the girls at the school they attended, are sought out by the newspapermen. They are surrounded and questioned and finally one of the sisters explains all. "They were not exceptional girls," the sister says, "they had no hobbies." About this time, some good-natured soul digs up Mrs. Bedwell, Benny's mother, and a meeting is arranged between this old woman and the mother of the slain teenagers. Their picture is taken together, two overweight, overworked American ladies, quite befuddled but sitting up straight for the photographers. Mrs. Bedwell apologizes for her Benny. She says, "I never thought any boy of mine would do a thing like that." Two weeks later, or maybe three, her boy is out on bail, sporting several lawyers and a new one-button roll suit. He is driven in a pink Cadillac to an out-of-town motel where he holds a press conference. Yes—he barely articulates—he is the victim of police brutality. No, he is not a murderer; a degenerate maybe, but even that is going out the window. He is changing his life—he is going to become a carpenter (a carpenter!) for the Salvation Army, his lawyers say. Immediately, Benny is asked to sing (he plays the guitar) in a Chicago night spot for two thousand dollars a week, or is it ten thousand? I forget. What I remember is that suddenly there is a thought that comes flashing into the mind of the spectator, or newspaper reader: Is this all Public Relations? But of course not—two girls are dead. At any rate, a song begins to catch on in Chicago, "The Benny Bedwell Blues." Another newspaper launches a weekly contest: "How Do You Think the Grimes Girls Were Murdered?" and a prize is given for the best answer (in the opinion of the judges). And now the money begins; donations, hundreds of them, start pouring in to Mrs. Grimes from all over the city and the state. For what? From whom? Most contributions are anonymous. Just money, thousands and thousands of dollars—the *Sun-Times* keeps us informed of the grand total. Ten thousand, twelve thousand, fifteen thousand. Mrs. Grimes sets about refinishing and redecorating

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her house. A strange man steps forward, by the name of Shultz or Schwartz—I don't really remember, but he is in the appliance business and he presents Mrs. Grimes with a whole new kitchen. Mrs. Grimes, beside herself with appreciation and joy, turns to her surviving daughter and says, "Imagine me in that kitchen!" Finally the poor woman goes out and buys two parakeets (or maybe another Mr. Shultz presented them as a gift); one parakeet she calls "Babs," the other, "Pattie." At just about this point, Benny Bedwell, doubtless having barely learned to hammer a nail in straight, is extradited to Florida on the charge of having raped a twelve-year-old girl there. Shortly thereafter I left Chicago myself, and so far as I know, though Mrs. Grimes hasn't her two girls, she has a brand new dishwasher and two small birds.

**A**ND WHAT is the moral of so long a story? Simply this: that the American writer in the middle of the 20th century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist. Who, for example, could have invented Charles Van Doren? Roy Cohn and David Schine? Sherman Adams and Bernard Goldfine? Dwight David Eisenhower? Several months back most of the country heard one of the candidates for the presidency of the United States, the office of Jefferson, Lincoln, and FDR, say something like, "Now if you feel that Senator Kennedy is right, then I sincerely believe you should vote for Senator Kennedy, and if you feel that I am right, I humbly submit that you vote for me. Now I feel, and this is certainly a personal opinion, that I am right...." and so on. Though it did not appear quite this way to some thirty-four million voters, it still seems to me a little easy to pick on Mr. Nixon as someone to ridicule, and it is not for that reason that I have bothered to paraphrase his words here. If one was at first amused by him, one was ultimately astonished. As a literary creation, as some novelist's image of a certain kind of human being, he might have seemed believable, but I myself found that on the TV screen, as a real public image, a political fact, my mind balked at taking him in. Whatever else the television debates produced in me, I should like to point out, as a literary curiosity, that they also produced a type of professional envy. All the machinations over make-up, rebuttal time, all the business over whether Mr. Nixon should look at Mr. Kennedy when he replied, or should look away—all of it was so beside the point, so fantastic, so weird and astonishing, that I found myself beginning to wish I had invented it. That may not, of course, be a literary fact at all, but a simple psychological one—for finally I began to wish that someone had invented it, and that it was not real and with us.

The daily newspapers then fill one with wonder and awe: Is it possible? Is it happening? And of course with sickness and despair. The fixes, the scandals, the insanities, the

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treacheries, the idiocies, the lies, the pieties, the noise.... Recently, in COMMENTARY,\* Benjamin DeMott wrote that the “deeply lodged suspicion of the times [is] namely, that events and individuals are unreal, and that power to alter the course of the age, of my life and your life, is actually vested nowhere.” There seems to be, said DeMott, a kind of “universal descent into unreality.” The other night—to give a benign example of the descent—my wife turned on the radio and heard the announcer offering a series of cash prizes for the three best television plays of five minutes’ duration written by children. At such moments it is difficult to find one’s way around the kitchen; certainly few days go by when incidents far less benign fail to remind us of what DeMott is talking about. When Edmund Wilson says that after reading *Life* magazine he feels that he does not belong to the country depicted there, that he does not live in that country, I think I understand what he means.

HOWEVER, for a writer of fiction to feel that he does not really live in the country in which he lives—as represented by *Life* or by what he experiences when he steps out his front door—must certainly seem a serious occupational impediment. For what will be his subject? His landscape? It is the tug of reality, its mystery and magnetism, that leads one into the writing of fiction—what then when one is not mystified, but stupefied? not drawn but repelled? It would seem that what we might get would be a high proportion of historical novels or contemporary satire—or perhaps just nothing. No books. Yet the fact is that almost weekly one finds on the best-seller list another novel which is set in Mamaroneck or New York City or Washington, with people moving through a world of dishwashers and TV sets and advertising agencies and Senatorial investigations. It all looks as though the writers are still turning out books about our world. There is *Cash McCall* and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *Marjorie Morningstar* and *The Enemy Camp* and *Advise and Consent*, and so on. But what is crucial, of course, is that these books aren’t very good. Not that these writers aren’t sufficiently horrified with the landscape to suit me—quite the contrary. They are generally full of concern for the world about them; finally, however, they just don’t seem able to imagine the corruptions and vulgarities and treacheries of American public life any more profoundly than they can imagine human character—that is, the country’s private life. All issues are generally solvable, which indicates that they are not so much wonder-struck or horror-struck or even plain struck by a state of civilization, as they are provoked by some topical controversy. “Controversial” is a common word in the critical language of this literature as it is, say, in the language of the TV producer. But it is clear that though one may refer to a “problem” as being controversial, one does not usually speak of a state of civilization as controversial, or a state of the soul.

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\* “Looking for Intelligence in Washington” (October 1960).—Ed.

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PHILIP ROTH

It is hardly news that in best-sellerdom we frequently wind up with the hero coming to terms and settling down in Scarsdale, or wherever, knowing himself. And on Broadway, in the third act, someone says, "Look, why don't you just love each other?" and the protagonist, throwing his hand to his forehead, cries, "Oh God, why didn't I think of that!" and before the bulldozing action of love, all else collapses—verisimilitude, truth, and interest. It is like "Dover Beach" ending happily for Matthew Arnold, and for us, because the poet is standing at the window with a woman who understands him. If the investigation of our times and the impact of these times upon human personality were to become the sole property of Wouk, Weidman, Sloan Wilson, Cameron Hawley, and the theatrical amor-vincit-omnia boys it would indeed be unfortunate, for it would be somewhat like leaving sex to the pornographers, where again there is more to what is happening than first meets the eye.

**A**ND OF COURSE the times have not yet been left completely to lesser minds and talents. There is Norman Mailer. And he is an interesting example, I think, of one in whom our era has provoked such a magnificent disgust that dealing with it in fiction has almost come to seem, for him, beside the point. He has become an actor in the cultural drama, the difficulty of which, I should guess, is that it leaves one with considerably less time to be a writer. For instance, to defy the Civil Defense authorities and their H-bomb drills, you have to take off a morning from the typewriter and go down and stand outside of City Hall; then if you're lucky and they toss you in jail, you have to give up an evening at home and your next morning's work as well. To defy Mike Wallace, or challenge his principle-less aggression, or simply use him or straighten him out, you must first go on the program—there's one night shot. Then you may well spend the next two weeks (I am speaking from memory) disliking yourself for having gone, and then two more writing an article (or a confession to a gentle friend) in which you attempt to explain why you did it and what it was like. "It's the age of the slob," says a character in William Styron's new novel. "If we don't watch out they're going to drag us under..." And the dragging under, as we see, takes numerous forms. We get, for instance, from Mailer a book like *Advertisements for Myself*, a chronicle for the most part of why I did it and what it was like—and who I have it in for: Life as a substitute for fiction. An infuriating, self-indulgent, boisterous, mean book, not much worse than most advertising we have to put up with, I think—but also, taken as a whole, a curiously moving book, moving in its revelation of the connection between one writer and the times that have given rise to him, in the revelation of a despair so great that the man who bears it, or is borne by it, seems for the time being—out of either choice or necessity—to have given up on making an imaginative assault upon the American experience, and has become instead the champion of a kind of public revenge. Unfortunately, however, what one is champion of one day, one may wind up victim of the next; that is everybody's risk. Once having written *Advertisements for Myself*, I don't

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see that you can write it again. Mr. Mailer probably now finds himself in the unenviable position of having to put up or shut up. Who knows—maybe it's where he wanted to be. My own feeling is that times are tough for a writer when he takes to writing letters to his newspaper rather than those complicated, disguised letters to himself, which are stories.

The last is not meant to be a sententious, or a condescending remark, or even a generous one. However one suspects Mailer's style or his reasons, one sympathizes with the impulse that leads him to be—or to want to be—a critic, a reporter, a sociologist, a journalist, a figure, or even Mayor of New York. For what is particularly tough about the times is writing about them, as a serious novelist or storyteller. Much has been made, much of it by the writers themselves, of the fact that the American writer has no status and no respect and no audience: The news I wish to bear is of a loss more central to the task itself, a loss of subject; or if not a loss, if to say that is, romantically and inexactly and defensively, an attempt to place most of the responsibility outside the writer for what may finally be nothing more than the absence of genius in our times—then let me say a voluntary withdrawal of interest by the writer of fiction from some of the grander social and political phenomena of our times.

Of course there have been writers who have tried to meet these phenomena head-on. It seems to me I have read several books or stories in the past few years in which one character or another starts to talk about "The Bomb," and the conversation generally leaves me feeling half convinced, and in some extreme instances, even with a certain amount of sympathy for fall-out; it is like people in college novels having long talks about what kind of generation they are. But what then? What can the writer do with so much of the American reality as it is? Is the only other possibility to be Gregory Corso and thumb your nose at the whole thing? The attitude of the Beats (if such a phrase has meaning) is not in certain ways without appeal. The whole thing is a kind of joke. America, ha-ha. The only trouble is that such a position doesn't put very much distance between Beatdom and its sworn enemy, best-sellerdom—not much more, at any rate, than what it takes to get from one side of a nickel to the other: For what is America, ha-ha, but the simple reverse of America, hoo-ray?

**I**T IS POSSIBLE that I have exaggerated both the serious writer's response to our cultural predicament, and his inability or unwillingness to deal with it imaginatively. There seems to me little, in the end, to be used as proof for an assertion having to do with the psychology of a nation's writers, outside, that is, of their books themselves. So, with this particular assertion, the argument may appear to be somewhat compromised in that the evidence to be submitted is not so much the books that have been written, but the ones that have been left unwritten and unfinished, and those that have not even been considered worthy of the attempt. Which is not to say that there have not been certain literary signs, certain obsessions and innovations and concerns, to be found in the novels of our best writers, supporting the notion that the world we have been given, the society and the community, has ceased to be as suitable or as manageable a subject for the novelist as it once may have been.

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Let me begin with some words about the man who, by reputation at least, is the writer of the age. The response of college students to the works of J.D. Salinger should indicate to us that perhaps he, more than anyone else, has not turned his back on the times, but instead, has managed to put his finger on what is most significant in the struggle going on today between the self (all selves, not just the writer's) and the culture. *The Catcher in the Rye* and the recent stories in the *New Yorker* having to do with the Glass family surely take place in the social here and now. But what about the self, what about the hero? This question seems to me of particular interest here, for in Salinger more than in most of his contemporaries, there has been an increasing desire of late to place the figure of the writer himself directly in the reader's line of vision, so that there is an equation, finally, between the insights of the narrator as, say, brother to Seymour Glass, and as a man who is a writer by profession. And what of Salinger's heroes? Well, Holden Caulfield, we discover, winds up in an expensive sanitarium. And Seymour Glass commits suicide finally, but prior to that he is the apple of his brother's eye—and why? He has learned to live in this world—but how? By not living in it. By kissing the soles of little girls' feet and throwing rocks at the head of his sweetheart. He is a saint, clearly. But since madness is undesirable and sainthood, for most of us, out of the question, the problem of how to live in this world is by no means answered; unless the answer is that one cannot. The only advice we seem to get from Salinger is to be charming on the way to the loony bin. Of course, Salinger is under no burden to supply us, writers or readers, with advice, though I must admit that I find myself growing more and more curious about this professional writer, Buddy Glass, and how he manages to coast through this particular life in the arms of sanity.

It is not Buddy Glass, though, in whom I do not finally believe, but Seymour himself. Seymour is as unreal to me as his world, in all its endless and marvelous detail, is decidedly credible. I am touched by the lovingness that is attributed to him, as one is touched by so many of the gestures and attitudes in Salinger, but this lovingness, in its totality and otherworldliness, becomes for me in the end an attitude of the writer's, a cry of desperation, even a program, more than an expression of character. If we forgive this lapse, it is, I think, because we understand the depth of the despairing.

There is, too, in Salinger the suggestion that mysticism is a possible road to salvation; at least some of his characters respond well to an intensified, emotional religious belief. Now my own involvement with Zen is slight, but as I understand it in Salinger, the deeper we go into this world, the further we can get away from it. If you contemplate a potato long enough, it stops being a potato in the usual sense; unfortunately, though, it is the usual sense that we have to deal with from day to day. For all the loving handling of the world's objects, for all the reverence of life and feeling, there seems to me, in the Glass family stories as in *The Catcher*, a spurning of life as it is lived in this world, in this reality—this place and time is seen as unworthy of those few precious people who have been set down in it only to be maddened and destroyed.

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**A**SPURNING OF OUR WORLD—though of a much different order—seems to occur in another of our most talented writers, Bernard Malamud. Even, one recalls, when Malamud writes a book about baseball, a book called *The Natural*, it is not baseball as it is played in Yankee Stadium, but a wild, wacky baseball, where a player who is instructed to knock the cover off the ball promptly steps up to the plate and knocks it off; the batter swings and the inner hard string core of the ball goes looping out to centerfield, where the confused fielder commences to tangle himself in the unwinding sphere; then the shortstop runs out, and with his teeth, bites the centerfielder and the ball free from one another. Though *The Natural* is not Malamud's most successful, nor his most significant book, it is at any rate our introduction to his world, which has a kind of historical relationship to our own, but is by no means a replica of it. By historical I mean that there are really things called baseball players and really things called Jews, but there much of the similarity ends. The Jews of *The Magic Barrel* and the Jews of *The Assistant*, I have reason to suspect, are not the Jews of New York City or Chicago. They are a kind of invention, a metaphor to stand for certain human possibilities and certain human promises, and I find myself further inclined to believe this when I read of a statement attributed to Malamud which goes, "All men are Jews." In fact we know this is not so; even the men who are Jews aren't sure they're Jews. But Malamud, as a writer of fiction, has not shown specific interest in the anxieties and dilemmas and corruptions of the modern American Jew, the Jew we think of as characteristic of our times; rather, his people live in a timeless depression and a placeless Lower East Side; their society is not affluent, their predicament not cultural. I am not saying—one cannot, of Malamud—that he has spurned life or an examination of the difficulties of being human. What it is to be human, to be humane, is his subject: Connection, indebtedness, responsibility, these are his moral concerns. What I do mean to point out is that he does not—or has not yet—found the contemporary scene a proper or sufficient backdrop for his tales of heartlessness and heartache, of suffering and regeneration.

Now Malamud and Salinger do not speak, think, or feel for all writers, and yet their fictional response to the world about them—what they choose to mention, what they choose to avoid—is of interest to me on the simple grounds that they are two of our best. Surely there are other writers around, and capable ones too, who have not taken the particular roads that these two have; however, even with some of these others, I wonder if we may not be witnessing a response to the times, perhaps not so dramatic as in Salinger and Malamud, but a response nevertheless.

**L**ET US TAKE UP the matter of prose style. Why is everybody so bouncy all of a sudden? Those who have been reading in the works of Saul Bellow, Herbert Gold, Arthur Granit, Thomas Berger, Grace Paley, and others will know to what I am referring. Writing recently in the *Hudson Review*, Harvey Swados said that he saw develop-

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ing “a nervous muscular prose perfectly suited to the exigencies of an age which seems at once appalling and ridiculous. These are metropolitan writers, most of them are Jewish, and they are specialists in a kind of prose-poetry that often depends for its effectiveness as much on how it is ordered, or how it looks on the printed page, as it does on what it is expressing. This is risky writing....” Swados added, and perhaps it is in its very riskiness that we can discover some kind of explanation for it. I should like to compare two short descriptive passages, one from Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March*, the other from Gold’s new novel, *Therefore Be Bold*, in the hope that the differences revealed will be educational.

As has been pointed out by numerous people before me, the language of *Augie March* is one that combines a literary complexity with a conversational ease, a language that joins the idiom of the academy with the idiom of the streets (not all streets—certain streets); the style is special, private, and energetic, and though occasionally unwieldy and indulgent, it generally, I believe, serves the narrative, and serves it brilliantly. Here for instance is a description of Grandma Lausch:

With the [cigarette] holder in her dark little gums between which all her guile, malice, and command issued, she had her best inspirations of strategy. She was as wrinkled as an old paper bag, an autocrat, hard-shelled and jesuitical, a pouncy old hawk of a Bolshevik, her small ribboned gray feet immobile on the shoe-kit and stool Simon had made in the manual-training class, dingy old wool Winnie [the dog] whose bad smell filled the flat on the cushion beside her. If wit and discontent don’t necessarily go together, it wasn’t from the old woman that I learned it.

Herbert Gold’s language has also been special, private, and energetic. One will notice in the following passage from *Therefore Be Bold* that here too the writer begins by recognizing a physical similarity between the character described and some unlikely object, and from there, as in Bellow’s Grandma Lausch passage, attempts to move into a deeper, characterological description, to wind up, via the body, making a discovery about the soul. The character described is named Chuck Hastings.

In some respects he resembled a mummy—the shriveled yellow skin, the hand and head too large for a wasted body, the bottomless eye sockets of thought beyond the Nile. But his agile Adam’s apple and point-making finger made him less the Styx-swimmer dog-paddling toward Coptic limbos than a high school intellectual intimidating the navel-eyed little girl.

First I must say that the grammar itself has me baffled: “...bottomless eye sockets of thought beyond the Nile.” Is the thought beyond the Nile, or are the eye sockets? What does it mean to be beyond the Nile anyway? The a-grammaticality of the sentence has little in common with the ironic inversion with which Bellow’s description begins: “With

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the holder in her dark little gums between which all her guile, malice, and command issued..." Bellow goes on to describe Grandma Lausch as "an autocrat," "hard-shelled," "Jesuitical," "a pouncy old hawk of a Bolshevik"—imaginative terms certainly, but tough-minded, exact, and not exhibitionistic. Of Gold's Chuck Hastings, however, we learn, "His agile Adam's-apple and point-making finger made him less the Styx-swimmer dog-paddling toward Coptic limbos etc...." Is this language in the service of the narrative, or a kind of literary regression in the service of the ego? In a recent review of *Therefore Be Bold*, Granville Hicks quoted this very paragraph in praise of Gold's style. "This is high-pitched," Mr. Hicks admitted, "but the point is that Gold keeps it up and keeps it up." I take it that Mr. Hicks's sexual pun is not deliberate; nevertheless, it should remind us all that showmanship and passion are not, and never have been, one and the same. What we have here, it seems to me, is not so much stamina or good spirits, but reality taking a backseat to personality—and not the personality of the character described, but of the writer who is doing the describing. Bellow's description seems to arise out of a firm conviction on the part of the writer about the character: Grandma Lausch IS. Behind the description of Chuck Hastings there seems to me the conviction—or the desire for us to be convinced—of something else: Herbert Gold IS. I am! I am! In short: Look at me, I'm writing.

Because Gold's work serves my purposes, let me say a word or two more about him. He is surely one of our most productive and most respected novelists, and yet he has begun to seem to me a writer in competition with his own fiction. Which is more interesting—my life or my work? His new book of stories, *Love and Like*, is not over when we have finished reading the last narrative. Instead we go on to read several more pages in which the author explains why and how he came to write each of the preceding stories. At the end of *Therefore Be Bold* we are given a long listing of the various cities in which Gold worked on this book, and the dates during which he was living or visiting in them. It is all very interesting if one is involved in tracing lost mail, but the point to be noted here is that how the fiction has come to be written is supposed to be nearly as interesting as what is written. Don't forget, ladies and gentlemen, that behind each and every story you have read here tonight is—me. For all Gold's delight with the things of this world—and I think that his prose, at its best, is the expression of that delight—there is also a good deal of delight in the work of his own hand. And, I think, with the hand itself.

USING A WRITER for one's own purposes is of course to be unfair to him (nearly as unfair as the gambit that admits to being unfair); I confess to this, however, and don't intend to hang a man for one crime. Nevertheless, Gold's extravagant prose, his confessional tone (the article about divorce; then the several prefaces and appendices about his own divorce—my ex-wife says this about me, etc.; then finally the story about divorce)—all of this seems to have meaning to me in terms of this separation I tried to describe earlier, the not-so-friendly relationship between the writer and the culture.

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PHILIP ROTH

In fact, it is paradoxical really, that the very prose style which, I take it, is supposed to jolt and surprise us, and thereby produce a new and sharper vision, turns back upon itself, and the real world is in fact veiled from us by this elaborate and self-conscious language-making. I suppose that in a way one can think of it as a sympathetic, or kinetic, response to the clamor and din of our mass culture, an attempt to beat the vulgar world at its own game. I am even willing to entertain this possibility. But it comes down finally to the same thing: not so much an attempt to understand the self, as to assert it.

I must say that I am not trying to sell selflessness. Rather, I am suggesting that this nervous muscular prose that Swados talks about may perhaps have to do with the unfriendliness between the self of the writer and the realities of the culture. The prose suits the age, Swados suggests, and I wonder if it does not suit it, in part, because it rejects it. The writer pushes before our eyes—it is in the very ordering of our sentences—personality, in all its separateness and specialness. Of course the mystery of personality is nothing less than the writer's ultimate concern; and certainly when the muscular prose is revelatory of character—as in *Augie March*—then it is to be appreciated; at its worst, however, as a form of literary onanism, it seriously curtails the fictional possibilities, and may perhaps be thought of, and sympathetically so, as a symptom of the writer's loss of the community as subject.

True, the bouncy style can be understood in other ways as well. It is not surprising that most of these writers Swados sees as its practitioners are Jewish. When writers who do not feel much of a connection to Lord Chesterfield begin to realize that they are under no real obligation to try and write like that distinguished old stylist, they are quite likely to go out and be bouncy. Also, there is the matter of the spoken language which these writers have heard, as our statesmen might put it, in the schools, in the homes, in the churches and the synagogues; I should even say that when the bouncy style is not an attempt to dazzle the reader, or one's self, but to incorporate into written prose the rhythms, the excitements, the nuances and emphases of urban speech, or immigrant speech, the result can sometimes be a language of new and rich emotional subtleties, with a kind of back-handed grace and irony all its own, as say the language of Mrs. Paley's book of stories, *The Little Disturbances of Man*.

**B**UT WHETHER the practitioner is Gold or Bellow or Paley, there is one more point to be made about bounciness, and that is that it is an expression of pleasure. One cannot deny that there is that in it. However, a question arises: If the world is as crooked and unreal as I think it is becoming, day by day; if one feels less and less power in the face of this unreality, day by day; if the inevitable end is destruction, if not of all life, then of much that is valuable and civilized in life—then why in God's name is the writer pleased? Why don't all of our fictional heroes wind up in institutions like Holden Caulfield, or suicides like Seymour Glass? Why is it, in fact, that so many of our fictional

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heroes—not just the heroes of Wouk and Weidman, but of Bellow, Gold, Styron, and others—wind up affirming life? For surely the air is thick these days with affirmation, and though we shall doubtless get this year our annual editorial from *Life* calling for affirmative novels, the plain and simple fact is that more and more books by serious writers seem to end on a note of celebration. Not just the tone is bouncy, but the moral is bouncy too. In *The Optimist*, another novel of Gold's, the hero, having taken his lumps, cries out at the conclusion, "More. More. More! More! More!" This is the book's last line. Curtis Harnack's novel, *The World of an Ancient Hand*, ends with the hero filled with "rapture and hope" and saying aloud, "I believe in God." And Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* is a book which is given over to celebrating the regeneration of a man's heart, feelings, blood, and general health. Of course it is of crucial importance, I think, that the regeneration of Henderson takes place in a world that is thoroughly and wholly imagined, but does not really exist; that is, it is not a part of that reality which we all read about and worry over—this is not the tumultuous Africa of the newspapers and the United Nations discussions that Eugene Henderson visits. There is nothing here of nationalism or riots or apartheid. But then, why should there be? There is the world, but there is also the self. And the self, when the writer turns upon it all his attention and talent, is revealed to be a remarkable thing. First off, it exists, it's real. I am, the self cries, and then, taking a nice long look, it adds, and I am beautiful.

At the conclusion of Bellow's book, the hero, Eugene Henderson, a big, sloppy millionaire, is returning to America, coming home from a trip to Africa where he has been plague-fighter, lion-tamer, and rainmaker; he is bringing back with him a real lion. Aboard the plane he befriends a small Persian boy, whose language he cannot understand. Still, when the plane lands at Newfoundland, Henderson takes the child in his arms and goes out onto the field. And then:

Laps and laps I galloped around the shining and riveted body of the plane, behind the fuel trucks. Dark faces were looking from within. The great, beautiful propellers were still, all four of them. I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running—leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence.

And so we leave Henderson, a very happy man. Where? In the Arctic. This picture has stayed with me since I read the book a year or so ago: of a man who finds energy and joy in an imagined Africa, and celebrates it on an unpeopled, icebound vastness.

**E**ARLIER I QUOTED from Styron's new novel, *Set This House on Fire*. Now Styron's book, like Bellow's, is also the story of the regeneration of a man, and too of an American who leaves his own country and goes abroad for a while to live. But where Henderson's world is removed from our own, not about riots or nationalism, Kin-

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PHILIP ROTH

solving, Styron's hero, inhabits a planet we immediately recognize. The book is drenched in details that twenty years from now will surely require footnotes to be thoroughly understood. The hero of the book is an American painter who has taken his family to live in a small town on the Amalfi coast. Cass Kinsolving detests America, and himself to boot. Throughout most of the book he is taunted and tempted and disgraced by Mason Flagg, a fellow countryman, rich, boyish, naive, licentious, indecent, and finally, cruel and stupid. Kinsolving, by way of his attachment to Flagg, spends most of the book choosing between living and dying, and at one point, in a language and tone that are characteristic, he says this, concerning his expatriation:

...the man I had come to Europe to escape [why he's] the man in all the car advertisements, you know, the young guy waving there—he looks so beautiful and educated and everything, and he's got it made, Penn State and a blonde there, and a smile as big as a billboard. And he's going places. I mean electronics. Politics. What they call communication. Advertising. Saleshood. Outer space. God only knows. And he's as ignorant as an Albanian peasant.

However, at the end of the book, for all his disgust with what the American public life does to a man's private life, Kinsolving, like Henderson, has come back to America, having opted for existence. But the America that we find him in seems to me to be the America of his childhood, and, if only in a metaphoric way, of all our childhoods: he tells his story while he fishes from a boat in a Carolina stream. The affirmation at the conclusion is not as go-getting as Gold's "More! More!" nor as sublime as Harnack's, "I believe in God," nor as joyous as Henderson's romp on the Newfoundland airfield. "I wish I could tell you that I had found some belief, some rock...." Kinsolving says, "but to be truthful, you see, I can only tell you this: that as for being and nothingness, the only thing I did know was that to choose between them was simply to choose being...." Being. Living. Not where one lives or with whom one lives—but that one lives.

And now, alas, what does all of this add up to? It would certainly be to oversimplify the art of fiction, and the complex relationship between a man and his times, to ignore the crucial matters of individual talent, history, and character, to say that Bellow's book, or Styron's, or even Herbert Gold's prose style, arise naturally out of our distressing cultural and political predicament. However, that our communal predicament is a distressing one, is a fact that weighs upon the writer no less, and perhaps even more, than his neighbor—for to the writer the community is, properly, both his subject and his audience. And it may be that when the predicament produces in the writer not only feelings of disgust, rage, and melancholy, but impotence, too, he is apt to lose heart and finally, like his neighbor, turn to other matters, or to other worlds; or to the self, which may, in a variety of ways, become his subject, or even the impulse for his technique. What I have tried to point out is that the sheer fact of self, the vision of self as inviolable, powerful, and nervy,

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## *Writing American Fiction*

self as the only real thing in an unreal environment, that that vision has given to some writers joy, solace, and muscle. Certainly to have come through a holocaust in one piece, to have survived, is nothing to be made light of, and it is for that reason, say, that Styron's hero manages to engage our sympathies right down to the end. However, when survival itself becomes one's *raison d'être*, when one cannot choose but be ascetic, when the self can only be celebrated as it is excluded from society, or as it is exercised and admired in a fantastic one, we then, I think, do not have much reason to be cheery. Finally there is for me something hollow and unconvincing about Henderson up there on top of the world dancing around that airplane. Consequently, it is not with this image that I should like to conclude, but instead with the image that Ralph Ellison gives to us of his hero at the end of *Invisible Man*. For here too the hero is left with the simple stark fact of himself. He is as alone as a man can be. Not that he hasn't gone out into the world; he has gone out into it, and out into it, and out into it—but at the end he chooses to go underground, to live there and to wait. And it does not seem to him a cause for celebration either. 🍷

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# Eichmann's Victims and the Unheard Testimony

By Elie Wiesel

**T**HE TRIAL of Eichmann at Jerusalem may be called historic insofar as it aimed not merely at judging the crimes and moral degradation of a single individual—or even of a system—but at trying to define more clearly a whole epoch of our history. That epoch, up to now, has eluded all human understanding—so inhumanly blind were its drives, so terrible their consequences.

Not one, but two peoples were transformed: the one into the murderers, the other into the silent horde of the murdered. How was it possible? we still ask sixteen years later. How was an Eichmann possible? We ask the question in anguish—we are in the dark, still. How explain away so total a triumph of beastliness over man, and at the expense of the destruction of a whole people? How, and why? At a cer-

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ELIE WIESEL is author of 57 books and best known for *Night*, a memoir of his imprisonment as an adolescent boy in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

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tain point in the asking, the why and the how come together, indistinguishably.

Those of us who looked to the trial for an answer to these questions looked in vain. I asked Alfred Kazin one day if he thought the death of six million Jews could have any meaning; and he replied that he hoped not. There can, indeed, be no answer naked enough, or real enough. But the trial should at the very least have shaped the question, should at least have revealed the cry inside the question that will echo through all time.... Simply to condemn Eichmann was not enough; not even, in fact, possible. The enormity, call it even the absurdity, of his acts, transcended his person and placed him outside of temporal justice. The laws of living men could not judge him—only the dead could confront him. It was this that often made the trial seem unreal: that the principal characters, Eichmann foremost, appeared actually to be at ease in their respective roles, as if they had come together in the usual kind of judicial proceeding, the ordinary sort of trial where a man is being judged by his peers. Not so: Not he, not Eichmann was being tried, but History. The accused Eichmann spoke freely, unafraid. He cited documents and figures, he held back nothing—he was desperately bent on saving his neck. Thus he often succeeded in giving a false emphasis to the proceedings. Yet we all know that it was not Eichmann's neck that was really at stake. The case of Eichmann—symbol as well as individual—had to be judged in the domain of psychiatry and metaphysics, and not only by the processes of law.

It was precisely this kind of larger scope that the trial never achieved, as critics of the proceedings have pointed out. The beam of light that it threw did not encompass enough and therefore failed to uncover all the dark horizons. And if the focus of the trial was too narrow, the reason was that the proceedings got stuck inside the rules of the legal game. The accused should have constituted the point of departure—he was, instead, the end in sight. So the equation was necessarily falsified: If, before the law, the Eichmanns are guilty, the others, therefore, are innocent. But the truth leads to a different conclusion: The others are guilty, too.

All of us, I believe, in varying degrees must take responsibility for what happened in Europe—Curzio Malaparte and even Karl Jaspers have pointed this out. We belong to a generation at once lost and guilty, and our collective conscience lies under a weight of humiliation. It is too easy to put the whole brunt on a single Eichmann: To do so is to evade coming face to face with the problem. No one ever doubted Eichmann's guilt; everyone was convinced of it from the start, and no trial was needed for proof. If the trial was important—and I for one believe it was—it was because by reviving the past it was able to demonstrate how a crime could spill over and outward, and splash its guilt onto those who thought themselves to be standing at a safe distance. If the grandiose proceedings had failed to teach this lesson, they would have been not useless, but incomplete.

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**F**UTURE HISTORIANS will find plenty of gaps in the Eichmann Trial: The research will have to go on. Contrary to what we had every right to expect, the brief of particulars kept within the narrow concerns of the accused, of him who was actually

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standing trial. The role played in the annihilation program by all humanity—Nazified or otherwise—was brought up only in passing.

Yet, we all know that the Germans could never have succeeded in solving the “Jewish Question” with such speed and efficiency if it had not been for the help and tacit consent of the Ukrainians, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians. The Slovaks paid for every person the Germans took out of their country; the Hungarians put pressure on Eichmann—who was by no means lacking in enthusiasm himself—to speed up the transports; the Letts and Ukrainians in their cruelty surpassed the Germans themselves; and as for the Poles, it was not by accident that the worst concentration camps were set up in Poland, worse than anywhere else.

But it is a well-established fact that wherever the local population was opposed to the deportation of their Jewish fellow citizens, the “yield” was poor—unsatisfactory to the Nazis. Eichmann himself emphasized this point in the confessions he made to the journalist Wilhelm Sassen, at Buenos Aires. In Denmark, almost the total Jewish population was saved. And because the Nazis could not get wide support for their anti-Jewish measures from the people of France, Belgium, or Holland, Eichmann’s henchmen did not do very well in those countries either—to the bitter disgust of the authorities at Berlin, it is known. Only where the indigenous populations were themselves eager to become “Judenrein” did the cattle trains with their suffocating human cargo roll swiftly into the night. This very important fact was hardly touched on at the Jerusalem trial.

Nor did the indictment at Jerusalem dwell much on the failure of the whole outside world, which looked on in a kind of paralysis and passively allowed whatever was being done to be done. The number—six million Jews murdered—could never have been reached if the voices of Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Pope had been more distinctly heard. If the Germans took the precautions they did to cover up their bloody deeds, it was because they were not indifferent to world opinion. In the confessions at Buenos Aires which I cited above, Eichmann notes—with amusement—that even if, through Joel Brand, he had managed to put up a million Jews for sale, there was not a single country which would have bought them. The indifference of our civilized world allowed the Germans a free hand: Go ahead, do what seems best to you with your Jews, we see nothing.

By 1942, Washington, London, and, yes, Jerusalem, too, were aware of what was going on, and Hitler and Goebbels on their side were expecting an avalanche of angry protestations. When none came, they understood: They had been given a free hand by the Western powers.

In the Jerusalem courtroom, correspondence between Chaim Weizmann and the British Foreign Office was offered in evidence: It spoke of a simple, touching favor that Weizmann had asked for: Would His Majesty’s government give the order to the Royal Air Force to bomb the railway tracks to Auschwitz? The answer was no. It is known that a similar request was addressed to President Roosevelt by one of the American Jewish

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leaders who had an entrée to the White House. As we also know, Roosevelt did nothing about it.

Is it not strange—let us use only that word—that the civilized world waited until it was too late before expressing its moral indignation, waited until there were scarcely any Jews left to be saved?

**A**ND FINALLY, in order to keep inviolate the historical truth, the Prosecutor should have removed the last taboo: to reveal the sorry but nonetheless ineluctable fact that the Jews themselves failed to do everything they should have done: They ought to have done more, they could have done better. The American Jewish community never made adequate use of its political and financial powers; certainly it did not move heaven and earth, as it should have. We know the reasons and the justifications: They are not good enough. There can be no justification, nor any explanation for passivity when an effort had to be made to save five to ten thousand Jews from murder each day. Just how many meetings were there at Madison Square Garden, and how many demonstrations in front of the White House? To think of how few, makes one's blood run cold.

In Palestine, the situation was hardly different. In Palestine, heart and conscience of the Jewish people, the means had not yet been found as late as the end of 1944 to give warning, or help if necessary, to the dense centers of Europe's Jewish populations, over which death already hovered. By the time the few parachutists had landed in Budapest (with what results we learned from the Kastner trial) there was nothing they could do: Half of Europe had been emptied of Jews. Why had agents not been sent over from Palestine sooner, with or without parachutists' uniforms? Yes, we know that there was the war in Palestine, but the young men of Palmach would gladly have volunteered to go. Ten, maybe only five, out of a hundred volunteers might have reached their destination in Europe; even those ten or five could have organized resistance, escape, rescues.

One of the war's most unforgivable incidents occurred when the Hungarian Jews from Transylvania were deported to Auschwitz. Their mass deportation took place in May-June of 1944, just a few days before the landing at Normandy. Arriving at the Auschwitz station, they still had no idea of what lay in wait for them; they were ignorant of the very name of the place, they had not heard of the horrors it concealed from them. Had they known, they could have made a dash for it, been saved. Not all, maybe, but the great majority. Mountains surrounded the area, and the Jews might have fled into these mountains and hidden out for a while. The Red Army had advanced to within eighteen to twenty miles from Auschwitz, and at night the rumbling of their guns could be distinctly heard. It was only a matter of a few days before the liberators would appear. But these pious Jews of Transylvania were told that they had nothing to fear, that they were only being transferred further inland—were told and believed, for there was no one to tell them anything else.

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This took place, I repeat, in the spring of 1944, by the time every child in Brooklyn, in Whitechapel, and in Tel Aviv knew that Treblinka and Birkenau were something other than the names of provincial little railway stations.

**A**ND YET to Joel Brand's urgent solicitation for an interview so that he might make known his doubly tragic mission, Chaim Weizmann replied, through his secretary, that he was at the moment too busy to see Brand, that he would be able to receive him in a couple of weeks. Brand had made it clear, in his letter to Weizmann, that every hour counted; every passing day meant the lives of at least ten thousand Jews. How did Brand not go stark raving mad? That in itself remains, for me, one of the great enigmas—the enigma of man's will to survive his damnation.

The terrible fact is that Weizmann's response reflected an attitude widespread among the Jews of Palestine. An attitude, I dare to say, of an inconceivable detachment. People in Palestine behaved as if what was happening over there did not concern them too much. In his memoirs, Yitzchak Grunebaum, who was at one time head of a Rescue Commission, tells how the question came up again and again among his colleagues of whether they had the right, in order to try to save European Jews, to use money earmarked for the building up of Palestine. Grunebaum himself thought absolutely not: first came the Land of Israel, then the Diaspora. The Yishuv's houses, factories, schools, must take priority.

One afternoon during the trial of Eichmann, a young Israeli poet, Haim Gouri, left the courthouse on an impulse. He went to the archives to look through the old Tel Aviv newspapers of 1943-44. He came back shocked. "I don't understand," he said to me. "If you knew the things that were bothering us here, while that was going on in Europe.... Front page headlines: Municipal elections at Hedera—or some other place.... And stuck away in a corner of an inside page, an item of a couple of lines: The Germans have begun the extermination of the Jews in the Ghetto of Lublin, or Lod...."

It was of course not the people's fault, but the fault of their leaders who evinced a surprising lack of initiative, of political maturity, and of courage. Nahum Goldmann acknowledged as much not long ago during a meeting in Geneva of the Executive Committee of the World Jewish Congress. The major Jewish organizations seemed incapable of surmounting their internal bickerings in order to achieve unity of action. The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People during the entire time it existed was boycotted by U.S. Jewish leaders. But if these leaders had their good reasons for not wishing to collaborate with this one or that one on the outside—and I daresay they did have their good reasons—why didn't they set up their own Committee of Rescue, one which could represent all the organizations? This they did not do.

Therefore, it seems to me, for the trial to have been conducted on its right moral plane—the plane of absolute truth—the Prosecutor, Gideon Hausner (or Ben Gurion himself as Witness), should have bowed his head and cried out in a voice loud enough

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*Eichmann's Victims and the Unheard Testimony*

to be heard by three generations: Before judging others, let us look into our own errors, our own weaknesses. We never attempted the impossible—we never even exhausted the possible.

It might be said that with the advent of the Nazi regime in Germany, humanity became witness to what Martin Buber would call an eclipse of God. As if from a mighty curse, strong men and weak men, cowards and those who had been wont to see clearly, were to find themselves guilty in an association with Evil, if from no other cause than that they were living inside the same moment in history. All actions became sullied. Generous spirits fell asleep, distinguished sensibilities were dulled, powerful voices were silenced. The general apathy created the climate in which the criminals on all sides could proceed quietly and efficiently, without disturbance of any kind, and without affected shame.

When the German surrender came, the civilized world uttered a great cry of horror but still shrank from coming to any closer grips with the problem. It wasn't I, was the popular refrain heard, and especially in what had been the Third Reich. Elsewhere, people were content to shed a tear, and declare, "We had nothing to do with it."

To be sure, Karl Jaspers set himself the task of investigating the "German guilt," but with the specific intention of thereby demonstrating the—universal guilt. As a result, his investigation succeeded in allaying many fears in occupied Germany, in reassuring many uneasy minds. Did this not show, on the part of the German philosopher, a flagrant lack of humility? The non-Nazi world had to be allotted its share of the guilt—but this should have been the task and the duty of the intellectuals of New York or of Stockholm. The world, indeed, had more than a few lessons to learn—but not from a German professor.

In Western Europe, the reaction was to be found mainly in works of literature. Sartre, Camus, Gabriel Marcel, going to Malraux for their theme, stressed action and commitment: Everything which happens around us, they proclaimed, involves us directly and necessarily. Yet, in these writings, the question was still not probed deeply enough. The hero of the modern novel, absorbed in expressing his protest, overlooks the nuances. A man was good or bad, a resister or a collaborator, or indifferent. The lines were drawn, the camps strictly defined. Whoever had blown up a train could sleep the sleep of the just, or of the proud, or the happy. The others were, in this degree or that, vile, salaud. The sense of guilt played very little part in the determination of the European youth to build a new future out of the ruins around them. The arts—with the exception of painting—seemed to have hardly any interior connection with the terrible events which should have furnished their inspiration. No new philosophy was engendered, nor any new religion: The earth had trembled and men had stayed the same.

It is reported that André Gide once told an anti-Semitic story. And when one of his disciples, blushing, reproached him: "You, too, Master?"—Gide started to cry. "I did not know that I was," he said. That was before the war. Afterwards, Gide did not cry. He had given up being witty at the expense of the Jews, so he no longer needed to feel guilty....

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It is by a strange irony of fate that the only ones who were, who still are, fully conscious of their share of responsibility for the dead are those who were saved, the ghosts who returned from the dead. They do not feel this through any concept of original sin; they are Jews, they do not believe in original sin. The idea that rules them is more immediate, more agonizing, a part of their very being.

Why did you not revolt? Why did you not resist? You were a thousand against ten, against one. Why did you let yourselves, like cattle, be led to the slaughter?

**D**URING THE EARLY DAYS of the Eichmann Trial, the Prosecutor tormented various witnesses with questions like these. His desire was to throw light on obscure parts of the drama for the benefit of the young generation of Israelis. But the witnesses invariably replied: You cannot know—whoever was not there cannot understand.

Two well-known psychiatrists who were there, Bruno Bettelheim and Victor Frankel, have attempted to give some explanation in their books dealing with the psychology of the concentration camp. The mystery of the victim's acceptance occupied them as much as the question of the executioner's cruelty. But to attribute that acceptance—as they do—to the disintegration of the personality, or to the rising up of the "death wish," or to something in Jewish tradition, can only be a partial explanation. The metaphysical why is still lacking. Nor is any account taken of the kind of guilt which had been implanted in the prisoners.

The feeling of guilt was, to begin with, essentially a religious feeling. If I am here, it is because God is punishing me; I have sinned, and I am expiating my sins. I have deserved this punishment that I am suffering. The revolt against God comes later—it is the final stage. First, the prisoner sacrifices his own freedom for God's. He prefers to believe himself guilty rather than think that his God is the God of Job, for whom man is a mere example—a means of demonstrating a thesis in a verbal duel with Satan.

As each passing day took him farther and farther away from his freedom, the prisoner's sense of guilt sharpened, pressed closer on his conscience. He was, in fact, only following a line of reaction which had been drawn for him by his jailers who, in the ghettos and in the camps, had known precisely—shrewdly—how to push to its extreme limit the emotion of shame and humiliation which he who is still alive normally experiences toward the dead.

I am alive, therefore I am guilty. If I am still here, it is because a friend, a comrade, a stranger, died in my place. Within a closed world, this certitude has a destructive power whose effects are easy to imagine. If to live means to accept or engender injustice, to die quickly becomes a promise and a deliverance.

The system of *Lebensschein* in the ghettos and of *Selektion* in the camps not only periodically decimated the populations, but also worked on each prisoner to say to himself: "That could have been me, I am the cause, perhaps the condition, of someone else's death."

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## *Eichmann's Victims and the Unheard Testimony*

In this way the Lebensschein came to stand for a moral torture... a prison without exits. One of the witnesses at the trial was a man who had been a doctor in Vilna, and his testimony was terribly moving. Recently married, he had succeeded in obtaining a "living permit" and was working in a German factory. He was told he could save one close relative, and he went to his mother to ask her: "What shall I do? Whom shall I save? You—or my wife?" A man forced to make such a choice, to become a concrete instrument of destiny, thereafter lives in a suffocating circle of hell; and whenever his thoughts turn to himself, it is in anger and in disgust. If Andre Schwarz-Bart's hero, Ernie Levy, finally decided to take the train for Auschwitz, it was neither out of love, nor out of pity, but from the conviction that humanity had come to such a pass of evil that no one could continue to live who wished to remain just.

**R**EDUCED to a mere number, the man in the concentration camp at the same time lost his identity and his individual destiny. He came to realize that his presence in the camp was due solely to the fact that he was part of a forgotten and condemned collectivity. It is not written: I shall live or die, but: Someone—today—will vanish, or will continue to suffer; and from the point of view of the collective, it makes no difference whether that someone is I or another. Only the number, only the quota counts. Thus, the one who had been spared, above all during the "selections," could not repress his first spontaneous reflex of joy. A moment, a week, or an eternity later, this joy weighted with fear and anxiety will turn into—guilt. I am happy to have escaped death becomes equivalent to admitting: I am glad that someone else went in my place. It was in order not to think about this that the prisoners so very quickly managed to forget their comrades or their relatives: those who had been selected. They forgot them quickly—trying to shut their eyes to the reproachful glances which still floated in the air around them.

Why did the Jews in the camps not choose a death with honor, knife in hand and hate on their lips? It is understandable that Bruno Bettelheim should wonder why. Putting aside the technical and psychological reasons which made any attempt at revolt impossible (the Jews knew that they had been sacrificed, forgotten, crossed off by humanity), to answer we must consider the moral aspects of the question. The Jews, conscious of the curse weighing them down, came to believe that they were neither worthy nor capable of an act of honor. To die struggling would have meant a betrayal of those who had gone to their death submissive and silent. The only way was to follow in their footsteps, die their kind of death—only then could the living make their peace with those who had already gone.

There comes to mind another case, also presented before the court at Jerusalem: the case of the woman who, naked and wounded, had managed to escape from the ditch, the mass grave in which all the Jews of her town were mowed down by German machine guns. That woman returned to the ditch after a little while to rejoin the phantasmagoric community of corpses. Miraculously saved, she still could not accept a life which in her eyes had become impure.

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*Elie Wiesel*

It is not known yet what the psychiatrists uncovered who examined Adolf Eichmann at great length, before and after his trial. Surely Eichmann's victims—those who are alive, that is—ought to be examined. Only, these ghosts maintain against us an oppressive silence which they brought back with them from over there. They refuse to open up. One thing that is not known is that they are afraid of their own voices. Their tragedy is the tragedy of Job before his submission: They believe themselves to be guilty, though they are not. Only a Great Judge would have it in his power to rid them of this burden. But in their eyes no one possesses either such authority or such power: No one, either human or divine.

Therefore they prefer, in this condemned world, not to hurl their defiance at men and their anger into the face of history, but to keep silent, to pursue the monologue which only the dead deserve to hear. Guilt was not invented at Auschwitz, it was disfigured there. 🍷



# Is New York City Ungovernable?

By Nathan Glazer

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NYONE studying the city of New York (as I have done for the past year or so) is likely to run across certain facts that cast a rather strange light on the present confusion in its politics. For example:

1. In 1940, in the seventh year of the administration of a reform Mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, the Board of Education was responsible for educating about 1,060,000 children, and employed about 37,600 teachers, supervisors, and assorted specialized personnel for the job. In 1960, in the seventh year of the administration of Democratic Mayor Robert F. Wagner, the Board of Education was responsible for educating about 980,000 children, and employed about 45,700 teachers, supervisors, and assorted specialized personnel for the job. Thus a 7 percent decrease in the number of children to be taught has been associated with a 22 percent increase in the number of people staffing and running the schools.

2. In 1946 (the first year of William O'Dwyer's Democratic administration), the Police Department had 20,171 employees listed in the city budget; in 1961, it had 27,239 employees—an increase of 35 percent. During the same period, the population of the city grew by no more than 3 or 4 percent.

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NATHAN GLAZER, *who taught at the University of California, Berkeley, and Harvard for decades, contributed frequently to COMMENTARY and was co-editor of the Public Interest from 1973 to 2003.*

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3. Since 1946, more than 90,000 low-rent housing units have been built in the city. Between 1950 and 1960, there was a net increase of 255,000 in the number of dwelling units available in the city—enough to house anywhere from half a million to a million more people than lived in New York in 1950. Yet during those ten years the population of the city declined by 110,000.

These facts are perhaps not so surprising in themselves. But consider, in connection with the first, the widespread conviction in New York that the Board of Education is doing an inadequate job both with the children of the poor and with the children of the well-to-do. The poor are often in a state of resentment and anger over the schools, and the well-to-do often withdraw their children from the public schools, if they can manage it. Consider, in connection with the second fact, that the state of law enforcement in New York is generally considered to be worse in some respects than it was about fifteen years ago. Most citizens are convinced, for example, that Central Park is far more dangerous today, and find it hard to believe that East Harlem slum dwellers once used to sleep out in the Park on hot summer nights. (The Park is now emptied at midnight.) And consider, in connection with the third fact, that vast numbers of Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and others live under incredibly cramped conditions, that scandals involving illegally overcrowded buildings continually erupt, that the Welfare Department (because it cannot find any place else to house its clients) is forced to patronize expensive and filthy tenements that stuff families of six and eight and more into a single room.

In other words, despite enormous increases in the number of teachers, policemen, and housing units, it is precisely in these areas (one could mention others too) that conditions are felt to have gotten completely out of hand over the last fifteen years.

We might add a fourth mystery—that while the city is being torn apart politically by a conflict between Mayor Wagner (seeking re-election to a third term with the support of a Reform Democratic faction) and the regular Democratic Party leaders (principally Carmine De Sapio of Manhattan, Charles Buckley of the Bronx, and Joseph Sharkey of Brooklyn, who have put up their own slate headed by Arthur Levitt), it is impossible to discover any difference between the two groups on these or any other questions which might be raised about New York. Indeed, even the most devoted reader of the *New York Times* would have to make an extraordinary effort to discover just what the issue was on which Mayor Wagner split with Carmine De Sapio, after living in harmony with him for many years. Having made the effort, I recall that it was a dispute over the choice of a successor to Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack earlier this year. But this issue was probably far less important in causing the break than Wagner's desire to be reelected. In order to be re-elected, Wagner knew that he would have to perform the political miracle of persuading an electorate which believed that the schools were doing a poor job, that the level of public safety was declining, and that the housing situation, after an expenditure of a few billion dollars, was apparently little improved—that he had not re-

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ally been Mayor for the past eight years. For if he had really been the Mayor, should he not have been held responsible?

**T**HIS MIRACLE was all the more necessary to Wagner because the Reform movement in the Democratic Party of Manhattan had made surprising headway and now posed a real threat. It had elected its first Congressman, William Fitts Ryan, in 1960, along with a number of state legislators, and it was showing signs of extending effectively to Brooklyn and the Bronx. Since the Reformers had dissociated themselves completely from the regular Democratic Party, they might well have inherited in 1961 the votes of a restive electorate, ready to believe that Tammany and the machine were to be blamed for everything that seemed wrong with the city. In 1950, disgusted with the vast amount of corruption made possible by only five years of Democratic administration, the people of the city voted for such an unlikely reform candidate as Vincent Impellitteri, simply because he labeled himself an "Independent." In 1961, with the schools collapsing, the police ineffective, and the housing problem almost as bad as ever, might they not have voted for a really competent candidate, backed by the big names of Senator Herbert H. Lehman and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt?

However, most of the leaders of the Reform movement were apparently as little concerned with analyzing the problems of the city and considering better policies as were the Mayor and the Democratic leaders. The Reform movement had arisen in the first place because the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in New York State was outraged at the power of the party leaders to name state-wide candidates, and because it conceived of a State Democratic Party in the hands of the liberals—who had provided its most attractive and effective candidates—as a strong support for the liberal wing of the national Democratic Party. The problems of New York City as such played no role in the origins of the Reform Democratic movement, though they did serve as the basis on which thousands of young, energetic people were drawn to it.

The Reform movement concentrated all its fire on that perennially attractive target, Tammany, its assumption being that with Tammany destroyed and the machine party leaders replaced by Reform party leaders, all would be well. Indeed, those people in the Reform movement who asked, "But what will we do when we get rid of De Sapio and company?" were considered politically naive and perhaps even suspect. And since the Reform movement did not raise any question of program or policy (aside, perhaps, from more intensive harrying of the slum landlords), it was easy for the Mayor to join them—he, too, could get his membership card as a Reformer simply by attacking De Sapio.

As for the Liberal party, it was apparently incapable of the effort of political intelligence necessary to create a reform coalition that might improve the administration of the city—and also supported the new Reformer, Mayor Wagner. On their side, the Republicans, observing all this confusion in the Democratic ranks, thought they had a chance of

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electing a candidate of their own without the help of the Liberals, and thus put forward a slate headed by State Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz. City Controller Lawrence E. Gerosa, who was dropped by Wagner, also saw an opportunity in the confusion, and hoping perhaps to pull another Impellitteri trick, decided to run for Mayor himself.

By the time this article appears, Mayor Wagner will be engaged in the difficult task of arguing that he is not responsible for what has happened in the city during the past seven years, while his three main opponents will be engaged in the easy demagogic job of blaming him for everything and yet giving no indication whatever that they are capable of being even as competent a Mayor as he has been. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to distance oneself a bit from this degrading spectacle and ask, or at least begin to consider, what is really wrong with New York? What is the Mayor's legitimate responsibility for the present condition of the city? What could he have done better? What could any Mayor do to improve the situation?

For the truth is that Mayor Wagner will certainly not go down in the history of New York as its worst Mayor, even if he does not go down as its best. When one compares him with James Walker, William O'Dwyer, and Vincent Impellitteri, one sees a man who has worked much harder at his job than the first, who is unmarred by the kind of contact with gangster and criminal elements that the second maintained, and who is far more competent and has made much better appointments than the third. Important structural changes in the administration of the city have also been effected during his two terms, changes that were difficult to carry through and that will improve the city in the future. The City Planning Commission has been strengthened and given a larger role in the running of the city, a new zoning ordinance has been carefully and successfully shepherded through years of study and hearings and will shortly go into effect, and a new city charter which (in accordance with the advice of the best analysts of the political problems of the city) proposes to increase the power of the Mayor and the City Council, and reduce the power of the Borough Presidents, will be presented to the voters in November.

**W**HAT THEN can the Mayor be held responsible for in the present situation? In attempting an answer to this question, one must be careful to avoid falling into the unconscious demagoguery involved in selecting outrageous examples (how easy they are to unearth in a city of almost 8,000,000!) while ignoring the scale of a city which permits it ten times as many teen-age killings, rapes, cases of graft, and the like, as a city the size of San Francisco. A good deal of this demagoguery is evident in discussions of New York. And there is another danger: the easy assumption that all problems are manageable even before they erupt—that, for example, a race riot or a particularly bad slum are always clear proof of inadequate administration. After all, there are problems which would baffle even the best will and the best administration in the world. To point to only one illustration—the addition to New York of half a million

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Puerto Rican migrants and their children in a mere ten years made it inevitable that certain things would get out of hand before they could be brought under control again.

An equally dangerous though more sophisticated assumption to be avoided is that no solutions can be found to the problems of New York. This assumption is held by many people who are aware of the enormously complex interplay of forces in the city (which means, alas, that no single element runs it—neither the bosses, nor the bankers, nor the criminals, nor the experts, nor the elected officials, nor the people), and who therefore conclude that things can't be done much better than they are already being done.

Such, in the end, is the point of view of the massive scholarly work by Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, *Governing New York City*,\* which must certainly be the most sophisticated, knowledgeable, and exhaustive analysis of the political structure of a great city that has ever been published. The final judgment made by Sayre and Kaufman is even a positive one: "The most lasting impressions created by a systematic analysis of New York City's political and governmental system as a whole are of its democratic virtues: its qualities of openness, its commitments to bargaining and accommodation among participants, its opportunities for the exercise of leadership by an unmatched variety and number of the city's residents, new and old. Defects accompany these virtues, and in some situations overshadow them, but the City of New York can confidently ask: What other large American city is as democratically and as well governed?"

Sayre and Kaufman do offer one major suggestion for improvement, one on which all students of the city and all candidates for Mayor agree: The Mayor must be stronger, so that a pluralism gone mad can be somewhat checked by the chief elected official of the city, who now shares his power with the Board of Estimate, the heads of departments, and the bureaucracies of city employees—all under the severe financial restrictions imposed by a Republican state legislature. I would guess that Sayre and Kaufman, as well as other expert students of the city, feel on balance that Mayor Wagner deserves a third term. Conscious of the almost impossible job thrust upon a Mayor of New York, they would probably back a man who has at least lived with these unmanageable and uncoordinated forces and knows something about how they operate. But before succumbing to this sophisticated and well-supported point of view, let us again contemplate the facts with which we began and consider whether it is really possible to do any better.

**I**T IS ALL TOO EASY to say that the trouble with the New York City Board of Education or the New York Police Department lies with bigness as such. The issue, however, is not the size of these institutions, but the level of their performance—more specifically the degree to which they handle the peculiar obstacles to performance that bigness brings.

There are many examples of such obstacles: The difficulties the people at the bot-

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\* Russell Sage Foundation, 815 pp., \$8.50.

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tom of a many-layered organization experience in communicating their ideas and feelings to the people at the top; the tendency of those who exist for the sake of servicing clients to orient their work not according to the needs of the clients but according to the special characteristics of the organization; the tendency of the organization to react to problems and crises by defensiveness rather than self-examination; the tendency of those inside the organization to close themselves off from new developments on the outside; the slowness of the organization to adopt new measures or new points of view; and the way in which new measures are weakened as they get applied over a large and diffuse area, thus being prevented from making a sharp and clear impact.

Neither the Board of Education nor the Police Department has shown itself capable of overcoming these obstacles to an improved standard of performance. The regular response of both institutions to any problem is to ask for more money and personnel, to do (in the words of Sayre and Kaufman) “more and more of what has traditionally been done,” instead of trying to think of something new and imaginative to do. Occasionally, when pressures from the outside are too great to resist, imaginative programs are developed—slowly, painfully, and often protestingly—within the huge bureaucracies. The Higher Horizons project, under which extra teachers are used to help children from lower-class homes, is one, and it has achieved results (though it is now suffering from the disease of being spread too thin over too many schools). Yet, with its budget of \$600 million think what the Board of Education might do! A mere one percent of this budget would permit the Board to establish half a dozen experimental schools run by the very best people in the country who might come up with ideas and approaches that could eventually spread through the entire system.

The Board not only has a huge budget, it also has 900 schools to work with—another great resource that might be imaginatively exploited, especially in coping with the much-discussed problem of Spanish-speaking children. Surely, one or two of those 900 schools could be put under the Education Department of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to see what it might come up with; one or two might be run on a bi-lingual basis to see if that would produce better results (some very distinguished private schools are bi-lingual); a national contest could be conducted among school principals on how to run a school with a high proportion of Puerto Rican children, and the winner could be given one of the twenty or thirty brand-new schools that are opened in New York every year on which to try out his ideas. One could ask the headmasters of the best private schools in the city if they would be willing to take over and run a public school as an annex—all expenses paid, including enough for administrative help. One could hire Martin Mayer, who has just written the best book on education in some decades and who lives in New York, to prowl around the school system for a year and come up with ideas as to what might be done. One could go to those hundreds of aspiring young writers in the city living on their parents’ money or on grants or on odd jobs and offer them a chance to spend a few hours a week

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teaching literature in the Junior High Schools and High Schools. It may be that none of these ideas would work. But surely with such funds as are available and with such a huge number of schools and teachers, a hundred new things could be going on that might well result in raising the level of the education offered by the public school system.

**W**HY ARE THEY NOT BEING DONE? The answer is that the Superintendent of Schools is bound by a volume of regulations and requirements that make it almost impossible for him (except by an infinite expense of time and energy and skill) to introduce any radical changes. These rules and regulations—ironically, set up in the first place to create a merit system to protect the city employee from unfair treatment and political manipulation—have now taken on a life of their own and become the major obstacle to improving city services. Anything which affects, even in the slightest, the interests and prerogatives of the employees runs into fantastic resistance, for the first aim of the rules and regulations is to defend the city employee against outsiders. Of the hundreds of school principals in New York, not one comes from outside the system. According to Sayre and Kaufman: “The New York City educational system is apparently more tightly closed than any other in the United States. The membership of the Board of Examiners [which gives all the examinations on which advancement is based] is recruited from within the bureaucracy it serves. When this cherished practice was broken into in the one instance on record (in 1937), the appointment of the outsider (who had formerly been a member of the system) was contested in litigation carried to the Court of Appeals.” What, one wonders, would happen to the State Department, the Ford Motor Company, or Harvard University, if they were similarly closed to anyone from outside the system?

As for the Police Department—fattened in the last fifteen years by an additional 7,000 employees with which to handle the safety problems of a declining population—the impregnability of this bureaucracy to outside influences is even greater than that of the Board of Education. “In the Police Department,” Sayre and Kaufman write, “the closed system now extends by adopted custom up to the Commissioner.... Competitive exams (limited to members of the Department in the next lower rank) control all promotions through the rank of Captain (except for detectives) and all higher positions must be filled from the ranks of Captain.” That some changes are necessary is obvious from the simple fact that the level of danger to life and property in the city is so high, despite the number of policemen available. Why, one wonders, is so much energy and time devoted by the police to the vindictive hounding of Greenwich Village coffee houses and bookstores and to the entrapment of prostitutes and homosexuals when the public safety—which the citizenry of New York rightly considers the first order of police business—is inadequately attended to? The police command very little respect from the middle-class people of the city (let alone from the poorer people)—and this is owing not to any

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propaganda to which they have been subjected, or to a cultural background in which police are painted as corrupt and menacing, but simply to their direct experience with the police, an experience which suggests that the Department is more devoted to the protection and extension of its own prerogatives than to carrying out its primary duties with maximum efficiency. Here again we are dealing with a hardened and inflexible bureaucracy. I myself have no good ideas for improving the situation, but I find it incredible that with an annual budget of \$224 million, the Police Department cannot find ways of raising the standard of its performance.

**I**N EDUCATION and policing no great issues of policy have been debated in the city, and I have expressed the perhaps Utopian hope that better administration and the mere breaking-up of traditional ways of doing things might improve matters. When we come to housing, where responsibility is spread among a great variety of agencies, both public and private, we find a situation where great issues of policy do exist and in which it has been much easier for intelligence to operate and make itself felt. It is difficult to ask a Mayor to be heroic in smashing up against the solid walls of the Board of Education and the Police Department—even though LaGuardia was on occasion capable of doing precisely that. But in an area such as housing, in which many forces and bureaucracies interact, it is possible to offer leadership; there is room for maneuver; and most important, there are policies which are unquestionably better than those that all the postwar Mayors have allowed the city's agencies to pursue.

When I use the word “mysteries” in referring to the situation in education, safety, and housing, I honestly mean that there are mysteries—things that I cannot explain, and for which I have seen no one else offer good explanations. Why is it that a huge increase in housing should be accompanied by such terrible crowding when no increase in the population has taken place? One possible answer is that prosperity permits children—whether married or unmarried—to leave home earlier to set up their own establishments, so that many more housing units are needed, even with a declining population. Another is that rent control, in existence for eighteen years, has made it economical for people to hold on to large apartments even when they no longer need them (though this is probably less true today than five years ago). These are partial answers which are not fully satisfying. One thing, however, is clear—that urban renewal programs and the building of low-income projects have gone hand in hand with the demolition of vast quantities of housing for the poor. Certainly such a procedure could not have been expected to remedy the desperate shortage of housing for the poor.

**W**E MAY POINT TO one major line of policy that was never followed in the past (and is still not being followed in the present), but that would have produced a much better city than the New York of today. This was to channel all low-

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cost government-supported housing to open and under-used land. At a time when the slums were groaning under the weight of the vast numbers crowded into them, it was criminal to build low-cost housing projects on expensive, overcrowded slum land, for the effect of this policy was to spread the slums further as those who had been ejected crammed themselves into other housing. Around almost every project built in the heart of the slums was created a frightful periphery of densely populated buildings, in which the problem elements who were denied admittance to the projects became ever more concentrated. In the early 40s, as the old slums that had high vacancy rates filled up because of the cessation of building and the rise of income, it became perfectly clear that postwar low-rent housing should be built on open or underused land. Nathan Straus and Charles Abrams and others spelled this out clearly, arguing—unanswerably—that in a time of housing shortage one increases the total housing stock in the hope that the eventual thinning out of the slums and the concomitant drop in the value of slum properties would make it possible for private and public builders to replace them with new housing—and at a much lower cost than is required when they are packed with people and supplying good income to their owners.

This was not the simplest policy in the world to put into effect. There was the problem of overcoming the opposition to low-rent housing of people living in outlying areas and their elected representatives; there was the problem of persuading slum dwellers that life could be led on Staten Island as well as on Manhattan Island. But a Mayor, whatever the limitations of his formal grants of power—and in connection, for example, with the Board of Education they are severe—has the enormous power of publicity at his disposal. He is the elected representative of all the people, and he can use his position to cause great pressure to be brought on those who resist a policy that is clearly designed for the general good. He can use his position—or try—to make such policies good politics. Again LaGuardia was a great master of this art. One cannot criticize a Mayor for not being one of the greatest politicians of the age, but one can be critical of him for never even attempting to use the powers of his office to promote a policy that would unquestionably have benefited the whole city, as against a policy that was bound to produce—and did produce—a grim mixture of unpleasant high-rise housing projects (they had to be high-rise to be built on the expensive land of Manhattan) and awful slums.

Indeed, the very obstacles in the way of this policy could have been turned to advantage. If residents of the outlying districts resisted housing projects, that should have inspired the Housing Authority to create communities so good that they would become real assets. I have never yet heard a good explanation of why the New York City projects are on the whole the worst designed in the nation. Certainly one reason is that they were built on such high-priced land. Another is that the country's largest housing authority probably also has erected the most impregnable bureaucratic barriers for any architect or urban planner to penetrate.

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There is a good deal more to complain about in housing: the use by Robert Moses's Slum Clearance Commission of tens of millions of dollars of public money to subsidize some private builders to put up the same kind of structures that other builders were putting up a few blocks away without public money; the universal cowardice in connection with rent control, which prevented the distribution of space in accordance with need; the steady incompetence or corruption in enforcing housing laws, which made it possible for the slums to remain profitable; the dullness and unimaginativeness in the building and administration of low-rent housing projects, which turned a great social experiment into a shameful part of the city.

**B**UT CAN the various Mayors who have held office since the 40s be held responsible for all this? Though they share responsibility with a multitude of independent and powerful agencies and administrators and elected officials, they did have it in their power to dramatize what had to be done, and to bring public opinion to the point where it could force the special interests to accept the best and most reasonable policies. The fact that none of them ever used this power is a measure of their true responsibility.

I am convinced that with the hardening of the bureaucratic structures—not only in New York City, but everywhere in American life—our need is for disrupters of the organizations, men who can batter the bureaucracies and make them respond to the real problems rather than to their own internal pressures and pulls, men who can open things up and let in air and light. LaGuardia, who not only made remarkable appointments but was given to outrageous interventions into every branch of city government, understood this need. He was the kind of Mayor who felt that there was less to be feared in blowing things up, in swinging wild, than in operating through channels which were all too effective in muffling and absorbing originality and inventiveness.

Obviously I have been offering a very different conception of the roots of New York City's problems than that held by many qualified observers. Some of these observers, for instance, argue that the trouble derives primarily from the growth of a low-income population. As those capable of paying higher taxes move to the suburbs, while those who require a heavy outlay of city services move into the center, a great strain is placed on the capacity of government to keep up the standard of city services. This is true. Yet New York suffers from this phenomenon less than most big cities do, for New York is so large that a good part of its "suburban expansion" has occurred within the borders of the city itself—in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. And on the other hand, New York's center is far more attractive to the wealthy than the centers of other American cities, and consequently it retains a stronger tax base there. Despite the supposed restriction of the tax base, the city government's budget has increased (in standard dollars) about 70 percent since the last LaGuardia administration. The newcomers do indeed require

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heavy services—but there is also a good deal more money available from the state and federal governments for these purposes than there used to be.

Another conception of the city's problems is held by the Reform Democrats, who insist that the machine is responsible for the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of city services. This claim, in my opinion, is based more on the desire of the Reformers to replace De Sapio and the other bosses (for the perfectly legitimate objective of increasing the strength of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party) than on a serious analysis of the city's problems. I do not see that the machine has had any great impact on the operations of the Board of Education, whose employees are selected and protected by a mass of civil-service regulations that would be difficult for local political leaders to overstep. If the Mayor wishes to be independent of the machine in administering the police and other agencies, there is little the machine can do, whether or not he was nominated by it. The machine, indeed, is mostly interested in judgeships and in the few remaining nests of patronage, not high policy. It is interesting to recall, too, that under a Tammany Mayor (Gaynor), Raymond B. Fosdick, an independent lawyer who later became head of the Rockefeller Foundation, was the energetic Commissioner of Investigation, a post designed to root out graft and corruption; and that under LaGuardia, Paul Blanshard, a Socialist, held the same office with distinction. If we have a Commissioner of Investigation today who seems to lag behind a variety of other agencies and offices engaged in the same job, the machine cannot be blamed, for the Commissioner of Investigation is appointed by and removable by the Mayor.

