

ABSTRACT

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TOTALITARIANISM AND
PARTISAN REVIEW

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This dissertation takes the literary and culturally modern magazine, *Partisan Review* (1934-2003), as its case study, specifically recounting its early intellectual history from 1934 to 1941. During this formative period, its contributing editors broke from their initial engagement with political radicalism and extremism to re-embrace the demo-liberalism of America's foundational principles during, and in the wake of, the Second World War. Indeed, *Partisan Review's* history is the history of thinking and re-thinking “totalitarianism” as its editors journeyed through the dialectics of disenchantment. Following their early (mis)adventures pursuant of the radical politics of literature, their break in the history of social and political thought, sounding pragmatic calls for an end to ideological fanaticism, was one that then required courage, integrity, and a belief in the moral responsibility of humanity. Intellectuals long affiliated with the journal thus provide us with models of eclectic intellectual life in pursuit of the open society, as does, indeed, the *Partisan Review*.

DIALECTICS OF DISENCHANTMENT:
TOTALITARIANISM AND PARTISAN REVIEW.

By

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Preface

What steered me in the direction of this dissertation topic—beyond my supervisor—was my interest in what seems to be a perennial battle: intellectuals versus anti-intellectuals. Perhaps the signature event in this epic confrontation came with the anti-intellectual purges of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976) whose excesses would spill into the excesses of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia (1975-1979). For Mao, intellectuals expressed their “general outlook through their way of looking at knowledge. Is it privately owned or publicly owned.” Those intellectuals attempting to maintain a liberalism of the mind rather than its collectivization he deemed mere “experts” and not “reds.”¹ Despite Deng Xiaoping’s economic liberalism and market-reform that followed in the wake of the overthrow of the Gang of Four in 1976, bringing to a close a traumatic chapter in Chinese history, anti-intellectualism in post-totalitarian China still persists. One need only mention the continued incarceration of Nobel Peace Laureate Liu Xiaobo and the recent detention—and release this past June—of dissident artist Ai Weiwei.

But in the history of ideas, this sometimes (and all-too-often) fatal confrontation stretches back even further. My unconventional entry into the story was in learning of the factional struggle over control of the First International (1864-1876), a struggle pitting two giants of modern revolutionary history, the socialist Karl Marx against the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. The gist of the Marx-Bakunin polemic—the polemic that would ultimately lay the seeds for the future “red”

¹ See section 11, on “The Transformation of Intellectuals,” in Mao’s *A Critique of Soviet Economics* (New York: Monthly Review, 1977).

(Marxist) and “black” (anarchist) divide and that led in 1872 to Marx’s immediate decision both to have Bakunin purged from the International and to have its headquarters moved to New York City, effectively thereby scuttling it rather than have it remain in the hands of Bakunin’s followers—has mistakenly been attributed to strategic differences regarding the role of the state in the future socialist revolution, rather than to the far more fundamental theoretical abyss that separated the two class fractions.

Thus, we have inherited a caricatured account of authoritarian Marxists angling to seize totalitarian control of the state, on the one hand, pitted against anti-authoritarian anarchists set on the destruction of state, on the other; and while the Marxists would employ a proletarian class dictatorship to nationalize all of industry and to then redistribute the wealth accordingly, the anarchists would rely on the free association of federated communes to collectivize and pool all wealth. Admittedly, as in most caricatures, there might be some truth to these exaggerated oversimplifications. The problem, however, is that it glosses right over the fundamental issue separating the two camps, i.e., “the question of the meaning of exploitation and the composition of the exploited class.”² It was disagreement over these two theoretical issues that led to differences in strategy, and not the other way around. Therefore, it is the theoretical concerns that merit consideration, for the state/non-state and political/apolitical issues are second order in this regard, and so are largely derivative of the former.

² Hodges, Donald C. “Bakunin’s Controversy With Marx: An Analysis of the Tensions Within Modern Socialism,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* (October 1961), 262.

The Marxist utopia projects that after the proletarian revolution the existence of class antagonisms and of classes, generally, will be swept away. No more social classes, thus no more social exploitation, either. Instead, “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”³ This was decidedly not how Bakunin foresaw reality on the morrow of the revolution.

What Bakunin did see in Marx’s brave new world was only the future prospect of “bourgeois Socialism . . . a new, more hypocritical and more skillful, but no less oppressive, exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie.”⁴ For once the state becomes the sole “banker, capitalist, organizer, and director of all national labor, and the distributor of all its products,” such being the fundamental principle of Marxian communism,⁵ manual workers deprived thereby of access to seats of power will be just as dependent upon the new class of workers made *ex-workers*—meaning that labor will be just as dependent upon the new class of scientist-savants and bureau-politicos—as they had all been under the capitalists’ previous tenure. What Bakunin intuited therefore was “that the labor theory of value could be used to justify the exploitation of a proletariat of manual wage earners by a salariat of professional and administrative employers.”⁶ And thereby, Bakunin had stumbled upon a case for

³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in Robert C. Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition* (New York: Norton, 1978), 490-491.

⁴ Michael Bakunin, in G. P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*. (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953), 289.

⁵ Michael Bakunin, “Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis,” in Sam Dolgoff, ed., *Bakunin on Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2002), 217.

⁶ In volume one of *Capital*, Marx writes, “All labour of a higher or more complicated character than average labour is expenditure of labour-power of a more costly kind, labour-power whose production has cost more time and labour, and which therefore has a higher value, than unskilled or simple labour-

redefining the proletariat; a redefinition all the more consistent with Marx's alleged goal of abolishing exploitation.⁷

When Bakunin read in the *Communist Manifesto* that the “first step in the revolution of the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class,” he immediately wondered: which proletariat?⁸ And, under whose dead body! He thus came to see that Marx and the authoritarian Marxists were representatives of “the intellectual proletariat,” the upper layer, most cultured, privileged and educated sector of its wage-earners; while he saw his self and the anti-authoritarian anarchists as representatives of “the flower of the proletariat,” the bottom layer, most uncultivated, disinherited, miserable and illiterate of its wage-earners.⁹ His was therefore a fundamental reformulation of the two basic classes of modern society; so that rather than seeing the increasing polarization of society into two hostile blocs of bourgeois and proletarians, generally, Bakunin depicted the narrative as one pegging “the *privileged classes*,” including those in possession only of bourgeois education against “the *working classes*” deprived of all education, instruction and power.¹⁰ Bakunin thus saw that the coming struggle, rather than pinning the “haves” against the “have-nots,” would more fundamentally pin “knows” against “know-nots.” (Though, to be sure, as Max Nomad has amply documented, the “knows” will then

power. This power being of a higher value, its consumption is *labour of a higher class*, labour that created in equal times proportionally higher values than unskilled labour does” (Marx 1978, 360, emphasis mine).

⁷ Hodges, Donald C. “Bakunin’s Controversy With Marx,” 263; Donald Clark Hodges, *The Literate Communist: 150 Years of the Communist Manifesto* (New York: Peter Lang 1999), 119-121.

⁸ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” 490; Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, 287.

⁹ Michael Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx,” in Sam Dolgoff, ed., *Bakunin on Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2002), 294.

¹⁰ Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, 189.

have become the “haves,” and the “know-nots” the “have-nots.”¹¹ After the Marxist Revolution, ushering in a post-capitalist, so-called people’s state, Bakunin’s schematic thus envisioned a cataclysmic show-down between mental and manual workers pushing past “the reign of scientific intelligence, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant, and elitist of all regimes” to the anarchist revolution in permanence. Mao might well have taken a cue or two from Bakunin, as did the (adopted) Cuban Maoist Che Guevara, often referred to in revolutionary circles as the “new Bakunin.”

At any rate, my next stop on the historical ladder took me further back to Bakunin’s intellectual forebears: it took me to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871), August Willich (1810-1878), Karl Schapper (1812-1870), Filippo Michele Buonarroti (1761-1837), Francois Noel “Gracchus” Babeuf (1760-1797), and to Babeuf’s mentor, Sylvain Marechal (1750-1803). Proudhon’s feud with Marx in ways resembled Bakunin’s—as did Marx’s feud with Weitling, Willich, and Schapper.

Most important for our purposes is the Marx-Schapper polemic that played out—no surprise—amid yet another factional struggle, this time over control of the Communist League (1847-1852), history first Marxist workingmen’s international organization. That conflict uncannily mirrors the conflict between Marx and Bakunin over control of the First International. Consider Schapper’s parting speech at a

¹¹ Max Nomad, “Masters—Old and New: A Social Philosophy Without Myths,” in V. F. Calverton, ed., *The Making of Society: An Outline in Sociology* (New York: Modern Library, 1937), 882, 884, 886; Max Nomad, *Aspects of Revolt* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959), 42-43, 46, 132; Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 10, 19, 204; Max Nomad, “A Reply to Hal Draper: Is There a Socialism from Below?,” in E. Haberkern, ed., *Hal Draper: Socialism from Below* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 174, 176-177.

meeting of the Central Authority held on 15 September 1850: “Just as in France the proletariat parts company with the Mantagne and *La Presse*, so it is here also: the people who represent the party in principle [Schapper’s faction] part company with those who organize the proletariat [Marx’s faction] . . . there should be two leagues, one for those who work with the pen and one for those who work in other ways.”¹² Schapper’s communism—for that matter, Weitling’s and Willich’s communism, too, as well as Proudhon’s in certain respects—harks back to the early French communist tradition as it found expression in Babeuf’s Conspiracy of the Equals, which, in 1796, aimed at overthrowing the Directorate (1795-1799) and carrying forth a revolutionary dictatorship set on destroying inequality and re-establishing the common welfare.¹³ And Babeuf’s mentor and inspiration for his Conspiracy was none other than Sylvain Marechal, whose Manifesto of the Equals (April 1796) epitomized the communist vision.

Marechal’s final goal was clear: “Equality! The first desire of nature! . . . We want real equality or death; that is what we need. . . . The French Revolution is only the herald of another revolution, far greater, which will be the last of them all. . . . Let it come to an end at last, this great scandal that our posterity will never believe! Disappear at last, revolting distinctions between rich and poor, great and small, masters and servants, governors and governed. Let there be no differences between human beings other than those of age and sex. Since all have the same needs and the same families, there should be a common education and a common supply of food for

¹² Cited in Hodges, *The Literate Communist*, 56.

¹³ See “Analysis of the Doctrine of Babuef,” by the Babouvists (1796), in Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, eds., *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 55-56; also, see Francois Noel Babeuf, “Babeuf’s Defense,” in Fried and Sanders, eds., *Socialist Thought*, 56-71.

all. PEOPLE OF FRANCE Let all the arts perish, if necessary, as long as real equality remains to us!”¹⁴

This was communism—true communism—that sought real equality or death. What had this to say, therefore, to and about Marx’s breed of “credible communism”?¹⁵ For in comparison, Marxism appeared moderately tempered, based on reason, scientific, and even, humane. After all, I thought, the British Labour Party, the governing party in England for over ten years until the last, is a member of the Socialist International—it is therefore “Marxist” in inspiration. My disconcerting answer was that Babouvism had not too much to do with Marxism. For Marxism in its foundational principles was a product of the best of the Enlightenment. In ideal form, it was expressive of socialist-humanism, “in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” As Robert C. Tucker put it, “The goal of all social revolutions, according to Marx, is freedom, but freedom in a specifically Marxist sense: the liberation of human creativity.” Marx’s *positive communism* would thus lead to a new man “profoundly endowed with all the senses,” rich in the finest sense of the word, cultured, knowledgeable, artistic, creative—whole again—in fulfillment of the divine vision that is man.¹⁶ On the other side of the fence, then, stood the anarcho-communists, going to battle on egalitarian grounds. Real equality their platform—even if all the arts must perish.

Was there thus an unbreachable divide separating the radical intelligentsia? Must one choose art and culture (and so-called “progress”), a politics grounded in the aesthetic sense of life? Or, must one opt for social leveling in its crudest form, for an

¹⁴ Sylvain Marechal, “Manifesto of the Equals,” in Fried and Sanders, eds., *Socialist Thought*, 51-55.

¹⁵ See Hodges, “Making Communism Credible,” *The Literate Communist*, Ch. 4, 67-86.

¹⁶ See Ch. 2 of this dissertation for a continuation of this paragraph’s discussion.

anti-aesthetic, ascetic and primitive form of communist politics on the supposed grounds of a higher ethic of solidarity and, perhaps even, of love?¹⁷ Marx seemed to contend that we could have it both ways—that mature communism was in fact compatible with self-cultivation. From what I knew of *Partisan Review*—during their early Marxist years, the period under scrutiny in my dissertation, from their founding in 1934 to 1941—they seemed to contend the same. That is what drew me to their story—the appeal of an American case study of precisely the problems that I had been grappling with for some time.

What I have learned since is that we cannot have it both ways. Until we arrive at the post-scarcity economy promised by the vast technocratic strain in Marxist thought—accomplished by merit of the “social regulation of production upon a definite plan,” a development that makes the existence of classes in society thereby an anachronism, when “all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly”—we are trapped in the whirlpool of economic struggle for limited resources, including those of art and culture.¹⁸ The truth is, however, man might never make this Marxist ascent—“from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.”¹⁹ We are thus bound to make a choice. In many respects, it is a deeply disturbing and troubling choice that we are thus forced to make. For it pushes and pulls us in opposing directions. But a choice we must make, regardless.

Today, that choice seems hopelessly obvious.

¹⁷ In “Notes on Man and Socialism in Cuba,” Che wrote: “At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love.” *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1995), 136.

¹⁸ Friedrich Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,” in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition* (New York: Norton, 1978), 712; Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 531. More on Marxist technocracy is discussed in Ch. 2.

¹⁹ Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,” 716.

Foreword

One evening in Moscow, in E. P. Pyeskovskaya's flat, Lenin was listening to a sonata by Beethoven being played by Isiah Dobrowein, and said: "I know nothing which is greater than the Appassionata; I would like to listen to it every day. It is marvelous superhuman music. I always think with pride—perhaps it is naive of me—what marvelous things human beings can do!"

Then screwing up his eyes and smiling, he added, rather sadly: "But I can't listen to music too often. It affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid, nice things, and stroke the heads of people who could create such beauty while living in this vile hell. And now you mustn't stroke any one's head—you might get your hand bitten off. You have to hit them on the head, without any mercy, although our ideal is not to use force against any one. H'm, h'm, our duty is infernally hard!"

Maxim Gorky,
Days with Lenin, 1932

Dedication

For my parents, and grandparents. And for their parents, and theirs

Acknowledgements

This is by far the most enjoyable section for me to write. Writing a dissertation—and surviving six years of graduate school intact—is by no means an easy accomplishment. An accomplishment, however, it is—one which would have been absolutely impossible if not for the help, guidance, and loving support of countless individuals.

Foremost, then, I thank my dissertation committee: Professors Tismaneanu, Alford, Butterworth, Glass and Korzeniewicz. Sociologist Patricio Korzeniewicz fondly came on board to serve as my Dean’s Representative and for that I thank him. Studying the great classics of sociological theory with him was invaluable—essential reading for a theorist hoping to one day make sense of the complexities of 21st century social reality. Thanks to Fred Alford for somehow making the stars align so that I could benefit from taking his course on “Scope and Methods,” the one semester out of the twelve that I’ve been here for, for which the course was taught by a theorist. From him I learned not of quantitative methodology, nor of polling and the public, but of civilization and its underlying discontents, of the modern eclipse of reason, of nihilism, tragedy, and of the importance in political science of paying *attention*. I thank Charles Butterworth, who seems to have been looking out for me from before I even stepped foot on College Park campus. My first graduate assignment was as his research assistant, and my first course here in political philosophy was in his seminar on Plato’s *Laws*. Since then he has been a consistent source of support and encouragement—a model educator to us all. Many a Maryland student looks back fondly to the days of the “Butterworth Post-Seminar.” He taught

me that though political philosophy is not Talmud—it might merit a reading as though indeed it were. I thank Jim Glass, like Professor Butterworth in his own way, for also always looking out for me. He has guided me significantly throughout my tenure at Maryland, and has always left his office door open for me. He helped coordinate my involvement with the College Park Scholars program to teach a course there on “The Process and Practice of Social Research,” among providing ample other opportunities to assist him in his own. From him I have learned of a competing tradition in moral and political theory, one that faces the all too often and ignored interrelationships between the political, social and psychological worlds—seeking the meaning of politics in “the dialectic between the external world and the internal self.” Perhaps unintentionally, his graduate seminars additionally seemed to offer the benefits of first-rate psycho-therapy. Never having undergone psycho-therapy, myself, I can’t be sure of this, but they did—at least for me—seem to provide a catharsis, of sorts, and in the most unexpected of places. Finally, I thank Vladimir Tismaneanu. What else can I say? Without Professor Tismaneanu I haven’t a dissertation. From the beginning he helped structure my project, both narrow and refine its focus. Often, along the way, he would remind me that we go from dissertation to book, and not vice versa. This was perhaps the soundest insight I received while writing my dissertation. Otherwise, the tendency towards perfectionism can be stifling, often, in fact, leading to paralysis. I have no doubt that he will continue to be a friend and a mentor as I advance in my academic career. I thank him for our countless meetings and conversations, whether they were at Politics & Prose, in passing during train rides to D.C. for any number of conferences he

helped coordinate, at 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, when a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in his office in Tydings Hall, or even in his home office. For a model of the responsible intellectual one needn't look further—he is a constant reminder of the role and function of critical intellectuals in sustaining vital democracies. All in all, I can't express enough of my gratitude for my committee members—mine is a committee of members that I wouldn't trade for any other in the world. I thank you all, as well—and the GVPT Political Theory sub-field, in particular—for your continued support in this tough academic job market.

Other professors I've had the good fortune of studying with in Maryland include: Patricia Hill Collins, Patrick Deneen, Jeffrey Herf, and George Ritzer. I thank them all. Special thanks are due to Patricia Hill Collins for teaching me that the half (or more) of good sociology lies in asking the right questions. I remember like yesterday her imploring of her class of budding young sociologists to incessantly ask themselves the question, “Am I really a sociologist?” Challenging her students to practice “sociology” from an unsafe place is a lesson I won't forget easily, hopefully, not even at all. Additional thanks are due to Jeffrey Herf for shedding much insight into the critical undertaking of *Partisan Review*, of which he was a longtime contributing editor; for sharing his reminiscences, impressions, and assessment of the magazine; for suggesting valuable secondary sources; and, most importantly, for helping to put me in touch with Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and Edith Kurzweil. Lastly, though I never had the chance of studying formally with him, recently retired Maryland historian James Gilbert was extremely helpful and generous in offering his expertise. His book, *Writers and Partisans* (1968), is absolute must reading for

anyone interested in the history of literary radicalism in America, of which *PR* makes up a definitive part.

I thank professors from my studies at the University of Chicago and Florida State University. Among them are included: Nicole Couture, Peter Dalton, Russell Dancy, Kimberly Germain, Michael Geyer, Jonathan Grant, Bradford Hadaway, John MacAloon, Alfred Mele, Maria Morales, Robert Pippin, Piers Rawling, Samuel Rickless, Nathan Stoltzfus, Mark Strand, Candace Vogler, and Dingxin Zhao. Special thanks are due to Saskia Sassen. From her—as fine a place as any—I was introduced to the question of globalization. She was also happy to sponsor my M.A. thesis while at Chicago, and for that I am thankful, as well as for her continuing support through the years since graduation in 2003. I am extremely grateful to Donald Hodges. His teaching philosophy was always to stress the hyperbolic—or perhaps he was being serious all along and it was me feigning for him hyperbole. Who knows? At any rate, as a student of James Burnham, he was a Machiavellian and a realist in politics. Unlike his teacher and mentor at NYU, he, however, never reneged on his commitment to Marxism. But from Max Nomad in the 1940s he learned of anarchism. His “Marxism” was therefore infused with a curious strain from the anarcho-skeptic, Max Nomad, whose own breed of “anarchism” stretched back by way of the Polish anarcho-syndicalist, Wacław Machajski, to the Russian anarcho-Marxist, Michael Bakunin. Regardless, for me, as a nineteen year old sophomore in college, all this—to be sure—was a strange and heady brew. Listening to his stories of his involvement with the Uruguayan urban guerilla, Abraham Guillen, over Hare Krishna lunch in sunny Tallahassee now seems surreal, as if from a previous life of

mine. Whatever his merits and demerits, he definitely enlivened me to the contours of the political and ideological imagination—for that I can't thank him enough. May he rest in peace (1923-2009).

Dr. Peter Westbrook, possibly the closest I'll ever come to having a guru, I thank for his always engaging and endearing conversations. And, for helping me to see (clearer) amid all the chaos the underlying unity of all that exists.

Thanks to Daniel Bell for giving me a remarkable three hours of conversation. Would that there were more. May he rest in peace (1919-2011).

To all the professors I've TA'ed for—Mark Graber, Dorith Grant-Wisdom, Paul Herrnson, Piotr Swistak, and Ian Ward—I thank you. Thanks to Virginia Haufler, Eric Liu, Irwin Morris, and Ann Marie Clark. (Ann Marie, I thank you again and again and again.) All due thanks to *Society* for agreeing to publish my article, “Why Bell Matters,” in the forthcoming September-October issue of the journal, and for their permission to include a version of that article in this dissertation. More specifically, I thank Jonathan Imber (Editor-in-Chief) and Daniel Mahoney (Book Review Editor) for their wonderful reception of the piece, as well as for their encouragement throughout. Thanks to the Office of Education Abroad at UMD for providing my funding during this crucial last year of my doctoral studies and for providing the perfect atmosphere to help maintain my sanity in the process. Lisa Tenley, unintentionally and perhaps unbeknownst to her, continuously reminded me of the great gift that is life, of the joys of love and laughter. And, Catherine Donohoe, thanks for being so understanding, and so very flexible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Intellectual Foundations of Partisan Review: 1934-1941

Some day it will have to be told how “anti-Stalinism,” which started out more or less as “Trotskyism,” turned into art for art’s sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come.

Clement Greenberg, “The Late Thirties in New York,”
Art and Culture, 1957/1961

In the January-February 1941 issue of *Partisan Review* (*PR*) Fairfield Porter expressed his appreciation to the editors for having abandoned their decision from a few months prior to change their name to *The Forties*. The American painter and critic explained, *PR* “has come to mean what the magazine is, and the name *The Forties* suggests nothing yet. . . . The trouble with the present name is, partisan of what?”²⁰ It is my thesis that the *Partisan Review* was—above all—partisan to intellectual and aesthetic values. So that in spite of all their apparent political zigzagging and turns, they remained remarkably consistent throughout. What they might not have known at the time was that they were in fact fishing for a politics to match their intellectual and aesthetic conception of life.

Initially, then, they were drawn to Marxist-Leninism, seeing in a disenchanting capitalist world brave possibility for renewal and re-enchantment along Soviet lines. Communism, indeed, constituted for them a veritable *Awakening*—offering the hope and promise of a world reconciling opposites, man and nature, the individual and species, form and content, and bringing along with it a desperately needed cultural

²⁰ Fairfield Porter, “P.R.—A Balance Sheet,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (January-February 1940), 77.

renaissance. Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides this background and sets the general historical context. More specifically, it focuses on intellectuals and the allure and mystique of Communism after the Crash of 1929 amid the Great Depression of the early 1930s; furthermore, charting the birth of *Partisan Review* as a John Reed Club magazine with Communist backing and support. This takes us to the *Communist Period* of *PR*'s history. Chapter 3 details that story from the magazine's origins in February 1934 to its folding in October 1936 on the grounds that orthodoxy and political mandates from above were undermining their literary radicalism, creativity, integrity and independence. This is thus a crucial period in *PR*'s history—a period noteworthy for its initial cultural alienation from very much within the Communist movement. It marks the bridge to its next phase of literary independence, then expressive of a cultural and political disenchantment without the movement.

But first came the *Break*—yet another crucial period in *PR*'s history during which they rejected, entire, the Stalinist vulgarization and political determination of art, vowing to infuse revolutionary life with a literary spirit and, in the words of Lionel Trilling, “to organize a new union between our political ideas and our imagination.”²¹ Critical during this period from 1936-1937, the focus of Chapter 4, was also the coming together of a community of writers, artists, and intellectuals hell-bent on the destruction of Stalinization of the mind—thus committed, politically, to a radical anti-Stalinism, and intellectually, to the cultural avant-garde. This marked the beginning of the magazine's *Trotskyist Period*, the focus of Chapter 5. While ostensibly Trotskyist from 1937-1939, just as they had ostensibly been Communist

²¹ Lionel Trilling, “The Function of the Little Magazine,” in L. Trilling's collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Anchor Books, 1953; originally published by Viking Press in 1950), 95.

from 1934-1936, *Partisan Review* openly disclaimed obligation to any organized political party, now opting for unadulterated and unequivocal literary independence. They opened their pages to all literary tendencies, seeing their newfound place as a “dissident generation in American letters.”²² During this period, *Partisan Review* also comes to reformulate their conception of the role of the intellectual. Amid the dark days of totalitarianism, with portents of its spread the world over, *PR* envisioned themselves as a group of critical intellectuals safeguarding culture from the new barbarisms. Their radically stated, revised role and function, therefore, was “to safeguard the dreams and discoveries of science and art, and to champion some political movement insofar as it fulfills the requirements of an intellectual ideal.”²³

Then, the Second World War erupted, and changed everything, constituting for *Partisan Review* a veritable crisis in Marxist theory, and ultimately *Re-Awakening* them to the virtues of liberal-democracy as found in America. This is the focus of Chapter 6, covering the period from 1939-1941. What drew them to Communism and Trotskyism in the first place, after a consecutive and dialectical series of radical disenchantments was, after all, the same thing that now drew them, as a result of yet another dialectical turning, to liberal-democracy. As they understood it, revolutionary socialism was supposed to lead to cultural renewal and renaissance, not to its evident and obvious retrogression. Making matters worse still, by 1941 it was clear to most of the *Partisan* lot of intellectuals that Fascism and Communism—in unrealized Trotskyist form, as well—led to terror and totalitarianism even beyond Kafka’s wildest imagination. Stalin had not betrayed the revolution, therefore, but rather, he

²² “Editorial Statement,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (December 1937), 3-4

²³ William Phillips. “Thomas Mann: Humanism in Exile,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 6 (May 1938), 3-10.

had fulfilled it. That they might find in revolutionary socialism—if not renewal—at least a haven for intellectuals to practice their artistic craft now also proved absurd. Only liberal-democracy offered the intellectuals protection—that is, the necessary freedom of thought that defined their existence. By the time of Axis attack at Pearl Harbor, *Partisan Review* had thus made America its home, ideologically speaking, and not just physically.

How strange are the workings of the “dialectics of disenchantment.”²⁴ All this, and more, are detailed in this dissertation on the “Dialectics of Disenchantment: Totalitarianism and *Partisan Review*.”

A few words regarding Chapter 7, the epilogue on *Why Bell Matters*: It is based on my interview conducted in mid-November, 2011, with the noted sociologist and New York intellectual, Daniel Bell. The discussion ranged from *Partisan Review* to Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism to religion, secularism, the sacred, and to the importance of tradition, and, ultimately, history. I wrote it in his memory (May he rest in peace) as an appreciation of his work and an articulation of his (and *Partisan Review*’s) sustained relevance. Alternately, to be certain, it could have been called, *Why Partisan Review Matters*.