It would be ridiculous to absolve the machine of all responsibility for misgovernment in the city, but at the same time it is disingenuous for those who wish to destroy the machine to claim that its destruction is the key to the improvement of the city. The politicians did not prevent a new zoning ordinance or a stronger Planning Commission, nor would they have blocked a better Superintendent of Schools. They would have fought a different policy in selecting sites for public housing—and in doing so would have democratically represented the wishes of their constituents. In short, the whole matter is far more complicated than the Reform Democrats would have us believe.

ONE'S CONCLUSION must be that in this election—as in that of 1950—the people of New York are suffering from the narrow-mindedness and simple lack of political imagination of almost all the leaders of the major political factions. The governing of New York City requires men of the greatest gifts and the highest imagination. The political system—and in this I include reformers as well as machine men, Republicans as well as Democrats, the men of property as well as the labor leaders—seems incapable, except on rare occasions, of offering such men to the city's voters. 🍷

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# Edmund Wilson's Civil War

By Robert Penn Warren

ONE OF THE FIGURES treated by Edmund Wilson in his *Patriotic Gore* is Francis Grierson. As a child, Grierson, whose real name was Jesse Shepherd, had lived in a log cabin in Sangamon County, Illinois, but at twenty, in 1869, he stormed Paris. He gave recitals of his piano improvisations in the salons of aristocratic ladies and before crowned heads. He was extravagantly praised by such writers as Mallarmé and Sully-Prudhomme. He himself became a famous writer, and that in French. Maeterlinck called him “the supreme essayist of the age.” Then, in middle life, in the middle of the exotic life he had created for himself, Grierson turned his thoughts back to the log cabin in Sangamon County, and to the strange sense of impending doom and visionary elation that had touched that world in the years before the Civil War, when he, as a boy, had heard Lincoln and Douglas debate. The book he wrote is called *The Valley of Shadows*. Wilson places it among the American classics.

After *Axel's Castle*, the *Finland Station*, and the *Dead Sea*, Wilson himself comes back, as it were, to America; and his book, too, may become a classic.

It will not do to push the parallel between Grierson and Wilson too far. There is little in common between the foggy mysticism ordinarily characteristic of Grierson and

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ROBERT PENN WARREN *was a novelist, poet, and critic. He was the only person to have won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and poetry.*

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the clear, hard, sometimes arrogant glare of Wilson's intelligence. But when Grierson, in recollection, returns to the years before the Civil War, the foginess lifts, and when Wilson, in imagination, returns, the intellectual glare is mollified. Now we not only see something new in the world that his intelligence lights up; we see, also, something new about Wilson, new ranges of sympathy, new dimensions of feeling.

Wilson has, indeed, written before about Americans, of the past as well as the present, but he has treated them with his special critical apparatus, which could be focused with more ease, perhaps, on Proust than on Hawthorne, and with no difference in the degree of detachment. But involvement, almost a sense of self-discovery, is what we can detect here. Wilson says of Grierson, that, in *The Valley of Shadows*, it is almost as though "the experience had imposed itself on him, that a great moment of history has lived itself through him." And that, allowing for all differences, is what we find here, too.

*Patriotic Gore* is a shocker, and the first and most obviously shocking thing about it is the Introduction. Wilson says: "Having myself lived through a couple of world wars and having read a certain amount of history, I am no longer disposed to take very seriously the professions of 'war aims' that nations make." Then, after describing the blind ingurgitation of one sea slug by another in a recent nature film by Walt Disney, he continues: "The wars fought by human beings are stimulated as a rule primarily by the same instincts as the voracity of the sea slug.... The difference [in this respect] between man and the other forms of life is that man has succeeded in cultivating enough of what he calls 'morality' and 'reason' to justify what he is doing in terms of what he calls 'virtue' and 'civilization.' Hence the self-assertive sounds which he utters when he is fighting and swallowing others..."

This is shocking enough. But it is even more shocking to encounter a thumbnail sketch of the history of our country written in terms of the behavior of the sea slug, with some record of the accompanying "self-assertive sounds," including historical justifications. Then, in the body of the book, in the limpid prose of the fascinating narratives, there is shock after shock to our official versions and received opinions, with sometimes more reports of the "self-assertive sounds" made by human beings who are merely, as William James puts it, "the survivors of one successful massacre after another."

But to return to the Introduction. Dramatically, it is a splendid way to begin the book—to throw the reader back on his heels, to make him come gasping for breath to the story of Americans of the past trying to find and justify their roles in a great crisis. But Wilson mixes the dramatic function with certain controversial elements which invite immediate and local criticism; he does not hold some prim distance as Swift would have done, a distance beyond local criticism, nor does he overwhelm local criticism by wit and elegant buffoonery, as Shaw would have done. For instance, neither Swift nor Shaw would have committed the tactical error of staking anything on Roosevelt's presumed responsibility for Pearl Harbor; instead either might have made much of the Japanese attack as a divinely sanctioned, well-deserved piece of good American luck which unified the nation and gave a ready-made "moral justification."

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THE POINT is not that Wilson should have imitated Swift or Shaw. I am merely regretting the confusion of impulses and of tone in the Introduction, because this confusion prevents the Introduction from working as clearly as it might as an emphasizing backdrop for the great themes of the book—the relation between myth and reality in history, and the anguishing problem of man's responsibility vis-à-vis the blank forces of history. After the chilling picture in the Introduction of history as voracity against voracity, Wilson says: "I am not here making a moral criticism of the course of our foreign policy: I am trying to disregard the pretensions to moral superiority with which we have attempted to clothe it; I am trying—as in the book that follows—to remove the whole subject from the plane of morality..." But this is not what, even in the Introduction, Wilson is doing. The Introduction itself is shot through with indignation. There is the indignation at the fact that moral rationalizations have worked toward self-deception, and have been used to deceive—and this indignation is, in itself, a moral judgment. There is also indignation at particular acts and particular policies. The Mexican War is, for example, morally heinous—a notion returned to and emphasized in discussing Grant, who said that, though he fought in the war, he had a "horror" of it. The dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima is morally heinous. Or the scientific research directed toward bacteriological warfare. We cannot miss the accent of moral indignation.

Furthermore, in the body of the book, what we find is not a removing of "the whole subject from the plane of morality," but a fascinating and carefully composed set of juxtaposed contrasts among interpretations, most often morally charged interpretations. It might be argued that such an array would, by its very diversity, imply a mere canceling out—would dramatize the basis for a total skepticism. Furthermore, in the careful composition of the book, the last portrait is of Justice Holmes, to whom the Civil War had given a contempt for "the tone that I became familiar with in my youth among the abolitionists," and who held that might makes "rights," and that "every society rests on the death of men." The fact of the placing of Holmes at the end would seem to give him a summarizing position; and it is true that in the amoral world of Holmes's theorizing we return to the combat of voracities first met in the picture of the sea slugs in the Introduction.

The Introduction and the portrait of the disillusioned Holmes do, in fact, bracket the book—do serve as a structural device. But what lies between the brackets? We find, indeed, other shadings of this "realism"—for example, the manic ruthlessness of Sherman. But the deepest impression we carry away from the body of the book is of individuals caught in a collision of blind forces—or rather, of forces they understand imperfectly or not at all—and trying desperately and devotedly to make "moral" sense of their experience. This pathos, set against the backdrop of the Introduction, is what moves us.

The pathos is present even in the story of Lincoln, who seems so nearly to conform, we might say, to Hegel's picture of the Hero, the man who draws his vocation, as Hegel says, from "a concealed fount," from an "inner Spirit still hidden beneath the surface..."

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*Edmund Wilson's Civil War*

The Lincoln presented by Wilson appears as a man of unsleeping ambition, of cold, uncolored perceptions and analytical mind, of powerful though slow feelings, of “style and imagination as well as of moral authority, of cogent argument and obstinate will.” Lincoln, sensing the deep logic of the moment, perfected the mystique of the Union (Alexander Stephens said that the Union had for Lincoln “the sublimity of a religious mysticism”), and promulgated a certain moral view of the national destiny; and these he imposed (*imposed*, because Wilson holds that without Lincoln they would have been far from inevitable) on the nation and on posterity—though posterity has all too often taken the mystique to be merely a guarantee of easy victories, TV dinners, and bonded bourbon in every “living area,” and three cars in every “carport,” and has read the moral view of destiny as something quite different from the deep, magnanimous attitude that Lincoln, chastened by personal suffering and what Holmes called the “butcher’s bill” of war, developed from his originally more simple and partisan notion. Lincoln perfected the myth, and predicted his own role in it, even by the ominous dreams and hallucinations which presaged, in a fashion dramatically appropriate to the event, his own martyrdom—a martyrdom which Henry James described as the “perfection of a classic woe,” and which we may say, as a sort of aside, belongs by necessity to the role of the Hegelian Hero.

**B**UT THE DEEPEST PATHOS in Lincoln’s story does not lie in the martyrdom thought of in terms of Hegelian necessity, or even in what Wilson describes as a sort of expiation: “...it was morally and dramatically inevitable that this prophet who had crushed opposition and sent thousands of men to their deaths should finally attest his good faith by laying down his own life with theirs.” Though Wilson thus describes the expiation, the pathos he finally feels in the story lies in the ironic fact that Lincoln, who saw so clearly into the historical moment, did not see to the depth. He did not see that the war was bringing forth not only the Union sanctified by blood, but also Gould and Cook and Brady and the Credit Mobilier and the Homestead blood and the Haymarket riot. It was bringing forth a world which Hawthorne (whom Wilson by-passes) saw, with dismay, emerging in the bar of Willard’s Hotel, in Washington, in 1862, a race of slick-faced fixers talking of discounts and drinking strange drinks called “cocktails,” and not the “horn of bourbon” which a few white-haired relics were still anachronistically ordering for their thirst. Behind the new, slick-faced race lay the uncoiling powers of technology and finance capitalism, the new world of Big Organization, which Lincoln understood not at all, not even dimly sensed, a world by whose tough-minded exponents he, had he survived Booth’s bullet, would almost certainly have been impeached.

The pathos of Lincoln’s role deeply engages Wilson’s imagination—the pathos of the contrast between his dream and the emerging reality. In fact, one of the themes of the book is just this contrast between the various forms of myth and reality. Wilson is unsparing and witty in his treatment of the pretensions of the Southern myth, but be-

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cause the South lost the war, that myth is, ultimately, a subject for comedy.\* But the North won, and so Wilson, like Henry and Brooks and Charles Francis Adams, Henry and William James, and James Russell Lowell, finds a savage irony, not comedy, as he surveys the Gilded Age, and after: "...with its miseries of an industrial life that was reducing white factory workers to the slavery which George Fitzhugh [the rabid Southern apologist who wrote *Sociology for the South* and *Cannibals All*] had predicted, with its millionaires as arrogant and brutal as any Carolina planters, with the violent clashes between them as bloody as Nat Turner's rebellion or John Brown's raid upon Kansas, with its wars in Cuba and Europe..."

This is the world of the great power state which Melville,\*\* though a patriotic Unionist (and devoted emancipationist), had predicted in "The Conflict of Convictions":

*Power unannointed may come—  
Dominion (unsought by the free)  
And the Iron Dome,  
Stronger for stress and strain*

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\* Except when it, or some representative of it, is used as a stick to beat the dog of Northern reality. I am thinking of the ironical use of the Confederate made by certain Northern writers, with the irony directed at what the North had become—Melville in *Clarel*, Henry Adams in *Democracy*, and Henry James in *The Bostonians*. (This, by the way, is a subject which G. Vann Woodward has handsomely explored in an essay.) The use of the Confederate by Melville, James, and Adams is similar to the use Wilson makes of the old Alexander H. Stephens sitting for ten years in the Congress of the Gilded Age, an invalid in a wheel-chair, "enrolled," as a reporter described him, "in countless thicknesses of flannel and broadcloth wrappings," with a "thin, pale, sad little face" peering out with eyes that seemed to "burn and blaze," the image, as Wilson puts it, of "pure principle, abstract, incandescent, indestructible."

\*\* Wilson dismisses Melville's as "versified journalism," "empty." Whatever the defects of *Battle Pieces*, it is not empty; and its content would seem very close to some of Wilson's own attitudes. Melville, despite his convictions, is unwilling to gloss over the difficulties, philosophical and emotional, of the situation, or the problem of historical costs. For instance, in the same poem from which I have quoted above, he says that if the war comes "the gulf" will its "slimed foundations bare"; and that the wind of history "spins against the way it drives." In "The House-Top," Melville presents the bloody Draft Riots of July 1863 and their bloody suppression, with, by the way, a reference to Calvin which Wilson, in his preoccupation with Calvinism, might have found interesting:

*Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll  
Of black artillery; he comes, though late;  
In code corroborating Calvin's creed  
And cynic tyrannies of honest kings;  
He comes, nor parlies; and the Town, redeemed,  
Gives thanks devout; nor being thankful, heeds  
The grimy slur on the Republic's faith implied,  
Which holds that Man is naturally good,  
And—more—is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged.*

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*Edmund Wilson's Civil War*

*Fling her huge shadow athwart the main;  
But the Founders' dream shall flee.*

This is the world in which few of the “really gifted men” escaped being maimed or perverted or subjected to “slow strangulation” by its gross values or by its sentimental tastes, and by their own automatically violent reaction to such values and tastes—George W. Cable, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, John W. De Forest, Albion W. Tourgee. Holmes, Wilson says, “stands alone as one who was never corrupted, never discouraged or broken,” and he survived partly by aristocratic contempt for the world and by the code of the gentleman, partly by the rigorously intellectual height of his ambition, and partly by his professional devotion, which worked as a sustaining morality, the code of what, ironically, he called the “jobbist.”\* Holmes survived into the uncomprehending reverence of our own time as the “last Roman.”

And this brings us to an important aspect of *Patriotic Gore*. What touches Wilson's heart most deeply is some courageous manifestation of the old virtues. Holmes is not the only one he comments on. There is Lee, after defeat in a war he had never believed in, going about his daily duty in little Washington College; there is Grant, disgraced in the new world he had never understood, dying of cancer but hanging on to write his book; there is Alexander Stephens, propped in his wheel-chair, swathed in wrappings like a mummy, in the midst of a Gilded Age Congress; there is Sherman in the late years, as contemptuous as Coriolanus of politics and politicians, with his definition of fame: “to be killed on the field of battle and have our names spelled wrong in the newspapers.”

Such men are not presented as appearing automatically and full-blown from the seeds of Time. In every case, Wilson has, with shrewd and economical strokes, indicated the depth of personal struggle which could lead to such fortitude, such moral certainty, such self-control. The main point here is that in our world where “other-directedness” rules and where even protest has its own clubbiness, its own version of promotional and public-relations mentality, and its own little sects and cells of “right-thinkingness” as un-

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“On the Slain Collegians” gives us the pathos of the entrapment in history:

*Warred one for Right, and one for Wrong?  
So put it; but they both were young—  
Each grape to his cluster clung*

And in the prose “Supplement,” we find passages worthy to be put by the “Second Inaugural.”

\* Holmes's notion of salvation, however minimal, by devotion to the job in the midst of a world drained of higher sanctions is similar to the key ethical view of Conrad, to the stoicism of Housman, to the “code” in the world of Hemingway. In addition, with a somewhat different emphasis, we might mention Henry James and Stevenson. All of this is but one manifestation of a very general situation.

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generous as a village sewing-circle at the gossip hour and as deficient in curiosity about ideas as the annual meeting of the Association of Hard-Shell Baptists—the main point is that Wilson finds an ultimate value in the mere fact of unawed character, in the “rare survival of the type of republican Roman.” And in an age when signing on the dotted line is the sure guarantee of salvation, Wilson finds this value “irrespective of what he [the Roman] stands for.”

**I**T IS THIS FEELING that leads Wilson, after considering the intransigent “idealism” of the “impossibilist” Alexander Stephens, to write: “There is in most of us an unreconstructed Southerner who will not accept domination as well as a benevolent despot who wants to mould others for their own good, and to assemble them in such a way as to produce a comprehensive unit which will satisfy our own ambition by realizing some vision of our own; and the conflict between these two tendencies—which on a larger scale gave rise to the Civil War—may also break the harmony of families and cause a fissure in the individual.”

Wilson, of course, uses that “unreconstructed Southerner,” who, he says, lurks somewhere in most of us, as a metaphor for the independence of character he admires. But a Southerner, while appreciating the compliment, might wish that, in some of its dimensions, the metaphor had better grounding. It is painful for a Southerner to think of Governor Faubus as an exemplar of that independence and to contemplate the near bankruptcy of leadership on the question of race in the South, a bankruptcy which signifies a lack of character as much as anything else. For the “Silent South”—as George W. Cable long ago called that stripe of opinion which looked forward to a reasonable and just handling of the race question—is as often silent out of calculation and cowardice as out of any sense of clan solidarity or manly resentment at coercion. Furthermore, Wilson’s praise of the resistance to domination which he attributes to the Southerner was historically associated, in the apologetics of slavery, with the attitude of the “benevolent despot who wants to mould others [i.e. slaves, and sometimes even the citizens of the rest of the country] for their own good.”

Wilson, of course, understands the limits of his metaphor. He knows the unrelenting pressure on opinion in the Old South, and remarks on the “mental and moral confusion” to which thinkers of the South were reduced when they tried to deal rationally with the questions of slavery and race. And no doubt he knows that in the generous way he uses the term, very few Southerners remain “unreconstructed”; they, too, live in the TV culture, and are as “other-directed” and as sensitive to the need for belongingness as any liberal gray-flannel-suiter, with *Dissent* and the *Nation* in his attaché case, who rides the commuter train out of New Rochelle, N.Y. Simply, as Wilson knows, the appropriate pressures are changed by latitude; and Wilson uses his term “unreconstructed Southerner” as, simply, one of his devices of shock.

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*Edmund Wilson's Civil War*

WILSON admires his Romans, but there is a remarkable range of sympathy and understanding for those others who never achieved the Roman virtues. He deals tenderly with even the rather hard-to-take Calvin Stowe (Harriet Beecher's husband) and generously with the often maudlin Sidney Lanier. He understands the motivations of Sut Lovingood even as he takes a sideswipe at the academic attempts to whitewash his "murderous clowning"; and Wilson has some appreciation of the humor in Sut (though not as much as I have, especially the humor in some of the language) and how this relates to the old social order, the same social order that was capable of producing a Lanier.

There are, throughout the book, quite wonderful flashes that, unpretentiously but adroitly, present the inwardness of men and moments—Hinton Helper's suicide in the dreary rooming house; the glimpse through an open door of Mr. Chestnut, the ninety-year-old planter, blind and defeated in his looted mansion, kneeling beside the bed once occupied by his dead wife; Richard Taylor's glimpse into the eyes of Stonewall Jackson, where, before Jackson turned in the next instant to prayer, he saw "an ambition boundless as Cromwell's, and as merciless"; the old Sherman leaping from his chair and flinging aside *Great Expectations* when they call him to the bedside of his dying wife, from whom he has been long estranged, and rushing up the stairs, crying: "Wait for me, Ellen: No one ever loved you as I love you!"

The note of irony that runs through the book is always subdued to an understanding of the human predicament. For instance, when Wilson winds up his account of the touching diary of Charlotte Forten, the Negro girl from Philadelphia who went to the Carolina Islands to teach and there became timorously the friend of the great Colonel Higginson and Dr. Seth Rogers, and dreamed, even more timorously, of a nearer relation with a certain Mr. Thorpe,\* Wilson writes:

This had all been a beautiful experience for Charlotte Forten and Colonel Higginson and Dr. Seth Rogers—those days when the Negro's deliverers and a cultivated Negro woman who wanted to work for the advancement of her race were meeting in a common mission on the plantation of the vanished enslaver, when they rode through the pines in the moonlight

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\* "I rode Mr. Thorpe's horse, a splendid, swift, high spirited creature. Could hardly hold him. But enjoyed the ride exceedingly. I like Mr. Thorpe. Report says that he more than likes me. But I *know* it's not so. Have never had the least reason to think it. Although he is very good and liberal, he is still an *American*, and would, of course, never be so insane as to love one of the proscribed race. The rumor—like many others—is entirely absurd and without the shadow of a foundation. How strange it seemed riding tonight through the woods—often in such perfect darkness we could see nothing—how strange and wild! I liked it." This is what she confided to the diary, to come to light, with publication, in 1953. She had reason for her little ironies. She had not been able to attend the white schools in her native Philadelphia; she was tutored at home and then sent to Salem, Massachusetts, where she attended the white school and was an academic star, but was cut on the street by white girls who had been friendly in class.

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and sang their patriotic songs. But the moment was soon to pass, and the contact was not to last long. Colonel Higginson and Dr. Rogers were to leave the delightful South [Higginson was to write of "the voluptuous charm of the season and the place"] and go back home to their Massachusetts and Charlotte Forten to the Philadelphia which could hardly be called hers; and thereafter, one imagines, they ceased to meet.

Only when Wilson deals with historical situations rather than persons does his irony lose its coolness. No, there are a few exceptions. When he treats us to an *explication de texte* of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," with an implied *explication* of the author, he has some not wholly innocent fun. Elsewhere, we are shown Thomas Nelson Page putting old animosities to sleep "with the chloroform of magazine prose," and there is the baleful glee, scarcely restrained, in the associated picture of Higginson, "who had subsidized John Brown, served as colonel of a Negro regiment and been present at the burning of Jacksonville...weeping over Page's *Marse Chan*"—the Higginson who had, in fact, put a white tea-rose in his buttonhole after setting fire to the town. And for a last example of those exceptions we find that when Wilson turns to the Lincoln steeped in the embalming fluid of Carl Sandburg's oleaginous prose, he allows himself the luxury of his own brand of "murderous clowning."

THE RANGE of Wilson's imaginative sympathy and the variety of figures on which it is turned mean that *Patriotic Gore* achieves something unique. Better than any book I know it gives a sense of the dynamic interrelation of persons and ideas involved, of comparisons and contrasts. George Fitzhugh, ironically enough, provides Lincoln with his telling notion of "a house divided." From an uncle of Ambrose Bierce, John Brown gets the cutlasses used in his Kansas massacre. Grant and Mosby, after the War, become friends. Holmes gives his opinion, not too flattering, of Lincoln; and William and Henry James give theirs, again not too flattering, of Holmes. Cable anticipates Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*. Stonewall Jackson and John Brown appear, in their dealings with the Almighty, as swatches off the same bolt of old American goods—as in certain aspects of personality Hinton Helper and John Brown might well have appeared, in their groping, home-made intellectual efforts, in their angry egotism, ambition, and paranoia, in their shady financial dealings, in their need for a cause. Garth James, the younger, soldier brother of William and Henry, explains God's Great Plan in arranging the assassination of Lincoln. And as a kind of over-all binder for those more incidental interrelations, we find the notion of the fatal attraction and mutual need of the North and the South, a notion presented in the conceit of Grant as Ahab to Lee's White Whale, in the treatment of Melville's "The Scout Toward Aldie," and in Julian Green's play "Sud," which, with its morbid homosexual treatment, more resembles the Paris of Gide, as Wilson says, than the battlefields of 1861–65. All of these interrelations give a remarkable sense of the density of the world Wilson is writing about; and, as he quite well knows, a sense of the intricate texture of roles and dooms in a single drama.

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## *Edmund Wilson's Civil War*

For *Patriotic Gore* is to be taken as a unit, not as a collection of pieces more or less referring to a common background, or as a protracted *causerie* on our history, or as a series of psychological *aperçus*. Not that the book has the documentary unity of a literary history (as it will be taken by some to be, and be criticized for not being); or the narrative unity of ordinary history (ditto). There is, rather, the unity of recurring themes, those of myth and reality, of the struggle for moral meaning in the midst of the blankness or complication of event. Less important is Wilson's recurrent use of Calvinism as an explanation, a use that will, no doubt, evoke some criticism. The effect of the War on ways of thinking and on prose style is, too, a recurrent concern, one that provides some of Wilson's best pages. All of these themes and concerns appear, as we have said, in a very subtly composed montage of character and event; and in these terms the unity of the work is unmistakable and compelling. But undergirding and emphasizing this unity is the unity imposed by the personality of Wilson.

We find Wilson present here as we find a novelist in his work—in style, in tone, in a pervasive sense of involvement in the issues implied by action. And this is true of the issues in the world Wilson has here penetrated imaginatively into. His own involvement is, as it were, testified to by the fact that, like a novelist, he never wants the issues to appear as abstractions; he wants them to appear in experience, with all the density, paradoxicality, and ambiguity of felt life.

Certainly the issues he presents are not soluble in any tidy fashion—or history would be tidy. Wilson is, for instance, aware of the massive pressure of events, and yet he cannot subscribe to that view (which even many non-Marxists take when it suits their convenience) by “which ‘history’ has become the object of a semi-religious cult.” No, the painful, twin stories of contingency and of human responsibility remain the central story, and for Wilson the great “if’s” of history, in both those dimensions, remain tragically tantalizing. Wilson is at once fascinated and repelled by that dark crossroads in the human soul where ambition and a sense of destiny, sometimes so nobly and so destructively, meet.

Wilson, at moments at least, posits some norm of reason, decency, and self-awareness that would be different from the crazy vanities and dark compulsions that are so often the fuel in the engine of history. For instance, he says that the writings of Fitzhugh “were pernicious in very much the same way—though on the opposite side—as the activities of John Brown”; that is, both Fitzhugh and Brown worked against any attempt to use reason. Or about the assassination of Lincoln: “there had died with him any possibility of a clear and decent policy toward the South.”\*

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\* Wilson even speculates that in revulsion from the general confusion and squalor of the period, the young Holmes began his habit of not reading the newspapers, “of dissociating himself from current events.” As for “a clear and decent policy toward the South,” Wilson, in passing, indicates two things: a gradual extension of the franchise to the freedmen, and an attempt to involve the old planter class, as the only considerable group with education and training, more responsibly in government. Perhaps both things have merit, but in the limits (continued on the following page)

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WILSON IS PERFECTLY CLEAR in his attitude toward slavery, the mania of Southern jingoism, and the sophistries of Southern apologetics, but he is appalled by the way the crusade against slavery worked out. He would agree, it seems, with William James, speaking in 1897, at the dedication of the monument in Boston to the high-minded and gallant young Robert Gould Shaw, killed at Fort Wagner in 1863 at the head of the 54th Massachusetts, the Negro regiment: "The Almighty cannot love such long-postponed accounts, or such tremendous settlements. And surely He hates all settlements that do such quantities of devils' work." We may say, in fact, that Wilson, despite his "having read a certain amount of history," does not primarily have the concerns of a historian, any more than he has those of a politician. He is a moralist—a rather peculiar moralist steeped in psychological awareness—looking at historical and political process and seeing a good deal of "devils' work."

But Wilson knows that somebody has to do the work of the world. And he knows, as well as Conrad's Marlow lolling on the deck of the little yacht anchored in the mouth of the Thames, in the dusk, in the early pages of *The Heart of Darkness*, that somebody has to pay the bill for the work of the world. He knows, that is, that a great part of the work of the world is done in terms of self-interest, even brutal self-interest. He knows, too, that in the strange paradoxicality of things, a great part is still done in terms of ideas, ideals, and that this always entails great risks, one of the greatest being that of being caught out, in the light of history, as hypocritical or ridiculous. He knows, and admits, that myths, with all the risks entailed, are necessary. Wilson is, nevertheless, asking what is the *necessary* relation between action and myth? If, as Wilson says, "the real causes of war still remain out of range of our rational thought," is this any reason for us to accept the myths

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of my ignorance I do not see that they would have achieved much. Something more fundamental was needed. For instance, there should have been some attempt to give a solid economic base to emancipation—a policy not confused with a punitive expropriation of land (which is not to say that redistribution of land might not have been in order). But what of some ambitious project involving the vast resources in public land? What of some systematic program of absorbing a certain number of freedmen into Northern industry, etc.? What of a thousand things? But that is all dreaming. As long as there was no self-reconstruction in the almost solidly racist and segregationist North, the South would take any attempt to give the Negro political and economic independence *in the South* as merely the combination of a punitive measure and a device for insuring the dominance of the Republican party. In the face of the general situation, North and South, no matter how intelligently and responsibly the freedmen exercised their new political role in the South, they were doomed; and the doom was, of course, sealed when the Republicans sold them out in the Big Deal of 1876. The real trouble in the Reconstruction was a marvellous confusion and intertwining of power-grab, "reconstruction," and vengeance. The question was not one of "toughness": a much tougher line than that actually pursued might have done more good to all if it had avoided confusion, had been more consistent and comprehensible. But history is irreversible, and we are still picking up the pieces. And one of the reasons Southerners, for their part, don't get more of the pieces picked up is their comforting bemusement with Yankee disingenuousness and self-righteousness. For in the bemusement, the Southerner feels absolved from any need to look at the problem straight.

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which war inevitably generates and which always “turn the conflict into melodrama”?

The task this book proposes to itself, and to us, is the liquidation of guff—of the self-righteousness and self-deception resulting from the easy fusion of self-interest (or self-justification) and ideals. That, of course, is a rather forlorn hope, for we all, as individuals and as a society, have an enormous vested interest in one kind of guff or another. Gentle reader, if you do not think so, kindly address yourself to the first five, or fifteen, works on American history drawn at random from the nearest shelf—or read any five, or fifteen, reviews of this book. And I suppose that Wilson would be the first to admit that anti-guffism carries the danger of its own kind of guff.

But what is guff? Does Wilson mean that any attempt to attach moral importance to history is guff? I do not read *Patriotic Gore* in that light. When Wilson says that he wishes “to remove the whole subject from the plane of morality,” I take it that he merely proposes to set it on a plane where what little we know of history, anthropology, and psychology—and what little talent we have for self-scrutiny—may be drawn on to criticize our myths and, even, to enrich them. And this, it should be emphasized, is not merely a dwelling on the past: it is a way of preparing for the future.

Meanwhile, we must realize that *Patriotic Gore*, in an important dimension, is a work of art, an essentially dramatic work in which experience, imaginatively conceived, imposes itself on us—as presumably it did on the author. And what Wilson gives in these portraits and narratives, and in the peculiar complexity of his own involvement is, willy-nilly, powerful evidence of man’s need for “moral” meaning. We find here, rendered with style, psychological subtlety, and a sense of the tragic depth of life, images of men and women struggling valiantly for meaning in their experience, and sometimes even achieving that moment of grace which makes “moral” meaning more than an illicit gratification of our secret needs and desires. *Patriotic Gore* does not say that history makes sense. But it clearly says that men must, in the end, try to make sense of history. The book is a moving record of that effort. 📖

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# Yiddish: Past, Present, and Perfect

By Lucy S. Dawidowicz

**O**N HEARING that the first volume of an unabridged ten-volume Yiddish dictionary has just been published, people ask, “Today?” Their skepticism reflects the common knowledge that Yiddish has fewer speakers today than ever before. Why, then, an unabridged dictionary of the Yiddish language now? The editors of the *Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language*, Judah A. Joffe and Yudel Mark, linguists and Yiddish scholars, explain in their introduction that they wished to create “a monument” to the centuries of Ashkenazic creativity: “We have not forgotten for one moment what happened to our language at the bloody hand of the murderer and in the tempests of linguistic assimilation. We consider our task to be not just linguistic, but social and ethical.” Or, to use the words of Hillel, “And if not now, when?” Under the pressure of history, Mark and Joffe see their responsibility as primarily to preserve the Yiddish language for the historical record and secondarily to set standards for and define its usage as a living language.

Yet however melancholy the outlook for Yiddish today, its prestige in America has never been higher. Madison Avenue dictates: “Dress British; think Yiddish.” Yiddish is taught at many universities; Yiddish writers, in translation, have attained consider-

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LUCY S. DAWIDOWICZ *was an American historian and author. She was a regular contributor to COMMENTARY.*

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able vogue; adult education courses in Yiddish and Yiddish literature have unpredicted popularity. The Yiddish novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer recently commented on this phenomenon, formulating what may be designated as the law of Yiddish status: the fewer its speakers, the greater its prestige.

About three million people—nearly a quarter of all Jews—speak Yiddish today or know it well enough to speak. Perhaps half as many more understand it. Before the Nazi holocaust Yiddish had nearly 7 million speakers, or 40 percent of all Jews. Back in 1900 over 60 percent of all Jews spoke Yiddish. Most Yiddish speakers nowadays are bilingual, knowing and speaking also the language of the country they live in, but Yiddish was predominantly once the spoken language of the Jews. Statistically, English has displaced Yiddish: Nearly twice as many Jews speak English, and English has nearly twice as many Jewish periodicals published all over the world (not counting Israel) as Yiddish. In the United States, where about 20 percent of Jews speak Yiddish, the *New York Times* has many more Jewish readers than the 115,000 who buy the city's two Yiddish dailies.

The decline in the number of Yiddish speakers and the ascendancy of English are easily explained by the great migration from Eastern Europe at the turn of the century and by the enormous Jewish losses during World War II. It is unlikely that any language would long survive the worldwide dispersal of its speakers amid alien tongues and the destruction of its linguistic base. That Yiddish has survived at all under such conditions illustrates its adaptability and its speakers' persistence. This determination to hold on to Yiddish is one of the ways in which Yiddish speakers have tried to win acceptance and status for their language.

**A**LMOST EVERY language has, at some stage in its history, aspired to political recognition and social acceptance. The struggle for recognition of the native languages in Lithuania and Latvia symbolized the peasants' defiance of the Polish- and German-speaking landowners. In Finland and Norway the native languages fought for emancipation from foreign rule. In Norway the conflict persists between Riksmål, the official Danish-derived language, and Landsmaal, the modernized standardized form of Norwegian dialects. In Ceylon today the two million Tamil-speaking Hindus have revolted against the government's plan to make Sinhalese, the language of the Buddhist majority, the official language. Hindi is today seeking status as the national language of India, competing with the high prestige of English and the multiple claims of the regional languages. Most modern languages have suffered the disabilities of their speakers, in class, caste, religion, or nationality, but none, I think, has ever had as large a share of disabilities as Yiddish.

Yiddish developed as a vernacular among Jews, under a double disability. It was despised as faulty German by those who did not discern its distinctive character. And as a

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written language, it had the lowliest status, being a substitute for Hebrew among women and the meanest and most uncultivated men. Early Yiddish books were addressed to “women and the common people who cannot study Torah.” (The *Tsene-Urene* was renowned as the “women’s Bible.”) The status of Yiddish has been reflected in some of the more common epithets applied to it: *taytch* (“translation” or “explanation”), meaning Yiddish as intermediary between the learned texts and the common people; *mame-loshn* (literally “mama-tongue”), meaning one’s own language, with emphasis on the woman and mother; *prost-Yiddish* (“plain Yiddish”), pointing to Yiddish as connected with the common and uneducated; *zhargon* (“jargon”) and *shifha* (“maidservant”), both embodying contempt.

The struggle of most vernaculars for recognition was frequently a class conflict. The lower classes spoke the vernacular and the upper class, the nobility and the educated, spoke Latin, French, German, or whatever the prevailing cultural style was. In 18th-century Russia, after Peter the Great’s reforms, when French culture flooded the upper classes, Russian was looked upon as “the language of lackeys and of all common people.” Just so, Yiddish was associated with the lower classes among Jews. It was offensive to the educated upper class, and despised by the middle class aspiring to Gentile society where German, Polish, or Russian were spoken. While most vernaculars have gained status with the emergence of the middle class as an influential factor in society, the emergence of a Jewish middle class in the main spelled doom for Yiddish. (Ultra-Orthodoxy among middle-class Jews was the most significant factor in halting linguistic assimilation.) So intent were these modern skeptics, the newly educated middle-class Jews, on integration into Gentile society that they even blamed anti-Semitism on Yiddish, as a particularly objectionable aspect of Jewish separatism. At the beginning of the 19th century, German Jews appealed to Polish Jews to discard Yiddish: “How long will you continue to speak a corrupt German dialect instead of the language of your country, Polish? How many misfortunes might have been averted by your forefathers had they been able to express themselves adequately in the Polish tongue before the magnates and kings!” (Disdain for the language of the Jewish masses is quite old. Long after Aramaic had spread as the vernacular among Jews, Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi protested: “Why should the Syriac language be used in Palestine? Either Hebrew or Greek!”)

**M**OST OF TODAY’S three million Yiddish speakers were born in Eastern Europe, though only about a quarter still live there. (Some 470,000 in Russia gave Yiddish as their mother tongue in the 1959 census; about 250,000 Yiddish speakers remain in Rumania, Poland, and Hungary.) Transported and transplanted to many countries of different cultural climates, Yiddish has flourished or withered, to complete the metaphor, according to the fertility of the soil and the care and skill of the gardener. Its fate has been inextricably bound up with each immigrant community and the way

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in which the community adapted itself to the host country. The steadfastness of Yiddish has varied from place to place for the widest variety of objective reasons: the general cultural level of the non-Jewish milieu, the nature of the school system and particularly the existence of Jewish day schools, the segregating tendency in many countries of the prevailing Catholic culture, the absence of a native middle class and the entrepreneurial function of Jews in industrially and commercially underdeveloped countries, the unre-served acceptance of cultural pluralism and multilingualism.

In the United States, which had the largest immigration of Yiddish speakers—well over one and a half million—Yiddish among the native-born children of Yiddish-speaking immigrants has not persisted as well as in Canada, Mexico, or Argentina. In these countries, the durability of Yiddish may be attributed in part to a later Jewish immigration. But there are reasons other than the time lag that Yiddish is spoken more in Toronto and Winnipeg than in New York, more in Mexico City than in London, and more in Buenos Aires than in Johannesburg. The English-speaking countries, except for bilingual Canada, seem to have been less hospitable to Yiddish than the Spanish-speaking ones. As for Canada, its bilingualism is surely of profound significance for the high survival rate of Yiddish (in the 1951 census, though 95 percent of the Jews reported they knew English, 50.6 percent gave Yiddish as their mother tongue).

The *subjective* reasons that have kept Yiddish alive far from its Ashkenazic base are fewer but perhaps more potent than the objective ones. National consciousness, national will, and religion—old-fashioned orthodox Judaism—have been the dominant factors in preserving Yiddish, admittedly among a relatively small number of Jews. In the United States, the survival rate has been rather low.

America had much to offer the Yiddish-speaking East European Jewish immigrant: civic and political equality, unparalleled economic opportunities, unlimited educational advantages. In return, America demanded Americanization, or Anglo-conformity, as Stewart G. Cole termed this traditional pressure of the majority on the minority to conform to the basic cultural pattern. Anglo-conformity, long before its vulgarization, was considered a virtue by the Founding Fathers. John Jay wrote in the *Federalist*: “With equal pleasure I have as often taken notice, that Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country, to one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs....”

Since 1788, the American ethos has repeatedly expressed itself in open and often violent hostility to foreignness, whether cultural, linguistic, religious, or racial. The Anti-masonic party, the Know-Nothing movement, the American Protective Association, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Ku Klux Klan, and the “national origins” quota system form an unmistakable pattern of how America demanded conformity to its dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. The immigrants’ retention of the old-country language, religion, and cus-

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toms was viewed by the natives (sometimes justly) not merely as habitual and nostalgic, but also as ideological and political and therefore a threat to American unity.

Partly in reaction to the pressure of Americanization, exerted formally through the public school and the already Americanized Jewish community and informally in the street and factory, and partly in an overwhelming response of love to America, Jews jettisoned Yiddish very rapidly. The 1940 census showed how rapidly. Yiddish ranked fifteenth of eighteen groups in the percentage of its third-generation speakers. Only 3 percent of those who gave Yiddish as the language spoken at home in their earliest childhood were third generation, while one-third of Spanish and French speakers were third generation, and about one-fifth of Dutch and German. Most who claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue were the foreign-born, whereas among other groups, the largest percentage admitting a foreign language as mother tongue were generally the second generation. These figures show, starkly and shatteringly, how few Jews have valued Yiddish enough to pass it on or even to claim it. The comparatively high rate of linguistic retention among Germans, despite their much earlier immigration and their high level of acculturation, suggests that the conscious effort to maintain the national language—a product of nationalism or self-esteem—was a vital factor in that retention.

In its transplanted immigrant existence, Yiddish has been cultivated only by two groups of immigrants for whom it has expressed the cultural or religious commitments of their past. They are either the non-religious (once anti-religious) socialist and Zionist radicals, or the most traditionally Orthodox Jews.

**M**OST OF the radical immigrants were ideological Yiddishists; Hebraists among them were few. Coming to America sixty years ago, these East European Yiddish-speaking masses created not only the American clothing industry, but a host of institutions—the Jewish labor movement, the Yiddish press, the Yiddish theater, Yiddish schools, *landsmanshaften*, massive fraternal and communal organizations—through which they accommodated themselves to America and which, ironically, served perhaps more as Americanizing agencies than as preservatives of the old culture. Sharing the revolutionary traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia, they were divided on their particular Jewish ideologies (Diaspora nationalism or Zionism), but agreed that Yiddish was the language of the Jewish masses. They were the heirs of a tradition that went back to the late decades of the 19th century, to the *narodnichestvo*—Russian populism, going to the people.

This movement had had a great impact on Jewish enlighteners and radicals alike, opening their eyes to the possibility that Yiddish, the language they despised and loathed, might be used as a vehicle for their propaganda. The Westernized *maskilim*, who thought the benighted Yiddish-speaking Jews needed secular education and Western culture, finally agreed that enlightenment, transmitted even in what they considered

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## *Yiddish: Past, Present, and Perfect*

an unworthy language, was better than no enlightenment. As for the Jewish radicals, it soon became obvious to them that they could preach socialism, revolution, labor unity to the people only in the language of the people. Few of the leaders among the radicals knew Yiddish and many had to learn it while teaching revolution.

Both the *maskilim*, often believing Jews, and the revolutionaries, non-believers, propagandized against the fanaticism and rigidity of degenerating Hasidic courts, against the rabbinic narrowmindedness that kept the people fettered in superstition. They succeeded in the long run, with the aid of great processes like the Industrial Revolution and urbanization, in attenuating the adherence to Judaism. Thus, wherever the secular teachings had prevailed, Yiddish was often the one remnant of a purely Jewish culture that could be taught and transmitted as part of an acceptable Jewish heritage. The vernacular became the hallmark of Jewish identity and the symbol of Jewish national self-consciousness.

It was this kind of linguistic nationalism among Jews that Ahad Ha'am particularly detested. In the tradition of the Russian *maskilim*, for whom rational humanism and high culture were the greatest desiderata, Ahad Ha'am considered the ideological Yiddishists a threat to the survival of Judaism. He wrote in 1909 to Simon Dubnow, the Jewish historian and architect of cultural autonomism: "If after thousands of years the Jewish people is to start developing its culture from the very beginning, if it is to fashion for itself a new literary language and new 'literary and cultural values' which are nothing more than a pale reflection of other cultures; if it is to be just like the Lithuanians and the Ruthenes and so forth: then I can see no point and no purpose in a national existence on so low a level."

Dubnow, also a *maskil*, was a lukewarm partisan of Yiddish as the basis of linguistic nationalism. In answer to Chaim Zhitlowski, who had become the ideologue of Yiddishism, Dubnow wrote: "Yiddish is dear to us and we must use it as a uniting force for the greater half of our people in the coming generations; but, to erect our entire national culture upon 'Yiddishism' means to cast off from us immediately millions of Jews who do not speak this language and to prepare millions of others for bankruptcy at a later time."

In another essay, in reply to Ahad Ha'am's views, Dubnow compared the Jews to a cripple with one natural leg, Hebrew, and one artificial leg, Yiddish. "On these two legs our people has stood and survived for many generations," he wrote, "just as in former years it stood on the linguistic dualism of Hebrew and Aramaic."

This was a period when nationalist ideologies flourished and when no one questioned the then popular notion that language and nation were inseparably fused. Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism provoked small nations to seek a new national mystique through the elevation and cultivation of their own national languages. The Jews shared in this nationalist ferment and ideological explosion and, in the long run, the Yiddish language was the beneficiary. The *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York City, the Montre-

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al Jewish Public Library, the Colegio Israelita de México, the Workmen's Circle Yiddish schools, are part of the heritage of that period, however remote the ancestry may now seem.

**Y**IDDISH has had a more direct line of continuity among the Orthodox, particularly the Hasidim. The tradition of *targum* is an ancient one among Jews, dating back to the Septuagint. Aramaic, as the language most widely spoken by the Jews, became the language of translation par excellence in the Talmudic period. The rabbis prescribed that a pious Jew should read the weekly portion on the Sabbath twice in Hebrew and once in translation. As the Jews in the course of centuries migrated away from the Aramaic-speaking Near East, the Aramaic targum became unintelligible, but tradition had enshrined it as a semi-sacred language, and it has persisted as such. (It is an amusing commentary that the Yiddish expression *targum-loshn*, literally "language of translation," means something unintelligible, the equivalent of the English "It's Greek to me.")

The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, urged his followers to use Yiddish because that way they could achieve spontaneous expression. The marvelous tales of Nahman of Bratzlav, the sayings of Dov Ber, the preacher of Mezritch, the prayers and poems of Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, gave Yiddish a sanction over and above its use merely as a vernacular. In a Yiddish textbook used in the Orthodox Beth Jacob schools for girls in inter-bellum Poland, a poem described Hebrew as the language of holiness and of the Torah. It was paired with a poem identifying Yiddish not only as the language of millions of Jews, but also as semi-sacred, the language of Reb Levi Yitzhak and Reb Nahman of Bratzlav.\* In elevating the common and uneducated man, in teaching that the unlearned man was the equal in God's eyes of the scholar, that fervor and faith could compensate for ignorance, the Hasidic rabbis succeeded in elevating not only the common people, but also their language, lending it the dignity of the intercourse with God. Today, in Hasidic-based Talmud Torahs and yeshivas, Yiddish still remains the language of translation and interpretation and is, I suspect, more effectively mastered than in some secular Yiddish schools. The reason may be—though I am surely simplifying—that among the Hasidim Yiddish still fulfills a real function in their transplanted but living culture. For they believe a Jew must speak Yiddish; otherwise he speaks "*goyish*," that is, any non-Jewish language. They have no need to ideologize Yiddish, for it is part of an organic whole, where the whole person and the whole Jew are identical. But this is scarcely true of most secularists among whom Yiddish has shrunk from an ideology into a cult or,

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\* Two of the verses read: *Yidish loshn, hartsik loshn / fun milyonen brider, / Reb Yitskhok-Levi hot mit dir / geshafn frume lider / S'hot Reb Nakhmen mayselekh oyf yidish undz gegeben. / Yidish loshn, mame-loshn / freyd fun undzer lebn.* (Yiddish language, tender language of millions of our brothers. Reb Levi Yitzhak composed devout poems in Yiddish. Reb Nahman gave us stories in Yiddish. Yiddish language, mother tongue, joy of our life.)

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even worse, a sentimentality.

The sentimentality is, in a way, endemic to Yiddish. Languages have their characteristics. German has been described as the language in which to give orders, Russian the language to swear in, French the language of elegance. Yiddish is the language of tenderness and endearment, it is indeed a *mame-loshn*. I recall a vivid illustration of this in a Swiss movie, *The Last Chance*, about refugees from Nazism, where many languages were used. A grandfather spoke Yiddish to his little granddaughter, Chanele. The Yiddish dialogue between them touched me more than anything else in the film. I cannot remember now whether it was the poignancy of the situation or the evocative power of Yiddish that called forth from me tears for the destroyed Jewish world of Eastern Europe. For Yiddish, originally the expression of a culture and its way of life, became first a symbol and then a substitute for that culture. Today, it has become the embodiment of a tragically lost past. That is why the Yiddish dictionary is important. It will contain the complete wealth of Yiddish, offering in place of sentimentality and tears, words.

## II

THE EDITORS ESTIMATE that upon completion the *Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language* will contain about 180,000 words. In comparison with Webster's 450,000, Yiddish may seem poor, but not in comparison with other major European languages like French, Russian, Spanish, or Italian, whose total vocabularies are estimated to range from 140,000 to 210,000 words. But though Yiddish is undoubtedly not what the linguists call a "sociologically complete" language, being deficient in scientific, technical, and military vocabularies, and meager in botanical, zoological, and agricultural terminology, it is nevertheless linguistically abundant in other areas of expression—religion, personal and social relations, morality, ethics, intellect, and feeling.

For the first time in the brief history of Yiddish lexicography, each word's complete record is given. Stress is shown and pronunciation given for Hebrew words (Yiddish is phonetic). Each word is grammatically described: part of speech, gender for nouns, verbs characterized as transitive or intransitive, with inflectional forms for nouns and verbs. Etymologies are given for basic words. Substandard borrowings from other languages are indicated (Germanism, Slavism, Americanism, Hispanism); regional and local dialects are indicated (Lithuanian dialect, Ukrainian localism). Special labels are used to indicate subject matter (mathematics, music, trades and professions); other labels identify the vocabulary by particular user—the speech of the *talmid-khokhem* (the religiously learned man), the language of the ghetto and concentration camp, thieves' argot. Status and usage labels are also given: archaic, neo-logicistic, rare, ironic, slang, vulgar, coarse. Definitions are extraordinarily precise and subtle in their distinctions. *Oyg* ("eye") has thirty-four different meanings; *agude* ("union") has six; *avekshteln* ("to stand up" or "to

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set down” are its more common meanings) has seventeen definitions.

All this is topped off by an extraordinary richness of quotation, drawn from folk usage and literary sources. Elijah Bahur’s *Bovo-bukh* of 1541, the *Maysebukh* of 1602, the statutes of the kehillah of Cracow of 1595, a contemporary Yiddish account of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, are among the early literary sources. The recent ones include the Yiddish press of New York and Buenos Aires and contemporary Yiddish writers all over the world. Between them is the incredibly rich treasure of Yiddish literature, not only the pre-classical Haskalah and Hasidic writings, and not only the three modern fathers, Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz; not only fiction and poetry, but also the scholarly, historical, linguistic, political, journalistic, and philosophical writings that appeared at a time when Yiddish was flourishing.

**H**OW DOES ONE DECIDE what words go into a dictionary? Who defines their status? The practice varies. In France, the French Academy; in India, the government’s Language Commission; in England, the Oxford English Dictionary; and in the United States—at least until the publication of the 3rd Edition—Webster’s Unabridged. But whatever the source, the basic criticism is universal: The standardizes are attacked either for being too conservative, for not admitting new words, new usages, new definitions; or for being too radical, for not protecting the language against corruption and vulgarity.

The makers of dictionaries, like the interpreters of Jewish law, may be put in two categories: *mekilim*, lenient interpreters, and *mahmirim*, strict ones. In the United States, for instance, the editors of Webster’s 3rd Edition are avowed *mekilim*. They were following an old lexicographical tradition which Oxford linguist Archibald H. Sayce summed up: “The sole standard of correctness is custom and the common usage of the community.”

The editors of the Yiddish dictionary share this outlook. They have defined as a word in the Yiddish language “every word used by a group of Jews, thinking and speaking in Yiddish.” They are obviously *mekilim*, and as such bound to incur the wrath of the *mahmirim*. Standardization is difficult enough in all tongues, even for so high-status a language as English, as the present violent controversy over Webster’s 3rd Edition demonstrates. What about Yiddish then? It has no country, no government, no academy, no permanent dictionary committee, no ministry of education, no geographical limits, no higher education to speak of—just words and speakers.

The first attempt to standardize Yiddish was the Yiddish Language Conference held in Czernowitz in Rumania in 1908. It was initiated by Nathan Birnbaum, one of the great (and unjustly neglected) personalities of the recent Jewish past, who wanted to have Yiddish proclaimed as the “national” Jewish language. The specific purposes of the conference were to deal with standardization of spelling and grammar and the com-

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pilation of a dictionary. But little was accomplished, because the conference became a platform for quarrels between Yiddishists and Hebraists. Time was short and the ideologically charged atmosphere was not conducive to the laborious and tedious tasks of linguistic standardization. The conference adopted the position that Yiddish was *a* (not *the*) national language of the Jewish people: This, like most compromises, satisfied no one. (Yitzkhok Leibush Peretz, who took a leading role at the conference, had argued that Jews had no national language: Hebrew was no longer the national language and Yiddish, aspiring to it, was not yet it.)

No progress in standardization of Yiddish was made until after World War I. Only then were modern school systems established in which Yiddish was the language of instruction. (The Polish Minorities Treaty had guaranteed cultural or national minorities the right to schools in their own languages.) A new university-educated intelligentsia arose, identifying itself, like the earlier populists, with the Yiddish-speaking masses. They helped to create a wide network of institutions which made it possible for Yiddish to aspire to high culture. One of these was the Yiddish Scientific Institute—Yivo (an acronym based on its Yiddish name), founded in 1925, which became for the Yiddish-speaking world an academy and university in one, bringing to Yiddish a luster and prestige among educated people that it had scarcely ever before enjoyed. Much of this achievement may be credited to Max Weinreich, one of Yivo's founders and directors, who has been largely responsible for the high repute of Yiddish in the halls of Academe.

**T**HE YIDDISH school systems, after the First World War, in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, the rapid growth and proliferation of the Yiddish press and book publishing, and over all the unique authority of Yivo, made possible some standardization where cultural anarchism had been rampant. Yivo and the Yiddish schools in Poland agreed in 1936 on one hundred and fifty rules for simple, hyphenated, and compound words, plurals, abbreviations, spelling, and punctuation. But the rules were not universally accepted: those that seemed too radical, departing too much from tradition, were often disregarded. Most of the daily press has resisted standardization, modernizing its spelling only with the speed of glaciers. Even today, the orthography of the Yiddish daily press is far from consistent and scarcely correct by modern standards.

The editors of the *Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language*—both connected with Yivo for a long time: Yudel Mark has been editor of Yivo's periodical *Yidishe Shprakh* for over twenty years—felt a few rules should be reviewed. They decided, on the basis of replies to a questionnaire from some two hundred Yiddish writers, linguists, teachers, editors, and journalists, to retain the silent *alef* (which Yivo had eliminated) between combinations of *vov* (generally when the double-*vov*, the consonant, followed or preceded the single-*vov*, the vowel) and *yud* (as vowel, semi-vowel, and diphthong). The other important difference from the old Yivo standards concerns the spelling of compound

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words or phrases (whether separated, hyphenated, or as one word). The editors concluded that meaning must determine the word unit: for example, in the new dictionary *farayorn* (“last year”) is one word rather than the three *far a yorn*.

These deviations from the Yivo rules deprived the dictionary of Yivo’s imprimatur. But Yivo in fact had given the dictionary working space, staff cooperation, and moral support, and perhaps for this reason or in an excess of courtesy, the editors of the dictionary published, in the prefatory matter, the Yivo’s *ne imprimatur*, explaining that it could not give its sanction to the dictionary because the dictionary had not given *its* sanction to Yivo’s orthography.

Of course, most of the words in the Yiddish dictionary are like words in any language. *Ober* is a conjunction like “but”; it is also an adverb and even a substantive, used in precisely the same sense as “But me no buts.” But Yiddish is, I think, more Jewish than English is American. Yiddish holds the mirror up to nature, recording and reflecting Jewish history and Jewish dispersion. The etymologies of the words and the labels affixed by the editors reveal the spread of Yiddish from the Rhineland eastward and then outward: Western Yiddish, Hungarian Yiddish; then the Ukrainian, the Lithuanian, White Russian, East Galician dialects; the later subversive penetrations from the German, the Russian, the Polish, English, and Spanish; the exotic kinds of Yiddish in Alsace and in 19th-century Jerusalem under Turkish rule. *Oysshnaydn* (“to cut out,” “to carve”) seems an ordinary verb, yet, unexpectedly, it contains a chunk of Jewish folklore. In defining the word, the editors quoted Peretz: “The famous forest looms darkly in the corner of the sky; on these trees our ancestors carved the names of the tractates of the Talmud which they finished studying on their way.” The reference, the editors explain, is to a legend about Jewish settlement in Poland. The first Jews who came to Poland stopped in a small forest near the town of Laszczew, where they carved the names of the Talmud tractates they had studied on their long wanderings. Then they heard a voice: “Po-lin” (Hebrew: rest here). That is where they settled and the way Poland got its name.

**O**RDINARY WORDS are permeated with Jewish history and tradition. Then there are the special words. Take a place name, Odessa, for example. It is defined this way:

Geographical name. Large city on the Black Sea, the Ukraine. In 1797—246 Jews; in 1914—165,000, a third of the population. Nicknames: Odessa hoboes, free-livers, crooks, pick-pockets, knaves. To live like God in Odessa = to live in comfort. Explanation: No one bothers God in Odessa, no one asks anything of him, people leave him alone; parallel to: to live like God in Paris. Proverbs: “Odessa is Little-Paris.” (Mendele, *Fishke the Lame*: “Odessa is Little-Stanislavchik,” *ironic*.) “Hell burns ten miles around Odessa” (it is a very sinful city). “God protect us from Kamenetzer helping hands and Odesser rakes.” Saying: “Don’t belittle the Odessa moon”

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(ironic, when someone describes the wonders of the big city). “An Odessa moon”—a beautiful woman (Ukrainian and White Russian Yiddish expression). “The wise men of Odessa” = the scholars and writers of Odessa in the Haskalah period and at the beginning of the 20th century (Mendele, Ahad Ha’am, Dubnow, etc.) “Odessa Yiddish” = full of Russian words.

A miniature social and cultural portrait emerges, reflecting the ambivalence of the folk about the well-to-do, secularly educated, Haskalah-minded, skeptical Jewish community of Odessa.

*Oysleyzgelt* (“ransom”) is another example of a word given specific colorations to all its meanings by Jewish history. The definitions and quotations refer to *pidyon haben*, the ceremonial redemption of the first-born; *pidyon-shevuyim*, ransom for a prisoner or money paid to ward off persecution or avoid great peril, with citations from medieval history through the Nazi occupation; money paid to avoid conscription in Czarist times; and, finally, to German restitution (“atonement payments”).

The dictionary is indeed more than a collection of words and definitions; it is a vast repository not only of the Yiddish language, but of Jewish customs, folkways, and history. The dictionary, when completed, will, I am rash enough to predict, stand beside Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, Mendele, and Yehoash’s translation of the Bible as one of the great achievements of Yiddish.

The dictionary, too, is a marvelous witness of how Yiddish has preserved Hebrew. The words and expressions from the Bible and Talmud which are extensively used in Yiddish have received their formal acknowledgment in the dictionary; particularly the speech of the *talmid-khokhem*. The definitions of *ahavas-yisroel* (“love of Israel”), for example, encompass a Jewish tradition, beginning with the Pentateuch, and going through the Talmud, the Rambam, the Kabbalists, down to Hasidism and modern times:

1. Love of Jews for the Jewish people, for all Jews, expressing itself in constant readiness to help Jews, to seek and find merit in Jews. Derived from the commandment to love one another “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18) and from Rabbi Akiba’s saying “This is a great principle in the Torah.” Maimonides ruled that *ahavas-yisroel* was a positive commandment of the Torah. Before praying pious Jews used to resolve to love Jews as themselves: “I am prepared to take upon myself the positive commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself” (*Kavaanat Ha’ari*). “The *ahavas-yisroel* spark in each Jew should be kindled” (Joseph Isaac Schneersohn, *Likute Diburim*).
  2. Trait of loving Jews even with their faults; interceding on behalf of the Jewish people and arguing with God about how wonderful the Jewish people are (reflected especially in Hasidic writings and folklore, in stories about Reb Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev, Reb Moshe Leib of Sassov, Reb Abraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apt, and others).
  3. Love of a non-Jew for the Jewish people, for Jews. *Ahavas-yisroel* of the pious among the Gentiles. “From love for the daughters of Israel he came to love of Israel”—said about a non-Jew who converts to Judaism for love of a Jewish girl.
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Hebrew, of course, has a particular vitality in Yiddish. Without Hebrew Yiddish appears dull and listless. Yehoash once said that the Hebrew words wore top hats. They have dignity, style, tradition, elegance. These qualities they bring into Yiddish. Their absence impoverishes the language, cutting it off from the culture, the religion, and the very traditions that shaped it.

For, in the final analysis, the religious culture created the Yiddish language. The religion and the way of life it imposed on its believers separated the Jews from their neighbors in medieval Germany. It determined the vocabulary and from the very inception made Yiddish different from German. Later on, other factors came into play, strengthening and supplementing the role of Judaism in shaping Yiddish: residential separation and occupational differentiation; governmental and popular anti-Semitism and the persecution of Yiddish itself which, in fact, only reinforced the language; restriction of educational opportunities and discrimination in employment. Finally, national consciousness—most nearly a substitute for Judaism—and the will to maintain Yiddish. Today, it appears that only the most old-fashioned kind of Judaism, national consciousness and national will, remain as crucial factors to perpetuate Yiddish.

**I**N A SMALL WAY, national consciousness has manifested itself among some young American Jews, most of them third generation, for whom Yiddish does not have the associations of ignorant immigrants which their parents felt so intensely. Mostly, these third-generation Jews do not know Yiddish. A study of an Eastern seaboard Jewish community made about ten years ago showed that among parents, two-thirds of whom were second generation, about half could speak Yiddish, while of their children, nearly all native, less than 10 percent could speak it. A more recent study of a Midwestern community was even more depressing. Over half of the parents, mostly native-born, had heard Yiddish spoken at home when they were children, but only a little more than a third could speak it and even fewer could read. Among their children, a bare 5 percent could speak it, and nearly all only poorly.

For those who know a bit, Yiddish serves as a form of Jewish identification in a broader group—the use of a word or expression helps to locate other Jews, or perhaps merely kindred spirits. Sometimes it is the object of curiosity and occasionally Yiddish becomes the discovery of roots. Marcus Lee Hansen, the historian of immigration, once formulated “the principle of third-generation interest,” that “what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember.” In their quest for their origin, and that background which gives their Americanness specificity and value, many young Jews are curious and sometimes eager to know where their grandparents came from and what their culture was like. Yiddish is something they would like to know or, at least, know about.

Yiddish can help give the individual access to his past, the world from which his

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parents came and whose culture, however attenuated its form, has had some influence on him. Yiddish is also important for the group past. Ahad Ha'am, sharp-sighted and penetrating as he was, was nevertheless mistaken when he predicted that no one would ever claim for Yiddish as for Hebrew "that it must be studied as a matter of national duty." Today, the importance—sometimes the crucial importance—of Yiddish for an understanding of the history and culture of Ashkenazic Jewry for the last five hundred years has been generally acknowledged. Neither Hasidism nor the Jewish labor movement, neither Zionism nor the Agudas Israel movement, can be understood without Yiddish. The scholar will need Yiddish for his work and his Yiddish, in time to come, will have to depend greatly upon Mark's and Joffe's *Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language*.

**W**HAT I HAVE WRITTEN reminds me of a Hasidic story with which Gershom Scholem closes his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*: "When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer—and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the 'Maggid' of Mezritch was faced with the same task, he would go into the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers—and what he wanted done, became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs—and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rizhin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done."

For those who remember the place and perhaps the prayers, telling the story may not seem anywhere near enough. But if telling the story is the only way left to recall the past, let us try to tell it as well as we can and use the *Great Dictionary* to find the right words. 🍷

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# Jewish & Other Nationalisms

H.R. Trevor-Roper

**I**N HIS FAMOUS *Auto-Emancipation*, published in 1882, Leo Pinsker urged his fellow Jews to make a great moral and practical effort and thereby re-embody the long disembodied ghost of their nationality. They were to create, not necessarily in Palestine, but somewhere, a permanent, autonomous, physical home. This effort, he felt, was not only a necessary condition of Jewish dignity and survival: It was also favored by the particular historical circumstances of the 19th century in Europe. “The general history of the present day,” he wrote, “seems destined to become our ally. In a few decades we have seen rising into new life nations which, at an earlier time, would not have dared to dream of a resurrection. The dawn is already breaking through the darkness of traditional statecraft. The governments already incline their ears—where it cannot be avoided—to the clamor of the awakening self-consciousness of nationalities.” In this essay I would like to consider and comment upon these remarks of Pinsker: to say something on the general subject of Jewish and other European nationalism.

For Jewish history is perhaps too often studied in isolation. The Jews of the Emancipation have then tended to leave it behind, using their gifts to illustrate not their own history but the history of the Europe which has received them. On the other hand the

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H.R. TREVOR ROPER *was an English historian who wrote extensively on modern Britain and Nazi Germany.*

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Jews of the Pale, driven back upon their private observances, have tended to narrow it within the Pale, representing it not as part of European history but as a long, thin line stretching back, self-contained, to the distant, Biblical past: a line charged inwardly with religious orthodoxy, and outwardly only brought into contact with Europe by periodic and painful persecution. And yet, I believe, Jewish history, for all its obvious differences, is a part of European history: a small part, a cramped part, and yet still a part—indeed unintelligible except as a part of it. In the Middle Ages perhaps that was not so: Perhaps then it was part of Islamic history. From now on it may not be so: after the holocaust of the 1930s it may, if Mr. Ben Gurion has his way, become part of Asiatic history. But for the intervening centuries the Jews have been a European nation—a nation without territory of course, and that makes a great difference—but still a European nation, responding to the same general forces which have moved the other European nations. One of these forces has been that great ideological impulse which burst the old framework of Europe in the 19th century: nationalism.

I think this is worth saying, for two reasons, one Jewish, one Gentile. For on the Jewish side there are writers who see Zionism, this modern movement which aimed at creating a Jewish society in Palestine and ended by creating a Jewish state, not as a new movement of the 19th century but merely as the logical culmination of what they suppose to be the constant, central message of Judaism ever since the destruction of the Temple; and on the Gentile side we have writers who, when dealing with our European nationalism of the 19th century, totally ignore what seems to me an exciting form or variant of it, springing from the same conditions: the Jewish form.

**O**F COURSE I do not mean to deny that Zionism differed from European nationalism, nor that it looked back, as all nationalism does, to its own distinctive antecedents. How could anyone deny that? A people which, from its earliest records, has designated itself a chosen people, and which, in all its history, in spite of every temptation, has never abandoned the traditions incorporating that belief, cannot be excused of nationalism before the 19th century. But I do not think we should take this argument too seriously. Those who protest, sometimes protest too much. It is well known that the furious denunciations of fornication and drunkenness by the 17th-century Scottish kirk did not represent the general dislike of the people for these faults, but rather their incorrigible liking; and if the old Hebrew prophets and the medieval rabbis thundered about the distinctness of the Jews, that may well indicate a maddening preference, among their inattentive disciples, for assimilation. Moreover, the other nations of Europe also had their fits of nationalism before the 19th century. The God we happen to share is a whimsical divinity who chooses now one people, now another. In Luther's time he chose Germany, a century later England. Shakespeare was not exempt from this fashion of speaking. Milton believed in God's Englishmen. And if Jewish outbursts are more often

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audible, we should remember that the Jews were more often subject to the normal cause of such emotions.

For nationalism has its normal causes. It is the expression of wounded nationality: the cry of men who have suffered great national defeat, or whose nationality is denied, or who live insecurely on exposed national frontiers, surrounded, and in danger of being swamped, by foreigners. Any nation may find itself in this posture. In England, happily exempt from great national defeat and surrounded by the insulating sea, we have only seldom known it, in times of great danger; but we have it in Ulster, which Home Rule has made the exposed land-frontier of Anglo-Saxonry. "To hell with the Pope!" is a nationalist, not a religious slogan. French nationalism was most acute after the great defeat of 1870, and of course it was expressed most violently on the amputated frontier, by the Lorrainer, Paul Déroulède. Perhaps it is no accident that General de Gaulle too is a Lorrainer. Similarly in Germany, it is on the raw edges that we find chronic nationalism, among the Sudeten-landers and the Austro-Germans, insecure among Czechs and South Slavs, or the Baltic Germans, insecure among the North Slavs. And if the Germans, being more closely surrounded by foreigners, are more liable to "normal" nationalism than the English, we should expect the Jews to be more liable still: the Jews who, in Palestine, were surrounded by Egyptians and Arabs, Syrians and Philistines, and whose every ghetto, after the Dispersion, was an exposed, unfortified citadel among jealous, watchful enemies.

For this reason we should not be surprised if we find expressions of Jewish nationalism throughout Jewish history. Nevertheless, we should not, I think, deduce too much from this normal response to abnormal circumstances. We should not suppose, as some of the more rigid traditionalists seem to do, that the Jews of the Dispersion, for nearly two thousand years, were constantly prepared for a return to the Holy Land, or that the Zionist solution was the end to which all creation, in those two thousand years, had been groaning and travailing. No doubt, at regular intervals, the idea of their old home recurred, with nostalgic force, to the scattered Jews of Europe. No doubt, as their historians (or some of them) remind us, they often spoke of it. But men often speak of heroic courses which they do not, in the end, take, and the fact remains that this course, in all those years, was not much taken. The Jews might suffer terrible persecutions and pogroms in Russia or Poland; but somehow when they left, with the Holy Land on their lips, their feet carried them resolutely in the other direction, to Germany or England or America. Even when—like the expelled Sephardim of Spain—they went to the hospitable, tolerant Turkish empire—that land of promise as it seemed in the 16th century—it is odd how few of them went to Palestine, which was after all an easily accessible and under-populated part of that empire. There was a trickle, but not a stream. To most of them Constantinople, with its opportunities of government finance, or Salonika, with its opportunities of army-provisioning, seemed more tempting than what Gibbon was to call the "mournful and solitary silence" of Arab Palestine.

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AND THEN, in the 19th century, the century of European nationalism, came this great change in Jewish history too: a change which Gentile historians, as it seems to me, have been slow to recognize as part of their own history. We Gentiles all know that the 19th century was the century of nationalist revolt. We all know how, in the intellectual world, the enlightened internationalism of the 18th century was challenged; how, in the political world, the great multi-national political structures, which had seemed stable for centuries—first the Hapsburg, then the Ottoman empires—were threatened, convulsed, and finally broken up by the explosive new nationalism of Germany, Italy, Hungary, and finally the Slav peoples. But we often fail to see, I think, how the movement of Jewish nationalism, which has ended in our day with the building of a Jewish national state, sprang out of the same circumstances and the same pressures: in short, how it was part of *our* history. In the old *Cambridge Modern History*, the *Cambridge Modern History* of Lord Acton, that most cosmopolitan, least obvious of historians, we can read all about the former movements; but we find not a word about the latter. Even in the new, post-1948 *Cambridge Modern History*, whose lightly turned pages sigh beneath their burden of not always memorable facts, we find very little.

I would like to redress this balance: to introduce the possibly otiose reminder that Jewish history is part of European history and should be studied as such, even though, in recent times, by a brilliant operation of inspired colonization and successful war, the Jews have occupied and gained political control of a small part of Asia, an Ulster in the great Ireland of Arabia. Romantic idealists may look back and discover the origins of this adventure in the dreams of medieval mystics, the vaticinations of Polish rabbis. Now that the ground is gained, that myth may safely be incorporated in the title deed. And indeed, not without some reason. But we should not forget that the particular appeal of Palestine, rather than any other basis for the national home, was only gradually effective; and its effect was perhaps as powerful among Biblically educated Gentiles as among Jews. Certainly it did good service as part of the external diplomacy of the movement. The first founders were not, I think, very strict believers in the old, narrow tradition. Nor perhaps were their great *epigoni*. Their roots may have been in the orthodoxy of the Pale, but their ideals were those of contemporary Europe. Herzl, like so many of the European nationalists, found his inspiration in the European cosmopolis of Vienna.

Yes, Vienna. Vienna was, in a sense, the metropolis and the motor of all 19th-century European nationalism. It was Vienna, the Vienna of Metternich, which roused the indignation and united the forces of German nationalism. It was the same Vienna, the Vienna of Francis Joseph, which vainly resisted the forces of Italian nationalism. It was the same Vienna which was compelled ultimately to yield to the pressure of the Hungarian nationalists and convert itself into the “dual monarchy” of Austria-Hungary. Germany, Italy, Hungary—these were the “historic nations,” as they somewhat invidiously called themselves, the nations which had not been conquered or atomized but only quietly absorbed, as historic

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units, first as partners, only gradually as subjects, into the Hapsburg empire. They had their memories of continuous history, their consciousness of national literature. It was not, or it was only partly, because they were “oppressed” that they took to nationalism: for they were not more oppressed than they had been, and in the past they had not thought of it as “oppression.” It was only in the new circumstances, under the influence of the new ideas, that they found themselves conscious of their nationality and resentful of its suppression: that men regarded it as an intolerable humiliation to find that they belonged not to a politically self-contained “nation” but to a mere “geographical expression.” For the nationalism of the 19th century was not episodic, not the mere result of temporary circumstances, like the periodic outbursts of the past. It was a new general idea, powerful, even irresistible, as new ideas can be; and it rendered all old politics useless, old remedies unavailing. By 1870 it had triumphed in its first and greatest campaigns. Garibaldi and Cavour in Italy, the Liberals of 1848 and Bismarck in Germany, Kossuth and Deak in Hungary had prevailed. Magenta, Solferino, Königgrätz, the Hungarian Compromise—these great events of the decade from 1859 to 1869 mark the victories of the first nationalism, the nationalism of the “historic nations”; and these victories were all won against the same enemy, Vienna.

Jewish nationalism, I hasten to add, did not spring directly from this first movement. Why should it? It was not the cosmopolitan Hapsburg empire which oppressed the Jews of Central Europe. Far from it. The Hapsburgs, those professional, necessary enemies of all national exclusiveness, had been the patrons and protectors of their Jewish subjects, as of other minorities. But nationalism is an explosive force, of evil potentiality, as we in this century have come to realize; and we have down-graded the word accordingly. To our ancestors it was a noble word for a noble emotion. In Victorian England, Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Kossuth were popular heroes; the German Liberals of 1848 were extolled; even Bismarck was admired, not for controlling the German nationalists (that is why we praise him now) but for realizing some at least of their aims. Today we are less sure about this. We have seen Mussolini and Hitler; and we realize that there is something to be said for the old, static cosmopolitanism which these romantic, rebellious prophets of the “historic nations” were the first to break. The lesser nations of the Hapsburg empire, as they were nearer to the facts, realized them sooner. For having triumphed, having asserted their national unity against the super-national authorities above them, the “historic nations,” or some of them, turned, to complete it, against the non-historic nations, the conquered, atomized “sub-nations” beneath them—the Slavs and the Jews; and those sub-nations, looking to their defenses, found two alternative courses open to them, of which, it seemed, they must take one or perish.

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**T**HE FIRST COURSE WAS REACTION: a return to cosmopolitanism, internationalism. At first, Czechs and Jews, feeling the new pressure of the German nationalists, and Croats and Slovenes, left to the mercy of new Hungarian power,

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looked back with regret to the old protective structure of the Hapsburg empire. Already in 1848–9, that great year of revolution by the “historic” nations, they had shown it. Then it was the Croat general Joseph Jellacic who had supported the dynasty against the Hungarian rebellion, the Czech Palacky František who, at the Pan-Slav Congress, had declared that if the Austrian empire did not exist it would be necessary to invent it. And indeed, for a time, these nations, or some of them, did succeed in keeping the empire going as a protective envelope for themselves. For half a century after 1870, if the Hungarians, enjoying their new power, oppressed the South Slavs, the government of Austria—this is the burden of the early chapters of *Mein Kampf*—prevented its German subjects from exercising their rights and oppressing the Czechs and Jews. In the stock phrases of the German nationalists, it enslaved the noble Germans to a mongrel parliament dominated by inferior races.

Return to cosmopolitanism—that was the first line of defense of the non-historic nations against the new, crude nationalism of the historic nations. But suppose that first alternative would not work. Suppose the old machinery of cosmopolitanism had been rotted and frayed, its spirit undermined, so that it could no longer maintain itself against the new spirit and the new pressure of the “historic” nations. Could the “sub-nations” by themselves maintain it? Of course not. And if not, what must they do? When new ideas are ruling the world, it is always easier for the weak, their victims, to clutch at them, hoping to appropriate and transform them, than to resist them. So, in the end, the “sub-nations” would copy the “historic” nations, would declare that they too were historic nations, and to prove it would discover their ancient history, find the continuity of their ancient traditions, re-create their half-forgotten languages, remember their old literature and, with the aid of ingenious statistics, retrace on the map the generous but not always strictly accurate frontiers of the past. So, after the primary nationalism of the “historic” nations, and in defense against it, came the secondary nationalism of the non-historic nations. The Czechs, after two centuries of unreluctant Germanization, remembered their Slavonic, Bohemian past, and the Battle of the White Mountain was reversed on mountains of paper. The South Slavs rediscovered their old history and historic literature: We think of Vuk Karadjic Stefanovic compiling the first dictionary of the language and collecting the heroic ballads of the Middle Ages, those ballads which commemorated the days of Serbian independence, before the fatal field of Kosovo. The Bulgarians remembered, as they still do, the old Bulgarian empire with its sweeping frontiers. And the Jews remembered Zion.

**F**OR IT IS TO THIS SECONDARY NATIONALISM, the nationalism of the non-historic nations, that Jewish nationalism, seen as a European movement, belongs. When the “historic” nations—Italy, Germany, Hungary—asserted their nationality, the Jews did not stir; or if they did, it was not as Jews, members of a Jewish nation,

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but as Germans or Italians, like Karl Marx or Daniele Manin. Indeed, why should they stir? In Europe their protection lay in cosmopolitanism, and their first, most obvious cry was that of Palacky. the Old Order, with its tolerance, its balance of nationalities, must be preserved. Only when the Old Order was clearly foundering did the second alternative finds its adherents. And so the Jews, like the Czechs and the South Slavs, turned to nationalism as their means of salvation. Their leaders might be Europeans of the Enlightenment, but the conditions of nationalism required that they go back to the narrower traditions preserved for them—or had it been against them?—by the rabbis of the Pale. They looked out from Europe, behind the history of Europe, beyond the frontiers of Europe, to a remote past in another continent: a past linked with the present only by a thin, persistent thread running from synagogue to synagogue through nearly twenty centuries of persecution.

Of course, being men of the Enlightenment, they both strengthened and varied that link. They were not content, like the old believers, with distant memories or merely religious traditions. If they revived the Hebrew language, it was not merely to study the Scriptures or the Law. If they remembered their history, it was not merely their ancient, sacred history. It was a Jew of the Emancipation, Heinrich Graetz, who wrote the first continuous history of the Jewish nation, carrying it through the destruction of the Second Temple, over the intervening centuries, to his own time. It was another Jew of the Emancipation, Moses Hess, who first urged escape from Europe to Jerusalem, and he urged it explicitly as a nationalist, secular movement, in imitation of the nationalist, secular Italian Risorgimento. In all this the prophets and forerunners of Zionism showed that they were Europeans. It was the character of 19th-century Europe to secularize the movements which hitherto had been clothed in religious form. If Zionism was the age-old hankering of the Jews for the Holy Land, it was that hankering secularized: a return to Israel without waiting for the Messiah, or led by a secular messiah—one, moreover, who was half-assimilated into Europe.

**F**OR OF COURSE all the great nationalist leaders have been only half-national themselves. Their followers may be—generally are—true nationals: authentic, autochthonous, monoglot aborigines of the tribe, bigoted fundamentalists of the faith. But the leaders, it is well known, tend to be marginal in their nationality, perhaps inspired by secret doubts of their nationality. The leader of the Irish nationalists in the last century was wholly English, in this, half-Cuban. Napoleon was not French nor Stalin Russian. Hitler was an Austrian, not a German; his high-priest Rosenberg was born a Russian subject. And today, I understand, the prophetess of Scottish nationalism is a lady with a good English name living in Manchester. We should not be surprised to find that Jewish nationalism, if its faithful masses came out of the Russian Pale, was headed by half-assimilated men whom strict Jews might regard as little better than Gentiles and

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whose life was led in the Western, cosmopolitan cities of Paris and Vienna.

Paris, Vienna, Russia—all these contributed to the finished form of Zionism. It was Russia, in its aggressive pan-Slav mood after 1870, which, by its pogroms, supplied the body of the first emigrations, the social form of the first settlements. It was Paris, in the defeated, introverted mood of the 1890s, which, by the Dreyfus case, aroused the zeal of the first prophets and the conscience of the West. But it was in Vienna, still in Vienna, that the pressures met. It was against Vienna, the conservative, complacent Vienna of Metternich, that the Italians, the Germans, the Hungarians had protested their nationality; it was in Vienna, the defeated, depressed Vienna after 1870, that the Jews, together with the Czechs, the South Slavs, and the Austro-Germans, saw the need for theirs. In 1895 the leader of the anti-Semitic German nationalists, Karl Lueger, was elected burgomaster of the city, and the Jews, as Herzl wrote, expected “a new Saint Bartholomew’s night.” For two years the imperial government refused to confirm the election. Then it gave way, and for ten years Lueger dominated the politics of the city. It was in Lueger’s Vienna that Theodor Herzl, having lost faith in the old ideal of emancipation, started on the course of thinking that led him, ultimately, to the idea of a *Judenstaat* in Palestine. A few years later, it was in Vienna that Thomas Masaryk, a Slovak member of its “mongrel” parliament, gradually despairing of the old ideal of Palacky, decided to found a new independent state for the Czechs and Slovaks. And it was from the same Vienna that Adolf Hitler, the professed admirer of Lueger, drew his grim inspiration and dreamed of a sinister new German nationalism which would be fatal alike to Czechs and Jews. Herzl, Masaryk, Hitler were all men of action. The aims of all were achieved. Their movements, however different their form, all sprang from European history, and from the same great crucible of European history, the source of cosmopolitanism and nationalism alike, Vienna.

Of course, once the three movements were launched, their courses diverged. How widely they diverged, and how formidably they clashed, we know. Our lives have been spent against the noise of their clashing. And now only one of them survives. Nazism has gone: after a decade of hideous violence it has foundered among the ruins it created, and German nationalism, if it is to achieve reunification of Germany, must begin again at the beginning. Hitler undid not only his own work but that of Bismarck as well. Czechoslovakia too, as an independent state, is gone: the name of Masaryk is no longer officially honored there; his work is undone. Only Israel, that smallest, most difficult growth, survives. It has already lasted longer, since its foundation, than Hitler’s Thousand-Year Reich. Of all the secondary nationalisms of Europe, it is, so far, the most successful. Unlike the Balkan successor-states, it has preserved its political independence. Unlike the Irish Free State, it has succeeded in giving life to its ancient language, and has thereby created a new national scholarship. It has also succeeded in presenting to the world a new idea. Just as the English Puritans, establishing in the reign of Charles I a perilous bridgehead in another continent, carried there a new social ideal which they had worked

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out in the face of intolerable pressure at home, and which was to become a gospel for other states, so the Jewish Pilgrim Fathers have carried to Asia a new form of social democracy, forged by the pressures of Central Europe, and able, in the deadlock of the cold war, to appeal to the uncommitted nations of the world. For all these reasons, this last, least typical of European nationalisms may in the end, if its work survives, prove the most significant of all.

**A**ND YET, let us not forget how much Israel owes to circumstances beyond the control of its founders. The collapse of Czarist Russia, the victory of the Western Powers in 1918, were as essential to Weizmann as to Masaryk, or as the victory of Napoleon III over Austria had been to Cavour. Who could have predicted this? And who could have predicted the terrible destruction of the European Jews by Hitler: a dreadful episode which has given Israel not only a population but also a mystique, and which broke down the opposition of the anti-Zionists in world Jewry? If Herzl could not have predicted these things, which so transformed his movement, how can we predict the next stage? Above all there are two things which we cannot predict. The generation of the founding fathers is passing: the next generation in Israel will be detached from the Europe which bred them, separated from the European history in which the first was a part. Elsewhere—we do not have to look far to see it—great exertions have created small independent states in one generation, which, through that detachment, have sunk into parochialism in the next. And if the primary nationalism of the Germans and Hungarians provoked the secondary nationalism of the Slavs and the Jews, is that necessarily the end of the process? Nationalism seems now dead in Europe, but it has been carried to Asia and Africa; and Israel, which to some may seem the return of an ancient people to its long-suspended rights, to others seems—and I believe it to be—the last product of European nationalism: A product which, since it is a national settlement, not a colonial exploitation, is the more solid and therefore the more formidable. How can we predict the course of the tertiary nationalism which in its turn it has sharpened: the nationalism of the Arabs? 🍷

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# My Negro Problem— and Ours

By Norman Podhoretz

*If we—and...I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world.*

—James Baldwin

**T**WO IDEAS PUZZLED ME DEEPLY as a child growing up in Brooklyn during the 1930s in what today would be called an integrated neighborhood. One of them was that all Jews were rich; the other was that all Negroes were persecuted. These ideas had appeared in print; therefore they must be true. My own experience and the evidence of my senses told me they were not true, but that only confirmed what a day-dreaming boy in the provinces—for the lower-class neighborhoods of New York belong as surely to the provinces as any rural town in North Dakota—discovers very early:

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NORMAN PODHORETZ *was editor of COMMENTARY from 1960 to 1995. His most recent book is* Why Are Jews Liberals? *(Doubleday, 2009).*

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## *My Negro Problem—and Ours*

*His* experience is unreal and the evidence of his senses is not to be trusted. Yet even a boy with a head full of fantasies incongruously synthesized out of Hollywood movies and English novels cannot altogether deny the reality of his own experience—especially when there is so much deprivation in that experience. Nor can he altogether gainsay the evidence of his own senses—especially such evidence of the senses as comes from being repeatedly beaten up, robbed, and in general hated, terrorized, and humiliated.

And so for a long time I was puzzled to think that Jews were supposed to be rich when the only Jews I knew were poor, and that Negroes were supposed to be persecuted when it was the Negroes who were doing the only persecuting I knew about—and doing it, moreover, to *me*. During the early years of the war, when my older sister joined a left-wing youth organization, I remember my astonishment at hearing her passionately denounce my father for thinking that Jews were worse off than Negroes. To me, at the age of twelve, it seemed very clear that Negroes were better off than Jews—indeed, than *all* whites. A city boy's world is contained within three or four square blocks, and in my world it was the whites, the Italians and Jews, who feared the Negroes, not the other way around. The Negroes were tougher than we were, more ruthless, and on the whole they were better athletes. What could it mean, then, to say that they were badly off and that we were more fortunate? Yet my sister's opinions, like print, were sacred, and when she told me about exploitation and economic forces I believed her. I believed her, but I was still afraid of Negroes. And I still hated them with all my heart.

It had not always been so—that much I can recall from early childhood. When did it start, this fear and this hatred? There was a kindergarten in the local public school, and given the character of the neighborhood, at least half of the children in my class must have been Negroes. Yet I have no memory of being aware of color differences at that age, and I know from observing my own children that they attribute no significance to such differences even when they begin noticing them. I think there was a day—first grade? second grade?—when my best friend Carl hit me on the way home from school and announced that he wouldn't play with me any more because I had killed Jesus. When I ran home to my mother crying for an explanation, she told me not to pay any attention to such foolishness, and then in Yiddish she cursed the *goyim* and the *schwartzes*, the *schwartzes* and the *goyim*. Carl, it turned out, was a *schwartz*, and so was added a third to the categories into which people were mysteriously divided.

SOMETIMES I wonder whether this is a true memory at all. It is blazingly vivid, but perhaps it never happened: Can anyone really remember back to the age of six? There is no uncertainty in my mind, however, about the years that followed. Carl and I hardly ever spoke, though we met in school every day up through the eighth or ninth grade. There would be embarrassed moments of catching his eye or of his catching mine—for whatever it was that had attracted us to one another as very small children

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NORMAN PODHORETZ

remained alive in spite of the fantastic barrier of hostility that had grown up between us, suddenly and out of nowhere. Nevertheless, friendship would have been impossible, and even if it had been possible, it would have been unthinkable. About that, there was nothing anyone could do by the time we were eight years old.

*Item:* The orphanage across the street is torn down, a city housing project begins to rise in its place, and on the marvelous vacant lot next to the old orphanage they are building a playground. Much excitement and anticipation as Opening Day draws near. Mayor LaGuardia himself comes to dedicate this great gesture of public benevolence. He speaks of neighborliness and borrowing cups of sugar, and of the playground he says that children of all races, colors, and creeds will learn to live together in harmony. A week later, some of us are swatting flies on the playground's inadequate little ball field. A gang of Negro kids, pretty much our own age, enter from the other side and order us out of the park. We refuse, proudly and indignantly, with superb masculine fervor. There is a fight, they win, and we retreat, half whimpering, half with bravado. My first nauseating experience of cowardice. And my first appalled realization that there are people in the world who do not seem to be afraid of anything, who act as though they have nothing to lose. Thereafter the playground becomes a battleground, sometimes quiet, sometimes the scene of athletic competition between Them and Us. But rocks are thrown as often as baseballs. Gradually we abandon the place and use the streets instead. The streets are safer, though we do not admit this to ourselves. We are not, after all, sissies—that most dreaded epithet of an American boyhood.

*Item:* I am standing alone in front of the building in which I live. It is late afternoon and getting dark. That day in school the teacher had asked a surly Negro boy named Quentin a question he was unable to answer. As usual I had waved my arm eagerly (“Be a good boy, get good marks, be smart, go to college, become a doctor”) and, the right answer bursting from my lips, I was held up lovingly by the teacher as an example to the class. I had seen Quentin’s face—a very dark, very cruel, very Oriental-looking face—harden, and there had been enough threat in his eyes to make me run all the way home for fear that he might catch me outside.

Now, standing idly in front of my own house, I see him approaching from the project accompanied by his little brother who is carrying a baseball bat and wearing a grin of malicious anticipation. As in a nightmare, I am trapped. The surroundings are secure and familiar, but terror is suddenly present and there is no one around to help. I am locked to the spot. I will not cry out or run away like a sissy, and I stand there, my heart wild, my throat clogged. He walks up, hurls the familiar epithet (“Hey, mo’f—r”), and to my surprise only pushes me. It is a violent push, but not a punch. A push is not as serious as a punch. Maybe I can still back out without entirely losing my dignity. Maybe I can

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still say, “Hey, c’mon Quentin, whaddya wanna do *that* for. I dint do nothin’ to *you*,” and walk away, not too rapidly. Instead, before I can stop myself, I push him back—a token gesture—and I say, “Cut that out, I don’t wanna fight, I ain’t got nothin’ to fight about.” As I turn to walk back into the building, the corner of my eye catches the motion of the bat his little brother has handed him. I try to duck, but the bat crashes colored lights into my head.

The next thing I know, my mother and sister are standing over me, both of them hysterical. My sister—she who was later to join the “progressive” youth organization—is shouting for the police and screaming imprecations at those dirty little black bastards. They take me upstairs, the doctor comes, the police come. I tell them that the boy who did it was a stranger, that he had been trying to get money from me. They do not believe me, but I am too scared to give them Quentin’s name. When I return to school a few days later, Quentin avoids my eyes. He knows that I have not squealed, and he is ashamed. I try to feel proud, but in my heart I know that it was fear of what his friends might do to me that had kept me silent, and not the code of the street.

*Item:* There is an athletic meet in which the whole of our junior high school is participating. I am in one of the seventh-grade rapid-advance classes, and “segregation” has now set in with a vengeance. In the last three or four years of the elementary school from which we have just graduated, each grade had been divided into three classes, according to “intelligence.” (In the earlier grades the divisions had either been arbitrary or else unrecognized by us as having anything to do with brains.) These divisions by IQ, or however it was arranged, had resulted in a preponderance of Jews in the “1” classes and a corresponding preponderance of Negroes in the “3’s,” with the Italians split unevenly along the spectrum. At least a few Negroes had always made the “1’s,” just as there had always been a few Jewish kids among the “3’s” and more among the “2’s” (where Italians dominated). But the junior high’s rapid-advance class of which I am now a member is overwhelmingly Jewish and entirely white—except for a shy lonely Negro girl with light skin and reddish hair.

The athletic meet takes place in a city-owned stadium far from the school. It is an important event to which a whole day is given over. The winners are to get those precious little medallions stamped with the New York City emblem that can be screwed into a belt and that prove the wearer to be a distinguished personage. I am a fast runner, and so I am assigned the position of anchor man on my class’s team in the relay race. There are three other seventh-grade teams in the race, two of them all Negro, as ours is all white. One of the all-Negro teams is very tall—their anchor man waiting silently next to me on the line looks years older than I am, and I do not recognize him. He is the first to get the baton and crosses the finishing line in a walk. Our team comes in second, but a few minutes later we are declared the winners, for it has been discovered that the

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anchor man on the first-place team is not a member of the class. We are awarded the medallions, and the following day our home-room teacher makes a speech about how proud she is of us for being superior athletes as well as superior students. We want to believe that we deserve the praise, but we know that we could not have won even if the other class had not cheated.

That afternoon, walking home, I am waylaid and surrounded by five Negroes, among whom is the anchor man of the disqualified team. "Gimme my medal, mo'f—r," he grunts. I do not have it with me and I tell him so. "Anyway, it ain't yours," I say foolishly. He calls me a liar on both counts and pushes me up against the wall on which we sometimes play handball. "Gimme my mo'f—n' medal," he says again. I repeat that I have left it home. "Le's search the li'l mo'f—r," one of them suggests, "he prolly got it *hid* in his mo'f—n' *pants*." My panic is now unmanageable. (How many times had I been surrounded like this and asked in soft tones, "Len' me a nickle, boy." How many times had I been called a liar for pleading poverty and pushed around, or searched, or beaten up, unless there happened to be someone in the marauding gang like Carl who liked me across that enormous divide of hatred and who would therefore say, "Aaah, c'mon, le's git someone else, *this* boy ain't got no money on 'im.") I scream at them through tears of rage and self-contempt, "Keep your f—n' filthy lousy black hands off a me! I swear I'll get the cops." This is all they need to hear, and the five of them set upon me. They bang me around, mostly in the stomach and on the arms and shoulders, and when several adults loitering near the candy store down the block notice what is going on and begin to shout, they run off and away.

I do not tell my parents about the incident. My teammates, who have also been waylaid, each by a gang led by his opposite number from the disqualified team, have had their medallions taken from them, and they never squeal either. For days, I walk home in terror, expecting to be caught again, but nothing happens. The medallion is put away into a drawer, never to be worn by anyone.

**O**BVIOUSLY experiences like these have always been a common feature of childhood life in working-class and immigrant neighborhoods, and Negroes do not necessarily figure in them. Wherever, and in whatever combination, they have lived together in the cities, kids of different groups have been at war, beating up and being beaten up: micks against kikes against wops against spicks against polacks. And even relatively homogeneous areas have not been spared the warring of the young: one block against another, one gang (called in my day, in a pathetic effort at gentility, an "S.A.C.," or social-athletic club) against another. But the Negro-white conflict had—and no doubt still has—a special intensity and was conducted with a ferocity unmatched by intramural white battling.

In my own neighborhood, a good deal of animosity existed between the Italian kids

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(most of whose parents were immigrants from Sicily) and the Jewish kids (who came largely from East European immigrant families). Yet everyone had friends, sometimes close friends, in the other “camp,” and we often visited one another’s strange-smelling houses, if not for meals, then for glasses of milk, and occasionally for some special event like a wedding or a wake. If it happened that we divided into warring factions and did battle, it would invariably be half-hearted and soon patched up. Our parents, to be sure, had nothing to do with one another and were mutually suspicious and hostile. But we, the kids, who all spoke Yiddish or Italian at home, were Americans, or New Yorkers, or Brooklyn boys: We shared a culture, the culture of the street, and at least for a while this culture proved to be more powerful than the opposing cultures of the home.

Why, *why* should it have been so different as between the Negroes and us? How was it borne in upon us so early, white and black alike, that we were enemies beyond any possibility of reconciliation? Why did we hate one another so?

I suppose if I tried, I could answer those questions more or less adequately from the perspective of what I have since learned. I could draw upon James Baldwin—what better witness is there?—to describe the sense of entrapment that poisons the soul of the Negro with hatred for the white man whom he knows to be his jailer. On the other side, if I wanted to understand how the white man comes to hate the Negro, I could call upon the psychologists who have spoken of the guilt that white Americans feel toward Negroes and that turns into hatred for lack of acknowledging itself as guilt. These are plausible answers and certainly there is truth in them. Yet when I think back upon my own experience of the Negro and his of me, I find myself troubled and puzzled, much as I was as a child when I heard that all Jews were rich and all Negroes persecuted. How could the Negroes in my neighborhood have regarded the whites across the street and around the corner as jailers? On the whole, the whites were not so poor as the Negroes, but they were quite poor enough, and the years were years of Depression. As for white hatred of the Negro, how could guilt have had anything to do with it? What share had these Italian and Jewish immigrants in the enslavement of the Negro? What share had they—downtrodden people themselves breaking their own necks to eke out a living—in the exploitation of the Negro?

**N**O, I CANNOT BELIEVE that we hated each other back there in Brooklyn because they thought of us as jailers and we felt guilty toward them. But does it matter, given the fact that we all went through an unrepresentative confrontation? I think it matters profoundly, for if we managed the job of hating each other so well without benefit of the aids to hatred that are supposedly at the root of this madness everywhere else, it must mean that the madness is not yet properly understood. I am far from pretending that I understand it, but I would insist that no view of the problem will begin to approach the truth unless it can account for a case like the one I have been

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trying to describe. Are the elements of any such view available to us?

At least two, I would say, are. One of them is a point we frequently come upon in the work of James Baldwin, and the other is a related point always stressed by psychologists who have studied the mechanisms of prejudice. Baldwin tells us that one of the reasons Negroes hate the white man is that the white man refuses to *look* at him: The Negro knows that in white eyes all Negroes are alike; they are faceless and therefore not altogether human. The psychologists, in their turn, tell us that the white man hates the Negro because he tends to project those wild impulses that he fears in himself onto an alien group which he then punishes with his contempt. What Baldwin does *not* tell us, however, is that the principle of facelessness is a two-way street and can operate in both directions with no difficulty at all. Thus, in my neighborhood in Brooklyn, I was as faceless to the Negroes as they were to me, and if they hated me because I never looked at them, I must also have hated them for never looking at *me*. To the Negroes, my white skin was enough to define me as the enemy, and in a war it is only the uniform that counts and not the person.

So with the mechanism of projection that the psychologists talk about: It too works in both directions at once. There is no question that the psychologists are right about what the Negro represents symbolically to the white man. For me as a child the life lived on the other side of the playground and down the block on Ralph Avenue seemed the very embodiment of the values of the street—free, independent, reckless, brave, masculine, erotic. I put the word “erotic” last, though it is usually stressed above all others, because in fact it came last, in consciousness as in importance. What mainly counted for me about Negro kids of my own age was that they were “bad boys.” There were plenty of bad boys among the whites—this was, after all, a neighborhood with a long tradition of crime as a career open to aspiring talents—but the Negroes were *really* bad, bad in a way that beckoned to one, and made one feel inadequate. *We* all went home every day for a lunch of spinach-and-potatoes; *they* roamed around during lunch hour, munching on candy bars. In winter *we* had to wear itchy woolen hats and mittens and cumbersome galoshes; *they* were bare-headed and loose as they pleased. *We* rarely played hookey, or got into serious trouble in school, for all our street-corner bravado; *they* were defiant, forever staying out (to do what delicious things?), forever making disturbances in class and in the halls, forever being sent to the principal and returning uncowed. But most important of all, they were *tough*; beautifully, enviably tough, not giving a damn for anyone or anything. To hell with the teacher, the truant officer, the cop; to hell with the whole of the adult world that held us in its grip and that we never had the courage to rebel against except sporadically and in petty ways.

This is what I saw and envied and feared in the Negro: This is what finally made him faceless to me, though some of it, of course, was actually there. (The psychologists also tell us that the alien group which becomes the object of a projection will tend to

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respond by trying to live up to what is expected of them.) But what, on his side, did the Negro see in me that made me faceless to *him*? Did he envy me my lunches of spinach-and-potatoes and my itchy woolen caps and my prudent behavior in the face of authority, as I envied him his noon-time candy bars and his bare head in winter and his magnificent rebelliousness? Did those lunches and caps spell for him the prospect of power and riches in the future? Did they mean that there were possibilities open to me that were denied to him? Very likely they did. But if so, one also supposes that he feared the impulses within himself toward submission to authority no less powerfully than I feared the impulses in myself toward defiance. If I represented the jailer to him, it was not because I was oppressing him or keeping him down: It was because I symbolized for him the dangerous and probably pointless temptation toward greater repression, just as he symbolized for me the equally perilous tug toward greater freedom. I personally was to be rewarded for this repression with a new and better life in the future, but how many of my friends paid an even higher price and were given only gall in return.

**W**E HAVE IT on the authority of James Baldwin that all Negroes hate whites. I am trying to suggest that on their side all whites—all American whites, that is—are sick in their feelings about Negroes. There are Negroes, no doubt, who would say that Baldwin is wrong, but I suspect them of being less honest than he is, just as I suspect whites of self-deception who tell me they have no special feeling toward Negroes. Special feelings about color are a contagion to which white Americans seem susceptible even when there is nothing in their background to account for the susceptibility. Thus everywhere we look today in the North, we find the curious phenomenon of white middle-class liberals with no previous personal experience of Negroes—people to whom Negroes have always been faceless in virtue rather than faceless in vice—discovering that their abstract commitment to the cause of Negro rights will not stand the test of a direct confrontation. We find such people fleeing in droves to the suburbs as the Negro population in the inner city grows; and when they stay in the city we find them sending their children to private school rather than to the “integrated” public school in the neighborhood. We find them resisting the demand that gerrymandered school districts be re-zoned for the purpose of overcoming de facto segregation; we find them judiciously considering whether the Negroes (for their own good, of course) are not perhaps pushing too hard; we find them clucking their tongues over Negro militancy; we find them speculating on the question of whether there may not, after all, be something in the theory that the races are biologically different; we find them saying that it will take a very long time for Negroes to achieve full equality, no matter what anyone does; we

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\* For an account of developments like these, see “The White Liberal’s Retreat” by Murray Friedman in the January 1963 *Atlantic Monthly*.

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find them deploring the rise of black nationalism and expressing the solemn hope that the leaders of the Negro community will discover ways of containing the impatience and incipient violence within the Negro ghettos.\*

But that is by no means the whole story; there is also the phenomenon of what Kenneth Rexroth once called “crow-jimism.” There are the broken-down white boys like Vivaldo Moore in Baldwin’s *Another Country* who go to Harlem in search of sex or simply to brush up against something that looks like primitive vitality, and who are so often punished by the Negroes they meet for crimes that they would have been the last ever to commit and of which they themselves have been as sorry victims as any of the Negroes who take it out on them. There are the writers and intellectuals and artists who romanticize Negroes and pander to them, assuming a guilt that is not properly theirs. And there are all the white liberals who permit Negroes to blackmail them into adopting a double standard of moral judgment, and who lend themselves—again assuming the responsibility for crimes they never committed—to cunning and contemptuous exploitation by Negroes they employ or try to befriend.

**A**ND WHAT about me? What kind of feelings do I have about Negroes today? What happened to me, from Brooklyn, who grew up fearing and envying and hating Negroes? Now that Brooklyn is behind me, do I fear them and envy them and hate them still? The answer is yes, but not in the same proportions and certainly not in the same way. I now live on the upper west side of Manhattan, where there are many Negroes and many Puerto Ricans, and there are nights when I experience the old apprehensiveness again, and there are streets that I avoid when I am walking in the dark, as there were streets that I avoided when I was a child. I find that I am not afraid of Puerto Ricans, but I cannot restrain my nervousness whenever I pass a group of Negroes standing in front of a bar or sauntering down the street. I know now, as I did not know when I was a child, that power is on my side, that the police are working for me and not for them. And knowing this I feel ashamed and guilty, like the good liberal I have grown up to be. Yet the twinges of fear and the resentment they bring and the self-contempt they arouse are not to be gainsaid.

But envy? Why envy? And hatred? Why hatred? Here again the intensities have lessened and everything has been complicated and qualified by the guilts and the resulting over-compensations that are the heritage of the enlightened middle-class world of which I am now a member. Yet just as in childhood I envied Negroes for what seemed to me their superior masculinity, so I envy them today for what seems to me their superior physical grace and beauty. I have come to value physical grace very highly, and I am now capable of aching with all my being when I watch a Negro couple on the dance floor, or a Negro playing baseball or basketball. They are on the kind of terms with their own bodies that I should like to be on with mine, and for that precious quality they seem blessed

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to me.

The hatred I still feel for Negroes is the hardest of all the old feelings to face or admit, and it is the most hidden and the most overlarded by the conscious attitudes into which I have succeeded in willing myself. It no longer has, as for me it once did, any cause or justification (except, perhaps, that I am constantly being denied my right to an honest expression of the things I earned the right as a child to feel). How, then, do I know that this hatred has never entirely disappeared? I know it from the insane rage that can stir in me at the thought of Negro anti-Semitism; I know it from the disgusting prurience that can stir in me at the sight of a mixed couple; and I know it from the violence that can stir in me whenever I encounter that special brand of paranoid touchiness to which many Negroes are prone.

**T**HIS, THEN, is where I am; it is not exactly where I think all other white liberals are, but it cannot be so very far away either. And it is because I am convinced that we white Americans are—for whatever reason, it no longer matters—so twisted and sick in our feelings about Negroes that I despair of the present push toward integration. If the pace of progress were not a factor here, there would perhaps be no cause for despair: Time and the law and even the international political situation are on the side of the Negroes, and ultimately, therefore, victory—of a sort, anyway—must come. But from everything we have learned from observers who ought to know, pace has become as important to the Negroes as substance. They want equality and they want it *now*, and the white world is yielding to their demand only as much and as fast as it is absolutely being compelled to do. The Negroes know this in the most concrete terms imaginable, and it is thus becoming increasingly difficult to buy them off with rhetoric and promises and pious assurances of support. And so within the Negro community we find more and more people declaring—as Harold R. Isaacs recently put it in these pages\*—that they want *out*: People who say that integration will never come, or that it will take a hundred or a thousand years to come, or that it will come at too high a price in suffering and struggle for the pallid and sodden life of the American middle class that at the very best it may bring.

The most numerous, influential, and dangerous movement that has grown out of Negro despair with the goal of integration is, of course, the Black Muslims. This movement, whatever else we may say about it, must be credited with one enduring achievement: it inspired James Baldwin to write an essay\*\* which deserves to be placed among the classics of our language. Everything Baldwin has ever been trying to tell us is dis-

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\* "Integration and the Negro Mood," December 1962.

\*\* Originally published last November in the *New Yorker* under the title "Letter From a Region in My Mind," it has just been reprinted (along with a new introduction) by Dial Press under the title *The Fire Next Time*.

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tilled here into a statement of overwhelming persuasiveness and prophetic magnificence. Baldwin's message is and always has been simple. It is this: "Color is not a human or personal reality; it is a political reality." And Baldwin's demand is correspondingly simple: Color must be forgotten, lest we all be smited with a vengeance "that does not really depend on, and cannot really be executed by, any person or organization, and that cannot be prevented by any police force or army: historical vengeance, a cosmic vengeance based on the law that we recognize when we say, 'Whatever goes up must come down.'" The Black Muslims Baldwin portrays as a sign and a warning to the intransigent white world. They come to proclaim how deep is the Negro's disaffection with the white world and all its works, and Baldwin implies that no American Negro can fail to respond somewhere in his being to their message: that the white man is the devil, that Allah has doomed him to destruction, and that the black man is about to inherit the earth. Baldwin of course knows that this nightmare inversion of the racism from which the black man has suffered can neither win nor even point to the neighborhood in which victory might be located. For in his view the neighborhood of victory lies in exactly the opposite direction: the transcendence of color through love.

Yet the tragic fact is that love is not the answer to hate—not in the world of politics, at any rate. Color is indeed a political rather than a human or a personal reality and if politics (which is to say power) has made it into a human and a personal reality, then only politics (which is to say power) can unmake it once again. But the way of politics is slow and bitter, and as impatience on the one side is matched by a setting of the jaw on the other, we move closer and closer to an explosion and blood may yet run in the streets.

Will this madness in which we are all caught never find a resting-place? Is there never to be an end to it? In thinking about the Jews I have often wondered whether their survival as a distinct group was worth one hair on the head of a single infant. Did the Jews have to survive so that six million innocent people should one day be burned in the ovens of Auschwitz? It is a terrible question and no one, not God himself, could ever answer it to my satisfaction. And when I think about the Negroes in America and about the image of integration as a state in which the Negroes would take their rightful place as another of the protected minorities in a pluralistic society, I wonder whether they really believe in their hearts that such a state can actually be attained, and if so *why* they should wish to survive as a distinct group. I think I know why the Jews once wished to survive (though I am less certain as to why we still do): They not only believed that God had given them no choice, but they were tied to a memory of past glory and a dream of imminent redemption. What does the American Negro have that might correspond to this? His past is a stigma, his color is a stigma, and his vision of the future is the hope of erasing the stigma by making color irrelevant, by making it disappear as a fact of consciousness.

I share this hope, but I cannot see how it will ever be realized unless color does

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in fact disappear: And that means not integration, it means assimilation, it means—let the brutal word come out—miscegenation. The Black Muslims, like their racist counterparts in the white world, accuse the “so-called Negro leaders” of secretly pursuing miscegenation as a goal. The racists are wrong, but I wish they were right, for I believe that the wholesale merging of the two races is the most desirable alternative for everyone concerned. I am not claiming that this alternative can be pursued programmatically or that it is immediately feasible as a solution; obviously there are even greater barriers to its achievement than to the achievement of integration. What I am saying, however, is that in my opinion the Negro problem can be solved in this country in no other way.

**I** HAVE TOLD THE STORY of my own twisted feelings about Negroes here, and of how they conflict with the moral convictions I have since developed, in order to assert that such feelings must be acknowledged as honestly as possible so that they can be controlled and ultimately disregarded in favor of the convictions. It is *wrong* for a man to suffer because of the color of his skin. Beside that clichéd proposition of liberal thought, what argument can stand and be respected? If the arguments are the arguments of feeling, they must be made to yield; and one's own soul is not the worst place to begin working a huge social transformation. Not so long ago, it used to be asked of white liberals, “Would you like your sister to marry one?” When I was a boy and my sister was still unmarried, I would certainly have said no to that question. But now I am a man, my sister is already married, and I have daughters. If I were to be asked today whether I would like a daughter of mine “to marry one,” I would have to answer: “No, I wouldn't *like* it at all. I would rail and rave and rant and tear my hair. And then I hope I would have the courage to curse myself for raving and ranting, and to give her my blessing. How dare I withhold it at the behest of the child I once was and against the man I now have a duty to be?” 🍷

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# The Civil Rights Act of 1964

By Alexander M. Bickel

**A**T A NEWS CONFERENCE in 1962, John F. Kennedy coined the phrase “sound public constitutional policy.” It was an entirely original conception, a hybrid of constitutional law and public policy. Constitutional law is produced by the Supreme Court. Public policy is what the political institutions—the Congress and the President jointly, and often the President on his own—evolve and put into effect. Mr. Kennedy’s phrase characterized with precision the civil rights commitment he had undertaken in the campaign of 1960. The broad and pervasive principle of the School Segregation Cases of 1954, he had then promised, would under his administration not only be the judicial policy of the federal government, but also the political policy of its executive branch. The executive department would be committed to “equal protection” as a rule of independent, self-starting political and administrative action, rather than merely as an obligation to uphold the courts.

Mr. Kennedy redeemed his pledge very substantially, making the best civil rights record of any national administration since Reconstruction. But such a statement, although entirely accurate, means less than it says. It means concretely that under Ken-

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ALEXANDER M. BICKEL *was a law professor at Yale University. He wrote frequently for COMMENTARY, the New York Times, and the New Republic, where he was a contributing editor.*

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nedy, whose posture was so very different from that of his predecessor, the pace of school desegregation speeded up, although it remained excruciatingly deliberate; that by litigation and the exertion of other pressures, the desegregation of interstate transportation facilities was about completed; that other problems, including employment and—after November 1962—housing, were freshly attacked by executive action, and were beginning to yield somewhat; and that a massive effort, different in kind from anything that had gone before, was being made through litigation to enforce the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, and thus to enfranchise large numbers of Southern Negroes. It should be added that the administration was also trying to improve general economic conditions, and that it was well aware of the bearing of this attempt on the civil rights problem.

But the long-range philosophy that informed the first two-and-a-half years of the Kennedy administration could fairly be stated as follows: The Negro must be helped to gain political power in the South. The right to vote, said Attorney General Robert Kennedy, is basic, “and from it all other rights flow.” Through the concerted efforts of the Department of Justice, the vote ought to be achievable within a decade. The effect would be felt in Congress as well as by state governments, and there could then be major moves on all fronts, by the executive as well as by legislatures; for, obviously, different attitudes in Congress would not only make it possible for the President to obtain legislation, but would also free him to act in areas in which he was now hesitating, even though theoretically he had sufficient independent power.

Accordingly, in the first two-and-a-half years, President Kennedy demanded little from Congress, and nothing very insistently. He asked and was not granted perfecting amendments to the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, dealing exclusively with the right to vote. It was February 28, 1963, before he sent his first full-scale civil rights message to Congress. He reported on his past independent initiatives, and promised further ones. He asked again for improvement in the statutes guaranteeing the right to vote, and he added a modest request for authority to extend technical and financial assistance to school districts in the process of desegregation. That was all. Then, two months later—in April and May of 1963—came Birmingham.

Birmingham was not the first instance of violently resisted Negro demonstrations, nor even of mass marching through the center of a city. Albany, Ga., preceded Birmingham, as did the freedom rides of the spring of 1961. Sit-ins had started early in 1960. And before that, there had been the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala., in 1955–56. Yet the marching in Birmingham became one of those events that seem to turn the course of history; or if that sounds insufficiently deterministic, then one of those events for which the course of history seems to wait before turning. Perhaps it was that Birmingham—with the notorious “Bull” Connor in charge (he is gone now)—had become something of a symbol of Southern racism. Perhaps it was that police reaction here was more brutal than elsewhere, and that the marching therefore seized the attention of

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more people over the country, and affected more consciences. Perhaps the murder from ambush, at about the same time, of Medgar Evers, the NAACP's man in Jackson, Mississippi, heightened the effect. And perhaps the consequences of Birmingham are explained by Aldous Huxley's remark that experience is not what happens to us but what we do with what happens to us. Birmingham, it may be, was a turning point not because it caused President Kennedy to register a sharp change in his policy on civil rights, but because that was what President Kennedy was willing and able to do with Birmingham. In the long run, very probably, broad new federal legislation was inevitable, but in the short run, John Kennedy surely had a choice. He could have stood on a platform of law and order, deploring not only violence, but all attempts, which are ever fraught with violence, to change the legal order without abiding the law's own procedures for advancing beyond itself. And he could have coupled this attitude with a promise to pursue more vigorously the executive program on which he was already launched. Further demonstrations and more violence were as likely to be avoided this way as any other, if they were at all avoidable.

Yet this was not the choice the President made. Instead, less than three months after his February message, he called off his old bets and went to the country and to Congress with eloquence and passion, setting radical new objectives. And so it was through John F. Kennedy that the Negro, without waiting for the vote, operating outside the law and also outside the customary political channels, touched the levers of political power. The result, thirteen months later, was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a fundamentally new departure in federal legislation.

**A**N OMNIBUS CIVIL RIGHTS BILL, drafted in the Department of Justice, was sent down by President Kennedy on June 19, 1963. It led off with the President's proposals of February to strengthen the voting provisions of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, and it included also the proposals concerning assistance to school districts that were being desegregated. Then came the new matter. The bill prohibited discrimination in public accommodations, meaning privately-owned facilities catering to the general public. It authorized the Attorney General to bring suit to desegregate public schools (instead of letting the burden of such suits continue to fall in each district on private parties). And it authorized the President to exact promises of non-discrimination from recipients of federal financial assistance "in connection with any program or activity by way of grant, contract, loan, insurance, guaranty, or otherwise."

The bill contained no general fair employment provision, but it did enlarge the jurisdiction of a Presidential commission which had existed by executive authority since the Eisenhower administration, and which was putting pressure on the government's contractors, and its defense contractors in particular, to get them to institute and pursue non-discriminatory employment policies. Finally, with lucid awareness of the lim-

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ited possibilities of enforcement through litigation, the bill established a Community Relations Service, whose function it would be, “in confidence and without publicity,” by negotiation, persuasion, and other dark arts known also to labor mediators, to induce voluntary compliance with the public accommodations title of the bill, and to attempt to settle other racial disputes as well. The Service put on an institutional looking the function that had been discharged in Birmingham by Assistant Attorney General Marshall.

For the next few months, through the fall of 1963, tripartite negotiations took place, involving the Kennedy administration, the Republican leadership of the House, and a bipartisan group of liberal congressmen. In the wings was the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a coalition of over 70 organizations interested in obtaining the broadest possible statute. At this stage, an excellent fair employment title, superseding but not displacing the Presidential commission which had been dealing with the government’s contractors, was added to the bill. But at the same time, there were also two significant subtractions from the administration’s draft. A section was dropped from the title on voting rights, under which federal courts would have appointed temporary referees to see to the speedy, if provisional, registration of qualified Negro voters in time for an impending election. And the Community Relations Service was killed. Perhaps—there is no other ready explanation—the Community Relations Service fell victim at this point to the most advanced liberals, who wanted, as the headlines called it, the “toughest” possible bill, providing for enforcement, not namby-pamby mediation. To be sure, there was enforcement power in the bill as it stood, but the idea may have been to afford the administration no alternative to the use of that power.

On the floor of the House, where it was passed handsomely on February 10, 1964, the bill suffered some further wounds, thin and quickly administered, but not altogether shallow. The provision, which had been rewritten and improved in committee, authorizing the President to see to it that there was no discrimination in federally financed programs, was amended to apply only to programs receiving federal assistance “by way of grant, loan, or contract other than a contract of insurance or guaranty.” This is and was intended to be an exemption for housing built or purchased on mortgages guaranteed by the Federal Housing Administration or the Veterans’ Administration. Such housing was covered by an Executive Order on Equal Opportunity in Housing, issued by President Kennedy on November 20, 1962, in the exercise of his independent executive power. The purpose of the Order was not to coerce an individual homeowner to sell to a Negro. The Order was aimed at developers of real estate, and it was meant to exert pressure on banks to make mortgage loans to Negroes who have found a willing seller on the same terms as to whites, which is far from the prevalent practice. The great problem with the exemption in the House amendment is not so much that Congress has chosen to leave FHA and VA mortgages unaffected by this statute, but that the amendment may well abrogate the Executive Order to the extent that it does cover such mortgages. The managers of the

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bill disclaimed any intention to do this, and similar disclaimers were later entered in the Senate, but the result may nevertheless follow as a matter of law. For it is quite clear that Congress did not wish to deal with discrimination in FHA and VA housing. As a general legal proposition, the President may have and may enforce an independent policy of his own in matters like this so long as Congress has not legislated a contrary policy. He may fill a policy vacuum, or complement a Congressional policy, but he may not displace a Congressional policy, even a negative one. And so a portion of the Executive Order on Housing was, to say the least, thrown into doubt.

A NUMBER OF FURTHER CHANGES made on the floor of the House must be noted. The provisions dealing with education were amended so as to render them inapplicable to the Northern problem of racial imbalance. The House extended the fair employment title to prohibit discrimination based on sex as well as race, religion, and national origin. (This amendment, although conceivably a worthy one on its own merits, is concerned with a quite separate problem, which should have been dealt with separately.) The House also saw fit to safeguard an employer's right to refuse to hire an atheist, a pretty clearly unconstitutional proviso, which was later struck in the Senate. Again, the employment title was changed in the House to exclude assorted Communists and subversives of whatever race, religion, or sex from the benefits of the bill—another provision of doubtful constitutionality, which remains in the Act. On the other hand, the bill was repaired in one important respect on the floor of the House. The Community Relations Service, eliminated in committee, was put back in, although in somewhat crippled shape. It was finally restored to full health by the Senate.

The main event in the progress of the bill to triumphant passage in the Senate, under cloture on June 19, 1964, was a series of amendments evolved chiefly by Senator Dirksen of Illinois, the minority leader. Aside from tinkering with the bill here and there, and sometimes improving it, the Dirksen amendments were directed at the enforcement provisions of both the public accommodations and fair employment titles. As these provisions came to the Senate, both private parties and the government, through the Attorney General and a federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, were authorized to bring enforcement suits. For these simplicities, the Dirksen amendments substituted a labyrinth of procedures, intended to emphasize private as against government litigating initiative, and to give state authorities, where relevant ones exist, a first crack at settling or litigating any complaint.

Apart from Mr. Dirksen's package, the only other significant change made in the Senate was a provision granting jury trials to defendants charged with criminal contempt of court. The upshot of litigation under the statute will be a judicial decree ordering somebody to do something or desist from doing it—serve Negroes at a lunch counter and stop refusing them service; employ a given applicant for a job and stop excluding

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others because of their race; and the like. Such orders are made effective by the power of the federal courts to hold violators in contempt. There are two kinds of contempt. A court may put a person in jail or subject him to a fine until he obeys: This is called civil contempt, because it does not purport to punish, but merely to exact obedience. But a court may also, after the fact, punish a person for the crime of having disobeyed a decree in the past: This is called criminal contempt. The amendment in question, proposed by Senator Morton of Kentucky, does not affect the power of federal courts to enforce their orders by civil contempt proceedings. Nor does it affect voting cases, which are governed by a compromise embodied in the Civil Rights Act of 1957. It affects only—as to all titles of the Act save the title dealing with the right to vote—a judge’s power, on his own, without a jury, to punish for criminal contempt.

Undoubtedly, for the foreseeable future, it will be difficult to make a charge of criminal contempt stick before a Southern jury in a civil rights case. But the civil contempt power is an ample one. Moreover, in the judgment of many lawyers, it is wrong on principle to dispense with juries in this sort of criminal case, which is not easily distinguishable from the common run of criminal cases, where trial by jury is a defendant’s constitutional right.

**T**HE ACT that emerged, from these origins and along this legislative path is a statutory booklet some 18,000 words long. It is divided into eleven titles or chapters. Title I, on voting, which is in the form of amendments to the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, plugs loopholes that have turned up in the course of litigation under those statutes. It applies only to federal elections, and orders state registrars to use the same standards in qualifying Negro voters as in qualifying whites; it also forbids them to disqualify an individual for minor errors (those which are not really material to his qualifications) in an application to register. The title then deals in some detail with literacy tests. It provides that they may not be administered to any applicant for registration unless they are administered to all applicants, and that they may be administered only in writing, with a certified copy of the test to be furnished to the individual upon request. Thus the disqualification of Negro Ph.D.’s on grounds of illiteracy becomes more difficult. But the Attorney General may certify that these provisions shall have no effect in states in which he is satisfied that literacy tests are fairly used, so that the kind of quick oral test given in many Northern states is likely to be unaffected. As an additional safeguard, it is then provided that anyone with a sixth-grade education, obtained in any school in which instruction is carried on predominantly in English, is presumed to be sufficiently literate to vote in federal elections; if a state wishes to disqualify him, it must prove him to be illiterate—which is to say, it must prove to the satisfaction of the federal courts that its standards of literacy, as applied to such an individual, make sense. Heretofore, standards of literacy could be attacked only on the ground that they were unequally

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administered, even if they required the applicant to do such preposterous things as to render a legal opinion on the meaning of any provision of the Mississippi Constitution. (It is noteworthy that this new statutory presumption does not touch requirements that literacy be in English, under which Puerto Rican voters, literate in Spanish only, may be disqualified in New York, for example.) Finally, this and other titles—by enabling the Attorney General to get voting and other civil rights cases heard by three-judge courts, rather than by single federal judges—give him the means to circumvent delays and other obstructionist tactics to which he has been subjected by a few segregationist federal judges in the South. It is unfortunate that such a cumbersome procedure should have had to be imposed on a busy and over-burdened federal judiciary, and the necessity for it emphasizes the importance of care in the selection of federal judges in the South.

Title II is the public accommodations title. It defines a public accommodation as any inn, hotel, motel, or other establishment providing lodging to transient guests, excepting only what came to be known in Washington as Mrs. Murphy's boarding house (meaning an establishment which offers no more than five rooms for rent, and in which the owner also lives); any restaurant or other place that sells food for consumption on the premises, including lunch counters in retail stores; any gasoline station; any place of entertainment, including theaters and sports arenas; and any other establishment which is physically located within the premises of one of the places just listed, and which holds itself out as serving the patrons of such a place (this being the provision under which some barber shops, for example, may be included, and some not). A public accommodation, so defined, is subject to this title if "its operations affect commerce, or if discrimination or segregation by it is supported by state action."

Commerce is said to be automatically affected by all the establishments in the hotel category, on the theory that hotels serve transients, most of whom cross a state line or two, and that the movement of persons across state lines is commerce within the sense of the constitutional provision defining the powers of Congress. Establishments in the restaurant category and gasoline stations affect commerce if they serve interstate travelers, or if a substantial portion of the food or gasoline or other products they sell has moved across state lines. Places of entertainment affect commerce if the thing or performers they exhibit have moved across state lines. Discrimination or segregation is "supported by state action," and thus prohibited whether or not the establishment affects commerce, if it is required by a state, formally by statute or informally by official action or pressure.

All these definitions, however, are expressly made inapplicable to a bona fide private club or other establishment not open to the public, except as a club or the like may open some of its facilities to the general public, in which event the title is applicable to those facilities. In establishments covered, the Act declares all persons to be entitled to full and equal enjoyment of everything that an establishment offers, without discrimi-

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nation or segregation on account of race, religion, or national origin. It is unlawful also for any third party to attempt to prevent an establishment from extending the privileges secured by this title to an individual, or to attempt to prevent an individual from claiming his privileges.

Persons aggrieved by a violation of this title may obtain from a federal court a decree directing that the violation cease. And there is a valuable provision authorizing the courts to appoint an attorney for a complainant in a suit under this title, and to allow him a reasonable attorney's fee as part of the costs awarded to him if he wins. However, if the violation occurred in a state which prohibits discrimination in public accommodations under its own law, complaint must first be made to the state authorities, and there can be no suit in the federal court until the state authorities have had thirty days to deal with the complaint. Subsequently, the federal court may stay its own proceedings until the termination of any local proceedings that may have been undertaken. But ultimately, if the complainant is unsatisfied with what the state has been able to do, he retains his essential federal right to redress. In a state which has no public accommodations law of its own, the federal court in which suit has been brought may refer the matter to the Community Relations Service for a total of no more than 120 days, if the court believes that a reasonable possibility exists of securing voluntary compliance. The Service may investigate and hold private hearings. Suits by the Attorney General on behalf of the government are possible only when he "has reasonable cause to believe that any person or group of persons is engaged in a pattern or practice of resistance."

**T**ITLE III authorizes the Attorney General to bring suit to desegregate public facilities, other than public schools or colleges, which are owned or operated by or on behalf of any state—parks, golf courses, municipal auditoriums, and the like. Judicial decisions have long since made clear the law as to such facilities, which turns on a constitutional right to equal access, as part of the general right to equal treatment at the hands of all units of government. Hence, the point of this title is merely that the Attorney General is now enabled to bring suit, rather than private parties only.

Title IV is the education title. It requires the Commissioner of Education, who heads the hundred-year-old Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, to make a survey and report, within two years, on the availability of equal educational opportunities to individuals of all races and religions in public institutions at all levels throughout the country, North and South. It then empowers him to render technical assistance to local authorities in the preparation and implementation of desegregation plans. A national professional agency will thus be in a position to work out and validate methods for dealing with special educational problems arising from desegregation. The Commissioner is also authorized to arrange and finance institutes for special training for teachers and administrative personnel who have to deal with problems

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of desegregation. But desegregation is so defined that the Commissioner will be unable to concern himself with what are commonly called problems of racial imbalance; aside from the survey and report, the effect of these provisions will thus be felt mainly in the South, and only, if at all, in such school districts in the North as may be found to have intentionally gerrymandered school attendance areas for purposes of separating the races. The Attorney General's new authority to litigate school cases is similarly limited. One of the Dirksen amendments, moreover, was careful to provide that nothing in the title should be constructed to empower any court to order the achievement of racial balance through the transportation of pupils from one school to another.

Title V extends for four years the life of the Civil Rights Commission, an investigative body established by the Act of 1957, which has done some valuable fact-gathering in the past.

Title VI embodies the requirement that there be no discrimination in federally assisted programs (other than those assisted by way of contracts of insurance or guaranty), and empowers the President ultimately to withhold funds as a penalty for non-compliance. The title carries certain procedural safeguards, as it ought.

Title VII is headed "Equal Employment Opportunity." It applies to any individual or corporate or other legal entity regularly employing 25 or more persons; to employment agencies, including the United States Employment Service and the system of state and local employment services which receive federal assistance; and to labor unions. Employers and labor unions are covered only if their activities affect interstate commerce. Unlike the public accommodations provisions, this title does not spell out the meaning of the technical phrase, "affect commerce," for its own purposes, but adopts the well-established definition that has been evolved under the federal labor law, and that covers a very great deal, indeed. This title makes it unlawful for any employer to fail to hire or to discharge, or otherwise to discriminate, in compensation or other terms of employment, against any individual because of his color, religion, sex, or national origin. Similar prohibitions apply to employment agencies and to labor unions. The latter are also forbidden to cause an employer to discriminate, and apprenticeship and other training programs must be open to all without discrimination. Exemptions are provided for the case where religion, sex, or national origin may be a legitimate occupational qualification. With a view to demands recently voiced by Negro organizations in the North, the title specifically forswears any requirement of preferential treatment for the purpose of curing an imbalance in the racial composition of a given body of employees or apprentices.

Complaints of a violation of this title may be made either by a person aggrieved or by a member of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which the statute establishes. The initial federal addressee of such complaints is the Commission. The Commission is to investigate and, without undue publicity, make every attempt to secure compliance with the law. Its visitatorial powers are considerable. It is authorized

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to examine witnesses under oath and require the production of documentary evidence, and it may seek the aid of federal courts when it runs up against a recalcitrant witness. It may require employers, labor unions, and employment agencies to keep relevant records and to make periodic reports, and it may cause them to post conspicuous notices on their premises informing all concerned of their rights and privileges under this title. In a state which has a fair employment practices law of its own, the local authorities are given a period of up to 120 days to deal with any complaint, and before that period is up, the federal Commission may not intervene. Elsewhere, federal jurisdiction attaches immediately.

In either case, if the federal Commission, having investigated and tried persuasion, fails to achieve compliance, an aggrieved individual may bring suit in a federal court, which is again empowered to appoint a lawyer for him and to award him a lawyer's fee if he wins. The court may not only order the defendant to stop discriminating on pain of contempt of court, but may also give special remedies, such as an order of reinstatement of an employee with back pay. The Commission itself has no litigating authority, except that it may initiate civil contempt proceedings when a decree handed down in a private suit has been disobeyed. As under the public accommodations title, the Attorney General is authorized to sue to enforce this title only when he finds that there is "a pattern or practice of resistance."

Those portions of this title which establish the Commission and give it its investigatory powers went into effect, like the rest of the Act, when the President signed it. But the provisions defining and prohibiting discriminatory practices do not go into effect until a year later. There is that much of a period of grace and adjustment. Moreover, these provisions will become effective in 1965 only for employers of 100 or more. Another year will pass before they are applicable to employers of 75 or more, and they will be fully applicable to all employers covered after yet another year (that is, in 1967).

Of the remaining four titles, one (X) sets up the Community Relations Service; another orders a special census of voters, with a view to the highly remote and, on its merits, highly dubious possibility of applying Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which would cut down the representation in the federal House of states that deny the vote to some of their citizens. For the rest, there are some technical provisions, the most important of which, mentioned earlier, deals with jury trials.

**W**ITHOUT QUESTION, this Civil Rights Act is a momentous statute, comparable in importance to the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 and the reforms of the first Wilson administration and of the first two administrations of Franklin Roosevelt. In the long view, the significance of such a statute rises quite above this or that inadequacy in its provisions. The point is that it commits the federal government, and particularly Congress—which can do things neither the President nor the judiciary,

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despite their prior commitment, could do alone—to a set of national goals that reach beyond minimal constitutional requirements. The commitment is not likely to be revoked, and the goals are not likely to be reduced. Over the years, an organic enactment like this trails further judicial and legislative law in its wake. There will be interpretations and amendments, all striving to make it, like the federal union itself, “more perfect.” And they will be achieved, despite occasional setbacks, more easily than the initial step. Such a statute affects the expectations and aspirations of the people, and the sense of duty and function of the institutions of government. For everyone concerned, it changes the universe of discourse.

But that is the long view. More immediately, how will the Act be translated into everyday life, North and South? Its address is largely to the South. In its education and employment titles, and in some measure even in the voting and federal assistance titles, it explicitly excludes application to problems that are typically Northern. To be sure, grievances in the North are, by and large, difficult and in the short run often impossible to redress by legislation. They are rooted, on the whole, not in deficiencies in the legal order, or in blatant discriminations that can be stopped with immediately visible results, but in deeply intricate features of the society which can be reorganized only over time. For all that, however, it is regrettable that the Act on its face looks in many places like a regional measure, for this lays it open to the deadly charge that Northerners are mostly interested in dealing with the racial difficulties of others, but not with their own. Even so, the Act will not be entirely without effect in the North: It will have some supportive effect on extra-legal pressure applied by the Negroes themselves; the public accommodations and employment titles will activate similar laws that have lain in some disuse in many states; and these titles will be widely obeyed in the North, even by people who in the past chose to shut their eyes to the state statutes. Moreover, the Community Relations Service, which is not confined merely to seeking compliance with the mandatory provisions of the Act, may prove to be a useful presence in the North, too.

In the South, provided only that the Justice Department is given enough money to double or triple its staff of civil rights lawyers, registration of Negro voters and public school desegregation ought to pick up quite noticeably, even if there is no great movement toward voluntary compliance. Results should be forthcoming within a reasonably short time with respect also to federally financed programs, of which there are a great many, including hospitals, libraries, vocational training, aid to higher education, and more. The public accommodations and employment titles, affecting as they do the actions not only of officials but of many thousands of private persons and institutions, must, like all such pervasive regulatory measures, gain general acceptance, however grudging, in order to be effective. It will take, said Senator Goldwater, a police state to enforce this law, and he was almost right; it *would* take. Absolute enforcement of any statute that is resisted consistently and on principle by substantial numbers of people

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would require a police state. But we do not expect absolute enforcement in such circumstances. By means of occasional enforcement, *pour encourager les autres*, and by other means of inducement and persuasion, we undertake rather to reduce the number of those who resist. That is what is in prospect in the South for the public accommodations and equal employment titles, and that is why the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Community Relations Service, which are inducing rather than enforcing agencies, are so important. Of course, inducement, persuasion, and mediation would not be very effective if the law did not declare in mandatory fashion some standard of behavior to which the mediators can urge people to measure up. And persuasion is not unnaturally hampered if an adamant refusal to be moved by it is known to be an alternative that never costs anything. Yet, while enforcement is a sword that is sometimes wielded, its chief uses are Damoclean.

At the beginning, however, litigation will play a role out of proportion to its eventual significance in rendering the public accommodations and equal employment titles effective. For although there will be some voluntary compliance almost immediately, some of it will await the outcome of the first round of litigation. As with all new statutes, there are issues of meaning and application about which doubt is legitimately possible, and which only litigation can authoritatively resolve. We may expect that the constitutionality of the titles dealing with public accommodations, employment, and federal financial assistance will be attacked at wholesale—the constitutionality of other provisions being for the most part quite specifically settled by existing decisions. Despite assertions to the contrary, there is no doubt that the public accommodations and employment titles are constitutional on their face and in general application, and that they will be so held by the Supreme Court in very short order. They rest on the power of Congress to regulate interstate commerce, a concept broadly defined in many contexts in the past, some of which—for example, wages-and-hour and child-labor legislation, the Pure Food and Drug Act, labor legislation in general, and the Mann Act—are quite analogous. Nor is there any doubt of the power of the federal government to set conditions on the disbursement of federal funds; indeed, under decided cases, there is considerable doubt whether the federal government may constitutionally allow its funds to be used in discriminatory fashion.

**B**EYOND the constitutional issue, there will be questions of construction. Such questions, becoming increasingly marginal, will continue to arise throughout the life of the statute. A number of initial ones can be foreseen. There are sure to crop up in the South things like “intrastate hotels” accepting no interstate travelers, “intrastate theaters” offering only local entertainment, and all varieties of private clubs. Their bona fides will be subject to litigation, as will the question, assuming bona fides, whether the statute was intended to cover them. In one instance—in the case of restaurants—the

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statute speaks of a “substantial” connection with interstate commerce. It remains for litigation to determine just exactly what that means, and the concept of a substantial connection may be read into other portions of the statute as well. Again, the Attorney General’s authority to sue is limited to cases where he finds a practice or pattern of resistance, under both the public accommodations and the employment titles. What does this phrase mean? What is its geographic coverage? Are statistics a sufficient proof of a pattern of resistance?

Before as well as after the first round of litigation, but particularly after, much will depend on the amount of pressure exerted by Negro communities, and on the effectiveness of the Community Relations Service and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The quality of the President’s appointments to those bodies, and the kind of public support he gives them, will be extremely important. The President’s first appointment—that of former Governor LeRoy Collins of Florida as head of the Service—and the prominence he gave it, augur well for the future. But in any event, the goals are set and they are set high. They will be attained, sooner or later. This statute was the point of no return. 📌

# On Becoming a Writer

By Ralph Ellison

**I**N THE BEGINNING writing was far from a serious matter; it was a reflex of reading, an extension of a source of pleasure, escape, and instruction. In fact, I had become curious about writing by way of seeking to understand the aesthetic nature of literary power, the devices through which literature could command my mind and emotions. It was not, then, the process of writing which initially claimed my attention, but the finished creations, the artifacts, poems, plays, novels. The act of learning writing technique was, therefore, an amusing investigation of what seemed at best a secondary talent, an exploration, like dabbling in sculpture, of one's potentialities as a "Renaissance Man." This, surely, would seem a most unlikely and even comic concept to introduce here; and yet, it is precisely because I come from where I do (the Oklahoma of the years between World War I and the Great Depression) that I must introduce it, and with a straight face.

Anything and everything was to be found in the chaos of Oklahoma; thus the concept of the Renaissance Man has lurked long within the shadow of my past, and I shared it with at least a half dozen of my Negro friends. How we actually acquired it I have never learned, and since there is no true sociology of the dispersion of ideas within the American democracy, I doubt if I ever shall. Perhaps we breathed it in with the air of the

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RALPH ELLISON *was a critic and scholar whose novel Invisible Man won the National Book Award in 1953.*

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Negro community of Oklahoma City, the capital of that state whose Negroes were often charged by exasperated white Texans with not knowing their “place.” Perhaps we took it defiantly from one of them. Or perhaps I myself picked it up from some transplanted New Englander whose shoes I had shined of a Saturday afternoon. After all, the most meaningful tips do not always come in the form of money, nor are they intentionally extended. Most likely, however, my friends and I acquired the idea from some book or from some idealistic Negro teacher, some dreamer seeking to function responsibly in an environment which at its most normal took on some of the mixed character of nightmare and of dream.

One thing is certain, ours was a chaotic community, still characterized by frontier attitudes and by that strange mixture of the naive and sophisticated, the benign and malignant, which makes the American past so puzzling and its present so confusing; that mixture which often affords the minds of the young who grow up in the far provinces such wide and unstructured latitude, and which encourages the individual’s imagination—up to the moment “reality” closes in upon him—to range widely and, sometimes, even to soar.

We hear the effects of this in the Southwestern jazz of the 30s, that joint creation of artistically free and exuberantly creative adventurers, of artists who had stumbled upon the freedom lying within the restrictions of their musical tradition as within the limitations of their social background, and who in their own unconscious way have set an example for any Americans, Negro or white, who would find themselves in the arts. They accepted themselves and the complexity of life as they knew it, they loved their art and through it they celebrated American experience definitively in sound. Whatever others thought or felt, this was their own powerful statement, and only non-musical assaults upon their artistic integrity—mainly economically inspired changes of fashion—were able to compromise their vision.

Much of so-called Kansas City jazz was actually brought to perfection in Oklahoma by Oklahomans. It is an important circumstance for me as a writer to remember, because while these musicians and their fellows were busy creating out of tradition, imagination, and the sounds and emotions around them, a freer, more complex, and driving form of jazz, my friends and I were exploring an idea of human versatility and possibility which went against the barbs or over the palings of almost every fence which those who controlled social and political power had erected to restrict our roles in the life of the country. Looking back, one might say that the jazzmen, some of whom we idolized, were in their own way better examples for youth to follow than were most judges and ministers, legislators and governors (we were stuck with the notorious Alfalfa Bill Murray). For as we viewed these pillars of society from the confines of our segregated community we almost always saw crooks, clowns, or hypocrites. Even the best were revealed by their attitudes toward us as lacking the respectable qualities to which they pretended and for

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RALPH ELLISON

which they were accepted outside by others, while despite the outlaw nature of their art, the jazzmen were less torn and damaged by the moral compromises and insincerities which have so sickened the life of our country.

Be that as it may, our youthful sense of life, like that of many Negro children (though no one bothers to note it—especially the specialists and “friends of the Negro” who view our Negro-American life as essentially non-human) was very much like that of Huckleberry Finn, who is universally so praised and enjoyed for the clarity and courage of his moral vision. Like Huck, we observed, we judged, we imitated and evaded as we could the dullness, corruption, and blindness of “civilization.” We were undoubtedly comic because, as the saying goes, we weren’t supposed to know what it was all about. But to ourselves we were “boys,” members of a wild, free, outlaw tribe which transcended the category of race. Rather we were Americans born into the forty-sixth state, and thus, into the context of Negro-American post-Civil War history, “frontiersmen.” And isn’t one of the implicit functions of the American frontier to encourage the individual to a kind of dreamy wakefulness, a state in which he makes—in all ignorance of the accepted limitations of the possible—rash efforts, quixotic gestures, hopeful testings of the complexity of the known and the given?