Partisan Review endured for another sixty-two years after the end point of this dissertation in 1941. During that time it served as the hub—indeed, can and should be

²⁴ I thank Vladimir Tismaneanu for helping me see this dialectical dynamic at work here in *Partisan Review*. I have thus titled my dissertation after his article of the same title, “Dialectics of Disenchantment,” published in *Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (May 1988), 7-9. His article speaks to a synonymous tale of dissident artists and critical intellectuals in Eastern Europe when under Communism. Tismaneanu writes: “Disenchantment with Marxism was therefore an opportunity to rethink the whole radical legacy and reassess the commitment to the Jacobin ideals of total community. In the struggles between the state and the civil society, it is the chance and the task of the latter to invent a new principle of power. It is one that would hold in deep respect the rights and aspirations of the individual.” (8). It thus begs for a comparative study that I hope to pursue upon graduation.

seen as the house organ—of a “new community” of artists, writers, and intellectuals committed to preserving individual integrity and world culture through the powers of “the probing conscience.”²⁵ And though its circulation never reached more than 15,000, dwindling down to 3,200 at the time of its closing, its reverberations ran far and wide. They knew about it in Eastern Europe, sometimes, perchance, amid a short-lived “thaw,” they might even have read it.²⁶ Across the Atlantic, to American intellectuals, the magazine was obviously more readily available. To many, as one of its readers’ and contributing editors’ has noted, its impact stretched across the generations, reaching to “some of us who, like . . . the original editors and contributors to *PR*, began political engagement on the radical Left and then evolved to liberalism. In so doing, [*PR*] eased and energized our journey of disillusionment, helped to turn us away from bitterness, and gave us assurance that changing one’s mind had nothing necessarily to do with religious conversions.”²⁷ It was a remarkable magazine that perhaps even outdid itself, surviving well past its prime until its eventual demise in 2003, following the death of its founding co-editor, William Phillips, the year prior.

During the twilight years of his life, Phillips assembled his memoirs in what became the book, *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life*. In its

²⁵ Philip Rahv, “Twilight of the Thirties,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (Summer 1939), 3-15. Also see Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the World: The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), wherein William Phillips explains that when they founded *PR* they had envisioned it as “the organ of a new community.” (73).

²⁶ In his tribute essay to William Phillips (the founding co-editor of *PR*, along with Philip Rahv), Vladimir Tismaneanu writes, “I really know of no other journal that has opened its pages so generously and uninterruptedly to the voices of those who fought against any form of tyranny in the twentieth century.” Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Tribute to William Phillips,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. LXX, No. 2 (Spring 2003), 223-226.

²⁷ Jeffrey Herf, “Tribute to William Phillips,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. LXX, No. 2 (Spring 2003), 185-187.

penultimate paragraph, he wrote: “As this epoch draws to a close, one has to be consumed by curiosity about the future. The fear of death is not to be underestimated, but I can think of no better reason for surviving than to see how it all turns out, if by some miracle of human persistence, the world should become a nicer place to live in—how awful not to know about.” Phillips would continue to write, read, and edit *Partisan Review* for another two decades until old age finally got the best of him at 94 years. He concluded *A Partisan View* with what can be seen to define the essence of the *Partisan* mentality: “It is perhaps more realistic to assume that all one can hope for is that things do not get worse—that the status quo is maintained. What a contradiction one has finally arrived at: to have been brought up on the necessities of history and now to be drawn psychologically and politically to the stability that exists only outside of history.”²⁸

I take Phillips to mean the stability that exists only in the eternal realm of the mind—in the inner sanctuary of ideas, art and culture. For *Partisan* intellectuals this became the only thing that merited a sense of permanence in this transitory human life of ours, the permanence that sustained itself through the united power of the intellectuals’ tradition, committed to the free play of ideas and the wonderful working and activity of the critical intellect in motion.

I hope you enjoy reading my work, as much as I enjoyed writing it.

²⁸ William Phillips, *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), 299.

Chapter 2

The Awakening: 1848-1934

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels,
The Communist Manifesto, 1848

Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.

Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 1924

The American capitalist system may last ten years, or a hundred. But when it begins to crack and tumble into final chaos, as it must, millions of native Americans will buzz around with the same bewildered horror as they did last month, when the stock market crashed. . . . Isn't it strange: Soviet Russia builds railroads and factories, makes love and writes books and symphonies and has the most creative life in the world of today, yet it has no stock market?

Mike Gold, *New Masses*, 1929

We, the young writers, working in offices, mills, factories, on the farms or drudging the streets in search of employment; we who are intent on a literary career, whose works are beginning to appear here and there in the magazines, are now faced with a key decision that will undoubtedly determine the entire course of our literary existence. Shall we take on the coloration of the bourgeois environment, mutilating ourselves, prostituting our creativeness in the service of a superannuated ruling class, or are we going to unfurl the banner of revolt, thus enhancing our spiritual strength by identifying ourselves with the only progressive class, the vigorous, youthful giant now stepping into the arena of battle, the class-conscious proletariat?

Phillip Rahv, *Rebel Poet*, 1932

THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM

In 1848 Marx and Engels wrote their now classic “Manifesto of the Communist Party.” They did so, they proclaimed, because it was “high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Specter of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself.”²⁹ But all talk of communist ghosts then haunting Europe was of the grossest exaggeration. Nearly seventy years later, after the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and seized power in Russia, it was another matter entirely. At 10 a.m., 25 October 1917, Lenin appeared publicly for the first time since July. A proclamation, drafted by Lenin and issued in the name of the Revolutionary Military Committee headed by Trotsky, thundered *To The Citizens of Russia!*

The Provisional Government has been deposed. State power has passed into the hands of the organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies—the Revolutionary Military Committee, which heads the Petrograd proletariat and the garrison.

The cause for which the people have fought, namely, the immediate offer of a democratic peace, the abolition of landed proprietorship, workers’ control over production, and the establishment of Soviet power—this cause has been secured.

Long live the revolution of workers, soldiers and peasants!³⁰

A new Communist dawn thus appeared on the horizon. And to the elite among the faithful—that is, to the intellectuals—the approaching Communist millennium meant more than simply “Peace, Land and Bread”³¹ and “All Power to the Soviets.”³²

²⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in Robert C. Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition* (New York: Norton, 1978), 473.

³⁰ Lenin, *Collected Works*, Moscow, 1964, Vol. 26, p. 246. Also available in Robert V. Daniels’s *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 62; Robert C. Tucker’s *The Lenin Anthology* (New York: Norton, 1975), 417.

Communism also meant the construction of an existentially bound new man in a higher-ordered civilization—“an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”³³ As the prominent Sovietologist Robert C. Tucker put it, in his book on *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (1970): “The goal of all social revolutions, according to Marx, is freedom, but freedom in a specifically Marxist sense: the liberation of human creativity.”³⁴ So that while the *Manifesto* specifically calls for the formation of a proletarian party, the conquest of state political power, and for the wresting by degrees of all capital from the bourgeoisie—all eminently political ends—Marx’s youthful, philosophical writings provide an ulterior end.

In the section titled “Private Property and Communism,”³⁵ in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx provides a key distinction between communism as crude communism, and communism as socialism or humanism—better yet, as socialist-humanism.

Crude communism refers to the position of the French and German workers’ communist parties then predominant in revolutionary circles. These are the parties of primitive Christian asceticism and Babouvist egalitarianism. When, in the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels attack “the writings of Babeuf and others” for having “inculcated universal asceticism and social leveling in its crudest form,”³⁶ they are attacking

³¹ “Peace, Land and Bread” became the Bolshevik slogan attributed to Lenin’s “On the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution” (the “April Theses”), published in *Pravda* on April 7 [20], 1917.

³² “All Power to the Soviets” became the Bolshevik slogan attributed to Lenin’s “On the Dual Power,” published in *Pravda* on April 9 [22], 1917.

³³ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” in Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 491.

³⁴ Robert C. Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (New York: Norton, 1970), 18.

³⁵ Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” in Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 81-93.

³⁶ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” in Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 497.

crude communism at its finest. The irony is that in the *Manifesto* they claim that it is “necessarily” of a “reactionary character,” whereas in the 1844 *Manuscripts* it can only be seen as progressive. What the young Marx refers to as “*crude* communism,” fundamentally “negative,” “thoughtless” communism seeking to “destroy *everything* which is not capable of being possessed by all as *private property*,” as “the consummation of this envy and of this leveling-down proceeding from the *preconceived* minimum,” speaks for early Bolshevism as much as, if not more than, Babouvism.

Crude communism is therefore the first negation of the modern, capitalist order. That communism must itself be negated—thus, Marx’s communism is the position of “the negation of the negation.” It is “the *actual* phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery.” Indeed, Marx sees this transitional and narrowly political communism as “the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future,”³⁷ but as such it is *not* the goal of human development or human society—the goal, instead, is socialist-humanism.

Socialist-humanism, then, is “man’s *positive self-consciousness* . . . no longer mediated through the annulment of private property, through *communism*.” It is “the real *appropriation of the human* essence by and for man . . . the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development.” Further, this “positive” communism “as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism, equals

³⁷ We might refer to this period, albeit anachronistically, as the period of “the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. [It] is the riddle of history solved”

For envisioning positive communism as the transcendence of the realm of human possibility and as the ultimate revolution in human self-realization, Marx can legitimately be pegged just as utopian as the utopian socialists he abhorred as intensely as he did. Nevertheless, and it goes without saying, this was his vision: that man would break free from the division of labor—exit the realm of necessity, enter the realm of freedom—and become a truly “*rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses.*” We find echoes of this same vision running throughout the entire corpus of Marx’s body of work.³⁸ The two most noteworthy passages are found in *The German Ideology* (1845-46) and in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), cited below, respectively:

. . . in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.³⁹

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished;

³⁸ In Robert C. Tucker’s *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* he writes, “The end of economics means the beginning of aesthetics as the keynote of the life of productive activity” (p .29). A fuller exposition on that theme in Marxist thought can be found in Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), Ch. 13.

³⁹ Marx, “The German Ideology: Part I,” in Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 160.

after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual⁴⁰

The point to be stressed is that communism puts an end to the dwarfism and whorem-rampant in modern, capitalistic and commodified societies. Marxism thus offers not only the promise of power and progress, but the promise of becoming whole again. In so many words, it is a vision for a “higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman.”⁴¹

There is no doubt that an additional component of the Communist idea that appealed to intellectuals was the technocratic vision found throughout the opening section of the *Manifesto*, in scattered sections of Marx's *magnum opus*, *Capital* (1867), and in Engels' third and final section of his extremely influential and populist pamphlet, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880).

Section 1 of the *Manifesto*, on “Bourgeois and Proletarians,”⁴² whose focus is on economic history, reads like one of the single greatest panegyrics for modern capitalism of all time. Truly, neither Adam Smith nor Milton Freidman could have said it better. Upon scrutiny, however, its praise might just be praise for technocracy.⁴³ We all know the story: “The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.” Why not say what you mean? The bourgeoisie, historically, has played *the* most revolutionary part: “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one

⁴⁰ Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” in Tucker's *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 531.

⁴¹ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 256.

⁴² Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” in Tucker's *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 473-483.

⁴³ In *The Literate Communist: 150 Years of the Communist Manifesto* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), Donald Clark Hodges defines technocracy as follows: “By ‘technocracy’ I mean the control of industry by technical experts, a planned rather than a market economy, and the rapid development of science, technology, and labor-saving devices that hold forth the promise of a postscarcity economy, an expanding sector of free goods, and the full satisfaction of the multiple needs indispensable to human self-fulfillment” (p. 83).

hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers . . . what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?" On close inspection, though, as the late Donald C. Hodges put it, the *Manifesto's* praise for capitalism is at bottom "acclaim for the benefits of applied science or technology." Furthermore, "its past record is hardly an argument for preserving a system that can no longer deliver the goods, that is no longer able to control the gigantic means of production it has created, that is governed by the greed for profits rather than by the prospect of overcoming poverty."⁴⁴

So to an under-employed—or even unemployed—scientist, engineer, or writer, proletarianized by capitalist "laws of motion," the Marxist solution to seize the means of production must have struck a loud and raging, imaginary bell. As Engels explains in *Socialism*, "The socialized appropriation of the means of production does away, not only with the present artificial restrictions upon production, but also with the positive waste and devastation of productive forces and products that are at the present time the inevitable concomitants of production, and that reach their height in the crises. . . . The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day by day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties—this possibility is now for the first

⁴⁴ Donald Clark Hodges, *The Literate Communist*, 84.

time here.”⁴⁵ So when the Depression hit the United States hard in the wake of the October 1929 stock market collapse—“American exceptionalism” and the “normalcy” of the Roaring Twenties quickly catching up with the reality of the rest of the capitalist, crisis-ridden world—it should have come as no surprise that intellectuals were then seen joining with the ranks of labor seemingly en masse.

CULTURE AND CRISIS

Three years in, in September 1932, an unprecedented event in American history issued forth in the publication of an “open letter” addressed to the “Writers, Artists, Teachers, Physicians, Engineers, Scientists, and Other Professional Workers of America.”⁴⁶ Among its sponsors were fifty-three prominent writers, artists and intellectuals, including Sherwood Anderson, Erskine Caldwell, Malcolm Cowley, Countee Cullen, John Dos Passos, Waldo Frank, Granville Hicks, Sidney Hook, Sidney Howard, Langston Hughes, Mathew Josephson, James Rorty, Lincoln Steffens, Edmund Wilson, and Ella Winter.⁴⁷ Unprecedented, however, was not the letter’s ultimate calling for support of the 1932 Communist candidates for President and Vice President, William Z. Foster and James W. Ford, and neither was it the

⁴⁵ Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,” in Tucker’s *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 715.

⁴⁶ *Culture and Crisis: An Open Letter to the Writers, Artists, Teachers, Physicians, Engineers, Scientists and Other Professional Workers of America* (League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, 1932). Also available as “Culture and the Crisis—League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford,” in Ed. Albert Fried, *Communism in America: A History in Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 166-172.

⁴⁷ The other sponsors included: Leonie Adams, Newton Arvin, Em Jo Basshe, Maurice Becker, Slater Brown, Fielding Burke, Robert Cantwell, W. L. Chappell, Lester Cohen, Louis Colman, Louis Corey (Fraina), Henry Cowell, Bruce Crawford, K.C. Crichton, H. W. L. Dana, Adolf Dehn, H. N. Doughty, Theodore Dreiser, M. A. de Ford, Alfred Frueh, Murray Godwin, Eugene Gordon, Horace Gregory, Louis Grudin, John Herrman, Orrick Johns, W. N. Jones, Alfred Kremborg, Louis Lozowick, Grace Lumpkin, Felix Morrow, Samuel ORnitz, Isidor Schneider, F. L. Schuman, Edwin Seaver, Herman Simpson, Charles R. Walker, and Robert Whitaker.

message's bleak tone nor its temper of cultural dissolution; unprecedented was their identification as a class of "brain workers," and their show of solidarity with the lower classes, the "muscle classes," as opposed to any and all previous allegiance with that of the bourgeoisie. In many ways, then, it was a manifesto all too akin to Marx and Engels' manifesto of 1848: its goal was the enlistment and recruitment of professionals into the increasingly immiserated army of labor in the interests of creating a revolutionary, brave new world of liberated human beings.

Separated into four loosely constructed sections, the first serves as introduction. The letter begins, "We of this generation stand midway between two eras." Important is the era that lay ahead, for ahead looms the imminent "threat of cultural dissolution." But, "We who wrote this," i.e., the so-called "intellectuals," whose business it is to both think and to act "shall not permit businessmen to teach us our business." The vision which follows is of the "responsible intellectual workers," uniting, in alliance with the Communist Party USA, "the party of the workers," to solve the social problem and to reconstruct the American foundation on a new sound basis. For the "United States under capitalism is like a house that is rotting away; the roof leaks, the sills and rafters are crumbling. The Democrats want to paint it pink. The Republicans don't want to paint it; instead they want to raise the rent. . . ."

"Under Socialism science and technology are freed from their dependence upon private profit." So begins the second section. The professional workers, thus liberated, are then freed to perform their particular craft functions on new and sound creative bases. Moving on to the third section, the Communist Party is there upheld as "the real solution of the present crisis." Linking up with the daily battles of the

working class for “jobs, bread and peace,” for the first time in recording history stands the possibility of a “classless society in which ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all,’ in which every human being is privileged to participate in the collective effort of the whole.” Soviet Russia is seen as the model to be emulated: for amidst a global sea of economic depression, only in theirs has unemployment been virtually eliminated, industry reconstructed on a planned basis, and a socio-cultural revolution making significant headway towards the liberation of women and minorities.

The concluding section—Why Vote Communist—offers the reasons. It asks: “Why should intellectual workers be loyal to the ruling class which frustrates them, stultifies them, patronizes them, makes their work ridiculous, and now starves them?” Intellectual workers are here seen eminently as “of the oppressed,” proletarianized by the greed and misdirection of the capitalist class. It quotes the *Manifesto* in support of its position with fire and conviction: “The bourgeoisie has robbed of their haloes various occupations hitherto regarded with awe and veneration. Doctor, lawyer, priest, poet and scientists have become its paid wage laborers . . . it has left no other bond between man and man . . . but crude self-interest and unfeeling “cash payment”” Thus, “false money-standards” applied to creative, professional crafts has amounted to the same dwarfism and “spiritual degradation” that Marx so astutely assessed. But this pamphlet-manifesto, nearly a century later, makes even clearer the role and function of the intellectual class.

Intellectuals are depicted as duty-bound, as men of responsibility destined to save the world from the cultural barbarism of capitalist society. The choice is made

clear: “between serving either as cultural lieutenants of the capitalist class or as allies and fellow travelers of the working class.” Also made eminently clear is the notion that professional workers do not constitute an independent economic class in modern society. While they might be able to attain some crude form of class consciousness (which by this point, presumably, they had), they are not equipped to act in their own class interests; they are thus forced to make the decision, either siding with the one or the other of the two great classes of modern society—namely, the Bourgeoisie or the Proletariat.

At any rate, in the end the “open letter” concludes with a humanist crescendo that resonates even stronger than the scattered humanism of the *Manifesto*:

In the interests of a truly human society in which all forms of exploitation have been abolished; in behalf of a new cultural renaissance which will produce integrated, creative personalities, we call upon all men and women—especially workers in the professions and arts—to join in the revolutionary struggle against capitalism under the leadership of the Communist Party.

Vote Communist—For Foster and Ford—on November 8.

A month later the fifty-three sponsors organized the League of Professional Writers for Foster and Ford; they expanded their original pamphlet-manifesto and gave it the name, *Culture and Crisis*.⁴⁸

TOWARDS PROLETARIAN ART

⁴⁸ Incidentally, the immediate goal of *Culture and Crisis*, i.e., to boost support among American professionals for the Communist Party’s 1932 presidential ticket, did not amount to much. According to historian Albert Fried, in his documentary history of *Communism in America* (1997), Foster and Ford “could garner no more than one hundred and three thousand votes, a mere eighth of those of Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party candidate, whose own performance greatly disappointed its followers” (p. 98). Nevertheless, Fried adds that while the Party might have stumbled in the presidential election of 1932, the *movement* was growing by leaps and bounds.

As significant as *Culture and the Crisis* was to American intellectuals in 1932, by then the cultural and literary class wars had already been well underway. Indeed, its first shots were fired by Mike Gold in his February 1921 manifesto, “Towards Proletarian Art.”⁴⁹

Published in *The Liberator*, “Towards Proletarian Art” was the last work Gold had published under the name, Irwin Granich. For some time, since the Palmer Raids of 1919-1920, with the Communists gone underground, he had adopted the pseudonym, Michael Gold, and it stuck. But in fact, Gold was born Itzok Isaac Granich on 12 April 1893, the first of three sons to Romanian-Jewish immigrants on New York’s East Side. His Whitmanesque manifesto would become in later years both a source of pride and embarrassment. It was markedly un-Marxist, callow, and even mystical in many ways. Yet it is perhaps the first—and at the least the clearest—call for a distinctly unique, proletarian art and literature.

It begins with portents of a coming apocalypse: “In blood, in tears, in chaos and wild, thunderous clouds of fear the old economic order is dying. We are not appalled or startled by that giant apocalypse before us. We know the horror that is passing away with this long winter of the world. We know, too, the bright forms that stir at the heart of all this confusion, and that shall rise out of the debris and cover the ruins of capitalism with beauty. We are prepared for the economic revolution of the world, but what shakes us with terror and doubt is the cultural upheaval that must come. . . .” Thus spoken, Gold envisions the death and destruction of the old ideals. Fearless, we are called upon to fling ourselves body and soul into “the cauldron of the

⁴⁹ Mike Gold, “Towards Proletarian Art,” in Michael Folsom’s *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 62-70.

Revolution.” For out of that death shall arise new glories, the greatest being “the new race—the Supermen.”

The basis for this post-apocalyptic renaissance—“the resurrection,” encompassing “an amazing revaluation of the old values”—is of course the social revolution. But, Gold reminds us, the social revolution is not merely political; least of all is it political. Rather: “It is Life at its fullest and noblest. It is the religion of the masses, articulate at last.” As such, it is worthy of the religious devotion of the artist. And yet, of a *new artist* called into being, and made flesh and blood. Essentially, then, Gold’s is a calling for a *new man* coinciding with a new and revolutionary art form. Indeed, Gold sees himself as the prototype, for he is the tenement and the tenement is he.

As opposed to past bourgeois artists and intellectuals, instinctively contemptuous of the people, spiritually sick, pessimistic, individualistic and alienated, Gold is an artist of the people. He confesses: “I was born in a tenement. . . . The tenement is in my blood. When I think it is the tenement thinking. When I hope it is the tenement hoping, I am not an individual; I am all that the tenement group poured into me during those early years of my spiritual travail.” Thus, Gold is the homegrown “boy in the tenement” who must lead and guide the masses to the creation of a “new and truer” art. For “[art] is the tenement pouring out its soul through us, its most sensitive and articulate sons and daughters.”

But Gold’s spiritual guidance only goes so far. He implores the masses of America to become more than simply workers. As they are not machines, neither are they capital personified, but real life men and women. Accordingly, Gold encourages

them to “to express their divinity in art and culture.” Long the sole possession of the bourgeoisie, artistic and cultural expression must become the possession of the great masses of workingmen and women. It must, therefore, be an indigenous movement: “Its roots must be in the fields, factories and workshops of America—in the American life.” And finally, “When there is singing and music rising in every American street, when in every American factory there is a drama group of the workers, when mechanics paint in their leisure, and farmers write sonnets, the greater art will grow and only then. . . .”

In the meantime, not surprisingly, the example to follow was the Soviet Union. For Russia’s Proletkult movement represented the first conscious effort towards such a proletarian culture, emerging “from the deepest depths upwards.” Indeed, said Gold, “[Proletkult] is not an artificial theory evolved in the brains of a few phrase-intoxicated intellectuals, and foisted by them on the masses,” but is “Russia’s organized attempt to remove the economic and social degradation that repressed that proletarian instinct during the centuries.” Once liberated, as in Russia—and as they will be the world over—“strange and beautiful things” will blossom, for the mass-soul is unbound and limitless.

LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION

Gold’s final destination, at least in “Towards Proletarian Art,” was very much in line with the Marxist goal of socialist-humanism. As spelled out earlier, this goal was of a brave new, higher-ordered world and civilization. Essentially, then, it was a world of

demigods. As Trotsky put it, “Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman.”⁵⁰ Actually written three years after Gold’s manifesto, Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution* (1924) thus concludes in spectacular fashion. “Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler,” says the revolutionary Bolshevik, and the “average human type [the average!] will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx.”⁵¹ On this fine point, to reiterate, Gold could not have agreed more. As he notes in a 1930 editorial for the Communist *New Masses*, after Trotsky had already become *persona non grata*, “We gave you a Lenin; we will give you a proletarian Shakespeare, too.”⁵² But on most of the other fine points, especially in regard to literature and revolution, Gold could not have disagreed more.

To be sure, Gold initially had tremendous praise for Trotsky, seeing his comrade as a revolutionary “Leonardo da Vinci.”⁵³ That was in 1926, prior to both Trotsky’s exile, which would come a year later, and to the new direction of world Communism—its militant “Third Period”—which would come in 1929, and endure until the popular front against fascism replaced it in 1935. But even in 1926, when Gold saw Trotsky’s criticism as “creative criticism,” criticism for which “the American brand is only conversation,” Gold still disagreed with Trotsky on the matter of proletarian art as distinct and unique.

⁵⁰ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 255-256.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁵² Gold, “Proletarian Realism,” in Folsom’s *Mike Gold*, 204.

⁵³ Gold, “American Needs a Critic,” in Folsom’s *Mike Gold*, 129-139.

Correctly identifying one of the major theses of *Literature and Revolution*, Gold notes that for Trotsky the term, proletarian art, is a misnomer. It is a misnomer because the proletariat—in contrast to all classes hitherto—knows itself to be but a transitory class in world history. While the bourgeoisie had several centuries to establish its own unique culture and art, the proletariat has mere decades before it dissolves its own rule. And then, in the post-revolutionary communist era, classes will have been abolished and the foundations thus established for a culture which is above classes—a culture and art form of the future that is, for the first time, truly human. It is only, according to Trotsky, above that communist ridge where “new peaks will rise.”

But Gold disagreed,

Even if for only fifty years the proletariat remains in subjection to capitalist society, will there not be some art growing out of this mass of intense, tragic, active human beings? Will they not sing, and need cartoons, plays, novels, like other human beings? Are they not studying, groping, reaching out hungrily for culture? It is not a matter of theory; it is a fact that a proletarian style is emerging in art. It will be as transitory as other styles; but it will have its day.

And, he might have added, it must have its day! Gold’s understanding of the role and function of the proletarian-artist-intellectual was thus mountains removed from Trotsky’s. The fact that the former was agitating in capitalist America, while the latter was indeed ruling in Soviet Russia should not be understated. Gold thus embarked on a literary movement aiming to enliven and awaken workingmen’s souls. Though Stalin said it, Gold would have agreed, the proletarian writer must be an “engineer of the human soul.”

Influenced by the Proletkult [the Organization for Proletarian Culture], Gold saw art as a weapon in revolutionary class warfare. Their position on art is best summed up in a paragraph from a resolution at the first Proletkult convention, held in 1918:

Art by means of living images organizes social experience not only in the sphere of knowledge, but also in that of the emotions and aspirations. Consequently, it is one of the most powerful implements for the organization of collective and class forces in a class society. A class-art of its own is indispensable to the Proletariat for the organization of its forces for social work, struggle and construction. Labor collectivism—this is the spirit of this art, which ought to reflect the world from the point of view of the labor collective, expressing the complex of its sentiment and its militant and creative will.⁵⁴

Proletarian art and culture was therefore to be a fighting art and a fighting culture. Ironically, Gold could have turned to Trotsky for his own justification. In chapter eight of *Literature and Revolution*, entitled, “Revolutionary and Socialist Art,”⁵⁵ Trotsky warns us not to confuse revolutionary with socialist art. Under socialism, as should be amply clear by now, with solidarity as the sole basis of society, a human art exceeding all of our wildest imaginations will flourish; but, during the period of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, “only that literature,” says Trotsky, “which promotes the consolidation of the workers in their struggle against the exploiters is necessary and progressive.” That is revolutionary literature, a literature that “cannot but be imbued with a spirit of social hatred, which is a creative historic factor in an epoch of proletarian dictatorship.” Nevertheless, Trotsky prefaces this passage by claiming that, as yet, as of 1924, there is still no revolutionary art. Noting that there have been hints and various attempts at it, but, “as yet,” there is still no

⁵⁴ Cited in Dave Laing, *The Marxist Theory of Art* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), 26.