Spurring us on in our controlled and benign madness was the voracious reading of which most of us were guilty and the vicarious identification and empathetic adventuring which it encouraged. This was due, in part, perhaps to the fact that some of us were fatherless—my own father had died when I was three—but most likely it was because boys are natural romantics. We were seeking examples, patterns to live by, out of a freedom which for all its being ignored by the sociologists and subtle thinkers, was implicit in the Negro situation. Father and mother substitutes also have a role to play in aiding the child to help create himself. Thus we fabricated our own heroes and ideals catch-as-catch-can; and with an outrageous and irreverent sense of freedom. Yes, and in complete disregard of ideas of respectability or the surreal incongruity of some of our projections. Gamblers and scholars, jazz musicians and scientists, Negro cowboys and soldiers from the Spanish-American and First World Wars, movie stars and stunt men, figures from the Italian Renaissance and literature, both classical and popular, were combined with the special virtues of some local bootlegger, the eloquence of some Negro preacher, the strength and grace of some local athlete, the ruthlessness of some businessman-physician, the elegance in dress and manners of some head-waiter or hotel doorman.

**L**OOKING BACK through the shadows upon this absurd activity, I realize now that we were projecting archetypes, recreating folk figures, legendary heroes, monsters even, most of which violated all ideas of social hierarchy and order and all accepted conceptions of the hero handed down by cultural, religious, and racist tradition. But we, remember, were under the intense spell of the early movies, the silents as well

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## *On Becoming a Writer*

as the talkies; and in our community, life was not so tightly structured as it would have been in the traditional South—or even in deceptively “free” Harlem. And our imaginations processed reality and dream, natural man and traditional hero, literature and folklore, like maniacal editors turned loose in some frantic film-cutting room. Remember, too, that being boys, yet in the play-stage of our development, we were dream-serious in our efforts. But serious nevertheless, for culturally play is a preparation, and we felt that somehow the human ideal lay in the vague and constantly shifting figures—sometimes comic but always versatile, picaresque, and self-effacingly heroic—which evolved from our wildly improvisatory projections: figures neither white nor black, Christian nor Jewish, but representative of certain desirable essences, of skills and powers, physical, aesthetic, and moral.

The proper response to these figures was, we felt, to develop ourselves for the performance of many and diverse roles, and the fact that certain definite limitations had been imposed upon our freedom did not lessen our sense of obligation. Not only were we to prepare but we were to perform—not with mere competence but with an almost reckless verve; with, may we say (without evoking the quaint and questionable notion of *négritude*) Negro-American style? Behind each artist there stands a traditional sense of style, a sense of the felt tension indicative of expressive completeness; a mode of humanizing reality and of evoking a feeling of being at home in the world. It is something which the artist shares with the group, and part of our boyish activity expressed a yearning to make any and everything of quality Negro-American; to appropriate it, possess it, recreate it in our own group and individual images.

And we recognized and were proud of our group’s own style wherever we discerned it, in jazzmen and prize-fighters, ballplayers, and tap dancers; in gesture, inflection, intonation, timbre, and phrasing. Indeed, in all those nuances of expression and attitude which reveal a culture. We did not fully understand the cost of that style, but we recognized within it an affirmation of life beyond all question of our difficulties as Negroes.

Contrary to the notion currently projected by certain specialists in the “Negro problem” which characterizes the Negro American as self-hating and defensive, we did not so regard ourselves. We felt, among ourselves at least, that we were supposed to be whoever we would and could be and do anything and everything which other boys did, and do it better. Not defensively, because we were ordered to do so; nor because it was held in the society at large that we were naturally, as Negroes, limited—but because we demanded it of ourselves. Because to measure up to our own standards was the only way of affirming our notion of manhood.

Hence it was no more incongruous, as seen from our own particular perspective in this land of incongruities, for young Negro Oklahomans to project themselves as Renaissance men than for white Mississippians to see themselves as ancient Greeks or noblemen out of Sir Walter Scott. Surely our fantasies have caused far less damage to the

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nation's sense of reality, if for no other reason than that ours were expressive of a more democratic ideal. Remember, too, as William Faulkner made us so vividly aware, that the slaves often took the essence of the aristocratic ideal (as they took Christianity) with far more seriousness than their masters, and that we, thanks to the tight telescoping of American history, were but two generations from that previous condition. Renaissance men, indeed!

I managed, by keeping quiet about it, to cling to our boyish ideal during three years in Alabama, and I brought it with me to New York, where it not only gave silent support to my explorations of what was then an unknown territory, but served to mock and caution me when I became interested in the Communist ideal. And when it was suggested that I try my hand at writing it was still with me.

**T**HE ACT OF WRITING requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike. When I began writing in earnest I was forced, thus, to relate myself consciously and imaginatively to my mixed background as American, as Negro-American, and as a Negro from what in its own belated way was a pioneer background. More important, and inseparable from this particular effort, was the necessity of determining my true relationship to that body of American literature to which I was most attracted and through which, aided by what I could learn from the literatures of Europe, I would find my own voice and to which I was challenged, by way of achieving myself, to make some small contribution, and to whose composite picture of reality I was obligated to offer some necessary modifications.

This was no matter of sudden insight but of slow and blundering discovery, of a struggle to stare down the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race. To avoid this was very important to me, and in light of my background far from simple. Indeed, it was quite complex, involving as it did, a ceaseless questioning of all those formulas which historians, politicians, sociologists, and an older generation of Negro leaders and writers—those of the so-called “Negro Renaissance”—had evolved to describe my group's identity, its predicament, its fate, and its relation to the larger society and the culture which we share.

Here the question of reality and personal identity merge. Yes, and the question of the nature of the reality which underlies American fiction and thus the human truth which gives fiction viability. In this quest, for such it soon became, I learned that nothing could go unchallenged; especially that feverish industry dedicated to telling Negroes who and what they are, and which can usually be counted upon to deprive both humanity and culture of their complexity. I had undergone, not too many months before taking the path which led to writing, the humiliation of being taught in a class in sociology at a Negro college (from Park and Burgess, the leading textbook in the field) that Negroes represented the “lady of the races.” This contention the Negro instructor passed blandly

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along to us without even bothering to wash his hands, much less his teeth. Well, I had no intention of being bound by any such humiliating definition of my relationship to American literature. Not even to those works which depicted Negroes negatively. Negro Americans have a highly developed ability to abstract desirable qualities from those around them, even from their enemies, and my sense of reality could reject bias while appreciating the truth revealed by achieved art. The pleasure which I derived from reading had long been a necessity, and in the act of reading, that marvelous collaboration between the writer's artful vision and the reader's sense of life, I had become acquainted with other possible selves; freer, more courageous and ingenuous and, during the course of the narrative at least, even wise.

At the time I was under the influence of Ernest Hemingway, and his description, in *Death in the Afternoon*, of his thinking when he first went to Spain became very important as translated in my own naive fashion. He was trying to write, he tells us,

and I found the greatest difficulty aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced....

His statement of moral and aesthetic purpose which followed focused my own search to relate myself to American life through literature. For I found the greatest difficulty for a Negro writer was the problem of revealing what he truly felt, rather than serving up what Negroes were supposed to feel, and were encouraged to feel. And linked to this was the difficulty, based upon our long habit of deception and evasion, of depicting what really happened within our areas of American life, and putting down with honesty and without bowing to ideological expediences the attitudes and values which give Negro-American life its sense of wholeness and which render it bearable and human and, when measured by our own terms, desirable.

I was forced to this awareness through my struggles with the craft of fiction; yes, and by my attraction (soon rejected) to Marxist political theory, which was my response to the inferior status which society sought to impose upon me (I did not then, now, or ever consider myself inferior).

I did not know my true relationship to America—what citizen of the U.S. really does?—but I did know and accept how I felt inside. And I also knew, thanks to the old Renaissance Man, what I expected of myself in the matter of personal discipline and creative quality. Since by the grace of the past and the examples of manhood picked willy-nilly from the continuing-present of my background, I rejected all negative definitions imposed upon me by others, there was nothing to do but search for those relationships which were fundamental.

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In this sense fiction became the agency of my efforts to answer the questions, Who am I, what am I, how did I come to be? What shall I make of the life around me, what celebrate, what reject, how confront the snarl of good and evil which is inevitable? What does American society mean when regarded out of my own eyes, when informed by my own sense of the past and viewed by my own complex sense of the present? How, in other words, should I think of myself and my pluralistic sense of the world, how express my vision of the human predicament, without reducing it to a point which would render it sterile before that necessary and tragic—though enhancing—reduction which must occur before the fictive vision can come alive? It is quite possible that much potential fiction by Negro Americans fails precisely at this point: through the writers' refusal (often through provincialism or lack of courage or through opportunism) to achieve a vision of life and a resourcefulness of craft commensurate with the complexity of their actual situation. Too often they fear to leave the uneasy sanctuary of race to take their chances in the world of art. 📖

# ‘I’m Sorry, Dear’

Leslie H. Farber

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked;  
and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*

–Genesis

*Lust is more abstract than logic; it seeks (hope triumphing over experience)  
for some purely sexual, hence purely imaginary, conjunction of an impossible  
maleness with an impossible femaleness.*

–C. S. Lewis

**T**HE MODERN DIALOGUE which furnishes me my title is practiced throughout the Western world. As a theme with only a limited number of variations, it cannot sustain much repetition: Familiarity breeds silence; although never really abandoned, the script quickly becomes implicit. When reduced to a dumb show—or perhaps no more than a monosyllabic token—it still remains faithful to its pathetic premise.

However, for the purposes of introduction I shall try to represent its essence in a wholly explicit manner. The man speaks first.

“Did you?”

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LESLIE H. FARBER *was a writer and practicing psychiatrist.*

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*"I'm Sorry, Dear"*

"Did *you*? You *did*, didn't you?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I—Oh, I'm sorry! I *am* sorry. I know how it makes you feel."

"Oh, don't worry about it. I'm sure I'll quiet down after a while."

"I'm *so* sorry, dearest. Let me help you."

"I'd rather you didn't."

"But, I..."

"What good is it when you're just—when you don't really want to? You know perfectly well, if you don't *really* want to, it doesn't work."

"But I *do really* want to! I *want* to! Believe me. It *will* work, you'll see. Only let me!"

"Please, couldn't we just forget it? For now the thing is done, finished. Besides, it's not really that important. My tension always wears off eventually. And anyhow—maybe next time it'll be different."

"Oh, it *will*, I *know* it will. Next time I won't be so tired or so eager. I'll make sure of that. Next time it's going to be *fine*! ... But about tonight—I'm sorry, dear."

Unhappily, no end to talking and trying for our pathetic lovers. To deaden self-consciousness they may turn to alcohol or sedatives, seeking the animal indifference that is unencumbered with hesitations, reservations, grievances—in short, all those human tangles that create the sexual abyss they will themselves to bridge. To delay his moment, to quicken hers, they may try to assist the chemicals by thinking of other matters—football games and cocktail parties—in order finally to arrive at that mutual consummation which, hopefully, will prove their sufficiency unto each other, if not their love. All the strategies and prescriptions of sexology that have often failed them in the past are not cast aside but stubbornly returned to, if only because in such an impasse there is nothing else. Instead of alcohol or drugs or irrelevant reveries they may—in solitude or mutuality—resort to sex itself as their sedative, intending the first try to spend their energies just enough to dull self-consciousness and thicken their passion to the "spontaneity" necessary for their second and final attempt. Although normally truthful people, our lovers are continually tempted by deception and simulation: He may try to conceal his moment, she to simulate hers—as they stalk their equalitarian ideal. It can happen that they will achieve simultaneity by means of one or several or none of these devices. But their success—in the midst of their congratulations—will be as dispiriting as their failures. For one thing the joy the lovers sought in this manner will be either absent or too fictitious to be believed. Furthermore, once the moment has subsided they must reckon with the extraordinary efforts that brought it about—efforts that appear too extraordinary for ordinary day-to-day existence. Thus does it happen that success may bring as much as or more pathos than failure. And always lying between them will be the premise borrowed from romanticism: if they really loved each other it would work.

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Small wonder, then, as self-pity and bitterness accumulate, that their musings—if not their actions—turn to adultery: a heightened situation which promises freedom from the impingements of ordinary sexual life. Or, pushed gradually past heightening, past hope, they may even come to abstinence, which can seem—with some irony—the least dishonorable course.

**M**Y CONVICTION is that over the last fifty years sex has for the most part lost its viability as a human experience. I do not mean there is any danger it will cease to be practiced—that it will be put aside like other Victorian bric-a-brac. The hunger will remain, perhaps even increase, and human beings will continue to couple with as much fervor as they can provoke, all the while that the human possibilities of sex will grow ever more elusive. Such couplings will be poultices after the fact: They will further extend the degradation of sex that has resulted from its ever-increasing bondage to the modern will. To those first pioneers at the turn of the century—sexologists, psychoanalysts, political champions of woman's suffrage—"sexual emancipation" seemed a stirring and optimistic cause. Who could have imagined then, as the battle was just beginning, how ironic victory would be: Sex was emancipated, true, but emancipated from all of life—except the will—and subsequently exalted as the measure of existence.

At this point I think it only fair that I commit myself, even if briefly, on how sex was, is, or could be a viable human experience. My view is not that of St. Augustine—that man, by reason of the Fall, is necessarily subject to the lust of concupiscence. Nor can I subscribe, at the other extreme, to the position of the Church of England, as reported at the Lambeth Conference in 1958: "The new freedom of sexuality in our time is . . . a gate to a new depth and joy in personal relationship between husband and wife." Of the erotic life Martin Buber has remarked that in no other realm are dialogue and monologue so mingled and opposed. I would agree that any attempt to offer a normative description would have to include precisely such mingling and opposition. Even if we place it optimally within an ongoing domestic world of affection, in which sex bears some relation, however slight, to procreation, our task is still the difficult one of maintaining that sex is both utterly important and utterly trivial. Sex may be a hallowing and renewing experience, but more often it will be distracting, coercive, playful, frivolous, discouraging, dutiful, even boring. On the one hand it tempts man to omnipotence, while on the other it roughly reminds him of his mortality. Over and over again it mocks rationality, only to be mocked in turn at the very instant it insists its domain is solely within the senses. Though it promises the suspension of time, no other event so sharply advises us of the oppressiveness of time. Sex offers itself as an alternative world, but when the act is over and the immodesty of this offering is exposed, it is the sheer worldliness of the world we briefly relinquished and must now re-enter that has to be confronted anew. Residing no longer in the same room which first enclosed us, we now lie in another room with an-

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*"I'm Sorry, Dear"*

other topography—a room whose surfaces, textures, corners, knobs have an otherness as absolute and formidable as the duties and promises which nag us with their temporal claims. What began as relief from worldly concern ends by returning us to the world with a metaphysical, if unsettling, clarity.

Though sex often seems to be morality's adversary, it more often brings sharply in its wake moral discriminations that previously had not been possible. Because the pleasure of sex is always vulnerable to splitting into *pleasuring* and *being pleased*, the nature of pleasure itself, as well as the relation between pleasure and power, are called into question. If pleasuring is the overpowering concern, intimations of the actual and immediate experience of slavery or peonage will appear. On the other hand, if being pleased is most compelling, tyranny and oppression will invade experience with some urgency. And finally, should the lovers will equality between these two concerns, in their effort to heal the split, they will personally suffer the problematic character of democratic forms. To some extent our political past influences our sexual negotiations, but in equal measure sexual pleasure itself is a source of political practice and theory.

The list of oppositions and minglings could easily be extended, but such an extension would not change the fact that human sex inevitably partakes of human experience, for better or for worse, and through its claim on the body simultaneously asserts its particular difference, for better or for worse.

Its particular difference from everything else in this life lies in the possibility which sex offers man for regaining *his own* body through knowing the body of his loved one. And should he fail that *knowing* and *being known*, should he lapse into all those ways of *knowing about* which he has proudly learned to confuse with knowing—both bodies will again escape him. Increasingly, as D.H. Lawrence understood, man has become separated from his body, which he yearns to inhabit, such yearning understandably bringing sentimental and scientific prescriptions for the reunion eluding him. Yet it is through the brief reconciliation with his own and his loved one's body that he can now grasp—and endure—the bodily estrangement which has always been his lot, without succumbing to the blandishments that would betray the realities of both sides of this duality.

**I**N ORDER TO DEVELOP more concretely my conviction that sex for the most part has lost its viability as a human experience, I wish to consider the Sex Research Project, directed by Dr. William H. Masters at the Washington University School of Medicine. Through the use of women volunteers Dr. Masters is endeavoring "to separate a few basic anatomic and physiologic truths" about "the human female's response" to what he calls "effective sexual stimulation." The subject, he believes, has been hopelessly beclouded by "literary fiction and fantasy," "pseudoscientific essays and pronouncements," and "an unbelievable hodgepodge of conjecture and falsehood." His debt to Kinsey is clear, though quali-

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fied. He acknowledges his “complete awe” for Kinsey’s “time-consuming efforts” which have made his own research not only “plausible, but possible.” On the other hand he finds that the work of his predecessors, including Kinsey, has unfortunately been “the result of individual introspection, expressed personal opinion, or of limited clinical observation”—rather than “a basic science approach to the sexual response cycle.”\* Therefore, he has done what was indeed inevitable: He has moved the whole investigation into the laboratory.

I should make clear that Dr. Masters’s project itself interests me far more than his exact findings. This project strikes me as one of those occasional yet remarkable enterprises which, despite its creator’s intentions, quite transcends its original and modest scientific boundaries, so that it becomes a vivid allegory of our present dilemma, containing its own image of man—at the same time that it charts a New Jerusalem for our future. Such an enterprise, when constitutive, is apt to be more relevant and revealing than deliberate art. Because no actual artist is involved, it is not particularly rewarding to ask how this matter acquires its revelatory, even poetic, power. Often its director merely pursues the prevailing inclination in his field. Yet the pursuit is so single-minded, so fanatical and literal, that part of the power of the enterprise as constitutive symbol must be credited to the director’s unflagging lack of imagination and his passionate naivete, which stay undeterred by all the proprieties, traditions, and accumulated wisdom that would only complicate his course.

I SHALL NOT LINGER over the anatomical and physiological detail in Dr. Masters’s reports, except to say it concerns the changes observed on the various parts of the bodies of his volunteers as they approach, accomplish, and depart from sexual climax. Of all the mechanical, electrical, and electronic devices at his command in this research, it is movie-making which seems to give Dr. Masters the clearest edge over the subjective distortions of his predecessors:

Since the integrity of human observation of specific detail varies significantly, regardless of the observer’s training or good intent, colored motion-picture photography has been used to record in absolute detail all phases of the human sexual response cycle.

This movie is often referred to in Dr. Masters’s writings and, I am told, has been exhibited at a number of scientific institutes throughout the country. So fond is he of this medium that there seem to be occasions when his scientific prose seeks, however incompletely, to emulate not only the objectivity but the aesthetic brilliance of his movie sequences:

If the bright pink of the excitement phase changes to a brilliant primiparous scarlet-red, or

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\* These and all subsequent quotations are from Dr. Masters’s article, “The Sexual Response Cycle of the Human Female” (*Western Journal of Surgery, Obstetrics, and Gynecology*, January-February 1960).

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*“I’m Sorry, Dear”*

the multiparous burgundy color, a satisfactory plateau phase has been achieved.

There is even a point at which the movie medium itself becomes the inventor: Like the accidental solution or the contaminated culture, which have heroic roles in older scientific romances, moviemaking allows Dr. Masters to uncover “the vascular flush reaction to effective sexual stimulation” which had not been previously described in the scientific literature.

With the aid of artificially-increased skin surface temperature, such as that necessary for successful motion-picture photography, the wide distribution of this flush becomes quite apparent.... With orgasm imminent, this measles-like rash has been observed to spread over the anterior-lateral borders of the thighs, the buttocks and the whole body.

Probably it was this discovery of the “measle-like rash” which inspired a more Pavlovian venture which, if read slowly, will be seen to have quite eerie dimensions:

One observed subject, undergoing electroencephalographic evaluation, had been trained for 4 months to attain orgasm without producing concomitant muscle tension in order to provide significance for her tracing pattern. Yet, this patient repeatedly showed a marked flush phenomenon over the entire body during plateau and orgasm, and during resolution was completely covered with a filmy, fine perspiration.

If movie-making is Dr. Masters’s main laboratory device, “automanipulative techniques” constitute his “fundamental investigative approach” to “the sexual response cycle of the human female.” His frankness here is to be commended—particularly since some scientists might feel that such auto-manipulation was inadequate to the verisimilitude necessary for laboratory demonstration. Dr. Masters himself does not discuss the issue, but his obvious preference for this approach over “heterosexual activity” does not appear to be ascribable to decorum. To some degree, I imagine, it was the laboratory procedures and devices—particularly motion picture photography—which determined the approach, automanipulation being clearly more accessible to scientific inspection than coition. But more important, there is evidence that Dr. Masters regards automanipulation to be a more reliable—that is, more predictable—technique than “heterosexual activity” in the pursuit of “the more intense, well-developed, orgasmic response” cycle.

This type of total pelvic reaction is particularly true for an orgasmic phase elicited by manual manipulation, but it also occurs, although less frequently, with coition.

Little is told us about the volunteers in this research. Apparently the project began with prostitutes. But when objections were made that such a profession might not yield the best “normal” sample, subjects were chosen among medical students and medical

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students' wives who volunteered and were paid a modest fee for their activities. Naturally no studies could be made on those who, for whatever reason, would not volunteer. And presumably quickly eliminated were those young women who offered themselves out of their enthusiastic wish to contribute to science, only to discover they could not sustain their sexual excitement in the setting of the laboratory, the paraphernalia, the cameras, the technicians, the bright lights. And even more quickly eliminated were those women who on initial interview were not sure whether or not they had climax: "Our rule of thumb is if they're not sure about it they probably haven't had it."

Other circumstances surrounding the study can only be guessed at. Like much scientific research, this particular project must have been an orderly affair. It can be assumed that the investigators did not wait on the whim of their volunteers; that is, they were not subject to call day or night whenever the volunteer felt in the mood. No, the women were given regular appointments during the working day when the entire research crew was available. Doubtless, too, the directors of the project considered it scientifically unseemly to encourage sexual titillation in their volunteers—certainly out of the question would have been anything resembling a physical overture. Should suggestive reading matter be required by the research—as it indeed occasionally was—it would have to be offered the volunteers in a spirit of detachment; not even the hint of a smirk could be allowed to disrupt the sobriety of the occasion. On the whole, the erotic basis would have to be provided by the scientific situation itself, in addition to the actual manipulation: that is, the prospect of arriving at the laboratory at 10:00 A.M., disrobing, stretching out on the table, and going to work in a somewhat businesslike manner while being measured and photographed, would have to provide its own peculiar excitement. (Thank you, Miss Brown, see you same time next week. Stop at the cashier's for your fee.) So, back to one's ordinary existence.

**I**F THESE SPECULATIONS have any truth, what can be said about the qualities that the ideal subject for such experiments would have? In a general way, her sexuality would have to be autonomous, separate from and unaffected by her ordinary world. "World" here would have to include not only affection but all those exigencies of human existence which tend to shape our erotic possibilities. Objectively, her sexuality would be mechanically accessible or "on call"—under circumstances which would be, if not intimidating, at least distracting to most bodies. Hers would have to be indifferent to the entire range of experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, whose claim is not only not salacious but makes us forget there is such a thing as sexuality. Her lust would lie to hand, ready to be invoked and consummated, in sickness or in health, in coitus or "automanipulation," in homosexuality or heterosexuality, in exasperation or calm, hesitancy or certainty, playfulness or despair. (This would be the other side of that older, though not unrelated romanticism which just as willfully insisted on soft lights, Brahms, incense,

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*"I'm Sorry, Dear"*

and poetical talk.) In other words, her sexuality would be wholly subject to her will: Whenever she determined—or the project determined—that she should have reached a climax, she would willingly begin those gestures that would lead to one. To use the modern idiom, all that would be unavailable to her sexological dexterity would be frigidity. Or, to speak more clearly, all that would be unavailable to her would be a real response to the laboratory situation. Insofar as her sexuality was under her will's dominion, she would resemble those odd creatures on the old television quiz programs—also ideal subjects in their own way—who were led from boarding houses to stand in a hot soundproof isolation booth, and when the fateful question was delivered from the vault, answered correctly and without a tremor how many words there were in *Moby Dick*—answered correctly in a loud clear voice under circumstances in which most of us could not even mumble our name. The popularity of these programs (at least until skullduggery was revealed) suggests the audience looked with envy and/or admiration at this caricature of knowledge—a knowledge equally responsive to its owner's will, regardless of contingency or trapping.

A truly constitutive symbol should embody both an accurate rendering of contemporary life and a clear indication of what that life should be. Taking, for the moment, only the ideal contained in my description of the volunteer in these experiments, I would say that she is a latterday Queen of Courtly Love, a veritable Queen Guinevere. For most modern men and women, who grow ever more discouraged by their bodies' stubborn refusal to obey their owners' will, this Lady of the Laboratory has long been the woman of their dreams: Men long to channel or claim this creature's prompt and unspecific response for their own specific overtures, while women dream of rivaling her capacity to serve her body's need whenever she so wills.

And what of those self-effacing scientists behind the camera who conceived and guided this research? Do they too reflect who we are and who we would become? We know as little about this research team as we know about the volunteers. How the scientific boundaries were staked out and protected against trespass is not described in the reports. Once again we can only surmise, but that there was difficulty is suggested by a remark Dr. Masters made in one of his lectures—namely, that he preferred to have a woman scientist alongside him in these investigations because she helped to make him or keep him more "objective." I assume he meant that having an actual woman present, fully clad in the white coat of science, reminded him not only of the point of the matter at hand but of the more hazardous life to be lived with women outside the laboratory—of the difference between the ideal and the actual. It would be a ticklish problem how to maintain the proper detachment to protect the scientists without at the same time inhibiting the volunteers. Here the equipment and rituals of research would help. And very possibly there would be a deliberate effort to eliminate even the ordinary frivolity that sometimes overcomes a surgical team in the midst of the most delicate op-

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eration, because frivolity in this sort of research might be only a way-station en route to the lubricious. Any falling-away into the most ordinary locker-room talk, in or out of the laboratory, would have to be regarded as a danger signal. I imagine each scientist, with all the resolution at his command, would remind himself continually it was just an ordinary day's work in the laboratory, no different from the work next door with the diabetic rats. At the end of the day, when his wife asked, "How were things at the lab today?" he would reply, "Oh nothing, just the same old grind." And if she pressed him in a jealous fashion, his justifications might resemble those of a young artist explaining his necessity to sketch nude models. Of course, there would be strict rules forbidding dalliance between scientist and volunteer after hours. But should they happen to run into one another in the cafeteria, each would keep his conversation casual, trying not to allude to those more cataclysmic events of a few hours before. Mindful of his professional integrity, the scientist would have to guard against prideful thoughts that he knew her, if not better, at least more microscopically than those nearest her. Most troublesome of his self-appointed tasks, it seems to me, would be his effort to prevent his research from invading his own ordinary erotic life, particularly if it were worried by the usual frustrations. In this regard he would be indeed heroic to withstand the temptation of comparing his mate's response to those unspecific, yet perfectly formed, consummations of the laboratory.

**A** GAIN, IF THESE IMAGININGS have any truth, how may we characterize the ideal scientist in research of this immediate order? First of all, he would have to *believe*, far more than the volunteers, in a "basic science" approach to sex. This is not to say that he would consider the practice of sex a possible science, even though his practice might eventually be informed by his scientific theories. But it would have to be an article of faith for him that the visible palpable reactions of the organs themselves, regardless of whatever human or inhuman context they might occur in, would speak a clear unambiguous truth to all who cared to heed. In his hierarchy of beliefs, these reactions would take precedence in every sense. The questions we are apt to ask about human affairs, not excluding lust, ordinarily have to do with appropriateness, affection, etc.—in other words, right or wrong, good or bad, judged in human terms. On the other hand, the ideal Sexologist, as he presses his eye to his research, finds another variety of drama—inordinately complicated in its comings and goings, crises and resolutions—with its own requirements of right and wrong, good and bad, all writ very small in terms of "droplets" and "engorgements" and "contractions."

The will of the ideal Sexologist seems different from the will of the Lady of the Laboratory, but it may be the opposition is more illusory than actual. The latter wills orgasm through physical manipulation. Certainly the sexologist supports and approves her willing, such sexual promptness being ideal for laboratory study. However, while his approval

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may be invented by his will, it is by no means the most important expression of his will. As a scientist his will must be given to the systematic inspection of the sexual response of the "human female," literally portrayed. To this end he persists in his gadgetry, always at the expense of any imaginative grasp of the occasion. His will to be a scientist requires his further commitment to any number of willful enterprises; in the present circumstance he finds it necessary to will his own body to be unresponsive—not merely to the events on the laboratory table but to any fictional construction of these events his imagination might contrive, because imagination, at least in this arena, is his opponent in his pursuit of science. On the surface his dilemma may seem a familiar one, being comparable to older ascetic ventures, particularly of the Eastern yoga variety. But the sexologist's task is actually more difficult: Asceticism is not his goal—the very nature of his enterprise points in an opposite direction. He wishes indifference which he can invoke at will: It may be the project which demands his not responding, but—as we shall see later—it may be other moments, unofficial and unscientific, which seem to call forth his willed lack of response. The will not to respond and the will to respond are related possibilities of the will. In this sense, the Lady of the Laboratory and the ideal Sexologist are collaborators rather than opponents. Of course, I speak in ideal terms—whether these ideals can be achieved is another matter. But if the Lady of the Laboratory is a latter day Queen of Courtly Love, then our ideal Sexologist is the modern Sir Galahad, and together—separately or commingled—they rule our dreams of what should be.

Let us remind ourselves that most of us could not hope to qualify for this research—either as volunteers or as scientists. But this does not mean the differences are great between us and them. True, compared to ours, their lives have an oversized quality, and true, they are in the vanguard. But in a real sense our fleshly home is that laboratory. Whatever room we choose for our lovemaking we shall make into our own poor laboratory, and nothing that is observed or undergone in the real laboratory of science is likely to escape us. At this stage, is there any bit of sexology that is not in the public domain, or at least potentially so for those who can read? Whatever detail the scientific will appropriates about sex rapidly becomes an injunction to be imposed on our bodies. But it is not long before these impositions lose their arbitrary and alien character and begin to change our actual experience of our bodies. Unfortunately our vision of the ideal experience tends to be crudely derived from the failure of our bodies to meet these imperatives.

Our residence in the laboratory is recent: Really only since the turn of the century has the act of sex been interviewed, witnessed, probed, measured, timed, taped, photographed, judged. Before the age of sexology, objectifications of the sexual act were to be found in pornography and the brothel, both illicit, both pleasurable in purpose, both suggesting the relatively limited manner in which will—given absolute dominion—could be joined to sexual pleasure. However else the Marquis de Sade may be read, he at least offered the most exhaustive inventory yet seen of techniques for exploiting the pleasure of the body's several parts, if one wholeheartedly put one's will to it. As a moralist he seemed to say, Why our particular rules? What if

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there were no limits? More recently, yet still before sexology, it was possible for shy erotomaniacs, disguised as greengrocers, to visit brothels, there to peek at the antics of the inmates. The bolder ones could join the sport. When the performance reached its final gasp our tradesmen, now satiated, would slink back to the propriety and privacy of their own quarters, convinced their ordinary domestic world was discreetly separate from the world of the peephole which they paid to enter. In fact, or so it seemed, the separateness of these two worlds heightened the erotic possibilities of each. The emancipation which sexology enforced gradually blurred this distinction, making it unclear whether each home had become its own brothel or whether every brothel had become more like home. The truth is that sexology eventually not only blurred the distinction, but by housing us all in laboratories, made both the brothel and pornography less exciting dwellings for our erotic investigations.

WHEN LAST WE LEFT our pathetic lovers I suggested that as their self-pity and bitterness mounted, they might—in desperation—turn to adultery. Yet even for the person who believes himself to be without scruples, adultery—in fact or fantasy—is difficult to arrange, exhausting to maintain. Requiring, as it does, at least two persons and two wills, this illicit encounter risks the danger of further pathos. But if we heed our laboratory drama carefully, we can see there is another possibility preferable to adultery. According to the lesson of the laboratory there is only one perfect orgasm, if by “perfect” we mean one wholly subject to its owner’s will, wholly indifferent to human contingency or context. Clearly, the perfect orgasm is the orgasm achieved on one’s own. No other consummation offers such certainty and moreover avoids the messiness that attends most human affairs. The onanist may choose the partner of his dreams who very probably will be the Lady of the Laboratory, or he may have his orgasm without any imagined partner. In either case, he is both scientist and experimental subject, science and sex now being nicely joined. In his laboratory room he may now abstract his sexual parts from his whole person, inspect their anatomic particularities, and observe and enjoy the small physiologic events he knows best how to control. True, this solitary experience may leave him empty and ashamed. But as a citizen of his times he will try to counter this discomfort by reminding himself that sexology and psychoanalysis have assured him masturbation is a morally indifferent matter. As a true modern he tells himself that it is not as good as what two people have, but that does not make it bad. Superstitious people of other ages thought it drove one crazy, but he knows better; he knows that the real threat to *his* sanity is unrelieved sexual tension. In fact—he may decide—were it not for certain neurotic Victorian traces he has not managed to expunge from his psyche, he could treat the matter as any other bodily event and get on with his business. So we must not be too harsh with our pathetic lovers if they take refuge in solitary pleasures—even if they come to prefer them to the frustrations of sexual life together. Nor should we be too surprised if such solitary pleasure becomes the ideal by which all mutual sex is measured—and found wanting.

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Let us now turn to the phenomenon being inspected and celebrated in our laboratory—the phenomenon which contributes most of all to our lovers' impasse. Of all the discoveries sexology has made, the female orgasm remains the most imposing in its consequences. De Tocqueville's prediction of life between the sexes in America\* might not have been so sanguine, could he have anticipated first, the discovery of sexology and psychoanalysis, and second, their discovery of the female orgasm.

In the second half of the 19th century Western man began to see nature in a new and utilitarian way as a variety of energies, hitherto unharnessed, which could now be tamed and transformed into industrial servants which in turn would fashion never-ending progress and prosperity. The health of the machine, powered by steam and electricity, and the sickness of the machine if those energies were misdirected or obstructed, were obsessive considerations of the period. It was entirely appropriate to regard the human body as still another natural object with many of the vicissitudes of the machine: this had always been medicine's privilege. But for the first time the scientists, in their intoxication, could forget the duality previous centuries knew: Namely, that the body is both a natural object and not a natural object. And once it was decided the dominant energy of the human machine was sex, the new science of sexology was born. With the suppression of the second half of the dialectic, sexology and psychoanalysis could—with the assistance of the Romantics—claim the erotic life as their exclusive province, removing it from all the traditional disciplines, such as religion, philosophy, literature, which had always concerned themselves with sex as human experience. Qualities such as modesty, privacy, reticence, abstinence, chastity, fidelity, shame—could now be questioned as rather arbitrary matters which interfered with the health of the sexual parts. And in their place came an increasing assortment of objective terms like *ejaculatio praecox*, foreplay, forepleasure, frigidity—all intended to describe, not human experience, but the behavior of the sexual parts. The quite preposterous situation arose in which the patient sought treatment for *ejaculatio praecox* or impotence and the healer sought to find out whether he liked his partner.

**I**F THE VICTORIANS found sex unspeakable for the wrong reasons, the Victorian sexologists found it wrongly speakable. (To what extent Victorian prudery was actually modesty or reticence, I cannot say. It has become habitual for us to regard Victorian lovemaking as an obscenity.) Science is usually democratic, and since sex now belonged to science, whatever facts or assumptions were assembled had immediately to

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\* "...I never observed that the women of America consider conjugal authority as an unfortunate usurpation of their rights, or that they thought themselves degraded by submitting to it. It appeared to me, on the contrary, that they attach a sort of pride to the voluntary surrender of their will.... Though their lot is different, they consider both of them as beings of equal value.... If I were asked... to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply: To the superiority of their women." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

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be transmitted to the people, there to invade their daily life. Writing of the Kinsey Report, Lionel Trilling finds—correctly, I believe—a democratic motive for the study:

In speaking of its motives, I have in mind chiefly its impulse toward acceptance and liberation, its broad and generous desire for others that they be not harshly judged....The Report has the intention of habituating its readers to sexuality in all its manifestations; it wants to establish, as it were, a democratic pluralism of sexuality....This generosity of mind...goes with a nearly conscious aversion from making intellectual distinctions, almost as if out of the belief that an intellectual distinction must inevitably lead to a social discrimination or exclusion.

If we disregard Kinsey's scientific pretensions, we still must recognize his eminence as arbiter of sexual etiquette. Like the lexicographer who finds his sanction in usage, Kinsey discovers his authority in practice: His democratic message is that we all do—or should do—more or less the same things in bed. And any notion lovers retain from an older tradition that what they have together is private and unique is effectively disproved by his cataloguing of sexual manners, providing they join him in equating behavior with experience. As a fitting disciple of Kinsey, Masters actualizes the “pluralism of sexuality” within the democratic unit of the laboratory and enlarges behavior to include the more minute physiological developments which, too, should belong to every citizen.

The political clamor for equal rights for woman at the turn of the century could not fail to join with sexology to endow her with an orgasm, equal in every sense to the male orgasm. It was agreed that she was entitled to it just as she was entitled to the vote. Moreover, if she were deprived of such release her perturbation would be as unsettling to her nervous system as similar frustration was thought to be for the man. Equal rights were to be erotically consummated in simultaneous orgasm. On the one hand it was unhealthful for her to be deprived of release and, on the other hand, psychoanalysis decreed that an important sign of her maturity as woman was her ability to achieve it. In other words, without orgasm she was neurotic to begin with or neurotic to end with.

Though simultaneous orgasm seemed to be a necessary consequence of equal rights, the problem remained that in matters of lust more than a decree or amendment was required for such an achievement. True, the sexologists were most generous with instruction, but each citizen has had to discover over and over again the degree to which he is caught in the futile struggle to will what could not be willed—at the same time that he senses the real absurdity of the whole willful enterprise. The lover learns, as his indoctrination progresses, to observe uneasily and even resist his rush of pleasure if it seems he is to be premature. When no amount of resolution can force his pleasure to recede, he learns to suffer his release and then quickly prod himself to an activity his body's exhaustion opposes. In other words, he learns to take his moment in stride, so to speak, omitting the deference these moments usually call forth and then without breaking stride get to his self-appointed and often fa-

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tiguing task of tinkering with his mate—always hopeful that his ministrations will have the appearance of affection. While she is not likely to be deceived by such dutiful exercises, she nevertheless wishes for both their sakes that her body at least will be deluded into fulfilling its franchise.

**A**S FAR AS I KNOW, little attention was paid to the female orgasm before the era of sexology. Where did the sexologists find it? Did they discover it or invent it? Or both? I realize it may seem absurd to raise such questions about events as unmistakable as those witnessed in our laboratory. But I cannot believe that previous centuries were not up to our modern delights; nor can I believe it was the censorship imposed by religion which suppressed the supreme importance of the female orgasm. My guess, which is not subject to laboratory proof, is that the female orgasm was always an occasional, though not essential, part of woman's whole sexual experience. I also suspect that it appeared with regularity or predictability only during masturbation when the more human qualities of her life with her mate were absent. Further, her perturbation was unremarkable and certainly bearable when orgasm did not arrive, for our lovers had not yet been enlightened as to the disturbances resulting from the obstruction or distortion of sexual energies. At this stage her orgasm had not yet been abstracted and isolated from the totality of her pleasures, and enshrined as the meaning and measure of her erotic life. She was content with the mystery and variety of her difference from man, and in fact would not have had it otherwise. Much that I have said, if we leave aside the erotomanias which have always been with us, applies to the male of previous centuries. For him, too, the moment of orgasm was not abstracted in its objective form from the whole of his erotic life and then idealized. And he too preferred the mystery of difference, the impact of human contingency, becoming obsessed with the sheer anatomy and mechanics of orgasm only when all else was missing, as in masturbation.

Theological parallelism is a treacherous hobby, especially when we deal with movements flagrantly secular. Nevertheless, the manner in which lovers now pursue their careers as copulating mammals—adopting whatever new refinements sexology devises, covering their faces yet exposing their genitals—may remind us of older heresies which, through chastity or libertinism, have pressed toward similar goals; one heretical cult went so far as to worship the serpent in the Garden of Eden. But the difference between these older heresies and modern science—and there is a large one—must be attributed to the nature of science itself, which—if we accept such evidence as the Lambeth Conference—by means of its claims to objectivity can invade religion and ultimately all of life to a degree denied the older heresies. So, with the abstraction, objectification, and idealization of the female orgasm we have come to the last and perhaps most important clause of the contract which binds our lovers to their laboratory home, there to will the perfection on earth which cannot be willed, there to suffer the pathos which follows all such strivings toward heaven on earth. 🍷

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# American Catholicism After the Council

By Michael Novak

**T**HE CITY OF ROME rests placidly in the crystalline Italian sun, century by century, and generations of men appear within her walls and disappear. There are men today, on all continents, who shed tears when they confront her beauty and her seeming eternity. But today the city is the symbol of crisis, not of peace.

Countless Roman Catholics of the present generation are challenging, not the essential truths of the Catholic faith, and not even the role of the bishop of Rome, but the mystical hold which the limited traditions of the city of Rome have long exercised upon the Catholic world. It is inevitable that a Church be secular. How else could a Church live in history, except by entering into the historical forms of its time and place? But if a Church must in any case be secular, many Catholics in the middle of the 20th century are asking: Why must its secularism be Roman and of the baroque Italian period?

Hardly a conflict at the Second Vatican Council has not been colored by this fundamental issue: whether the Church shall be Latin or Catholic. The fundamental opposition is between a party of nostalgia on the one hand, and a party of the present and the real on the other. Yet it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the intelligence,

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MICHAEL NOVAK *is a Catholic philosopher and former diplomat. His latest book is No One Sees God: The Dark Night of Atheists and Believers (2008).*

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seriousness, conviction, and past successes of the party of nostalgia. The Church over which that party has presided has for generations captured the imagination and the intellectual allegiance of legions of talented men. Through most difficult and disturbing times, defended and guided by the party of nostalgia, the Church has come to the threshold of a new age intact and robust.

It is a remarkable fact that although anti-Catholicism has long been the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals, and although the atheist has appropriated to himself all the moral pro-words which attract the young—honesty, courage, integrity, and the rest—the Catholic Church is at the present moment more intellectually fit than she has been for centuries. There have seldom been so many first-rate artists, writers, theologians, philosophers, and men of affairs who are also Catholic. It is true that countless young people of sensitivity and intelligence have left the Church in these centuries, and continue to do so at a high rate. But her present health is a direct result of the imagination and intelligence and energy of those many who have remained within.

For some ninety years and longer, an intellectual underground has been building up in Roman Catholicism. Small at first, centering in groups of writers, theologians, and philosophers, now in Paris, now in Tübingen, now at Munich, London, Louvain, Milan, or even Rome, this underground has self-consciously labored for the renewal and reform of Roman Catholicism from within.

Since early in the last century, young theologians like Johann Möhler of Tübingen (d. 1838) have been working for the reunion of the churches, and writers in France and Germany have strained every nerve to draw Catholicism out of her isolation from the contemporary world. A curious phenomenon all these years is that outsiders writing or speaking of Catholicism have often been as Roman, hierarchical, and monolithic in their view of the Church as the most conservative Catholics. Such outsiders called “Catholic” only those manifestations which bore the stamp of curial and official Rome; perhaps 95 percent of their utterances about Catholicism had the curial hierarchical pyramid, not the living underground, in mind. Hence the great sense of surprise, shock, and at first hesitant pleasure which nearly everywhere greeted the “new” attitudes of Pope John and the Council.

To be sure, this preoccupation with the outward appearance of pre-Johannine Catholicism was in large measure justified. “Every time one of us succeeds in stirring a little flame in the ashes,” François Mauriac once wrote, “someone from curial Rome comes and crushes it.” Nevertheless, the unpreparedness of most professional commentators on Catholicism (H. Stuart Hughes is one notable exception) for what has come to the surface since 1962 is the symptom of a sickness in contemporary intellectual life. The antipathy and prejudice which have in the main prevented sympathetic studies of the role of Catholicism in Western civilization are something of a scandal. All too often, especially in the United States, intelligent Catholics, under questioning, have stated what

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they believe their faith to involve, only to be faced with the rejoinder: "But you can't be in good standing and hold that, can you?" The stereotype is a burden, and the Catholic, like the Negro and the Jew, would like to be taken for what he is, not for what Cardinal Spellman, Graham Greene, Charles de Gaulle, and other assorted Catholics are.

**T**HE PRESENT TURMOIL in the Catholic Church has been occasioned by the official recognition at the Vatican Council of the fact that there are in the Church countless styles of Catholic life, many competing theologies, many philosophies of man, and many conceptions of freedom and law, Italian Catholics and Irish Catholics live in quite different emotional worlds. When the French say *liberté* they do not mean what Americans mean by freedom; Englishmen and Spaniards speaking of law have different concrete experiences in mind; a German and a Latin American mean different things by order; some Catholics in Africa understand spontaneously the notion "people of God," since they are still living a tribal life which is more like that of biblical peoples than is Western life today. "Catholic" does not mean universal and the same, but universal and diverse.

Moreover, it is impossible to make sense out of the current restlessness among Roman Catholics without recalling that, after 1789, nearly every major Catholic institution of learning in Northern Europe—and often in the South as well—was seized by the state. Originality and imagination in Catholic studies were at a low ebb in the 18th century; but in the 19th, Catholic studies were virtually wiped out. Moral theology, for example, as a recent book by John T. Noonan, Jr.,\* intimates, endured a gap in scholarship for almost the entire first two generations of the 19th century. Only toward mid-century were libraries reassembled, eclectic surveys of previous scholarship organized, seminary manuals hastily put together. Too early to benefit by the fruits of historical scholarship just being organized, but cut off by two generations from a living tradition, 19th-century Catholic moral theology had virtually to be begun from scraps. Into the vacuum rushed the canon lawyers; about four-fifths of the material in standard textbooks on moral theology used in Catholic seminaries (Regatillo-Zalba, for example) is borrowed from canon law. Here lie the roots of the present Catholic dilemma on birth control.

In 1870, the First Vatican Council articulated the faith of Catholics in the infallibility of the Church, in which the pope shares; marching armies drove the Council from Rome before the complementary role of the bishops could be discussed. Theologically, the chief effect of what the Council did was to establish stringent conditions upon papal teaching, so that the line between the pope's personal opinions and his articulation of the faith of all is now clearly marked. Nevertheless, the chief psychological effect was a heightening of the baroque monarchical view of the papacy dear to certain Roman

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\* *Contraception*, Harvard University Press, 561 pp..

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hearts.

Worse still, modern means of communication were shortly to change the impact and universality of papal teaching; the stage was set for the most pyramidal period in the history of the Church. The pope would be seen as the peak of the pyramid, the papal curia as an intermediary between him and the bishops; below the bishops would come priests and religious, and, like an iceberg nine-tenths of which is under water, laymen would be left by canon law with hardly a mention. (Even now when laymen speak about the Church, they speak of “they.” “When will the Church do something about birth control?” means “When will *they*....”)

This same period marked the Celtic ascendancy in the Church: Not only did Ireland gain political independence from England and ecclesiastical subservience at home, but Irish bishops multiplied in the United States, in Australia, in England, and throughout the mission lands of the British Empire. The Celtic bishops have maintained a theological tradition largely isolated from the life of our times, unfertilized by dissent or pluralism, greatly inclined to viewing the Church as a pyramid and seriously vulnerable to establishing a personality cult around the pope. On the other side of the ledger, the Celtic bishops are in the main excellent organization men, whose primary virtue is loyalty.

In an era of radio, teletype, and television, meanwhile, papal teaching suddenly became not merely the theology of the bishop of Rome, distant and localized, but the ordinary teaching of the Church spread through the world—particularly wherever the non-intellectual Irish were in charge. The whole system of checks and balances in Roman Catholicism was upset. Now, because of radio and the daily press, and a heretofore unheard-of deference to Rome, the “ordinary teaching” of the bishops had lost its crucial theological role. *Whatever* the pope said was now known everywhere, on the instant, and was much more gravely discussed than hitherto. It has become a serious, novel, and yet common misconception among some Catholics to accept all papal opinions as if they were gospel truth.

Three amusing ironies are at work here. The first is that the hyperpapalists often try to comfort non-Catholics by noting that the exercise of papal infallibility is, necessarily, a most rare occurrence. But before their own people, they endow nearly every papal instruction with some subtle measure of infallibility: “near to being infallible” or the like. (Their opponents retort that infallibility, like pregnancy, is or isn’t; there’s no in-between.)

The second irony is that most of the hyperpapalists, in practice, are selective in their attitude toward Rome; they discount the instructions they don’t like—Pius XI on social reconstruction and the sins of capitalism, for example, or Pius XII on liturgical reform.

The third irony is that since 1878 and the pontificate of Leo XIII most of the popes, skipping over the heads of the bishops, have been in alliance with the intellectual un-

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derground. The popes have been “liberal,” the bishops in the main have not. Leo’s *Rerum Novarum*, for example, was a belated effort to awaken the baroque apathies of Roman Catholics to the magnitude of the social reconstruction required in our time; it was a response to the challenge of socialism. Even Leo’s choice of Thomas Aquinas as special teacher of the Church was an appeal to historical studies—Leo well knew the low estate of Catholic scholarship in the 19th century, and Thomas Aquinas was infinitely better than the manuals then so recently scraped together (and misleadingly purporting to be “Thomistic”).

The popes since Leo XIII have been an extraordinary series of leaders. Fr. Gustav Weigel, S.J., said once, not long before his death: “We’ve had good popes for too long; nothing would be better for the faith than a bad one.” Fr. Weigel had a horror of Christians who put their faith not in God but in men; and he seemed to believe that overemphasis on the pope was a characteristic vice of the Catholicism of our time. Others, less gentle than Fr. Weigel, call this vice the Celtic heresy.

Yet every heresy contains a portion of truth, and its error is usually by exaggeration. The Second Vatican Council has set in motion the elaboration of a more authentic view of the role of the bishop of Rome. The distinguishing mark of God’s covenanted people is its service to others, and the relationships which unite that people are also relations of service. Bishops and priests are chosen from among the people to represent them before God, to minister to their needs, to preside at their worship, to teach, to govern. They are clearly warned not to rule as the rulers of the Gentiles, but by service. And the servant of these servants of God, the center of unity among them, is the bishop of Rome.

The pope has two special services to offer the Catholic people. In the first place, he is a focal point of unity—one of the college of bishops, and yet not merely one among equals, because also the central focus of the others. (The relations between pope and college are not yet thoroughly worked out in history; a great deal remains to be learned through future developments.) In the second place, he offers a single clear voice by which, in time of need, the conscience of the Church can be articulated—in exceptional cases, even without consulting the bishops. Hochhuth’s play testifies to the usefulness of such a ministry in Christianity; he does not single out the World Council of Churches or the Catholic bishops for equal blame with Pius XII.

Just before the opening of the Second Vatican Council, one of the outstanding theologians of the Catholic underground, later to become the chief light of the Council, voiced his pessimism. “The Council is coming fifty years too soon; if only we had more time!” Everywhere the men working for renewal and reform were hitching their belts for another long siege; they knew renewal would win in the end, but a retrogressive Council might postpone the day. They feared that the many hundreds of Italian bishops, the Spanish and Latin American bishops, and the Celtic bishops would rubber-stamp the seminary theology of the last three generations. “We thought we would come in Octo-

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ber, say yes, and be home for good by Christmas,” one American bishop later confessed.

Pope John’s opening address to the Council on October 11, 1962, was the beginning of the end of the Roman style in the Church. The Pope called for a *pastoral* Council—a realistic Council, a Council attending to the needs of men. No condemnations. No definitions. No subtleties. Traditional *Romanità* could not thrive on that sort of ground.

THERE IS NO NEED to recapitulate here the story of the Council thus far.\*\* As to its repercussions in America, however, from 1962 on, pioneering ecumenical gatherings in city after city, attracting thousands, have been electric in their impact. In 1964, Cardinal Gushing urged Boston Catholics for their spiritual profit to listen to Billy Graham. Nuns from St. Louis marched in Selma, Alabama, in 1965; and in quiet defiance of orders from the chancery (while Cardinal Cushing was ill and in the hospital) hundreds of priests and seminarians then marched with the Catholic Interracial Council in the South Boston St. Patrick’s Day parade. All of a sudden, things which long ago should have happened are happening. The distance covered between 1962 and 1965 is little short of amazing.

But the distance covered is only, let us say, from 1789 to 1945. Pope John wanted an *aggiornamento* that would bring the Church “up to today.” The Council has, in the end, let him down. The Council has hardly begun to cope with the world of the coming era on which we have already embarked. Looking backward, the Council is an astonishing success. But looking forward, the Council is in many ways a failure. Perhaps a Council—an unwieldy organ of more than two-thousand men—must inevitably work twenty years or so behind the time, dealing with issues that are ripe for institutional resolution. Perhaps it is enough that the Council has established the principle of renewal and reform, and that the old Roman will to eternity and changelessness appears to be broken. The Church is an historical, ever-changing institution, as the Council has recognized; that very fact liberates the energies of the Church to meet the future on its own terms, to enter the coming secular culture as enthusiastically, though in an entirely new manner, as she entered the secular culture of ancient Greece, or Rome, or the early Northern countries of Europe.

But a vision of the secular civilization of the future hardly seems to have entered the minds of many of the bishops. Too many of them are more concerned about the “confusions” which the recent changes are causing among their previously undisturbed flocks. Some of the bishops are of an appallingly rigid and frightened cast of mind: Bishop Hannon of Scranton has forbidden his people to take part in Bible vigils (a danger to their faith); Bishop Topel of Spokane has called 1964 “a year of shame” because the newly awakened Catholic press has been calling spades spades, and naming bishops by

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\* See, e.g., the reports by the pseudonymous Xavier Rynne, published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

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name for what they do or don't do. Unaccustomed to being held to account for their actions like other men, some bishops may be forgiven for sighing after the good old days.

**N**EVERTHELESS, the world in which we live is a serious world, not a toy for timid bishops. Between thirty and fifty million people in Europe have been killed by violence since this century began, and the same moral, political, social, and economic factors which contributed to this bloodshed are still operative. A new civilization, as Albert Camus saw in *The Rebel*, is rising on the rubble heap left by the Second World War, a civilization technical beyond any ever known, international in scope, and secularist in attitude. The Church has no time to worry about how deeply a bishop's feelings may be hurt. The question for her is whether the yeast of religious faith will be able to penetrate this technical world at all.

Pope John XXIII was sufficiently sensitive to feel the malaise which after the Second World War gripped Europe and the world: Old traditions have been discredited, old beliefs are mere words on the lips even to many who hold them, and for values like justice, human dignity, and liberty it is very difficult to give an intellectual justification. From a coldly scientific point of view, the planet Earth is insignificant; among men, the species is of more significance than the individual; the natural course of history treats men cruelly. It is difficult, as Albert Camus found, to argue one's way out of the nihilism which facts seem to force upon us.

In the United States, few saw dramatized in fire and in pain the depths of modern nihilism; besides, the more limited illusions of the pragmatist live longer. Anglo-American life has always maintained amenities of fair play, liberty, and law, for which no creditable account is to be found in Anglo-American philosophy. Such amenities are a part of the Anglo-American inheritance, part of our acquired fund of sentiment which David Hume extolled and which is not yet bankrupt. So long as this inheritance lasts, many philosophers will be able to continue their games with words. But one day they will have to resume the hard work of articulating why we value individual persons more than things, why persons are valuable beyond their usefulness or beyond the contributions they make to the economy, and what, in short, a man is.

These are questions in which believers and non-believers have an equal stake, and which are absolutely fundamental for the future. The Council convened by Pope John has barely touched these questions, having become deeply involved in ecclesiastical problems. Thus, as Cardinal Lercaro of Bologna recently warned in Rome, there is a grave danger that the Council will not have lived up to the vision of Pope John. In no case are the documents approved by the Council representative of the best that Catholic theology has to offer. In every case, compromise with the men of Romanità or with the bishops who lacked theological sophistication was required. The Council was, under the leadership of Roman minds, badly prepared. It was snatched from disaster only by the

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## *American Catholicism After the Council*

ardent hopes and example of Pope John, assisted by the energy, intelligence, and determination of a score of leaders among the cardinals and bishops of the world.

It seems that the bishops, particularly those of the United States, have hardly grasped the extent to which not only the Middle Ages but also the modern age are at an end; a new, technical, secular, urban, pluralistic age has begun. Language appropriate for an agricultural society no longer conveys meaning; even the word “father” means something different for the human spirit after Freud, not to mention what it means in “broken” homes or in those millions of families whose lives center not on parents but on teenagers.

“Secularism” for many of the American bishops is a dirty word; they blame on it virtually every ill that plagues society, from racial discrimination to lurid advertising. The bishops hardly ever recognize their own complicity in the evils of modern life; one seldom hears them, as a group, confess their own sins. There are, after all, bishops who have in the name of prudence compromised their professed moral code in the matter of race (but who even in the name of the same prudence brook no compromise in the matter of birth control). But most of all, the bishops have yet to come to grips with the fact that atheism and agnosticism represent a noble way of life, a way of life which is more attractive than Celtic folk religion to many young, educated Catholics.

A fourteen-year-old girl was recently overheard to say on a campus where she had come to attend a Newman Club meeting: “They’re talking about Scripture and liturgy. But I came here to find out *whether there’s a God*.” The Catholic people have changed in character under the system of universal education the atheists of the Enlightenment saw fit to pioneer, and under the system of parochial schools the German and Irish bishops of the United States insisted on providing for them. Catholics in the United States constitute the largest body of college-educated Catholics in the history of the Church.

In the last few years, partly under the release granted them by Kennedy’s election, partly under the impact of the Council, partly by the ripeness of time, Catholics in the United States have “aged” remarkably. In the schools and universities, in the Catholic and secular press, and in Church meeting rooms, the atmosphere is charged with questions, criticisms, and initiatives. The drive to understand, the drive of inquiry and personal appropriation, has clearly been awakened, and pupils from the schools the bishops took such pains to build are, as it were, turning around to bite the bishops’ hands. Teachers of the old style hardly know how to cope. The defensive speak of a “breakdown in the spirit of obedience.” But in reality nothing has broken down but the image of the pyramid; the questioners and the doers are obeying the Council’s directives and following the Council’s example.

It is in this sense that the Council has had its greatest success. Catholics now want the whole Church, every day and everywhere, to be one large Council: full of free speech, argument, dissent, respect for diversity, and the slow search for consensus. Not all the

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bishops are like Pope John; not all like this kind of Church. But who, then, are the better Catholics, those of the Church of silence, conformity and comfort, or those of the Church of freedom and dissent?

In fact, the spirit of faith and obedience among Catholics has seldom been more alert; but this faith is directed toward the whole Church rather than toward the local pastor or diocesan bishop. Catholics listen now with two ears: one for the local voice, one for the voice of renewal and reform which is stirring in many other places, including the Council, if not locally. It is difficult for some pastors to be reminded, perhaps for the first time, that they are stewards and not masters of the faith. In the old days, the great ideal of many a pastor was to let nothing disturb the waters; now such a man hesitates, for fear the disturbance might be the Holy Spirit.

**B**UT IF THE NEWER CATHOLICS have two ears, they also have three eyes. That, at least, is the claim of Daniel J. Callahan's new collection, *The Generation of the Third Eye*.<sup>\*</sup> The title is taken from a phrase of John Courtney Murray's, about the introspective, analytic temper of the times, and the contributors are writers, artists, and scholars who are under forty. John Cogley, who at forty-eight finds himself untimely placed in an older generation, adds an "afterword" which shows, if anything can, that there is a difference between the generations.

Two points emerge from this collection. One is that for nearly every contributor the ordinary parish life of the Church in America has been virtually bankrupt. The sermons are abominable, both in theology and in culture; the churches are run as "parish plants" rather than as praying and believing communities. The financial strain of building and maintaining parochial schools seems to have made practical materialists out of the Catholic community.

Secondly, nearly every one of the writers represented has found his nourishment as a Catholic not from the ecclesiastical structure but from the intellectual Catholic underground. Years ago, this one discovered Bernanos and Bloy, or that one Simone Weil. Through a friendship here, a prophetic book there, they developed against the stream of unintellectual Catholicism. It seems likely that the next generation of such Catholics, now in the colleges, will number in the scores of thousands; for the Council has made the underground official.

To be sure, some members of the underground are reacting as if the war were still on; everyone is anticipating a backlash among the bishops. It is perfectly plain that the bishops of the United States, especially those along the Eastern seaboard (Cardinal Spellman and the two recent Apostolic Delegates purportedly share a large responsibility for their nomination) were unprepared for the Council. Many of them for years

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<sup>\*</sup> Sheed & Ward, 256 pp.

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strenuously opposed liturgical reform, did little to publish the social encyclicals of the popes, treated the new theology of Rahner, Congar, Daniélou, and others as vaguely heretical, and knew almost nothing of the intellectual revolution in contemporary biblical studies. It would be too much to expect that all of these bishops, after a brief "graduate school" exposure at the Council to what has been going on in Catholicism these last ninety years, will be able to relay their discoveries to the often unread, firmly set monsignors and pastors who preside over the daily life of their dioceses.

Still, most of the bishops of the United States appear not only to have benefited immeasurably by the Council, but also to have begun to win over their clergy and their Waugh-like laymen. One of the touching aspects of the Council was the sight of old men changing the ideas of a lifetime, and voting—for the good of the Church—for ideas they had many long years opposed. "If you had told me last week that I would vote yes this morning, I'd have said you were crazy," one Archbishop from the Midwest told a reporter at the Council, "but I did."

**W**HAT, THEN, of the future? The fact that the underground is now official has temporarily brought a wavering in the sense of direction. Since their inception, journals like *The Commonweal* and *Cross Currents* had been saying that reform and renewal are required; suddenly Pope John and the Council have concurred. Now what?

There are enormous institutional problems to be dealt with in Roman Catholicism. There are too few places in which the insight, experience, and concern of the laymen are made institutionally effective. Laymen are given no responsibility; in the business world and in government they are treated as adults, but in the Church as children. The extreme spiritual poverty of parish and diocesan community life seems to be due chiefly to this enforced childlikeness.

One of the brightest spots is the fact that the nearly two hundred thousand nuns in the United States, especially those from the Midwest and the West, are moving swiftly into 20th-century and secular American life; the example of the six from St. Louis who marched at Selma was a shot heard round the country: even in Boston.

Serious sectional problems are also involved. The Catholic cities of the Eastern seaboard are depressingly dead; the Celtic heresy has killed them. Sister Marie Augusta Neal's thesis for Harvard, *Values and Interests in Social Change*,\* a study of the Boston clergy, indicates that the future in Boston, at least, is hopeful. But the Boston Catholic paper, *The Pilot*, often has to be ecclesiastically careful, and, when the Cardinal is out of the office, the chancery can be as narrow, complacent, and restrictive as any in the country. Let us not speak of Providence, New York, the major sees of New Jersey, or Philadelphia.

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\* Prentice-Hall, 192 pp.

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MICHAEL NOVAK

Wherever one visits in America, one finds again and again that the fundamental problem of American Catholicism lies in the bureaucratic minds who hover like flies around many of the bishops, the nervous Nellies of the chancery offices who censor books, discourage talks with Protestants, fear that the Council has caused “confusion” among the faithful, and build (as in one diocese) \$400,000 and (in another) \$90,000 rectories for the use of no more than four priests. Such men may be loyal administrators and genial golf companions and they may often think of themselves as the most select group in the world; but many of them should recognize that they are among the most unenlightened, mediocre, and complacent men who ever represented the gospels of Jesus Christ.

This problem is formally like that which afflicts civil government and even universities: How can a living institution make effective in its midst not only bureaucrats but also prophets? How do you get, and keep, open minds and free spirits in administrative posts?

The problem is only exacerbated by the tradition of authoritarianism in the Church and by the tradition of celibacy. The fact is commonly discussed among Catholics that too many of those who advance in the hierarchy seem attracted to these traditions because of their own emotional disturbances. It is probable that some manifestations of ecclesiastical power reveal deep personal insecurity. There are very few checks-and-balances in Church structure to minimize the potential dangers of such disequilibrium.

St. Augustine, that great bishop, once wrote in self-reflection that bishops are the enemies of the Church, and surely it is true that every blindness of the local bishop injures the life of the diocese he serves. The Catholic people, and the clergy, need institutional safeguards against abuses. The monsignori in Chicago who resisted Cardinal Meyer’s every effort to integrate the parochial schools—for fear those who form the economic base of their huge, brick parish plants would move away—and some among the clique who form a purple guard around Cardinal Spellman are by their impenetrable complacency scandals to every alert man who encounters them.

Connected with this issue are several others. The ordinary parish priests, particularly the assistant pastor, are at the present time the least free members of the Church. In canon law, they have almost no protection for what may be called in imitation of Thoreau “evangelical disobedience.” How can the gospels be preached when those of sensitive conscience are forbidden by administrative prudence to avoid disturbing the present order? Many a priest finds himself saying one thing in private, another in public. What is the use of giving one’s life to the service of the gospels if one is made to serve, instead, the timidity of those who, with whatever good intentions, flatter the rich, the powerful, the secure?

Besides, the Catholic people have, until recently, been unwilling to let a priest speak in his own name; he is taken much too seriously as speaking for the entire Church.

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Consequently, many priests do not speak their own minds; they mouth accepted conventions which will “disturb” no one. Their acquiescence has entangled them in spiderwebs of their own weaving, and only their own courage will free them and the gospels to which they are dedicated.

Thirdly, the descendants of Europe’s peasants are only now beginning to lift their eyes from the vulgar and aggressive search for dollars which they found to be the obvious requirement for coping with the Protestant Establishment of the United States. No one is deceived into thinking that “the emerging laymen” (a descriptive phrase for the religiously and intellectually alert) in this country number more than a few score thousand, perhaps a few hundred thousand. Apathy, indifference to religion except as a vague and ultimate comfort, and docility in early assimilating the pyramidal view of the Church mark the vast majority of American Catholics. Here, again, the situation faced by Catholicism in the United States is formally similar to that of the life of general culture and the intellect: The vast majority of the people belong spiritually to the hucksters of Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the thoughtless pulpit.

**B**UT THESE are largely intramural issues. The internal political structure of the Church as it exists at present inhibits spiritual and intellectual development; and it is the business of laymen, nuns, priests, and bishops who care about such things to reform the structure and practices of the institution they love.

On a wider front, there are a whole host of issues of concern to all Americans in which the Church is more or less “officially” involved: education, for example. An increasing number of educated Catholics are critical of the parochial schools not so much because these are intellectually inferior to the public schools (often they aren’t), but because their graduates do not seem noticeably different in behavior and attitudes from those who go to the public schools. Why put millions of dollars into a program of such meager religious fruitfulness?

The younger Catholic intellectuals—often products of the Catholic schools—are the most vociferous critics of the schools. But in many new suburbs, the people of the parish rather than the clergy insist on the building of a Catholic school. Many parents seem to feel incompetent to educate their own children in religious matters; they seem to need the feeling of security which comes from placing their children under the moral protection of priests and nuns. Meanwhile, those who teach in the schools, trying valiantly to reach new standards both in secular disciplines and in the “new theology” of Vatican II, become increasingly sensitive to criticism, whose truth they are often willing to admit but whose practicality they sometimes question.

Three relatively modest propositions appear to be developing as a feasible and widespread attitude toward this question: (1) At some period in their education, Catho-

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lic children ought to have *some* formal Catholic education; otherwise, their theological education will fall below their general education. But they should spend part of their career also in public and secular schools; (2) At least one important part of religious education can best be given in the home, through public prayer in church, and through personal reading and organized discussion groups; (3) The maintenance of an independent Catholic school system, for part of the education of at least part of the Catholic population, contributes to the diversity and richness of American education.

On a second important public issue, racial justice, only a year ago the inactivity of Catholics threatened to dissipate the trust and good feeling of the then just budding ecumenical movement. For the very Jews and Protestants who were most apt to be open to new dialogue with Catholics were among the first to become sensitive to the moral demands of the racial revolution; and they were scandalized by Catholic inactivity. But gradually, through the lonely witness of such men as the Berrigan brothers (one a Jesuit, one a Josephite), and through the pressure of other active spirits who increasingly allowed themselves to be diverted from the work of Vatican II and other intramural matters, more and more Catholic consciences were touched. An institutional mark of sorts was reached when the well-known Paulist Center on Boston Common threw open its doors, in May 1965, to an ecumenically sponsored teach-in on the emotionally charged issue of racial imbalance in the Boston public schools.

Several important traits of the American Catholic community came to light in these developments; and these traits illuminate Catholic attitudes on other problems. In America more than in Europe, many Catholics are victims of the serious flaws in late scholastic philosophy and theology; many interpret reality through eyes blinded to certain important features. For example, American Catholics commonly interpret a generalization as a normative statement; they register the descriptive mode only with difficulty. If a psychologist or a sociologist describes what frequently happens, they take him to be recommending a course of action; detached analysis is seldom credited. "Is" (in the tradition of the Aristotelian final cause) is taken as an "ought."

Again, many American Catholics are fond of verbal solutions to concrete problems. If the American bishops said in 1957 that racial discrimination is immoral, and said it solemnly in their annual proclamation, many Catholics feel the problem has been solved.

Again, if the essential position of the Church is once enunciated, then many American Catholics believe it is illegitimate to blame the Church for the concrete, individual actions or attitudes of the Catholic clergy or people. Thus, if Pius XII in (as Albert Camus sadly noted) an obscure encyclical condemned Nazism, then the *Church* was not involved in Hitler's wars, only errant individuals were. In fact, even if Pius XII had not spoken, the *Church* would have "spoken," silently. For the *Church* is a pure, immaculate, spotless Platonic ideal, not to be confused with the sinners who give her flesh in history. The Church, for example,

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has always believed in religious liberty, never persecuted Jews or Protestants, always fostered truth and scientific inquiry, ever championed the rights of man, never approved racial discrimination.

Again, the upper blade of Platonic unreality in late scholasticism makes necessary a lower blade of Machiavellian “prudence” in dealing with actual complexities in history. The very bishop who believes most in the sinlessness of the Platonic Church is apt to have a finger in many deals involving local real estate; another is warning the local newspaper not to print a certain story; another is pressuring politicians in this direction or in that. Italian and Irish bishops, in particular, seem to have mastered the regular swing of the pendulum from the rhetoric of sermons on the sinless beauty of the Church to the vigorous use of power for the worldly needs of the Church.

Finally, many American Catholics still seem to prefer group loyalty to truth; self-congratulation to honesty. There is at present a vogue of criticism and self-accusation, to be sure; but many are still untouched by it, and many who voice it seem surprised at the new possibility of speaking out; like Edward M. Keating of *Ramparts*, they sound not a little strident.

This group loyalty has largely blinded American Catholics to the needs of other groups. The oscillation between idealism and cynical prudence has led American Catholics to believe in racial justice while tolerating racial injustice. The emphasis on essential definition rather than on personal appropriation and responsibility, and the confusion of the normative with the descriptive, have enabled American Catholics to be blind to concrete realities in the name of “unchanging principles.”

These same traits of mind characterize the usual American Catholic foray into American social or political life, on the censorship of movies, on birth control clinics, on aid to parochial schools, etc. Often the values which Catholics wish to uphold in these matters are commendable in themselves; but the political and social techniques for defending them smack of Italian or Irish scholasticism. Essentialistic, non-historical, and abstract ideals are voiced on the one hand, and ecclesiastical prestige is wielded as political power on the other.

Increasingly, this mental scholasticism is yielding to the sunshine of American liberties and the brisk winds of American realities. Cardinal Cushing has recently recognized that the Catholic conscience need not be articulated in public law, and tentatively approved the amendment of the birth control laws of Massachusetts so that they would be more in conformity with the general public conscience. Catholics can maintain their stricter views in private; the domain of public law is distinguishable from the domain of personal conscience.

Pope John XXIII, Cardinal Cushing’s closest ecclesiastical model, made another important distinction in *Mater et Magistra*, concerning Communism: The original ideology is one thing, the reality which has evolved under historical pressures is another. Late scholasticism pure and simple was unable to make such a distinction; in its purview, only logic and essential definitions mattered.

In proportion as American Catholics learn to distinguish essences from existents,

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norms from descriptions, logic from history, their political and social actions will become increasingly more nuanced, reasoned, and appropriate to a democratic society. Catholics will ever have a moral code more strict in certain matters than many other Americans, but their way of defending the values they cherish can become both more effective from their own point of view and less repugnant to others. A more historically minded and concrete philosophy and theology, already gaining in acceptance, will gradually make this transition in intellectual style possible.

**M**ANY OF the younger Catholic intellectuals, however, are involved neither in the intramural problems of the Church nor in the problems of the “official” Church and American culture. They are getting their degrees or are teaching in the whole spectrum of academic studies, are entering political life or the professions, are active in urban renewal or journalism or the arts. They have little or no interest in ecclesiastical matters; they often resent the ecclesiastical establishment as vaguely stupid, or narrow, or merely professional. They have never had a conversation with a bishop and, except with a personal friend or relative, rarely with a priest. They often remain practicing Catholics, faithful to the sacraments. But the world of the spirit in which they live is that of the general secular world rather than that of the Catholic community at large.

They are concerned about the fact that automobiles are choking our cities; that the very poor continue to suffer gravely in our society; that our complex democracy requires the replacement of venal-minded and unintelligent politicians with men of talent, of some vision, and of suitably thick skin. They are worried about the inequalities suffered by women in our society. They are disturbed to the depths of their consciences by the risks of wider warfare the U.S. is courting. As Christians, they may feel they have a special stake in these problems, and special emphases in defining and attacking them. But they receive little enlightenment in how they might cope with such problems in church on Sunday morning.

Thus the great irony of American Catholicism is that, after decades of ecclesiastical warnings about the dangers of “secularism,” the most sensitive and inquiring young Catholics are presently finding the spiritual values represented by American secularism more compelling than the spiritual attitudes of the Catholic clerical establishment. The secular world has little to say, of course, about God, about ultimate questions of hope, destiny, and conscience; for such matters, and for the Eucharist which is their communal symbol, many young Catholics maintain their ties with the historic Church and its spiritual tradition. But they find a broadly conceived pragmatism to be a more adequate philosophical language for dealing with reality than late scholasticism. And they find contemporary political, economic, and social theory more morally relevant than most of the sermons they suffer through on Sunday mornings.

The future of American Catholicism will probably manifest an increasing secularization of the thought patterns of clergy and people, to the benefit of the religious faith

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## *American Catholicism After the Council*

they cherish. For though most varieties of American secularism appear to be agnostic, few appear to be absolutely closed to religious values. Consequently, many more Catholics will probably adopt some version of pragmatism, with an existentialist emphasis upon self-appropriation and self-criticism, as their basic philosophical and theological language. Given this language, they will add to the pluralistic values usually championed by secular philosophers, special religious values of their own. And their fundamental ethical and political decisions will involve balancing one of these values against another, in establishing what is best to do here and now on each occasion.

If this prediction is correct, American Catholics will in a sense be recovering the Aristotelian tradition of *phronesis* and the short-lived Thomistic tradition of concrete *prudentia* and *caritas*, which were swallowed up in the abstract, essentialistic “Reason” of late scholasticism. Neither Aristotle nor Thomas Aquinas, however, shared what would today be called “historical consciousness.” Thus, the contribution of modern secularism to the wisdom which can be assimilated by the Church is above all an acute awareness of the historical and contingent factors which characterize human history and the development of human intelligence.

American Catholics have little to fear, and much to gain, from the critical assimilation of secular wisdom in their attempt to understand the meaning of their faith at this moment in human history. In so doing, from their own treasury they also bring their own special contribution to the general wisdom of our culture. Their tradition of contemplative life will have much to say to a world of greater leisure; their tradition of emptiness and abandonment in prayer will have much to say to those, like the Anglican Bishop J.A.T. Robinson, who suddenly discover that God cannot be imagined nor, strictly, conceived.

American culture and American Catholicism benefit by the mutual criticism and guarded but respectful cooperation they lend to one another. American Catholicism is becoming, and ought to become, different from any other form of Catholicism in history, because it is American. And America, without its minority groups and their special values, is homogenized and vulgar.

Each man who cherishes the needs of the human spirit is a precious asset in a land of buyers and sellers. Every analysis of the life of the spirit in the United States leads to the same conclusion: the real war, the bitter war which lies ahead, is for the soul of the American people. Who will get there first, the huckster and the demagogues, or men of reality and statesmen? On every corner there are barkers who desire, for a fee, to cover up the realities of the world of bloodshed in which we live. There are too few who speak with honesty, with reverence for human personality, with compassion for the weak, with restraining intelligence for the strong, with realism in action. Secular intellectuals and religious men who value such things need each other—and that is why American Catholicism needs soon to be making its intellectual and artistic contributions to American culture. 🍷

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MICHAEL NOVAK

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# Modes and Mutations: Quick Comments on the Modern American Novel

By Norman Mailer

**T**RUST ME FOR A TIME. Indulge me. Assume I am a lecturer in the fields of Fellowship and am trying to draw a grand design in twenty minutes. Knowing attention is iron for the blood of a lecturer, I will pick a title—"The Dynamic of American Literature," as preparation for a lightning discussion of *Herzog* and Terry Southern with a coda on the Art of the Absurd. And for a first sentence I would say: There has been a war at the center of American letters for a long time. (The look of absolute comprehension on the face of the audience encourages the lecturer to go on.)

The war began as a class war; an upper-middle class looked for a development of its taste, a definition of its manners, a refinement of itself to prepare a shift to the aristocratic; that was its private demand upon culture. That demand is still being made by a magazine called *The New Yorker*. This upper-class development of literature was invaded a long time ago, however, back at the cusp of the century, by a counter-literature whose roots were found in poverty, industrial society, and the emergence of new class. It was a literature which grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon—a tenden-

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NORMAN MAILER *was the Pulitzer-Prize winning author of The Executioner's Song (1979) and many other works of fiction and nonfiction.*

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cy of American society to alter more rapidly than the ability of its artists to record that change. Now, of course, one might go back two thousand years into China to find a society which did not alter more rapidly than its culture, but the American phenomenon had to do with the very rate of acceleration. The order of magnitude in this rate had shifted. It was as if everything changed ten times as fast in America, and this made for extraordinary difficulty in creating a literature. The sound, sensible, morally stout delineation of society which one found in Tolstoy and Balzac and Zola, in Thackeray and in Trollope, had become impossible. The American novelist of manners had to content himself with manners—he could not put a convincing servant into his work, and certainly not a workingman, because they were moving themselves in one generation out from the pantry into the morning dress of the lady in the parlor and up from the foundry to the master of the factory. The novelist of manners could not go near these matters—they promised to take over all of his book. So the job was left to Howells, Stephen Crane, to Dreiser, and in lesser degree to such writers as Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair—let us say it was left to Dreiser. A fundamental irony of American letters had now presented itself. For in opposition to Dreiser was the imperfectly developed counter-tradition of the genteel. The class which wielded the power which ran America, and the class which most admired that class, banded instinctively together to approve a genteel literature which had little to do with power or the secrets of power. They encouraged a literature about courtship and marriage and love and play and devotion and piety and style, a literature which had to do finally with the *excellence* of belonging to their own genteel tradition. Thus it was a literature which borrowed the forms of its conduct from European models. The people who were most American by birth, and who had the most to do with managing America, gave themselves a literature which had the least to say about the real phenomena of American life, most particularly the accelerated rate, the awful rate, of growth and anomaly through all of society. That sort of literature and that kind of attempt to explain America was left to the sons of immigrants who, if they were vigorous enough, and fortunate enough to be educated, now had the opportunity to see that America was a phenomenon never before described, indeed never before visible in the record of history. There was something going on in American life which was either grand or horrible or both, but it was going on—at a dizzy rate—and the future glory or doom of the world was not necessarily divorced from it. Dreiser labored like a titan to capture the phenomenon; he became a titan; Thomas Wolfe, his only peer as giant (as the novelist-as-giant), labored also like a titan, but for half as long and died in terror of the gargantuan proportions of the task. Yet each failed in one part of the job. They were able to describe society—Wolfe like the greatest five-year-old who ever lived,\* an inval-

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\* This remark brought laughter from the audience. Since I did not wish to insult the memory of Wolfe, it would have been happier and perhaps more accurate to have said: like the greatest fifteen-year-old alive.

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NORMAN MAILER

able achievement, and Dreiser like some heroic tragic entrepreneur who has reasoned out through his own fatigue and travail very much how everything works in the iron mills of life, but is damned because he cannot pass on the knowledge to his children. Dreiser and Wolfe were up from the people, and Dreiser particularly came closer to understanding the social machine than any American writer who ever lived, but he paid an unendurable price—he was forced to alienate himself from manner in order to learn the vast amount he learned. Manner insists one learn at a modest rate, that one learn each step with grace before going on to the next. Dreiser was in a huge hurry, he had to learn everything—that was the way he must have felt his mission, so there is nothing of manner in his work; which is to say nothing of tactics.

**I**F THE UPPER CLASS quite naturally likes a literature which is good for them, a literature at the surface perhaps trivial, but underneath amusing, elucidative, *fortifying*, it is because this kind of literature elaborates and clarifies the details of their life, and thus adjusts their sense of power, their upper-class sense of power, which is invariably lubricated by a sense of detail. So too does that other class of readers in American literature, that huge, loose, all but unassociated congregation of readers—immigrant, proletarian, entrepreneur—wish in turn for a literature which is equally good for them. That is where Dreiser had to fail. He was only half-good for such readers. He taught them strategy as Americans had never gotten it before in a novel. If they were adventurers, he was almost as useful to them as Stendhal was exceptionally useful to a century of French intellectuals who had come to Paris from the provinces. But not quite. Dreiser, finally, is not quite as useful, and the difference is crucial. Because a young adventurer reads a great novel in the unvoiced hope it is a grindstone which sharpens his axe sufficiently to smash down doors now locked to him. Dreiser merely located the doors and gave warnings about the secret padlocks and the traps. But he had no grindstone, no manner, no eye for the deadly important manners of the rich, he was obliged to call a rich girl “charming”; he could not make her charming when she spoke, as Fitzgerald could, and so he did not really prepare the army of his readers for what was ahead. His task was doubly difficult—it was required of him to give every upstart fresh strategy and tactics. No less than the secret sociology of society is what is needed by the upstart and that strategy Dreiser gave him. But tactics—the manners of the drawing room, the deaths and lives of the drawing room, the cocktail party, the glorious tactics of the individual kill—that was all beyond him. Dreiser went blind climbing the mountains of society, so he could not help anyone to see what was directly before him—only what had happened and what was likely to come next.

That was the initial shape of the war, Naturalism versus the Genteel Tradition it has been called, and one might pose Henry James against Dreiser, but James is sufficiently great a writer to violate the generalizations one must make about the novel of

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manners which must always—precisely because it deals with manners—eschew the over-ambitious, plus extremes of plot—which James of course did not. So let us say the war was between Dreiser and Edith Wharton, Dreiser all strategy, no tactics; and Wharton all tactics. Marvelous tactics they were—a jewel of a writer and stingy as a parson—she needed no strategy. The upper-class writer had all strategy provided him by the logic of his class. Maybe that is why the war never came to decision, or even to conclusion. No upper-class writer went down into the pits to bring back the manner alive of the change going on *down there*, certainly not Edith Wharton, not James Branch Cabell, of course not, nor Hergesheimer nor even Cather or Glasgow, not Elinor Wylie, no, nor Carl Van Vechten, and no diamond in the rough was ever reshaped by the cutters of Newport. The gap in American letters continued. Upper-class writers like John Dos Passos made brave efforts to go down and get the stuff and never quite got it, mainly in Dos Passos's case because they lacked strategy for the depths—manners may be sufficient to delineate the rich but one needs a vision of society to comprehend the poor, and Dos Passos had only revulsion at injustice, which is ultimately a manner. Some upper-class writers like Fitzgerald turned delicately upon the suppositions of their class, lost all borrowed strategy and were rudderless, were forced therefore to become superb in tactics, but for this reason perhaps a kind of hysteria lived at the center of their work; lower-class writers like Farrell and Steinbeck described whole seas of the uncharted ocean but their characters did not push from one milieu into another, and so the results were more taxonomic than apocalyptic.

**S**INCE THEN THE WAR HAS SHIFTED. No writer succeeded in doing the single great work which would clarify a nation's vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*, and Stendhal with *The Red and the Black*, no one novel came along which was grand and daring and comprehensive and detailed, able to give sustenance to the adventurer and merriment to the rich, leave compassion in the ice-chambers of the upper class and energy as alms for the poor. (Not unless it was *Tropic of Cancer*.) Dreiser came as close as any, and never got close at all, for he could not capture the moment, and after his heroic failure, American literature was isolated—it was necessary to give courses in American literature to Americans, either because they would not otherwise read it, or because reading it, they could not understand it. It was not quite vital to them. It did not save their lives, make them more ambitious, more moral, more tormented, more audacious, more ready for love, more ready for war, for charity and for invention. No, it tended to puzzle them. The realistic literature had never caught up with the rate of change in American life, indeed it had fallen further and further behind, and the novel gave up any desire to be a creation equal to the phenomenon of the country itself; it settled for being a metaphor. Which is to say that each separate author made a separate peace. He would no longer try to capture America,

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he would merely try to give life to some microcosm in American life, some metaphor—in the sense that a drop of water is a metaphor of the seas, or a hair of the beast is for some a metaphor of the beast—and in that metaphor he might—if he were very lucky—have it all, rich and poor, strategy and tactics, insight and manner, detail, authority, the works. He would have it all for a particular few. It was just that he was no longer writing about the beast but, as in the case of Hemingway (if we are to take the best of this), about the paw of the beast, or in Faulkner about the dreams of the beast. What a paw and what dreams! Perhaps they are the two greatest writers America ever had, but they had given up on trying to do it all. Their vision was partial, determinedly so, they saw that as the first condition for trying to be great—that one must not try to save. Not souls, and not the nation. The desire for majesty was the bitch which licked at the literary loins of Hemingway and Faulkner: The country could be damned. Let it take care of itself.

And of course the country did. Just that. It grew by itself. Like a weed and a monster and a beauty and a pig. And the task of explaining America was taken over by Luce magazines. Those few aristocratic novelistic sensibilities which had never seen the task of defining the country as one for them—it was finally most unamusing as a task—grew smaller and smaller and more and more superb. Edith Wharton reappeared as Truman Capote, even more of a jewel, even stingier. Of writers up from the bottom there were numbers: Dreiser's nephews were as far apart as Saul Bellow and James Jones. But the difference between the two kinds of writers had shifted. It had begun to shift somewhere after the Second World War, and the shift had gone a distance. One could not speak at all now of aristocratic writers and novelists whose work was itself the protagonist to carry the writer and his readers through the locks of society; no, the work had long since retreated, the great ambition was gone, and then it was worse, even the metaphor was gone, the paw of the beast and the dreams of the beast, no, literature was down to the earnest novel and the perfect novel, to moral seriousness and Camp. Herzog and Candy had become the protagonists.

Frank Cowperwood once amassed an empire. Herzog, his bastard great-nephew, diddled in the ruins of an intellectual warehouse. Where once the realistic novel cut a swath across the face of society, now its reality was concentrated into moral seriousness. Where the original heroes of naturalism had been active, bold, self-centered, close to tragic, and up to the nostrils in their exertions to advance their own life and force the webs of society, so the hero of moral earnestness, the hero Herzog and the hero Levin in Malamud's *A New Life*, are men who represent the contrary—passive, timid, other-directed, pathetic, up to the nostrils in anguish: the world is stronger than they are; suicide calls.

Malamud's hero is more active than Herzog, he is also more likeable, but these positive qualities keep the case from being so pure. There is a mystery about the reception of *Herzog*. For beneath its richness of texture and its wealth of detail, the fact remains:

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never has a novel been so successful when its hero was so dim. Not one of the critics who adored the book would ever have permitted Herzog to remain an hour in his house. For Herzog was defeated, Herzog was an unoriginal man, Herzog was a fool—not an attractive God-anointed fool like Gimpel the Fool, his direct progenitor, but a sodden fool, over-educated and inept, unable to fight, able to love only when love presented itself as a gift. Herzog was intellectual but not bright, his ideas not original, his style as it appeared in his letters unendurable—it had exactly the leaden-footed sense of phrase which men laden with anxiety and near to going mad put into their communications. Herzog was hopeless. We learned nothing about society from him, not even anything about his life. And he is the only figure in the book. His wives, his mistress, his family, his children, his friends, even the man who cuckolds him are seen on the periphery of a dimming vision. Like all men near to being mad, his attention is within, but the inner attention is without genius. Herzog is dull, he is unendurably dull—he is like all those bright pedagogical types who have a cavity at the center of their brain.

**Y**ET THE NOVEL SUCCEEDS. There is its mystery. One reads it with compassion. With rare compassion. Bored by Herzog, still there is a secret burning of the heart. One's heart turns over and produces a sorrow. Hardly any books are left to do that.

Of course, Herzog is alive on sufferance. He is a beggar, an extraordinary beggar who fixes you with his eye, his breath, his clothing, his dank near-corrupt presence; he haunts. Something goes on in Herzog's eye. It says: I am debased, I am failed, I am near to rotten, and yet something just as good and loving resides in me as the tenderest part of your childhood. If the prophet Elijah sent me, it is not to make you feel guilt but to weep. Suddenly, Herzog inspires sorrow—touch of alchemy to the book—Herzog is at the center of the modern dilemma. If we do not feel compassion for him, a forceful compassion which sends blood to warm the limbs and the heart, then we are going to be forced to shoot him. Because if Herzog does not arouse your compassion there is no other choice—he is too intolerable a luxury to keep alive in his mediocrity unless he arouses your love. The literary world chose to love him. We were not ready to shoot Herzog. It all seemed too final if we did. Because then there would be nothing left but Camp, and Camp is the art of the cannibal, Camp is the art which evolved out of the bankruptcy of the novel of manners. It is the partial thesis of these twenty minutes that the pure novel of manners had watered down from *The House of Mirth* to the maudlin middle reaches of *The Rector of Justin*; had in fact gone all the way down the pike from *The Ambassadors* to *By Love Possessed*. So, one does not speak of the novel of manners any longer—one is obliged to look at the documentary, *In Cold Blood*—or one is obliged to look at satire. The aristocratic impulse turned upon itself produced one classic—Terry Southern's *The Magic Christian*. Never had distaste for the habits of a mass mob reached such pre-

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cision, never did wit falter in its natural assumption that the idiocies of the mass were attached breath and kiss to the hypocrisies, the weltering grandeurs, and the low stupidities of the rich, the American rich. The aristocratic impulse to define society by evocations of manner now survived only in the grace of any cannibal sufficiently aristocratic to sup upon his own family. *The Magic Christian* was a classic of Camp.

Note then: The two impulses in American letters had failed, the realistic impulse never delivered the novel which would ignite a nation's consciousness of itself, and the aristocratic impulse clawed at the remaining fabric of a wealthy society it despised and no longer wished to sustain. Like a Tinguely machine which destroys itself, Camp amused by the very act of its destruction. Since it was also sentimental, the artifacts were necrophiliac.

Literature then had failed. The work was done by the movies, by television. The consciousness of the masses and the culture of the land trudged through endless mud.

The American consciousness in the absence of a great tradition in the novel ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion, a formless force filled with the terrors of all the Christians left to fill the spaces left by the initial bravery of the frontiersman, and these latterday Christians were simply not as brave. That was one component of the mud. The other was the sons of the immigrants. Many of them hated America, hated it for what it offered and did not provide, what it revealed of opportunity and what it excluded from real opportunity. The sons of these immigrants and the sons' sons took over the cities and began to run them, high up in the air and right down into the ground, they plucked and they plundered and there was not an American city which did not grow more hideous in the last fifty years. Then they spread out—they put suburbs like blight on the land—and piped mass communications into every home. They were cannibals selling Christianity to Christians, and because they despised the message and mocked at it in their own heart, they succeeded in selling something else, a virus perhaps, an electronic nihilism went through the mass media of America and entered the Christians and they were like to being cannibals, they were a tense and livid people, swallowing their own hate with the tranquilizers and the sex in the commercials, whereas all the early cannibals at the knobs of the mass-media made the mistake of passing on their bleak disease and were left now too gentle, too liberal, too programmatic, filled with plans for social welfare, and they looked and talked in Show Biz styles which possessed no style and were generally as unhealthy as Christians who lived in cellars and caves.

**Y**ES, THE CANNIBAL SONS of the immigrants had become Christians, and the formless form they had evolved for their mass-media, the hypocritical empty and tasteless taste of the television arts they beamed across the land encountered

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the formless form and the all but tasteless taste of the small-town tit-eating cannibal mind at its worst, and the collision produced schizophrenia in the land. Half of America went insane with head colds and medicaments and asthmas and allergies, hospitals and famous surgeons with knives to cut into the plague, welfares and plans and committees and cooperations and boredom, boredom plague deep upon the land; and the other part of America went ape, and the motorcycles began to roar like lions across the land and all the beasts of all the buried history of America turned in their circuit and prepared to slink toward the market place, there to burn the mother's hair and bite the baby to the heart. One thought of America and one thought of aspirin, kitchen-commercials, and blood. Hot damn, Vietnam. And the important art in America became the art of the absurd.

**W**RITING IS NOT AN ACT TO EXCITE TOLERANCE. Maybe there has been nothing more catastrophic to America than the failure of its novelists, maybe we are the last liberators in the land, and if we continue to thrive on much less than our best, then the being of all of us may be deadened before we are done.

That is a statement which sups on the essence of extravagance, and yet it is the distance of the bridge to be built. It may be necessary that a communication of human experience, of the deepest and most unrecoverable human experience, must yet take place if we are to survive. Such at least is the covert opinion beneath the criticism you have just been kind enough to attend. 🍷

# Young in the Thirties

By Lionel Trilling

**I**N THE 1950s it was established beyond question that the 1930s had not simply passed into history but had become history. The decade had never been thought of as a mere undifferentiated segment of the past, but now it was to be canonized as a veritable epoch or period, an entity with a beginning, middle, and end, and a style appropriate to the discernible logic of its events. Like any authentic period, this one had its characteristic pathos and the power of arousing nostalgia. Intellectuals who had grown up in the intervening time discovered in themselves a lively affinity with the famous years, which, they suggested, would have sustained their best impulses, as the year in which they wrote manifestly did not. They thought of the admired age as belonging more truly to them than to the people who had lived in it—their received opinion held that such figures of the decade as were still on the scene had not been equal to, or worthy of, the moral opportunities that had been offered by their high-hearted magnanimous moment.

A survivor of the actualities of the Thirties was bound to meet the celebrations of those hypostasized years with some wryness. At scarcely any point was his own recollection of the decade in accord with the moralizing nostalgia of the younger men. He took what comfort he could from the thought that there can be no history without myth, that fictions about



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the past are always being contrived by generous youth. And he was relieved to find a degree of corroboration of his own sense of things in the view of at least one writer of a generation later than his. In 1955 Murray Kempton published *Part of Our Time*, in which he looked at the events and personalities of the period in some detail and with the intention of objective judgment. One might deplore the rather high, ripe elegiacism of his prose, an Ossianic tone perhaps generated by the subtitle of the book, "Some Ruins and Monuments of the Thirties." But what he had to say about those years went far toward explaining why they should have left a sour taste in the mouths of many who had experienced them. Mr. Kempton did not describe them in an adversary spirit; he spoke more in wondering sorrow than in dismay and he knew that for American intellectuals of this century, the Thirties were the indispensable decade. But he also knew something of the dryness and deadness that lay at the heart of their drama and that they had brought to the fore a peculiarly American desiccation of temperament. He knew the dull unreverberant minds and the systematically stupid minds that had been especially valued. He knew the minds that had corrupted themselves on the highest motives—he had no illusions about the innocence of the time, and he could give a pretty good account of its accepted lies.

For me the authority of Mr. Kempton's book was the greater because it put into evidence Tess Slesinger's novel, *The Unpossessed*, which it spoke of as "almost forgotten." The characterization took me aback, for the book had never been forgotten by me, and to see it referred to in this way was a forcible reminder of how rapidly the years go by and with what ease they carry things to oblivion. The fact was as Mr. Kempton stated it—after a sizable flurry of success on its appearance in 1934, *The Unpossessed* did pass from memory and Mr. Kempton's reference to it was the only one I could recollect having seen since a few years after its publication. Mr. Kempton spoke of it as a "document" and used it as such, and indeed it does have, as an account of a particular time and place, a certain evidential value. But it deserves to be remembered for more reasons than that, for the spirit-edness of its address, for what in it is pertinent not only to its own period but to ours.

The book would not have been forgotten if the author had continued her career as a novelist. Had there been a considerable body of work, *The Unpossessed* might well have been kept in memory as its auspicious beginning. But no novel followed the first; the only other book by Tess Slesinger is the collection of her short stories, *Time: The Present*. She published nothing after this and she died ten years later.

She was, I have no doubt, born to be a novelist. Her talent, so far as she had time to develop it, invites comparison with Mary McCarthy's. She had a similar vivacity and wit, although rather more delicate, and similar powers of social and moral observation, which, like Miss McCarthy's, were at the service of the impulse to see through what was observed. In her satiric enterprise Tess Slesinger was gentler than Miss McCarthy; her animus, although it was strong, was checked by compunction. This was partly because the literary practice of the time still imposed certain restraints, but chiefly for reasons of personal disposition.

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*Lionel Trilling*

Still, her animus was strong, and the effect upon it of what I have called her compunction perhaps does something to explain why her career as a novelist came to an end. Those who knew Tess Slesinger when she wrote *The Unpossessed* were aware that the book was not only a literary enterprise but also a personal act. It passed judgment upon certain people; in effect it announced the author's separation from them and from the kind of life they made. The act had in it, I have always thought, more aggression than the compunctious young person could support. I have no doubt that it was a perfectly "healthy" aggression, not any greater than was needed to meet the situation. If there was anger in it, there was no hatred and no malice. But probably it disconcerted Tess to break ties, to judge others to be wrong and to say so publicly, the more because, as I believe, she had not lost her affection for those whom she was judging adversely and from whom she was separating herself.

The burden of uneasy—of "guilty"—feeling must have been increased by the success the book achieved. It was not success of an overwhelming kind, but it was real. And in those days success was not, as now it is, thought to be naturally compatible with purity of intention, even the sign and reward of a special virtue. In the ethos of the time, the idea of "integrity" had great coercive power and it was commonly supposed that success indicated an integrity compromised or even wholly lost; the gratification it brought was almost certain to be shot through with shame. This did not, of course, make success any the less interesting and attractive, and those who constituted the circle of Tess's friends wanted it for themselves, chiefly in the form of fame through literary achievement. But it was Tess who first had it. This must surely have made a difficult situation for her. It would have been difficult for a man; it was even harder for a woman. And it wasn't only as a woman that Tess had done what men wanted to do and hadn't done. She had done it as a girl. She quite liked being a girl and handled the persona gracefully, with only an infrequent self-consciousness or affectation; her natural charm was of a daughterly or young-sisterly kind, and in some considerable part consisted of her expectation of being loved, indulged, forgiven, of having permission to be spirited and even naughty. And now by her act, by what the book said and by the success it made, she had, she might well have felt, abolished the person she had known herself to be and liked being. One can understand that she might find the new prospect of a novel rather terrifying.

It was also true that she had wanted to stop being a girl, and daughterly and young-sisterly. She wanted to be quite grown, to the point of having children. It was not a wish that at the time could be thought of as a personal instance of a desire which was in the course of nature; it implied cultural considerations of a quite arduous kind. Young people will perhaps not understand this and I find it harder and harder to do so. Yet it is the fact that the intellectuals of the Twenties and Thirties were likely to assume that there was an irreconcilable contradiction between babies and the good life. The fear of pregnancy was omnipresent and it was not uncommon for young married couples to have a first pregnancy aborted not because they were so very poor but because they were not yet "ready" to have the child.

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One might have a wide circle of married friends of some maturity without knowing any who were parents. Men were generally presumed not to want children, intellectual men thought of them as “biological traps,” being quite certain that they must lead to compromise with, or capitulation to, the forces of convention. There was also the belief that it was wrong to bring children into so bad a world. And quite apart from all practical and moral concerns, the imagination of parenthood was not easily available, or it worked only to propose an absurdity, an image that was at essential odds with that of the free and intelligent person: What parent known to anyone had ever been free and intelligent? That Tess, like Margaret Flinders, one of the two heroines of *The Unpossessed*, should want to be a parent and should avow her wish was a cultural choice of no small import, a mutation in faith, with all the stress that attends such occasions and makes them unpropitious for the writer.

She had her wish. In Hollywood she made a happy second marriage with Frank Davis, a producer, and she bore a son and a daughter. She died of cancer when she was forty.

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THE FIRST TIME I saw Tess Slesinger was at her wedding to her first husband, Herbert Solow, on a June evening of 1928. Solow and I had been at Columbia College together, although we were not in the same class and had not known each other until after we had both graduated. He was a man of quite remarkable intelligence, very witty in a saturnine way, deeply skeptical, tortured by bouts of extreme depression. His was the first political mind I ever encountered. Knowledge about power and the means by which it is won was the breath of life to him, the more because his passionate curiosity served high, strict political principle. He was meant to be a great political journalist. I do not know the reasons for his never having made a continued effort toward the career he might have had—our friendship was not intimate, although of long duration—but I suppose them to be connected with his periods of depression. The years of his youth were devoted to radical politics, in which his most notable achievement was the organization of the Trotsky Commission in 1937. He was a member of the staff of *Fortune*, where his work as writer and editor was held in especially high regard. He died in 1964.

The wedding took place in the meeting-hall of the Ethical Culture Society, whose well-known school in the same building on Central Park West Tess had attended. Neither Solow nor I would have been indifferent to the implications of the scene. The Society was not wholly Jewish in its membership, but largely so, and it was often thought of as a means by which Jews of a certain class carried forward their acculturation, although that word, if then invented, was not yet current. The tone of the Society was judged to be that of an unassailable gentility; it was respectable, well-mannered, undistressed. The Jews who belonged to it were chiefly German, more easily detached from their Reform faith than were the East European (generally called Russian) Jews from their Orthodoxy. The extent of the acculturation of the

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German Jews was a matter for pride with them, and they were likely to be envied and resented by East European Jews for what would have been called their refinement. To all that its Jewish members were presumed to want from Ethical Culture, Solow and certain of his friends were antagonistic. Our adverse feeling had been raised to the level of principle by our connection with the *Menorah Journal*.

**I**T CAN SCARCELY BE A DIGRESSION from Tess Slesinger if I take notice of this remarkable magazine, for Tess lived in its ambience during an important part of her life, and her debt to its managing editor, Elliot Cohen, was considerable, and one that she was happy to acknowledge.

I should explain that the *Menorah Journal* that I knew is not commemorated in the large anthology edited by Leo Schwarz in 1964 and intended as a memorial to Henry Hurwitz, the founder and chief editor of the magazine. Between Hurwitz and Cohen there were extreme differences of temperament and opinion, and Dr. Schwarz's piety has perpetuated the ancient quarrel by excluding from the anthology any contribution that might seem to have been inspired or influenced by Cohen. No one reading the sedate, temperate, measured, rather elderly volume could possibly know that between 1925 and 1929 the magazine had published the stories, essays, and reviews of a group of lively talented young people who thought of it as the natural medium for their work and gave it a tone of irreverent vivacity that its chief editor had not bargained for and did not want.

The *Menorah Journal* would not have come into being, or continued there, had it not been for Hurwitz, who stubbornly insisted that it be maintained by the Jewish community. But Hurwitz was a man with whom it was impossible to converse, at least if you were young and clever. He was shy and stiff, without wit and with no more than a formal humor, and he easily became defensive, although I am sure he meant to be genial and even kind. Cohen was his opposite in every way. He was a Socratic personality, drawing young men to him to be teased and taught. He conversed endlessly, his talk being a sort of enormously enlightening gossip—about persons, books, baseball players and football plays, manners, morals, comedians (on these he was especially good), clergymen (with emphasis on rabbis, one of whom he once described as “the Jewish Stephen Wise”), colleges, the social sciences, philanthropy and social work, literary scholarship, restaurants, tailors, psychiatry. He had gained much from having been born and reared in Mobile, Alabama; he was proud of his knowledge of an American life that wasn't easily available to young Jewish intellectuals, and he cherished his feeling (it was not the less genuine because he was conscious of it) for the unregenerate commonplaces of ordinary existence. Indeed, the basis of his intellectual life sometimes seemed to be a feeling for “the people”; he had reasoned tenderness for the culture of the people such as we find nowadays in the writings of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. At that time, among his younger friends, it seemed almost an eccentricity.

Cohen was not very much older than the youngest of us, but with his great beautiful

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head he had the aspect of an essential seniority which he was entirely willing to support, for he never played the game of being young. He entranced and infuriated us. He had an infrequent smile that was dazzling in its charm; his surliness, if things did not go as he wished, was impenetrable. No one ever had such pleasing manners, or such bad ones. And no one—certainly none of our teachers—ever paid so much attention to what we thought and how we wrote. He has often been called a great editor and so he was. He gave us things to do and when we had done them, he gave them back to us to do over, and better, having first carefully showed us what was wrong. Eventually one had to set up a protection against Cohen's involvement in one's work. Nothing concerned him so much as the written word, and he wanted above all things to be a writer, but he wrote only with the greatest difficulty, and—except in his letters and in the little ironic pieces he wrote for a time under the nom de guerre of "An Elder of Zion"—never in a way that gave a true indication of his quality; as a consequence, one stood in danger of becoming the instrument of his intellectual intentions. But at its beginning his interest in one's writing did only good.

I had come to know Cohen through his having accepted a short story of mine in my senior year at college; at some time in the following year I had brought him together with Solow. The acquaintance flourished; not long after it began, Solow became Cohen's assistant editor and between the two men there developed a close relationship of often painful ambivalence that lasted until Cohen's death in 1958. After her marriage to Solow, Tess Slesinger came into the circle of Cohen's tutelage; no doubt she learned the more from him because he held her in great affection, as she did him. Eventually, like others, she felt the need to work without particular reference to his approval, but, as I have said, she was direct and constant in her gratitude for the help he had given.

**W**HAT BOUND TOGETHER THE GROUP around the *Menorah Journal*, what made those of us who came to Solow's wedding take a high line about the Ethical Culture Society, was the idea of Jewishness. This had nothing to do with religion; we were not religious.\* It had nothing to do with Zionism; we were inclined to be skeptical about Zionism and even opposed to it, and during the violence that flared up in 1929 some of us were on principle pro-Arab. Chiefly our concern with Jewishness was about what is now called authenticity.

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\* With the exception of Henry Rosenthal, my closest friend at college, who was studying for the rabbinate. Rosenthal gave up his religious profession in the Thirties and took a degree in philosophy, which he now teaches. Other members of the group were Clifton Fadiman and Louis Berg; Felix Morrow came into it at a later date; Meyer Levin, when he was in the city, consorted with it, and so did Albert Halper. Anita Brenner, a young Texan, a precocious scholar of Mexican archaeology, should also be mentioned. Lewis Mumford, a non-Jewish contributor to the *Journal*, was a presence in the offing and I recall encounters with him; but he was an established figure at an early age, and although only ten years older than the youngest of us, he seemed very grand and we were not easy with him; in those days seniority was more of a bar to communication than it has since become.

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*Lionel Trilling*

The word must not be given too much weight, and some might judge that it can have no weight at all, considering what we were not concerned with. If we excluded religion from our purview, if we excluded Zionism, with all that it implied of the social actualities of Europe as well as of an ethnic aspiration that must inevitably be moving, what could a conception of Jewish authenticity possibly refer to? At this distance in time the answer must seem fairly dull—we had in mind something that probably still goes under the name of a “sense of identity,” by which is meant, when it is used of Jews, that the individual Jewish person recognizes naturally and easily that he is a Jew and “accepts himself” as such, finding pleasure and taking pride in the identification, discovering in it one or another degree of significance. From which there might follow an impulse of kinship with others who make the same recognition, and perhaps the forming of associations on the basis of this kinship.

The way in which Cohen and his clever young friends thought about the matter was not essentially at odds with the view of the man they judged to be all too literal and limited—Henry Hurwitz had started the Menorah Society at Harvard to deal with the sense of exclusion felt by Jewish students, the method being to make them aware of the interest and dignity of the Jewish past, to assure them of, as it were, the normality of the Jewish present, toward which they would, it was hoped, have the attitude of *noblesse oblige*. Our intention was much the same, perhaps even to the *noblesse oblige*, although the actual use of the phrase would have appalled us; only our means were different. When it came to the Jewish present, we undertook to normalize it by suggesting that it was not only as respectable as the present of any other group but also as foolish, vulgar, complicated, impossible, and promising. We named names, we pointed to particular modes of conduct. To write our endless reviews of Jewish books, directing our satire at the sodden piety so many of them displayed, to tease Jewish life, as Cohen did in his “Notes for a Modern History of the Jews” and his “Marginal Annotations,” to write vivacious stories of modern sensibility in which the protagonists were Jewish, as Tess Slesinger did, was to help create a consciousness that could respond to the complexities of the Jewish situation with an energetic unabashed intelligence.

The situation of the American Jew has changed so much in the intervening years that it may be hard for some to understand the need for such efforts. Nowadays one of the most salient facts about American culture is the prominent place in it that is occupied by Jews. This state of affairs has become a staple subject of both journalism and academic study—for some years now the *Times Literary Supplement* has found it impossible to survey the American literary scene without goggling rather solemnly over the number of Jews that make it what it is; foreign students have withdrawn their attention from the New Criticism to turn it upon The Jew in American Culture. Jewish protagonists are a matter of course in the contemporary novel, Jewish backgrounds taken for granted. Jewish idioms and turns of speech have established themselves in the language.\* And,

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\* And as elements of American speech are having an effect on English English—“Should, Shmould. Shouldn’t, Shmouldn’t” is the way a *TLS* reviewer recently expressed his indifference to prescriptive statements.

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## *Young in the Thirties*

so far as I can make out, there are virtually no barriers to Jews in the universities. But in the time of which I write, things were not so. Jewish writers were not yet numerous and such novelists as there were did not yet find it natural and easy to take their subjects from their own lives. In the universities the situation was very tight indeed. Cohen, after a brilliant undergraduate career at Yale, had given up the graduate study of English because he believed that as a Jew he had no hope of a university appointment. When I decided to go into academic life, my friends thought me naive to the point of absurdity, nor were they wholly wrong—my appointment to an instructorship in Columbia College was pretty openly regarded as an experiment, and for some time my career in the College was complicated by my being Jewish.

As compared to some anti-Semitic situations that have prevailed, this was certainly not an extreme one, but it had a sufficiently bad effect upon the emotional lives of many who experienced it. Jews who wanted to move freely in the world were easily led to think of their Jewishness as nothing but a burden. One doesn't often encounter nowadays the ugly embarrassment, once quite common, with which Jews responded to an implicit accusation directed against them which they accepted as in some way justified. The young people around the *Menorah Journal* were not much concerned with the anti-Semitism itself. Their interest was in its emotional or characterological effects, which they undertook at least to neutralize.

To wish to create an enclave of culture that would have the effect of advancing Jews—chiefly, of course, Jews of the middle class—toward an “acceptance” of themselves, can scarcely seem a momentous purpose, and, indeed, now that the old state of affairs has gone by, it may be hard to see why it should have engaged the energies of young people to whom cleverness or spiritedness is attributed. And indeed the therapeutic intention I have described, although it was important in our sense of our enterprise, was not at all what made for its excitement. This came from the fact that we had found a way of supposing that society was actual and that we were in some relation to it. If the anti-Semitism that we observed did not arouse our indignation, this was in part because we took it to be a kind of advantage: Against this social antagonism we could define ourselves and our society, we could discover who we were and who we wished to be. It helped to give life the look of reality.

For a young man in the Twenties, the intellectual or cultural situation was an enervating one. The only issue presented to him was that of intelligence as against stupidity, the fine and developed spirit confronting the dull life of materialist America. With that theme, for what it was worth, Mencken had done all that could be done. I read *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Freeman* and hoped that some day I would be worthy to respond to their solemn liberalism with something more than dim general assent. I was addicted to Wells and Shaw but it seemed to me that they spun delightful but fanciful tales about young Philosopher Kings who insisted that their divine right be recognized. I recall my

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college days as an effort to discover some social entity to which I could give the credence of my senses, as it were, and with which I could be in some relation. But this probably makes me out to be more conscious than I really was—put it, rather, that I was bored and vacuous because I had no ground upon which to rear an imagination of society.

The discovery, through the *Menorah Journal*, of the Jewish situation had the effect of making society at last available to my imagination. It made America available to my imagination, as it could not possibly be if I tried to understand it with the categories offered by Mencken or Herbert Croly, or, for that matter, by Henry Adams. Suddenly it began to be possible—better than that, indeed: It began to be necessary—to think with categories that were charged with energy and that had the effect of assuring the actuality of the object thought about. One couldn't, for example, think for very long about Jews without perceiving that one was using the category of social class. It was necessary not merely in order to think about Jews in their relation to the general society but in order to think about Jews as Jews, the class differences among them being so considerable and having so complex a relationship to the general concept of Jewishness that had at first claimed one's recognition and interest.

At least among some of us, feelings about class developed a quite considerable intensity. They became the basis for personal judgments, often quite bitter, for some years before they were politicalized. But the politicalization was not long in coming. The stock-market crash of 1929 and the consequent depression brought to an end the *Menorah Journal* as we knew it. Funds were in very short supply, the magazine ceased monthly publication and became an uncertain quarterly. In 1932, Cohen withdrew from the managing editorship and Hurwitz began his long sad struggle to keep the magazine alive, which, in some sort, he did until 1947. The young contributors turned to the Marxist radicalism of the day.

### III

IN ANY VIEW of the American cultural situation, the importance of the radical movement of the Thirties cannot be overestimated. It may be said to have created the American intellectual class as we now know it in its great size and influence. It fixed the character of this class as being, through all mutations of opinion, predominantly of the Left. And quite apart from opinion, the political tendency of the Thirties defined the style of the class—from that radicalism came the moral urgency, the sense of crisis, and the concern with personal salvation that mark the existence of American intellectuals.

*The Unpossessed* was the first novel to deal with this new class in an effort of realism. Not until two years later did John Dos Passos bring his U.S.A. trilogy to its conclusion with *The Big Money*, which, among other records of personal disaster, sets forth the careers of intellectuals who chose the life of liberty and enlightenment and were destroyed by the cold actualities of this ideal existence. What Dos Passos had to say in 1936 about the death of the heart and mind that might overtake the radical intellectual had been exceeded in

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stringency by Flaubert in 1869, but *L'Education Sentimentale* was not widely known at the time and *The Big Money* was read with shock and bewilderment. The idea that the life of radicalism is not of its nature exempt from moral dangers is still difficult to accommodate—the articles on Dos Passos and *The Big Money* in the latest edition of *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* do not take note of its place in Dos Passos's view of American life and are content to speak of “the vitiation and degradation of character in a decaying civilization based on commercialism and exploitation.” *The Unpossessed* cannot claim the force of *The Big Money* and it lacks the detailed verisimilitude which was Dos Passos's forte, but it too brought word of danger in the very place where salvation was believed to be certain, and its unhappy news came early.

Not the least interesting element of *The Unpossessed* is its title, which, we may suppose, makes reference to Dostoevski's great novel about radicalism, *The Possessed*. A recent English version corrects Constance Garnett's translation of the name of the book to *The Devils*, a literal rendering which does indeed convey, better than Mrs. Garnett's, the direct force of Dostoevski's adverse judgment of his radical characters. In the word “possessed” there is now a laudatory connotation which is stronger than the pejorative one. To be possessed by a devil is a condition that is indeed bad and even repulsive, but one may also be possessed by a daimon or a god, which makes quite a different state of affairs. We intend admiration when we say of a person that he fought or rode or worked “like one possessed,” implying an accession of vital energy which carries him beyond his usual powers. Similarly, the man who is said to be possessed by an idea or a purpose, unless it is manifestly evil, is usually regarded with admiration. Like the word “passion,” the word “possessed” has subordinated its bad to its good meaning. And it is the good meaning that Tess Slesinger had chiefly in mind—those persons in her novel who are not possessed are unfortunate or blameworthy.

The word in the sense she intended, that of not being in the service of some great impersonal vital intention, applies differently to the men and the women of the novel. In the latter case, the old sexual meaning of the word is in point. Neither of the two heroines is possessed by the man she loves. Margaret Flinders, besides being denied the gratifications of motherhood, is frustrated by her husband's refusal to lay full claim to her treasure of frank and open feeling. Elizabeth, adoring her cousin Bruno Leonard, is no less adored by him, but he is unable to take advantage of the commitment she is eager to give him and thus condemns her to a life of sexual promiscuity. The failure of the men to possess the women is consonant with their inability to surrender themselves to the ideals they profess. Miles Flinders is fussy and finicky, his intelligence limited by his conscience, the last man in the world to bear the brunt of the actuality of political power. Bruno Leonard is what is often thought to be the “typical intellectual,” egotistical, self-doubting, skeptical of all purpose whatever; at the big party in aid of the Hunger Marchers and his own ill-conceived magazine, he makes a cynical and vulgar speech in which he expresses his disgust with himself and the whole class of intellectuals.

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AS A DOCUMENT of its time, *The Unpossessed* must be used with caution. I have said that it has a certain evidential value, but it must be added that its testimony is not of a direct and unambiguous kind. Mr. Kempton uses it in an insufficiently critical way and he comes to conclusions that are not to be accepted. From the radical-intellectual characters of the novel Mr. Kempton undertakes to make inferences about the actual persons who were their prototypes and to describe the tendency of their time that they exemplified; he says of the group that it “was an elite not of origin so much as of attitude; like [Edmund] Wilson, its members hated the middle class from above. Its motives were disgust and alienation.... It represented an aesthetic rather than a social tendency.” Some of the errors of this description arise from Mr. Kempton’s reading of the novel: Most readers would say, I think, that “hated” is too strong and simple a word for the characters’ attitude to the middle class; nor could it accurately be used of the attitude of the actual persons to whom the characters may be thought to refer. And Mr. Kempton’s word, “aesthetic,” needs explication, for none of the characters is especially concerned with art or displays attitudes derived from such a concern. The word can perhaps be made to serve accuracy if it is taken to suggest a preoccupation with the look and feel of society, the look and feel of the moral life. But such a preoccupation would be, precisely, social. I think that what Mr. Kempton meant to say was that the novel portrays a group whose tendency was social or moral rather than political.

This the novel does do, its further intention being to suggest that the characters practice a deception upon themselves when they think of themselves as being political, and that this deception is to be viewed with satiric irony. The situation thus proposed is interesting in itself and it might well be thought to throw some light on the way people act or on the way certain people acted at a certain time. But it does not throw light on the actual group of which some members were, as Mr. Kempton infers, the prototypes of the novel’s characters. In point of fact, the group was nothing if not political in the particular mode of radical politics at the time. That mode may be understood from Daniel Aaron’s study, *Writers on the Left*. A reading of this useful work might lead to the conclusion that no politics was ever drearier. But it will make clear that the group’s participation in it was, if anything, more consciously, and, I think, more intelligently, political than was common.\* If eventually the group came to regard radical politics with despair, no member of it reached this state of feeling by having passed through Miles Flinders’s simplemindedness, nor would he have expressed his hope-

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\* See especially page 439, note 3. Since my name is mentioned in this extended reference to the *National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners*, perhaps it is here that I should correct Mr. Kempton when, if I read him aright, he suggests that I am represented in *The Unpossessed*. This is not the case and was not supposed to be the case by any of the author’s friends at the time the book appeared and was much talked about, with, of course, frequent reference to such portrayals of actual people as it was understood to contain. I make the correction partly in the interests of accuracy, partly in order to be able to claim a more nearly complete objectivity in speaking about the book than might be thought possible if I were personally portrayed in it. Perhaps I should add that none of the characters of the novel is a literal, or even nearly literal, representation of the person to whom the character may be referred.

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lessness in anything like the ugly self-pity of Bruno Leonard's drunken speech. The radical politics the group despaired of was that of the Communist party, which was not the rather comical remote abstraction that *The Unpossessed* represents it as being, and any member of the group would have been able to explain his disillusionment by a precise enumeration of the errors and failures of the party, both at home and abroad. During the considerable time when Stalinism was established as sacrosanct among a large and influential part of the intellectual class, all the members of the group, on reasoned political grounds, opposed this powerful body of opinion, to which, it must be said, the author of *The Unpossessed* found it possible to give her assent during her Hollywood years.

IT CANNOT BE IMPUTED to *The Unpossessed* as a fault that it does not accurately present the people and events it is presumed to have had in mind as the basis of its invention. A novel is not in the first instance a document, and its right to make free with the actuality from which most novels take their start cannot be compromised. To actuality the novel owes nothing, although to reality it gives total allegiance: So runs the prescript of criticism. But sometimes actuality and reality are one, or very nearly so, and *The Unpossessed*, good as it is, would have been a better book still if the author, by a firmer commitment to actuality, had set a more substantial historical scene, if she had encompassed the political particularities of her time. Politics was not her subject, but it made the root and ground of her subject, which is the ironic discrepancy, eventually the antagonism, between life and the desire to make life as good as it might be.

The dialectic is a familiar one and it has attracted literary temperaments as diverse as Molière and Hawthorne. It begins with the discovery that the established values of society are wrong, not only corrupt but corrupting, and with the decision to reject them in favor of other values, which, to all appearance, are far superior, of a different and higher spiritual order. It proceeds in the growing awareness that the preferred new values have their own deficiencies and constitute their own danger. They are by no means proof against human depravity. If they are affirmed by a group, the small dissident social unit is seen to have its own principle of corruption, perhaps different in kind from that of the rejected society but no less active. In the conscious commitment to virtue there is seen to lie a fault which in due time becomes fully apparent—an absoluteness or abstractness which has the effect of denying some free instinctual impulse that life must have. It then seems to be true that the rejected society, for all that its values are wrong, does at least permit “the simple and normal life,” as Thomas Mann called it in speaking of his famous story *Tonio Kröger*, in which he expounds an analogous dialectic, that between art and established society. In the antagonism between “nature” and “spirit”—the terms are Mann's—the established society, although it may indeed be the enemy of spirit, is the ally of nature. And if it seems to be after all but an ambiguous ally, it may be the more willingly accepted when it is understood that corrupted spirit is rather worse than corrupted nature.

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*Lionel Trilling*

In the radical political culture of the Thirties, the dialectic was to be perceived at work in its fullest ironic force. The doctrine of the politics affirmed freedom; the conduct of the politics was likely to be marked by a dull rigidity. The doctrine was directed toward the richness and fullness that would eventually be given to human life, but a solicitude for mankind in general and in the future had the effect of diminishing the awareness of actual particular persons within the reach of the hand. One has but to read the politically oriented novels of the time to know the dreary limitation that overtook the imagination of what life is or might ever be.

It is scarcely surprising, since the dialectic is between “spirit” and “nature,” that a woman should have been the first to take note of the state of things. For some decades before the Thirties, the belief prevailed that woman stood in a special and privileged relation to “nature,” or, as it was sometimes called, “life.” Many writers, among them Meredith, Henry James, Shaw, Henry Adams, Wells, Lawrence, and Yeats, had contributed to a rather engaging mystique of Woman which developed concomitantly with the feeling that the order of the world as it had been contrived by man was a dismal and possibly a doomed enterprise. The masculine mind, dulled by preoccupation, was to be joined and quickened by the Woman-principle, which drew its bright energies from ancient sources and sustained the hope of new things. Implicit in the mystique was a handsome promise made to women—they were to be free, brilliant, and, in their own way, powerful, and, like men, they were to have destinies, yet at the same time they would be delightful, and they would be loved because they were women. The mystique faded and the promise lapsed. There are no traces of them in our contemporary literature, and when in older books we encounter the female characters born of that late Victorian and Edwardian dream of Woman, all aglow and shining from the peculiarly close connection with nature, or life, that their authors assigned to them, they appear as the nymphs and goddesses of a vanished age. But up through the Twenties, the mystique and its promise could still command the belief of some women.

It was a generous credence. Tess Slesinger set out with it and it made part of her singular personal charm. It probably shaped her style, for better or worse. *The Unpossessed*, quite apart from its parti pris, is avowedly and unabashedly a woman’s novel and that lack of substantiality of which I have complained is in part the result of a woman writer’s stylistic intention—gross and weighty facts were to be kept to a minimum so that there would be little impediment to the bright controlled subjectivity of a feminine prose manner inaugurated by Katherine Mansfield, given authority by Virginia Woolf, and used here with a happy acerbity of wit superadded.

At least a little irony must surely have touched such faith as Tess Slesinger gave to the waning cult of Woman. Yet there is a strange moment in *The Unpossessed* which suggests that the author received it with rather less doubleness of mind than might have been expected of her. Among a small party of friends Margaret Flinders’s husband, Miles,

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has shown great emotional distress. His wife moves quickly to comfort him by her touch and succeeds in doing so. This passage follows: "Had Margaret Flinders sprouted wings? Bruno watched her moving in her sudden radiance. She was beside Miles in a second, her arms about his neck. Something had taken hold of Margaret, filled her with triumphant storm; and Miles, allured, bewildered, stood like a moon beside her sun." It is then said that Miles "was frightened of her.... But he was smitten with joy and pride in her." And: "He timidly put out his hand and patted her. The gesture was ridiculous; like patting God."

It is possible, of course, to interpret this in an adversary way. The American litigation between the sexes, after having been quite overt and articulate, has gone into a latent phase, but not before it produced a judgment against women that has established itself in our structure of belief. The substance of this judgment is that women are hostile to men and carry their hostility to the point of being castrating, or, as some say, thinking it to be a subtler and more scientific word, castrative. And here in this passage, it will occur to some readers to remark, is the archetypical female fantasy: The woman in her specifically feminine role puts on power, becomes more powerful than the man; in the metaphor of her own perverse mythology, she is the sun to the moon of the frightened and bewildered husband; nor does the fantasy of power stop short of her assumption of a masculine godhead.

THE PASSAGE is certainly curious. And no doubt there is ground for the adversary reading of it I have supposed, just as there is ground for taking the book as a whole to be that so often graceless thing, a novel of feminine protest. But to settle for this view of *The Unpossessed* would be to misunderstand its real intention, which, as I have said, was to set forth the dialectic between life and the desire to make life as good as it might be, between "nature" and "spirit." That this intention should be susceptible of misunderstanding is, no doubt, the fault of the book itself: Had the two terms of its dialectic been of equal substantiveness, had the actuality of politics been more fully realized, the possibility of seeing the issue as merely that between men and women would not have existed. And it is the real intention of the book that gives rise to the imagery of the passage I have quoted—the wings, radiance, triumphant storm, dominant sun, and very godhead are not to be understood as the feminine armament in a war between the sexes: The Blakean paraphernalia are meant to suggest the will and the hope of still uncorrupted nature in its resistance to the tyranny of spirit.

"In our time," said Thomas Mann, "the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms." Instead of political terms Mann might have said social terms or moral terms, any terms at all for the meaning of man's destiny, and still W.B. Yeats would have seized the sentence to inscribe at the head of a poem which says to its solemn epigraph that what it remarks is all very well, and maybe true, but has nothing to do with the real motions of man's heart. Yeats, however, knew that there is no escape from terms—the pathetic little

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tantrum of a poem called “Politics” (“How can I, that girl standing there...”) is followed in *Last Poems* by “The Man and the Echo” in which the old poet, searching his life for the harm he may have done others by what he had spoken and written, defends himself from his own accusation by saying that it had not been open to him to “shirk / The spiritual intellect’s great work,” going on to say that there is no “work so great / As that which cleans man’s dirty slate.”

It is a characteristic of the modern age that an ever-increasing number of people suppose that they must be involved in the spiritual intellect’s great work. Whoever can recall the Twenties and Thirties might well have a clear notion of how constant has been the augmentation of their number. The modern person who has reached a certain not uncommon point of intellectual development lives in relation to terms, that is to say, to ideas, principles, pasts, futures, the awareness of the dirty slate and the duty of cleaning it. Some stand closer to the activity of the spiritual intellect than others, but all are obedient to its imperative, and proud of their obedience. Yet over this necessity there hovers the recollection, or the imagination, of a mode of existence that is not in the control of the spiritual intellect, the mode of existence that, to use Yeats’s language, is of “the body and its stupidity,” the blessed stupidity of nature and instinct. Tess Slesinger, who might herself have been “that girl standing there” of Yeats’s little poem, enrolled herself early among those who undertook to advance the “great work.” Like the friends with whom she began her public intellectual life, she believed that there was no better occupation than to scrub the slate clean of the scrawls made on it by family, class, ethnic or cultural group, the society in general. She did not change her judgment of the enterprise, but in one especially vivacious and articulate moment, she took notice of the scribble she had not expected to see on the slate—the one made by the spiritual intellect itself. 🍷

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# Koufax the Incomperable

By Mordecai Richler

**W**ITHIN MANY A ONCE-PROMISING, now suddenly command-generation Jewish writer, there is a major league ball player waiting to leap out; and come Sunday mornings in summer, from the playing fields of East Hampton to the Bois de Boulogne to Hyde Park, you can see them, heedless of tender discs and protruding bellies, out in the fresh air together, playing ball. We were all raised on baseball. While today there do not seem to be that many Jewish major league stars about, when I was a kid there were plenty we could identify with. Sid Gordon and Al Rosen and of course Hank Greenberg. Even in Montreal we had, for a time, one of our own in the outfield, Kermit Kitman. Kitman, alas, was all field and no hit and never graduated from the Royals to the parent Dodgers, but it was once our schoolboy delight to lie in wait for him over the clubhouse at Saturday afternoon games and shout, "Hey, Kermit, you *pipick-head*, you think it's right for you to strike out on *Shabbes*?"

Baseball was never a bowl of cherries for the Jewish player. *The Encyclopedia of Jews in Sport*, a trusty reference I am never without, observes that while the initial ball-player to accept money for playing was a Jew, Lipman E. Pike, first figuring in a box-score in Montauk a week after his bar-mitzvah in 1857, baseball, in those days, was dominated by unsavory, hard-drinking elements, and so there were few *known* Jewish players. The

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MORDECAI RICHLER *was a Canadian writer and the author of Barney's Version, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, and other novels.*

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## *Koufax the Incomperable*

*Sporting News*, in 1902, wrote of one player, “His name was Cohen and he assumed the name of Kane when he became a semi-professional, because he fancied that there was a popular and professional prejudice against Hebrews as ball players.” Other major-leaguers were more militantly Jewish. Barney Peltz, for instance, who pitched for the St. Louis Browns from 1903 to 1912, seemingly did not object to being known as “The Yiddish Curver.” Still, the number of our players in any era has been small, possibly because, as Norm Sherry, once a catcher with the Dodgers, has said, “Many boys find opposition at home when they want to go out for a ballplaying career.” Despite opposition at home or in the game the Jew, as the *Encyclopedia* happily notes, has won virtually every honor in baseball. If there remains a Jewish Problem in the game today, it hinges on the Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur syndrome, for the truth we all have to live with is that much as the Reform temple has done to lighten our traditional Jewish burdens, the rush for the pennant and Rosh Hashanah, the World Series and Yom Kippur, still sometimes conflict.

Should a nice Jewish boy play ball on the High Holidays? Historical evidence is inconclusive. Harry Eisenstadt, once a pitcher for the Dodgers, was in uniform but not scheduled to pitch on Rosh Hashanah 1935, but when the Giants began to hurt his team he was called into the game *and his first pitch was hit for a grand slam home-run*. And yet—and yet—one year earlier Hank Greenberg, with the Tigers close to their first pennant since 1909, played on Rosh Hashanah and hit two home runs. Greenberg went to *shul* on Yom Kippur, alas, and the Tigers lost. The whole country, rabbis and fans at odds, was involved in the controversy, and Edgar Guest was sufficiently inspired to write a poem the last verse of which reads:

*Come Yom Kippur—holy fast day world-wide over to the Jew—  
And Hank Greenberg to his teaching and the old tradition true  
Spent the day among his people and he didn't come to play.  
Said Murphy to Mulrooney “We shall lose the game today!  
We shall miss him in the infield and shall miss him at the bat,  
But he's true to his religion—and I honor him for that!”*

Honor him, yes, but it is possible that Greenberg, the only Jew in the Hall of Fame, was also tragically inhibited by his Jewish heritage. I'm thinking of 1938, when he had hit 58 home runs, two short of Babe Ruth's record, but with five games to play failed to hit another one out of the park. Failed...or just possibly held back, because Greenberg just possibly understood that if he shattered the Babe's record, seemingly inviolate, it would be considered pushy of him and given the climate of the times, not be such a good thing for the Jews.

Greenberg, in any event, paved the way for today's outstanding Jewish player, the incomparable Sandy Koufax. So sensitive is the Dodger front office to Koufax's religious feel-

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ings that Walter Alston, the Dodgers' manager, who was once severely criticized for scheduling him to play on Yom Kippur, is now reported to keep a Jewish calendar on his desk.

Koufax, who has just published his autobiography, is not only the best Jewish hurler in history, he may well be the greatest pitcher of all time, regardless of race, color, or creed. His fast ball, Bob Feller has said, "is just as good as mine," and Casey Stengel was once moved to comment, "If that young fella was running for office in Israel, they'd have a whole new government over there...." Koufax has won the National League's Most Valuable Player Award, the Cy Young Award as the outstanding major league pitcher of the year, and the Hickok Pro Athlete of the Year Award. He has pitched four no-hit games, more than any other major league pitcher. He holds the major league record for both the most shutouts and the most strikeouts in one season and also the major league record for the number of seasons in which he has struck out more than three hundred batters. He has tied the major league record for most strikeouts in a nine-inning game and also tied World Series records. I could go on and on, but a nagging question persists. This, you'd think, was enough. Koufax, at least, has proved himself. He is accepted. But is he?

**A**NTI-SEMITISM takes many subtle shapes and the deprecating story one reads again and again, most memorably recorded in *Time*, is that Sandy Koufax is actually something of an intellectual. He doesn't mix. Though he is the highest-paid player in the history of the game, improving enormously on Lipman E. Pike's \$20 a week, he considers himself above it. Fresco Thompson, a Dodger vice-president, is quoted as saying, "What kind of a line is he drawing anyway—between himself and the world, between himself and the team?" Another report quotes Koufax himself as saying, "The last thing that entered my mind was becoming a professional athlete. Some kids dream of being a ball player, I wanted to be an architect. In fact, I didn't like baseball. I didn't think I'd ever like it." And the infamous *Time* story relates that when Koufax was asked how he felt after winning the last game in the 1965 World Series, he said, "I'm just glad it's over and I don't have to do this again for four whole months."

In *Koufax*, which the pitcher wrote with the dubious relief help of one Ed Linn, he denies the accuracy of most of these stories. In fact, looked at one way, Koufax's autobiography can be seen as a sad effort at self-vindication, a forced attempt to prove once and for all that he is the same as anybody else. Possibly, Koufax protests too much. "I have nothing against myths," he begins, "but there is one myth that has been building through the years that I would just as soon bury without any particular honors: the myth of Sandy Koufax, the anti-athlete." He goes on to state flatly that he is no "dreamy intellectual," lured out of college by a big bonus, which he has since regretted, and as if to underline this point he immediately lapses into regular-guy English. "Look, if I could act that good I'd have signed with 20th Century Fox instead of Brooklyn...." Koufax protests that though he is supposed to read Aldous Huxley and Thomas Wolfe, and listen to

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## *Koufax the Incomperable*

Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn, if anybody dropped in at his place they would more likely find him listening to a show tune or a Sinatra album. All the same, he does own up to a hi-fi. "I wish," he writes, "my reading tastes were classier, but they happen to run to the bestseller list and the book-club selections," which strikes this reader as something of an evasion. Which book clubs, Sandy? Literary Guild or Readers' Subscription?

Koufax insists the only thing he was good at in school was athletics (he captained the basketball team which won the National Jewish Welfare Board hoop tournament in 1951-52) and denies, to quote *Time* again, that he is an anti-athlete "who suffers so little from pride that he does not even possess a photograph of himself." If you walk into his room, Koufax writes, "you are overwhelmed by a huge, immodest action painting," by which he means a picture which shows him in four successive positions of delivery. Furthermore, he denies that "I'm mightily concerned about projecting a sparkling all-American image," and yet it seems to me this book has no other purpose. Examined on any other level it is a very bush-league performance, thin, cliché-ridden, and slapped together with obnoxiously clever chapter headings such as, "Where the Games Were," "*La Dolce Vita* of Vero Beach," "Suddenly, That Summer," and "California, Here We—Oops—Come." A chapter called "The Year of The Finger," I should hasten to add in this time of Girodias and Grove Press books, actually deals with Koufax's near tragic circulatory troubles, his suspected case of Raynaud's Phenomenon.

Projecting an all-American image or not, Koufax hasn't one unkind or, come to think of it, perceptive, word to say about the game or any of his teammates. Anecdotes with a built-in twinkle about this player or that, unfailingly end with "That's John (Roseboro)," or "That's Lou (Johnson)," and one of his weightiest observations runs "life is odd," which, *pace* Fresco Thompson, is not enough to imply alienation.

Still true to the all-American image, Koufax writes, nicely understating the case, that though there are few automobiles he couldn't afford today, nothing has given him more joy than the maroon Rollfast bicycle his grandparents gave him for his tenth birthday when he was just another Rockville Centre kid. "An automobile is only a means of transportation. A bike to a ten-year-old boy is a magic carpet and a status symbol and a gift of love." Self-conscious, perhaps, about his towering salary, which he clearly deserves, considering what a draw he is at the gate, he claims that most of the players were for him and Drysdale during their 1966 holdout. "The players felt—I hope—that the more we got paid, the more they would get paid in the future," which may be stretching a point some.

**K**OUFAX WAS NOT AN INSTANT SUCCESS in baseball. He was, to begin with, an inordinately wild pitcher, and the record for his 1955 rookie year was 2-2. The following year he won two more games, but lost four, and even in 1960 his record was only 8-13. Koufax didn't arrive until 1961, with an 18-13 record, and though

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MORDECAI RICHLER

some accounts tell of his dissatisfaction over the earlier years and even report a bitter run-in with Dodgers' general manager, Buzzy Bavasi—because Koufax felt he was not getting sufficient work—he understandably soft-pedals the story in his autobiography. Koufax is also soft on Alston, who, according to other sources, doubted that the pitcher would ever make it.

If Koufax came into his own in 1961—becoming a pitcher, he writes, as distinct from a thrower—then his transmogrification goes some way to belie the all-American image; in fact there is something in the story that will undoubtedly appeal to anti-Semites who favor the Jewish-conspiracy theory of history. Koufax, according to his own account, was helped most by two other Jews on the team, Allen Roth, the resident statistician, and Norm Sherry, a catcher. The turning-point, Koufax writes, came during Spring training, at an exhibition game, when Sherry told him, “Don’t try to throw hard, because when you force your fast ball you’re always high with it. Just this once, try it my way....”

“I had heard it all before,” Koufax writes. “Only, for once, it wasn’t blahblahblah. For once I was rather convinced....” Koufax pitched Sherry’s way and ended up with a seven-inning no-hitter and went on from there to super-stardom. The unasked question is, would Norm Sherry have done as much for Don Drysdale? 🍷

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# The American Left & Israel

By Martin Peretz

**I**T IS HARD TO IMAGINE what would happen to the intellectual and moral style of the Left if radicalism ever became the dominant force in American politics. In the present circumstances, however hyperbolic and egregious its verbal and tactical excesses, the Left can always, and often does, explain or justify its hardened positions by reference to its minority status. Whether the issue is the Negro struggle, Vietnam, or—most recently—the Arab-Israel conflict, each and every new dogmatism, not excluding the most incendiary, lays claim to serious attention by characterizing itself as a courageous heresy. It may well be that all these years of unrequited love for the people have made the ethical sense of radicals dependent on the assurance of their marginality. With the stunning intrusion of the Middle East crisis onto a stage long monopolized by Vietnam, this habit has reached new heights of righteous arrogance and absurdity. For never before has a self-proclaimed heterodoxy, defiant and of course daring in its unpopularity, been so quickly established on the American Left as the ideologically correct view of a situation shrouded in ideological ambiguity. The American involvement in Vietnam is now commonly viewed on the Left as an exercise in genocide, a race war against coloreds, but that particular heterodoxy took some years to graduate into orthodoxy. And even now, the more sensible though no less committed in the peace ranks—i.e., those still insistent upon drawing important

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MARTIN PERETZ *is a journalist and the former owner and editor of the New Republic.*

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## *The American Left & Israel*

distinctions—are troubled by such vulgar and altogether gratuitous distortions of truths which are sufficiently horrendous in themselves.

Where the Middle East is concerned, the doctrine which has won so quick an acceptance—in the sectarian press of the Left, in the writings of occasional emissaries to the “outside” world, in discussions among movement activists, and in the resolutions adopted at the disastrous convention of the National Conference for New Politics in Chicago last September—is that Israel and Israel alone must bear the blame for the past and the responsibility for the future. Not, it should be clear, only for the plight of the Arab refugees, but for the behavior of the Arab regimes as well, and even (how powerful little Israel must have become!) for the policy of the Soviet Union, its sycophants (at least when Jews are in question), and virtually the entire Third World.

Now, it is decidedly not the case that, of the many hundreds of thousands who have marched and worked for peace in Vietnam and associated themselves in concrete ways with the battle for Negro rights, any very substantial percentage thought of themselves last spring as hostile to the state of Israel. A large number, in fact, shared the anxieties of those weeks for Israel’s very survival and the relief at its liberation from imminent fear. It is precisely because so many of the Left rank-and-file feel both existential and rational ties to the people of Israel, while the radical ideologues at the top are in almost complete sympathy with the politics of Israel’s enemies, that there have developed within every part of the peace and rights constituency fissures shattering the fragile unities cemented by the war in Vietnam.