⁵⁵ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 228-256.

revolutionary art should definitely leave us scratching our heads. It is also enough to invalidate Proletkult as a logical candidate; and, is certainly reason for Gold not to cite Trotsky as his crutch.

More important, Gold did not turn to Trotsky because Trotsky's position was the antithesis of the Proletkult position. While the Proletkult refused to have any contact with intellectuals of non-proletarian origins and largely rejected the art and culture of the past, Trotsky, as a "Marxist," could never reject the past. Instead, he saw in the past a usable heritage for which the communist revolution would merely allow for a most remarkable evolutionary development. Thus, wrote Trotsky, "The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in the immediate future is not the abstract formation of a new culture regardless of the absence of a basis for it, but definite culture-bearing, that is, a systematic, planful and, of course, critical imparting to the backward masses of the essential elements of the culture which already exists."⁵⁶ In other words, so-called "red professors" must appropriate, and impart, the valuable aspects of aristocratic and bourgeois culture. Translated into communist policy toward art in a revolutionary transitional period, Trotsky makes explicit, there must be "complete freedom of self-determination." Opposed to Proletkult notions of art as a weapon of the mighty proletariat, Trotsky thereby carves a free and autonomous space for an art form that is judged, first and foremost, "by its own law, that is, by the law of art."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 193.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 178.

During the “mixed economy” of the NEP years (1921-1928), such a “Trotskyist” independent line in culture and the arts was possible. In fact, Trotsky helped influence a resolution of the Central Committee of 1925, which read,

The communist critic must be free from any form of pretentious, semi-literate and self-satisfied communist superiority. . . . The Party favors the free competition of literary schools and currents. . . . Any other solution would be formal and bureaucratic. . . . The Party will not grant any group a monopoly in literary production. The Party can give no group a monopoly position, even a group that is completely proletarian in its ideas. This would be tantamount to a destruction of proletarian literature itself. The Party believes it is necessary to root out every kind of high-handed and incompetent administrative interference in literary matters.⁵⁸

But before long the revolution was “turning left.” The Sixth World Congress of 1928 signaled a new direction—the militancy and combat of “Third Period” Communism, 1929-1934. Thus Stalin’s “revolution from above”⁵⁹ spelled immediate defeat for Trotsky, on a personal level, and for the Trotskyist line in literary and cultural policy. Both thereafter were banished forever from the Soviet Union.

GO LEFT, YOUNG WRITERS!

As with War Communism (1918-1921) and the NEP years (1921-1928), the Party’s position on cultural issues largely reflected its political and economic orientation. So that in 1928, on the eve of the first Five Year Plan, accompanying Stalin’s feverish drive for massive industrialization and the rapid collectivization of the economy, there followed a militantly leftist, cultural revolution that meant, at least temporarily,

⁵⁸ Cited in Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky as Alternative* (London: Verso, 1995), 159-160.

⁵⁹ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution From Above, 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990).

revival of the Proletkult camp. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), the new cultural leftists, would come to dominate the “literary front.” As one eminent historian has put it, “The ideology of the cultural leftists was class oriented; they stood for ‘proletarian hegemony’ and the creation of a literature, art, and more broadly a culture that would be proletarian in spirit and content.”⁶⁰ Tolerating no culture except the rigidly proletarian, the RAPP’s slogan would become: “Either ally or enemy!”

To American radicals, “The Year of the Great Turn,”⁶¹ was cause for celebration. The end of the NEP—at best seen as a retreat from Communism, at worst a betrayal—meant that a momentous, new chapter in history was at the door. Albert Fried summed up its significance by explaining that it “would enable Communists to again seek through class struggle to rouse the masses from their torpor, to again practice their vocation as history’s vanguard, and, if called upon, as its martyrs.”⁶² Mike Gold, intellectual guerilla and literary agitator *extraordinaire*, was thus relevant once more.

Mike Gold’s first move was the editorial takeover of the Communist periodical, the *New Masses*. As cultural historian Daniel Aaron put it, with the assumption of the editorship by Gold, “the magazine became what Gold had always wanted it to be: a revolutionary organ dedicated to the working class, smaller in format, and printed on cheaper paper.”⁶³ Thus established as a literary periodical of,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁶¹ Robert C. Tucker notes that, “Stalin chose the October anniversary, 7 November 1929, to issue a manifesto of the second revolution in a *Pravda* article, ‘The Year of the Great Turn’” (*Stalin in Power*, 91).

⁶² Fried, *Communism in America*, 93.

⁶³ Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 204.

by and for the working class he left the “big names” to the other magazines, ever prepared for the discovery of a “Shakespeare in overalls.” His overly optimistic manifesto, “Towards Proletarian Art,” again read prophetic.

Gold’s next move followed with an editorial enunciating the new principles by which he guided the magazine that he had recently taken over in May 1928. The editorial, titled “Go Left, Young Writers!”⁶⁴ hit the newsstands in January 1929. Gold exclaimed, “Let us be large, heroic and self-confident at our task. The best and newest thing a young writer can do now in America, if he has the vigor and the guts, is to go leftward. If he gets tangled up in the other thing he will make some money, maybe, but he will lose everything else.” Concluding the editorial, he appealed to his readers: “Do not be passive. Write. Your life in mine, mill and farm is of deathless significance in the history of the world. Tell us about it in the same language you use in writing a letter. It may be literature—it often is. Write. Persist. Struggle.”

In the years to come, many writers followed Gold’s calling and indeed turned left. No less prestigious of an intellectual, America’s premier literary critic, Edmund Wilson, had even come over to support Communism. His reasoning, however, was that capitalism had simply run its course. And most important, capitalism, amid wholesale depression, was a detriment to the arts. He therefore appealed to other leading artists and intellectuals to unite in the making of a new world. His vision was of a society remodeled “by the power of imagination and thought,” whereby intellectual—as opposed to acquisitive—brains would rule the roost.⁶⁵ Definite echoes of *Culture and Crisis*, to be sure. But Edmund Wilson was clearly one among

⁶⁴ Gold, “Go Left, Young Writers!,” in Folsom’s *Mike Gold*, 186-189.

⁶⁵ “The Case of the Author—Edmund Wilson,” in Fried, *Communism in America*, 158-162.

many of the intellectuals recently taken in by the mystique and allure of the communist specter. As seen, *Culture and Crisis* in 1932 profoundly expressed the intellectuals' newfound strength, conviction and rejuvenated sense of purpose amid social catastrophe and disarray. Lending even greater scope and force to the intellectuals' vision for the creation of a brave new world was the founding of the John Reed Clubs. Indeed, by May 1932, the date of their first national conference, they could already boast of twelve such clubs scattered throughout the nation.

JOHN REED CLUBS

Founded in 1929 by *New Masses* editors Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman, the John Reed Clubs would serve as the foundation on which the proletarian movement was to be built. Writers turning left now found themselves a home; not to mention, outlet for publication. But its defining moment came in November 1930 at the Second World Plenum of the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature, convened at Kharkov. It was there that the John Reed Clubs, as well as the *New Masses*, officially affiliated with Moscow, adopting its literary and cultural line *in toto*. This thus marked a shift towards an art form that was of "explicit social and political content." Or, in other words, of an art form that "culminated in a [Stalinist] interpretation of politically revolutionary art" ⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, "New Masses and John Reed Club Artists, 1926-1936: Evolution of Ideology, Subject Matter and Style," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*. Vol. 12 (Spring 1989), 75.

To the thirty-eight delegates gathered at the first national conference of the John Reed Clubs in Chicago in May of 1932, Stalinist art did not quite carry the pejorative tone it carries today. Their program, as seen in the “Draft Manifesto of the Clubs,” published in the *New Masses* in June, contained six points. Theirs will be: (1) a fight against imperialist war and a defense of the Soviet Union; (2) a fight against fascism; (3) a fight for the strengthening and defense of the revolutionary labor movement; (4) a fight against white chauvinism; (5) a fight against the influence of middle-class ideas; and (6), a fight against the imprisonment of revolutionary writers and artists. To that end,

[The John Reed Clubs] call upon all honest intellectuals, all honest writers and artists, to abandon decisively the treacherous illusion that art can exist for art’s sake, or that the artist can remain remote from the historic conflicts in which all men must take side. . . . We urge them to join with the literary and artistic movement of the working class in forging a new art that shall be a weapon in the battle for a new and superior world.⁶⁷

As with the many callings cast upon intellectuals amid crisis- and depression-ridden America, this one, too, did not go unanswered.

Active chapters soon blossomed, in cities large and small. And by January 1934 nearly thirty clubs had been formed, most of which were publishing their own militant proletarian magazines. A “little magazine” movement had thus found rejuvenated strength; a movement determined to integrate revolutionary politics with a radical culture. Among the most noted and important of these little magazines was *Partisan Review*.

⁶⁷ “Draft Manifesto of John Reed Clubs,” *New Masses*, VII (June 1932), 3-4. Also available as “Draft Manifesto—John Reed Clubs,” in Fried, *Communism in America*, 176-177.

Chapter 3

The Communist Period: 1934-1936

I have been resurrecting my memories of the 30's and trying to piece together my personal experience and my ideas about what happened in the 30's I was both scared and cocky then, a combination not uncommon in ambitious young people, but at that time it seemed to go with the mood of the period. I had just gotten out of City College, where the only thing I had learned . . . was to question everything. I went on to New York University where I did graduate work and taught, and while I was there the world fell apart. I went through several stages very rapidly. I moved left, joined the John Reed Club, a radical organization of writers and artists, was a co-founder of the Partisan Review, became disillusioned with the Communists—all in a few years.

William Phillips, *New York Times*, 1978

We must see to it that Communists do not make a *similar mistake*, only in the opposite sense, or rather, we must see to it that a similar mistake, only made in the opposite sense by the “Left” Communists, is corrected as soon as possible and eliminated as rapidly and painlessly as possible. It is not only Right doctrinairism that is erroneous; Left doctrinairism is erroneous too. Of course, the mistake of Left doctrinairism in communism is at present a thousand times less dangerous and less significant than that of Right doctrinairism . . . but, after all, that is only due to the fact that Left communism is a very young trend, is only just coming into being. It is only for this reason that, under certain conditions, the disease can be easily eradicated, and we must set to work with the utmost energy to eradicate it. . . . Right doctrinairism persisted in recognizing only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not notice the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms . . .

V. I. Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism—An Infantile Disorder*,
1921

THE FOUNDERS, and HOW PARTISAN REVIEW BEGAN

While the preceding chapter had our tale begin as far back as 1848 with the growing specter of communism, a mere ghost brought to life when the idea became flesh in 1917, in another sense our tale actually begins in the 1930s with the Great Depression. For the hard-times of the depression had ravaged the land, spreading unemployment, poverty, hunger and insecurity. Social crisis, chaos, and misery had even brought the educated classes over to the reserve army of labor—the intellectuals thus became proletarianized. Writers everywhere were turning left, brains and brawn marching in unison for the liberation of mankind, or so at least it seemed. *Foster and Ford* in 32! A brave new America seemed on the horizon.

Then followed the John Reed Clubs: now, writers truly had a mass base. In direct contact with a proletarian audience, a new literature begged to be born. First envisioned by Mike Gold, proletarian literature was then at its peak. With culture on the brink of destruction, intellectuals, seemingly duty-bound, arose to its calling. They adopted the viewpoint of the proletariat, furnishing revolutionary themes for literary fiction, poetry, and drama. They unfurled the banner of revolt, contributing what they might to class war. And while most of the Reed Club chapters had sponsored their own periodicals, the most enduring one—by all accounts, the most interesting one—was *Partisan Review*.

The two central figures in the history of *Partisan Review* are its co-founders, William Phillips and Phillip Rahv. William Phillips was born William Litvinsky in

1907 Manhattan, the only child of recently emigrated Russian Jewish parents.⁶⁸ His father was a “luftmensch,” a “totally unsuccessful lawyer,” in Phillips’s words, who sought solace in a withdrawn life of social isolation, intellectual idealism and spirituality; while his mother was a “self-made victim,” whose search for another world took the form of hysteria and hypochondria. Also partaking in his childhood household and youthful memories was his grandmother, an “old female Jewish Robespierre,” the “demon” of the family hailing from Kiev; to converse with her he had learned Yiddish. All together, the household “combined an abysmal provinciality” that had resulted in “an admirable but unsophisticated snobbery toward the concern for status, money, and social climbing they saw all around them.” Thus growing up in poverty, Phillips attended Morris High School in the predominantly Jewish Bronx; he later attended the City College of New York, where he studied with Morris Cohen, from whom he learned the art of “dialectical” and skeptical thinking; and finally, he attended NYU and Columbia, studying philosophy with Sidney Hook, instructing English, and becoming “aware” of Greenwich Village, radical poets, rebels and communist literati. Importantly, it was during this period, between 1929 and 1932, that Phillips acquired his “first real education,” an education steeped in the “experience of modernism,” bounded on all sides by Eliot, Pound, Joyce, the Cubists, Mondrian, etc. He published his first piece, notably, a work of “non-Marxist” literary criticism, titled, “Categories of Criticism,” and printed in the *Symposium*. Then, in the depth of the Depression, he began to take an interest in social and political themes

⁶⁸ This biographical portrait is based on William Phillips’s autobiographical account laid out in his memoir, *A Partisan Life: Five Decades of the Literary Life* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983). Specifically, I turned to chapters 3 and 4, respectively titled, “Growing Out of the Twenties” and “The Thirties.” Also helpful was Phillips’s essay, “How ‘Partisan Review’ Began,” *Commentary* 62 (December 1976), most of which was later incorporated into *A Partisan Life*.

and movements. Ironically, though, it was not the very real and harsh reality of crisis-ridden America that turned him to the left, but, instead, ideas that truly brought him over. Teaching a course at NYU in the 30s, he soon replaced the standardized texts in “expository writing” with essays from the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. “And in the process of reading and discussing these magazines religiously as they came out each week,” Phillips recollects, “both teacher and students became radicalized”—meaning, they became aware of a world existing outside of literature and the arts, essentially, then, of an eminently political and social world filled to the brim with problems, issues and concerns for all.

Shortly thereafter, with local chapters spreading throughout the country, the largest of chapters located in New York City, Phillips learned of the John Reed Clubs. He quickly began frequenting their meetings, each time absorbing more of their ideological vapors, and soon began to see the world in an entirely new, Marxian light. The depression, which had destroyed the very “notion of progress,” bringing with it a dreadful “air of uncertainty, restlessness, and drift,” now, for the first time, seemed to be accompanied by the dialectical possibility of its material transcendence. Marxism thus brought hope to Phillips, even if he always secretly harbored grave and serious doubts. Before long, he would become the New York Club’s secretary—thus occupying the top post in the Communist hierarchy. And from that position, he met Phillip Rahv. But before introducing Phillip Rahv, *PR*’s co-founder, a few words about the “politics of memory.”

Could the politics of memory, or, a certain type of cultural and political amnesia, have tainted Phillips’s account of his own upbringing and education? Alan

Wald, Professor of American Culture at the University of Michigan, at least seems to think so. In his assessment, a major obstacle for writers of biographical history is indeed the politics of memory. Not merely a “euphemism for lying about one’s past actions and motivations,” perhaps not even at all, the politics of memory occurs when “individuals sometimes perceive or remember facets of their lives inaccurately for psychological or emotional reasons beyond their control.” It tends to take three principal forms: first, is in the sublimation of the personal into the political; second, is by way of “cultural amnesia”; and third, by way of “political amnesia.” Sublimation of the personal into the political, for instance, occurs when writers join political movements because of their wives or for reasons of careerist opportunity and aspiration. When asked, or writing their memoirs, though, writers rarely are candid enough to offer such ‘low’ motives as explanations for their actions. Cultural amnesia occurs when writers simply *cannot recall* the most elementary truths from their past experience, perhaps as a result of some great shock or perceived trauma. And finally there is political amnesia, what Wald considers the most common manifestation of the politics of memory. This occurs “when an individual, sometimes without the slightest calculation, attempts for pragmatic reasons to assign a spurious consistency to his or her political career by focusing on secondary aspects of their earlier thought and omitting, minimizing, or reinterpreting what was primary.”⁶⁹ Wald considers this the case in *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life*, Phillips’s autobiography, from which the earlier portrait was indeed constructed.

⁶⁹ Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 3-24, 13-14 (quotes).

But if Wald is to be believed, there are significant flaws in Phillips' account. Fundamentally, it is that Phillips downplays the depths of his early, radical involvement. In the end, we get the "impression that he and his friends were always more or less liberal socialists who were deceived and manipulated by dishonest Leninists."⁷⁰ More pertinent to our portrait, we get the impression that Phillips was always more or less skeptical of the Communist Party; and, the impression that his commitment was always above all else to radical modernity, rather than a dual commitment to radical modernism *and* revolutionary politics—even, of the Stalinist breed of revolutionary politics. To be sure, Wald presents his case convincingly. He notes that Phillips writes that he had first heard about the John Reed Clubs in 1934 (even though the clubs had been established as early as 1929); also, that he was surprised to learn that the clubs were closely associated with the Communist Party. Yet Phillips had to have been more intimate and closely associated with the Party than he is willing to admit some fifty years after the fact. Wald reminds us that the January 1933 issue of the *Communist* contains a 3,000 word-essay by Wallace Phelps—William Phillips's party name (never once mentioned or acknowledged in his memoir)—denouncing Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset as a "social fascist backed by Wall Street and a slanderer of the Soviet Union." This means that the essay was likely written as early as 1932; and, more likely, it was accepted by a person known to the movement. Furthermore, Wald adds that Phillips's essay clearly indicates that he had been studying the ultra-leftist and militant Third Period's political line and trying to apply its line to cultural matters.⁷¹ So, in the end, Wald is

⁷⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁷¹ Ibid.

probably onto something. Nevertheless, his case must not be overstated. For the more important fact is that William Phillips came to communism by way of ideas. He was a communist on literary and cultural grounds, aspiring to a powerful marriage exemplified in proletarian literature. As for his future comrade-in-intellectual-arms, Phillip Rahv, he turned left without going through a modernist phase, or so it appeared to Phillips.

Like Phillips, Phillip Rahv was also the son of Russian Jewish emigrants.⁷² Born Ivan Greenberg in 1908 Ukraine, in the small town of Kupin, he was the second of three sons. Living in a Jewish ghetto surrounded by peasants, his parents ran a dry-goods store. And as Mary McCarthy recalls, his childhood there had always “stayed fast in his mind.” He used to tell her how his devoutly religious grandmother one day ran into their store, screaming, “The Czar has fallen.” To the young Ivan, it was as if she had said, “The sky has fallen”; he hid behind the counter, trembling in fear. In 1916, his father moved to Providence, Rhode Island, working as a peddler, trying to raise enough money to bring the family over. Then, after the shop was expropriated during the Civil War, the family fled to Austria. There for two years, the Greenbergs reunited in Providence, before moving as Zionists to Palestine in 1921. In Palestine, his father opened a small cement factory. When it failed, the fourteen-year old Ivan returned to America, alone, to live with his older brother. “There, in Providence,

⁷² This biographical portrait is based largely on Mary McCarthy’s obituary, “Phillip Rahv, 1908-1973,” published in the *New York Times Book Review* (February 17, 1974). It is more readily available as a foreword in Phillip Rahv’s posthumous collection of essays, titled, *Essays on Literature and Politics: 1932-1972*, edited by Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Dvosin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), vii-x. All quotes are taken from there. Additionally helpful was James Burkhart Gilbert’s sketch based on information provided by Rahv to the author in *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968), 113-114. Alan M. Wald’s sketch in *The New York Intellectuals* is also worth a look; his is based primarily on Andrew J. Dvosin’s “Literature in a Political World: The Career and Writings of Phillip Rahv” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1977).

Rhode Island, already quite a big boy, he went to grade school still dressed in the old-fashioned European schoolboy style, in long black trousers and black stockings, looking like a somber little man among the American kids.” He finally mastered English, adding it to the Russian, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and French he had already acquired from his many sojourns. Then, in short order, he went to work, his first job as a copywriter for an advertising firm in Oregon, while giving Hebrew lessons on the side. His passion, however, throughout it all, was literature. During the early twenties, in fact, he scarcely even bothered reading the newspapers. Instead, his spare moments were spent in public libraries, pouring over the classics of literature, history and philosophy. When the Depression hit in 1929, he lost his job and moved east. He spent six penniless months in Chicago and by 1930 had made his way to New York. “Standing in breadlines and sleeping on park benches, he became a Marxist.”

By 1932, Ivan Greenberg—reborn as Phillip Rahv—was an active Communist. He joined Jack Conroy’s Rebel Poets group, wrote and translated left-wing poetry, published reviews in the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses*, even became secretary of *Prolit Folio*, a monthly magazine sponsored by the Revolutionary Writers Federation. Rahv also joined the John Reed Club; indeed, like so many other radical intellectuals, the Club was his point of entry into the vastly growing movement. From there, as mentioned, he met William Phillips. Phillips’s impression was that Rahv was “unsophisticated, but very intelligent and endowed with a shrewd political sense.”⁷³ He thus saw Rahv as being far more “politicized” than he was. In this regard, Phillips’s impressions are spot-on. Where his assessment

⁷³ William Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 35.

fails, however, is in claiming that Rahv turned left without going through his own modernist phase. Politics of memory apparently at work here, again. Indeed, the education that shaped Rahv, as pointed out by McCarthy, was a cocktail that included Russia, the Bolshevik Revolution, Palestine, books read in libraries, and hunger.⁷⁴ Phillips therefore errs in overly-emphasizing the hunger component, whereas McCarthy's assessment benefits from its overall balance. What we need emphasize is that while Rahv was clearly more politicized than Phillips, his exposure to modern literature was not in the least any less bountiful. In Rahv's own self-assessment, in a 1934 essay, he describes himself a few years earlier as a standard modernist waiting to be rescued by radicalism: "As so many other middle class intellectuals, though I studied Freud, Nietzsche [*sic*], Proust, Joyce, Rimbaud, etc., I really knew and saw nothing."⁷⁵ So, either way you cut it, however as much as Rahv may have disparaged his modernist pedigree, his exposure to it definitely shaped his sensibilities.

So, from the first issue of their little, "proletarian" magazine, hitting newsstands in February-March 1934, it was apparent that *Partisan Review* was to be a different type of John Reed Club publication—though a JRC publication it was to be, nevertheless. Indeed, as recalled by William Phillips, they never envisioned their magazine as being anything beyond an "organ" of the John Reed Club.⁷⁶ What they had in mind, however, was for it to be a literary organ supplementing what they considered to be the excessively political *New Masses*. Phillips and Rahv thus approached Joseph Freeman in 1933, then an editor of the *New Masses*, and suggested the creation of a new, literary and cultural magazine of the revolutionary

⁷⁴ Mary McCarthy, "Philip Rahv, 1908-1973," ix.

⁷⁵ Phillip Rahv, "For Whom Do You Write," *New Quarterly*, 1 (Summer 1934), 12.

⁷⁶ William Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 35.

movement—a journal that would be devoted exclusively to matters of cultural criticism, art and literary theory. As the story goes—at least one of its versions—Freeman not only agreed with the young and budding writers, but actually helped them start the journal and even wrote the opening editorial statement.⁷⁷ This, at least, was Freeman’s version of the journal’s foundations; Phillips and Rahv remembered things differently. Neither one of their accounts even mentions the role of Freeman. But, there can be no doubt that established Communist cultural leaders like Joseph Freeman and Mike Gold played a significant role in the journal’s founding; if not strictly in an editorial sense, then, to be sure, in terms of getting the journal started and in fundraising.

Recalls Phillips,

We had no experience in putting out a magazine, no sense of what it involved, no notion of how to raise the necessary money. We were cocky kids, driven by a grandiose idea of launching a new literary movement, combining older with younger talents, and the best of the new radicalism with the innovative energy of modernism. . . . The only trouble was that there was no money⁷⁸

No money; not at the John Reed Clubs nor anywhere else, that was the initial hang-up. And yet the Communist Party aided the journal in other ways. By endorsing *PR*, the stage was set for take-off. The two “cocky kids,” co-editors-to-be, apparently without a clue, soon organized a fundraiser. Receiving word that the British Marxist John Strachey had agreed to give a lecture on “Literature and Dialectical Materialism,” a lecture to be presided over by Mike Gold, they immediately “hired a hall, sold tickets, [and] publicized the event.” The lecture turned out to be a “smash

⁷⁷ Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, 298.

⁷⁸ William Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 35.

hit,” whereby they managed to raise “the unbelievable sum of eight hundred dollars,” enough to publish the first issue of the journal, not to mention the second.⁷⁹

THE OPENING EDITORIAL STATEMENT

The first issue of *Partisan Review*, subtitled “A Bi-Monthly of Revolutionary Literature” and published by the John Reed Club of New York, hit newsstands in February of 1934. Its editorial board then included the following: Nathan Adler, Edward Dahlberg, Joseph Freeman, Sender Garlin, Alfred Hayes, Milton Howard, Joshua Kunitz, Louis Lozowick, Leonard Mins, Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], Phillip Rahv, and Edwin Rolfe—all active participants in the proletarian movement, or, at the least, maintaining close ties.

Nevertheless, according to Phillips and Rahv, *PR* was their baby from the start.⁸⁰ In their words,

For while *Partisan Review* was officially the organ of the John Reed Club, the actual editing as well as money-raising was done mostly by ourselves, and thus the magazine necessarily reflected our own interpretation of the Marxist approach to literature.⁸¹

Furthermore, ten years after the journal’s initial 1934 publication—“In Retrospect”—they mentioned that the editorial board was “constantly changing and dwindling in number, [and] was chiefly made up of writers rewarded for their political loyalty or

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, even if purely coincidental, Phillip Rahv shared the same initials as the journal, PR.

⁸¹ William Phillips and Phillip Rahv, “In Retrospect: Ten Years of *Partisan Review*,” in *The Partisan Reader: 1934-1944: An Anthology*, edited by Phillips and Rahv (New York: The Duel Press, 1946). 680.

paid off for their literary prestige.”⁸² Joseph Freeman’s alternative tale, however, tells otherwise. In his recollection, it was he, along with Mike Gold and Granville Hicks that were the early editors of the magazine.⁸³ Why Gold and Hicks are not even included on the lengthy list of editors is another question not quite asked, and definitely not answered. And yet Freeman, in a letter to Floyd Dell, dated 13 April 1952, does add that the three initial editors stepped down to move on to more urgent matters, thus leaving Phillips and Rahv in control. So, regardless, all parties agree that Phillips and Rahv assumed control of the journal at one critical juncture in its early history. Indeed, with all the editorial shifting and reshaping in its formative years, they remained the one constant throughout.

After all, *Partisan Review* was still “officially” the organ of the John Reed Club. As a result, its opening editorial statement, more or less, simply restated the aims of the John Reed Club “Draft Manifesto” of 1932. The main points of the JRC Manifesto are therefore similarly found in the *PR* Manifesto: (1) anti-imperialism and defense of the Soviet Union; (2) anti-fascism; (3) support for the labor movement; (4) anti-racism; (5) anti-liberalism; and (6), progressive efforts towards a revolutionary proletarian literature, with the underlying assumption that proletarian art and culture shall be a mighty arm—literally, a weapon—in the battle for a brave, new communist world. As the journal’s founding document and statement of its purpose, it is accordingly quoted below, in full:

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ James Gilbert references a letter from Joseph Freeman to Floyd Dell, dated 13 April 1952, to the effect that “[Freeman], Gold, and Hicks were “early editors (in addition to Phillip and Rahv), but that the three editors stepped out of the magazine to do other things, leaving Phillips and Rahv in control.” See Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 120 (footnote 2).