Again, as so often in the past, the political and journalistic leadership of Left movements has isolated itself from the main body of its support and from its professed moral foundations. A cynicism bred of the frustrations of failure has combined with an ideological absolutism induced and continually strengthened by the persistent irrelevance of what the leadership thinks to whatever actually happens in history, and this lethal combination has forced much American radical opinion on the problems of the Israel-Arab area into the mold of Third Force socialist rhetoric. Ironically, this is true not only for the small and dreary bands on the Left still faithful to Moscow or Peking; it holds equally for the leadership of those diverse groups and groupings independent of Communist discipline and spiritual sway. But within the latter category, the orthodox notion of Israel as “imperialist” or as a neo-imperialist instrument makes sense only to those embittered rank-and-filers for whom the side in a dispute which engages the open and general support of Americans is ipso facto bound to be in the wrong. The Jewish radicals and other ideological agnostics who have been unable to accept this reading of Israel’s role are being forced out of the movement. Yet their departure only succors the posture of unhonored prophecy which the leadership has always affected. At the same time, the theory that the middle classes are unreliable radicals gains currency, and another convenient betrayal is imagined to excuse the Left’s declining fortunes. Meanwhile the myth

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that the wretched everywhere will rise some day allows for hope to spring eternal.

**I**F IN DESCRIBING THE SITUATION IN SUCH TERMS, one wonders for a moment whether one has constructed a caricature, one need only look at the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to be reassured of its verisimilitude. From the early days of the personality cult of Stokely Carmichael, SNCC had found itself continually allaying the apprehensions of its supporters. “Did Carmichael *really* call for the burning to the ground of Western civilization?” “Distortions of the reactionary press,” came back the predictable explanation. I was among those who eagerly accepted such brazenly offered blandishments. But Carmichael is an articulate and irrepressible young man. After a brief time, the comforting words no longer persuaded. And soon they were dropped; inflammatory invective had become the very stuff of SNCC’s program. Indeed, there is a saddening parallel between SNCC and the Third World governments it apotheosizes. “From what at home does he now flee?” asks the poet Lermontov. As with the Nasser, Nkrumah, Sukarno, and perhaps even Boumedienne regimes, SNCC’s hapless forays into international affairs were at once cause and effect of its failure as an indigenous radical movement. The inability to sustain the discipline and elan of cadres doing prosaic and largely unrecognized, though nonetheless revolutionary, work results in a politics of desperate fancy. From Hanoi and Havana, SNCC’s leaders deliver ever more threatening and empty pronunciamientos; and James Forman, the organization’s once dignified and decent long-time executive secretary, is consumed as its majordomo Foreign Minister, jetsetting through African capitals with his earnest message of solidarity from a few handfuls of people who do not work very hard.

SNCC’s recent attack in its official newsletter on Israel and Zionism was met with shock, but it should have come as no surprise. The group’s heroes—publicly avowed at last—had, after all, already secured Israel a central place in its demonology. The apocryphal writings of Che Guevara, for example, fit Israel into “the International of Crime and Treason.” By extension, of course, all its Arab enemies, however retrograde, become part of the nascent oppositionist—will it be called the fifth?—international. Since SNCC sees issues only in the grossest terms, there is not even in its position a concession of Israel’s right to exist—a right which even the Soviet Union and Cuba reaffirmed in their otherwise belligerent and cruelly mendacious statements at the United Nations.

Nor is SNCC overly concerned, as some of Israel’s critics are, with dissociating its anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism (though the distinction is not an always easy one, and though “anti-Zionism” has often been an all too transparent cover for anti-Semitism pure and simple). After questioning by the press, SNCC’s spokesman, one Ralph Featherstone, suddenly seemed to be seized by such scruples, but his answers, no less than the original “fact sheet,” belie his claim of being interested in indicting “only Jewish oppressors.” The imagery in word and picture in this document is so shot through with an-

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ti-Semitic overtones that only the most benighted and willfully innocent can fail to see either its malice or the intent behind it. Rothschilds are clumsily juxtaposed with allusions to international conspiracy, Moshe Dayan's epaulets have dollar signs for insignia, and the dollar sign is again pictured helping the Star of David to strangle both Nasser and Mohammed Ali—all surrounded by a collection of sheer falsehoods and half-truths about Israel. It is a document reminiscent of a populist anti-Semitism as old as socialism itself—the “socialism of fools,” August Bebel termed it.

This tradition has always vexed radicals who do not own to its canons and it still does. (Many of these radicals, however, would not now be nearly so embarrassed had SNCC contented itself with its customary hostility against *all* whites.) Thus it is that for some of us the unique history of Jewish suffering still establishes limits on what can be tolerated from those whose faults we are anxious to overlook. Yet by the same token, radicals have by their indulgent silence up to now opened themselves to this most recent experience of race hatred from within their own ranks—and not only from SNCC.

A CERTAIN NAIVETE about the purity and virtue of the revolutionary world has characterized much Left and anti-war sentiment in America. In consequence of this naivete, the response of many radicals to the Middle East crisis was confused by the fraternal greetings from Ho Chi Minh to Nasser and the fantastic charge by a Cuban officer that Israel used Nazis in its drive through Sinai (a converse confusion was created by Marshal Ky's statement of support for Israel). Here, after all, was a little country, and a progressive one at that, threatened at its very foundations—and yet here too were all the countries the Left considers victims of American imperialism allied against it in a cabal of what Abba Eban aptly and inventively called *politicide*. The willingness to sacrifice small countries for large stakes was supposed to be a Washington specialty, but slowly it began to dawn on some elements of the Left that cynicism was amply distributed around the globe and around the political spectrum. Walter Laqueur has only hinted in these pages\* at the havoc wrought in Left alignments all over the world by such realizations. From Poland the case of the dismissed generals, from Czechoslovakia the campaign against Ladislav Mnacko (recalling the Greek action against Melina Mercouri), stubborn rumblings here, cautious and politic retreats there, all testify to the difficulty with which the anti-Israel line went down in Left circles everywhere.\*\*

Some demurrers from the official Left version of the war had a pathetically heroic quality about them—for example, the independent thrust of the *Jewish Morning Frei-*

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\* “Israel, the Arabs, and World Opinion,” August 1967.

\*\* On the twisting line of the French Communists, see also the article by the left-wing arabisant Roger Paret in the *Wiener Library Bulletin*, New Series, No. 8.

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*heit*, the Yiddish daily equivalent of *The Worker*. It cannot be easy, even if one is Jewish and Israel is involved, to end decades of fellow-traveling. Similarly, *Jewish Currents*, an occasionally intelligent though conventionally pro-Russian Left periodical (which had, however, already tested itself on the question of Soviet anti-Semitism at least on cultural matters), published an exhaustive account of pro-Israel sentiment throughout the “progressive” world. Those who automatically trooped behind Moscow are likely to find their capacity to work with broadly based Left groups, only recently somewhat restored, greatly impaired. As with the Communists in the nascent French popular front, American Communists may soon find themselves on the outside of an exclusionary policy that independent radicals will have little trouble in justifying.

There is hardly an issue on which the newspapers *New America* and the *National Guardian* agree. The former is a monthly publication representing the remnant of organized social democracy in this country; the latter, now terming itself “an independent radical newsweekly,” is a strident sheet on the far Left fringes of Third-Camp socialism. For some time now, the two have been at war over the modern variations on the old divisive themes. Early this summer, however, the *National Guardian* made a special point of telling its readers it was echoing *New America*’s fears that the Israel issue would seriously rupture the Left just when it could least afford a split. The apprehensions were not groundless. But to argue at that point against a split in the ranks of the Left was in fact to urge that Israel’s friends agree as to the relative insignificance of a matter that stirred their minds and hearts no less surely and genuinely than the agony of Vietnam. This could not help but awake in many the distressed sense that radicals, for all the humane sentiments they profess, are not above the callous politics of their own governments. It was unavoidable, once so much of the eminent Left had moved against Israel, and in particularly reprehensible ways, that the blessedly naive and the intransigently principled should, like Arnold Wesker in England, also begin to ask themselves desperate questions: about the individuals and periodicals they had come to trust; about the political positions and moral perspectives they had long thought of as their own. These months, then, have been trying ones; and it is not likely that the Left will soon recover from the malaise of lost confidence which, exemplified by bitter acrimony or nervous silence, now afflicts it.

**T**HE STRAINS IN THE RADICALISMS of Europe and the developing world are limited in number—deriving from a grand philosophic system, the crucible of some traumatic historic experience, or both—and they all have an obvious ideological character and a definitive institutional ancestry. Nothing of the sort can be said of our own radical insurgencies. The thought patterns of the American Left are a pastiche of many traditions. Because some of these have been quietly absorbed through the impact of a leading figure, or as fallout from an earlier crisis—in any case, largely without

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## *The American Left & Israel*

the imprint of a corporate identity or organizational sponsorship—the Middle East crisis found individuals involved in movements whose sometimes barely articulated precepts were, they now discovered, at odds with their deepest instincts. In the long weeks of Israel's heightening insecurity, one would turn to comrades from old struggles and find them full of reproach.

The confirmed pacifist was reproachful quite simply because he could not brook the idea of a just war which now appealed to many peace activists. Likewise, the principled isolationists, of whom there are still considerable numbers, were aghast at the calls for American action in the Middle East emanating from the very people who had along with them denounced intervention by Washington in Vietnam, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Lastly, those rare visionaries of universalism, some of whom had also opposed the establishment of the State of Israel, were horrified by the upsurge of nationalist and even chauvinist sentiment occasioned by Israel's conflict with the Arabs. That Jews in the peace movement, like Erich Fromm and David Riesman, were of this party, provoked many pro-Zionists to an irrational venom that does scarce justice to the real issues at stake (although it must be said that the effort to counter hysterical passions of the pro-Israel variety would not always be matched by any comparable intolerance of Arab xenophobia). This occasional asymmetry notwithstanding, such views were argued with an integrity that it is difficult to fault. Indeed, much less disillusionment would have set in had Left anti-Zionist sentiment generally been of this order. As it happens, however, no Left press or organization to speak of reflected these values (except to appropriate them in anomalous contexts).

Once Israel was off the front pages, or on them at its own instigation, it became possible to sort out one's emotions and thoughts. What became increasingly clear was that many on the Left had swallowed an ill-digested, even a thoughtless, pacifism. What had begun as an eminently reasonable nuclear pacifism slowly had been rendered into a pacifism pure and simple—or a pacifism which still allowed for the violence of revolutionaries. By its horrors, the Vietnam adventure indubitably hastened this process, and only something like the experience of Israel could have made respectable again in certain circles the notion that some countries fight some wars for good and sufficient reasons.

The question of American intervention was more complicated, in no small measure because Israel itself wanted no part of U.S. military action on its behalf. The Left taboo against American interventions had prospered on the confident surety that any decisive response by Washington to a political crisis was likely to be at the service of some landlord class or army junta. The refusal of the U.S. to act against the blockade of Eilat should tend, of course, to confirm this conviction. But in mid-May, the situation was such that an intervention at the Gulf might have averted a war and, ironically, brought down upon this country hardly more ire than its non-intervention. Moreover, as radicals had been saying whenever America sought to isolate a country by sea, a blockade was an act

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of war not only against the country blockaded but against all who wished to trade with it—that is, an act against the world's peace. Some critics of the Vietnam war saw this instantly and lent their names to statements appealing for American action, eliciting from both Mr. Johnson's friend John Roche and from William Buckley their characteristically impudent humor.

In the aftermath, it was only natural that there should be some vigorous rethinking of attitudes. Some would recall, for example, that H. Stuart Hughes, the first and most distinguished peace candidate, had, in *An Approach to Peace* (1962), delineated criteria according to which it would be a radical's imperative to support intervention in defense of certain countries. Israel clearly fit these criteria in almost every way, surely as much as Republican Spain had. Nor would there be any need, for those able to see the difference between Israel and Vietnam, to take refuge in fatuities like Arthur Schlesinger's statement: "I think it inconsistent to favor unilateral intervention in one part of the world when I'm already opposed to unilateral intervention in another..." In any case, if radicals sought sanctions against Rhodesia or South Africa, then sanctions against a belligerent Egypt or support for a threatened Israel also made sense. As to the plenary isolationism of recent fashion, it will doubtless no longer have the easy appeal it had when only reactionary forces could be conceived of as a beneficiary of American power.

One's moral bona fides as a leftist has come to depend these days on some species of withdrawal position on Vietnam and a corresponding contempt for the more equivocating and politic approaches. If, after all, the war in Vietnam is viewed as an utterly indefensible enterprise, a crime against Vietnamese and Americans alike, then bombing pause stratagems are rightly seen as diversions from real issues. And even if the Left has been unduly rigid and exclusionary on this score, at least it cannot be taxed for lack of clarity. Those of us in the radical community, then, for whom Israel's rights are on the same moral plane as the rights of the Vietnamese, have drawn a kind of moral cut-off line on this issue; other radicals cannot deny or reasonably plead against it in the name of unity. For certain anti-Israel positions cast a shadow over the intellectual probity and political responsibility of men and movements which had commanded serious attention and strong loyalties as a result of their early and forthright stand against the war in Vietnam.

In general, it appears that the Left is still reluctant to face up to Russian mischief in the world. From the old and quasi-official party-liners, one has of course come to expect portrayals of the Soviet Union in colors similar to those Dean Rusk reserves for the United States. *New World Review*, a doctrinaire little monthly, did not disappoint these expectations in its analysis of the crisis, and the *National Guardian* was sensitive enough to the same expectations to omit from its coverage of the UN proceedings the more embarrassing aspects of Premier Kosygin's diplomacy. As part of the same syndrome comes a facile anti-Americanism. Thus Sidney Lens—echoing a widespread notion in the peace

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movement—asserts in a lead editorial in the June *Liberation* that he would not dismiss the possibility that Johnson sent planes to bomb Jordan or Egypt. This lie was subsequently to be disavowed by Hussein himself, but its falsity should have been obvious even in June from the behavior of the Johnson administration, which not only sought to keep Israel from military action, but was anxious to force a settlement of the Gulf dispute that would derogate Israeli sovereignty.

PERHAPS the most blatant (and influential) example of the tendency to shy away from a confrontation with Russia's inflammatory role in the Middle East can be found in I.F. Stone's ample writings on the Israel-Arab dispute—in several issues of his *Weekly*, in a long article in the *New York Review of Books* of August 3, and in a rambling essay in the July *Ramparts*, which according to the cheap coinage of its editor was nothing less than brilliant. A justification of the reluctance to judge Soviet behavior that one often encounters on the Left is that there is already too much criticism of the USSR from other segments of the population. In judging Arab behavior, Mr. Stone is motivated by analogous considerations. "I feel honor bound," he explained in the *New York Review*, "to report the Arab side, especially since the U.S. press is so overwhelmingly pro-Zionist." In the service of "honor," then, he purges the anti-Zionist case of its usual vitriol, obfuscates it a bit, and makes it his own. One would think that a writer's compulsion would be to tell the truth, regardless of whether it has been aired or not. But as Marie Syrkin conclusively demonstrates in the current *Midstream*, Mr. Stone has, at least in dealing with the origins of the refugee problem, already shown that he is hardly a reliable guide. For if what he now argues on the testimony of others about a coerced Arab exodus is correct, then his own *first-hand account* of 1948 to the contrary must be wrong—or vice versa. His sleight-of-hand in the present discussion is in any event none too deft. Basing his contentions on British and U.S. monitoring records, he insists that there were no Arab radio appeals in 1948 to the Palestine Arabs that they leave their homes; yet it is he and no one else who has tried to create the impression that the case for Arab instigation of the exodus rests solely on the radio. Nonetheless, one is pleased to find that there are some official documents from the West which Mr. Stone does choose to believe.

The significance for the Left of Mr. Stone's apostasy cannot be overestimated. It may even be more important than the shift in attitudes of the Soviet government. Mr. Stone is widely thought of as an independent journalist,\* and his coverage of the Vietnam war (particularly his refutation of the State Department White Paper of 1965) has given the peace movement much of its bearings. Apparently, however, there is wide distress at Mr. Stone's inability to weigh the divergent claims of Arab and Israeli fairly. Quite understandably has he been "shocking many readers," as he reported on July 3, presumably to demonstrate his

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\* See, for example, my review of his *The Haunted Decade* in *Dissent*, Summer 1964.

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courage yet again. He has shocked them by discerning a “cheerfully cynical” trend toward chauvinism and militarism in Israel which, he thinks, will turn that country “into an Ishmael...a minuscule Prussia...a new Wild West.” (The Newark activist Tom Hayden, only verbally less restrained, conjures up a Jewish Fascism; Lens evokes an expansionism, its heart set on Damascus and Cairo; the less imaginative refrain is about an Israeli Sparta.) Now given the entreaties of Mr. Stone and his friends all these years for us to realize that this Communist government or that Third World despotism is dictatorial or belligerent or both largely because of the hostility of its neighbors, are we not entitled to expect a like tolerance for Israel? Actually, however, no such tolerance would be appropriate here since the facts are not as Mr. Stone et al describe them. It is an old axiom that when there are enemies at the gates, there is terror in the cities. Yet in an Israel besieged by implacable foes for two decades, hampered in its trade, and harassed by virtually continuous violence on its borders, nothing like the garrison state of Mr. Stone’s imaginings has come to pass. Even during the Six-Day War, the treatment of Israel’s Arabs was almost unexceptionable. Moreover, internal democracy is as secure there now as ever before in the country’s history. Leftists might be interested in noting, for example, that Israel alone in the Middle East has a functioning Communist politics with representation in the Knesset—and with two Communist parties at that. It seems that the Left, so patient with the political grotesqueries of its favored nations, would only be satisfied with an absolutely unflawed Israel, which would mean also an Israel willing to surrender its national existence. The abuse which Israel has long suffered for its fast receding and always limited theocratic aspects is reflective of how inordinately and obsessively critical have been those who have decided to be critical.

**O**F LATE, the fixation has shifted from theocracy to General Dayan and the Israeli military. Mr. Stone, in line with this shift, is concerned to protect Israel’s politicians from its generals, though he is favorably impressed by at least one of the latter. But it is a vulgar oversimplification to see Israeli politics in terms of a split along conventional dove-hawk lines between civilian and military. The more militant strategies were long kept at bay by military and politicians alike, undermined only by the Egyptian *casus belli* of mid-May and the international community’s indifference to it. Even now, Dayan’s authority is severely circumscribed, as the news reports amply show. And for all his Bonapartist posturings—which are by no means characteristic of his colleagues—neither his actions in war nor in troubled peace warrant the apprehensions they have created. Moslem authorities, as an instance, are probably much more secure in their rights and privileges dealing with Dayan’s Defense Ministry than they would be with Warhaftig’s Ministry of Religion. As for the war itself, we have the testimony of an observer attached to the *Ligue Internationale pour les Droits des Hommes*, confirmed by various Red Cross statements, about a scrupulously restrained military. (Parenthetically, all the wild figures of Arab military casualties have by now been scaled down. The *New*

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*York Times* of July 26 reported, for example, that Jordan lost no more than five hundred men, as opposed to the fifteen thousand or more charged by Amman earlier. Syria, to which, according to Paul Jacobs in an exceptionally uninformed report in *Ramparts*, the Israeli victory was “particularly punishing,” got off relatively unscathed.) All this makes the talk in left-wing circles about Israel’s “mad hawks” (David McReynolds in the *Village Voice* of June 29) simply vicious hyperbole.

Israel’s behavior in the aftermath of the war has also provoked much contention. But Martha Gellhorn, highly respected by radicals for her hard-hitting reports on the victims of the Vietnam war, has, in a series of articles in the *Manchester Guardian* of July 24, 25, and 26, systematically disposed of the most misleading misconceptions about civilian casualties, the refugees, and the administration of the West Bank. On these points, Mr. Stone betrays some very disconcerting research traits. In his *Weekly* of June 18, he quotes a London *Sunday Telegraph* dispatch testifying to a vague lack of compassion by the Israelis for the Arabs. Since Israel has failed to provide the world with the vengeful atrocities we have come to expect from victorious armies, the unavoidable callousness of war and its consequences are passed off by Mr. Stone as unmitigated horror. No doubt because it would subvert his tendentious argument, he does not refer to Colin Legum, faithfully and wisely cited for years on the Left for his judicious reporting from the Congo and elsewhere in Africa, who gives a detailed and rather different picture of Israeli behavior in several June numbers of the London *Observer*. That there is great suffering on Israel’s border no one would wish to deny, but surely humane radicals like Mr. Stone should not be willing to countenance the grim cynicism with which the Arab states, by their own admission, have exploited the refugees for political ends. Thus the United Arab Republic has conceded that it would not allow the settlement of refugees in Arab lands since that would end the Palestine problem.\* A more “honor bound” I.F. Stone would not have been inclined to lay the entire blame for the refugee problem on Israel. At the very least, the cruelty of the Arab governments should have cost them his sympathies as a radical.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Stone has the temerity to insist that on these issues he writes, not as a radical, but as a Jew, and he carries this presumption very far. In his article in the *New York Review*, Mr. Stone especially commends the contribution of another Jew, Maxime Rodinson, to the *Les Temps Modernes* symposium on the Arab–Israeli conflict. Stone for some mysterious reason fails to identify Rodinson as a relatively doctrinaire Marxist,\*\* but he does say that Rodinson is “too much the humanist...and no

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\* See, for example, Information Department, U.A.R., *The Problem of the Palestinian Refugees* (Cairo 1962), pp. 92–93.

\*\* See his *Islam et Capitalisme* (Paris 1966), as well as his earlier evaluation of Nasserism in the April 1963 *Les Temps Modernes*.<sup>6</sup> “Israel and World Politics,” August 1967.

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doubt the Jew to welcome an apocalyptic solution at the expense of Israel's existence." Too much the Jew indeed! In context, it appears rather that, being a Jew, Rodinson gives proof of his humanism to Mr. Stone by lending "strong support to every basic Arab historical contention." Stone, the old Zionist, is now possessed by a curious nostalgia for the Jew "with a sense of mission as a Witness in the human wilderness." One wonders by what right he presumes to tell the survivors of the camps, the children of the European ghettos, the escapees from the barrios of the Arab world that they should continue to bear Witness? Perhaps Mr. Stone will now counsel our mutual friends in the black freedom movement to content themselves with bearing Witness to the world's injustice.

A paradoxical dialectic is at work here, urging a universalism justifiable only on the most parochial grounds. (One is reminded of the anguished indictment of God by Reb Levi Itzhak of Berdichev, dissatisfied with the conditions of his people's chosenness: "What do you have against Your people, Israel? / Why do You afflict Your people, Israel? / ... There must be an end to this / The exile must come to an end!") The house of Israel must be the first people which, having won a war, should behave as if it were the loser. As metaphysics this may appeal to some temperaments; as politics in the real world, especially given the apparently inveterate irrationality of Arab leadership, it is dangerous cant.

WHERE STONE is the *éminence grise* of American radicalism, *Ramparts* is its brash young voice. The magazine's dynamic editor, Warren Hinckle, has an intuitive feel for what he calls the "flippy." Now flippiness has its merits, particularly if one is intent on stirring up cauldrons. But it also entails a sacrifice of intellectual rigor. As it happens, moreover, the flippy style coincides nicely with Mr. Hinckle's ideological predispositions. Having discovered anti-anti-Communism, he is now unable to perceive any justice or reason in American opposition to the expansion of Soviet power in the Middle East, though the July *Ramparts* wanly concedes that Russian motives were not of the most salutary in the recent crisis.

Big media journalists are notoriously lax on the matter of expertise, but surely no more on the Right than on the Left. (One astute observer, very sympathetic to the anti-Israel case, has noted the paucity of hard facts to back it up.) Because Paul Jacobs had visited Israel on several occasions and also meets the requirements of flippiness as a writer, he was chosen to provide *Ramparts* with its report on the sources of the crisis. Not surprisingly, his brisk romp through the record weighted the scales against Israel, with the help of numerous distortions and omissions. In discussing 1956, for example, he says that "Israel had made no public outcry about [the nationalization of] the canal," suggesting that she had no interests in it; he fails to inform the reader that Israel's relative silence on this matter was a consequence of the fact that her rights of passage had been continuously violated even when British troops had occupied the zone, under Labor and Conservative governments, and in defiance of a United Nations Resolution of 1951. On

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the intrusion of the cold war into the area, Jacobs insinuates that Ben Gurion pushed Israel into the Western bloc; but he neglects to mention that before the die of Soviet–Israeli hostilities was cast, Israel had voted, despite the unmistakable displeasure of the United States, to seat Peking at the UN, for the complete independence of Libya, along with the Communist countries against a call for free elections throughout the Germanies, and in support of many measures aimed against the Union of South Africa. Nor does he point to the connection between the rupture of diplomatic relations with Moscow in February 1953 and Stalin’s demented anti-Semitic campaigns. Most objectionable, finally, are Jacobs’s stray remarks, echoed by Stone, on Israeli socialism, for whose spirit and concrete achievements he totally lacks any feel. Is it too much to hope that radicals who see more of socialism in Nasser’s rhetoric than in Israel’s kibbutzim and moshavim, will one day come to their senses and recognize the realities for what they are? (A reading of Georges Friedmann’s judicious and probing *The End of the Jewish People?* might help.)

And why weight the moral scales against Israel? The motives of the Russians are clear enough. Having, through the establishment of the state of Israel, helped create a perpetual thorn in the flesh of American diplomacy toward the Arabs, and having dislodged Great Britain from Palestine, the Soviet Union is now free to employ any methods in courting the Arab world. But it has a good deal to overcome. Theodore Draper has, in his masterful study in these pages,\* somewhat understated the responsibility of the USSR for the birth of Israel. When the United States faltered in its support of partition, even on the very day of Israel’s independence, when it wanted to retreat to still another plan of trusteeship or diminution of territory, the Soviet Union was unflinching in its support of the Israeli cause. And, most important, at decisive moments in the military struggle, Russia made available to Israel the arms which turned the tide of battle against the Arabs. Thus, to allay Arab resentment over the past, the Russian strategy must now be built on excess. The requirements of ideology are no less demanding.

**T**HE NEW LEFT’S ENCHANTMENT with the Third World will prove as costly as was its old enchantment with the second, for the erection of double standards inevitably leads to a corruption of the moral sense no less than the political. Stone, for example, can write: “The precedent of the cease-fire resolution at the UN is a most disturbing one. It accepts preventive war and allows the country which launched it to keep the fruits of aggression as a bargaining card.” Quite apart from sharing the peculiar American fixation with who fires the first shot,\*\* Stone here entirely ignores what even U Thant has conceded—that Egypt set off the events which led to the present conflagra-

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\* “Israel and World Politics,” August 1967.

\*\* See Robert W. Tucker, *The Just War* (Baltimore 1960).

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tion. Should Israel not have fought for its rights? Should it have risked the bombing of its population centers and not have thrust through the desolate Sinai? Should it, upon victory, have retreated without guarantees?

Stone, of course, shrinks from this political medusa. But only because he seems unwilling as yet to tell us how far he would have Israel go in appeasing the voracious revanchism of the Arab world. In discussing this world, Stone has already given many signs of just how discriminating he is prepared to be. "It is Nasser," he says, "who represents the future and who can create the internal stability so necessary to peace." On what evidence? The fact that Algeria's Boumedienne more threateningly cries for justice to the last drop of non-Algerian blood? Robert Scheer, the Managing Editor of *Ramparts* and a 1964 peace candidate for Congress, is more specifically credulous. According to his on-the-scene report from Cairo, "Nasser was sincere in his resignation and acceptance of responsibility for his defeat." As for Nasser's resignation, Mr. Scheer's certainty must raise some questions. As for the dictator's acceptance of responsibility for the defeat, one wonders why he punitively sacked so many of his officers. Scheer goes on to write that "the notion of exporting revolution to the other Arab countries was abandoned with the secession of Syria in the early 60s..." Not a word about Yemen!

For the November issue of his magazine, Scheer has written what must be the most carefully selective and skewed history of the conflict to come from any source save possibly the propaganda machines of the respective parties. And while he occasionally takes note of Nasser's calculating politics, he settles the burden of tragic events squarely on Israel. Indeed, Israel is seen almost as an unmoved mover. A mere speech by one of its officials is enough, in this reading, to paralyze Nasser in his quest for peace, and indeed to foreclose on the possibilities of revolutionary socialism itself.

**B**Y THE TIME the American Left met as a corporate body in Chicago over Labor Day, the orthodoxy was securely entrenched. (A handful of Hashomer Hatzair members were to be seen wandering about, dazed by the antics of past allies.) Those who in other ages might have quoted Scripture now had recourse to I.F. Stone. The more sophisticated cited the last contribution of Isaac Deutscher in this vale, an interview in the July-August *New Left Review* in which the traditional intellectual pyrotechnics reduces the Israel-Arab conflict to a struggle between reactionary and progressive nationalisms. The Black Caucus had no patience for such refinements. The fifth of its thirteen resolutions, all submitted as one unit and voted on as such, condemned "the imperialistic Zionist war." Scheer took exception to that one, saying, however, that he accepted the others, including: (1) an attack on the convention steering committee of which he was a member for rigging the gathering against black people; (2) a call for the establishment of "white civilizing committees to civilize and humanize the savage and beastlike character that runs rampant throughout America..."; and (3) support for the

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(unenumerated) resolutions of the Newark Black Power Conference (which inter alia denounced birth control). It was a perfect setting for someone of Scheer's considerable talents as a trimmer. But even his transparent maneuver in offering an alternative on the question of Israel, which he assured his hearers was the Egyptian position, did not satisfy the crowd, now so enthusiastically engaged in what Kenneth Rexroth has called "Crow Jimism." Those who could not deny disagreement with at least the Israel resolution, but who voted for them all nonetheless, evoked the image of the Jews in the *Narodnaya Volya* welcoming the pogroms in 1881 as rehearsals for revolution. After the convention had handed over 50 percent of its votes to an unknown number of unidentified Negroes, the phraseology was quietly changed to a condemnation of the Israeli government's aggression. The *New Politics* had not even the courage of its perversity.

**B**UT ISRAEL FORTUNATELY HAS NOTHING TO FEAR—and had precious little to gain—from what the radical movement in its *Walpurgisnacht* of abasement did or said. Even the smallest and newest Third World country could affect her destiny more. This Third World which she has been said to have alienated is not, however, as monolithic as its partisans on the American Left seem to think. In the United Nations, roughly half of Africa, including the relatively creative governments of Ghana and Kenya, failed to go along with the chorus of condemnation against Israel. Of those that voted for the Yugoslav resolution, Tanzania did so with a visible lack of relish and the Congo (Kinshasa) at least with one eye on the extradition proceedings in Algeria against Tshombe. Among the world's "progressives" could be counted the governments of Spain, Greece, Indonesia, and Nigeria—the latter now waging with the assistance of the Russians a truly cruel war against the Ibo state of Biafra.

The attitude of so many on the Left toward Israel and the Arab world has brought a welcome end of innocence to many other American radicals who will from now on be somewhat more skeptical of all the nostrums of the *enragés* which have been so readily and thoughtlessly accepted—as the desperation bred by the war and the riots in our cities intensifies. It remains to be seen whether out of the intellectual and moral debacle of these past months, a sensible movement with sensible perspectives for peace and human rights can at last emerge. 🍷

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# Jerusalem and Athens: Some Introductory Reflections

By Leo Strauss

## I. The Beginning of the Bible and Its Greek Counterparts

**A**LL THE HOPES that we entertain in the midst of the confusion and dangers of the present are founded, positively or negatively, directly or indirectly, on the experiences of the past. Of these experiences, the broadest and deepest—so far as Western man is concerned—are indicated by the names of two cities: Jerusalem and Athens. Western man became what he is, and is what he is, through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought. In order to understand ourselves and to illuminate our trackless way into the future, we must understand Jerusalem and Athens. It goes without saying that this is a task whose proper performance goes much beyond my power; but we cannot define our tasks by our powers, for our powers become known to us

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LEO STRAUSS *was a German-born American political philosopher, classicist, and professor of political science. He held the Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professorship at the University of Chicago. The present essay was adapted from two lectures inaugurating the Frank Cohen Lectures in Judaic Affairs at the City College of New York.*

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through the performance of our tasks, and it is better to fail nobly than to succeed basely.

The objects to which we refer when we speak of Jerusalem and Athens are understood today, by the science devoted to such objects, as cultures; “culture” is meant to be a scientific concept. According to this concept there is an indefinitely large number of cultures:  $n$  cultures. The scientist who studies them beholds them as objects; as scientist, he stands outside all of them; he has no preference for any of them; he is not only impartial but objective; he is anxious not to distort any of them; in speaking about them he avoids any “culture-bound” concepts—i.e., concepts bound to any particular culture or kind of culture. In many cases the objects studied by the scientist of culture do or did not know that they are or were cultures. This causes no difficulty for him: Electrons also do not know that they are electrons; even dogs do not know that they are dogs. By the mere fact that he speaks of his objects as cultures, the scientific student takes it for granted that he understands the people whom he studies better than they understood or understand themselves.

This whole approach has been questioned for some time, but the questioning does not seem to have had any effect on the scientists. The man who started the questioning was Nietzsche. We have said that according to the prevailing view there were or are  $n$  cultures. Let us say there were or are 1,001 cultures, thus reminding ourselves of the *1,001 Arabian Nights*; the account of the cultures, if it is well done, will be a series of exciting stories, perhaps of tragedies. Accordingly, Nietzsche speaks of our subject in a speech by his Zarathustra that is entitled “Of 1,000 Goals and One.” The Hebrews and the Greeks appear in this speech as two among a number of nations, not superior to the two others that are mentioned or to the 996 that are not. The peculiarity of the Greeks, according to Nietzsche, is the full dedication of the individual to the contest for excellence, distinction, supremacy. The peculiarity of the Hebrews is the utmost honoring of father and mother. Nietzsche’s reverence for the sacred tables of the Hebrews, as well as for those of the other nations in question, is deeper than that of any other beholder. Yet since he too is only a beholder of these tables, since what one table commends or commands is incompatible with what others command, he himself is not subject to the commandments of any. This is true also and especially of the tables, or “values,” of modern Western culture. But according to him, all scientific concepts, and hence in particular the concept of culture, are culture-bound; the concept of culture is an outgrowth of 19th-century Western culture; its application to the “cultures” of other ages and climates is an act stemming from the spiritual imperialism of that particular culture. There is, then, for Nietzsche, a glaring contradiction between the claimed objectivity of the science of cultures and the subjectivity of that science. To state the case differently, one cannot behold—i.e., truly understand—any culture unless one is firmly rooted in one’s own culture or unless one belongs, in one’s capacity as a beholder, to some culture. But if the universality of the beholding of all cultures is to be preserved, the culture to which

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the beholder of all cultures belongs must be the universal culture, the culture of mankind, the world culture; the universality of beholding presupposes, if only by anticipating, the universal culture which is no longer one culture among many. Nietzsche sought therefore for a culture that would no longer be particular and hence in the last analysis arbitrary. The single goal of mankind is conceived by him as in a sense super-human: He speaks of the super-man of the future. The super-man is meant to unite in himself, on the highest level, both Jerusalem and Athens.

However much the science of all cultures may protest its innocence of all preferences or evaluations, it fosters a specific moral posture. Since it requires openness to all cultures, it fosters universal tolerance and the exhilaration which derives from the beholding of diversity; it necessarily affects all cultures that it can still affect by contributing to their transformation in one and the same direction; it willy-nilly brings about a shift of emphasis from the particular to the universal. By asserting, if only implicitly, the rightness of pluralism, it asserts that pluralism is *the* right way; it asserts the monism of universal tolerance and respect for diversity; for by virtue of being an “-ism,” pluralism is a monism.

One remains somewhat closer to the science of culture as it is commonly practiced if one limits oneself to saying that every attempt to understand the phenomena in question remains dependent upon a conceptual framework that is alien to most of these phenomena and therefore necessarily distorts them. “Objectivity” can be expected only if one attempts to understand the various cultures or peoples exactly as they understand or understood themselves. Men of ages and climates other than our own did not understand themselves in terms of cultures because they were not concerned with culture in the present-day meaning of the term. What we now call culture is the accidental result of concerns that were not concerns with culture but with other things—above all with the Truth.

**Y**ET OUR INTENTION to speak of Jerusalem and Athens seems to compel us to go beyond the self-understanding of either. Or is there a notion, a word that points to the highest that both the Bible and the greatest works of the Greeks claim to convey? There is such a word: wisdom. Not only the Greek philosophers but the Greek poets as well were considered to be wise men, and the Torah is said, in the Torah, to be “your wisdom in the eyes of the nations.” We, then, must try to understand the difference between biblical wisdom and Greek wisdom. We see at once that each of the two claims to be the true wisdom, thus denying to the other its claim to be wisdom in the strict and highest sense. According to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to the Greek philosophers, the beginning of wisdom is wonder. We are thus compelled from the very beginning to make a choice, to take a stand. Where then do we stand? Confronted by the incompatible claims of Jerusalem and Athens, we are open to both and willing to listen to each. We ourselves are not wise but we wish to become wise. We are seekers for wisdom, “philo-sophoi.” Yet since we say that we wish to hear first and

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then to act or to decide, we have already decided in favor of Athens against Jerusalem.

This, indeed, seems to be the necessary position for all of us who cannot be Orthodox and therefore must accept the principle of the historical-critical study of the Bible. The Bible was traditionally understood to be the true and authentic account of the deeds of God and men from the beginning till the restoration after the Babylonian exile. The deeds of God include His legislation as well as His inspirations to the prophets, and the deeds of men include their praises of God and their prayers to Him as well as their God-inspired admonitions. Biblical criticism starts from the observation that the biblical account is in important respects not authentic but derivative or consists not of “histories” but of “memories of ancient histories,” to borrow a Machiavellian expression. Biblical criticism reached its first climax in Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*, which is frankly anti-theological; Spinoza read the Bible as he read the Talmud and the Koran. The result of his criticism can be summarized as follows: The Bible consists to a considerable extent of self-contradictory assertions, of remnants of ancient prejudices or superstitions, and of the outpourings of an uncontrolled imagination; in addition, it is poorly compiled and poorly preserved. He arrived at this conclusion by presupposing the impossibility of miracles. The considerable differences between 19th- and 20th-century biblical criticism and that of Spinoza can be traced to their difference in regard to the evaluation of imagination: Whereas for Spinoza imagination is simply sub-rational, it was assigned a much higher rank in later times when it was understood as the vehicle of religious or spiritual experience, which necessarily expresses itself in symbols and the like. The historical-critical study of the Bible is the attempt to understand the various layers of the Bible as they were understood by their immediate addressees, i.e., the contemporaries of its authors. Of course, the Bible speaks of many things—for instance, the creation of the world—that for the biblical authors themselves belong to the remote past. But there is undoubtedly much history in the Bible—accounts of events written by contemporaries or near-contemporaries. One is thus led to say that the Bible contains both “myth” and “history.” Yet this distinction is alien to the Bible; it is a special form of the Greek distinction between mythos and logos. From the point of view of the Bible, the “myths” are as true as the “histories”: what Israel “in fact” did or suffered cannot be understood except in the light of the “facts” of Creation and Election. What is now called “historical” are those deeds and speeches that are equally accessible to the believer and to the unbeliever. But from the point of view of the Bible, the unbeliever is the fool who has said in his heart “there is no God”; the Bible narrates everything as it is credible to the wise in the biblical sense of wisdom. Let us never forget that there is no biblical word for doubt. The biblical signs and wonders convince men who have little faith or who believe in other gods; they are not addressed to “the fools who say in their hearts ‘there is no God.’”

It is true that we cannot ascribe to the Bible the theological concept of miracles, for that concept presupposes the concept of nature, and the concept of nature is foreign to the Bible. One is, however, tempted to ascribe to the Bible what one may call the poetic concept of miracles as illustrated by Psalm 114:

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LEO STRAUSS

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange tongue, Judah became his sanctuary and Israel his dominion. The sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. What ails thee, sea, that thou fleest, thou Jordan that thou turnst back? Ye mountains that ye skip like rams, ye hills like lambs? From the presence of the Lord tremble thou earth, from the presence of the God of Jacob who turns the rock into a pond of water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

The presence of God calls forth from His creatures a conduct that differs strikingly from their ordinary conduct: it enlivens the lifeless; it makes fluid the fixed. It is not easy to say whether the author of the psalm did not mean his utterance to be simply or literally true. It is easy to say that the concept of poetry—as distinguished from that of song—is foreign to the Bible. It is perhaps more simple to say that owing to the victory of science over natural theology the impossibility of miracles can no longer be said to be established but has degenerated to the status of an undemonstrable hypothesis. One may trace to the hypothetical character of this fundamental premise the hypothetical character of many, not to say all, results of biblical criticism. Certain it is that biblical criticism in all its forms makes use of terms having no biblical equivalents and is to this extent unhistorical.

**H**OW THEN must we proceed? We shall not take issue with the findings or even the premises of biblical criticism. Let us grant that the Bible and in particular the Torah consists to a considerable extent of “memories of ancient histories,” even of memories of memories. But memories of memories are not necessarily distorted or pale reflections of the original; they may be recollections of recollections, deepenings through meditation of the primary experience. We shall therefore take the latest and uppermost layer as seriously as the earlier ones. We shall start from the uppermost layer—from what is first for us, even though it may not be simply the first. We shall start, that is, where both the traditional and the historical study of the Bible necessarily start. In thus proceeding we avoid the compulsion to make an advance decision in favor of Athens against Jerusalem. For the Bible does not require us to believe in the miraculous character of events that the Bible does not present as miraculous. God’s speaking to men may be described as miraculous, but the Bible does not claim that the putting-together of those speeches was done miraculously. We begin at the beginning, at the beginning of the beginning. The beginning of the beginning happens to deal with the beginning: the creation of heaven and earth. The Bible begins reasonably.

**‘I**N THE BEGINNING God created heaven and earth.” Who says this? We are not told; hence we do not know. We have no right to assume that God said it, for the Bible introduces God’s sayings by expressions like “God said.” We shall then assume that

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the words were spoken by a nameless man. Yet no man can have been an eyewitness of God's creating heaven and earth; the only eyewitness was God. Since "There did not arise in Israel a prophet like Moses whom the Lord saw face to face," it is understandable that tradition ascribed to Moses the sentence quoted and its whole sequel. But what is understandable or plausible is not as such certain. The narrator does not claim to have heard the account from God; perhaps he heard it from some man or men; perhaps he is retelling a tale. The Bible continues: "And the earth was unformed and void...." It is not clear whether the earth thus described was created by God or antedated His creation. But it is quite clear that while speaking about how the earth looked at first, the Bible is silent about how heaven looked at first. The earth, i.e., that which is not heaven, seems to be more important than heaven. This impression is confirmed by the sequel.

God created everything in six days. On the first day He created light; on the second, heaven; on the third, the earth, the seas, and vegetation; on the fourth, the sun, the moon, and the stars; on the fifth, the water animals and the birds; and on the sixth, the land animals and man. The most striking difficulties are these: light and hence day (and nights) are presented as preceding the sun, and vegetation is presented as preceding the sun. The first difficulty is disposed of by the observation that creation-days are not sun-days. One must add at once, however, that there is a connection between the two kinds of days, for there is a connection, a correspondence between light and sun. The account of creation manifestly consists of two parts, the first part dealing with the first three creation-days and the second part dealing with the last three. The first part begins with the creation of light and the second with the creation of the heavenly light-givers. Correspondingly, the first part ends with the creation of vegetation and the second with the creation of man. All creatures dealt with in the first part lack local motion; all creatures dealt with in the second part possess local motion.<sup>1</sup> Vegetation precedes the sun because vegetation lacks local motion and the sun possesses it. Vegetation belongs to the earth; it is rooted in the earth; it is the fixed covering of the fixed earth.<sup>2</sup> Vegetation was brought forth by the earth at God's command; the Bible does not speak of God's "making" vegetation; but as regards the living beings in question, God commanded the earth to bring them forth and yet God "made" them. Vegetation was created at the end of the first half of the creation-days; at the end of the last half, the living beings that spend their whole lives on the firm earth were created. The living beings—beings that possess life in addition to local motion—were created on the fifth and sixth days, on the days following the day on which the heavenly light-givers were created. The Bible presents the creatures in an ascending order. Heaven is lower than earth. The heavenly light-givers lack life; they are lower than the lowliest living beast; they serve the living creatures, which are to be found only beneath heaven; they have been created in order to rule over day and night: They have not been made in order to rule over the earth, let alone over man.

The most striking characteristic of the biblical account of creation is its demoting

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or degrading of heaven and the heavenly lights. Sun, moon, and stars precede the living things because they are lifeless: They are not gods. What the heavenly lights lose, man gains; man is the peak of creation. The creatures of the first three days cannot change their places; the heavenly bodies change their places but not their courses; the living beings change their courses but not their "ways"; men alone can change their "ways." Man is the only being created in God's image. Only in the case of man's creation does the biblical account of creation repeatedly speak of God's "creating" him; in the case of the creation of heaven and the heavenly bodies, that account speaks of God's "making" them. Similarly, only in the case of man's creation does the Bible intimate that there is a multiplicity in God: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Bisexuality is not a preserve of man, but only man's bisexuality could give rise to the view that there are gods and goddesses: There is no biblical word for "goddess." Hence creation is not begetting. The biblical account of creation teaches silently what the Bible teaches elsewhere explicitly: There is only one God, the God whose name is written as the Tetragrammaton, the living God Who lives from ever to ever, Who alone has created heaven and earth and all their hosts; He has not created any gods and hence there are no gods besides Him. The many gods whom men worship are either nothings that owe such being as they possess to man's making them, or if they are something (like sun, moon, and stars), they surely are not gods.<sup>3</sup> All non-polemical references to "other gods" occurring in the Bible are fossils whose preservation indeed poses a question but only a rather unimportant one. Not only did the biblical God not create any gods; on the basis of the biblical account of creation, one could doubt whether He created any beings one would be compelled to call "mythical": Heaven and earth and all their hosts are always accessible to man as man. One would have to start from this fact in order to understand why the Bible contains so many sections that, on the basis of the distinction between mythical (or legendary) and historical, would have to be described as historical.

**A**CCORDING TO THE BIBLE, creation was completed by, and culminated in, the creation of man. Only after the creation of man did God "see all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." What then is the origin of the evil or the bad? The biblical answer seems to be that since everything of divine origin is good, evil is of human origin. Yet if God's creation as a whole is very good, it does not follow that all its parts are good or that creation as a whole contains no evil whatsoever: God did not find all parts of His creation to be good. Perhaps creation as a whole cannot be "very good" if it does not contain some evils. There cannot be light if there is not darkness, and the darkness is as much created as is the light: God creates evil as well as He makes peace (Isaiah 45:7). However this may be, the evils whose origin the Bible lays bare, after it has spoken of creation, are a particular kind of evils: the evils that beset man. Those evils

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are not due to creation or implicit in it, as the Bible shows by setting forth man's original condition. In order to set forth that condition, the Bible must retell man's creation by making man's creation as much as possible the sole theme. This second account answers the question, not of how heaven and earth and all their hosts have come into being but of how human life as we know it—beset with evils with which it was not beset originally—has come into being. This second account may only supplement the first account but it may also correct it and thus contradict it. After all, the Bible never teaches that one can speak about creation without contradicting oneself. In post-biblical parlance, the mysteries of the Torah (*sithre torah*) are the contradictions of the Torah; the mysteries of God are the contradictions regarding God.

**T**HE FIRST account of creation ended with man; the second account begins with man. According to the first account, God created man and only man in His image; according to the second account, God formed man from the dust of the earth and He blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The second account makes clear that man consists of two profoundly different ingredients, a high one and a low one. According to the first account, it would seem that man and woman were created simultaneously; according to the second account, man was created first. The life of man as we know it, the life of most men, is that of tillers of the soil; their life is needy and harsh. If human life had been needy and harsh from the very beginning, man would have been compelled or at least almost irresistibly tempted to be harsh, uncharitable, unjust; he would not have been fully responsible for his lack of charity or justice. But man is to be fully responsible. Hence the harshness of human life must be due to man's fault. His original condition must have been one of ease: He was not in need of rain nor of hard work; he was put by God into a well-watered garden that was rich in trees that were good for food. Yet while man was created for a life of ease, he was not created for a life of luxury: There was no gold or precious stones in the garden of Eden. Man was created for a simple life. Accordingly, God permitted him to eat of every tree of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." Man was not denied knowledge; without knowledge he could not have known the tree of knowledge, nor the woman, nor the brutes; nor could he have understood the prohibition. Man was denied knowledge of good and evil, i.e., the knowledge sufficient for guiding himself, his life. Though not being a child, he was to live in childlike simplicity and obedience to God. We are free to surmise that there is a connection between the demotion of heaven in the first account and the prohibition against eating of the tree of knowledge in the second. While man was forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge, he was not forbidden to eat of the tree of life.

Man, lacking knowledge of good and evil, was content with his condition and in particular with his loneliness. But God, possessing knowledge of good and evil, found

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that “it is not good for man to be alone, so I will make him a helper as his counterpart.” So God formed the brutes and brought them to man, but they proved not to be the desired helpers. Thereupon God formed the woman out of a rib of the man. The man welcomed her as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh but, lacking knowledge of good and evil, he did not call her good. The narrator adds that “therefore [namely because the woman is bone of man’s bone and flesh of his flesh] a man leaves his father and his mother, and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Both were naked but, lacking knowledge of good and evil, they were not ashamed.

Thus the stage was set for the fall of our first parents. The first move came from the serpent, the most cunning of all the beasts of the field; it seduced the woman into disobedience and then the woman seduced the man. The seduction moves from the lowest to the highest. The Bible does not tell what induced the serpent to seduce the woman into disobeying the divine prohibition. It is reasonable to assume that the serpent acted as it did because it was cunning, i.e., possessed a low kind of wisdom, a congenital malice; everything that God had created would not be very good if it did not include something congenitally bent on mischief. The serpent begins its seduction by suggesting that God might have forbidden man and woman to eat of any tree in the garden, i.e., that God’s prohibition might be malicious or impossible to comply with. The woman corrects the serpent and in so doing makes the prohibition more stringent than it was: “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden; it is only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: you shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.”

Now, God did not forbid the man to touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Besides, the woman does not explicitly speak of the tree of knowledge; she may have had in mind the tree of life. Moreover, God had issued the prohibition only to the man, whereas the woman claims that God had spoken to her as well; she surely knew the divine prohibition only through human tradition. The serpent assures her that they will not die, “for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The serpent tacitly questions God’s veracity. At the same time it glosses over the fact that eating of the tree involves disobedience to God. In this it is followed by the woman. According to the serpent’s assertion, knowledge of good and evil makes man immune to death (although we cannot know whether the serpent believes this). But the woman, having forgotten the divine prohibition, having therefore in a manner tasted of the tree of knowledge, is no longer wholly unaware of good and evil: she “saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise”; therefore she took of its fruit and ate. She thus made the fall of the man almost inevitable, for he was cleaving to her: she gave some of the fruit of the tree to the man, and he ate. The man drifts into disobedience by following the woman. After they had eaten of the tree, their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves

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aprons: through the fall they became ashamed of their nakedness; eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil made them realize that nakedness is evil.

**T**HE BIBLE SAYS NOTHING to the effect that our first parents fell because they were prompted by the desire to be like God; they did not rebel highhandedly against God; rather, they forgot to obey God; they drifted into disobedience. Nevertheless, God punished them severely. But the punishment did not do away with the fact that, as God Himself said, as a consequence of his disobedience “man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” There was now the danger that man might eat of the tree of life and live forever. Therefore God expelled him from the garden and made it impossible for him to return to it. One may wonder why man, while he was still in the garden of Eden, had not eaten of the tree of life of which he had not been forbidden to eat. Perhaps he did not think of it because, lacking knowledge of good and evil, he did not fear to die and, besides, the divine prohibition drew his attention away from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge.

The Bible intends to teach that man was meant to live in simplicity, without knowledge of good and evil. But the narrator seems to be aware of the fact that a being which can be forbidden to strive for knowledge of good and evil, i.e., that can understand to some degree that knowledge of good and evil is evil for it, necessarily possesses such knowledge. Human suffering from evil presupposes human knowledge of good and evil and vice versa. Man wishes to live without evil. The Bible tells us that he was given the opportunity to live without evil and that he cannot blame God for the evils from which he suffers. By giving man that opportunity, God convinces him that his deepest wish cannot be fulfilled. The story of the fall is the first part of the story of God’s education of man.

Man has to live with knowledge of good and evil and with the sufferings inflicted on him because of that knowledge or its acquisition. Human goodness or badness presupposes that knowledge and its concomitants. The Bible gives us the first inkling of human goodness and badness in the story of the first brothers. The older brother, Cain, was a tiller of the soil; the younger brother, Abel, a keeper of sheep. God preferred the offering of the keeper of sheep, who brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock, to that of the tiller of the soil. There were many reasons for this preference but one of them seems to be that the pastoral life is closer to original simplicity than the life of the tillers of the soil. Cain, however was vexed, and despite his having been warned by God against sinning in general, killed his brother. After a futile attempt to deny his guilt—an attempt that increased that guilt (“Am I my brother’s keeper?”)—he was cursed by God as the serpent and the soil had been after the Fall, in contradistinction to Adam and Eve who were not cursed. He was punished by God, but not with death: Anyone slaying Cain would be punished much more severely than Cain himself. The relatively mild punishment of Cain cannot be explained by the fact that murder had not been expressly forbid-

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den: Cain possessed some knowledge of good and evil, and he knew that Abel was his brother, even assuming that he did not know that man was created in the image of God. It is better to explain Cain's punishment by assuming that punishments were milder in the beginning than later on. Cain—like his fellow fratricide, Romulus—founded a city, and some of his descendants were the ancestors of men practicing various arts: The city and the arts, so alien to man's original simplicity, owe their origin to Cain and his race rather than to Seth, the substitute for Abel, and his race. It goes without saying that this is not the last word of the Bible on the city and the arts but it is its first word, just as the prohibition against eating of the tree of knowledge is, one may say, its first word simply, and the revelation of the Torah—i.e., the highest kind of knowledge of good and evil that is vouchsafed to men—is its last word. The account of the race of Cain culminates in the song of Lamech who boasted to his wives of his slaying of men, of his being superior to God as an avenger. The (antediluvian) race of Seth cannot boast of a single inventor; its only distinguished members were Enoch, who walked with God, and Noah, who was a righteous man and walked with God: Civilization and piety are two very different things.

By the time of Noah the wickedness of man had become so great that God repented of His creation of man and all other earthly creatures, Noah alone excepted; so He brought on the flood. Generally speaking, prior to the flood, man's lifespan was much longer than after it. Man's antediluvian longevity was a relic of his original condition. Man originally lived in the garden of Eden where he could have eaten of the tree of life and thus become immortal. The longevity of antediluvian man reflects this lost chance. To this extent the transition from antediluvian to postdiluvian man is a decline. This impression is confirmed by the fact that before the flood rather than after it the sons of God consorted with the daughters of man and thus generated the mighty men of old, the men of renown. On the other hand, the fall of our first parents made possible or necessary in due time God's revelation of His Torah, and this was decisively prepared, as we shall see, by the flood. In this respect, the transition from antediluvian to postdiluvian mankind is a progress. The ambiguity regarding the Fall—the fact that it was a sin and hence avoidable and that it was at the same time inevitable—is reflected in the ambiguity regarding the status of antediluvian mankind.

The link between antediluvian mankind and the revelation of the Torah is supplied by the first covenant between God and men, the covenant following the flood. The flood was the proper punishment for the extreme and well-nigh universal wickedness of antediluvian men. Prior to the flood, mankind lived, so to speak, without restraint, without law. While our first parents were still in the garden of Eden, they were not forbidden anything except to eat of the tree of knowledge. The vegetarianism of antediluvian men was not due to an explicit prohibition (Gen. 1:29); rather, their abstention from meat belongs together with their abstention from wine (cf. 9:20); both were relics of man's original simplicity. After the expulsion from the garden of Eden, God did not punish men, apart

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from the relatively mild punishment which He inflicted on Cain. Nor did He establish human judges. God experimented, as it were, for the instruction of mankind, with the possibility of mankind's living free of the law. The experiment, just like the experiment of having men remain like innocent children, ended in failure. Fallen or awake man needs restraint, must live under law. But this law must not be simply imposed. It must form part of a covenant in which God and man are equally, though not equal, partners. Such a partnership was established only after the flood; it did not exist in antediluvian times either before or after the fall.

**T**HE INEQUALITY regarding the covenant is shown especially by the fact that when God undertook never again to destroy almost all life on earth as long as the earth lasts, He did not do so on the condition that all or almost all men obey the laws promulgated by God after the flood: God makes His promise despite, or because of, His knowing that the devisings of man's heart are evil from his youth. Noah is the ancestor of all later men just as Adam was; the purgation of the earth through the flood is to some extent a restoration of mankind to its original state; it is a kind of second creation. Within the limits indicated, the condition of postdiluvian men is superior to that of antediluvian men. One point requires special emphasis: In the legislation following the flood, murder is expressly forbidden and made punishable by death on the ground that man was created in the image of God (9:6). The first covenant brought an increase in hope and at the same time an increase in punishment. Not until after the flood was man's rule over the beasts, ordained or established from the beginning, to be accompanied by the beasts' fear and dread of man (cf. 9:2 with 1:26-30 and 2:15).

The covenant following the flood prepares the covenant with Abraham. The Bible singles out three events that took place between the covenant after the flood and God's calling of Abraham: Noah's curse of Canaan, a son of Ham; the achievement of excellence by Nimrod, a grandson of Ham; and men's attempt to prevent their dispersal over the earth by building a city which had a tower that reached to the heavens. Canaan, whose land came to be the promised land, was cursed because Ham saw the nakedness of his father, Noah—because Ham transgressed a most sacred, if unpromulgated, law; the curse of Canaan was accompanied by the blessing of Shem and Japheth who turned their eyes away from the nakedness of their father. Here we have the first and the most fundamental division of mankind, at any rate of postdiluvian mankind, the division into "cursed" and "blessed." Nimrod was the first to be a mighty man on earth—a mighty hunter before the Lord; his kingdom included Babel (big kingdoms are attempts to overcome by force the division of mankind, conquest and hunting being akin to each other). The city that men built in order to remain together and thus to make a name for themselves was Babel; God scattered them by confounding their speech, by bringing about the division of mankind into groups that could not understand one another: into nations, i.e., groups

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united not only by descent but also by language. The division of mankind into nations may be described as a milder alternative to the flood.

The three events that took place between God's covenant with mankind after the flood and His calling of Abraham point to God's way of dealing with men who know good and evil and devise evil from their youth. Well-nigh universal wickedness will no longer be punished with well-nigh universal destruction, but will be prevented through the division of mankind into nations. Mankind will be divided, not into the cursed and the blessed (the curses and blessings were Noah's, not God's), but into a chosen nation and into nations that are not chosen. The emergence of nations made it possible to replace Noah's Ark—which floated alone on the waters covering the entire earth—by a whole, numerous nation living in the midst of the nations covering the earth. The election of the holy nation begins with the election of Abraham. Noah was distinguished from his contemporaries by his righteousness; Abraham separates himself from his contemporaries and in particular from his country and kindred at God's command—a command accompanied by God's promise to make of him a great nation. The Bible does not say that this primary election of Abraham was preceded by the fact of Abraham's righteousness. However this may be, Abraham shows his righteousness by obeying God's command at once, by trusting in God's promise whose fulfillment he could not possibly live to see, given the short lifespan of postdiluvian man: Only after Abraham's offspring would have become a great nation would the land of Canaan be given to them forever.

The fulfillment of the promise required that Abraham not remain childless, and he was already quite old. Accordingly, God promised him that he would have issue. It was Abraham's trust in God's promise that, above everything else, made him righteous in the eyes of the Lord. It was God's intention that His promise be fulfilled through the offspring of Abraham and his wife Sarah. But this promise seemed laughable to Abraham, to say nothing of Sarah: Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah, ninety. Yet nothing is too wondrous for the Lord. The laughable announcement became a joyous one. It was followed immediately by God's announcement to Abraham of His concern with the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. God did not yet know whether those people were as wicked as they were said to be. But they might be; they might deserve total destruction as much as did the generation of the flood. Noah had accepted the destruction of his generation without any questioning. Abraham, however, who had a deeper trust in God, in God's righteousness, and a deeper awareness of his being only dust and ashes, presumed in fear and trembling to appeal to God's righteousness lest He, the judge of the whole earth, destroy the righteous along with the wicked. In response to Abraham's insistent pleading, God as it were promised to Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom if ten righteous men could be found in the city: He would save the city for the sake of the ten righteous men within it. Abraham acted as the mortal partner in God's righteousness; he acted as if he had some share in the responsibility for

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God's acting righteously. No wonder God's covenant with Abraham was incomparably more incisive than His covenant immediately following the flood.

**A**BRAMHAM'S TRUST in God thus appears to be the trust that God in His righteousness will not do anything incompatible with His righteousness and that while, or because, nothing is too wondrous for the Lord, there are firm boundaries set to Him by His own righteousness, by Himself. This awareness is deepened and therewith modified by the last and severest test of Abraham's trust: God's command to him to sacrifice Isaac, his only son by Sarah. Abraham's supreme test presupposes the wondrous character of Isaac's birth: The very son who was to be the sole link between Abraham and the chosen people and who was born against all reasonable expectations, was to be sacrificed by his father. This command contradicted not only the divine promise, but also the divine prohibition against the shedding of innocent blood. Yet Abraham did not argue with God as he had done in the case of Sodom's destruction. In the case of Sodom, Abraham was not confronted with a divine command to do a certain thing and more particularly he was not confronted with a command to surrender to God what was dearest to him: Abraham did not argue with God for the preservation of Isaac because he loved God—not himself or his most cherished hope—with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might. The same concern with God's righteousness that had induced him to plead with God for the preservation of Sodom if ten just men could be found in that city, induced him not to plead for the preservation of Isaac, for God rightfully demands that He alone be loved unqualifiedly. The fact that the command to sacrifice Isaac contradicted the prohibition against the shedding of innocent blood must be understood in the light of the difference between human justice and divine justice: God alone is unqualifiedly, if unfathomably, just. God promised Abraham that He would spare Sodom if ten righteous men could be found in it, and Abraham was satisfied with this promise; He did not promise that He would spare the city if nine righteous men were found in it; would those nine be destroyed together with the wicked? And even if all Sodomites were wicked and hence justly destroyed, did their infants who were destroyed with them deserve their destruction? The apparent contradiction between the command to sacrifice Isaac and the divine promise to the descendants of Isaac is disposed of by the consideration that nothing is too wondrous for the Lord. Abraham's supreme trust in God, his simple, singleminded, childlike faith was rewarded although, or because, it presupposed his entire unconcern with any reward, for Abraham was willing to forgo, to destroy, to kill the only reward with which he was concerned: God prevented the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham's intended action needed a reward although he was not concerned with a reward because his intended action cannot be said to have been intrinsically rewarding. The preservation of Isaac is as wondrous as his birth. These two wonders illustrate more clearly than anything else the origin of the holy nation.

The God Who created heaven and earth, Who is the only God, Whose only image is

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man, Who forbade man to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Who made a covenant with mankind after the flood and thereafter a covenant with Abraham which became His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—what kind of God is He? Or, to speak more reverently and more adequately, what is His name? This question was addressed to God Himself by Moses when he was sent by Him to the sons of Israel. God replied: “*Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*,” which is most often translated: “I am That (Who) I am.” I believe, however, that we ought to render this statement, “I shall be What I shall be,” thus preserving the connection between God’s name and the fact that He makes covenants with men, i.e., that He reveals Himself to men above all by His commandments and by His promises and His fulfillment of those promises. “I shall be What I shall be” is, as it were, explained in the verse (Ex. 33:19), “I shall be gracious to whom I shall be gracious and I shall show mercy to whom I shall show mercy.” God’s actions cannot be predicted, unless He Himself has predicted them, i.e., promised them. But as is shown precisely by the account of Abraham’s binding of Isaac, the way in which He fulfills His promises cannot be known in advance. The biblical God is a mysterious God: He comes in a thick cloud (Ex. 19:4); He cannot be seen; His presence can be sensed but not always and everywhere; what is known of Him is only what He chose to communicate by His word through His chosen servants. The rest of the chosen people knows His word—apart from the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4:12 and 5:4-5)—only mediately and does not wish to know it immediately (Ex. 20:19, and 21, 24:1-2; Deut. 10:15-18; Amos 3:7). For almost all purposes the word of God as revealed to His prophets and especially to Moses became the source of knowledge of good and evil, the true tree of knowledge which is at the same time the tree of life.

HAVING SAID this much about the beginning of the Bible and what it entails, let us now cast a glance at some Greek counterparts to the beginning of the Bible—to begin with, at Hesiod’s *Theogony* as well as the remains of Parmenides’s and Empedocles’s works. They are all the works of known authors. This does not mean that they are, or present themselves as being, merely human. Hesiod sings what the Muses, the daughters of Zeus who is the father of gods and men, taught him or commanded him to sing. One could say that the Muses vouch for the truth of Hesiod’s song, were it not for the fact that they sometimes speak lies which resemble what is true. Parmenides transmits the teaching of a goddess, and so does Empedocles. Yet these men composed their books; their songs or speeches are books. The Bible, on the other hand, is not a book. The most one could say is that it is a collection of books. The author of a book, in the strict sense of the term, excludes everything that is not necessary, that does not fulfill a function necessary to the purpose his book is meant to fulfill. The compilers of the Bible as a whole and of the Torah in particular seem to have followed an entirely different rule. Confronted with a variety of preexisting holy speeches, which as such had to be treated with the utmost respect, they excluded only what could not by any stretch of the imagination be rendered compatible with the funda-

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mental and authoritative teaching; their very piety, aroused and fostered by the pre-existing holy speeches, led them to make such changes in those holy speeches as they did make. Their work may then abound in contradictions and repetitions that no one ever intended as such, whereas in a book in the strict sense there is nothing that is not intended by the author.

Hesiod's *Theogony* sings of the generation or begetting of the gods; the gods were not "made" by anybody. Far from having been created by a god, earth and heaven are the ancestors of the immortal gods. More precisely, according to Hesiod everything that is has come to be. First there arose Chaos, Gaia (Earth), and Eros. Gaia gave birth first to Ouranos (Heaven) and then, mating with Ouranos, she brought forth Kronos and his brothers and sisters. Ouranos hated his children and did not wish them to come to life. At the wish and advice of Gaia, Kronos deprived his father of his generative power and thus unintentionally brought about the emergence of Aphrodite; Kronos became the king of the gods. Kronos's evil deed was avenged by his son Zeus whom he had generated by mating with Rheia and whom he had planned to destroy; Zeus dethroned his father and thus became the king of the gods, the father of gods and men, the mightiest of all gods. Given his ancestors it is not surprising that while he is the father of men and belongs to the gods who are the givers of good things, he is far from being kind to men. Mating with Mnemosyne, the daughter of Gaia and Ouranos, Zeus generated the nine Muses. The Muses give sweet and gentle eloquence and understanding to the kings whom they wish to honor. Through the Muses there are singers on earth, just as through Zeus there are kings. While kingship and song may go together, there is a profound difference between the two—a difference that, guided by Hesiod, one may compare to that between the hawk and the nightingale. Surely Metis (Wisdom), while being Zeus's first spouse and having become inseparable from him, is not identical with him; the relation of Zeus and Metis may remind one of the relation of God and wisdom in the Bible.

Hesiod speaks of the creation or making of men not in the *Theogony* but in his *Works and Days*, i.e., in the context of his speeches regarding how man should live, regarding man's right life, which includes the teaching regarding the right seasons (the "days"); the question of the right life does not arise regarding the gods. The right life for man is the just life, the life devoted to working, especially to tilling the soil. Work thus understood is a blessing ordained by Zeus who blesses the just and crushes the proud: often even a whole city is destroyed for the deeds of a single bad man. Yet Zeus takes cognizance of men's justice and injustice only if he so wills. Accordingly, work appears to be not a blessing but a curse: Men must work because the gods keep hidden from them the means of life and they do this in order to punish them for Prometheus's theft of fire—a theft inspired by philanthropy. But was not Prometheus's action itself prompted by the fact that men were not properly provided for by the gods and in particular by Zeus? Be this as it may, Zeus did not deprive men of the fire that Prometheus had stolen for them; he punished them by sending them Pandora and her box, that was filled with countless evils like hard labor. The evils with which human life

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is beset cannot be traced to human sin. Hesiod conveys the same message by his story of the five races of men which came into being successively. The first of these, the golden race, was made by the gods while Kronos was still ruling in heaven. These men lived without toil or grief; they had all good things in abundance because the earth by itself gave them abundant fruit. Yet the men made by father Zeus lack this bliss. Hesiod does not make clear whether this is due to Zeus's ill-will or to his lack of power; he gives us no reason to think that it is due to man's sin. He creates the impression that human life becomes ever more miserable as one race of men succeeds another: There is no divine promise, supported by the fulfillment of earlier divine promises, that permits one to trust and to hope.

The most striking difference between the poet Hesiod and the philosophers Parmenides and Empedocles is that according to the philosophers, not everything has come into being: that which truly is, has not come into being and does not perish. This does not necessarily mean that what exists always is a god or gods. For if Empedocles calls one of the eternal four elements Zeus, this Zeus has hardly anything in common with what Hesiod, or the people generally, understood by Zeus. At any rate, according to both philosophers, the gods as ordinarily understood have come into being, just like heaven and earth, and will therefore perish again.

At the time when the opposition between Jerusalem and Athens reached the level of what one may call its classical struggle, in the 12th and 13th centuries, philosophy was represented by Aristotle. The Aristotelian god, like the biblical God, is a thinking being, but in opposition to the biblical God he is *only* a thinking being, pure thought: pure thought that thinks itself and only itself. Only by thinking himself and nothing but himself does he rule the world. He surely does not rule by giving orders and laws. Hence he is not a creator-god: The world is as eternal as god. Man is not his image: Man is much lower in rank than other parts of the world. For Aristotle it is almost a blasphemy to ascribe justice to his god; he is above justice as well as injustice.

**I**T HAS OFTEN BEEN SAID that the philosopher who comes closest to the Bible is Plato. This was said not least during the classical struggle between Jerusalem and Athens in the Middle Ages. Both Platonic philosophy and biblical piety are animated by the concern with purity and purification: "Pure reason" in Plato's sense is closer to the Bible than "pure reason" in Kant's sense or for that matter in Anaxagoras's and Aristotle's sense. Plato teaches, just as the Bible does, that heaven and earth were created or made by an invisible God whom he calls the Father, who is eternal, who is good, and hence whose creation is good. The coming-into-being and the preservation of the world that he has created depend on the will of its maker. What Plato himself calls theology consists of two teachings: (1) God is good and hence in no way the cause of evil; (2) God is simple and hence unchangeable. On the question of divine concern with men's justice and injustice, Platonic teaching is in fundamental agreement with biblical teaching; it even culminates in a statement that agrees almost literally with biblical statements.<sup>4</sup> Yet the differences between the Platonic and bib-

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lical teachings are no less striking than the similarities. The Platonic teaching on creation does not claim to be more than a likely tale. The Platonic God is a creator also of gods, of visible living beings, i.e., of the stars; the created gods rather than the creator God create the mortal living beings and in particular man; heaven is a blessed god. The Platonic God does not create the world by his word; he creates it after having looked to the eternal ideas which therefore are higher than he. In accordance with this, Plato's explicit theology is presented within the context of the first discussion of education in the Republic, within the context of what one may call the discussion of elementary education; in the second and final discussion of education—the education of philosophers—theology is replaced by the doctrine of ideas. As for the thematic discussion of providence in the Laws, it may suffice here to say that it occurs within the context of the discussion of penal law.

In his likely tale of how God created the visible whole, Plato makes a distinction between two kinds of gods, the visible cosmic gods and the traditional gods—between the gods who revolve manifestly, i.e., who manifest themselves regularly, and the gods who manifest themselves so far as they will. The least one would have to say is that according to Plato the cosmic gods are of much higher rank than the traditional gods, the Greek gods. Inasmuch as the cosmic gods are accessible to man as man—to his observations and calculations—whereas the Greek gods are accessible only to the Greeks through Greek tradition, one may, in comic exaggeration, ascribe the worship of the cosmic gods to barbarians. This ascription is made in a manner and with an intention altogether non-comic in the Bible: Israel is forbidden to worship the sun and the moon and the stars which the Lord has allotted to the other peoples everywhere under heaven. This implies that the worship of the cosmic gods by other peoples, the barbarians, is not due to a natural or rational cause, to the fact that those gods are accessible to man as man, but to an act of God's will. It goes without saying that according to the Bible the God Who manifests Himself as far as He wills, Who is not universally worshipped as such, is the only true God. The Platonic statement taken in conjunction with the biblical statement brings out the fundamental opposition of Athens at its peak to Jerusalem: The opposition of the God or gods of the philosophers to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the opposition of reason and revelation.

## II.

### **On Socrates and the Prophets**

**F**IFTY YEARS AGO, in the middle of World War I, Hermann Cohen, the greatest representative of, and spokesman for, German Jewry, the most powerful figure among the German professors of philosophy of his time, stated his view on Jerusalem and Athens in a lecture entitled "The Social Ideal in Plato and the Prophets." He

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repeated that lecture shortly before his death, and we may regard it as stating his final view on Jerusalem and Athens and therewith on the truth. For, as Cohen says right at the beginning, "Plato and the prophets are the two most important sources of modern culture." Being concerned with "the social ideal," he does not say a single word about Christianity in the whole lecture.

Cohen's view may be restated as follows. *The* truth is the synthesis of the teachings of Plato and the prophets. What we owe to Plato is the insight that the truth is in the first place the truth of science but that science must be supplemented, overarched, by the idea of the good which to Cohen means, not God, but rational, scientific ethics. The ethical truth must not only be compatible with the scientific truth; the ethical truth *needs* the scientific truth. The prophets are very much concerned with knowledge: with the knowledge of God. But this knowledge, as the prophets understood it, has no connection whatever with scientific knowledge; it is knowledge only in a metaphorical sense. It is perhaps with a view to this fact that Cohen speaks once of the divine Plato but never of the divine prophets. Why then can he not leave matters at Platonic philosophy? What is the fundamental defect of Platonic philosophy that is remedied by the prophets and only by the prophets? According to Plato, the cessation of evil requires the rule of the philosophers, of the men who possess the highest kind of human knowledge, i.e., of science in the broadest sense of the term. But this kind of knowledge like, to some extent, all scientific knowledge, is, according to Plato, the preserve of a small minority: of the men who possess a certain nature and certain gifts that most men lack. Plato presupposes that there is an unchangeable human nature and, as a consequence, a fundamental structure of the good human society which is unchangeable. This leads him to assert or to assume that there will be wars as long as there will be human beings, that there ought to be a class of warriors and that the class ought to be higher in rank and honor than the class of producers and exchangers. These defects in Plato's system are remedied by the prophets precisely because they lack the idea of science and hence the idea of nature, and therefore they can believe that men's conduct toward one another can undergo a change much more radical than any change ever dreamed of by Plato.

Cohen brought out very well the antagonism between Plato and the prophets. Nevertheless we cannot leave matters at his view of that antagonism. Cohen's thought belongs to the world preceding World War I, and accordingly reflects a greater faith in the power of modern Western culture to mold the fate of mankind than seems to be warranted now. The worst things experienced by Cohen were the Dreyfus scandal and the pogroms instigated by Tsarist Russia: he did not experience Communist Russia and Hitler Germany. More disillusioned than he regarding modern culture, we wonder whether the two separate ingredients of modern culture, of the modern synthesis, are not more solid than the synthesis itself. Catastrophes and horrors of a magnitude hitherto unknown, which we have seen and through which we have lived, were better provided for, or made

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## *Jerusalem and Athens: Some Introductory Reflections*

intelligible, by both Plato and the prophets than by the modern belief in progress. Since we are less certain than Cohen was that the modern synthesis is superior to its pre-modern ingredients, and since the two ingredients are in fundamental opposition to each other, we are ultimately confronted by a problem rather than by a solution.

More particularly, Cohen understood Plato in the light of the opposition between Plato and Aristotle—an opposition that he understood in turn in the light of the opposition between Kant and Hegel. We, however, are more impressed than Cohen was by the kinship between Plato and Aristotle on the one hand and the kinship between Kant and Hegel on the other. In other words, the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns seems to us to be more fundamental than either the quarrel between Plato and Aristotle or that between Kant and Hegel.

We, moreover, prefer to speak of Socrates and the prophets rather than of Plato and the prophets, and for the following reasons. We are no longer as sure as Cohen was that we can draw a clear line between Socrates and Plato. There is traditional support for drawing such a clear line, above all in Aristotle; but Aristotle's statements on this kind of subject no longer possess for us the authority that they formerly possessed, and this is due partly to Cohen himself. The clear distinction between Socrates and Plato is based not only on tradition, but on the results of modern historical criticism; yet these results are in the decisive respect hypothetical. The decisive fact for us is that Plato points, as it were, away from himself to Socrates. If we wish to understand Plato, we must take him seriously; we must take seriously in particular his deference to Socrates. Plato points not only to Socrates's speeches but to his whole life, and to his fate as well. Hence Plato's life and fate do not have the symbolic character of Socrates's life and fate. Socrates, as presented by Plato, had a mission; Plato did not claim to have a mission. It is in the first place this fact—the fact that Socrates had a mission—that induces us to consider, not Plato and the prophets, but Socrates and the prophets.

I cannot speak in my own words of the mission of the prophets. Let me, however, remind the reader of some prophetic utterances of singular force and grandeur. Isaiah 6:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole world is full of his glory.... Then I said, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.... Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

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**I**SAIAH, IT SEEMS, volunteered for his mission. Could he not have remained silent? Could he refuse to volunteer? When the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me," "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord"; Jonah ran away from his mission; but God did not allow him to run away; He compelled him to fulfill it. Of this compulsion we hear in different ways from Amos and Jeremiah. Amos 3:7-8: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken; who will not prophesy?" The prophets, overpowered by the majesty of the Lord, bring the message of His wrath and His mercy. Jeremiah 1:4-10.

Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee and before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

To be sure, the claim to have been sent by God was raised also by men who were not truly prophets but prophets of falsehood, false prophets. Many or most hearers were therefore uncertain as to which kinds of claimants to prophecy were to be trusted or believed. According to the Bible, the false prophets simply lied in saying that they were sent by God. The false prophets tell the people what the people like to hear; hence they are much more popular than the true prophets. The false prophets are "prophets of the deceit of their own heart" (ibid. 26); they tell the people what they themselves imagined (consciously or unconsciously) because they wished it or their hearers wished it. But: "Is not my word like as a fire saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh rock in pieces?" (ibid. 29). Or, as Jeremiah put it when opposing the false prophet, Hananiah: "The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence" (28:8). This does not mean that a prophet is true only if he is a prophet of doom; the true prophets are also prophets of ultimate salvation. We understand the difference between the true and the false prophets if we listen to and meditate on these words of Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed is the man, that trusteth in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. . . . Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." The false prophets trust in flesh, even if that flesh is the temple in Jerusalem, the promised land, the chosen people itself, or even God's promise

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to the chosen people (if that promise is taken to be an unconditional promise and not as a part of a covenant). The true prophets, regardless of whether they predict doom or salvation, predict the unexpected, the humanly unforeseeable—what would not occur to men, left to themselves, to fear or to hope. The true prophets speak and act by the spirit and in the spirit of *Ehyeh-asher-ehyeh*. For the false prophets, on the other hand, there cannot be the wholly unexpected, whether bad or good.

Of Socrates's mission we know only through Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, which presents itself as the speech delivered by Socrates when he defended himself against the charge that he did not believe in the existence of the gods worshipped by the city of Athens and that he corrupted the young. In that speech he denies possessing any more than human wisdom. This denial was understood by Judah Halevi among others as follows: "Socrates said to the people: 'I do not deny your divine wisdom, but I say that I do not understand it; I am wise only in human wisdom.'"<sup>5</sup> While this interpretation points in the right direction, it goes somewhat too far. Socrates, at least, immediately after having denied possessing anything more than human wisdom, refers to the speech that originated his mission, and of this speech he says that it is not his but he seems to ascribe to it divine origin. He does trace what he says to a speaker who is worthy of the Athenians' credence. But it is probable that he means by that speaker his companion, Chairephon, who is more worthy of credence than Socrates because he was attached to the democratic regime. This Chairephon, having once come to Delphi, asked Apollo's oracle whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates. The Pythia replied that no one was wiser. This reply originated Socrates's mission. We see at once that Socrates's mission originated in human initiative, in the initiative of one of Socrates's companions. Socrates, on the other hand, takes it for granted that the reply given by the Pythia was given by the god Apollo himself. Yet this does not induce him to take it for granted that the god's reply is true. He does take it for granted that it is not meet for the god to lie. Yet this does not make the god's reply convincing to him. In fact he tries to refute that reply by discovering men who are wiser than he. Engaging in this quest, he finds out that the god spoke the truth: Socrates is wiser than other men because he knows nothing, i.e., nothing about the most important things, whereas the others believe that they know the truth about the most important things. Thus his attempt to refute the oracle turns into a vindication of the oracle. Without intending it, he comes to the assistance of the god; he serves the god; he obeys the god's command. Although no god had ever spoken to him, he is satisfied that the god had commanded him to examine himself and the others, i.e., to philosophize, or to exhort everyone he meets to the practice of virtue: He has been given by the god to the city of Athens as a gadfly.

While Socrates does not claim to have heard the speech of a god, he claims that a voice—something divine and demonic—speaks to him from time to time, his *daimonion*. This *daimonion*, however, has no connection with Socrates's mission, for it never urges him forward but only keeps him back. While the Delphic oracle urged him forward to-

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ward philosophizing, toward examining his fellow men, and thus made him generally hated and thus brought him into mortal danger, his *daimonion* kept him back from political activity and thus saved him from mortal danger.

**T**HE FACT that both Socrates and the prophets have a divine mission means, or at any rate implies, that both Socrates and the prophets are concerned with justice or righteousness, with the perfectly just society which, as such, would be free of all evils. To this extent Socrates's figuring out of the best social order and the prophets' vision of the messianic age are in agreement. Yet whereas the prophets predict the coming of the messianic age, Socrates merely holds that the perfect society is possible: whether it will ever be actual depends on an unlikely, although not impossible, coincidence, the coincidence of philosophy and political power. For, according to Socrates, the coming-into-being of the best political order is not due to divine intervention; human nature will remain as it always has been; the decisive difference between the best political order and all other societies is that in the former the philosophers will be kings or the natural potentiality of the philosophers will reach its utmost perfection. In the most perfect social order, as Socrates sees it, knowledge of the most important things will remain, as it always was, the preserve of the philosophers, i.e., of a very small part of the population. According to the prophets, however, in the messianic age "the earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the earth" (Isaiah 11:9), and this will be brought about by God Himself. As a consequence, the messianic age will be the age of universal peace: all nations shall come to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4). The best regime, however, as Socrates envisages it, will animate a single city which, as a matter of course, will become embroiled in wars with other cities. The cessation of evils that Socrates expects from the establishment of the best regime will not include the cessation of war.

Finally, the perfectly just man, the man who is as just as is humanly possible, is, according to Socrates, the philosopher; according to the prophets, he is the faithful servant of the Lord. The philosopher is the man who dedicates his life to the quest for knowledge of the good, of the idea of the good; what we would call moral virtue is only the condition or by-product of that quest. According to the prophets, however, there is no need for the quest for knowledge of the good: God "hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6.8). 📖

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, Part I, Jerusalem, 1961, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the characterization of the plants as *eyyela* (“in or of the earth”) in Plato’s *Republic*, 491 d 1. Cf. Empedocles A 70.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the distinction between the two kinds of “other gods” in Deut. 4:15-19, between the idols on the one hand and sun, moon, and stars on the other.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Plato’s *Laws* 905 a 4-b 2 with Amos 9:1-3 and Psalm 139:7-10.

<sup>5</sup> Kuzari IV, 13 and V, 14.

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# Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment

Emil L. Fackenheim

**W**ITHIN the past two centuries, three events have shaken and are still shaking Jewish religious existence—the Emancipation and its after-effects, the Nazi Holocaust, and the rise of the first Jewish state in two thousand years—and of these, two have occurred in our own generation. From the point of view of Jewish religious existence, as from so many other points of view, the Holocaust is the most shattering. Doubtless the Emancipation and all its works have posed and continue to pose powerful challenges, with which Jewish thought has been wrestling all along—scientific agnosticism, secularism, assimilation, and the like. The Emancipation represents, however, a challenge *ab extra*, from without, and for all its well-demonstrated power to weaken and undermine Jewish religious existence, I have long been convinced that the challenge can be met, religiously and intellectually. The state of Israel, by contrast, is a challenge *ab intra*, from within—at least to much that Jewish existence has been throughout two millennia. But this challenge is positive—the fact that in one sense (if not in many others) a long exile has ended. That it represents a positive challenge was revealed during and immediately after the Six-Day War, when biblical (i.e., pre-exilic) language suddenly came to life.

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EMIL L. FACKENHEIM, *who escaped Nazi Germany, was professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto.*

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## *Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment*

The Holocaust, too, challenges Jewish faith from within, but the negativism of its challenge is total, without light or relief. After the events associated with the name of Auschwitz, everything is shaken, nothing is safe.

To avoid Auschwitz, or to act as though it had never occurred, would be blasphemous. Yet how face it and be faithful to its victims? No precedent exists either within Jewish history or outside it. Even when a Jewish religious thinker barely begins to face Auschwitz, he perceives the possibility of a desperate choice between the faith of a millennial Jewish past, which has so far persisted through every trial, and faithfulness to the victims of the present. But at the edge of this abyss there must be a great pause, a lengthy silence, and an endurance.

## II

**M**EN SHUN THE SCANDAL of the particularity of Auschwitz. Germans link it with Dresden; American liberals, with Hiroshima. Christians deplore anti-Semitism-in-general, while Communists erect monuments of victims-of-Fascism-in-general, depriving the dead of Auschwitz of their Jewish identity even in death. Rather than face Auschwitz, men everywhere seek refuge in generalities, comfortable precisely because they are generalities. And such is the extent to which reality is shunned that no cries of protest are heard even when in the world community's own forum obscene comparisons are made between Israeli soldiers and Nazi murderers.

The Gentile world shuns Auschwitz because of the terror of Auschwitz—and because of real or imagined implication in the guilt for Auschwitz. But Jews shun Auschwitz as well. Only after many years did significant Jewish responses begin to appear. Little of real significance is being or can be said even now. Perhaps there should still be silence. It is certain, however, that the voices, now beginning to be heard, will grow ever louder and more numerous. For Jews now know that they must ever after remember Auschwitz, and be its witnesses to the world. Not to be a witness would be a betrayal. In the murder camps the victims often rebelled with no other hope than that one of them might escape to tell the tale. For Jews now to refrain from telling the tale would be unthinkable. Jewish faith still recalls the Exodus, Sinai, the two destructions of the Temple. A Judaism which survived at the price of ignoring Auschwitz would not deserve to survive.

It is because the world shrinks so fully from the truth that once a Jew begins to speak at all he must say the most obvious. Must he say that the death of a Jewish child at Auschwitz is no more lamentable than the death of a German child at Dresden? He must say it. And in saying it, he must also refuse to dissolve Auschwitz into suffering-in-general, even though he is almost sure to be considered a Jewish particularist who cares about Jews but not about mankind. Must he distinguish between the mass-killing at Hiroshima and that at Auschwitz? At the risk of being thought a sacrilegious quibbler, he must, with

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endless patience, forever repeat that Eichmann was moved by no such “rational” objective as victory when he diverted trains needed for military purposes in order to dispatch Jews to their death. He must add that there was no “irrational” objective either. Torquemada burned bodies in order to save souls. Eichmann sought to destroy both bodies and souls. Where else and at what other time have executioners ever separated those to be murdered now from those to be murdered later to the strain of Viennese waltzes? Where else has human skin ever been made into lampshades, and human body-fat into soap—not by isolated perverts but under the direction of ordinary bureaucrats? Auschwitz is a unique descent into hell. It is an unprecedented celebration of evil. It is evil for evil’s sake.

**A** JEW MUST BEAR WITNESS TO THIS TRUTH. Nor may he conceal the fact that Jews in their particularity were the singled-out victims. Of course, they were by no means the sole victims. And a Jew would infinitely prefer to think that to the Nazis, Jews were merely a species of the genus “inferior race.” This indeed was the theme of Allied wartime propaganda, and it is still perpetuated by liberals, Communists, and guilt-ridden Christian theologians. Indeed, “liberal”-minded Jews themselves perpetuate it. The superficial reason is that this view of Auschwitz unites victims of all races and creeds: It is “brotherly” propaganda. Under the surface, however, there broods at least in Jewish if not in some Gentile minds\* an idea horrible beyond all description. Would even Nazis have singled out Jews for such a terrible fate unless Jews had done *something* to bring it upon themselves? Most of the blame attaches to the murderers: must not at least some measure of blame attach to the victims as well? Such are the wounds which Nazism has inflicted on some Jewish minds. And such is the extent to which Nazism has defiled the world that, while it should have destroyed every vestige of anti-Semitism in every Gentile mind on earth, Auschwitz has, in some Gentile minds, actually increased it.

These wounds and this defilement can be confronted only with the truth. And the ineluctable truth is that Jews at Auschwitz were not a species of the genus “inferior race,” but rather the prototype by which “inferior race” was defined. Not until the Nazi revolution had become an anti-Jewish revolution did it begin to succeed as a movement;\*\* and when all its other works came crashing down only one of its goals remained: the murder of Jews. This is the scandal which requires, of Germans, a ruthless examination of their whole history; of Christians, a pitiless reckoning with the history of Christian anti-Semitism; of the whole world, an inquiry into the grounds of its indifference for twelve long years. Resort to theories of suffering-in-general or persecution-in-general permits such investigations to be evaded.

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\* Witness the recent Polish propaganda campaign—tantamount to a rewriting of Holocaust history—in which it was suggested that the Jews had cooperated with the Nazis in their own destruction.

\*\* See, e.g., George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*; especially chapter 17.

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Yet even where the quest for explanations is genuine there is not, and never will be, an adequate explanation. Auschwitz is the scandal of evil for evil's sake, an eruption of demonism without analogy; and the singling-out of Jews, ultimately, is an unparalleled expression of what the rabbis call groundless hate. This is the rock on which throughout eternity all rational explanations will crash and break apart.

How can a Jew respond to thus having been singled out, and to being singled out even now whenever he tries to bear witness? Resisting rational explanations, Auschwitz will forever resist religious explanations as well. Attempts to find rational causes succeed at least up to a point, and the search for the religious, ideological, social, and economic factors leading to Auschwitz must be relentlessly pressed. In contrast, the search for a purpose in Auschwitz is foredoomed to total failure. Not that good men in their despair have not made the attempt. Good Orthodox Jews have resorted to the ancient "for our sins are we punished," but this recourse, unacceptable already to Job, is in this case all the more impossible. A good Christian theologian sees the purpose of Auschwitz in a divine reminder of the sufferings of Christ, but this testifies to a moving sense of desperation—and to an incredible lapse of theological judgment. A good Jewish secularist will connect the Holocaust with the rise of the state of Israel, but while to see a causal connection here is possible and necessary, to see a purpose is intolerable. A total and uncompromising sweep must be made of these and other explanations, all designed to give purpose to Auschwitz. No purpose, religious or non-religious, will ever be found in Auschwitz. The very attempt to find one is blasphemous.

**Y**ET IT IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE to recognize that seeking a purpose is one thing, but seeking a response quite another. The first is wholly out of the question. The second is inescapable. Even after two decades any sort of adequate response may as yet transcend the power of any Jew. But his faith, his destiny, his very survival will depend on whether, in the end, he will be able to respond.

How can a Jew begin to seek a response? Looking for precedents, he finds none either in Jewish or in non-Jewish history. Jewish (like Christian) martyrs have died for their faith, certain that God needs martyrs. Job suffered despite his faith, able to protest within the sphere of faith. Negro Christians have died for their race, unshaken in a faith which was not at issue. The one million Jewish children murdered in the Nazi Holocaust died neither because of their faith, nor in spite of their faith, nor for reasons unrelated to faith. They were murdered because of the faith of their great-grandparents. Had these great-grandparents abandoned their Jewish faith, and failed to bring up Jewish children, then their fourth-generation descendants might have been among the Nazi executioners, but not among their Jewish victims. Like Abraham of old, European Jews some time in the mid-19th century offered a human sacrifice, by the mere minimal commitment to the Jewish faith of bringing up Jewish children. But unlike Abraham they

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did not know what they were doing, and there was no reprieve. This is the brute fact which makes all comparisons odious or irrelevant. This is what makes Jewish religious existence today unique, without support from analogies anywhere in the past. This is the scandal of the particularity of Auschwitz which, once confronted by Jewish faith, threatens total despair.

**I** CONFESS THAT IT TOOK ME TWENTY YEARS until I was able to look at this scandal, but when at length I did, I made what to me was, and still is, a momentous discovery: that while religious thinkers were vainly struggling for a response to Auschwitz, Jews throughout the world—rich and poor, learned and ignorant, religious and non-religious—had to some degree been responding all along. For twelve long years Jews had been exposed to a murderous hate which was as groundless as it was implacable. For twelve long years the world had been lukewarm or indifferent, unconcerned over the prospect of a world without Jews. For twelve long years the whole world had conspired to make Jews wish to cease to be Jews wherever, whenever, and in whatever way they could. Yet to this unprecedented invitation to group-suicide Jews responded with an unexpected will-to-live—with, under the circumstances, an incredible commitment to Jewish group survival.

In ordinary times, a commitment of this kind may be a mere mixture of nostalgia and vague loyalties not far removed from tribalism; and, unable to face Auschwitz, I had myself long viewed it as such, placing little value on a Jewish survival which was, or seemed to be, only survival for survival's sake. I was wrong, and even the shallowest Jewish survivalist philosophy of the postwar period was right by comparison. For in the age of Auschwitz a Jewish commitment to Jewish survival is in itself a monumental act of faithfulness, as well as a monumental, albeit as yet fragmentary, act of faith. Even to do no more than remain a Jew after Auschwitz is to confront the demons of Auschwitz in all their guises, and to bear witness against them. It is to believe that these demons cannot, will not, and must not prevail, and to stake on that belief one's own life and the lives of one's children, and of one's children's children. To be a Jew after Auschwitz is to have wrested hope—for the Jew and for the world—from the abyss of total despair. In the words of a speaker at a recent gathering of Bergen-Belsen survivors, the Jew after Auschwitz has a second *Shema Yisrael*: no second Auschwitz, no second Bergen-Belsen, no second Buchenwald—anywhere in the world, for anyone in the world!

What accounts for this commitment to Jewish existence when there might have been, and by every rule of human logic should have been, a terrified and demoralized flight from Jewish existence? Why, since Auschwitz, have all previous distinctions among Jews—between religious and secularist, Orthodox and liberal—diminished in importance, to be replaced by a new major distinction between Jews committed to Jewish survival, willing to be singled out and counted, and Jews in flight, who rationalize

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this flight as a rise to humanity-in-general? In my view, nothing less will do than to say that a commanding Voice speaks from Auschwitz, and that there are Jews who hear it and Jews who stop their ears.

The ultimate question is: Where was God at Auschwitz? For years I sought refuge in Buber's image of an eclipse of God. This image, still meaningful in other respects, no longer seems to me applicable to Auschwitz. Most assuredly no *redeeming* Voice is heard from Auschwitz, or ever will be heard. However, a *commanding* Voice is being heard, and has, however faintly, been heard from the start. Religious Jews hear it, and they identify its source. Secularist Jews also hear it, even though perforce they leave it unidentified. At Auschwitz, Jews came face to face with absolute evil. They were and still are singled out by it, but in the midst of it they hear an absolute commandment: *Jews are forbidden to grant posthumous victories to Hitler*. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. A secularist Jew cannot make himself believe by a mere act of will, nor can he be commanded to do so; yet he can perform the commandment of Auschwitz. And a religious Jew who has stayed with his God may be forced into new, possibly revolutionary, relationships with Him. One possibility, however, is wholly unthinkable. A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.

In the Midrash, God is, even in time of unrelieved tragedy, only "seemingly" powerless, for the Messiah is still expected. In Elie Wiesel's *Night*, God hangs on the gallows, and for the hero of Wiesel's *The Gates of the Forest*, a Messiah who is able to come, and yet at Auschwitz failed to come, is not to be conceived. Yet this same hero asserts that precisely because it is too late we are commanded to hope. He also says the Kaddish, "that solemn affirmation, filled with grandeur and serenity, by which man returns to God His crown and His scepter." But how a Jew after Auschwitz can return these to God is not yet known. Nor is it yet known how God can receive them.

### III

THE NAZI HOLOCAUST has brought Jews and Christians closer together—and set them further apart. The first truth is comforting and obvious. The second is painful, complex, and obscure, but perhaps in the end more necessary to confront. The gulf between Jews and Christians which Hitler succeeded in creating can be bridged only if it is recognized. But to bridge it is of incalculable importance for the fu-

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ture of both Judaism and Christianity.

Since an objective grasp of this issue is almost impossible, I had better state my views in terms of my own subjective development. Twenty years ago I believed that what once separated Jew and Christian was now dwarfed by what united them—namely their opposition to Nazism. I was of course not unaware of phenomena like the Nazi “German-Christian” church, or of the fact that respectable and indeed outstanding theologians were part of it. But so far as my native Germany was concerned, it was not the Christian Nazis who mattered to me; it was rather the Christian anti-Nazis, however small their number—not the “German-Christian” but rather the German confessional church. And what mattered theologically was thinkers like Barth and Tillich, able to recognize Nazi idolatry and to fight it courageously and unequivocally. To this day I still revere Kierkegaard, the first Christian thinker to perceive the nature and extent of modern idolatry, who would surely have been put into a concentration camp had he lived and written in Nazi Germany. To this day I am supported in my Judaism by the faithfulness of Christians to their Christianity. And when a new generation of Christian theologians arises to proclaim the death of God I feel, as a Jew, abandoned and betrayed.

The ancient rabbis recognized “righteous Gentiles” as being equal to the high priest in the sight of God; but they had no real acquaintance with Christianity and, of course, none with Islam. Medieval Jewish thinkers recognized Christianity and Mohammedanism as valid monotheistic religions, and considering the state of medieval Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Moslem relations, it is surprising that they did. But since the experience of Nazism and of Christian opposition to Nazism (which goes back to my adolescence), I have been convinced that there is now a need for Jewish recognition that the Christian (and the Mohammedan) not only affirms the One God but also stands in a living relation to Him. Where to go from here I cannot say. I never could accept Rosenzweig’s famous “double covenant” doctrine, according to which all except Jews (who are already “with the Father”) need the Son in order to find Him. How can a modern Jew pray for the conversion of the whole non-Jewish world to Christianity when even pre-modern Jews could pay homage to Moslem monotheism? Rosenzweig’s doctrine seems altogether outmoded at a time when Christians themselves are beginning to replace missionary efforts with inter-religious dialogue, and I wonder whether even for Rosenzweig this doctrine was more than a stage in his self-emancipation from modern paganism.

Thus, though I very much feel the need for a Jewish doctrine of Christianity, I am left without one and must for the time being rest content only with openness to Jewish-Christian dialogue. As regards the prospect of such dialogue, I confess that I have over the years become less optimistic in the hope that the long age of Christian triumphalism over Judaism is truly being superseded by an age of Jewish-Christian dialogue. In view of recent Christian developments, such as ecclesiastical declarations deploring anti-Semitism and absolving Jews of the charge of deicide, this may seem a strange, and even

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## *Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment*

perverse, personal opinion. Yet I think that recent events have shown it to be realistic.

To most impartial observers it has always been a plain fact that, ever since the Age of Enlightenment, it was secularists who spearheaded the struggle for Jewish emancipation; organized Christian forces sometimes accepted emancipation, often opposed it, but rarely if ever led the fight. This fact, plain to so many, I myself failed to see (or refused to accept) until quite recently. I saw the distinction between the new Nazi and the old Christian anti-Semitism, but could not bear to admit a relation between them. In the grim years of Nazism and immediately thereafter, I found it humanly impossible to see enemies on every side. Twenty-five years later, however, it is necessary to confront yet another painful truth.

I will confine myself to two examples, both concerning German Christians opposed to Nazism. In 1933, many Jews then in Germany, myself included, made a veritable saint of Cardinal Faulhaber, crediting him with opposing both Nazism and Nazi anti-Semitism. This image remained with me for many years. I had read the Cardinal's relevant sermons, but had somehow not noticed what they said. Not until about three years ago, when I came upon Guenter Lewy's masterful *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, did I realize that Faulhaber had confined his defense to the Jews of the Old Testament, and had gone out of his way to make clear that he was not defending his Jewish contemporaries. To quote Lewy:

We must distinguish, he told the faithful, between the people of Israel before the death of Christ, who were vehicles of divine revelation, and the Jews after the death of Christ, who have become restless wanderers over the earth. But even the Jewish people of ancient times could not justly claim credit for the wisdom of the Old Testament. So unique were these laws that one was bound to say: "People of Israel, this did not grow in your own garden of your own planting. This condemnation of usurious land-grabbing, this war against the oppression of the farmer by debt, this prohibition of usury, is not the product of your spirit."

Rarely has the Christian belief in the revealed character of the Hebrew Bible been put to so perverse a use.

**M**Y SECOND EXAMPLE is even more painful, for it involves none other than the universally beloved Dietrich Bonhoeffer, brave anti-Nazi Christian witness and martyr to his cause. Even now I find it hard to believe that he should have confined his attack on Nazi Aryan legislation to its application to converted Jews; and I find it even harder to believe that these words were written by Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany in response to Nazi anti-Semitism:

Now the measures of the state toward Judaism in addition stand in quite special context for

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the church. The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the “chosen people,” who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross, must bear the curse for its action through a long history of suffering....

Rather than comment myself, I prefer to cite the comment of the American Christian theologian, J. Coert Rylaarsdam:

We all think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a good Christian, even a martyr, perhaps. With great courage he insisted on “the crown rights of the Redeemer” within his own church. Moreover, he insisted that Jews who had converted to Christianity were entitled to the same rights in the church as other Christians, a position by no means unanimously held in the church of Hitler’s Germany. Nevertheless, standing in the Christian tradition of the curse, Bonhoeffer did not hesitate to appeal to it to rationalize Hitler’s program for Jews faithful to their own faith.

To keep the record straight, one must add that the passages in question were written in 1933 (when, according to his friend Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer still suffered from “lack of reality-relatedness”), that his opposition to Nazism became more complete as it came to assume secular-political expression, and, indeed, that he took personal risks to save Jewish lives. Even so, I know of no evidence yet (though I would dearly love to hear of any) to the effect that Bonhoeffer ever totally repudiated the Christian “tradition of the curse.” From the very beginning he opposed the encroachment of racism upon the church and spoke up for Jews converted to Christianity. By 1940 he charged that the church “was silent when she should have cried out because the blood of the innocent was crying aloud to heaven.... she is guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenseless brothers of Jesus Christ.” But during the most grievous Jewish martyrdom in all of history, did he ever repudiate a millennial Christian tradition, and seek a bond (even if only in his own mind) with “Jews faithful to their own faith,” because, and not in spite of, their faithfulness? How different would Bonhoeffer’s struggle have been if he had repudiated the “Christian tradition of the curse” from the start! How different would Jewish fate have been in our time had his whole church repudiated it!

In America, to be sure, it has always been different, and the churches of the 1960s differ everywhere from those of the 1940s, there being historic changes in the making in Christian attitudes toward Jews. The question is, however, whether American differences are not mainly due to the effect of secular democracy, and also whether the changes in Christian attitudes toward Jews possess the radicalism which, after Auschwitz, is a categorical imperative. Here again, only ruthless truthfulness can save the future of Jewish-Christian dialogue. And the truth, as I am now forced to see it, is that the organized Christian forces will find it easiest to drop the ancient charge of deicide, harder to recognize roots of anti-Semitism in the New Testament, and hardest of all to face up

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to the fact that Jews and Judaism are both still alive. Confronted with the awkward fact of Jewish survival after the advent of Christianity, theologians have looked upon Judaism as a fossil, an anachronism, a shadow. It is not easy to reverse a doctrine which has persisted for two millennia (assuming not only religious, but also, as in Toynbee, secular, and, as in Marx, anti-religious forms), and to recognize that both Jews and Judaism have maintained an unbroken existence throughout the entire Christian era. But how can a Jew, however he may strain his ears, hear God speak to the Christian church, if even after Auschwitz this ancient calumny is not at length totally and categorically rejected? And how, he wonders, can a Christian enter into dialogue with a Jew unless he recognizes that the person across the table is no shadow but alive?

These questions became traumatically vivid for any Jew committed to Jewish-Christian dialogue during the momentous events of May and June 1967, when the state of Israel, the most incontestable proof that the Jewish people still lives, was threatened with destruction. The secular Western press understood well enough that Israel was fighting for her life. Yet only a handful of Christian spokesmen showed the same understanding. Why should Christian spokesmen have remained neutral as between Israel's claim to the right to live and Arab claims to the right to destroy her—if not because of old, unconscious, theologically-inspired doubts as to whether the “fossil” Israel did indeed have the right to live? Why has there always been much Christian concern for Arab refugees from Israel, but none whatever for Jewish refugees from Arab countries—if not because of old, no longer consciously remembered ecclesiastical doctrines to the effect that Jews (unlike Arabs) must be kept landless, and therefore right-less? Why were ecclesiastical authorities untroubled by two decades of Moslem control of the Christian holy places (and of Arab desecration of Jewish holy places), and yet now so deeply distressed by Jewish control?

**B**UT A STILL MORE ULTIMATE QUESTION is raised by the events of 1967. For two long weeks in May the worldwide Jewish community perceived the specter of a second Jewish Holocaust in a single generation. For two weeks it listened to the same words emanating from Cairo and Damascus which had once emanated from Berlin, largely composed, one may be sure, by pupils of Joseph Goebbels. For two weeks it longed for Christian words of apprehension and concern. But whereas some such words came from secular sources, from the churches there was little but silence.\* Once again, Jews were alone. This fact, transcending as it does all politics, is a trauma for Jews regardless of political persuasion—non-Zionists and even anti-Zionists as well as Zionists. Moreover, it stands between Jews and Christians even now, for when Jews

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\* See A. Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, “Again, Silence in the Churches,” *The Christian Century*, July 26 and August 2, 1967.

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ask why there was no moral Christian outcry against a second Auschwitz they are still widely misunderstood, as demanding of Christians that they side politically with Israel against the Arab states.

Any Jew pondering this ultimate question must surely reject the idea that the Christian churches abandoned Jews knowingly to a second Holocaust. What, then, was revealed by the Christian silence in the spring of 1967? Not, I believe, an old Christian anti-Semitism, but rather a new Jewish-Christian problem—the fearful truth that Hitler, against his will bringing Jews and Christians closer, also had his will in setting them further apart.

A Jew at Auschwitz was murdered because he was a Jew; a Christian was murdered only if he was a saint: but there are few saints among either Jews or Christians. Hitler gave a new and perverse reality to the ancient Jewish doctrine that anyone born a Jew is a Jew. He also gave a new and perverse reality to the ancient Christian doctrine that one becomes a Christian only through an act of voluntary commitment—and, with diabolical cunning as well as terror, he led Christians into temptation. Hitler tried to create an abyss between Jews and Christians; he succeeded; and—this is the horror—he continues to enjoy posthumous successes. The Jew after Auschwitz exists with the knowledge of abandonment; the Christian cannot bear to face his responsibility for this abandonment. He knows that, as a Christian, he should voluntarily have gone to Auschwitz, where his own Master would have been dragged, voluntarily or involuntarily, and he is wracked by a sense of guilt the deeper the less he has cause to feel it. Hence the Christian failure to face Auschwitz. Hence Christian recourse to innocuous generalities. Hence, too, Christian silence in May 1967. If in May 1967 the Christian community did not cry out against a second Auschwitz, it was not because of its indifference to the words emanating from Cairo and Damascus, but rather because it did not hear them. It failed to recognize the danger of a second Holocaust because it has yet to recognize the fact of the first.

To bridge the Jewish-Christian gulf which Hitler has succeeded in creating is a task of incalculable importance, and at a Jewish-Christian colloquium prior to the events of May 1967 I attempted a hesitant step in that direction. I said there that if every Christian in Hitler's Europe had followed the example of the King of Denmark and decided to put on the yellow star, there would today be neither confusion nor despair in the church, nor talk of the death of God. I said with every emphasis at my command that, as a Jew after Auschwitz, I did not and could not speak as a judge, but only as a witness. To remove every trace of ambiguity or doubt I stated not politely, but quite truthfully, that I had been sixteen years of age when Hitler came to power, and had not known then, any more than I knew now, whether I would have become a Nazi had I been born a Gentile. Yet a leading Christian thinker, himself a lifelong anti-Nazi, mistook my statement for a case of Jewish triumphalism. So wide still is the gulf between Jews and Christians which Hitler opened decades ago. So close are we to handing him further, posthumous victories.

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*Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment*

ON ANOTHER public occasion, in March 1967, I asked the following question:

Would we [like Job] be able to say that the question of Auschwitz will be answered in any sense whatever in case the eclipse of God were ended and He appeared to us? An impossible and intolerable question.

Less than three months later this purely hypothetical question had become actual, when at Jerusalem the threat of total annihilation gave way to sudden salvation, atheists spoke of miracles, and hardboiled Western reporters resorted to biblical images.

The question is impossible and intolerable. Even Job's question is not answered by God's presence, and to him children are restored. The children of Auschwitz will not be restored, and the question of Auschwitz will not be answered by a saving divine presence.

And yet, is a Jew after Auschwitz permitted to despair of salvation because of Auschwitz? Is it permitted him to cast out all hope and all joy? But on the other side, can there be any hope and any joy, purchased at the price of forgetting? Any one of these responses would be further victories handed to Hitler, and are thus impossible.

It was into precisely this impossible and intolerable contradiction that believing Jews were placed by the events at Jerusalem in May and June 1967. Those events cast into clear relief the whole as yet unassimilated fact of an embattled, endangered, but nevertheless free Jewish state, emerging from ashes and catastrophe. Solely because of the connection of the events of May and June with Auschwitz did a military victory (rarely applauded in Judaism, and never for its own sake) acquire an inescapable religious dimension.

In this context, let me quote from a letter I recently received from Professor Harold Fisch of Bar-Han University in Israel:

May I report to you a conversation I had last summer with a colleague, a psychologist, who had served during the war as an artillery officer in Sinai. I asked him how he accounted for the remarkable heroism of the quite ordinary soldier of the line, for, as you may know, exemplary heroism was the normal thing at that time; mere carrying out of duty was the exception. Where, I asked him, was the psychological spring? To my surprise, he answered that what deeply motivated each and every soldier was the memory of the Holocaust, and the feeling that *above all this must never happen again*. There had been an ominous similarity between the statements of Arab leaders, their radio, and newspapers, and the remembered threats of the Nazis: We had entered into a *Shoah* (holocaust) psychosis, all around us enemies threatening us with extermination and having both the means and the will to carry out their threat. As the ring closed in and help seemed far, one noticed one's neighbors who had been in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen going about white-faced. It was all too obvious what was the source of their dread. The years in between had momentarily fallen away, and they were back in that veritable nightmare world. The dark night of the soul was upon us. *And it was the com-*

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*mandment which the Lord of history had, so to speak, pronounced at Auschwitz which saved us.* [Italics added.] I told my friend that I could not entirely accept his explanation because I knew that a majority of the soldiers had no personal or family recollections of the European Holocaust: They had come from North Africa or Yemen, or even the neighboring Arab countries where at that time such horrors were unknown. How could they feel the force of the analogy as could the survivors of Buchenwald? He told me that the intervening twenty years had brought it about that the Holocaust had become a collective experience pressing consciously and unconsciously on the minds of all, even the young, for whom Jewish history in the Diaspora had come to an end with the beginnings of Israeli independence.

It is solely because of this connection of the events of May and June with Auschwitz that a Jew must both tremble and rejoice. He must tremble lest he permit any light after Auschwitz to relieve the darkness of Auschwitz. He must rejoice, lest he add to the darkness of Auschwitz. Rejoicing after Auschwitz and because of Auschwitz, the Jew must be a Jew, *am Yisrael chai* (“the people Israel, alive”), a witness to the world, preparing a way for God. 📖



# The New York Intellectuals: A Chronicle & A Critique

By Irving Howe

**W**E DO NOT YET HAVE A full-scale history of intellectuals in the United States, but when that book comes to be written one of its central themes will surely be that our intellectuals have done their work mostly in isolation. Even the groups we locate in the past—the Transcendentalists encircling Emerson, the writers and critics following Van Wyck Brooks during the *Seven Arts* period—are groups mainly by courtesy of retrospect. The figures we see within them were not nearly so close to one another in experience nor so allied in opinion as our need for historical reconstruction makes them out to have been. The kind of inner fraternity we associate with literary groups in Paris and London has rarely been characteristic of American intellectual life. It is hardly an accident that one of our most poignant cultural legends concerns the brief friendship between Hawthorne and Melville and then its long sequel of separation. Ours is a culture in which people rattle around.

A seeming exception is the group of writers who have come to be known, these past few decades, as the New York intellectuals. They appear to have a common history, prolonged now for more than thirty years; a common political outlook, even if marked by ceaseless internecine quarrels; a common style of thought and perhaps composi-

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IRVING HOWE, a frequent contributor to COMMENTARY, was editor of Dissent.

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tion; a common focus of intellectual interests; and once you get past politeness—which becomes, these days, easier and easier—a common ethnic origin. They are, or until recently have been, anti-Communist; they are, or until some time ago were, radicals; they have a fondness for ideological speculation; they write literary criticism with a strong social emphasis; they revel in polemic; they strive self-consciously to be “brilliant”; and by birth or osmosis, they are Jews.

The New York intellectuals are perhaps the only group America has ever had that could be described as an *intelligentsia*. This term comes awkwardly to our lips, and for good reason: It suggests, as Martin Malia, a historian of Russian culture, writes, “more than intellectuals in the ordinary sense. Whether merely ‘critical-thinking’ or actively oppositional, their name indicates that [in Russia] they thought of themselves as the embodied ‘intelligence’ . . . or ‘consciousness’ of the nation. They clearly felt an exceptional sense of apartness from the society in which they lived.”

Malia’s phrase about “consciousness of the nation” seems special to the problems of the Russian intellectuals under Tsarism, but the rest of his description fits the New York intellectuals rather well: the stress upon “critical thinking,” the stance of active opposition, the sense of apartness. Or perhaps more accurately, it is a description which fits the past of the New York intellectuals. And just as the Russian “intelligentsia” was marked by a strongly Westernizing outlook, a wish to bring Russian culture out of its provincial limits and into a close relationship with the culture of Western Europe, so the New York intellectuals have played a role in the internationalization of American culture, serving as a liaison between American readers and Russian politics, French ideas, European writing.

A more complicated approach to the problem of the intelligentsia is provided by Renato Poggioli in his book *The Theory of the Avant Garde*. He describes the Russian intelligentsia as “an intellectual order from the lower ranks . . . created by those who were rejected by other classes: an intellectual order whose function was not so much cultural as political. . . .” Poggioli remarks that in Russia the term referred to a “cultural proletariat,” but

these intellectuals are not so much proletarian as proletarianizing . . . they may become ideologically and politically bound to the mass of workers and peasants but they are not, at bottom, an order economically bound to the interests of those masses. A member of the intelligentsia is not born but made.

I suspect there may be a contradiction between regarding the intelligentsia as an order “from the lower ranks” and concluding that a member of this order “is not born but made.” But Poggioli’s description is valuable insofar as it suggests that the intelligentsia is defined primarily by its position in society rather than by its relation to cul-

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ture. Poggioli wishes sharply to distinguish the intelligentsia from an “intellectual elite,” which he regards as a self-mobilized group whose *raison d’être* is a cultural attitude, and in our time, a positive commitment to modernist literature. In respect to late 19th and early 20th-century Russia, this distinction is useful; when we turn to America, we are obviously dealing with loose analogies, yet useful ones too, for Poggioli’s distinction should help us, a little later, to see the precise nature and limits of the New York intellectuals as a group.

Reflecting upon the experience of these writers, one begins to wonder whether—apart from a few years during the late 30s—they ever did constitute a coherent and self-defined group. The steady exchange of ideas, the reading of manuscripts, the preliminary discussion of work, all these characteristics of European intellectuals were not often evident in New York. On the contrary. In their work habits the New York intellectuals have mostly been loners, and in their relationships with one another, closer to the vision of life we associate with Hobbes than with Kropotkin. Repeatedly I have been struck by the way writers commonly associated with this group will hotly deny that it exists, or will say that if indeed it does exist they—*they!*—would not be so docile as to be part of it. Certain New York intellectuals like Harold Rosenberg and Lionel Abel have never been very strong in sentiments of group fraternity, and Rosenberg, in the course of a polemic against other New York writers, once coined the memorable phrase, “a herd of independent minds.” Some, like myself, have seen themselves as only in part and then ambivalently related, since we are also caught up with a separate political milieu.<sup>1</sup> After a time, in Europe, it became a source of pride for writers to say they had once been associated with the Bloomsbury group or the *Scrutiny* critics or the socialists led by Gorky before the Revolution; but for whatever reasons, that point has not been reached among the New York writers. I doubt that it ever will be. Contentious and, by virtue of their origins and history, uncertain as to their relationship with American culture, the New York intellectuals wish, so far as I can tell, to form a loose and unacknowledged tribe.

Yet the mere fact that there does exist a commonly-shared perception of a New York intellectual group, even if that perception is held mainly by hostile academics and a parasitic mass media, must be taken as decisive. That people “out there” believe in the reality of the New York group, makes it a reality of sorts. And in all candor there is something else: the New York writers dislike being labeled, they can speak bitterly about each other’s work and opinions, they may not see one another from year’s start to year’s end, but they are nervously alert to one another’s judgments. *Attention is paid*—whether from warranted respect or collective vanity or provincial narrowness, it hardly matters.

Such groups approach a fragile state of coherence only at the point where writers are coming together and the point where they are drifting apart. Especially does this seem true at the end, when there comes that tremor of self-awareness which no one would have troubled to feel during the years of energy and confidence. A tradition in

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process of being lost, a generation facing assault and ridicule from ambitious younger men—the rekindled sense of group solidarity is brought to a half-hour's flame by the hardness of dying. And it is at such moments that the mass media, never more than twenty years late, become aware of the problem: Their publicity signals recognition and recognition a certificate of death.

## II

**T**he social roots of the New York writers are not hard to trace. With a few delightful exceptions—a tendril from Yale, a vine from Seattle—they stem from the world of the immigrant Jews, either workers or petty bourgeois.<sup>2</sup> They come at a moment in the development of immigrant Jewish culture when there is a strong drive not only to break out of the ghetto but also to leave behind the bonds of Jewishness entirely. Earlier generations had known such feelings, and through many works of fiction, especially those by Henry Roth, Michael Gold, and Daniel Fuchs, one can return to the classic pattern of a fierce attachment to the provincialism of origins as it becomes entangled with a fierce eagerness to plunge into the Gentile world of success, manners, freedom. As early as the 1890s this pattern had already come into view, and with diminishing intensity it has continued to control Jewish life deep into the 20th century; perhaps its last significant expression comes in Philip Roth's stories, where the sense of Jewish tradition is feeble but the urge to escape its suburban ruins extremely strong.

The New York intellectuals were the first group of Jewish writers to come out of the immigrant milieu who did not define themselves through a relationship, nostalgic or hostile, to memories of Jewishness. They were the first generation of Jewish writers for whom the recall of an immigrant childhood does not seem to have been completely overwhelming. (Is that perhaps one reason few of them tried to write fiction?) That this severance from Jewish roots and immigrant sources would later come to seem a little suspect, is another matter. All I wish to stress here is that, precisely at the point in the 30s when the New York intellectuals began to form themselves into a loose cultural-political tendency, Jewishness as idea and sentiment played no significant role in their expectations—apart, to be sure, from a bitter awareness that no matter what their political or cultural desires, the sheer fact of their recent emergence had still to be regarded, and not least of all by themselves, as an event within Jewish American life.

For decades the life of the East European Jews, both in the old country and the new, might be compared to a tightly-gathered spring, trembling with unused force, which had been held in check until the climactic moment of settlement in America. Then the energies of generations came bursting out, with an ambition that would range from pure to coarse, disinterested to vulgar, and indeed would mix all these together,

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IRVING HOWE

but finally—this ambition—would count for more as an absolute release than in any of its local manifestations. What made Sammy run was partly that his father and his father's father had been bound hand and foot. And in all the New York intellectuals there was and had to be a fraction of Sammy. All were driven by a sense of striving, a thrust of will, an unspoken conviction that time had now to be regained.

The youthful experiences described by Alfred Kazin in his autobiography are, apart from his distinctive outcroppings of temperament, more or less typical of the experiences of many New York intellectuals—except, at one or two points, for the handful that involved itself deeply in the radical movement. It is my impression, however, that Kazin's affectionate stress on the Jewish sources of his experience is mainly a feeling of retrospect, mainly a recognition in the 50's and 60's that no matter how you might try to shake off your past, it would still cling to your speech, gestures, skin and nose, it would still shape, with a thousand subtle movements, the way you did your work and raised your children. In the 30's, however, it was precisely the idea of discarding the past, breaking away from families, traditions, and memories which excited intellectuals. They meant to declare themselves citizens of the world and, that succeeding, perhaps consider becoming writers of this country.

The Jewish immigrant world branded upon its sons and daughters marks of separateness even while encouraging them to dreams of universalism. This subculture may have been formed to preserve ethnic continuity, but it was the kind of continuity that would reach its triumph in self-disintegration. It taught its children both to conquer the Gentile world and to be conquered by it, both to leave an intellectual impress and to accept the dominant social norms. By the 20s and 30s the values dominating Jewish immigrant life were mostly secular, radical, and universalist, and if these were often conveyed through a parochial vocabulary, they nonetheless carried some remnants of European culture. Even as they were moving out of a constricted immigrant milieu, the New York intellectuals were being prepared by it for the tasks they would set themselves during the 30s. They were being prepared for the intellectual vocation as one of assertiveness, speculation, and free-wheeling; for the strategic maneuvers of a vanguard, at this point almost a vanguard in the abstract, with no ranks following in the rear; and for the union of politics and culture, with the politics radical and the culture cosmopolitan. What made this goal all the more attractive was that the best living American critic, Edmund Wilson, had triumphantly reached it: he was the author of both *The Triple Thinkers* and *To the Finland Station*, he served as a model for emulation, and he gave this view of the intellectual life a special authority in that he seemed to come out of the mainstream of American life.

That the literary avant garde and the political Left were not really comfortable partners would become clear with the passage of time; in Europe it already had. But during the years the New York intellectuals began to appear as writers and critics wor-

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thy of some attention, there was a feeling in the air that a union of *the advanced*—critical consciousness and political conscience—could be forged.

Throughout the 30s the New York intellectuals believed, somewhat naively, that this union was not only a desirable possibility but a tie both natural and appropriate. Except, however, for the Surrealists in Paris, and it is not clear how seriously this instance should be taken, the paths of political radicalism and cultural modernism have seldom met. To use Poggioli's terms, the New York writers were more an "intelligentsia" than an "intellectual elite," and more inclined to an amorphous "proletarianizing" than to an austere partisanship for modernism.

THE HISTORY OF THE WEST in the last century offers many instances in which Jewish intellectuals played an important role in the development of political radicalism; but almost always this occurred when there were sizable movements, with the intellectuals serving as spokesmen, propagandists, and functionaries of a party. In New York, by contrast, the intellectuals had no choice but to begin with a dissociation from the only significant radical movement in this country, the Communist party. What for European writers like Koestler, Silone, and Malraux would be the end of the road was here a beginning. In a fairly short time, the New York writers found that the meeting of political and cultural ideas which had stirred them to excitement could also leave them stranded and distressed. Radicalism, in both its daily practice and ethical biases, proved inhospitable to certain aspects of modernism—and not always, I now think, mistakenly. Literary modernism often had a way of cavalierly dismissing the world of daily existence, a world that remained intensely absorbing to the New York writers. Literary modernism could sometimes align itself with reactionary movements, a fact that was intensely embarrassing and required either torturous explanations or complex dissociations. The New York writers discovered, as well, that their relationship to modernism as a purely literary phenomenon was less authoritative and more ambiguous than they had wished to feel. The great battles for Joyce and Eliot and Proust had been fought in the 20's and mostly won; and now, while clashes with entrenched philistinism might still take place, they were mostly skirmishes or mopping-up operations (as in the polemics against the transfigured Van Wyck Brooks). The New York writers came at the end of the modernist experience, just as they came at what may yet have to be judged the end of the radical experience, and as they certainly came at the end of the Jewish experience. One shorthand way of describing their situation, a cause of both their feverish brilliance and their recurrent instability, is to say that *they came late*.

During the 30s and 40s their radicalism was anxious, problematic, and beginning to decay at the very moment it was adopted. They had no choice: The crisis of socialism was worldwide, profound, with no end in sight, and the only way to avoid that crisis was to bury oneself, as a few did, in the left-wing sects. Some of the New York writ-

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ers had gone through the “political school” of Stalinism, a training in coarseness from which not all recovered; some had even spent a short time in the organizational coils of the Communist party. By 1936, when the anti-Stalinist *Partisan Review* was conceived, the central figures of that moment—Philip Rahv, William Phillips, Sidney Hook—had shed whatever sympathies they once felt for Stalinism, but the hope that they could find another ideological system, some cleansed version of Marxism associated perhaps with Trotsky or Luxemburg, was doomed to failure. Some gravitated for a year or two toward the Trotskyist group, but apart from admiration for Trotsky’s personal qualities and dialectical prowess, they found little satisfaction there; no version of orthodox Marxism could retain a hold on intellectuals who had gone through the trauma of abandoning the Leninist *Weltanschauung* and had experienced the depth to which the politics of this century, most notably the rise of totalitarianism, called into question the once-sacred Marxist categories. From now on, the comforts of system would have to be relinquished.

Though sometimes brilliant in expression and often a stimulus to the kind of cultural speculation at which they excelled, the radicalism of the New York intellectuals during the 30s was not a deeply-grounded experience. It lacked roots in a popular movement which might bring intellectuals into relationship with the complexities of power and stringencies of organization. From a doctrine it became a style, and from a style a memory. It was symptomatic that the *Marxist Quarterly*, started in 1937 by a spectrum of Left intellectuals and probably the most distinguished Marxist journal ever published in this country, could survive no more than a year. The differences among its founders, some like James Burnham holding to a revolutionary Marxist line and others like Sidney Hook and Lewis Corey moving toward versions of liberalism and social democracy, proved too severe for collaboration. And even the radicalism of the *Partisan Review* editors and writers during its vivid early years—how deeply did it cut, except as a tool enabling them to break away from Marxism? Which of those writers and readers who now look back nostalgically have troubled to examine the early files of this important magazine and read—with embarrassment? amusement? pleasure?—the political essays it printed?

**Y**ET IF THE RADICALISM of the New York intellectuals seems to have been without much political foundation or ideological strength, it certainly played an important role in their own development. For the New York writers, and even I suspect those among them who would later turn sour on the whole idea of radicalism (including the few who in the mid-60’s would try to erase the memory of having turned sour), the 30’s represented a time of intensity and fervor, a reality or illusion of engagement, a youth tensed with conviction and assurance: so that even Dwight Macdonald, who at each point in his life has made a specialty out of mocking his previous beliefs, could not help displaying tender feelings upon remembering his years, God help us, as a

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“revolutionist.” The radicalism of the 30’s gave the New York intellectuals their distinctive style: a flair for polemic, a taste for the grand generalization, an impatience with what they regarded (often parochially) as parochial scholarship, an internationalist perspective, and a tacit belief in the unity—even if a unity beyond immediate reach—of intellectual work.

By comparison with competing schools of thought, the radicalism of the anti-Stalinist Left, as it was then being advanced in *Partisan Review*, seemed cogent, fertile, alive: it could stir good minds to argument, it could gain the attention of writers abroad, it seemed to offer a combination of system and independence. With time the anti-Stalinist intellectuals came to enjoy advantages somewhat like those which have enabled old radicals to flourish in the trade unions: they could talk faster than anyone else, they knew their way around better, they were quicker on their feet. Brief and superficial as their engagement with Marxism may have been, it gave the intellectuals the advantage of dialectic, sometimes dialectic as it lapsed into mere double-talk.

Yet in fairness I should add that this radicalism did achieve something of substantial value in the history of American culture. It helped destroy—once and for all, I would have said until recently—Stalinism as a force in our intellectual life, and with Stalinism those varieties of populist sentimentality which the Communist movement of the late 30s exploited with notable skill. If certain sorts of manipulative soft-headedness have been all but banished from serious American writing, and the kinds of rhetoric once associated with Archibald MacLeish and Van Wyck Brooks cast into permanent disrepute, at least some credit for this ought to go to the New York writers.

IT HAS RECENTLY BECOME fashionable, especially in the pages of the *New York Review of Books*, to sneer at the achievements of anti-Stalinism by muttering darkly about “the cold war.” But we ought to have enough respect for the past at least to avoid telescoping several decades. The major battle against Stalinism as a force within intellectual life, and in truth a powerful force, occurred before anyone heard of the cold war; it occurred in the late 30s and early 40s. In our own moment we see “the old crap,” as Marx once called it, rise to the surface with unnerving ease; there is something dizzying in an encounter with Stalin’s theory of “social fascism,” particularly when it comes from the lips of young people who may not even be quite sure when Stalin lived. Still, I think there will not and probably cannot be repeated in our intellectual life the ghastly large-scale infatuation with a totalitarian regime which disgraced the 30’s. Some achievements, a very few, seem beyond destruction.

A little credit is therefore due. Whatever judgments one may have about Sidney Hook’s later political writings, and mine have been very critical, it is a matter of decency to recall the liberating role he played in the 30s as spokesman for a democratic radicalism and a fierce opponent of all the rationalizations for totalitarianism a good many in-

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tellectuals allowed themselves. One reason people have recently felt free to look down their noses at “anti-Communism” as if it were a mass voodoo infecting everyone from far Right to democratic Left, is precisely the toughness with which the New York intellectuals fought against Stalinism. Neither they nor anybody else could reestablish socialism as a viable politics in the United States; but for a time they did help to salvage the honor of the socialist idea—which meant primarily to place it in the sharpest opposition to all totalitarian states and systems. What many intellectuals now say they take for granted, had first to be won through bitter and exhausting struggle.

I should not like to give the impression that Stalinism was the beginning and end of whatever was detestable in American intellectual life during the 30s. Like the decades to come, perhaps like all decades, this was a “low dishonest” time. No one who grew up in, or lived through, these years should wish for a replay of their ideological melodramas. Nostalgia for the 30s is a sentiment possible only to the very young or the very old, those who have not known and those who no longer remember. Whatever distinction can be assigned to the New York intellectuals during the 30s lies mainly in their persistence as a small minority, in their readiness to defend unpopular positions against apologists for the Moscow trials and the vigilantism of Popular Front culture. Some historians, with the selectivity of retrospect, have recently begun to place the New York intellectuals at the center of cultural life in the 30s—but this is both a comic misapprehension and a soiling honor. On the contrary; their best hours were spent on the margin, in opposition.

Later, in the 40s and 50s, most of the New York intellectuals would abandon the effort to find a renewed basis for a socialist politics—to their serious discredit, I believe. Some would vulgarize anti-Stalinism into a politics barely distinguishable from reaction. Yet for almost all New York intellectuals the radical years proved a decisive moment in their lives. And for a very few, the decisive moment.

I have been speaking here as if the New York intellectuals were mainly political people, but in reality this was true for only a few of them, writers like Hook, Macdonald, and perhaps Rahv. Most were literary men or journalists with no experience in any political movement; they had come to radical politics through the pressures of conscience and a flair for the dramatic; and even in later years, when they abandoned any direct political involvement, they would in some sense remain “political.” They would maintain an alertness toward the public event. They would respond with eagerness to historical changes, even if these promised renewed favor for the very ideas they had largely discarded. They would continue to structure their cultural responses through a sharp, perhaps excessively sharp, kind of categorization, in itself a sign that political styles and habits persisted. But for the most part, the contributions of the New York intellectuals were not to political thought. Given the brief span of time during which they fancied themselves agents of a renewed Marxism, there was little they could have done. Sidney Hook wrote one or two excellent books on the sources of Marxism, Harold Rosenberg

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one or two penetrating essays on the dramatics of Marxism; and not much more. The real contribution of the New York writers was toward creating a new, and for this country almost exotic, style of work. They thought of themselves as cultural radicals even after they had begun to wonder whether there was much point in remaining political radicals. But what could this mean? Cultural radicalism was a notion extremely hard to define and perhaps impossible to defend, as Richard Chase would discover in the late 50s, when against the main drift of New York opinion he put forward the idea of a radicalism without immediate political ends but oriented toward criticism of a meretricious culture. What Chase did not live long enough to see was that his idea, much derided at the time, would lend itself a decade later to caricature through success.

Chase was seriously trying to preserve a major impetus of New York intellectual life: the exploration and defense of literary modernism.<sup>3</sup> He failed to see, however, that this was a task largely fulfilled and, in any case, taking on a far more ambiguous and less militant character in the 50s than it would have had twenty or thirty years earlier. The New York writers had done useful work in behalf of modernist literature. Without fully realizing it, they were continuing a cultural movement that had begun in the United States during the mid-19th century: the return to Europe, not as provincials knocking humbly at the doors of the great, but as equals in an enterprise which by its very nature had to be international. We see this at work in Howells's reception of Ibsen and Tolstoy; in Van Wyck Brooks's use of European models to assault the timidities of American literature; in the responsiveness of *The Little Review* and *The Dial* to European experiments; and somewhat paradoxically, in the later fixation of the New Critics, despite an ideology of cultural provincialism, on modernist writing from abroad.

THE NEW YORK CRITICS, and most notably *Partisan Review*, helped complete this process of internationalizing American culture (also, by the way, Americanizing international culture). They gave a touch of glamor to that style which the Russians and Poles now call "cosmopolitan." *Partisan Review* was the first journal in which it was not merely respectable but a matter of pride to print one of Eliot's *Four Quartets* side by side with Marxist criticism. And not only did the magazine breakdown the polar rigidities of the hard-line Marxists and the hardline nativists; it also sanctioned the idea, perhaps the most powerful cultural idea of the last half century, that there existed an all but incomparable generation of modern masters, some of them still alive, who in this terrible age represented the highest possibilities of the human imagination. On a more restricted scale, *Partisan Review* helped win attention and respect for a generation of European writers—Silone, Orwell, Malraux, Koestler, Serge—who were not quite of the first rank as novelists but had yielded themselves to and suffered the failure of socialism.

If the *Partisan* critics came too late for a direct encounter with new work from

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the modern masters, they did serve the valuable end of placing that work in a cultural context more vital and urgent than could be provided by any other school of American criticism. For many young people up to and through the Second World War, the *Partisan* critics helped to mold a new sensibility, a mixture of rootless radicalism and a desanctified admiration for writers like Joyce, Eliot, and Kafka. I can recall that even in my orthodox Marxist phase I felt that the central literary expression of the time was a now half-forgotten poem by a St. Louis writer called "The Wasteland."

In truth, however, the New York critics were then performing no more than an auxiliary service. They were following upon the work of earlier, more fortunate critics. And even in the task of cultural consolidation, which soon had the unhappy result of overconsolidating the modern masters in the academy, the New York critics found important allies among their occasional opponents in the New Criticism. As it turned out, the commitment to literary modernism proved insufficient either as a binding literary purpose or as a theme that might inform the writings of the New York critics. By now modernism was entering its period of decline; the old excitements had paled and the old achievements been registered. Modernism had become successful; it was no longer a literature of opposition, and thereby had begun that metamorphosis signifying its ultimate death. The problem was no longer to fight for modernism, the problem was now to consider why the fight had so easily ended in triumph. And as time went on, modernism surfaced an increasing portion of its limitations and ambiguities, so that among some critics earlier passions of advocacy gave way to increasing anxieties of judgment. Yet the moment had certainly not come when a cool and objective reconsideration could be undertaken of works that had formed the sensibility of our time. The New York critics, like many others, were trapped in a dilemma from which no escape could be found but which lent itself to brilliant improvisation: it was too late for unobstructed enthusiasm, it was too soon for unobstructed valuation, and meanwhile the literary work that was being published, though sometimes distinguished, was composed in the heavy shadows of the modernists. At almost every point this work betrayed the marks of *having come after*.

Except for Harold Rosenberg, who would make "the tradition of the new" a signature of his criticism, the New York writers slowly began to release those sentiments of uneasiness they had been harboring about the modernist poets and novelists. One instance was the notorious Pound case,<sup>4</sup> in which literary and moral values, if not jammed into a head-on collision, were certainly entangled beyond easy separation. Essays on writers like D. H. Lawrence—what to make of his call for "blood consciousness," what one's true response might be to his notions of the leader cult—began to appear. A recent book by John Harrison, *The Reactionaries*, which contains a full-scale attack on the politics of several modernist writers, is mostly a compilation of views that had been gathering force over the last few decades. And then, as modernism stumbled into its late period, those recent years in which its early energies have evidently reached a point

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of exhaustion, the New York critics became still more discomfited. There was a notable essay several years ago by Lionel Trilling in which he acknowledged mixed feelings toward the modernist writers he had long praised and taught. There was a cutting attack by Philip Rahv on Jean Genet, a perverse genius in whose fiction the compositional resources of modernism seem all but severed from its moral—one might even say, its human—interests. And more recently there has been an essay by myself ending with the gloomy expectation that no dignified funeral awaits modernism, only noisy prolongation “in publicity and sensation, the kind of savage parody which may indeed be the only fate worse than death.”

For the New York intellectuals in the 30s and 40s there was still another focus of interest, never quite as strong as radical politics or literary modernism but seeming, for a brief time, to promise a valuable new line of discussion. In the essays of writers like Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald, more or less influenced by the German neo-Marxist school of Adorno-Horkheimer, there were beginnings at a theory of “mass culture,” that mass-produced pseudo-art characteristic of industrialized urban society, together with its paralyzed audiences, its inaccessible sources, its parasitic relation to high culture. More insight than system and more intuition than knowledge, this slender body of work, which appeared mostly in *Politics* and COMMENTARY, was nevertheless a contribution to the study of that hazy area where culture and society meet. It was attacked by writers like Edward Shils as being haughtily elitist, on the ground that it assumed a condescension to the tastes and experiences of the masses. It was attacked by writers like Harold Rosenberg, who charged that only people taking a surreptitious pleasure in dipping their noses into trash would study the “content” (he had no objection to sociological investigations) of mass culture. Even at its most penetrating, the criticism of mass culture was beset by uncertainty and improvisation; perhaps all necessary for a beginning.

Then, almost as if by common decision, the whole subject was dropped. For years hardly a word could be found in the advanced journals about what a little earlier had been called a crucial problem of the modern era. One reason was that the theory advanced by Greenberg and Macdonald turned out to be static: it could be stated but apparently not developed. It suffered from weaknesses parallel to those of Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism: by positing a *cul de sac*, a virtual end of days, for 20th-century man and his culture it proposed a suffocating relationship between high or minority culture and the ever-multiplying mass culture. From this relationship there seemed neither relief nor escape, and if one accepted this view, nothing remained but to refine the theory and keep adding grisly instances.

**I**N THE ABSENCE of more complex speculations, there was little point in continuing to write about mass culture. Besides, hostility toward the commercial pseudo-arts was hard to maintain with unyielding intensity, mostly because it was hard to

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remain all that *interested* in them—only in Macdonald's essays did both hostility and interest survive intact. Some felt that the whole matter had been inflated and that writers should stick to their business, which was literature, and intellectuals to theirs, which was ideas. Others felt that the movies and TV were beginning to show more ingenuity and resourcefulness than the severe notions advanced by Greenberg and Macdonald allowed for—though no one could have anticipated that glorious infatuation with trash which Marshall McLuhan would make acceptable. And still others felt that the multiplication of insights, even if pleasing as an exercise, failed to yield significant results: a critic who contributes a nuance to Dostoevsky criticism is working within a structured tradition, while one who throws off a clever observation about Little Orphan Annie is simply showing that he can do what he has done.

There was another and more political reason for the collapse of mass culture criticism. One incentive toward this kind of writing was the feeling that industrial society had reached a point of affluent stasis where no major upheavals could now be registered much more vividly in culture than in economics. While aware of the dangers of reductionism here, I think the criticism of mass culture did serve, as some of *its* critics charged, conveniently to replace the criticism of bourgeois society. If you couldn't stir the proletariat to action, you could denounce Madison Avenue in comfort. Once, however, it began to be felt among intellectuals in the 50s that there was no longer so overwhelming a need for political criticism, and then, at the other pole, once it began to seem in the 60s that there were new openings for political criticism, the appetite for cultural surrogates became less keen.

Greenberg now said little more about mass culture; Macdonald made no serious effort to extend his theory or test it against new events; and in recent years, younger writers have seemed to feel that the whole approach of these men was heavy and humorless. An influential critic like Susan Sontag has proposed a cheerfully eclectic view which undercuts just about everything written from the Greenberg-Macdonald position. Now everyone is to do "his thing," high, middle, or low; the old puritan habit of interpretation and judgment, so inimical to sensuousness, gives way to a programmed receptivity; and thus we are enlightened by lengthy studies of the ethos of the Beatles.

By the end of the Second World War, the New York writers had reached a point of severe intellectual crisis, though as frequently happens at such moments, they themselves often felt they were entering a phase of enlarged influence and power. Perhaps indeed there was a relation between inner crisis and external influence. Everything that had kept them going—the idea of socialism, the advocacy of literary modernism, the assault on mass culture, a special brand of literary criticism—was judged to be irrelevant to the postwar years. But as a group, just at the time their internal disintegration had seriously begun, the New York writers could be readily identified. The leading critics were Rahv, Phillips, Trilling, Rosenberg, Abel, and Kazin. The main political theorist

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was Hook. Writers of poetry and fiction related to the New York milieu were Delmore Schwartz, Saul Bellow, Paul Goodman, and Isaac Rosenfeld. And the recognized scholar, as also inspiring moral force, was Meyer Schapiro.