PARTISAN REVIEW appears at a time when American literature is undergoing profound changes. The economic and political crisis of capitalism, the growth of the revolutionary movement the world over, and the successful building of socialism in the Soviet Union have deeply affected American life, thought and art. They have had far-reaching effects not only upon the political activities of writers and artists, but upon their writing and thinking as well. For the past four years the movement to create a revolutionary art, which for a decade was confined to a small group, has spread throughout the United States. A number of revolutionary magazines has [*sic*] sprung up which publish revolutionary fiction, poetry and criticism. Some of these are issued by the John Reed Clubs.

PARTISAN REVIEW is the organ of the John Reed Club of New York, which is the oldest and largest Club in the country. As such it has a specific function to fulfill. It will publish the best creative work of its members as well as of non-members who share the literary aims of the John Reed Club.

We propose to concentrate on creative and critical literature but we shall maintain a definite viewpoint—that of the revolutionary working class. Through our specific literary medium we shall participate in the struggle of the workers and sincere intellectuals against imperialist war, fascism, national and racial oppression, and for the abolition of the system which breeds these evils. The defense of the Soviet Union is one of our principal tasks.

We shall combat not only the decadent culture of the exploiting classes but also the debilitating liberalism which at times seeps into our writers through the pressure of class-alien forces. Nor shall we forget to keep our own house in order. We shall resist every attempt to cripple our literature by narrow-minded, sectarian theories and practices.

We take this opportunity to greet the various magazines of revolutionary literature already in the field, especially the *New Masses* whose appearance as a weekly, like the present issuance of PARTISAN REVIEW, is evidence of the growth of the new within the old.⁸⁴

Again, there is tremendous similarity between what we find here in *PR*'s editorial statement and what was found earlier in the JRC "Draft Manifesto." To the casual reader, *Partisan Review* must have seemed very much a product of its times. Said its co-editors, "In the editorial statement opening the issue we dedicated ourselves to revolutionary aesthetics, Marxist thinking, and good will toward the Soviet Union: all

⁸⁴ Editorial Statement, *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 1 (February-March 1934), 3-4.

of which on the surface apparently represented the typical Communist position.”⁸⁵ Beneath the surface, however, lay dormant a subversive literary program that eventually developed into a full-fledged critique of the Communist Party’s literary and cultural line. Matters hit breaking-point in late 1936 when the journal initially closed for financial reasons, but began anew on its own independent basis in late 1937. Glimmers of *PR*’s independent, critical, literary radicalism can already be found in their opening editorial statement.

Noting that *Partisan Review* is “the organ of the John Reed Club of New York, the oldest and largest Club in the country,” the editors claim that the journal has a “specific function” to fulfill. This is to “concentrate on creative and critical literature,” albeit from a “definite viewpoint—that of the revolutionary working class.” Additionally, they “shall combat not only the decadent culture of the exploiting classes but also the debilitating liberalism which at times seeps into our writers” Their journal is clearly, therefore, a revolutionary little magazine of proletarian literature. But, they shall also never forget to keep their own house in order, meaning: “We shall resist every attempt to cripple our literature by narrow-minded, sectarian theories and practices.” Thus, instead of a crippled and corrupted proletarian literature, they will only publish the “best creative work of its members as well as of its non-members” Form, then, might even on occasion take precedent over content. *Partisan Review*’s strange breed of radicalism was at this point greatly understated, perhaps even veiled. For as opposed to Mike Gold’s breed of proletarian literature, where literary form takes second seat to revolutionary content, no political mandate is here mandated from above. Rather, *PR* would participate in the political

⁸⁵ William Phillips and Phillip Rahv, “In Retrospect,” in *The Partisan Reader*, 680.

struggle against imperialism, fascism, racism, exploitation, etc., “through [their] specific literary medium.” What exactly this meant remains to be determined. Phillips and Rahv claimed that within a few months of launching the journal, they had “initiated a basic criticism of the party-line notions by which the ‘literary movement,’ as it was called, was then dominated”⁸⁶ Presumably, then, their basic critique is there for the taking; only they now lie within dusty back-issues hidden in library stacks. Chapter two will hereafter present the key essays, articles and reviews from 1934-1936; they will be presented in detail, to be analyzed in full at a later point in this dissertation.

THE REED CLUB DAYS

Historian James Burkhart Gilbert divides the “two crowded years” of the first *Partisan Review* into three noteworthy periods: the Reed Club days, from the journal’s founding in February-March 1934 to April 1935; the period from April 1935 to the end of the year; and the remaining ten months prior to its eventual folding in October 1936. Despite an essential, underlying current of similarity, each period can be characterized by its own particular mood. The first, clearly the most radical period, “was a time when the proletarian renaissance seemed close at hand, and therefore the need to settle questions of revolutionary criticism was the most pressing.” It thrived until a shift in Communist policy—marked by the end of the “third period” and the beginning of the Popular Front—dictated the dissolution of the Clubs, and their effective replacement by a new, more populist League of American Writers. The

⁸⁶ Ibid.

second period, though it was short, “exhibited indecision about the direction of the magazine.” And lastly, the period when *PR* merged with Jack Conroy’s *Anvil* was important “because the editors grew [increasingly] harsh in their assessment of the proletarian literary movement.”⁸⁷

Volume I, No. 1, February-March 1934

This first issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of the opening editorial, five pieces of fiction, six poems, four book reviews, and a critical essay by William Phillips.⁸⁸ Phillips’s essay, “The Anatomy of Liberalism,”⁸⁹ was a critical review of Henry Hazlitt’s *The Anatomy of Criticism*. It is central to any understanding of *Partisan Review*, not least because it is Phillips’s first major contribution to the journal, thus marking its incipient, theoretical direction. Phillips wastes no time blasting Hazlitt’s attack and outright dismissal of proletarian literature. In this regard, as James Burkhart Gilbert has noted, his review “was a fairly standard example of

⁸⁷ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 119.

⁸⁸ Who wrote the opening editorial, as discussed earlier, is subject to debate, though it was likely written by William Phillips, Phillip Rahv, and perhaps some of it by Joseph Freeman, as well; nevertheless, there is no way to know for certain. The fiction included “Two Sketches”—“The Conversion of Bobbie Rawlins” and “An Imposition on the Judge”—by Grace Lumkin; “Studs Lonigan,” which were excerpts from James T. Farrell’s forthcoming novel, *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*; “The Sheep Dip,” by Ben Field; and, “Death of a Ship,” by Arthur Pense. The poems included “In a Coffee Pot,” by Alfred Hayes; “Poem,” by Edwin Rolfe; and, “Four Poems,” by Joseph Freeman. Book reviews included *Poems: 1924-1933*, written by Archibald MacLeish, reviewed by Obed Brooks; *The Disinherited*, by Jack Conroy, reviewed by Granville Hooks; *Winner Take Nothing*, by Ernest Hemingway, reviewed by Phillip Rahv; and, Waldo Tell’s review of four little magazines, including *Left Front*, *Revolutionary Art of the Midwest*, published by the Organ of the John Reed Clubs of the middle west; *The Anvil, Stories for Workers*, edited by Jack Conroy; *Blast, Proletarian Short Stories*, edited by Fred R. Miller; and, *Dynamo, A Journal of Revolutionary Poetry*, edited by S. Funaroff, Herman Spector, Joseph Vogel and Nicholas Wirth. The critical essay was “The Anatomy of Liberalism,” by Wallace Phelps [William Phillips].

⁸⁹ Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], “The Anatomy of Liberalism,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 1 (February-March 1934), 47-51.

contemporary leftist criticism.”⁹⁰ In another sense, however, it most certainly was not. That it was a steadfast defense of proletariat literature goes without saying; the question is how Phillips had it defined.

Interestingly, Phillips offers an unconventional account of proletarian literature in response to Hazlitt’s critique of the conventional one. So, as Hazlitt sees it, “any poetry that attempts to enforce a specific article in the conventional moral code, to bring about a specific reform, to explain a scientific theory, or in any other way falls into didacticism, is likely to be abominable.” But, in response, Phillips attests that “these are certainly not the kind of beliefs which Marxists advocate for literature.” Rather, as he sees it, “Proletarian literature does not ‘enforce a specific article’; it introduces a new way of living and seeing into literature. It does not enforce the new view; it embodies it.” Phillips’s vision, his “new way of living and seeing into literature,” was thus a “far cry” from dialectical-materialism,⁹¹ not to mention from Mike Gold’s *Jews Without Money*. As English professor Harvey Teres has noted, their “subtle critique” of doctrinaire Marxist criticism in the mid-1930s was a type of *Eliotic Leftism* that owed more to the modernism of T.S. Elliot than to any other form of revolutionary, Marxist radicalism.⁹² That very well be might be so; however, it could also be seen as having Leninist roots. Remember, both Lenin and Trotsky abhorred sectarianism; Lenin, himself, castigating it as an “infantile disorder.” Perhaps the Leninist sensibility, however, speaks more for the

⁹⁰ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 123.

⁹¹ Harvey Teres, *Renewing the Left: Politics, Imagination, and the New York Intellectuals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 38-56

“unsophisticated” Phillip Rahv, as Phillips referred to his colleague, “who turned left without going through a modernist phase,” than for anyone else in the mix.

In his review of Ernest Hemingway’s *Winner Take Nothing*,⁹³ Phillip Rahv denounced as left sectarianism any proletarian literary theory that completely rejected the utility of bourgeois literature. Instead, he argued for selectively incorporating features of the modern bourgeois “sensibility.” His is thus a case for a usable and rich cultural past. This position stood opposed to the dominant trend in leftist literary circles; a trend that led to a form of criticism mightily “useless” to the proletarian writer. Useless, to reiterate, because it amounted to a rejection of bourgeois art on principled, or, rather, political, grounds.

As a result, Rahv looked around the lot of “serious literary journals” and found Hemingway’s *Winner Take Nothing* reviewed by the radical, proletarian critics with “almost uniform disfavor.” But there was a fundamental error in their judgment. For,

The principle that content determines form, if exaggerated, reduces itself to an absurdity, and withal a very dangerous absurdity, for it makes the proletarian artist insensible to those few—largely external—features of contemporary bourgeois art that are class determined in such a slender and remote manner as to render them available for use .

...

Rahv added, that since the danger of ideological contamination was rather small, there was little cause for concern; furthermore, since there was much to be gained from the positive accomplishments of modern bourgeois writers, in this particular case from Hemingway, the benefits of cultural borrowing definitely outweighed the possible costs. The way Rahv assessed proletarian literature in its present stage was

⁹³ Phillip Rahv, review of *Winner Take Nothing* by Ernest Hemingway, *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 1 (February-March 1934), 58-60.

that is was “marked by a certain mawkish idealization and sentimentality that repels rather than convinces the reader.” In other words, it was overly formulaic and obsessively driven by content to the detriment of form. And the critics were in large part to blame.

This last point brings us back to Phillips’s essay, specifically this time, concerning the role of the critic. As yet not considered, Phillips also attacked Hazlitt for underemphasizing the central role of the critic as guide—indeed, as cultural vanguard—in creating proletariat literature. In Hazlitt’s assessment, “It is more than dubious to talk of the critics guiding a culture or a set of literary tendencies; because in practice the critic is just as much the child and victim of his age as the creative writer.” Interestingly, Phillips countered Hazlitt’s claim by stating the case for objective standards in literary criticism. Access to these “truths” could be acquired by proletarian critics; but, apparently only by proletarian critics of *PR* persuasion—even then, perhaps only by its own elite, i.e., by Phillips and Rahv. This, then, would appear to be the *raison d’etre* of the *Review*.

Proletarian magazines, past and contemporary, lacked the fundamental maturity that Phillips and Rahv hoped to bring to the movement. In Phillips’s words,

Criticism has long been concerned with the relation of the new to the old. But these categories have usually been thought of as revolt and tradition in *aesthetics*. Undoubtedly, literary currents will emerge under capitalism. But they will be nourished by the dominant bourgeois perspectives. A genuine revolt, like that of proletarian literature, has roots in a completely new outlook.

But, the “completely new outlook” must remain in possession of a rich cultural heritage. The problem, then, is to determine “which are the most important forces of tradition and which the genuine forces of revolt.” Thankfully, adds Phillips: “A

Marxist is no longer in the dark about this. In fact, he proceeds to estimate the correct balance of this stress and strain in specific forms of proletarian literature in successive stages of its progress.” Crude proletarian literature—an infantile leftist disorder—only serves to debase the great promise of the movement, that proletariat literature, as with proletarian civilization, will surpass the definite wonders of modern, bourgeois literature and civilization, too. Remember, intellectuals joined the movement in large part on grounds of culture. So, even to an “unsophisticated” Phillip Rahv, it was clear that the “supple precision” and “impersonality of method” found in Hemingway, “if selectively assimilated,” could prove a major benefit to proletarian literature.

Volume I, No. 2, April-May 1934

The second issue was sixty-two pages in length, consisting of four pieces of fiction, three poems, nine book reviews, and a critical essay by the leading European Marxist critic, Georg Lukacs.⁹⁴ The appearance of Lukacs’s essay in *PR* was a special, though not altogether rare, occurrence for the young and budding, proletarian literary

⁹⁴ The fiction included “The Iron Throat,” by Tillie Lerner; “Theodore Roosevelt Hyman,” by Isidor Schneider; “The Death of a German Seaman,” by Leon Dennen; and, “Queen City of the Adirondacks,” by Sender Garlin. The poems included “To Otto Bauer,” by Alfred Hayes; “Homeless but Not Motherless,” by Phillip Rahv; and, “Poverty Comes to the Kennedys,” by Fanya Foss. Book reviews included Nathan Adler’s “Three Urban Studies,” including reviews of *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, written by James T. Farrell, *On the Shore*, by Albert Halper, and *Such is My Beloved*, by Morley Callaghan; Phillip Rahv’s “The Novelist as Partisan,” including reviews of *Parched Earth*, by Arnold B. Armstrong and *The Shadow Before*, by William Rollins, Jr.; Wallace Phelps’s “Eliot Takes His Stand,” including reviews of two books by T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* and *After Strange Gods*; Ben Field’s “From Smith College to Pit College,” a review of *I Went to Pit College*, by Lauren Gilfillan; Walter Snow’s “Gorman’s Picturesque Puppets,” a review of *Jonathan Bishop*, by Herbert Gorman; Alfred Hayes’s “Whose Tragedy,” a review of *A Modern Tragedy*, by Phyllis Bentley; L.T. Hurwitz’s “Potemkin’s Legacy,” a review of *The Eyes of the Movie*, by Harry Alan Potamkin; S.S. Utah, written by Mike Pell, and reviewed by W.R.; and, *Pilgrim of the Apocalypse: A Critical Study of D.H. Lawrence*, by Horace Gregory, and reviewed by Robert Kress. The critical essay was “Propaganda or Partisanship?” by the leading European Marxist critic, Georg Lukacs.

magazine. From time to time, European novelists and critics were therein published, encompassing a cultural-elite group that included Louis Aragon, Nicholai Bukharin, Andre Malraux, Ilya Ehrenbourg, and Andre Gide, among others. Lukacs's contribution, "Propaganda or Partisanship?,"⁹⁵ was an abridged version of his 1932 *Linkskurve* article, "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit," dealing with the conflict of art versus propaganda, and the place of partisanship within it.

As Lukacs assessed the problem, there were but two alternatives:

Either the writer deliberately abjured "propaganda" (this abjuration being merely illusory) and created "pure art," which resulted in a *tendentious* portrayal of reality, and hence "tendency literature" in the worst connotation of the term. Or the "tendency" was contrasted with the re-created reality in a subjectivist, moralizing and preaching manner, thus making it a foreign element in the creative work.

In other words, presented above is the apparent chasm separating the "pure" artists of the modern, bourgeois camp from the "propaganda" artists of the leftist proletarian camp—what, for Lukacs, equals the Trotskyist camp.⁹⁶ Thus expressed, Lukacs's solution for the divided artist is to simply portray objective reality, "its actual motive forces and its actual trends of development." This he sees as the great vision of *partisan*, proletarian literature. His position is quoted below at greater length:

If the subjective factor in history is so defined—and the proletarian revolutionary writer who has mastered dialectical materialism must so define it—all the problems discussed above in connection with "propaganda" cease to be problems. The writer then rejects the dilemma of "pure art" versus "propaganda art." For there is no room for an "ideal," either moral or esthetic, in his work, which is a portrayal of objective reality, its actual motive forces and its actual trends of development. *He makes no "external" demands upon his recreation of reality*, for—if he is to mirror reality correctly, i.e. dialectically—his recreation of it must itself contain the fate of those

⁹⁵ Georg Lukacs, "Propaganda or Partisanship?," *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 2 (April-May 1934), 36-46.

⁹⁶ Never mind that Lukacs's "Trotskyist" might very well have been code for Stalinist.

demands (which arise really and concretely out of the class struggle) as integrating factors of objective reality, as arising out of it and reacting upon it. And he likewise rejects the other dilemma of the “tendentious” weaving of “propaganda” and the image of reality. *He does not need to distort, rearrange or “tendentiously” color reality,* for his portrayal—if it is a correct, dialectical one—is founded upon the perception of those tendencies (in the justified Marxian sense of the term) that make themselves felt in objective evolution. And no “tendency” can be set up as a “demand” in contrast to this objective reality, for the demands made by the writer are an integral part of the dynamics of this very same reality—the effects as well as the antecedents of its dynamics (emphasis mine).

Lukacs’s literary dagger aimed at the “unliquidated” heritage of the Second International. His hope was its eradication and the further strengthening of Marxism-Leninism the world over. The irony, perhaps not lost to Phillips and Rahv, was that Lukacs’s Leninist critique bended backwards, in ways, in the direction of Stalinist art and propaganda, too.

In the same issue, Rahv put Lukacs’s theories to critical literary practice in his “The Novelist as a Partisan,”⁹⁷ a review of two proletarian novels, Arnold B. Armstrong’s *Parched Earth* and William Rollins, Jr.’s *The Shadow Before*. To begin, Rahv noted that, “For some years Marxist critics in America have busied themselves with the building of a theoretical scaffolding for a partisan literature expressing the revolutionary reconstruction of society.” Now, though, there can be no doubt that their efforts have not been in vain. The new working-class novels hot off the press month after month, the little magazine revival spreading like wildfire—all this appeared as “signs of a promise fulfilled.” In the familiar and ecstatic style reminiscent of Mike Gold, Rahv wrote of the movement’s maturation: “No hue and cry of propaganda, no lugubrious head-shaking of wiseacres, and no amount of

⁹⁷ Phillip Rahv, “The Novelist as Partisan,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 2 (April-May 1934), 50-52.

sneering on the part of those who persist in tracing their palsied hieroglyphics on the fly-paper of bourgeois class impotence, can arrest its progress.” Yet, more importantly, the substantive content of Rahv’s review was reminiscent of Lukacs, and not Gold.

Consider Rahv’s language,

The primary merit of *Parched Earth* and *The Shadow Before* lies in the fact that their authors are acutely conscious of the *material* reality of act and character. And it is precisely this consciousness of the economic factor as the leading factor in the determinism of life under capitalism that makes it possible for them not merely to state the mounting contradiction between the classes but also to resolve it. In both novels the solution is definitely established: not externally, through the well-known device of preaching and finger-pointing, but internally, through the inevitable logic of social necessity materializing in highly articulate images of existing life. Hence both novels, though the sensibilities of Armstrong and Rollins are poles asunder, postulate one solution: the proletarian revolution.

Both novels are thus praised in a Lukacsian sense, for they are “devoid of that communist self-consciousness that results in formula, rather than in the imaginative re-creation of life.” Rahv, however, did consider Rollins’s *The Shadow Before* to be the superior work.

While the partisan nature of both novels shows great promise, and though they both indeed manage to avoid the “communist self-consciousness that results in formula,” Rahv considered Armstrong’s *Parched Earth* to be the inferior work. According to Rahv, Armstrong’s flaw was directly traceable to his “inadequate mastery of literary art and to his somewhat outdated sensibility.” Though both Rollins and Armstrong accepted the proletarian view, to general success, Rollins had not made the “mistake of discarding the literary heritage,” as apparently Armstrong had done with “grave damage” to his “creative power.” The trick, on the road to literary

millenarianism, was to combine Communist partisanship with the “Marxian principle of cultural continuity.”

Another notable article in the same issue was Phillips’s “Eliot Takes his Stand,”⁹⁸ a review of two works by T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* and *After Strange Gods*. On its own, there is no great theoretical development in the review. But it is important, if only to highlight Phillip’s denunciation of what he interprets as Elliot’s recent turn to reactionary politics. Like the feudal agrarianism and regional patriotism championed by the contributors to *I’ll Take My Stand*, Elliot has taken his: “Only the blind would hesitate to call Eliot a fascist.” The problem, as Phillips saw it, was the “implicit reactionary politics” found throughout Eliot’s recent writing, and his “ever more ecstatic espousal of the church, the state, an aristocracy of intellect, [and] racial purity—in short, of most of the forces and myths that foster fascism.”

Set in the larger context, then, Phillips’s review is remarkable. Remember Teres: his position was that *PR*’s “subtle critique” of doctrinaire Marxist criticism in the mid-1930s was a type of *Eliotic Leftism* that owed more to the modernism of Eliot than to any other form of revolutionary, Marxist radicalism⁹⁹—even Lukacsian. In his words: “Whereas Lukacs’s aesthetic valued those works that most convincingly depicted the totality of objective historical forces, Phillips and Rahv tended to emphasize the ingenuity, resonance, and depth of a fully realized sensibility operating within the work.” To be sure, as seen, Rahv’s “The Novelist as Partisan” borrows mightily from Lukacs. Indeed, it is a fairly close application of Lukacs’s abstract

⁹⁸ Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], “Eliot Takes his Stand,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 2 (April-May 1934), 52-54.

⁹⁹ Teres, *Renewing the Left*, 38-56.

theories to concrete criticism. But as *PR* further develops its mature literary line, Eliot's modernist influence becomes increasingly more prominent while Lukacs's radical realism seems to fall by the wayside. The unsettling question, as yet unanswered, is the following: how is one to reconcile Eliot's reactionary politics with his acknowledged radical approach to literature?¹⁰⁰

Volume I, No. 3, June-July 1934

The third issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of an editorial statement co-written by Phillips and Rahv, five pieces of fiction, five poems, seven book reviews, and two essays.¹⁰¹ The editorial board was slightly revised: dropped from the list were Edward Dahlberg, Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick; and added was S. Funaroff. Its editorial board now included the following: Nathan Adler, Joseph Freeman, S. Funaroff, Sender Garlin, Alfred Hayes, Milton Howard, Leonard Mins, Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], Phillip Rahv, and Edwin Rolfe. The editorial statement,

¹⁰⁰ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 125.

¹⁰¹ The fiction included "Southern Highway 51," by John Wexley; "The Eclipse," by Ben Field; "Bum's Rush in Manhattan," by Edward Newhouse; "The Kamarinskaya Comes to the Shop," by Arthur Pense; and, "Notes on a Character," by Barney Conal. The poems included "Ballad of Tampa," by Joseph Freeman; "Sadly They Perish," by Herman Spector; "A Fresco for A. MacLeish," by Alfred Hayes; and, "Out of this House," by Loyd Collins. Book reviews included Jack Conroy's "A Factory Lives," a review of *The Land of Plenty*, written by Robert Cantwell; Isidor Schneider's "Dos Passos: Sympathetic Spectator," including reviews of two books by John Dos Passos, *In all Countries* and *Three Plays*; David Ramsey's "A Sociological Fairy-Tale," a review of *Technics and Civilization*, by Lewis Mumford; Edwin Berry Burgum's "Malraux and The Revolutionary Novel," a review of *La Condition Humaine*, by Andre Malraux; Edwin Berry Bergum's "Jews Under Hitler," a review of *The Oppermann's*, by Lion Feuchtwanger; Jerry Mangione's "No Focus," including reviews of *The Last Pioneers*, by Melvin P. Levy, and *Second Sight*, by Clifton Cuthbert; and, L.D.'s "Old and New," including reviews of *Driving Axle*, by V. Ilyenkov, and *The Well of Days*, by Ivan Bunin. The essays, listed under the general title, "Max Eastman: The Man Under the Table," included one, sub-titled, "In Reference to Myself," by Boris Pilnyak, and the other, "Bunk by a Bohemian," by Leon Dennen. The editorial, co-written by Phillips and Rahv, was titled "Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature."

“Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature,”¹⁰² stands out as the most important piece of the issue, if not of the entire early history of *PR* to date, for it effectively supplants the magazine’s opening editorial. The original editorial, left unsigned, tacitly acknowledged the equality of each and every one of the journal’s editors. But now it was clear—Phillips and Rahv had assumed intellection direction of the magazine that they had considered as their baby all along. Joseph Freeman still appeared on the masthead, but Phillips and Rahv’s editorial had thus spoken volumes.

The editorial is divided into the following six sections: Introduction; Conflicting Currents in Revolutionary Writing; Pulling in Opposite Directions; Problems and Pioneers; Looking Ahead; and, The Role of Partisan Review. It begins by noting the “quickenings in the growth of revolutionary literature in America.” In the arena of fiction, poetry, the theatre, reportage, and literary criticism, a new literature is everywhere on the rise; a new literature that is “unified not only by its themes but also by its perspectives.” Most importantly, proletarian literature was possessed by a “new way of looking at life—the bone and flesh of a revolutionary sensibility taking on literary form.” It thus promised an activist form of literature, an “intimate relationship” reconciling the apparent opposites of reader and writer. And just as Marx’s vaunted proletarian revolution would overcome human alienation in all of its manifest forms, Phillips and Rahv envisioned their proletarian, literary revolution overcoming the *writer’s alienation* in all of its forms, too.

In the meantime, much work still needed to be done. The role of *Partisan Review*, as understood by its founding co-editors, was “to develop a critical

¹⁰² Philip Rahv and Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], “Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 3 (June-July 1934), 3-10.

atmosphere that will strengthen the most vital forces in our young literary tradition.”

In democratic fashion, they envisioned a “collective discussion” flooding the pages of their little magazine, enriched by a “reciprocal influence” between reader and writer that would help bring their revolutionary literature to full maturation. At the same time, in dialectical fashion, they envisioned themselves—the critics—as literary vanguard of the movement. Writers, in their assessment, needed “adequate guidance.”

In their words,

The assimilation of this new material requires direct participation instead of external observation; and the critic’s task is to point out the dangers inherent in the *spectator’s* attitude. The critic is the ideologist of the literary movement, and any ideologist, as Lenin pointed out “is worthy of that name only when he marches ahead of the spontaneous movement, points out the real road, and when he is able, ahead of all others, to solve all the theoretical, political and tactical questions which the ‘material elements’ of the movement spontaneously encounter. It is necessary to be critical of it [the movement], to point out its dangers and defects and to aspire to *elevate* spontaneity to consciousness.

Lenin’s notion of a vanguard was not all that these literary guerillas borrowed from the model revolutionary. They also borrowed Lenin’s oft-cited and belittling term, “leftism.” In Phillips and Rahv’s assessment, literary leftism was the “most striking tendency” and problem in the burgeoning, revolutionary literary movement; more so even, remarkably, than the right-wing tendency at the other extremity.