### III

A SHARP TURN OCCURS, or is completed, soon after the Second World War. The intellectuals now go racing or stumbling from idea to idea, notion to notion, hope to hope, fashion to fashion. This instability often derives from a genuine eagerness to capture all that seems new—or threatening—in experience, sometimes from a mere desire to capture a bitch-goddess whose first name is Novelty. The abandonment of ideology can be liberating: a number of talents, thrown back on their own resources, begin to grow. The surrender of “commitment” can be damaging: some writers find themselves rattling about in a gray and chilly freedom. The culture opens up, with both temptation and generosity, and together with intellectual anxieties there are public rewards, often deserved. A period of dispersion; extreme oscillations in thought; and a turn in politics toward an increasingly conservative kind of liberalism—reflective, subtle, acquiescent.

The postwar years were marked by a sustained discussion of the new political and intellectual problems raised by the totalitarian state. Nothing in received political systems, neither Marxist nor liberal, adequately prepared one for the frightful mixture of terror and ideology, the capacity to sweep along the plebeian masses and organize a warfare state, and above all the readiness to destroy entire peoples, which characterized totalitarianism. Still less was anyone prepared—who had heeded the warning voices of the Russian socialist Martov or the English liberal Russell?—for the transformation of the revolutionary Bolshevik state, either through a “necessary” degeneration or an internal counterrevolution, into one of the major totalitarian powers. Marxist theories of fascism—the “last stage” of capitalism, with the economy statified to organize a permanent war machine and mass terror employed to put down rebellious workers—came to seem, if not entirely mistaken, then certainly insufficient. The quasi- or pseudo-Leninist notion that “bourgeois democracy” was merely a veiled form of capitalist domination, no different in principle from its open dictatorship, proved to be a moral and political disaster. The assumption that socialism was an ordained “next step,” or that nationalization of industry constituted a sufficient basis for working-class rule, was as great a disaster. No wonder intellectual certainties were shattered and these years marked by frenetic improvisation! At every point, with the growth of Communist power in Europe and with the manufacture of the Bomb at home, apocalypse seemed the name of tomorrow.

So much foolishness and malice has been written about the New York intellectuals

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and their anti-Communism, either by those who have signed a separate peace with the authoritarian idea or those who lack the courage to defend what is defensible in their own past, that I want here to be both blunt and unyielding.

Given the enormous growth of Russian power after the Second World War and the real possibility of a Communist takeover in Europe, the intellectuals—and not they alone—had to reconsider their political responses.<sup>5</sup> An old-style Marxist declaration of rectitude, a plague repeated on both their houses? Or the difficult position of making foreign policy proposals for the United States, while maintaining criticism of its social order, so as to block totalitarian expansion without resort to war? Most intellectuals decided they had to choose the second course, and as far as that goes, I think they were right.

Like anti-capitalism, anti-Communism was a tricky politics, all too open to easy distortion. Like anti-capitalism, anti-Communism could be put to the service of ideological racketeering and reaction. Just as ideologues of the fanatic Right insisted that by some ineluctable logic anti-capitalism led to a Stalinist terror, so ideologues of the authoritarian Left, commandeering the same logic, declared that anti-Communism led to the politics of Dulles and Rusk. There is, of course, no “anti-capitalism” or “anti-Communism” in the abstract; these take on political flesh only when linked with a larger body of programs and values, so that it becomes clear what *kind* of “anti-capitalism” or “anti-Communism” we are dealing with. It is absurd, and indeed disreputable, for intellectuals in the 60s to write as if there were a unified “anti-Communism” which can be used to enclose the views of everyone from William Buckley to Michael Harrington.

There were difficulties. A position could be worked out for conditional support of the West when it defended Berlin or introduced the Marshall Plan or provided economic help to underdeveloped countries; but in the course of daily politics, in the effort to influence the foreign policy of what remained a capitalist power, intellectuals could lose their independence and slip into vulgarities of analysis and speech.

Painful choices had to be faced. When the Hungarian revolution broke out in 1956, most intellectuals sympathized strongly with the rebels yet feared that active intervention by the West might provoke a world war. For a rational and humane mind, anti-Communism could not be the sole motive, it could only be one of several, in political behavior and policy; and even those intellectuals who had by now swung a considerable distance to the Right did not advocate military intervention in Hungary. There was simply no way out—as, just recently, there was none in Czechoslovakia.

It became clear, furthermore, that U.S. military intervention in underdeveloped countries could help local reactionaries in the short run, and the Communists in the long run. These difficulties were inherent in postwar politics, and they ruled out—though for that very reason, also made tempting—a simplistic moralism. These difficulties were also exacerbated by the spread among intellectuals of a crude anti-Communism, often ready to justify whatever the U.S. might do at home and abroad. For a hard-line group

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within the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, all that seemed to matter in any strongly-felt way was a sour hatred of the Stalinists, historically justifiable but more and more a political liability even in the fight against Stalinism. The dangers in such a politics now seem all too obvious, but I should note, for whatever we may mean by the record, that in the early 50s they were already being pointed out by a mostly unheeded minority of intellectuals around *Dissent*. Yet, with all these qualifications registered, the criticism to be launched against the New York intellectuals in the postwar years is not that they were strongly anti-Communist but rather that many of them, through disorientation or insensibility, allowed their anti-Communism to become something cheap and illiberal.

NOR IS THE MAIN POINT of *moral* criticism that the intellectuals abandoned socialism. We have no reason to suppose that the declaration of a socialist opinion induces a greater humaneness than does acquiescence in liberalism. It could be argued (I would) that in the ease with which ideas of socialism were now brushed aside there was something shabby. It was undignified, at the very least, for people who had made so much of their Marxist credentials now to put to rest so impatiently the radicalism of their youth. Still, it might be said by some of the New York writers that reality itself had forced them to conclude socialism was no longer viable or had become irrelevant to the American scene, and that while this conclusion might be open to political argument, it was not to moral attack.

Let us grant that for a moment. What cannot be granted is that the shift in ideologies required or warranted the surrender of critical independence which was prevalent during the 50s. In the trauma—or relief—of ideological ricochet, all too many intellectuals joined the American celebration. It was possible, to cite but one of many instances, for Mary McCarthy to write: “Class barriers disappear or tend to become porous [in the U.S.]; the factory worker is an economic aristocrat in comparison with the middle-class clerk. . . . *The America . . . of vast inequalities and dramatic contrasts is rapidly ceasing to exist*”<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added). Because the New York writers all but surrendered their critical perspective on American society—that is why they were now open to attack.<sup>7</sup>

It was the growth of McCarthyism which brought most sharply into question the role of the intellectuals. Here, presumably, all men of good will could agree; here the interests of the intellectuals were beyond dispute and directly at stake. The record is not glorious. In New York circles it was often said that Bertrand Russell exaggerated wildly in describing the U.S. as “subject to a reign of terror” and that Simone de Beauvoir retained Stalinist clichés in her reportage from America. Yet it should not be forgotten that, if not “a reign of terror,” McCarthyism was frightful and disgusting, and that a number of Communists and fellow-travelers, not always carefully specified, suffered serious harm.

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A magazine like *Partisan Review* was of course opposed to McCarthy's campaign, but it failed to take the lead on the issue of freedom which might once again have imbued the intellectuals with fighting spirit. Unlike some of its New York counterparts, it did print sharp attacks on the drift toward conservatism, and it did not try to minimize the badness of the situation in the name of anti-Communism. But the magazine failed to speak out with enough force and persistence, or to break past the hedgings of those intellectuals who led the American Committee for Cultural Freedom.

COMMENTARY under Elliot Cohen's editorship, was still more inclined to minimize the threat of McCarthyism. In September 1952, at the very moment McCarthy became a central issue in the presidential campaign, Cohen could write: "McCarthy remains in the popular mind an unreliable, second-string blowhard; his only support as a great national figure is from the fascinated fears of the intelligentsia"—a mode of argument all too close to that of the anti-anti-Communists who kept repeating that Communism was a serious problem only in the minds of anti-Communists.

In the American Committee for Cultural Freedom the increasingly conformist and conservative impulses of the New York intellectuals, or at least of a good number of them, found formal expression. I quote at length from Michael Harrington in a 1955 *Dissent*, first because it says precisely what needs to be said and second because it has the value of contemporary evidence:

In practice the ACCF has fallen behind Sidney Hook's views on civil liberties. Without implying any "conspiracy" theory of history . . . one may safely say that it is Hook who has molded the decisive ACCF policies. His *Heresy Yes, Conspiracy No* articles were widely circulated by the Committee, which meant that in effect it endorsed his systematic, explicit efforts to minimize the threat to civil liberties and to attack those European intellectuals who, whatever their own political or intellectual deficiencies, took a dim view of American developments. Under the guidance of Hook and the leadership of Irving Kristol, who supported Hook's general outlook, the American Committee cast its weight not so much in defense of these civil liberties which were steadily being nibbled away, but rather against those few remaining fellow-travelers who tried to exploit the civil-liberties issue.

At times this had an almost comic aspect. When Irving Kristol was executive secretary of the ACCF, one learned to expect from him silence on those issues that were agitating the whole intellectual and academic world, and enraged communiqués on the outrages performed by people like Arthur Miller and Bertrand Russell in exaggerating the dangers to civil liberties in the U.S.

Inevitably this led to more serious problems. In an article by Kristol, which first appeared in COMMENTARY and was later circulated under the ACCF imprimatur, one could read such astonishing and appalling statements as "there is one thing the American people know about

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Senator McCarthy; he, like them, is unequivocally anti-Communist. About the spokesmen for American liberalism, they feel they know no such thing. And with some justification.” This in the name of defending cultural freedom!

Harrington then proceeded to list several instances in which the ACCF had “acted within the United States in defense of freedom.” But

these activities do not absorb the main attention or interest of the Committee; its leadership is too jaded, too imbued with the sourness of indiscriminate anti-Stalinism to give itself to an active struggle against the dominant trend of contemporary intellectual life in America. What it *really* cares about is a struggle against fellow-travelers and “neutralists”—that is, against many European intellectuals. . . .

One of the crippling assumptions of the Committee has been that it would not intervene in cases where Stalinists or accused Stalinists were involved. It has rested this position on the academic argument . . . that Stalinists, being enemies of democracy, have no “right” to democratic privileges. . . . But the actual problem is not the metaphysical one of whether enemies of democracy (as the Stalinists clearly are) have a “right” to democratic privileges. What matters is that the drive against cultural freedom and civil liberties takes on the guise of anti-Stalinism.

Years later came the revelations that the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which had its headquarters in Paris and with which the American Committee was for a time affiliated, had received secret funds from the CIA. Some of the people, it turned out, with whom one had sincerely disagreed were not free men at all; they were knowing accomplices of an intelligence service. What a sad denouement! And yet not the heart of the matter, as the malicious *Ramparts* journalists have tried to make out. Most of the intellectuals who belonged to the ACCF seem not to have had any knowledge of the CIA connection—on this, as on anything else, I would completely accept the word of Dwight Macdonald. It is also true, however, that these intellectuals seem not to have inquired very closely into the Congress’s sources of support. That a few, deceiving their closest associates, established connections with the CIA was not nearly so important, however, as that a majority within the Committee acquiesced to a politics of acquiescence. We Americans have a strong taste for conspiracy theories, supposing that if you scratch a trouble you’ll find a villain. But history is far more complicated, and squalid as the CIA tie was, it should not be used to smear honest people who had nothing to do with secret services even as they remain open to criticism for what they did say and do.

At the same time, the retrospective defenses offered by some New York intellectuals strike me as decidedly lame. Meetings and magazines sponsored by the Congress,

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Daniel Bell has said, kept their intellectual freedom and contained criticism of U.S. policy—true but hardly to the point, since the issue at stake is not the opinions the Congress tolerated but the larger problem of good faith in intellectual life. The leadership of the Congress did not give its own supporters the opportunity to choose whether they wished to belong to a CIA-financed group. Another defense, this one offered by Sidney Hook, is that private backing was hard to find during the years it was essential to publish journals like *Preuves* and *Encounter* in Europe. Simply as a matter of fact, I do not believe this. For the Congress to have raised its funds openly, from non-governmental sources, would have meant discomfort, scrounging, penny-pinching: all the irksome things editors of little magazines have always had to do. By the postwar years, however, leading figures of both the Congress and the Committee no longer thought or behaved in that tradition.

Dwight Macdonald did. His magazine *Politics* was the one significant effort during the late 40's to return to radicalism. Enlivened by Macdonald's ingratiating personality and his table-hopping mind, *Politics* brought together sophisticated muckraking with torturous revaluations of Marxist ideology. Macdonald could not long keep in balance the competing interests which finally tore apart his magazine: lively commentary on current affairs and unavoidable if depressing retrospects on the failure of the Left. As always with Macdonald, honesty won out (one almost adds, alas) and the "inside" political discussion reached its climax with his essay "The Root Is Man," in which he arrived at a kind of anarcho-pacifism based on an absolutist morality. This essay was in many ways the most poignant and authentic expression of the plight of those few intellectuals—Nicola Chiaromonte, Paul Goodman, Macdonald—who wished to dissociate themselves from the postwar turn to Realpolitik but could not find ways of transforming sentiments of rectitude and visions of Utopia into a workable politics. It was also a perfect leftist rationale for a kind of internal emigration of spirit and mind, with some odd shadings of similarity to the Salinger cult of the late 50s.<sup>8</sup>

The overwhelming intellectual drift, however, was toward the Right. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., with moony glances at Kierkegaard, wrote essays in which he maintained that American society had all but taken care of its economic problems and could now concentrate on raising its cultural level. The "end of ideology" became a favorite shield for intellectuals in retreat, though it was never entirely clear whether this phrase meant the end of "our" ideology (partly true) or that all ideologies were soon to disintegrate (not true) or that the time had come to abandon the nostalgia for ideology (at least debatable). And in the mid-50s, as if to codify things, there appeared in *Partisan Review* a symposium, "Our Country and Our Culture," in which all but three or four of the thirty participants clearly moved away from their earlier radical views. The rapprochement with "America the Beautiful," as Mary McCarthy now called it in a tone not wholly ironic, seemed almost complete.

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IN THESE YEARS there also began that series of gyrations in opinion, interest, and outlook—so frenetic, so unserious—which would mark our intellectual life. In place of the avant-garde idea we now had the *style of fashion*, though to suggest a mere replacement may be too simple, since as Poggioli remarks, fashion has often shadowed the avant garde as a kind of dandified double. Some intellectuals turned to a weekend of religion, some to a semester of existentialism,<sup>9</sup> some to a holiday of Jewishness without faith or knowledge, some to a season of genteel conservatism. Leslie Fiedler, no doubt by design, seemed to go through more of such episodes than anyone else: Even his admirers could not always be certain whether he was *davenning* or doing a rain dance.

These twists and turns were lively, and they could all seem harmless if only one could learn to look upon intellectual life as a variety of play, like potsie or king of the hill. What struck one as troubling, however, was not this or that fashion (tomorrow morning would bring another), but the dynamic of fashion itself, the ruthlessness with which, to remain in fashion, fashion had to keep devouring itself.

It would be unfair to give the impression that the fifteen years after the war were without significant growth or achievement among the New York writers. The attempt of recent New Left ideologues to present the 40s and 50s as if they were no more than a time of intellectual sterility and reaction is an oversimplification. Together with the turn toward conservative acquiescence, there were serious and valuable achievements. Hannah Arendt's book on totalitarianism may now seem open to many criticisms, but it certainly must rank as a major piece of work which, at the very least, made impossible—I mean, implausible—those theories of totalitarianism which, before and after she wrote, tended to reduce fascism and Stalinism to a matter of class rule or economic interest. Daniel Bell's writing contributed to the rightward turn of these years, but some of it, such as his excellent little book *Work and Its Discontents*, constitutes a permanent contribution, and one that is valuable for radicals too. The stress upon complexity of thought which characterized intellectual life during these years could be used as a rationale for conservatism, and perhaps even arose from the turn toward conservatism; but in truth, the lapsed radicalism of earlier years had proved to be simplistic, the world of late capitalism was perplexing, and for serious people complexity is a positive value. Even the few intellectuals who resisted the dominant temper of the 50s underwent during these years significant changes in their political outlooks and styles of thought: e.g., those around *Dissent* who cut whatever ties of sentiment still held them to the Bolshevik tradition and made the indissoluble connection between democracy and socialism a crux of their thought. Much that happened during these years is to be deplored and dismissed, but not all was waste; the increasing sophistication and complication of mind was a genuine gain, and it would be absurd, at this late date, to forgo it.

In literary criticism there were equivalent achievements. The very instability that

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might make a shambles out of political thought could have the effect of magnifying the powers required for criticism. Floundering in life and uncertainty in thought could make for an increased responsiveness to art. In the criticism of men like Trilling, Rahv, Chase, and Dupee there was now a more authoritative relation to the literary text and a richer awareness of the cultural past than was likely to be found in their earlier work. And a useful tension was also set up between the New York critics, whose instinctive response to literature was through a social-moral contextualism, and the New Critics, whose formalism may have been too rigid yet proved of great value to those who opposed it.

**M**EANWHILE, the world seemed to be opening up, with all its charms, seductions, and falsities. In the 30s the life of the New York writers had been confined: the little magazine as island, the radical sect as cave. Partly they were recapitulating the pattern of immigrant Jewish experience: an ingathering of the flock in order to break out into the world and taste the Gentile fruits of status and success. Once it became clear that waiting for the revolution might turn out to be steady work and that the United States would neither veer to fascism nor sink into depression, the intellectuals had little choice but to live within (which didn't necessarily mean, become partisans of) the existing society.

There was money to be had from publishers, no great amounts but more than in the past. There were jobs in the universities, even for those without degrees. Some writers began to discover that publishing a story in *The New Yorker* or *Esquire* was not a sure ticket to Satan; others to see that the academy, while perhaps less exciting than the Village, wasn't invariably a graveyard for intellect and might even provide the only harbor in which serious people could do their own writing and perform honorable work. This dispersion involved losses, but usually there was nothing sinister about it—unless one clung, past an appropriate age, to the fantasy of being a momentarily unemployed “professional revolutionist.” Writers ought to know something about the world; they ought to test their notions against the reality of the country in which they live. Worldly involvements would, of course, bring risks, and one of these was power, really a very trifling kind of power, but still enough to raise the fear of corruption. That power corrupts everyone knows by now, but we ought also to recognize that powerlessness, if not corrupting, can be damaging—as in the case of Paul Goodman, a very courageous writer who stuck to his anarchist beliefs through years in which he was mocked and all but excluded from the New York journals, yet who could also come to seem, in his very rectitude, an example of asphyxiating righteousness.

What brought about these changes? Partly ideological adaptation, a feeling that capitalist society was here to stay and there wasn't much point in maintaining a radical position or posture. Partly the sly workings of prosperity. But also a loosening of the society itself, the start of that process which only now is in full swing—I mean the remark-

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able absorptiveness of modern society, its readiness to abandon traditional precepts for a moment of excitement, its growing permissiveness toward social criticism, perhaps out of indifference, or security, or even tolerance.

In the 60s well-placed young professors and radical students would denounce the “success,” sometimes the “sellout” of the New York writers. Their attitude reminds one a little of George Orwell’s remark about wartime France: Only a Pétain could afford the luxury of asceticism, ordinary people had to live by the necessities of materialism. But really, when you come to think of it, what did this “success” of the intellectuals amount to? A decent or a good job, a chance to earn extra money by working hard, and in the case of a few, like Trilling and Kazin, some fame beyond New York—rewards most European intellectuals would take for granted, so paltry would they seem. For the New York writers who lived through the 30s expecting never to have a job at all, a regular pay check might be remarkable; but in the American scale of things it was very modest indeed. And what the “leftist” prigs of the 60s, sons of psychiatrists and manufacturers, failed to understand—or perhaps understood only too well—was that the “success” with which they kept scaring themselves was simply one of the possibilities of adult life, a possibility, like failure, heavy with moral risks and disappointment. Could they imagine that they too might have to face the common lot?—I mean the whole business: debts, overwork, varicose veins, alimony, drinking, quarrels, hemorrhoids, depletion, the recognition that one might not prove to be another T.S. Eliot, but also some good things, some lessons learned, some “rags of time” salvaged and precious.

Here and there you could find petty greed or huckstering, now and again a drop into opportunism; but to make much of this would be foolish. Common clay, the New York writers had their share of common ambition. What drove them, and sometimes drove them crazy, was not, however, the quest for money, nor even a chance to “mix” with White House residents; it was finally, when all the trivia of existence was brushed aside, a gnawing ambition to write something, even three pages, that might live.

The intellectuals should have regarded their entry into the outer world as utterly commonplace, at least if they kept faith with the warning of Stendhal and Balzac that one must always hold a portion of the self forever beyond the world’s reach. Few of the New York intellectuals made much money on books and articles. Few reached audiences beyond the little magazines. Few approached any centers of power, and precisely the buzz of gossip attending the one or two sometimes invited to a party beyond the well-surveyed limits of the West Side showed how confined their life still was. What seems most remarkable in retrospect is the innocence behind the assumption, sometimes held by the New York writers themselves with a nervous mixture of guilt and glee, that whatever recognition they won was cause for either preening or embarrassment. For all their gloss of sophistication, they had not really moved very far into the world. The immigrant milk was still on their lips.

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IN THEIR PUBLISHED WORK during these years, the New York intellectuals developed a characteristic style of exposition and polemic. With some admiration and a bit of irony, let us call it the style of brilliance. The kind of essay they wrote was likely to be wide-ranging in reference, melding notions about literature and politics, sometimes announcing itself as a study of a writer or literary group but usually taut with a pressure to “go beyond” its subject, toward some encompassing moral or social observation. It is a kind of writing highly self-conscious in mode, with an unashamed vibration of bravura and display. Nervous, strewn with knotty or flashy phrases, impatient with transitions and other concessions to dullness, willfully calling attention to itself as a form or at least an outcry, fond of rapid twists, taking pleasure in dispute, dialectic, dazzle—such, at its best or most noticeable, was the essay cultivated by the New York writers. Until recently its strategy of exposition was likely to be impersonal (the writer did not speak much as an “I”) but its tone and bearing were likely to be intensely personal (the audience was to be made aware that the aim of the piece was not judiciousness but rather a strong impress of attitude, a blow of novelty, a wrenching of accepted opinion, sometimes a mere indulgence of vanity).

In most of these essays there was a sense of *tournament*, the writer as gymnast with one eye on other rings, or as skilled infighter juggling knives of dialectic. Polemics were harsh, often rude. And audiences nurtured, or spoiled, on this kind of performance, learned not to form settled judgments about a dispute until all sides had registered their blows: Surprise was always a possible reward.

This style may have brought new life to the American essay, but in contemporary audiences it often evoked a strong distaste and even fear. “Ordinary” readers could be left with the fretful sense that they were not “in,” the beauties of polemic racing past their sluggish eye. Old-line academics, quite as if they had just crawled out of *The Dunciad*, enjoyed dismissing the New York critics as “unsound.” And for some younger souls, the cliffs of dialectic seemed too steep. Seymour Krim has left a poignant account of his disablement before “the overcerebral, Europeanish, sterilely citified, pretentiously alienated” New York intellectuals. Resentful at the fate which drove them to compare themselves with “the over-cerebral etc. etc.,” Krim writes that he and his friends “were often tortured and unappeasably bitter about being the offspring of this unhappily unique-ingrown-screwed-up breed.” Similar complaints could be heard from other writers and would-be writers who felt that New York intellectualism threatened their vital powers.

At its best the style of brilliance reflected a certain view of the intellectual life: free-lance dash, peacock strut, daring hypothesis, knockabout synthesis. For better or worse it was radically different from the accepted modes of scholarly publishing and middle-brow journalism. It celebrated the idea of the intellectual as anti-specialist, or as a writer whose speciality was the lack of a speciality: the writer as dilettante-connoisseur,

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*Luftmensch* of the mind, roamer among theories. But it was a style which also lent itself with peculiar ease to a stifling mimicry and decadence. Sometimes it seemed—no doubt mistakenly—as if any sophomore, indeed any parrot, could learn to write one of those scintillating *Partisan* reviews, so thoroughly could manner consume matter. In the 50s the cult of brilliance became a sign that writers were offering not their work or ideas but themselves, the *persona* as content; and this was but a step or two away from the exhibitionism of the 60s. Brilliance could become a sign of intellect unmoored: the less assurance, the more pyrotechnics. In making this judgment I ought to be frank enough to register the view that serious writers may prove to be brilliant and take pleasure in the proving, but insofar as they are serious, their overriding aim must be absolute lucidity.

IF TO THE MINOR GENRE of the essay the New York writers made a major contribution, to the major genres of fiction and poetry they made only a minor contribution. As a literary group and no more than a literary group, they will seem less important than, say, the New Critics, who did set in motion a whole school of poetry. A few poets—Berryman, Lowell, Jarrell, perhaps Kunitz—have been influenced by the New York intellectuals, though in ways hard to specify and hardly comprising a major pressure on their work: all were finished writers by the time they brushed against the New York milieu. For one or two poets, the influence of New York meant becoming aware of the cultural pathos resident in the idea of the Jew (not always distinguished from the idea of Del-more Schwartz). But the main literary contribution of the New York milieu has been to legitimate a subject and tone we must uneasily call American Jewish writing. The fiction of urban malaise, second-generation complaint, Talmudic dazzle, woeful alienation, and dialectical irony, all found its earliest expression in the pages of *COMMENTARY* and *Partisan Review*—fiction in which the Jewish world is not merely regained in memory as a point of beginnings, an archetypal Lower East Side of spirit and place, but is also treated as a portentous metaphor of man's homelessness and wandering.

Such distinguished short fictions as Bellow's "Seize the Day," Schwartz's "In Dreams Begin Responsibility," Mailer's "The Man Who Studied Yoga," and Malamud's "The Magic Barrel" seem likely to survive the cultural moment in which they were written. And even if one concludes that these and similar pieces are not enough to warrant speaking of a major literary group, they certainly form a notable addition—a new tone, a new sensibility—to American writing. In time, these writers may be regarded as the last "regional" group in American literature, parallel to recent Southern writers in both sophistication of craft and a thematic dissociation from the values of American society. Nor is it important that during the last few decades both of these literary tendencies, the Southern and the Jewish, have been overvalued. The distance of but a few years has already made it clear that except for Faulkner Southern writing consists of a scatter of talented minor poets and novelists; and in a decade or so a similar judgment may be

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IRVING HOWE

commonly accepted about most of the Jewish writers—though in regard to Bellow and Mailer settled opinions are still risky.

What is clear from both Southern and Jewish writing is that in a society increasingly disturbed about its lack of self-definition, the recall of regional and traditional details can be intensely absorbing in its own right, as well as suggestive of larger themes transcending the region. (For the Jewish writers New York was not merely a place, it was a symbol, a burden, a stamp of history.) Yet the writers of neither school have thus far managed to move from their particular milieu to a grasp of the entire culture; the very strengths of their localism define their limitations; and especially is this true for the Jewish writers, in whose behalf critics have recently overreached themselves. The effort to transform a Jewishness without religious or ethnic content into an emblem of universal dismay can easily lapse into sentimentality.

Whatever the hopeful future of individual writers, the “school” of American Jewish writing is by now in an advanced state of decomposition: how else explain the attention it has lately enjoyed? Or the appearance of a generation of younger Jewish writers who, without authentic experience or memory to draw upon, manufacture fantasies about the lives of their grandfathers? Or the popularity of Isaac Bashevis Singer who, coming to the American literary scene precisely at the moment when writers composing in English had begun to exhaust the Jewish subject, could, by dazzling contrast, extend it endlessly backward in time and deeper in historical imagination?

Just as there appear today young Jewish intellectuals who no longer know what it is that as Jews they do not know, so in fiction the fading immigrant world offers a thinner and thinner yield to writers of fiction. It no longer presses on memory, people can now *choose* whether to care about it. We are almost at the end of a historic experience, and it now seems unlikely that there will have arisen in New York a literary school comparable to the best this country has had. Insofar as the New York intellectual atmosphere has affected writers like Schwartz, Rosenfeld, Bellow, Malamud, Mailer, Goodman, and Roth (some of these would hotly deny that it has), it seems to have been too brittle, too contentious, too insecure for major creative work. What cannot yet be estimated is the extent to which the styles and values of the New York world may have left a mark on the work of American writers who never came directly under its influence or have been staunchly hostile to all of its ways.

Thinking back upon intellectual life in the 40s and 50s, and especially the air of malaise that hung over it, I find myself turning to a theme as difficult to clarify as it is impossible to evade. And here, for a few paragraphs, let me drop the porous shield of impersonality and speak openly in the first person.

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WE WERE LIVING directly after the Holocaust of the European Jews. We might scorn our origins; we might crush America with discoveries of ardor; we might change our names. But we knew that but for an accident of geography we might also now be bars of soap. At least some of us could not help feeling that in our earlier claims to have shaken off all ethnic distinctiveness there had been something false, something shaming. Our Jewishness might have no clear religious or national content, it might be helpless before the criticism of believers; but Jews we were, like it or not, and liked or not.

To recognize that we were living after one of the greatest and least explicable catastrophes of human history, and one for which we could not claim to have adequately prepared ourselves either as intellectuals or as human beings, brought a new rush of feelings, mostly unarticulated and hidden behind the scrim of consciousness. It brought a low-charged but nagging guilt, a quiet remorse. Sartre's brilliant essay on authentic and inauthentic Jews left a strong mark. Hannah Arendt's book on totalitarianism had an equally strong impact, mostly because it offered a coherent theory, or at least a coherent picture, of the concentration camp universe. We could no longer escape the conviction that, blessing or curse, Jewishness was an integral part of our life, even if—and perhaps just because—there was nothing we could do or say about it. Despite a few simulated seders and literary raids on-Hasidism, we could not turn back to the synagogue; we could only express our irritation with “the community” which kept nagging us like disappointed mothers; and sometimes we tried, through imagination and recall, to put together a few bits and pieces of the world of our fathers. I cannot prove a connection between the Holocaust and the turn to Jewish themes in American fiction, at first urgent and quizzical, later fashionable and manipulative. I cannot prove that my own turn to Yiddish literature during the 50s was due to the shock following the war years. But it would be foolish to scant the possibility.

The violent dispute which broke out among the New York intellectuals when Hannah Arendt published her book on Eichmann had as one of its causes a sense of guilt concerning the Jewish tragedy—a guilt pervasive, unmanageable, yet seldom declared at the surface of speech or act. In the quarrel between those attacking and those defending *Eichmann in Jerusalem* there were polemical excesses on both sides, insofar as both were acting out of unacknowledged passions. Yet even in the debris of this quarrel there was, I think, something good. At least everyone was acknowledging emotions that had long gone unused. Nowhere else in American academic and intellectual life was there such ferocity of concern with the problems raised by Hannah Arendt. If left to the rest of the American intellectual world, her book would have been praised as “stimulating” and “thoughtful,” and then everyone would have gone back to sleep. Nowhere else in the country could there have been the kind of public forum sponsored on this subject by *Dissent*: A debate sometimes ugly and outrageous, yet also urgent and afire—evidence

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that in behalf of ideas we were still ready to risk personal relationships. After all, it had never been dignity that we could claim as our strong point.

## IV

**N**OTHING ABOUT THE NEW YORK WRITERS is more remarkable than the sheer fact of their survival. In a country where tastes in culture change more rapidly than lengths of skirts, they have succeeded in maintaining a degree of influence, as well as a distinctive milieu, for more than thirty years. Apart from reasons intrinsic to the intellectual life, let me note a few that are somewhat more worldly in nature.

- There is something, perhaps a quasi-religious dynamism, about an ideology, even a lapsed ideology that everyone says has reached its end, which yields force and coherence to those who have closely experienced it. A lapsed Catholic has tactical advantages in his apostasy which a lifelong skeptic does not have. And just as Christianity kept many 19th-century writers going long after they had discarded religion, so Marxism gave bite and edge to the work of 20th-century writers long after they had turned from socialism.
- The years in which the New York writers gained some prominence were those in which the style at which they had arrived—irony, ambiguity, complexity, the problematic as mode of knowledge—took on a magnified appeal for the American educated classes. After the Second World War the cultivation of private sensibility and personal responsibility were values enormously popular among reflective people, to whom the very thought of public life smacked of betrayal and vulgarity.
- An intelligentsia flourishes in a capital: Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin. The influence of the New York writers grew at the time New York itself, for better or worse, became the cultural center of the country. And thereby, to return to Poggioli's categories, the New York writers slowly shed the characteristics of an intelligentsia and transformed themselves into—

### An Establishment?

Perhaps. But what precisely *is* an Establishment? Vaguely sinister in its overtones, the term is used these days with gay abandon on the American campus; but except as a spread-eagle put-down it has no discernible meaning, and if accepted as a put-down, the problem then becomes to discover who, if anyone, is not in the Establishment. In England the term has had a certain clarity of usage, referring to an intellectual elite which derives from the same upper and middle classes as the men who wield political power and which shares with these men Oxbridge education and Bloomsbury culture. But ex-

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cept in F. R. Leavis's angrier tirades, "Establishment" does not bear the conspiratorial overtones we are inclined to credit in this country. What it does in England is to locate the social-cultural stratum guiding the tastes of the classes in power and thereby crucially affecting the tastes of the country as a whole.

In this sense, neither the New York writers nor any other group can be said to comprise an American Establishment, simply because no one in this country has ever commanded an equivalent amount of cultural power. The New York writers have few, if any, connections with a stable class of upper-rank civil servants or with a significant segment of the rich. They are notably without connections in Washington. They do not shape official or dominant tastes. And they cannot exert the kind of control over cultural opinion that the London Establishment is said to have maintained until recently. Critics like Trilling and Kazin are listened to by people in publishing, Rosenberg and Greenberg by people in the art world; but this hardly constitutes anything so formidable as an Establishment. Indeed, at the very time mutterings have been heard about a New York literary Establishment, there has occurred a rapid disintegration of whatever group ties may still have remained among the New York writers. They lack—and it is just as well—the first requirement for an Establishment: that firm sense of internal discipline which enables it to impose its values and tastes on a large public.

During the last few years the talk about a New York Establishment has taken an extremely unpleasant turn. Whoever does a bit of lecturing about the country is likely to encounter, after a few drinks, literary academics who inquire enviously, sometimes spitefully, about "what's new in New York." Such people seem to feel that exile in outlying regions means they are missing something remarkable (and so they are: the Balanchine company). The cause of their cultural envy is, I think, a notion that has become prevalent in our English departments that scholarship is somehow unworthy and the "real" literary life is to be found in the periodical journalism of New York. Intrinsically this is a dubious notion and for the future of American education, a disastrous one; when directed against the New York writers it leads to some painful situations. As polite needling questions are asked about the cultural life of New York, a rise of sweat comes to one's brow, for everyone knows what no one says: New York means Jews.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the duration or extent of the influence enjoyed by the New York intellectuals, it is now reaching an end. There are signs of internal disarray: unhealed wounds, a dispersal of interests, the damage of time. More important, however, is the appearance these last few years of a new and powerful challenge to the New York writers. And here I shall have to go off on what may appear to be a long digression, since one cannot understand the present situation of the New York writers without taking into detailed account the cultural-political scene of America in the 60s.

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**T**HERE IS A RISING YOUNGER GENERATION of intellectuals: ambitious, self-assured, at ease with prosperity while conspicuously alienated, unmarred by the traumas of the totalitarian age, bored with memories of defeat, and attracted to the idea of power. This generation matters, thus far, not so much for its leading figures and their meager accomplishments, but for the political-cultural style—what I shall call the new sensibility—it thrusts into absolute opposition both to the New York writers and to other groups. It claims not to seek penetration into, or accommodation with, our cultural and academic institutions; it fancies the prospect of a harsh generational fight; and given the premise with which it begins—that everything touched by older men reeks of betrayal—its claims and fancies have a sort of propriety. It proposes a revolution, I would call it a counterrevolution, in sensibility. Though linked to New Left politics, it goes beyond any politics, making itself felt, like a spreading blot of anti-intellectualism, in every area of intellectual life. Not yet fully cohered, this new cultural group cannot yet be fully defined, nor is it possible fully to describe its projected sensibility, since it declares itself through a refusal of both coherence and definition.

There is no need to discuss once more the strengths and weaknesses of the New Left, its moral energies and intellectual muddles. Nor need we be concerned with the tactical issues separating New Left politics from that of older left-wing intellectuals. Were nothing else at stake than, say, “coalition politics,” the differences would be both temporary and tolerable. But in reality a deeper divergence of outlook has begun to show itself. The new intellectual style, insofar as it approximates a politics, mixes sentiments of anarchism with apologies for authoritarianism; bubbling hopes for “participatory democracy” with manipulative elitism; unqualified populist majoritarianism with the reign of the cadres.

A confrontation of intellectual outlooks is unavoidable. And a central issue is certain to be the problem of liberalism, not liberalism as one or another version of current politics, nor even as a theory of power, but liberalism as a cast of mind, a structure of norms by means of which to humanize public life. For those of us who have lived through the age of totalitarianism and experienced the debacle of socialism, this conflict over liberal values is extremely painful. We have paid heavily for the lesson that democracy, even “bourgeois democracy,” is a precious human achievement, one that, far from being simply a mode of mass manipulation, has been wrested through decades of struggle by the labor, socialist, and liberal movements. To protect the values of liberal democracy, often against those who call themselves liberals, is an elementary task for the intellectuals as a social group.

Yet what I have just been saying, axiomatic as it may seem, has in the last few years aroused opposition, skepticism, open contempt among professors, students, and intellectuals. On the very crudest, though by no means unpopular, level, we find a vulgarization of an already vulgar Marxism. The notion that we live in a society that can be described

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as “liberal fascism” (a theoretic contribution from certain SDS leaders) isn’t one that serious people can take seriously; but the fact that it is circulated in the academic community signifies a counterrevolution of the mind: a refusal of nuance and observation, a willed return to the kind of political primitivism which used to declare the distinctions of bourgeois rule—democratic, authoritarian, totalitarian—as slight in importance.

For the talk about “liberal fascism” men like Norman Mailer must bear a heavy responsibility, insofar as they have recklessly employed the term “totalitarian” as a descriptive for present-day American society. Having lived through the ghastliness of the Stalinist theory of “social fascism” (the grand-daddy of “liberal fascism”) I cannot suppose any literate person really accepts this kind of nonsense, yet I know that people can find it politically expedient to pretend that they do. It is, in Ernest Nolte’s phrase, “a lie which the intellect sees for what it is but which is [felt to be] at one with the deeper motivations of life.”

**T**HERE ARE SOPHISTICATED EQUIVALENTS. One of these points to the failings and crises of democracy, concluding that the content of decision has been increasingly separated from the forms of decision-making. Another emphasizes the manipulation of the masses by communication media and declares them brain-washed victims incapable of rational choice and acquiescing in their own subjugation. A third decries the bureaucratic entanglements of the political process and favors some version, usually more sentiment than scheme, for direct plebiscitary rule. With varying intelligence, all point to acknowledged problems of democratic society; and there could be no urgent objection were these criticisms not linked with the premise that the troubles of democracy can be overcome by undercutting or bypassing representative institutions. Thus, it is quite true that the masses are manipulated, but to make that the crux of a political analysis is to lead into the notion that elections are mere “formalities” and majorities mere tokens of the inauthentic; what is needed, instead, is Marcuse’s “educational dictatorship” (in which, I hope, at least some of the New York intellectuals would require the most prolonged reeducation). And in a similar vein, all proposals for obligatory or pressured “participation,” apart from violating the democratic right not to participate, have a way of discounting those representative institutions and limitations upon power which can alone provide a degree of safeguard for liberal norms.

Perhaps the most sophisticated and currently popular of anti-democratic notions is that advanced by Herbert Marcuse: his contempt for tolerance on the ground that it is a veil for subjection, a rationale for maintaining the status quo, and his consequent readiness to suppress “regressive” elements of the population lest they impede social “liberation.” About these theories, which succeed in salvaging the worst of Leninism, Henry David Aiken has neatly remarked: “Whether garden-variety liberties can survive the ministrations of such ‘liberating tolerance’ is not a question that greatly interests

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Marcuse.” Indeed not.

Such theories are no mere academic indulgence or sectarian irrelevance; they have been put to significant use on the American campus as rationalizations for schemes to break up meetings of political opponents and as the justification for imaginary *coups d'état* by tiny minorities of enraged intellectuals. How depressing that “men of the Left,” themselves so often victims of repression, should attack the values of tolerance and freedom.<sup>11</sup>

THESE DIFFERENCES concerning liberal norms run very deep and are certain to affect American intellectual life in the coming years; yet they do not quite get to the core of the matter. In the *Kulturkampf* now emerging there are issues more consequential than the political ones, issues that have to do with basic views concerning the nature of human life.

One of these has been with us for a long time, and trying now to put it into simple language, I feel a measure of uneasiness, as if it were bad form to violate the tradition of antinomianism in which we have all been raised.

What, for “emancipated” people, is the surviving role of moral imperatives, or at least moral recommendations? Do these retain for us a shred of sanctity or at least of coercive value? The question to which I am moving is not, of course, whether the moral life is desirable or men should try to live it; no, the question has to do with the provenance and defining conditions of the moral life. Do moral principles continue to signify insofar as and if they come into conflict with spontaneous impulses, and more urgently still, can we conceive of moral principles retaining some validity if they do come into conflict with spontaneous impulses? Are we still to give credit to the idea, one of the few meeting-points between traditional Christianity and modern Freudianism, that there occurs and must occur a deepseated clash between instinct and civilization, nature and nurture, or can we now, with a great sigh of collective relief, dismiss this as still another hangup, perhaps the supreme hangup, of Western civilization?

For more than 150 years there has been a line of Western thought, as also of sentiment in modern literature, which calls into question not one or another moral commandment or regulation, but the very idea of commandment and regulation; which insists that the ethic of control, like the ethic of work, should be regarded as spurious, a token of a centuries-long heritage of repression. Sometimes this view comes to us as a faint residue of Christian heresy, more recently as the blare of Nietzschean prophecy, and on our own day as a psychoanalytic gift.

Now, even those of us raised on the premise of revolt against received values, against the whole system of bourgeois constriction and anti-pleasure, did not—I suppose it had better be said outright—imagine ourselves to be exempt from the irksome necessity of regulation, even if we had managed to escape the reach of the commandments. Neither

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primitive Christians nor romantic naïfs, we did not suppose that we could entrust ourselves entirely to the beneficence of nature, or the signals of our bodies, as a sufficient guide to conduct. My very use of the word “conduct,” freighted as it is with normative associations, puts the brand of time on what I am saying.

By contrast, the emerging new sensibility rests on a vision of innocence: an innocence through lapse or will or recovery, an innocence through a refusal of our and perhaps any other culture, an innocence not even to be preceded by the withering away of the state, since in this view of things the state could wither away only if men learned so to be at ease with their desires, all need for regulation would fade. This is a vision of life beyond good and evil, not because these experiences or possibilities of experience have been confronted and transcended, but because the categories by which we try to designate them have been dismissed. There is no need to taste the apple: the apple brings health to those who know how to bite it: And look more closely, there is no apple at all, it exists only in your sickened imagination.

The new sensibility posits a theory that might be called the *psychology of unobstructed need*: Men should satisfy those needs which are theirs, organic to their bodies and psyches, and to do this they now must learn to discard or destroy all those obstructions, mostly the result of cultural neurosis, which keep them from satisfying their needs. This does not mean that the moral life is denied; it only means that in the moral economy costs need not be entered as a significant item. In the current vocabulary, it becomes a matter of everyone doing “his own thing,” and once all of us are allowed to do “his own thing,” a prospect of easing harmony unfolds. Sexuality is the ground of being, and vital sexuality the assurance of the moral life.

Whether this outlook is compatible with a high order of culture or a complex civilization I shall not discuss here; Freud thought they were not compatible, though that does not foreclose the matter. More immediately, and on a less exalted plane, one is troubled by the following problem: What if the needs and impulses of human beings clash, as they seem to do, and what if the transfer of energies from sexuality to sociality does not proceed with the anticipated abundance and smoothness? The new sensibility, as displayed in the writings of Norman Brown and Norman Mailer, falls back upon a curious analogue to *laissez faire* economics, Adam Smith’s invisible hand, by means of which innumerable units in conflict with one another achieve a resultant of cooperation. Is there, however, much reason to suppose that this will prove more satisfactory in the economy of moral conduct than it has in the morality of economic relations?

Suppose that, after reading Mailer’s “The White Negro,” my “thing” happens to be that, to “dare the unknown” (as Mailer puts it), I want to beat in the brains of an aging candystore keeper; or after reading LeRoi Jones, I should like to cut up a few Jews, whether or not they keep stores—how is anyone going to argue against the outpouring of my need? Who will declare himself its barrier? Against me, against my ideas it is pos-

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sible to argue, but how, according to this new dispensation, can anyone argue against my *need*? Acting through violence I will at least have realized myself, for I will have entered (to quote Mailer) “a new relation with the police” and introduced “a dangerous element” into my life; thereby, too, I will have escaped the cell-block of regulation which keeps me from the free air of self-determination. And if you now object that this very escape may lead to brutality, you reveal yourself as hopelessly linked to imperfection and original sin. For why should anyone truly heeding his nature wish to kill or wound or do anything but love and make love? That certain spokesmen of the new sensibility seem to be boiling over with fantasies of blood, or at least suppose that a verbal indulgence in such fantasies is a therapy for the boredom in their souls, is a problem for dialecticians. And as for skeptics, what have they to offer but evidence from history, that European contamination?

**W**HEN IT IS TRANSPOSED to a cultural setting, this psychology—in earlier times it would have been called a moral psychology—provokes a series of disputes over “complexity” in literature. Certain older critics find much recent writing distasteful and tiresome because it fails to reach or grasp for that complexity which they regard as intrinsic to the human enterprise. More indulgent critics, not always younger, find the same kind of writing forceful, healthy, untangled. At first this seems like a problem in taste, a pardonable difference between those who like their poems and novels knotty and those who like them smooth; but soon it becomes clear that this clash arises from a meeting of incompatible world-outlooks. For if the psychology of unobstructed need is taken as a sufficient guide to life, it all but eliminates any need for complexity—or rather, the need for complexity comes to be seen as a mode of false consciousness, an evasion of true feelings, a psychic bureaucratism in which to trap the pure and the strong. If good sex signifies good feeling; good feeling, good being; good being, good action; and good action, a healthy polity, then we have come the long way round, past the Reichian way or the Lawrentian way, to an Emersonian romanticism minus Emerson’s complicatedness of vision. The world snaps back into a system of burgeoning potentialities, waiting for free spirits to attach themselves to the richness of natural object and symbol—except that now the orgasmic blackout is to replace the Oversoul as the current through which pure transcendent energies will flow.

We are confronting, then, a new phase in our culture, which in motive and spring represents a wish to shake off the bleeding heritage of modernism and reinstate one of those periods of the collective naï which seem endemic to American experience. The new sensibility is impatient with ideas. It is impatient with literary structures of complexity and coherence, only yesterday the catchwords of our criticism. It wants instead works of literature—though literature may be the wrong word—that will be as absolute as the sun, as unarguable as orgasm, and as delicious as a lollipop. It schemes to throw

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off the weight of nuance and ambiguity, legacies of high consciousness and tired blood. It is weary of the habit of reflection, the making of distinctions, the squareness of dialectic, the tarnished gold of inherited wisdom. It cares nothing for the haunted memories of old Jews. It has no taste for the ethical nail-biting of those writers of the Left who suffered defeat and could never again accept the narcotic of certainty. It is sick of those magnifications of irony that Mann gave us, sick of those visions of entrapment to which Kafka led us, sick of those shufflings of daily horror and grace that Joyce left us. It breathes contempt for rationality, impatience with mind, and a hostility to the artifices and decorums of high culture. It despises liberal values, liberal cautions, liberal virtues. It is bored with the past: for the past is a fink.

Where Marx and Freud were diggers of intellect, mining deeper and deeper into society and the psyche, and forever determined to strengthen the dominion of reason, today the favored direction of search is not inward but sideways, an “expansion of consciousness” through the kick of drugs. The new sensibility is drawn to images of sickness, but not, as with the modernist masters, out of dialectical canniness or religious blasphemy; it takes their denials literally and does not even know the complex desperations that led them to deny. It seeks to charge itself into dazzling sentience through chemicals and the rhetoric of violence. It gropes for sensations: the innocence of blue, the ejaculations of red. It *ordains* life’s simplicity. It chooses surfaces as against relationships, the skim of texture rather than the weaving of pattern. Haunted by boredom, it transforms art into a sequence of shocks which, steadily magnified, yield fewer and fewer thrills, so that simply to maintain a modest *frisson* requires mounting exertions. It proposes an art as disposable as a paper dress, to which one need give nothing but a flicker of notice. Especially in the theater it resurrects tattered heresies, trying to collapse aesthetic distance in behalf of touch and frenzy. (But if illusion is now worn out, what remains but staging the realities of rape, fellatio, and murder?) Cutting itself off from a knowledge of what happened before the moment of its birth, it repeats with a delighted innocence most of what did in fact happen: expressionist drama reduced to skit, agit-prop tumbled to farce, Melvillean anguish slackened into black humor. It devalues the word, which is soaked up with too much past history, and favors monochromatic cartoons, companionate grunts, and glimpses of the ineffable in popular ditties. It has some humor, but not much wit. Of the tragic it knows next to nothing. Where Dostoevsky made nihilism seem sinister by painting it in jolly colors, the new American sensibility does something no other culture could have aspired to: It makes nihilism seem casual, good-natured, even innocent. No longer burdened by the idea of the problematic, it arms itself with the paraphernalia of post-industrial technique and crash-dives into a Typee of neo-primitivism.

Its high priests are Norman Brown, Herbert Marcuse, and Marshall McLuhan,<sup>12</sup> all writers with a deeply conservative bias: all committed to a stasis of the given: the stasis of unmoving instinct, the stasis of unmovable society, the stasis of endlessly moving

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technology. Classics of the latest thing, these three figures lend the new sensibility an aura of profundity. Their prestige can be employed to suggest an organic link between cultural modernism and the new sensibility, though in reality their relation to modernism is no more than biographical.

Perhaps because it is new, some of the new style has its charms—mainly along the margins of social life, in dress, music, and slang. In that it captures the yearnings of a younger generation, the new style has more than charm: a vibration of moral desire, a desire for goodness of heart. Still, we had better not deceive ourselves. Some of those shiny-cheeked darlings adorned with flowers and tokens of love can also be campus *enragés* screaming “Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers, This Is a Stickup” (a slogan that does not strike one as a notable improvement over “Workers of the World, Unite”).

**T**HAT FINALLY there should appear an impulse to shake off the burdens and entanglements of modernism need come as no surprise. After all the virtuosos of torment and enigma we have known, it would be fine to have a period in Western culture devoted to relaxed pleasures and surface hedonism. But so far this does not seem possible: the century forbids it. What strikes one most forcefully about a great deal of the new writing and theater is its grindingly ideological tone, even if now the claim is for an ideology of pleasure. And what strikes one even more is the air of pulsing *ressentiment* which pervades this work, an often unearned and seemingly inexplicable hostility. If one went by the cues of a critic like Susan Sontag, one might suppose that the ethical torments of Kamanetz Podolsk and the moral repressiveness of Salem, Massachusetts had finally been put to rest, in favor of creamy delights in texture, color, and sensation. But nothing of the sort is true, at least not yet; it is only advertised.

Keen on tactics, the spokesmen for the new sensibility proclaim it to be still another turn in the endless gyrations of modernism, still another revolt in the permanent revolution of 20th-century sensibility. This approach is very shrewd, since it can disarm in advance those older New York (and other) critics who still respond with enthusiasm to the battlecries of modernism. But several objections or qualifications need to be registered:

- Modernism, by its very nature, is uncompromisingly a minority culture, creating and defining itself through opposition to a dominant culture. Today, however, nothing of the sort is true. Floodlights glaring and tills overflowing, the new sensibility is a success from the very start. The middle-class public, eager for thrills and humiliations, welcomes it; so do the mass media, always on the alert for exploitable sensations; and naturally there appear intellectuals with handy theories. The new sensibility is both embodied and celebrated in the actions of Norman Mailer, whose condition as a swinger in America is not quite comparable with that of Joyce in Trieste or Kafka in Prague or Lawrence anywhere;
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it is reinforced with critical exegesis by Susan Sontag, a publicist able to make brilliant quilts from grandmother's patches; it is housed and braced by Robert Brustein, who has been writing drama reviews as if thumbing one's nose on the stage were a sufficient act of social criticism.<sup>13</sup> And on a far lower level, it has even found its Smerdyakov in LeRoi Jones, that parodist of apocalypse who rallies Jewish audiences with calls for Jewish blood. Whatever one may think of this situation, it is surely very different from the classical picture of a besieged modernism.

- By now the search for the "new," often reduced to a trivializing of form and matter, has become the predictable old. To suppose that we keep moving from cultural breakthrough to breakthrough requires a collective wish to forget what happened yesterday and even the day before: ignorance always being a great spur to claims for originality. Alienation has been transformed from a serious and revolutionary concept into a motif of mass culture, and the content of modernism into the decor of *kitsch*. As Harold Rosenberg has pungently remarked:

The sentiment of the diminution of personality is an historical hypothesis upon which writers have constructed a set of literary conventions by this time richly equipped with theatrical machinery and symbolic allusions. . . . The individual's emptiness and inability to act have become an irrefrangible cliché, untiringly supported by an immense, voluntary phalanx of latecomers to modernism. In this manifestation, the notion of the void has lost its critical edge and is thoroughly reactionary.

- The effort to assimilate new cultural styles to the modernist tradition brushes aside problems of value, quality, judgment. It rests upon a philistine version of the theory of progress in the arts: All must keep changing, and change signifies a realization of progress. Yet even if an illicit filiation can be shown, there is a vast difference in seriousness and accomplishment between the modernism of some decades ago and what we have now. The great literary modernists (to cite but one instance) put at the center of their work a confrontation and struggle with the demons of nihilism; the literary swingers of the 60s, facing a nihilist violation, cheerfully remove the threat by what Fielding once called "a timely compliance." Just as in the verse of Swinburne echoes of Romanticism sag through the stanzas, so in much current writing there is indeed a continuity with modernism, but a continuity of grotesque and parody, through the doubles of fashion.

**S**TILL, IT WOULD BE FOOLISH to deny that in the *Kulturkampf* of the 60s, the New York intellectuals are at a severe disadvantage. Some have simply gone over to the other camp. A critic like Susan Sontag employs the dialectical skills and accumulated knowledge of intellectual life in order to bless the new sensibility as a dis-

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pensation of pleasure, beyond the grubby reach of interpretation and thereby, it would seem, beyond the tight voice of judgment. That her theories are skillfully-rebuilt versions of aesthetic notions long familiar and discarded; that in her own critical writing she interprets like mad and casts an image anything but hedonistic, relaxed, or sensuous—none of this need bother her admirers, for a highly literate spokesman is very sustaining to those who have discarded or not acquired intellectual literacy. Second only to Miss Sontag in trumpeting the new sensibility is Leslie Fiedler, a critic with an amiable weakness for thrusting himself at the head of parades marching into sight.<sup>14</sup> But for those New York (or any other) writers not quite enchanted with the current scene there are serious difficulties.

They cannot be quite *sure*. Having fought in the later battles for modernism, they must acknowledge to themselves the possibility that, now grown older, they have lost their capacity to appreciate innovation. Why, they ask themselves with some irony, should “their” cultural revolution have been the last one, or the last good one? From the publicists of the new sensibility they hear the very slogans, catchwords, and stirring appeals which a few decades ago they were hurling in behalf of modernism and against such diehards as Van Wyck Brooks and Bernard de Voto. And given the notorious difficulties in making judgments about contemporary works of art, how can they be certain that Kafka is a master of despair and Burroughs a symptom of disintegration, Pollack a pioneer of innovation and Warhol a triviality of pop? The capacity for self-doubt, the habit of self-irony, which is the reward of decades of experience renders them susceptible to the simplistic cries of the new.

Well, the answer is that there can be no certainty: We should neither want nor need it. One must speak out of one’s taste and conviction, and let history make whatever judgments it will care to. But this is not an easy stand to take, for it means that after all these years one may have to face intellectual isolation and perhaps dismissal, and there are moments when it must seem as if the best course is to be promiscuously “receptive,” swinging along with a grin of resignation.

**I**N THE FACE OF THIS CHALLENGE, surely the most serious of the last twenty-five years, the New York intellectuals have not been able to mount a coherent response, certainly not a judgment sufficiently inclusive and severe. There have been a few efforts, some intellectual polemics by Lionel Abel and literary pieces by Philip Rahv; but no more. Yet if ever there was a moment when our culture needed an austere and sharp criticism—the one talent the New York writers supposedly find it death to hide—it is today. One could imagine a journal with the standards, if hopefully not the parochialism, of *Scrutiny*. One could imagine a journal like *Partisan Review* stripping the pretensions of the current scene with the vigor it showed in opposing the Popular Front and neo-conservative cultures. But these are fantasies. In its often accomplished pages *Partisan*

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*Review* betrays a hopeless clash between its editors' capacity to apply serious standards and their yearnings to embrace the moment. Predictably, the result satisfies no one.

One example of the failure of the New York writers to engage in criticism is their relation to Norman Mailer. He is not an easy man to come to grips with, for he is "our genius," probably the only one, and in more than a merely personal way he is a man of enormous charm. Yet Mailer has been the central and certainly most dramatic presence in the new sensibility, even if in reflective moments he makes clear his ability to brush aside its incantations.<sup>15</sup> Mailer as thaumaturgist of orgasm; as metaphysician of the gut; as psychic herb-doctor; as advance man for literary violence;<sup>16</sup> as dialectician of unreason; and above all, as a novelist who has laid waste his own formidable talent—these masks of brilliant, nutty restlessness, these papery dikes against squalls of boredom—all require sharp analysis and criticism. Were Mailer to read these lines he would surely grin and exclaim that, whatever else, his books have suffered plenty of denunciation. My point, however, is not that he has failed to receive adverse reviews, including some from such New York critics as Norman Podhoretz, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Philip Rahv; perhaps he has even had too many adverse reviews, given the scope and brightness of his talent. My point is that the New York writers have failed to confront Mailer seriously as an intellectual spokesman, a cultural agent, and instead have found it easier to regard him as a hostage to the temper of our times. What has not been forthcoming is a recognition, surely a painful one, that in his major public roles he has come to represent values in deep opposition to liberal humaneness and rational discourse. That the New York critics have refused him this confrontation is both a disservice to Mailer and a sign that, whatever it may once have been, the New York intellectual community no longer exists as a significant force.

An equally telling sign is the recent growth in popularity and influence of the *New York Review of Books*. Emerging at least in part from the New York intellectual milieu, this journal has steadily moved away from the styles and premises with which it began. Its early dependence on those New York writers who lent their names to it and helped establish it seems all but over. The Jewish imprint has been blotted out; the *New York Review*, for all its sharp attacks on current political policies, is thoroughly at home in the worlds of American culture, publishing, and society. It features a strong Anglophile slant in its literary pieces, perhaps in accord with the *New Statesman* formula of blending leftish (and at one time, fellow-traveling) politics with Bloomsbury culture, Kingsley Martin with tips on wine. More precisely, what the *New York Review* has managed to achieve—I find it quite fascinating as a portent of things to come—is a link between campus "leftism" and East Side stylishness, the worlds of Tom Hayden and George Plimpton. Opposition to Communist politics and ideology is frequently presented in the pages of the *New York Review* as if it were an obsolete, indeed a pathetic, hangover from a discredited past or worse yet, a dark sign of the CIA. A snappish and crude anti-American-

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ism has swept over much of its political writing—and to avoid misunderstanding, let me say that by this I do not mean anything so necessary as attacks on the ghastly Vietnam war or on our failures in the cities. And in the hands of writers like Andrew Kopkind (author of the immortal phrase, “morality . . . starts at the barrel of a gun”), liberal values and norms are treated with something very close to contempt.

Though itself too sophisticated to indulge in the more preposterous New Left notions, such as “liberal fascism” and “confrontationism,” the *New York Review* has done the New Left the considerable service of providing it with a link of intellectual respectability to the academic world. In the materials it has published by Kopkind, Tom Hayden, Philip Rahv, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, Jason Epstein, and others, one finds not an acceptance of the fashionable talk about “revolution” which has become an indoor and outdoor sport on the American campus, but a kind of rhetorical violence, a verbal “radicalism,” which gives moral and intellectual encouragement to precisely such fashionable (self-defeating) talk.

This is by no means the only kind of political material to have appeared in the *New York Review*; at least in my own experience I have found its editors prepared to print articles of a sharply different kind; and in recent years it has published serious political criticism by George Lichtheim, Theodore Draper, and Walter Laqueur.

And because it is concerned with maintaining a certain level of sophistication and accomplishment, the *New York Review* has not simply taken over the new sensibility. No, at stake here is the dominant tone of this skillfully edited paper, an editorial keenness in responding to the current academic and intellectual temper—as for instance in that memorable issue with a cover featuring, no doubt for the benefit of its university readers, a diagram explaining how to make a Molotov cocktail. The genius of the *New York Review*, and it has been a genius of sorts, is not, in either politics or culture, for swimming against the stream.

**P**ERHAPS IT IS ALL TOO LATE. Perhaps there is no longer available among the New York writers enough energy and coherence to make possible a sustained confrontation with the new sensibility. Still, one would imagine that their undimmed sense of the Zeitgeist would prod them to sharp responses, precise statements, polemical assaults. What, after all, would be risked in saying that we have entered a period of overwhelming cultural sleaziness?

Having been formed by, and through opposition to, the New York intellectual experience, I cannot look with joy at the prospect of its ending. But neither with dismay. Such breakups are inevitable, and out of them come new voices and energies. Yet, precisely at this moment of dispersion, might not some of the New York writers achieve renewed strength if they were to struggle once again for whatever has been salvaged from these last few decades? For the values of liberalism, for the politics of a democratic radicalism,

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for the norms of rationality and intelligence, for the standards of literary seriousness, for the life of the mind as a humane dedication—for all this it should again be worth finding themselves in a minority, even a beleaguered minority, and not with fantasies of martyrdom but with a quiet recognition that for the intellectual this is likely to be his usual condition. 🍷

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<sup>1</sup> Is it “they” or “we”? To speak of the New York intellectuals as “they” might seem coy or disloyal; to speak of “we” self-assertive or cozy. Well, let it be “they,” with the proviso that I do not thereby wish, even if I could, to exempt myself from judgment.

<sup>2</sup> In placing this emphasis on the Jewish origins of the New York intellectuals, I am guilty of a certain—perhaps unavoidable—compression of the realities. Were I writing a book rather than an essay, I would have to describe in some detail the relationship between the intellectuals who came on the scene in the 30s and those of earlier periods. There were significant ties between *Partisan Review* and *The Dial*, *Politics and the Masses*. But I choose here to bypass this historical connection because I wish to stress what has been distinctive and perhaps unique.

A similar qualification has to be made concerning those intellectuals who have been associated with this milieu but have not been Jewish. I am working on the premise that in background and style there was something decidedly Jewish about the intellectuals who began to cohere as a group around *Partisan Review* in the late 30s—and one of the things that was “decidedly Jewish” was that most were of Jewish birth! Perhaps it ought to be said, then, that my use of the phrase “New York intellectuals” is simply a designation of convenience. I don’t mean to suggest that there have been or will be no other intellectuals in New York. I am using the phrase as a shorthand for what might awkwardly be spelled out as “the intellectuals of New York who began to appear in the 30’s, most of whom were Jewish.”

<sup>3</sup> In a lengthy essay printed in this journal, “The Culture of Modernism,” November 1967, I have tried to suggest what this term can signify.

<sup>4</sup> In 1948 Ezra Pound, who had spent the war years as a propagandist for Mussolini and whose writings contained strongly anti-Semitic passages, was awarded the prestigious Bollingen Prize. The committee voting for this award contained a number of ranking American poets. After the award was announced, there occurred in the pages of *Partisan Review*, *COMMENTARY*, and other journals a harsh dispute as to its appropriateness.

<sup>5</sup> Some recent historians, under New Left inspiration, have argued that in countries like France and Italy the possibility of a Communist seizure of power was really quite small. Perhaps; counter-factuals are hard to dispose of. What matters is the political consequences these historians would retrospectively have us draw, if they were at all specific on this point. Was it erroneous, or reactionary, to believe that resistance had to be created in Europe against further Communist expansion? What attitude, for example, would they have had intellectuals, or anyone else, take during the Berlin crisis? Should the city, in the name of peace, have been yielded to the East Germans? Did the possibility of Communist victories in Western Europe require an extraordinary politics? And to what extent are present reconsiderations of Communist power in postwar Europe made possible by the fact that it was, in fact, successfully contained?

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<sup>6</sup> Fifteen years later, again swept along by the *Zeitgeist*, Miss McCarthy would write that the Communist societies, because of their concentration of ownership, made economic planning more feasible than did capitalist societies. She is perhaps the last intellectual in the world who seems not to have heard about the disasters of “planning” in totalitarian society (e.g., recent reports from Czechoslovakia).

<sup>7</sup> One such attack was an essay by myself, “This Age of Conformity,” *Partisan Review*, 1954. Looking at it again I believe that, apart from some gratuitous polemical sentences, its main thrust still holds. No close, let alone sympathetic, analysis can be found in this essay as to why intellectuals now felt themselves so much more at home in capitalist society than they had in the 30’s or why they felt themselves driven to an intransigent anti-Communism. I wrote as a polemicist, not as a historian or a sociologist of knowledge; and if that limited the scope it did not, I think, blunt the point of my attack.

<sup>8</sup> It is not clear whether Macdonald still adheres to “The Root Is Man.” In a recent BBC broadcast he said about the student uprising at Columbia: “I don’t approve of their methods, but Columbia will be a better place afterwards.” Perhaps it will, perhaps it won’t; but I don’t see how the author of “The Root Is Man” could say this, since the one thing he kept insisting was that means could not be separated from ends, as the Marxists too readily separated them. He would surely have felt that if the means used by the students were objectionable, then their ends would be contaminated as well—and thereby the consequences of their action. But in the swinging 60s not many people trouble to remember their own lessons.

<sup>9</sup> The most lasting contribution this school of thought seems to have made to America is an adjective, as in “existential crisis,” which communicates the sensation of depth without the burden of content.

<sup>10</sup> Not quite no one. In an attack on the New York writers (*Hudson Review*, Autumn 1965) Richard Kostelanetz speaks about “Jewish group-aggrandizement” and “the Jewish American push.” One appreciates the delicacy of his phrasing.

<sup>11</sup> That Marcuse chooses not to apply his theories to the area of society in which he himself functions is a tribute to his personal realism, or perhaps merely a sign of a lack of intellectual seriousness. In a recent public discussion, recorded by the *New York Times Magazine* (May 26, 1968), there occurred the following exchange:

Hentoff: We’ve been talking about new institutions, new structures, as the only way to get fundamental change. What would that mean to you, Mr. Marcuse, in terms of the university, in terms of Columbia?

Marcuse: I was afraid of that because I now finally reveal myself as a fink. I have never suggested or advocated or supported destroying the established universities and building new anti-institutions instead. I have always said that no matter how radical the demands of the students and no matter how justified, they should be pressed within the existing universities. . . . I believe—and this is where the finkdom comes in—that American universities, at least quite a few of them, today are still enclaves of relatively critical thought and relatively free thought.

<sup>12</sup> John Simon has some cogent things to say about Brown and McLuhan, the pop poppas of the new: “. . . like McLuhan, Brown fulfills the four requirements for our prophets: (1) to span and reconcile, however grotesquely, various disciplines to the relief of a multitude of specialists; (2) to affirm something, even if it is something negative, retrogressive, mad; (3) to justify something vulgar or sick or indefensible in us, whether it be television-addiction

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## *The New York Intellectuals: A Chronicle & A Critique*

(McLuhan) or schizophrenia (Brown); (4) to abolish the need for discrimination, difficult choices, balancing mind and appetite, and so reduce the complex orchestration of life to the easy strumming of a monochord. Brown and McLuhan have nicely apportioned the world between them: the inward madness for the one, the outward manias for the other.”

<sup>13</sup> Reviewing a theatrical grope-in called *Dionysus in 69* (*New Republic*, August 10, 1968), Brustein pulls back a little from his enthusiasm for the swinging new. He remarks that in *Dionysus* “the pelvis becomes the actor’s primary organ of expression” and that “only about a third of Euripides’s play” *The Bacchae* is used in this “adaptation.” (But why even a third? Who needs words at all?) And then says Brustein: “The off-off-Broadway movement which began so promisingly with *America Hurrah*, *MacBird*, and the experimental probes of the Open Theatre, is now cultivating its worst faults, developing an anarchic Philistinism which virtually throws the writer out of the theater.”

But if what the Dean of the Yale Drama School counter-poses to *Dionysus in 69* is *America Hurrah* and *MacBird*—noisy, coarse, derivative, and third-rate—how can he possibly bring to bear serious critical standards?

<sup>14</sup> Fiedler’s essay “The New Mutants” (*Partisan Review*, Fall 1965) is a sympathetic charting of the new sensibility, with discussions of “porno-aesthetics,” the effort among young people to abandon habits and symbols of masculinity in favor of a feminized receptiveness, “the aspiration to take the final evolutionary leap and cast off adulthood completely,” and above all, the role of drugs as “the crux of the futurist revolt.”

With uncharacteristic forbearance, Fiedler denies himself any sustained or explicit judgments of this “futurist revolt,” so that the rhetorical thrust of his essay is somewhere between acclaim and resignation. He cannot completely suppress his mind, perhaps because he has been using it too long, and so we find this acute passage concerning the responses of older writers to “the most obscene forays of the young”:

. . . after a while, there will be no more Philip Rahv and Stanley Edgar Hymans left to shock—anti-language becoming mere language with repeated use and in the face of acceptance; so that all sense of exhilaration will be lost along with the possibility of offense. What to do then except to choose silence, since raising the ante of violence is ultimately self-defeating; and the way of obscenity in any case leads as naturally to silence as to further excess?

About drugs Fiedler betrays no equivalent skepticism, so that it is hard to disagree with Lionel Abel’s judgment that, “while I do not want to charge Mr. Fiedler with recommending the taking of drugs, I think his whole essay is a confession that he cannot call upon one value in whose name he could oppose it.”

<sup>15</sup> Two examples:

“Tom Hayden began to discuss revolution with Mailer. ‘m for Kennedy,’ said Mailer, ‘because I’m not so sure I want a revolution. Some of those kids are awfully dumb.’ Hayden the Revolutionary said a vote for George Wallace would further his objective more than a vote for RFK.” (*Village Voice*, May 30, 1968—and by the way, some Revolutionary!)

“If he still took a toke of marijuana from time to time for Auld Lang Syne, or in recognition of the probability that good sex had to be awfully good before it was better than on pot, yet, still!—Mailer was not in approval of any drug, he was virtually conservative about it, having demanded of his 18-year-old daughter . . . that she not take mari-

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juana, and never LSD, until she completed her education, a mean promise to extract in these apocalyptic times.” (The Armies of the Night).

<sup>16</sup> In this regard the editor of *Dissent* bears a heavy responsibility. When he first received the manuscript of “The White Negro,” he should have expressed in print his objections to the passage in which Mailer discusses the morality of beating up a fifty-year-old storekeeper. That he could not bring himself to risk losing a scoop is no excuse whatever.