The problem stemmed from the rigid understanding of Marxism as mechanical materialism. From this philosophical position, which assumes a direct determinism of the whole superstructure by the economic foundation, the entire “dialectical interaction between consciousness and environment, and the reciprocal

influence of the parts of the superstructure on each other and on the economic determinants,” is woefully ignored. Leftism’s salient features are easily recognized,

Its zeal to steep literature overnight in the political program of Communism results in the attempt to force the reader’s responses through a barrage of sloganized and inorganic writing. “Leftism,” by tacking on political perspectives to awkward literary forms, drains literature of its more specific qualities. Unacquainted with the real experiences of workers, “leftism,” in criticism and creation alike, hides behind a smoke-screen of verbal revolutionism. It assumes a direct line between economic base and ideology, and in this way distorts and vulgarizes the complexity of human nature, the motives of action and their expression in thought and feeling. In theory the “leftist” subscribes to the Marxian thesis of the continuity of culture but in practice he makes a mockery of it by combating all endeavors to use the heritage of the past.

Never once did Phillips and Rahv attack literary leftism at its more important source—i.e., in the work of leading Communist critic and writer, Mike Gold. In fact, they actually credit Gold, in addition to Freeman, as being the “earliest pioneers” of Marxist criticism in America. They note their work as being “in the nature of direct *general* class warfare against bourgeois literary ideology,” and add that they had “fought valiantly to win a place for proletarian writers in American literature.” To be sure, Gold and Freeman’s role in the literary movement went without saying. But, as acknowledged by James Gilbert, “their repudiation of leftism was in part an attack on the *New Masses* and on the older proletarian critics.”¹⁰³ At this point, however, it apparently was not interpreted as such.

Looking ahead, Phillips and Rahv proposed a number of solutions to be made “step by step, in the course of the continuous interaction of literary theory and literary practice.” But fundamentally, they demanded the imaginative assimilation of political content, and made pervasive cases for useable elements in bourgeois literature and for

¹⁰³ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 127.

definitive standards in literature. “Sensibility” would be the medium of assimilation: “political content should not be isolated from the rest of experience but must be merged into the creation of complete personalities and the perception of human relations in their physical and sensual immediacy. The class struggle must serve as a premise, not as a discovery.” They thus called for an end to crude and formulaic, proletarian literature. Political content must not be artificially infused to the detriment of reality; neither to the detriment of radical form. “The problem of the revolutionist is not to seek universals but usables [*sic*], for his task is to create a synthesis and not merely an innovation.” Both the creative and the social impulse were to be cultivated simultaneously; in other words, neither artist nor activist would be valued above the other, but both taken as a whole. Remember, they considered themselves legitimate Marxists, and, as such, understood the meaning of socialism as ultimately putting an end to the alien and divided state of man.

Volume I, No. 4, September-October 1934

The fourth issue was sixty-three pages in length, consisting of six pieces of fiction, five poems, two book reviews, and three essays.¹⁰⁴ The editorial board dropped Leonard Mins, all others remaining. The two essays in this issue, by Rahv and

¹⁰⁴ The fiction included “The Strike,” by Tille Lerner; “Prelude,” by Murrell Edmunds; “Storm in Texas,” by Nelson Algren; “St. Louis Idyll,” by J.S. Balch; and, “The Mother,” by Gertrude Diamant. The poems included “February,” by Louis Aragon; “Room with Revolutionists,” by Edwin Rolfe; “In a Hotel Lobby,” by Isidor Schneider; “No Credit,” by Kenneth Fearing; and, “Light,” by Millen Brand. Book reviews included William Rollins, Jr.’s “The Collective Novel,” a review of *And Quiet Flows the Don*; and, Alan Calmer’s “In the Vanguard,” a review of *With a Reckless Preface: Two Plays*, by John Howard Lawson. The essays included “I Came Near Being a Fascist,” originally published in *Commune*, the organ of the Union of Revolutionary Writers in France; “How the Waste Land Became a Flower Garden,” by Phillip Rahv; and, “Three Generations,” by Wallace Phelps.

Phillips, respectively, “How the Waste Land Became a Flower Garden”¹⁰⁵ and “Three Generations,”¹⁰⁶ compliment each other wonderfully. They both build upon the new foundation recently laid in “Problems and Perspectives.” This involved their increasingly more prominent attacks upon the notion of Marxism as mechanical materialism, their pervasive cases for useable elements in bourgeois literature and for definitive standards in literature; and, not to mention, the necessity for a literary synthesis of the old with the new in a higher-ordered proletarian art and literature. Together, it made for a powerful critique of literary “leftism.”

The point of departure for Phillip Rahv’s essay, “How the Waste Land Became a Flower Garden,” was Joseph Wood Krutch’s volume of writings, *The Modern Temper*, for it summarized most clearly his “waste land” school of thought. According to Rahv, Krutch’s main point “was that the heroic and tragic attitudes were things of the past, for man no longer believed in his greatness and importance.” But to Krutch’s despair, Rahv responds with the promise of proletarian art, literature and revolution. In his words,

Proletarian literature, because it expresses the movement of vast social forces, the making of *positive* history, the suffering and heroism of multitudes, is indeed capable of that vital affirmation which is the essence of the tragic. It can be produced by those creators who are able not merely to state the gigantic contradictions of contemporary life, but also to resolve them.

And yet Rahv’s major concern in this essay lay elsewhere—in the critical relationship between the new tragic and affirmative mode of proletarian literature and the old, decadent and negative mode of bourgeois literature. Rahv warned his readers not to

¹⁰⁵ Philip Rahv, “How the Waste Land Became a Flower Garden,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 4 (September-October 1934), 37-42.

¹⁰⁶ Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], “Three Generations,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 4 (September-October 1934), 49-55.

fall into the trap of left doctrinairism, noting that we make the grossest of errors in believing that we have exhausted our critical relation to the past.

Assessing the import of bourgeois literature, Rahv made an important distinction between bourgeois literature in its commercial form, as opposed to its intellectual form. In commercial form, bourgeois literature became “the open instrument of propertied class interest in letters.” It was thus an art form that lacked integrity, essentially serving the cause of reaction at its every beck and calling. On the other hand, in intellectual form, “we are not confronted with shallow optimism and an open-cash valuation of life, but with an art that articulates despair, that slashes certain forms of philistinism, and that even indulges in virulent social criticism.” This art form, what Rahv called “negative art,” “both retards and accelerates the radicalization of intellectuals.” In its radical form, by immersing its reader in an atmosphere of disillusionment and despair, it is a protest against the bourgeois way of life that serves as “an introduction and a stimulus to social insurgence.” Literary leftists that have mistakenly lumped the entirety of bourgeois literature into the camp of reaction, simply dismissing it *in toto* as homogenous waste, have done so to the detriment of the movement. The Marxian solution, in true dialectical fashion, lies in the revolutionary synthesis of the affirmative future with the negative, though useable art of the bourgeois past.

Further application of the Marxian dialectic is found in William Phillips’s essay, “Three Generations.” The three generations under discussion are the Dreiser generation, the so-called “lost generation,” and the proletarian generation. Dreiser’s group included Dreiser, Anderson, Lewis, Robinson, and Sandberg, and was

seemingly characterized by “a firm setting in American soil, and a social interest.” The group is otherwise known as the generation of regional American writers. “They were generally free of sophistication and verve, almost to the point of provincialism.” Theirs was a period of muckraking, iconoclasm and satire, “and extreme literalism of method.” Indirectly repudiating this generation, then followed the lost generation; otherwise, they were known as the generation of the exiles. The prototype of this new generation was Valery, “to whom writing was a form of speculative research,” though it also included Joyce, Eliot, and Stein. As opposed to the literalism and regionalism of the previous generation, this period “turned out to be one of transition, one of infiltration of new currents, one of cosmopolitanization.” Epitomized by Eliot, Phillips speaks of Eliot’s perfecting of a “new idiom and tighter rhythms for expressing many prevailing moods and perceptions.” Phillips thus depicts the lost generation as the first critical negation in the American literary tradition. They introduced “new ways of handling new subjects,” while assimilating the most significant ideas of the period. What remained to be done, however, was to negate the negation. This was the great opportunity and task that lay ahead for the latest literary generation—the proletarian generation of writers just recently turned left.

Explaining the literary dialectics here at work, Phillips wrote:

In a very concrete sense the Marxian idea of synthesis is here exemplified. The lost generation negated many of the values of the preceding one, though both operated in the same framework of capitalist culture. In rejecting this culture the proletarian generation effects [*sic*] a higher synthesis of both earlier periods.

The trick, however, was not outright rejection of the past, but its critical assimilation— for only the critical assimilation of the literary heritage of the twenties

by class-conscious revolutionary writers would result in the *higher synthesis* promised by proletarian art. Literary “leftists” who thus repudiate the bourgeois heritage “fall into primitive, oversimplified and pseudo-popular rewrites of political ideas and events.” An informed and astute reader might have interpreted this as an attack on the likes of Joseph Freeman and Mike Gold. Phillips had to have known as much. Perhaps for that reason he mentions them in a positive light, referring to Freeman, Gold, and Kunitz as men of integrity and power, as the “few confident pioneers” that helped build the proletarian literary movement. But a level of literary immaturity is implied in his overall assessment of the older generation of proletarian writers. Similar to his mistaken assessment of Rahv, Phillips—this time correctly—notes that the older generation “never really passed through the literary period which their ‘lost’ contemporaries introduced.” Under “the strain and exigencies of pioneering,” they had “side-stepped” the literary modernism “in order to carry the line of the revolution forward.” The road to maturity thus ran through the younger generation—effectively, Phillips was saying, it ran through *Partisan Review*.

Volume I, No. 5, November-December 1934

The fifth issue was sixty-one pages in length, consisting of two pieces of fiction, five poems, nine book reviews, and three essays.¹⁰⁷ The editorial board dropped S.

¹⁰⁷ The fiction included “No Wine in his Cart,” by Meridel Le Sueur; and, “The Spectre,” by Peter Quince. The poems “Somebody and Somebody Else and You,” by Edwin Rolfe; “Subway,” by Robert Halperin; “Two Cities,” by Philip Cornwall; “The Road These times Must Take,” by C. Day Lewis, a poem which first appeared in *Left Review*, the organ of the Writers’ International in Great Britain, along with its response, “Speaking Concretely,” by T. H. Wintringham. Book reviews included Edwin Berry Burgum’s “Six Authors in Search of their Future,” including reviews of *Slow Vision*, by Maxwell Bodenheim, *Those Who Perish*, by Edward Dahlberg, *We Accept with Pleasure*, by Bernard

Funaroff, all others remaining. Noteworthy in this issue was the contribution by Nikolai Bukharin, the so-called “Golden Boy of the Revolution.” His article, “Poetry and Socialist Realism,”¹⁰⁸ is based on a speech made at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers recently held in Moscow. Its place in the pages of *PR* should have been obvious to most any reader. The topic, poetry and socialist realism, dealt with “the most burning problem” of content and form. More generally, it dealt with the problem of “the cultural heritage,” and, in particular, with the problem of “mastering the technique of art.” Like Phillips and Rahv, Bukharin asked: “How can we learn from the old masters, from the classics and their predecessors?” His answer was found in the Marxian dialectic, “according to which the ‘negation’ is not a simple process of destruction, but a new phase in which, to speak with Hegel, ‘the old exists in a higher form.’ In this type of ‘movement’ a ‘succession’ is possible which dialectically represents both a breach with the past and its peculiar perpetuation.”

Bukharin did not elaborate further on the components in the dialectical equation, neither mentioning what literary aspects required super-session. But it was clear that he was not pleased with the state of proletarian culture to date. Bluntly, he even remarked: “It must be admitted quite frankly that occasionally, and particularly

De Voto, *The Foundry*, by Albert Halper, *Calico Shoes*, by James T. Farrell, and *The Death and Birth of David Markand*, by Waldo Frank; Alfred Hayes’s “The Poetry of Auden and Spender,” including reviews of *Poems*, by W. H. Auden, and *Poems*, by Stephen Spender; Alan Calmer’s “Anatomy of Fascism,” a review of *Fascism and Social Revolution*, by R. Palme Dutt; Leon Dennen’s “Negroes and Whites,” a review of *The Ways of White Folks*, by Langston Hughes; Gertrude Diamant’s “Chinese Epic,” a review of China’s Red Army Marches, by Agnes Smedley; Kenneth Fearing’s “On the Ruins of the Old Ghettos,” a review of *Where the Ghetto Ends*, by Leon Dennen; Nathan Adler’s “A Self Portrait,” a review of *Not I, but the Wind*, by Frieda Lawrence; and, Jerre Mangione’s review of three “Proletarian Magazines,” including reviews of *Blast*, a bi-monthly of proletarian short stories, edited by Fred R. Miller, *The Anvil*, a bi-monthly of proletarian stories and poems, edited by Jack Conroy, and *Leftward*, a monthly published by the John Reed Clubs of Boston. The essays included “Poetry and Socialist Realism,” by N. Bukharin; “The Great Alliance,” by Johannes R. Becher, and, “Andres Gide and Communism,” by Samuel Putnam.

¹⁰⁸ Nikolai Bukharin, “Poetry and Socialist Realism,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. I, No. 5 (November-December 1934), 11-15.

with those who are ideologically nearest to us, our poetry is primitive.” This was unacceptable to a Marxist of such intellectual stature as Bukharin. To him, and to men of his ilk, the point of Communism was the “all-round development of all the potentialities of man, and not a poverty-stricken, one-sided mutilation of man in this or that direction.” Bukharin’s mantra thus became: “Culture, culture and again culture!” His speech was thus a calling to excite the ambition of the young budding artists and writers; not surprising in the least, therefore, was Phillips’s and Rahv’s decision for its publication.

Also noteworthy in this issue was the absence of any contributed essays from Phillips and Rahv. Perhaps they figured they might lie low for a while, considering that their “roundabout jabs at leading proletarian theoreticians” was beginning to be noticed.¹⁰⁹ Or, perhaps they took the moment to rest briefly on their perceived laurels. At the national meeting of the John Reed Clubs, held in Chicago during September 1934, Phillips and Rahv came to the conclusion that its consistent critique of literary leftism was beginning to exert “a wide influence” among the younger writers within the Clubs. They noted this in the closing pages of the issue, where the editors commented that members of the writers’ commission “unanimously denounced” the leftist character of much of the revolutionary literature appearing in the little, proletarian magazines. Furthermore: “They condemned those practices in our work that lead fellow-travelers to think that they must become revolutionary-proletarian writers overnight. . . . [and] directed a collective attack against writing which consists of unconvincing, sloganized tracts disguised as poetry and fiction.” As they saw it,

¹⁰⁹ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 130.

this was *PR* 101, and Phillips and Rahv basked in the relatively quick success of their literary line on proletarian literature.

Volume II, No. 6, January-February 1935

The sixth issue was ninety-six pages in length, consisting of six pieces of fiction, five poems, six book reviews, two essays, and a call, titled, “The Coming Writers Congress,” to participate in a Writers Congress to be held May 1, 1935, in New York City.¹¹⁰ The editorial board was significantly revised: dropped from the list were Nathan Adler, Joseph Freeman, Sender Garlin, and Milton Howard; and added were Leon Dennen, Kenneth Fearing, Henry Hart, and Edwin Seaver. In full, its editorial board now included the following: Leon Dennen, Kenneth Fearing, Henry Hart, Alfred Hayes, Wallace Phelps, Phillip Rahv, Edwin Rolfe, and Edwin Seaver. All in all, considering how long the issue is, it is actually quite underwhelming. What endures, above all, is the “Call” to participate in “The Coming Writers Congress.” It endures less for its theoretical import—it is but a “Call”—than for its historical

¹¹⁰ The fiction included “A Place to Lie Down,” by Nelson Algren; “Benefits of American Life,” by James T. Farrell; “The Scab,” by Arkady Leokum; “If a Man Bites a Dog,” excerpts from Edwin Seaver’s forthcoming novel, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil*; “The New Housekeeper,” by Ben Field; and, “I Meet Scotland Yard,” by Nathan Adler. The poems included “The Port of New York,” by Alfred Hayes; “Two Poems,” including “American Rhapsody” and “Lullaby,” by Kenneth Fearing; “For Ernst Thaelmann,” by Richard Goodman; “City of Monuments,” by Muriel Rukeyser; and, “The Front,” Harold Rosenberg’s first poem in a proletarian magazine. Book reviews included Edwin B. Bergum’s “A Significant Revolutionary Novel,” a review of *The Executioner Waits*, by Josephine Herbst; Philip Rahv’s “Narcissus,” a review of *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, by William Saroyan; Samuel Putnam’s “Exiles from Reality,” including reviews of *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, by Franz Werfel, and *Tabaras, A Guest on Earth*, by Joseph Roth; Alan Calmer’s “The Depression Generation,” a review of *You Can’t Sleep Here*, by Edward Newhouse; William Pillin’s “Old Horizons,” a review of *Horizons of Death*, by Norman Macleod; and, Gertrude Diamant’s “Magazine Review,” including a review of *International Literature, organ of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, Nos. 1-4, 1934*. The essays included “Literature in Two Worlds,” by Andre Malraux; and, “Form and Content,” by Wallace Phelps. The call, titled, “The Coming Writers Congress,” was to participate in a Writers Congress, to be held May 1, 1935, in New York City.

import. And yet, before turning to the “Call,” equally important for marking the transition to the journal’s second period in its short-lived history, we turn briefly to the other pieces worthy of consideration. This includes the critical essays by Phillips and Andres Malraux.

Andres Malraux’s essay, “Literature in Two Worlds,”¹¹¹ considered two problems: the first had to do with the relationship between Marxism and Soviet literature, or, more generally speaking, between an ideology (to use his word, a “doctrine”) and a literature; and the second had to do with the freedom of the artist in the two opposing worlds of bourgeois liberalism on the one hand, and Soviet Communism on the other. More generally speaking, the latter problem collapsed into the familiar Marxian conundrum of the alienation and estrangement that exists between writer and society. As Malraux understood it, artist and society are “by their very nature opposed to each other.” Not so, however, under Communism: for “Soviet civilization is a totalitarian one.” Interestingly, Malraux employs the term, *totalitarian*, employed here for the first time in the pages of *Partisan Review*, but he does so in a positive light. It is positively totalitarian because it allows for each and every man to play his part in the construction of a brave new world. More specifically, it is a society to which writers accord their “conscious allegiance”; also, one in which their labor is not a “deadening part of life,” but a means to a richer, and nobler, existence for all. In the end, it is a fundamental reaffirmation of Marxism as a “new humanism,” as opposed to the degrading “individualism” of decadent liberalism.

¹¹¹ Andre Malraux, “Literature in Two Worlds,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 6 (January-February 1935), 14-19.

Moving on to “Form and Content,”¹¹² wherein Phillips addressed the form/content debate then circulating in radical, literary circles. Harvey Teres explains the conundrum,

Generally speaking, the Marxist view of the form/content [debate] has always been problematic. Its premises have been that form and content are dialectically related and that, in the last instance, content is the primary category. For those within the proletarian literary movement of the 1930s, the discrepancy between these views . . . was magnified by the repeated belittling of literary form and questions pertaining to it. For some critics, “in the last instance” became “in each instance” as they diagnosed capitalism’s cultural condition as decadent and perfunctorily labeled each modernist innovation in form as a particularly egregious symptom.¹¹³

Persistent “belittling” of questions of literary form had thus led to a crippling of the proletarian, literary movement; that, at any rate, was how Phillips understood the problem. Content indeed became the central category, in each and every instance silencing radical, literary form. As a result, a wedge had been driven through revolutionary literature, separating out, on the one side, content, and on the other, form. To bolster the promise of proletarian literature, Phillips added the following corrective: “A more significant definition of form and content would reveal them *as two aspects of a unified vision.*” The task of the revolutionary writer, therefore, was precisely to develop this “unified vision,” or, this “new sensibility,” as Phillips additionally called it in this essay and elsewhere. Thus, to reiterate, rather than driving a wedge through proletarian literature, the Marxist approach to literature—better yet, his radical *Partisan* approach to literature—ought to be the medium that actually unites what are the apparent irreconcilables of form and content. Going into

¹¹² Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], “Form and Content,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 6 (January-February 1935), 31-39.

¹¹³ Teres, *Renewing the Left*, 47.

their by now ready arsenal of theoretical arms, Phillips claimed that the critic must re-evaluate, “from the viewpoint of usability,” the literary heritage, as well as set definite standards for revolutionary writers in the burgeoning proletarian movement.

Despite lacking in any fundamentally novel insight—perhaps merely articulating earlier conclusions in different idiom—“Form and Content” is nevertheless important, precisely because it expresses the extent to which Phillips still envisioned the possibility of a radical, new proletarian literature, at exactly the moment when the militant Third Front period was being abandoned for the more conservative days of the Popular Front. Signaling the shift, and thus marking the transition to the journal’s second period from April 1935 to the end of the year, was the editors’ publication of the “Call” to participate in “The Coming Writers Congress.” Significantly, among the list of its sponsors—which included Theodore Dreiser, Waldo Frank, Josephine Herbst, Michael Gold, Joseph Freeman, Robert Cantwell, Erskine Caldwell, Malcolm Cowley, and Horace Gregory, among many others¹¹⁴—conspicuously absent were William Phillips and Phillip Rahv.

¹¹⁴ The entire list of sponsors included the following: Nelson Algren, Arnold B. Armstrong, Natan Asch, Maxwell Bodenheim, Thomas Boyd, Earl Browder, Bob Brown, Fielding Burke, Kenneth Burke, Robert Coates, Erskine Caldwell, Alan Calmer, Robert Cantwell, Lester Cohen, Jack Conroy, Malcolm Cowley, Theodore Dreiser, Edwar Dahlberg, Guy Endore, James T. Farrell, Kenneth Fearing, Ben Field, Waldo Frank, Joseph Freeman, Michael Gold, Eugene Gordon, Horace Gregory, Henry Hart, Clarence Hathaway, Josephine Herbst, Robert Herrick, Granville Hicks, Langston Hughes, Orrick Johns, Arthur Kallet, Lincoln Kirstein, Herbert Kline, Joshua Kunitz, John Howard Lawson, Tillie Lerner, Meridel Le Sueur, Melvin Levy, Robert Morss Lovett, Louis Lozowick, Grace Lumpkin, Lewis Mumford, Edward Newhouse, Joseph North, Moissaye J. Olgin, Samuel Ornitz, Myra Page, John Dos Passos, Paul Peters, Allen Porter, Harold Preece, Williams Rollins Jr., Paul Romaine, Isidor Schneider, Edwin Seaver, Claire Sifton, Paul Sifton, George Sklar, John L. Spivak, Lincoln Steffens, Philip Stevenson, Genevieve Taggard, Alexander Trachtenberg, Nathaniel West, Ella Winter, and Richard Wright. The list is noted in Henry Hart’s “Introduction” to *American Writers’ Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), an anthology of some of the principal papers, discussions and resolutions of the first Congress of American Writers.

THE POPULAR FRONT, and THE LEAGUE OF AMERICAN WRITERS

At the Seventh Comintern Congress, held in Moscow on 25 July 1935, 371 delegates from parties around the world resolved on the launching of the Popular Front. This thus signaled a fundamental shift in Party line policy: it signaled the shift away from the revolutionary militancy of Third Period Communism to a more defensively minded and conservative call for a united and popular front of the working class against fascism. As a result of this shift in tactics, labor was encouraged to seek alliance to join forces with bourgeois liberals and so-called “progressives.” And as fascism became the most pressing issue of the day, any class collaboration that promised to arrest its development was immediately sought after. This political shift soon thereafter led to cultural shift, as literature “from the viewpoint of the revolutionary workers” was now considered passé. Instead, a “usable past” was once more affirmed.

This apparent victory for the literary line of the foremost of *PR* editors, however, was never characterized as such. To be sure, a major tenet of Phillips’s and Rahv’s line was the case for a usable modern past. Indeed, theirs was a case for a more thorough and detailed analysis of the literary heritage; but, their understanding of usability was always on the grounds of a higher proletarian synthesis. If not for its supersession, therefore, effectively subtracting revolutionary proletarianism as the senior partner in the mix, then all that would remain would be reaction. The immediate closing of John Reed Clubs across the country could only confirm what very well might have been their suspicions. Why else not sign the call for

participation in the coming Writers Congress? At any rate, *Partisan Review* did publish the call. Even stronger, the editors stated that their journal “not only endorse this Congress but also offer the pages of this organ for a thorough discussion of the problems which will be analyzed at this gathering of proletarian and sympathetic authors.”¹¹⁵ This was confirmed in the next issue, when *Partisan Review*, together with *Dynamo*, offered more than two-thirds of its pages to discussion of some of the literary problems confronting writers on the eve of the First Writers’ Congress.

Volume II, No. 7, April-May 1935

The seventh issue of *Partisan Review* was unique in the editors’ decision to publish, on the eve of the first Congress of American Writers, a preliminary discussion of some of the literary problems confronting revolutionary writers. Still subtitled “A Bi-Monthly of Revolutionary Literature,” the editors continued to note that they were published by the John Reed Club of New York when in fact the Clubs no longer existed, having been shut down the previous February. Perhaps it was their last show of solidarity, or appreciation, for the organization that had sustained them in their formative years. The next issue no longer mentioned the JRCs. Now, *PR* had entered a state of semi-independence—“indecision” and “uncertainty” might be better words to describe their newfound status—a state in which it was very much associated with the League of American Writers but never entirely affiliated with it.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ “The Coming Writers Congress,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 6 (January-February 1935), 94.

¹¹⁶ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 140, 142.

Ninety-six pages in length, it consisted of three leading articles—on the novel, criticism, and poetry—each followed by a number of comments. “What is a Proletarian Novel?” was written by Edwin Seaver, with a discussion following by Edwin B. Burgum, Henry Hart, and James T. Farrell; “Criticism” was written by Wallace Phelps and Phillip Rahv, with a discussion following by Newton Arvin, Granville Hicks, and Obed Brooks; and, “Poetry” was written by Edwin Rolfe, with a discussion following by Isidor Schneider, Alfred Hayes, Stanley Burnshaw, and Ruth Lechlitner. The fifty-eight pages devoted to the Writers’ Congress are made all the more fascinating when considering that the Congress ended in the creation of the populist, League of American Writers, the effective replacement for the obsolete radicalism of the John Reed Clubs. This is important to note because the vision of the League of American Writers all but abandoned the JRC’s struggle for the creation of a revolutionary literature. Again, fascism became the most pressing issue of the day. Politics had thus trumped the less pertinent concerns of culture, even if one indirect consequence of war and organized “fascist terror”¹¹⁷ was a darker world without the wonders of art, music, theater and dance. Either way, on the whole, *Partisan Review* was clearly on board with the creation of the new League of American Writers, James Gilbert even noting the “special relationship” that was evident between them from the beginning.¹¹⁸ This seventh issue was indication. The rest of the issue consisted of two pieces of fiction, one poem, one essay, and seven book reviews.¹¹⁹ There was no

¹¹⁷ “The Coming Writers Congress,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 6 (January-February 1935), 95.

¹¹⁸ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 135.

¹¹⁹ The fiction included “Take a Number, Take a Seat,” by J.S. Balch; and, “Education of a Texan,” by Joseph Wilson. The poem was “Acts of God,” by David Wolff. The essay was “Revolution and the Individual Writer,” by Horace Gregory. Book reviews included Harold Rosenberg’s “A Specter Haunts Mr. Krutch,” a review of *Was Europe a Success?* by Joseph Wood Krutch; Obed Brooks’s “Eastman’s Purism,” a review of *Art and the Life of Action*, by Max Eastman; Bernard Smith’s “Time and Thomas

change in editorial direction. The board remained as follows: Leon Dennen, Kenneth Fearing, Henry Hart, Alfred Hayes, Wallace Phelps, Phillip Rahv, Edwin Rolfe, and Edwin Seaver.

The issue also included the editorial, “Forward to the Great Alliance: The American Writers Congress Convenes,”¹²⁰ wherein the editors remarked on the approaching Congress of American Writers, opening on the 26th of April in New York City. “From all parts of the country writers of varying backgrounds and reputations—all responsive to the necessity of combating reaction, fascism and war—will come together to consider the economic, political and literary problems facing the writer today.” Its hope was that the Congress would “set the frame for a more profound and more extensive revolutionary literature.” But, more importantly, it would be the basis of “the great battle-alliance of intellectuals and the exploited masses against fascism and war.” When the Congress convened, as Henry Hart noted, there were present as delegates 216 writers from twenty-six States, 150 writers attending as guests, including fraternal delegates from Mexico, Cuba, Germany and Japan, and the hall was crowded with 4000 spectators—intellectuals, professionals and workers coming to greet this “unprecedented” event in American literature.¹²¹

The preliminary discussion in this issue of *PR* offers us a glimpse of what was to

Wolfe,” a review of *Of Time and the River*, by Thomas Wolfe; Kenneth Fearing’s “Symbols of Survival,” a review of *Chorus of Survival*, by Horace Gregory; Samuel Putnam’s “Aragon as a Novelist,” a review of *Les Cloches de Bale*, by Louis Aragon; Eric Estorick’s “Struggle in Africa,” a review of *In A Province*, by Laurens Van Der Post; and, Joseph Wolf’s “Portrait of the Artist as a Child,” a review of *Call it Sleep*, by Henry Roth. The issue also included the editorial, “Forward to the Great Alliance: The American Writers Congress Convenes.”

¹²⁰ “Forward to the Great Alliance: The American Writers Congress,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 7 (April-May 1935), 3-4.

¹²¹ Henry Hart, “Introduction,” in *American Writers’ Congress*. (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 12.

follow, in the Mecca Temple of New York City, on the nights of April 26, 27 and 28, 1935.

Edwin Seaver's article, "What is a Proletarian Novel,"¹²² served as launching pad for discussion of the problem of the proletarian novel. It began by offering some notes towards a definition: "It is not necessarily a novel written by a worker, about workers or for workers." Instead, what was fundamental was that it be defined in terms of history and of political philosophy: in terms of "the materialistic dialectic, recognition of the class struggle, acceptance of the historic role of the proletariat in the formation of a new and socialist society." Furthermore, and most importantly: "It is not only the class alignment of the novelist that must be considered, not only his acceptance and use of the Marxian interpretation in his work, but the revolutionary purpose of his work, his aim not merely to understand the world and not merely to explain it, but to change it." These were the fundamental "elements" without which one cannot have a genuine proletarian novel.

The comment that followed by James T. Farrell¹²³ was the most critical of Seaver's position, and certainly was the one closest to the literary line of Phillips and Rahv. Farrell's anti-leftist stance took issue with the "general procedure" that revolutionary writers seemed to be resorting to in the crafting of their revolutionary, proletarian novels. Farrell understood the process to be something of the following,

Marxian thought in general, and the conception of the class struggle in particular, is used as source for first premises. Then these premises are developed by a simple process of logical extension into an adequate conclusion. The conclusion is then pasted onto the subject of literature,

¹²² Edwin Seaver, "What is a Proletarian Novel," *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 7 (April-May 1935), 5-8.

¹²³ James T. Farrell, "Discussion," *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 7 (April-May 1935), 13-15.

without any testing of it in terms of literary developments and traditions.

The result is a crass, deterministic and formulaic literature, for in its attempt to recapture and recreate the complexities of modern life it simply falls back on a pseudo-Marxian, “algebraic equation.” The reality, however, is that leftist literature is based upon an “inadequate assumption” and is actually a position quite foreign to the thought of Marx. The problem is that Marx’s writings easily lend themselves to misinterpretation.

Regarding the relation between culture and economics, or, in other words, the relation between ideas and matter—between the superstructure and the substructure—Farrell references Marx, in his final note in *A Treatise on Political Economy*. There, Marx states that “it is a well known fact that in periods of highest development in art, there is not a direct relationship between art and the material relationships in society.” Marx’s classic example was Greek art. The Marxist notion of historical materialism, written during the heyday of philosophical dualism, was a revolt against idealism. But, Farrell continues, the place of economics and matter was overly emphasized, and perhaps with good reason, during “a time when dualism still held the day.” The fact, however, is that Marx never intended economics to be seen as the sole, all-determining factor in historical change. “For he conceived of societies as in process, and he perceived that there is ever present the factor of changes in social relationships.” Furthermore,

And because there is this factor of change, the effects of one set of relationships become the causes of the next set, and there is ever evolving a whole network of influences. So that cultural manifestations which are directly related to the basic material conditions upon which a society is founded in one era, evolve away

from that set of relationships as the process unfolds in the passage of time, and they in turn become causal factors in the general stream of social tendencies and forces.

Farrell's articulate opposition to what he saw as the "crass determinism" of mechanical, leftist Marxism might as well have come from the pens of Phillips and Rahv. To be sure, there was definitely more they could agree with in Farrell's piece than in Seaver's.

Phillips and Rahv's article on "Criticism,"¹²⁴ though it came in a separate section specifically dealing with the problem of proletarian criticism, could equally be seen as the fourth comment on Seaver's note on the proletarian novel. For Seaver's article is itself a work of literary criticism, as it is intended to encourage a type of proletarian novel while it purports to be offering nothing but a few notes towards a definition. With reason does the article end by listing the fundamental "elements" of the genuine, proletarian novel: the most fundamental seemingly being the "revolutionary purpose" for which the work is made to function. In other words, his was the familiar leftist position that proletarian literature was a weapon—an instrument to be employed in the class struggle. In response, Phillips and Rahv asked for clarification, offering their own question, the question being: *what kind of a weapon is art?*

The common assumption at the time was that literature was a weapon of politics, "an instrument of class struggle" as direct as political and economic writing. This meant that literature had become a device of propaganda, significant for its "agitational effect" to move the masses to revolutionary action. This placed far too

¹²⁴ Philip Rahv and Wallace Phelps [William Phillips], "Criticism," *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 7 (April-May 1935), 16-25.

much of a burden on art, for art that was propaganda therein ceased to be art. As Phillips and Rahv saw it, literature was more properly understood as “an instrument of reorienting social values, attitudes and sympathies.” Many a reader might ask,

“Well, does this poem make me want to go out and do something about it?” In asking such a question, however, the reader assumes that poetry can undertake all the tasks of political education. At most a poem usually helps to crystallize latent urges to action stimulated by a variety of other influences, such as one’s economic position, one’s friends, one’s reading in politics and sociology, and some actual situation in the class struggle one encounters. If the poem’s effect is isolated from these other factors, a burden it cannot bear is placed on literature.

Another result of this burden unduly placed on literature is that writers consequently shed their qualitative standards, instead relying on quantitative measures that inevitably favor the gross simplification of form. The kernel of the problem is illustrated when someone asks the following: “If the working class is unable to grasp modern literary forms . . . is it not possible to develop simpler forms that will carry the same content?” It certainly is; the question, however, is at what cost, and at what cost, more specifically, to the artist.

Phillips and Rahv, therefore, here, as elsewhere in their budding body of work, sought to disengage art from the immediacy of class struggle. They did so, however, always on the auspicious ground of Marxian thought. Citing Engels’ treatment of Balzac, they note the critical separation he made between the general ideology of a work and its specific content:

“Balzac was politically a legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the irreparable decay of good society; his sympathies are with the class that is doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply—the nobles. And the only men of whom he speaks with undisguised admiration are

his bitterest political antagonists, the republican heroes of the Cloitre Saint Merri, the men who at that time (1830-1836) were indeed the representatives of the popular masses” (*Letter to Miss Harkness*).

This is a crucial distinction that undergirded their remarkable case for a return to the literary heritage, for literary standards, and for a usable, modern and *bourgeois* past. Absent such a separation and someone with the “formal complexities of Cummings, Crane or Pound,” not to mention those of Joyce or Eliot, would never be considered as part of a potentially usable past. At which point, as the authors rightfully claimed, there “is no use whatsoever in talking about the usable past if we assume beforehand that nothing is usable save that which is near-Marxian.” Their distinction, to reiterate, thus drove a wedge between the writer’s ideology and his specific content, as the two do not dovetail as neatly as is commonly assumed: “While a general relation between the two . . . doubtless exists, the critic cannot assume a uniform relation applying to all writers. His job is to examine this relation anew when judging individual creations and creators.”

Such an approach would lead to the critical assimilation of many a modern’s radical sensibility. As an example, Phillips and Rahv cite Eliot, whose “restlessness and futility” is a form of revolt against existing society, and “therefore establishes a point of contact (usable elements) between him and the revolutionary poets.” Critics that simply cast away Eliot as an un-usable reactionary on the grounds of his recent “conversion” to Royalism and Anglo-Catholicism do so at great peril to their craft, for there is a “variety of fruitful influence in world literature, past and present, which revolutionary writers may select for their individual purposes.” The point to be remembered is that revolutionary literature is not the literature of a sect, indeed it

abhors sects, as did Marx and Lenin; rather, “it is the product of an emerging civilization, and will contain the wealth and diversity which any cultural range offers.”

Volume II, No. 8, July-August 1935

The eighth issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of five pieces of fiction, two poems, five book reviews, and one critical essay.¹²⁵ The editorial board was slightly, though significantly, revised: dropped from the list were Leon Dennen and Henry Hart; added to the list were Alan Calmer and Ben Field. The editorial board of the short, second period, only lasting another issue of publication, was now solidified. It included the following: Alan Calmer, Kenneth Fearing, Ben Field, Alfred Hayes, William Phillips, Phillip Rahv, Edwin Rolfe, and Edwin Seaver. Noteworthy is the addition of Alan Calmer, a figure that would come to play a major role in the direction of the journal in its approaching third period, eventually becoming the last remaining editor alongside William Phillips and Phillip Rahv. Also worthy of note, William Phillip, here, for the first time in a Communist periodical, used his real name,

¹²⁵ The fiction included “Three Mexican Stories,” all stories translated by Langston Hughes, which included the following: “Home,” by Jose Macisidor; “Cry of Warning,” by Francisco Rojas Gonzalez; and, “Greetings, Comrade,” by Herman Litz Arzubide. Fiction also included “They do the Same in England,” by Albert Halper; and, “The Hunt,” by Ben Field. The poems included “Between the World and Me,” by Richard Wright; and, “I Have Inherited No Country House,” by Alfred Hayes. Book reviews included Alan Calmer’s “Tradition and Experiment,” a review of *Collected Poems 1929-1933 & A Hope for Poetry*, by C. Day Lewis; William Phillips’s “American Tragedy,” a review of *Judgment Day*, by James T. Farrell; Obed Brook’s “Dialectic of Love and Hatred,” a review of *Poems*, by Kenneth Fearing; Edwin Rolfe’s “Progress or Retrogression,” a review of *Kneel to the Rising Sun and Other Stories*, by Erskine Caldwell; and, Phillip Rahv’s “The Lower Depths,” a review of *Somebody in Boots*, by Nelson Algren. The critical essay was *Mask, Image, and Truth*, by Joseph Freeman.

dropping the pseudonym of Wallace Phelps. Perhaps this can be explained as a result of the Communist turn to respectability.

“Beginning with this issue,” the editors noted, “PARTISAN REVIEW will not be published as the organ of the John Reed Club of New York but as a revolutionary literary magazine edited by a group of young Communist writers, whose purpose will be to print the best revolutionary literature and Marxist criticism in this country and abroad.”¹²⁶ Additionally, there was some talk of reducing the price from 25 cents to 15 cents a copy, in the hopes of eliciting a larger audience; furthermore, if that audience was proven to exist, then perhaps they could become a monthly, as opposed to a bi-monthly, periodical. In the meantime, the “indecision” and “uncertainty” of this second period was not conducive to great advances in revolutionary literary theory. That, or perhaps there was simply little left to say in the ideological battle against sectarianism and literary leftism. As James Gilbert—the expert on the early history of the magazine—sees it, the turn to respectability and to the ensuing cultural and literary line that followed the politics of the Popular Front was tantamount to victory for *Partisan Review*, at least on the matter of its incessant struggle against sectarian literature.¹²⁷ Yet never did the revolutionary editors translate their “victory” into a literary program for the literary renaissance. No higher proletarian synthesis seemed anywhere on or even near the horizon. The fact was that the John Reed Clubs were dead; in place of the promise of a great new proletarian art came the promise of a great new, fundamentally political, alliance of workers, intellectuals and large segments of the “progressive” bourgeoisie to stave off the coming tide of fascism.

¹²⁶ *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 8 (July-August 1935).

¹²⁷ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 141-142.

Nothing of enduring value remains in this issue; neither would there be much in the next, at least which was written by Phillips and Rahv.

Volume II, No. 9, October-November 1935

The ninth issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of six pieces of fiction, four poems, one essay, and three speeches.¹²⁸ The editorial board remained the same. An editorial note precedes the speeches of John Strachey, Andre Gide, and Andre Malraux. Their respective speeches, “Marxism and the Heritage of Culture,” “Literature and Society,” and “The Work of Art,” were delivered at The First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, held in Paris, June 21-25. Neither Phillips nor Rahv contributed an essay or a book review to this issue; however, their theoretical position is evident in their decision to publish these speeches of John Strachey, Andre Gide, and Andre Malraux. Apparently, they had done so in the “hope to stimulate interest in the proceedings at Paris and to extend the influence of that gathering on American readers.”¹²⁹ That gathering—The First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, an international organization of the Popular Front—brought together such diverse figures as Julien Benda, Heinrich Mann, Aldous Huxley, Waldo Frank and Louis Aragon. Their

¹²⁸ The fiction included “Tonight is Part of the Struggle,” by Meridel Le Seuar; “Trial by Fire,” by Grace Lumpkin; “American Obituary,” by Nelson Algren; “Guillotine Party,” by James T. Farrell; “Oil for the Guters,” by Nellie Coombs; and, “Flight into Reality,” by Betsey Foote. The poems included “Images of Poverty,” by David Wolff; “Men on the Boston Common,” by Albert Raffi; “Letter,” by Robert Halperin; and, “Journal of the Diamond,” by Louis Aragon. The essay was “The Surrealists,” by Illya Ehrenbourg, translated from the Russian by Samuel Putnam. An editorial note precedes the speeches of John Strachey, Andre Gide, and Andre Malraux. Their respective speeches, “Marxism and the Heritage of Culture,” “Literature and Society,” and “The Work of Art,” were delivered at The First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, held in Paris, June 21-25.

¹²⁹ *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 9 (October-November 1935), 28.

common agenda was centered on an intellectuals' alliance for the defense of culture the world over against the imminent threat of fascism, what they took to be the most immediate source of the impending menace of world war. More than 250 writers, representing 38 countries, were in attendance.

An important figure in the founding of *Partisan Review*, the British Marxist John Strachey,¹³⁰ gave an interesting speech, titled, "Marxism and the Heritage of Culture."¹³¹ There should be little wonder why the editors were so taken in by his speech. Strachey begins by noting that the reason and justification for the calling of the conference in Paris is that "our cultural heritage is in danger." The chief culprit is German Nazi fascism. Through its embrace of "irrationality" and "unreason," its "sustained attack on every form of cerebration . . . in favor of blood-thinking and instinct," it is "one by one," putting out the "lamps of reason." Strachey then responds to the critics, objecting in turn, that Marxism is every bit as much an enemy of our cultural heritage as fascist capitalism. That only if the Marxists had their day, culture would just as effectively be destroyed ("even if by different methods"). Quite to the contrary, protests Strachey, for Marxism is a humanistic philosophy grounded in the cultural traditions of Western Europe and modern Enlightenment. "In fact," Strachey adds, "Marxism . . . rests upon three great achievements of European culture, viz: English political economy from Petty to Ricardo, French materialism of the eighteenth century and German classical philosophy." But again, what about its practice—might not its alleged theoretical humanism amount to a practical anti-humanism, as is the case "in the rising civilization of the Soviet Union?" In response,

¹³⁰ See earlier section in this chapter.

¹³¹ John Strachey, "Marxism and the Heritage of Culture," *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 9 (October-November 1935), 29-33.

Starchy explains that the object of the current industrialization underway in the Soviet Union is “to provide the indispensable material basis upon which the mass of the population can alone participate in cultural life, and thus develop those humanistic values which its critics actually suppose the U.S.S.R. to be neglecting.” And furthermore, that though it might seem paradoxical, that Marxism stands for radical political and economic revolution precisely because it is culturally conservative. In his words, “Marxists are convinced that it is only by a revolutionary change in the political and economic basis of society that human culture can be conserved and, of course, developed; but that development . . . must be on the basis of the existing cultural heritage.”

Phillips and Rahv, for some time now, had been making similar claims regarding Marxism and the heritage of culture. Likewise, to ground their claims, both the *PR* editors and Strachey would often cite the great extent to which Marx and Engels were so thoroughly steeped in the culture of the West. In his speech, Strachey noted that Marx was “a very considerable Shakespeare scholar,” his work often amply studded with Shakespearian quotations. And, of course, there was Marx’s “worship” of Balzac. Towards the end of his speech, Strachey remarks that Marx “did not care a fig for Balzac’s political views because, in spite of them Balzac, better than anyone else, revealed and exposed the realities of nineteenth century life in capitalist France.” Anyone who failed to appreciate Balzac was therefore not worthy of their serious consideration. As Phillips and Rahv might have castigated such a man as a literary, infantile leftist, Marx and Engels “quite literally refused to have anything to do with a man because he failed to appreciate Balzac’s *Pere Goriot*.” Literature, in

their assessment, had its purpose even—and perhaps especially—in the absence of political dictate and directive

Andre Gide's speech, "Literature and Society,"¹³² was basically of the same vision. Speaking as a self-proclaimed and proud "man of letters," Gide believed it a "good thing to leave each mind free to interpret after its own fashion the great texts of literature." More and more, he discovered a certain contempt for beauty and of art for art's sake, and "an overinsistence upon the lesson, in a too exclusive search for *motives*, to the neglect of *quietives*." His vision was thus of radical culture liberating minds in preparation for universal liberation, enlightenment, and even universal happiness. For Gide, Marxism, and, more specifically, the Marxism come reality manifested in the Soviet Union of 1935, served as the model and the answer to the darkness of fascism then enveloping the world.

As for Andre Malraux, his speech, "The Work of Art,"¹³³ was less outspokenly supportive of the Communist experiment then underway in Russia; indeed, only once does he comment on the "Comrades of the Soviets," who have done well in their efforts at safeguarding the cultural tradition, even at the great cost of blood, famine and typhus. However, of them, he still asks more, calling on the creation of a "fresh and significant" new culture of renewed hope, inspiration and reincarnation. To this vision, his real calling is to the intellectuals of the world to not merely make the world safe and free of fascism, but "to open the eyes of all the sightless statues, to turn hopes into will and revolts into revolutions, and to shape

¹³² Andre Gide, "Literature and Society," *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 9 (October-November 1935), 33-40.

¹³³ Andre Malraux, "The Work of Art," *Partisan Review*, Vol. II, No. 9 (October-November 1935), 41-43.

thereby, out of the age-old sorrows of man, a new and glowing consciousness of humankind.”

TEMPORARY MARRIAGE: THE PARTISAN REVIEW AND ANVIL

Only three issues hit the newsstands during the journal’s second phase, a period, as mentioned, of editorial indecision and uncertainty, not to mention of semi-independence. Never officially affiliating with the League of American Writers, even more than granting the little magazine a state of semi-independence, meant that *Partisan Review* had found itself once again in dire financial straits. Its way out came by way of a planned merger with Jack Conroy’s *Anvil*. So, after Alexander Trachtenberg gave his approval, and after the obligatory spree of fund raising activities came in the fall of 1935, yet another new magazine was born in February 1936: the *Partisan Review and Anvil*. Six issues and ten months later, the auspicious marriage would suddenly end in divorce. While it lasted, it quickly became clear, that, in the words of James Burkhart Gilbert, it had “amounted to little more than the absorption of the *Anvil* by the *Partisan Review*.”¹³⁴ This is important to understand because while the general temperament remains consistent with the previous two periods, the journal’s third period is marked by an intensification of, and harshness in, their assessment of the proletarian literary movement. This should be noted, then, because the journal’s change in tone is less the product of the import of the *Anvil* side of the equation than it is something endemic to *Partisan Review*, after its two years of criticism within the movement seemed to have come to a head.

¹³⁴ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 143.

The first issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil*—now a monthly—was 32 pages in length, consisting of four pieces of fiction, four poems, one essay, two speeches, a book review, and featured three new sections which included theatre reviews, movie reviews, and correspondence.¹³⁵ The merger resulted in a revised editorial board that added Jack Conroy and Clinton Simpson, while dropping Kenneth Fearing, Alfred Hayes, and Edwin Seaver. In the end, the editorial board included the following: Alan Calmer, Jack Conroy, Ben Field, William Phillips, Phillip Rahv, Edwin Rolfe, and Clinton Simpson.

In this first issue of *Partisan Review and Anvil*, there still lingered the editorial indecision and uncertainty of the journal's second phase. Its articles pushed and pulled in opposing directions: Was *Partisan Review and Anvil* to be a literary magazine of the Popular Front, thus reinforcing the new Communist turn towards

¹³⁵ The fiction included "Grade Crossing," by John Dos Passos; "In the Heart of Darkness," a selection from *Days of Wrath*, Andre Malraux's latest work; "The Cock's Funeral," by Ben Field; and, "The Library," by Saul Levitt. The poems included "Where?" by James Neugass; "Why the Druids All Died," by Kerker Quinn; "Funeral in May," by Genevieve Taggard; and, "The Shape of the Sun," by Clara Weatherwax. The essay was "The Truth about the Brazilian Revolution," by Pereda Valdez. Speeches included "To the Left: To the Subsoil," an address delivered by Carl Van Doren at a dinner hosted by the Book Union, a new left-wing book club; and, "The Writer's Part in Communism," an address to the International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture, held in Paris, the previous June 21-25. The book review, Newton Arvin's "A Letter on Proletarian Literature," was a review of *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*, written in the form of a letter "To the Editors" of *Partisan Review and Anvil*. The new sections, which would become regular features of *Partisan Review and Anvil*, respectively included reviews of the latest theatre, of the most current movies, and letters to the editor. In this issue, "Theatre Chronicle," as James T. Farrell's column would be called, included reviews of Clifford Odets's *Paradise Lost*; of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother*, an adaptation of Gorky's *Mother*; of Albert Bein's *Let Freedom Ring*, a dramatization of Grace Lumpkin's novel, *To Make My Bread*; of *Squaring the Circle*, an adaptation of Katayev's Russian success; and, of Nelissa Child's *Weep for the Virgins*. "Nevertheless It Moves," by Kenneth Fearing, included movie reviews of Michael Curtiz's *Captain Blood*; Jack Conway's *A Tale of Two Cities*; George Stevens's *Annie Oakley*; and, Clarence Brown's *Ah, Wilderness!* "To the Editors" included two respective letters by Robert Cantwell and Upton Sinclair.

respectability? Did the urgency of the coming fascism supersede its calling for a higher, proletarian literature? Or would it return, regardless, to its roots in radical culture? Carl Van Doren's address, "To the Left: To the Subsoil,"¹³⁶ spoke to the former possibility; while Newton Arvin's review, "A Letter on Proletarian Literature,"¹³⁷ spoke to the latter. Either way, neither of the two pieces is theoretically informative nor of much lasting consequence. The one enduring piece of writing in this issue is surprisingly J. T. Farrell's "Theatre Chronicle."¹³⁸ In it, Farrell blasted a number of left-wing dramas then showing on the theatre circuit. Most important was his attack on Clifford Odet's latest play, *Paradise Lost*, and on Bertolt Brecht's *Mother*.

Farrell submitted that *Paradise Lost* was a "burlesque" on Odet's previous work. In his words,

What the play fundamentally lacks is understanding. Lacking understanding—both of the characters and the social processes in which they are thrown—there is no motivation. The people are travesties. Many of the lines are gags. Others are dull speeches and swaggering platitudes. It leaves me in open-mouthed wonder. . . .

As for *Mother*, Farrell argued that the play was fit only for infants and illiterates, and that it was "over-simplified" to an exhausting degree. Furthermore, he attacked the Brechtian notion of theatre as a kind of school, or "of drama as education." The magazine's previously subtle—some not so subtle—diatribes against literary leftism was now in full swing, gathering still further momentum, and many a Communist would soon take notice.

¹³⁶ Carl Van Doren, "To the Left: To the Subsoil," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 1 (February 1936), 9.

¹³⁷ Newton Arvin, "A Letter on Proletarian Literature," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 1 (February 1936), 12-14.

¹³⁸ James T. Farrell, "Theatre Chronicle," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 1 (February 1936).

The second issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil* was 32 pages in length, consisting of five pieces of fiction, five poems, two theatre reviews, six book reviews, one autobiographical essay, and one critical essay by Alan Calmer.¹³⁹ The editorial board, slightly revised, only dropped Edwin Rolfe, all others remaining.

The title of Alan Calmer's essay, "All Quiet on the Literary Front,"¹⁴⁰ refers to the current lull in hostilities in the literary battle between bourgeois and proletarian critics. The lull, however, perhaps a result of the Popular Front, Calmer took to be but fleeting. So, what Calmer drafted was "some kind of treaty or a series of articles of war, defining the most elementary limits of the Marxian position." In essence, it was a draft resolution, rather than an essay, that he took to be a future guide for those on both sides of the divide "who want to see a clean fight." But, like Phillips and Rahv,

¹³⁹ The fiction included "The Golden Harvest," by Josephine Herbst; "Black Hussars," by Ilya Ehrenbourg; "Blue with White Dots," by Charles Bradford; "Stopover," by Nathan Asch; and, "The Runners," by Prudencio de Pereda. The poems included "A Little Anthology," consisting of the following five poems: "'Dover Beach'—A Note to that Poem," by Archibald MacLeish; "Never, Never Never," by Kenneth Fearing; "More of a Corpse than a Woman," by Muriel Rukeyser; "Speak to Me of Mussolini!" by Samuel Putnam; and, "Of Thee," by James Neugass. Theatre reviews included "Theatre Chronicle," by James T. Farrell and "Revolution is a Form of Necking," by Edward Newhouse. The former included reviews of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset* and Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End*; the latter a review of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's *Soak the Rich*. Book reviews included David Ramsey's "Intellectual Ping-Pong," a review of *American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow*, a collection of essays edited by Horace M. Kallen and Sidney Hook; Obed Brook's "In the Mold of Poverty," a review of *From the Kingdom of Necessity*, by Isidor Schneider; "First Books," including Ruth Lechlitner's review of *Theory of Flight*, by Muriel Rukeyser, as well as Harold Rosenberg's review of *Before the Brave*, by Kenneth Patchen; Jack Conroy's "A World Won," a review of *Seeds of Tomorrow*, by Mikhail Sholokhov; and, Edwin Berry Burgum's "It Happened There," a review of *The Last Civilian*, by Ernst Glaeser. The autobiographical essay was Andres Gide's "The 27th of September," a journal entry written at the suggestion of Maxim Gorky for a projected collection of writing to be titled *A Day Round the World*, in which writers in countries around the world would describe how they had spent the previous 27th of September. The critical essay was Alan Calmer's "All Quiet on the Literary Front."

¹⁴⁰ Alan Calmer, "All Quiet on the Literary Front," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 2 (March 1936), 12-13.

whom he acknowledges, along with Granville Hicks, Joseph Freeman and Edwin Seaver, as greatly informing his position, his focus is more concerned with the proletarian critics of a literary leftist bent. In short, his position stated that art is *not* a weapon in the conventional sense, and that, therefore, “Be it resolved that henceforth all critics shall not identify proletarian literature with political agitation, but shall differentiate between the uses of literature and those of other social instruments.”

There was nothing novel in Calmer’s timely resolution; neither in his resolution recognizing that proletarian literature “is not a negation of past literature but its legitimate heir.” Indeed, all his resolutions found expression in earlier issues of *Partisan Review*. Curious, however, was the timing of his resolution. With “all quiet on the literary front,” all pens directed against the immediate enemy of fascism, why even bother drawing attention to a seemingly dead issue?¹⁴¹ Ironic, then, that it was precisely during this period that the journal would in fact re-up its attacks on literary leftism.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Terry Cooney writes: “A few observers at the time and a number of scholars since have suggested that the battle against ‘leftism’ was pointless by 1936 and that the struggle to gain for literature the freedom to develop on its own had been won with the shift to the Popular Front” (85). The scholars he refers to are Daniel Aron and James Gilbert. As Aron sees it, *PR*’s “crusade against ‘leftism’ started too late, for, as Calverton gleefully observed, Stalinist critics in the post-RAPP period no longer had to minimize aesthetic values” (302). And Gilbert writes the following: “Significantly, the *New Masses* was gradually giving up its interest in proletarian literature, but the *Partisan Review* continued to make this issue primary in its discussion of the radical cultural movement. The intensity of their attacks on leftism increased, even though the tendency was diminishing as the whole movement lost momentum. Rahv and Phillips had actually won their argument about sectarian literature, but to the Communist literati this was a dead issue by the end of 1936 (152). On the withering of proletarian literature: see Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 138, 141; Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 85 (note 37); and, James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois), 1991.

¹⁴² We return to the matter in the following chapter, in the section titled “All Quiet on the Literary Front.”

The third issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil* was 32 pages in length, consisting of three pieces of fiction, four poems, one theatre review, one movie review, five book reviews, and a special symposium which included ten essays.¹⁴³ The editorial board remained the same. The Symposium on Marxism and the American Tradition was titled “What is Americanism?.” It included ten respective essays by the following writers: Theodore Dreiser, Newton Arvin, Josephine Herbst, Robert Herrick, Mathew Josephson, Kenneth Burke, Waldo Frank, William Troy, William Carlos Williams, and Joseph Freeman.

“What is Americanism?,”¹⁴⁴ *Partisan Review*’s first symposium of many to come, focused on the problem of “Americanism,” that is to say, on the American tradition and its relation to Marxist ideology, its practice, and to revolutionary literature in particular. Responses to the intriguing questionnaire, sent to ten writers of “diverse shades of opinion,” were multiple and varied. Asked to respond to the

¹⁴³ The fiction included “High Gear,” by Nathan Asch; “The People’s Choice,” by Ruth Kronman; and, “Homecoming,” by Alfred Morang. The poems included “The Landlord,” by Kenneth White; “Plea for an Epitaph,” by Harold A. Boner; “Memory at Night,” by Edward J. Fitzgerald; and, “The Scab—Two Choruses from a Play,” by Hector Rella. The theatre review, “Theatre Chronicle,” by James T. Farrell, included reviews of Lynn Riggs’s *Russett Mantle* and Ronald Gow and Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*. The movie review, “Charlie’s Critics,” by Edward Newhouse, was a review of Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*. The book reviews included William Phillips’s “The Last Platonist,” a review of *The Last Puritan*, by George Santayana; Phillip Rahv’s “An Esthetic of Migration,” a review of *The Destructive Element*, by Stephen Spender; Harold Rosenberg’s “New Poetry,” including reviews of *The Iron Land*, by Stanley Burnshaw, and *To My Contemporaries*, by Edwin Rolfe; Kenneth Fearing’s “A Night Letter on William Saroyan,” a review of *Inhale and Exhale*, by William Saroyan; and, Richard Wright’s “A Tale of Folk Courage,” a review of *Black Thunder*, by Arna Bontemps. The Symposium on Marxism and the American Tradition was titled “What is Americanism?.” It included ten respective essays by the following writers: Theodore Dreiser, Newton Arvin, Josephine Herbst, Robert Herrick, Mathew Josephson, Kenneth Burke, Waldo Frank, William Troy, William Carlos Williams, and Joseph Freeman.

¹⁴⁴ “What is Americanism,” *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 3 (April 1936), 3-16.

following questionnaire in essay form, *Partisan Review* thus opened its April 1936 issue with this citation in full:

What is your conception of Americanism? Do you think of it as separate and opposed to the cultural tradition of Western Europe? Do you think of it as identical with, or opposed to, or inclusive of the distinct native revolutionary heritage of the early Jacobins like Tom Paine, the populist movements of later days and the radicalism of the Knights of Labor, Albert Parsons, Gene Debs, Bill Haywood, etc.? Should the values of this American tradition be continued and defended or do they symbolize the brutal struggle for individual riches which some writers . . . have interpreted as the essence of Americanism? Does your conception of Americanism postulate its continuity from colonial days to the present age or do you place it within definite historical limits? . . . In your opinion, what is the relationship between the American tradition and Marxism as an ideological force in the United States, with particular reference to the growth of revolutionary literature in this country? Do you think that our revolutionary literature reflects and integrates the American spirit or is it in conflict with it? If this conflict exists, do you think this is a failure on the part of revolutionary writers or do the very premises of revolutionary writing prevent the organic integration of the two?

As mentioned, the responses were multiple and varied. Most of the responses, however, were expressive of the new Popular Front line in Communist literary policy. What this meant to many an American Communist writer was a return “to the subsoil,” as Carl Van Doren aptly put it in an address published in the February 1936 issue of *Partisan Review*. Thus, the American tradition was depicted as a radical—even revolutionary—tradition that had much to offer to Communist politics. Theodore Dreiser, Newton Arvin, Mathew Josephson, Kenneth Burke, Waldo Frank, and Joseph Freeman, accordingly wrote that not only was there “no conflict between Americanism and Marxism,” but that there was a “necessary continuity” between the two traditions, and that, socialism, “far from spelling an abrupt break with the American past,” is today “the only conceivable realization of it.” Nevertheless, all

agreed, if Communism had something of merit to offer to Americanism then it would have to be a Communist way of life thoroughly adapted to the localized Yankee ways of the American environment—physically, morally, and historically. Robert Herrick, William Troy, and William Carlos Williams, however, offered their own accounts, controversially challenging the “necessary continuity” between the traditions.

Herrick, Troy, and Williams all agreed that Americanism was rooted in a type of “rugged individualism.” Its paramount values thus emphasized individuality, independence, self-assurance and self-reliance, and even adventurous experimentation. The differing “brands” of Americanism, as they saw it, were equated with the likes of Franklin, Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, even Ford, Barnum, and Rockefeller. Ironically, and according to Robert Herrick, unfortunately too, their “admirable qualities” may very well have encouraged the “predatory development of American character quite as powerfully as more attractive spiritual aspects,” but one thing remains certain: that is, the distinctly American pragmatic temper, always suspicious of theory. Thus, Herrick clings to his “early faith in the American tradition, in the so-called democratic process,” offering the merit of the “evolutionary process,” to chart a uniquely American pathway “between the Scylla of fascism and the Charybdis of communism.” Interestingly, Herrick also offered his position on proletarian literature. As he saw it, “The more distinctly ‘Marxian’ our literature becomes the less actual and distinguished it will be as literature.” His was thus a position long affiliated with Phillips and Rahv’s anti-leftist tirades against literature as propaganda—instead calling for “representation and interpretation,” more “understanding, less conviction.” William Carlos Williams took

matters one step further. According to Williams, “the American tradition is completely opposed to Marxism.” Phillips and Rahv never went this far in their criticism, merely offering criticism from within the movement, and always maintaining their belief in a truer, proletarian synthesis. For Williams, though, revolutionary literature was seen as being “definitely in conflict with our deep-seated ideals.” Williams’s contribution would create quite the stir.

Volume III, No. 4, May 1936

The fourth issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil* was 32 pages in length, consisting of four pieces of fiction, five poems, one theatre review, four book reviews, two pieces of reportage in a new section titled “Cross-Country,” one essay, one critical review essay, and two letters to the editor in “Correspondence.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ The fiction included “Gus,” by John Dos Passos; “May Days,” by Saul Levitt; “In Asturias,” by Prudencio de Pereda; and, “A Last Look Back,” by John Herrmann. The poems included “The Sleepers,” by James Neugass; “New Calendars,” by Norman Ross; and, Stanley J. Kunitz’s “Two Poems,” including “The Signal from the House” and “Confidential Instructions.” The theatre review, “Theatre Chronicle,” by James T. Farrell, was a review of Irwin Shaw’s *Bury the Dead*, though also mentioned, for comparative purposes, Sidney Howard’s dramatization of Humphrey’s Cobb’s novel, *Paths of Glory*, as well as Reverend John Haynes Holmes and Reginald Lawrence’s *If This Be Treason*. “Cross-Country” included two pieces of reportage: the first, “Al and the Chief,” by John Mullen, is an account of his recent experience as a union organizer on the second night of the Pressed Steel Car strike; the second, “A Letter from Chicago,” by Sydney Justin Harris, is an account of the current state of letters and magazines in Chicago. The essay was “Home Thoughts from Abroad,” by Paul Engle. The other essay, “MacLeish and Proletarian Poetry,” by Alan Calmer, was a critical review of *Public Speech*, by Archibald MacLeish. The book reviews included William Phillips’s “Dixie Idyll,” a review of *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas*, by Allen Tate; and, a “Variety” of three reviews, including Horace Gregory’s review of *A Time to Dance*, by C. Day Lewis, Genevieve Taggard’s review of *Break the Heart’s Anger*, by Paul Engle, and Clarence Weinstock’s review of *Thanksgiving before November*, by Norman Macleod. “Correspondence” included “Sanctions Against Williams” and “From a Young Man.”

In a letter addressed “To the Editors,” one San Franciscan, Charles Forrest, called for immediate “Sanctions Against Williams.”¹⁴⁶ Though he clearly found the April symposium on Marxism and the American Tradition to be “stimulating,” he also found William Carlos Williams to have made a complete “ass of himself.” Apparently Forrest’s response was not the only such “spirited exception” taken against Williams’ point of view. The editors noted, in response, that “numerous other letters” reflected a “lively interest in the subject,” but that on the whole Williams’ position was “roundly condemned.” To which the editors, thinking it “needless to say,” made explicit that their editorial position was “utterly opposed to the direction of thought shown in Mr. Williams’ contribution.” Interestingly, no mention was made of either Herrick or Troy, whose respective criticisms of Marxism never went as far as did Williams’. At least Herrick and Troy left open the possibility for a uniquely Americanized breed of Marxism. No such possibility was evident in Williams’ assessment—Marxism simply needed to be expunged.

However, the editors were undoubtedly growing increasingly harsh in their assessment of proletarian literature; not to mention, perhaps even skeptical of it entirely. Alan Calmer’s essay, “MacLeish and Proletarian Poetry,”¹⁴⁷ is a case in point. To Calmer, Archibald MacLeish’s new book, *Public Speech*, had put to shame all the efforts of the younger generation of proletarian writers. In his words,

Unlike most of the political verse being written today, there is nothing cocksure or blatant about *Public Speech*. There is no easy sloganizing or parroting of doctrine or eagle oratory. Instead, there is an ideological depth to these poems, a firmness about their thinking

¹⁴⁶ Charles Forrest, “Sanctions Against Williams,” *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 4 (May 1936), 30.

¹⁴⁷ Alan Calmer, “MacLeish and Proletarian Poetry,” *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 4 (May 1936), 19-21.

which comes from an inner compulsion. They are not synthetic, fabricated out of external materials: they ring true because their philosophy is perfectly attuned to the poet's personal emotion and the emotion to the philosophy, and because one arises out of the other.

MacLeish's work was therefore depicted as "genuinely poetic"; issuing forth organically from the depths of his soul, rather than falling back on stale, "concentrated, universalized sentiment." He was a man devoted to the craft, discipline, and integrity of writing, resisting the degradation of utilitarian and propagandized, leftist literature.

Calmer's position was thus a familiar one: art was not propaganda. Where Calmer now went further was in claiming that in "identifying the logic of the creative process with the logic of political agitation," proletarian literature had not only become sterile, but had become "as harmful in its own way as the arid results of pure aestheticism." The literary "left" was now being equating with the literary "right," and, as the historian Terry Cooney sees it, "as a way of condemning the left."¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Calmer reiterated the position of Phillips and Rahv: literary leftism was a corruption of true Marxian aesthetic principles, and had not a wit to do with the fundamentals of Communist literary theory. MacLeish's "compass" was navigating the way "towards a significant major poetry," while the same definitely could not be said for the corruptors of both left and right.

Volume III, No. 5, June 1936

¹⁴⁸ Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 87.

The fifth issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil* was 32 pages in length, consisting of three pieces of fiction, one poem, one theatre review, three book reviews, two pieces of reportage, two review essays, and one letter to the editor.¹⁴⁹ In the preceding May issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil*, Alan Calmer, as noted, praised Archibald MacLeish for being a true poet—for navigating the path forward to a “significant major poetry.” This MacLeish accomplished on his own terms, as opposed to the failure and corruption of both left and right. While Calmer refused to name names among the left—though his not so well kept secret would be fully disclosed come June—he did specifically call out T. S. Eliot as among the chief corruptors of the right: whose “instruments . . . were put out of commission more than a decade ago—causing him to turn into treacherous channels” This is a remarkable passage for what was to follow come June. For in June, Phillip Rahv’s “A Season in Heaven,”¹⁵⁰ a review of T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, cast an entirely new and unorthodox portrait of Eliot’s legacy.

There was little doubt—Rahv seemed to agree with the lot of proletarian critics—that Eliot had taken his stand with fascism.¹⁵¹ But there was even less doubt

¹⁴⁹ The fiction included “The Bloodletting,” by Gertrude Diamant; “Camp Is All Right for Kids,” by Irving Fineman; and, “Pockets Full of Southwind,” by Jesse Stuart. The poem was “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” by Louis Aragon. The theatre review, “Theatre Chronicle,” by James T. Farrell, included reviews of Victor Wolfson’s *Bitter Stream*, a dramatization of Ignazio Silone’s *Fontamara*; Claire and Paul Sifton’s *Blood on the Moon*; and, Orson Welle’s production of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The book reviews included Newton Arvin’s “A Minor Strain,” a review of *A Further Range*, by Robert Frost; Harold Rosenberg’s “The Education of John Reed,” a review of *John Reed*, by Granville Hicks; and, Ben Field’s “Regional Stories,” a review of *Head O’ W-Hollow*, by Jesse Stuart. Reportage included “From a Strike Diary,” by John Mullen; and, included in “Cross-Country” was “Wood,” by Nathan Asch. Review essays included Alan Calmer’s “Down with ‘Leftism’!” a review of *A Note on Literary Criticism*, by James T. Farrell; Phillip Rahv’s “A Season in Heaven,” including reviews of T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* and Irwin Shaw’s *Bury the Dead*; and, William Phillips’s “The Humanism of Andre Malraux,” a review of *Days of Wrath*, by Andre Malraux. The letter to the editor, in “Correspondence,” was by Richard Wright.

¹⁵⁰ Phillip Rahv, “A Season in Heaven,” *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 5 (June 1936), 11-14.

¹⁵¹ See April-May 1934, Phillips’s essay, “Eliot Takes his Stand.”

regarding what has previously been referred to as the *Partisan Review's* *Eliotic Leftism*. Already as early as September-October 1934, in "Three Generations," Phillips spoke of Eliot's radical, modernist sensibility: that is, of Eliot's avant-garde approach to literature, his perfecting of "new ways of handling new subjects," "new idiom and tighter rhythms for expressing many prevailing moods and perceptions." This was what the co-editors of *Partisan Review* considered to be Eliot's assimilatable literary qualities, what the current generation of proletarian writers had to incorporate and to critically assimilate into their writing styles if they wanted to arrive at the higher synthesis promised by proletarian art. By this point, then, June 1936, Rahv had once more returned to the unsettling question: how is one to reconcile Eliot's reactionary politics with his radical approach to literature? Perhaps still left unanswered in the end, Rahv takes us a step closer with the notion of "creative contradiction."

In "A Season in Heaven," Rahv thus warns proletarian critics to be weary not to simply cast aside the work of Eliot, the so-called "fugleman of literary reaction." For all too often this has been the blind and immediate response: leftist critics declaring Eliot's work, in this case his play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, to be fascist; hence, by implication, "beyond the pale of analysis and interpretation." Rahv regards this as a gross mistake. Quoting him, below, at length:

It is true, of course, that of late Eliot has been steering close to fascism in his general attitude to the problems of our time. But that by no means signifies that his poetry, existing and potential, is automatically suffused with the fascist spirit. Every work of art, no matter how sure we are of its origin, must be examined anew. There is always the possibility of creative contradictions, on which the dialectic feeds. The danger lies in the excess of confidence with which we tend to identify the *apparent* idea of a work with the work as written, its intention with

its actual meaning, and finally its individual quality with the quality of its creator's complete works.

In Rahv's assessment, at bottom, the mistake had been the equation of literature with life, when the two needed be separated; when, after all, poet could not be defined as persona. Therefore, Rahv believed that the "creative contradictions" in Eliot had made him our literary contemporary "in more than a chronological sense," perhaps even our "comrade" (we might add, or so we might even come to speak of him). For Eliot's poetry is both "various and complex." Furthermore, Rahv valued Eliot's poetry precisely because:

It has an historic sense, both of language and of events; it summarizes centuries of experiment and discovery; above all, it is precise, contemporary, sustained by a sensibility able to transform thought and feeling into each other and combine them in simultaneous expression. Our poets cannot return to the vapid sublimities of Victorian verse, or to the homespun doggerel of the sectarian past. Neither is it necessary to encase Marx's titanic brain in a steel helmet. The variety and complexity—yes, exactly that of our philosophy and of our experience, to be recreated, must command a poetry both various and complex.

In the same issue, William Phillips's essay, "The Humanism of Andre Malraux,"¹⁵² similarly praised the work of Malraux, i.e., praising the author for overcoming in a different sense than Eliot another one of the specific limitations of the proletarian writer.

To Phillips, the reception given to Malraux's *Man's Fate* in 1934 by left-wing American critics was practically a "literary scandal." Scanning it as though it were a pamphlet on China, they asked: "Where are the workers?" "It doesn't show the way out!" Such murmurings were heard from all sides. "Fortified by belligerent 'leftist'

¹⁵² William Phillips, "The Humanism of Andre Malraux," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 5 (June 1936), 16-19.

slogans, these critics were able to compensate for their insensitiveness to the variety and novelty of meanings that make up a novel,” wrote Phillips, adding that their so-called theories “sanctioned an escape from literature.” For the truth was that Malraux’s novel was “revolutionary in the entire range of its perception, while these critics had hypnotized themselves into the belief that a revolutionary novel must be a trumpet-call to action.” *Days of Wrath*, though it lacked the “variety and complexity” of *Man’s Fate*, still shared its chief merit: that is, its “psychological intensity.” Depicting societies in transition, Phillips characterizes Malraux’s novels as projections of psychological transitioning into fiction. Phillips thus sees Malraux as articulating “our humanist mythology.” As a result, Malraux’s writing becomes part of our evolving humanity, indeed setting the stage for the “next act” in history. And in this fashion, perhaps only in this fashion, for Phillips, literature can have a “social effect.” To reiterate, as Phillips understood it in more detail,

[T]he poverty of much revolutionary fiction in America comes from an attempt to construct a fabulous Christian world where political virtue triumphs over political evil, where neon signs point the moral, and conversion is swift and miraculous. That these allegories have little correspondence to the life of the American people, with its myriad psychological tensions and clashes, is evidenced by the further assumption that novels are to serve as direct instruments of conversion. If a novel is to have a social effect, it will come necessarily through its tracing of a shift in values from a position which is in some way identifiable with that of the reader’s to one which is more humanly desirable and psychologically credible.

Phillips thus assessed the task of fiction for Malraux to be one of altering the existing scale of emotions “through a profound study of the existing scale itself.” It was a lesson Phillips dearly hoped to have imparted to the infantile leftists of proletarian persuasion.

Nevertheless, by this point it seemed that the great hope, dream and promise of a higher proletarian literature had all but faded. All that seemingly remained in its stead was a negative agenda—one epitomized in Calmer's essay, "Down With 'Leftism'!"¹⁵³ Calmer's essay, an enthusiastic review of James T. Farrell's *A Note on Literary Criticism*, did not articulate a novel position for the young, now surprisingly almost three year old, journal, but it did perfectly summarize their three years of nagging and internal dissent. As Calmer saw it, Farrell was concerned with the literary tendency then known as "leftism," a tendency first characterized in the American annals of *Partisan Review*, though stretching back to Lenin's more general discussion of the phenomenon in 1920. What Farrell, however, assails in 1936 is the way in which the function of literature has been confused and equated with the purpose of direct action. Says Calmer: "He criticizes the [leftist] writers who separate Marxian interpretation from esthetic judgment and who superimpose one upon the other, instead of developing an organic critical system." Thus, rather than seeing in Marxism a "straight equation," one running directly from economics to ideology, Farrell harks back to the *Partisan*—even Marxian—notion of a usable past. The past was not to be abolished *in toto* but was rather to be transcended and superseded. And despite the more recent Popular Front tactics aimed at assimilating the artistic past, Calmer still sees in Communism "vestiges of a narrow, anti-esthetic attitude," "oversimplified beliefs" and "easy formulas," too much of an emphasis placed upon the "use-value of writing," and, in sum, "a lack of thinking which caused, and still causes, revolutionary critics to blunder into the kind of functional extremism" *PR* had been attacking from its earliest foundations.

¹⁵³ Alan Calmer, "Down With 'Leftism!'" *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 5 (June 1936), 7-9.

Next, then, what followed was Calmer's apparent critique of the Popular Front:

Writers who are identified with [leftism] have succumbed to a blind empiricism; they have swung from one extreme of their position to the other: their political evaluation of literature has extended from literary praise of the most mediocre writers who eulogize the revolutionary workingclass [*sic*], to political approval of the most "successful" authors whose sympathies are remote from the workingclass [*sic*] movement. "Left" extremism has usually been the outcome of oversimplified thinking—the worst possible guide through the winding, swerving paths of art.

Thus nothing fundamentally had changed in the transition to Popular Front with the new literary policy marking the Popular Front. While perhaps there was change at the surface, at bottom literature was still subservient to politics—subject to whims of political fancy. This sentiment would become absolutely paramount to the new *Partisan Review* of 1937.

Volume III, No. 6, October 1936

The sixth issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil* was 32 pages in length, consisting of four pieces of fiction, three poems, two critical essays, one review essay, and one piece of reportage.¹⁵⁴ The editorial board was all but reduced to Alan Calmer, William Phillips, and Phillip Rahv. All things considered, this final issue of the first *Partisan*

¹⁵⁴ The fiction included "Two Syllables," a chapter from Ignazio Silone's forthcoming novel, *Bread and Wine*; "The Enemy," by Josephine Herbst; "Morning with the Family," a selection from James T. Farrell's new novel, *A World I Never Made*; and, "Happy Birthday," by Joseph Bridges. The poems included "It Is Later Than You Think: Abigail to Minerva," by Horace Gregory; and, "Two Poems," by Sterling A. Brown, including "Transfer" and "Southern Cop." Critical essays included "Criticism in Transition," by Louis Kronenberger; and, "The Philosophic Thought of the Young Marx," by Max Brauschweig. The review essay was Harold Rosenberg's "Poets of the People," a review of *The People, Yes*, by Carl Sandburg.

Review was rather anti-climactic. With the June issue having thrown a triple-headed assault on the literary left, this October issue in comparison was significantly tame.

Most interesting was Louis Kronenberger's "Criticism in Transition."¹⁵⁵ In that essay, Kronenberger discussed the problem for the critic in times of extreme social duress—facing the onslaught of fascism, world war, unstable markets, soaring unemployment, and generally curtailed freedoms. Not least of all was the problem that resulted from "social literature." In Kronenberger's words: "As men of thought tend increasingly to approximate the psychology of men of action; as the business of saving civilization increasingly ousts from their minds the idea of enriching it, there must follow all along a relaxation of standards, both ethical and esthetic. The amenities decline, the non-utilitarian aspects of culture decrease, tolerance ceases to be feasible, and reason to be altogether sufficient." Amid these dark days of increasing ir-reason, culture subject to daily bombardments from economics and politics, Kronenberger takes the role of critic as one embedded with authority and responsibility. For when the crisis is finally over, the critical intellectuals' role as preserver of culture will have been fully justified. Nevertheless, here we find an ostensibly conservative notion of the intellectual—indeed, the intellectual as conserver and preserver of culture.

This would be a paramount virtue emphasized when a new group of intellectuals got the *Partisan Review* rolling back on its feet come November 1937. For now, though, *Partisan Review* was over and done with, folding for reasons of

¹⁵⁵ Louis Kronenberger, "Criticism in Transition," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III, No. 6 (October 1936), 5-7.

inadequate funding, and not then for any outright or irreparable disagreement with the Communist Party. Fundamental break, however, was imminent.

Chapter 4

The Break: 1936-1937

A member of the intelligentsia could never become a real proletarian, but his duty was to become as nearly one as he could. Some tried to achieve this by forsaking neckties, by wearing polo sweaters and black fingernails. This, however, was discouraged: it was imposture and snobbery. The correct way was never to write, say, and above all never to think, anything which could not be understood by the dustman. We cast off our intellectual baggage like passengers on a ship seized by panic, until it became reduced to the strictly necessary minimum of stock-phrases, dialectical clichés and Marxist quotations, which constitute the international jargon of Djughashwilese.

Arthur Koestler, *The God That Failed*, 1950

Can the serious writer ever reconcile his art with activist politics, continue to write while serving in the ranks of a revolutionary party or any party? . . . In anger or sorrow, or sometimes with a sense of relief, the writer quietly slipped away from the party or noisily took his leave. Some waited to be thrown out for intellectual deviations, refusing at the last moment to yield or to recant.

Daniel Aron, *Writers on the Left*, 1961

Breaking with the Communist party is a terribly wrenching process, because it's breaking with a whole way of life, not just breaking with one idea, or one belief, or a set of ideas or beliefs. It meant changing your whole way of life. Changing your friends. All my friends, people I had known for years—some people whom I was responsible for convincing to become Communists—all of these people stopped talking to me. When I walked down the street and they were walking on the same side of the street, they'd cross the street to avoid me, not to look at me. That was not easy.

And it was not easy to be called names by the Communist party in the *Daily Worker*. I was called an imperialist, a reactionary, the worst things, a snake, a traitor to the left, and so on.

William Phillips, *Arguing the World*, 2000

The non-Stalinist left found the Popular Front extraordinary sickening, rather nauseating. The Communists turning on a dime, suddenly becoming pro-American at the behest of Moscow. We were internationalists, revolutionary internationalists.

Irving Kristol, *Arguing the World*, 2000

LITERATURE IN A POLITICAL DECADE

1936 was a tumultuous year among a tumultuous decade. The Spanish Civil War erupted in July and the first of the Moscow Trials were held in August—trials that ultimately led to the conviction and execution of the entire Old Guard of the Bolshevik Revolution. For many among the communist faithful living abroad, awareness of Stalin’s purges would lead to their fundamental break with Stalinism and the Soviet experiment then underway. It was cause for their “Kronstadt.” But, as Louis Fischer has noted: “Until its advent one may waver emotionally or doubt intellectually or even reject the cause altogether in one’s mind and yet refuse to attack it.”¹⁵⁶ This was the status of *Partisan Review* from 1934-36. They wavered emotionally, doubted intellectually—even publicly—but were always steadfast in their overarching support of the Soviet Union. For Stalin’s Leninist politics held forth the promise of a brave new world and *Partisan* intellectuals were determined to ride that wave of the future to its ultimate fruition. Not least of all would Communism usher in a new era of social brotherhood, equality and justice, but it would bring upon a higher ordered civilization expressly marked by its higher ordered art and literary form.

¹⁵⁶ Louis Fischer, “Louis Fischer,” in Richard H. Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 204.

Therefore, from the debut issue of *PR* in February-March 1934 to April 1935 questions of revolutionary criticism moved to the front and center of the magazine's literary debates. As William Phillips and Phillip Rahv assessed the 1930s, it had epitomized the political decade *par excellence*. Politics indeed was placed at the center of the times to the extent that no one or any thing could escape its grasp. In the founding co-editors words: "The atmosphere of American literature became more political than at any time in its history. . . . And as the terminology of the social sciences invaded criticism, magazines were packed with debates concerning propaganda and proletarian literature; people wanted to know who read what and who wrote for whom, and literary gatherings argued the ability of untutored workers to create a great art. Writers felt that they were at the dawn of a golden age and that these question must be settled quickly lest they retard the expected burst of creative glory."¹⁵⁷

The first issue—critical for marking the magazine's incipient, theoretical direction—offers what seems to be the *raison d'être* of the *Review*: i.e. to act as cultural vanguard in the creation of proletarian literature. In this process, Phillips and Rahv claimed that the benefits of cultural borrowing definitively outweighed the possible costs of ideological contamination. Theirs was thus a case for a usable and rich cultural past, one in critical opposition to the dominant trend in leftist literary circles—a trend that rejected bourgeois art in its entirety on the grounds that it were backward, retrograde, and of a bygone era. Or, in other words—already as early as their debut issue in 1934—*Partisan Review* rejected the political determination of art.

¹⁵⁷ William Phillips and Phillip Rahv, "Literature in a Political Decade," in *New Letters in America*, ed. Horace Gregory (New York: Norton, 1937), 170.

Phillips's essay, "The Anatomy of Liberalism," thus called for a proletarian literature that did not merely 'enforce a specific article,' but that introduced a new way of living and seeing into literature—that embodied this view. And Rahv, in his review of Hemingway's *Winner Take Nothing*, warned that the leftist principle that content always determines form reduces itself to a dangerous absurdity; and he argued for selectively incorporating features of the modern bourgeois "sensibility." This idiosyncratic perspective consistently repeats itself throughout the original *Review*, at the very least until the Popular Front had appeared to change the terms of discussion.

By the 25th of July 1935, the date of the Seventh Comintern Congress officially launching the Popular Front, the conservative supersession of the militant Third Period had already been underway. The John Reed Clubs had been shut down in February and replaced with the more populist League of American Writers. Political shift thus spelled cultural shift, as literature "from the standpoint of the revolutionary workers" was now considered passé. Instead, a "usable past" was once more affirmed. But this apparent victory for the literary line of the foremost of *PR* editors was never characterized as such. Remember, that though theirs was a case for a more thorough and detailed analysis of the literary heritage, their understanding of usability was always on the grounds of a higher proletarian synthesis—subtract revolutionary proletarianism as the senior partner in the mix and all that would remain would be reaction. This might explain their silent protest—i.e. their decision not to sign the call for participation in the "The Coming Writers Congress" to be held on May Day 1935 in New York City. And yet in the end they did publish the call,

indeed offering more than two-thirds of the January-February 1935 issue to discussion of the literary problems confronting writers on the eve of the Congress.

The next three issues of *Partisan Review*—issues 7-9 from April to November 1935—were rather underwhelming. It was a brief period in its early history marked by indecision and uncertainty as to the future role of Marxist literary criticism and for possibilities of a higher proletarian synthesis. For the fact was that the John Reed Clubs were dead, and in place of the promise of a great new proletarian art came the promise of a great new, fundamentally political, alliance of workers, intellectuals and large segments of the “progressive” bourgeoisie to stave off the coming tide of fascism. Never officially affiliating with the League of American Writers, *PR* was then a semi-independent organ. But what this ultimately meant—more than anything else—was that the magazine had once more found itself in dire financial straits. Its way out came in the fall of 1935 by way of a planned merger with Jack Conroy’s *Anvil*. And so in February 1936 another new little magazine was born: the *Partisan Review and Anvil*. Six issues and ten months later, the auspicious marriage would suddenly end in divorce. Yet it is a critical period in *PR*’s history. For while the general temperament remains consistent with the previous two periods (February-March 1934 to April 1935; and April 1935 to the end of the year), this third period (from February 1936 to its final issue in October 1936) is marked by an intensification of, and harshness in, their assessment of the proletarian literary movement (then defined by the Popular Front). Its change in tone, though, is less the product of the import of the *Anvil* side of the equation than it is something endemic to

Partisan Review, after its two years of criticism within the movement seemed to have come to a head.

PAPA ANVIL AND MOTHER PARTISAN

Leaving behind the indecisive and uncertain space of the second period in early *PR* history, the first issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil* still pushed and pulled in opposing directions: Was the merged magazine to be a literary magazine of the Popular Front, thus reinforcing the new Communist turn toward respectability? Indeed, did the urgency of the coming fascism supersede its calling for a higher, proletarian literature? Or would it return, regardless, to its roots in radical culture? One indication of the new editorial tone can be in James T. Farrell's February 1936 "Theatre Chronicle," which included reviews of Clifford Odets's latest play, *Paradise Lost*, and Bertolt Brecht's *Mother*. Farrell submitted that *Paradise Lost* was a "burlesque" on Odets's previous work. And, as for *Mother*, he argued that the play was fit only for infants and illiterates—that it was "over-simplified" to an exhausting degree. It was therefore evident that the magazine's previously subtle—some not so subtle—diatribes against literary leftism was now in full swing, gathering still further momentum, and many a Communist would soon take notice.

Mike Gold immediately fired back in a *New Masses* review of the "shotgun wedding" that had led to the emergence of the new magazine, "Papa Anvil and Mother Partisan."¹⁵⁸ Under scrutiny were the objectivity, fairness and common sense of James Farrell, particularly in his review of Odets's *Paradise Lost*. But Gold took

¹⁵⁸ Michael Gold, "Papa Anvil and Mother Partisan," *New Masses* 18 (February 18, 1936), 22-23.

Farrell's lambasting of Odets as symptomatic of a larger issue epitomized in the work of *Partisan* critics, William Phillip and Phillip Rahv. As Gold assessed their "terrible mandarinism":

They carry their Marxian scholarship as though it were a heavy cross. They perform academic autopsies on living books. They wax pious and often sectarian. Often, they use a scholastic jargon as barbarous as the terminology that for so long infected most Marxian journalism in this country, a foreign language no American could understand without a year or two of post-graduate study.

Therefore, at bottom, Gold's was an attack at their *intellectuality*. In similar fashion, Newton Arvin framed it in "A Letter on Proletarian Literature,"¹⁵⁹ published in the same *Partisan Review & Anvil* issue under review: "There is no reason under the sun why [literary criticism] has to be dryly expository or prosaically analytical, or why it can only be written from the eyebrows up." His criticism, too, then, was evidently directed at the overbearing intellectualism of Phillips and Rahv, and leftwing literary critics of their ilk.

But, never mind, for Phillips and Rahv—the foremost of critics that had come to be known in jest as Form and Content, or as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern¹⁶⁰—refused to cast off their "intellectual baggage like passengers on a ship seized by panic," reducing themselves "to the strictly necessary minimum of stock-phrases, dialectical clichés and Marxist quotations, which constitute the international jargon of Djugashwilese."¹⁶¹ Before long, they would break with the Communists entirely, and do so largely for reasons of what they took to be the anti-intellectualism inherent in

¹⁵⁹ Newton Arvin, "A Letter on Proletarian Literature," *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Vol. III No. 1 (February 1936), 12-14.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 61-62. Lionel Abel speaks of James Farrell referring to Phillips and Rahv as Form and Content; and also of Harold Rosenberg even calling them Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

¹⁶¹ Arthur Koestler, "Arthur Koestler," *The God That Failed*, 49.

the mechanics of the movement, then most immediately expressive in Popular Front tactics and maneuvering.

ALL QUIET ON THE LITERARY FRONT

In February 1936, in spite of Gold's attacks, fundamental break did not seem immanent. There was a literary feud—but still an in-house feud. For in the end Gold swore that the *Partisan Review & Anvil* merited the movement's sustained interest and support, admitting their "fine start at its job of organizing and developing the newest generation in American literature."¹⁶² But both sides in the debate in 1936—with the Popular Front and the Moscow Trials as backdrop—would grow increasingly antagonistic toward the other. There remains an important question, however: Why exactly did the two Communist periodicals come to butt heads even more in the populist and conservative days of 1936?

As mentioned earlier, the Popular Front essentially brought with it an alliance between labor and capital to stave off the coming onslaught of the fascist tide. For literary critics of *Partisan* persuasion this not only meant the demise of the John Reed Clubs, but also the effective end of the promise of proletarian literature. Indeed, the title of Calmer's March essay sums it up perfectly: all was quiet on the literary front. With this phrase Calmer was referring to the current lull in hostilities between bourgeois and proletarian critics. He thus took the opportunity to write, in essence, a draft resolution setting the terms of debate and defining the most elementary limits of the Marxian position. In short, his position stated that art is *not* a weapon in the

¹⁶² Gold, "Papa Anvil and Mother Partisan," 23.

conventional sense, and that, therefore, “Be it resolved that henceforth all critics shall not identify proletarian literature with political agitation, but shall differentiate between the uses of literature and those of other social instruments.” To be sure, nothing was novel here; neither with his resolution recognizing that proletarian literature “is not a negation of past literature but its legitimate heir.” All his resolutions found expression in earlier issues of *Partisan Review*. Curious, however, was the timing of his resolution. With “all quiet on the literary front,” all pens directed against the immediate enemy of fascism, why even bother drawing attention to a seemingly dead issue.

But was the issue of literary leftism really dead? As Terry Cooney sees it, “the issues in 1936 were largely continuous with those of 1934,” Popular Front or no Popular Front.¹⁶³ Despite having seemingly won their campaign against crude sectarianism communism, by fiat of the Popular Front once more affirming a “usable past,” the *PR* editors not only continued with their diatribes against the literary left, but even seemed to be increasing the intensity of their attacks. What then is the significance of *PR* upping the attacks at a time that might have seen its great reduction, almost annihilation? Likely it was because the *PR* circle saw in the immediate withering away of leftism in response to the shift in literary policy wrought by the Popular Front precisely the problem of literary leftism—i.e. that politics must never dictate literary lines, directives and imperatives.

In June 1936 Calmer proclaimed again, this time even louder, “Down with ‘Leftism’!” For despite the recent Popular Front tactics aimed at assimilating the artistic past, Calmer still saw in Communism “vestiges of a narrow, anti-esthetic

¹⁶³ Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 85.

attitude,” “oversimplified beliefs” and “easy formulas,” too much of an emphasis placed upon the “use-value of writing,” and, in sum, “a lack of thinking which caused, and still causes, revolutionary critics to blunder into the kind of functional extremism” *PR* had been attacking from its earliest foundations. He laid his critique of the Popular Front with force and conviction:

Writers who are identified with [leftism] have succumbed to a blind empiricism; they have swung from one extreme of their position to the other: their political evaluation of literature has extended from literary praise of the most mediocre writers who eulogize the revolutionary workingclass [*sic*], to political approval of the most “successful” authors whose sympathies are remote from the workingclass [*sic*] movement.

Thus nothing fundamentally had changed in the transition to the new literary policy that marked the line of the Popular Front. While perhaps there was change at the surface, at bottom literature was still subservient to politics—subject to whims of political fancy.

The sixth issue of *Partisan Review & Anvil*, published in October 1936, would be its last: the auspicious marriage of “Papa Anvil and Mother Partisan” ending in divorce a mere ten months later. So that *Partisan Review*, after three years, was over and done with, folding for reasons of inadequate funding, and not then for any outright or irreparable disagreement with the Communist Party. Fundamental break, however, was imminent—but not immediate. It took *PR* another seven months, indeed not until June 1937, on the heels of the Second Writers’ Congress, held in New York City, for break to be complete.

THE GOD THAT FAILED

Seven more months “full of backtracking and indecision”¹⁶⁴ filled the gap leading to break. For some time it appeared, though increasingly disillusioned, Phillips and Rahv wavered, unable to cut their selves adrift from the movement that had come to define them, serving as their effective compass to guide and direct the meaning of their lives. No surprise, then, that for many among the faithful mass of communist intellectuals, the break from communism was traumatic.

William Phillips expressed this exact sentiment in his memoir, in a chapter titled, simply, “The Thirties.”¹⁶⁵ He wrote, “I should emphasize again that breaking was not easy for anyone, and for some it was traumatic” Joseph Freeman’s assessment of the communist intellectual’s disenchantment and attempts at withdrawal is similarly spoken. He speaks first to the “powerful drug of habit,” but then goes on to note the more important issue of loyalty—to an idea, to the Party, and to your comrades. In his words,

Unlike periods of relative social peace, a revolutionary situation fuses political and private life into one burning existence inspired by a common goal which is also your personal goal. And your fellow Christians, Jacobins or Communists are also—and with that as an indispensable basis—your personal friends. The cumulative revolutionary tradition is not only one of liberty and quality, but of *fraternity*. Besides, outside the fold there is no salvation. To leave is to be damned by your former comrades and friends—and your own conscience.¹⁶⁶

Communism as a way of life thus shaped the intellectuals living in its midst. Indeed, as Irving Howe assessed it, it “operated as a variety of religious

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 95.

¹⁶⁵ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 33-45.

¹⁶⁶ Cited in Aron, *Writers on the Left*, 311.

experience.”¹⁶⁷ Breaking therefore meant great pain and disorientation. In “A Memoir of the Thirties,”¹⁶⁸ Howe recalls that growing up in the Jewish slums of the East Bronx, the movement had become his teacher, home and passion. Not merely drawn to it by the power of ideology, nor simply because it had given the devotee a “purpose” in life—far more important, said Howe, was that it offered “a coherent perspective upon everything that was happening to us.” It provided “a language of response and gesture, the security of a set orientation.” But even more fundamental was the profoundly *dramatic* view of human experience that Marxism had entailed. For Howe, this explained the reason why intellectuals were taken in by the movement. “With its stress upon inevitable conflicts, apocalyptic climaxes, ultimate moments, hours of doom, and shining tomorrows, it appealed deeply to our imaginations,” wrote Howe. “We felt that we were always on the rim of heroism And so we lived in hopes of re-enactment that would be faithful to the severities of the Marxist myth and would embody once more in action the idea of October.” The other Irving in the City College cohort of New York intellectuals, once-comrade in alcove 1, Irving Kristol, in his “Memoirs of a Trotskyist,” likewise spoke of the movement’s enchantments: “By virtue of being radical intellectuals, we had ‘transcended’ alienation The elite was us—the ‘happy few’ who had been chosen by History to guide our fellow creature toward a secular redemption.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Irving Howe, “Radical Criticism and the American Intellectuals,” in *Steady Work: Essays in the Politics of Democratic Radicalism, 1953-1966* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 4.

¹⁶⁸ Irving Howe, “A Memoir of the Thirties,” in *Steady Work*, 349-364.

¹⁶⁹ Irving Kristol, “Memoirs of a Trotskyist,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1977, 43.

All throughout *The God That Failed*, in essays by the three “initiates,” novelists Arthur Koestler,¹⁷⁰ Ignazio Silone,¹⁷¹ and Richard Wright¹⁷² speak in similar tongues. Introducing the ground-breaking anthology, Richard Crossman asks, “What happens to the Communist convert when he renounces his faith?”¹⁷³ His answer: they will never escape Communism. “Their lives will always be lived inside its dialectic The true ex-Communist can never again be a whole personality.”¹⁷⁴ As Koestler understood it: “Gradually I learned to distrust my mechanistic preoccupation with facts and to regard the world around me in the light of dialectical interpretation. It was a satisfactory and indeed blissful state we had faith—the true faith, which no longer takes divine promises quite seriously—and, the only righteous men in a crooked world, we were happy.”¹⁷⁵ Koestler wrote of work in the movement as “a potent drug,”¹⁷⁶ of the “ideological hooch”¹⁷⁷ of Marxism, and of the “addiction to the Soviet myth.”¹⁷⁸ Inevitably, then, communist break meant severe withdrawal and perpetual hangover. Perhaps worse, as Koestler saw it, renegades from the party were “lost souls.”¹⁷⁹

Here is how Silone described his involvement with the movement:

For me to join the Party of Proletarian Revolution was not just a simple matter of signing up with a political organization; it meant a conversion, a complete dedication. . . . Life, death, love, good, evil, truth, all changed their meaning or lost it altogether. . . . The Party

¹⁷⁰ Koestler, “Arthur Koestler,” *The God That Failed*, 15-75.

¹⁷¹ Ignazio Silone, “Ignazio Silone,” *The God That Failed*, 76-114.

¹⁷² Richard Wright, “Richard Wright,” *The God That Failed*, 115-162.

¹⁷³ Richard Crossman, “Introduction,” *The God That Failed*, 10.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷⁵ Koestler, “Arthur Koestler,” 34-35.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

became family, school, church, barracks; the world that lay behind it was to be destroyed and built anew.¹⁸⁰

In retrospect, Silone saw the same psychological dynamic and mechanism at work under Communism as he saw under Church and Militia. So that the day Silone broke was a very sad one for him: “it was like a day of deep mourning, the mourning for my lost youth.”¹⁸¹ After Richard Wright’s break, attacked in public by his former-friends and ex-comrades as a “goddamn Trotskyite!” and “traitor!” he lamented: “For a moment it seemed that I ceased to live. I had now reached that point where I was cursed aloud in the busy streets of America’s second-largest city. It shook me as nothing else had.”¹⁸²

All these accounts are in line with Phillips’s account—all markers therefore of a synonymous tale of illusion and subsequent disillusion with communism. Whether it was the drug of habit, loyalty, fraternity, a sense of home and belonging, a fear of damnation, or perhaps the more pragmatic reason that the communists were the only game in town, fundamental break was not easy on anyone. Here is how Phillips explains the campaign of vilification that was unleashed after their break:

When we broke we were called every dirty name in the Communist political lexicon. Rahv even more than I, because he had had more to do with the Communist party than I did. *The Daily Worker* called us Trotskyites, counterrevolutionaries, literary snakes, agents of imperialism. . . . People we had known for years stopped talking to us; when we met them on the street they looked the other way.¹⁸³

Phillips even claimed that once or twice he could not get a job because of communist black-listing. Years later, he still didn’t know how they managed to do it. In his

¹⁸⁰ Silone, “Ignazio Silone,” 98-99.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸² Wright, “Richard Wright,” 159.

¹⁸³ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 43.

words, “It was a kind of youthfulness and foolishness. Maybe if we were older we couldn’t have done it. I noticed that many older people stuck to these worn-out ideas and loyalties for a longer time than they should have. Perhaps they couldn’t break so easily.”¹⁸⁴ But neither could Phillips and Rahv break so easily. As explained, for three years *Partisan Review* opted for a form of internal dissent very much from within the communist movement. Then, it was only after the shock of the Moscow Trials coupled with the rallying together of a band of apparent “Trotskyist” intellectuals of *Partisan* mind and persuasion, that the incipient new *Review* would formulate plans for complete break in their opposition at the Second Writers’ Congress in June 1937.

BREAK

When *Partisan Review & Anvil* folded in October 1936, on the pragmatic grounds of inadequate funding, there was then no indication that anyone had actually intended to break with the movement. Yet there is evidence that Phillips and Rahv had considered—though ultimately rejected—affiliation with the Communist League of American Writers (LAW). In May 1936 the organization had agreed to lend *Partisan Review & Anvil* \$100 to continue publication. Then, in September Rahv became an executive member of the League and possibilities for outright affiliation grew even stronger. But, as James Gilbert notes—detailing the minutes of the LAW executive committee meetings of September 8, 21, and October 15, 1936—after a series of subcommittee meetings, open discussions and negotiations, followed by various proposals and counter-proposals, the editors chose independence rather than

¹⁸⁴ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 69.

Communist dependence and continuation of business as usual.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the next few months were filled with hesitancy and indecision, often bordering on paralysis.

In December 1936, James Farrell claims that Phillips and Rahv had visited him, declaring themselves “through with the Stalinist movement” on the grounds that it was “completely dead and demoralized.”¹⁸⁶ There was, however, still the pervasive fear of the Communist Party. Terry Cooney does a fine job—in his group biography, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*—of explaining their position at the time, on the basis of Farrell’s diary entries from December 1936 to March 1937.¹⁸⁷ First, he notes, their disaffection led them into the camp of the Socialists, seeking possibilities for renewal on an independent basis. Meanwhile, in December they were still attending executive committee meetings of the LAW, even if subject to personal scrutiny and attack. Farrell’s diary finds Phillips in January bursting with a “whole string of arguments against the Trotskyist movement, Trotskyists, etc,” railing “about the lack of an independent organ,” and worried that he might have “no place to write” if he moved toward the anti-Stalinist Trotskyist camp. Clearly, the editors were confused, anxious, and guilt-ridden regarding their future paths.

Mid-January found Phillips and Rahv back again in flirtations with the Socialists, but still fearing similar political control issues ala Communist dictates of the past three years. Even more striking to Farrell was then hearing from the editors, asking him if he would write for them if they started up again without “breaking with

¹⁸⁵ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 153.

¹⁸⁶ Cited in Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 98, from Farrell Diary, December 31, 1947.

¹⁸⁷ Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 98-100.

the Stalinist movement.” Farrell found the whole matter contemptible, pusillanimous and even embarrassing. But Farrell had by then already made his break—and for him there was no turning back. Indeed, with the Moscow Trials ominously lurking in the background, he wrote in his diary: “There is now a line of blood drawn between the supporters of Stalin and those of Trotsky, and that line of blood appears like an impassable river.” Indecision and hesitancy was no longer possible. By late March, Phillips and Rahv realized that their decision was being made for them, reporting to Farrell that they were “rapidly being read out of the movement.” Daniel Aron wrote, in words aptly summarizing the personal road to and from Kronstadt: “In anger or sorrow, or sometimes with a sense of relief, the writer quietly slipped away from the party or noisily took his leave. Some waited to be thrown out for intellectual deviations, refusing at the last moment to yield or to recant.”¹⁸⁸ And so it went for *PR*—until June 1937 would mark open and outright break with their voiced opposition at the Second Writer’s Congress, and until November 1937 would mark conclusive break, with the renewal of *Partisan Review* on a new and independent, ostensibly “Trotskyist” basis.

RENEWAL

A community of dissident intellectuals first needed to come together for *PR* to be reborn, and the nucleus of some such community seems to have emerged by the spring of 1937. For it was about this time, Phillips recounted in his memoir, that he

¹⁸⁸ Aron, *Writers on the Left*, 312.

had met F. W. Dupee, then the literary editor of the *New Masses*.¹⁸⁹ It did not take long for Rahv and Phillips to persuade Dupee to break from the Party and to join them in re-launching *Partisan Review* on a new, independent, and structurally unaffiliated basis.

Born in 1904 Chicago, of Huguenot descent, Dupee graduated from Yale after briefly attending both the Universities of Illinois and Chicago.¹⁹⁰ While at Yale he met Dwight Macdonald, with whom, in late 1929, he initiated a bi-monthly literary magazine published in New York, the *Miscellany*, which ran for a year until folding in March 1931. During this period, Dupee also wrote for the *Symposium*, a beacon of the burgeoning modernist literary sensibility, which ran from 1930-1933, edited by his friend, James Burnham and Philip Wheelwright. Shortly thereafter, however, Dupee traveled abroad, spending the early thirties in Spain and North Africa, though mostly in Mexico. Returning in the mid-thirties, he discovered the leftward turn in the political and literary climate and briskly joined the Communist Party, ignoring his friend, Robert Cantwell's admonition that writers should refrain from joining the party. Within a couple years, by 1936, he had become the literary editor of the *New Masses*. Like Phillips and Rahv, though, Dupee was also steeped in modernism. Indeed, he considered his early interest in Eliot to be critical in his theoretical shift to Marxism, for just as Eliot's poetry had made the literary world conscious of the meaning of modernity, so did Marx seem to do for political modernity. And yet when

¹⁸⁹ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 47.

¹⁹⁰ This biographical portrait is based in large measure on James Gilbert's September 22, 1965 interview with Dupee in New York recounted in *Writers and Partisan*, 173-174; also, from Alan Wald's August 1973 interview with Dupee in Carmel, California recounted in *The New York Intellectuals*, 85-87. Also helpful was Mary McCarthy's "On F. W. Dupee (1904-1979)," *New York Review of Books* (27 October 1983); and, "Fred W. Dupee," in Stanley J. Kunitz, ed. *Twentieth Century Authors*, 1st Supplement (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1955).

Phillips and Rahv's offer for renewal opened the door to impending break and possibilities for re-launching on literary independent grounds, Dupee's response was swift: he was in. In Phillips's words: "Dupee was not an ideologue, nor very responsive to abstract political arguments, but he was a man of great sensibility and taste: hence he was aware of the political atmosphere around the *New Masses* and had no difficulty in grasping its ultimately corrupting effect on all literary activity."¹⁹¹ In short order, he even suggested that his old friend, former Yale classmate, and fellow editor of *Miscellany*, Dwight Macdonald, join them in their new endeavor.

So they arranged to meet at Phillips's house one Sunday—and for several years hence they would refer to that day as "Bloody Sunday." For as Phillips later recalled it: "[We] were at it all day long; and I still have in my mind a picture of Rahv and myself backing Macdonald up against a wall, knocking down his arguments, firing questions without giving him time to answer, and constantly outshouting him. . . . All I can say is that we were fired up enough with the rightness of our position to keep banging away, and Dwight was uncertain enough to listen, with the result that at the end of the day we were all agreed we should revive *Partisan Review* as an independent, radical literary journal."¹⁹² Macdonald's joining of the *PR* team was a tremendous accomplishment. Though at this point still a political newborn, according to historian Neil Jumonville, "Macdonald had the sharpest wit and cleverest sense of irony among the New York group and was its most polished and engaging writer."¹⁹³ In Phillips's words, Macdonald possessed "an enormous bustling energy, [he] was stubborn, opinionated, argumentative, full of convictions in all areas, an excellent

¹⁹¹ Phillips, "How *Partisan Review* Began," 44.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹³ Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 35.

journalist and polemicist.” Theirs was thus a great match for intellectual camaraderie, regardless of their vastly different backgrounds. To be sure, when the new editorial staff finally coalesced—with the addition to the four of Mary McCarthy and George L. K. Morris—it made for a “remarkably aggressive and varied board.”¹⁹⁴ So aggressive and varied was the board it is indeed a wonder that they were able to work together for as long as they did. As the original co-founders saw it, they were nevertheless “bound together . . . by common values and aims.”¹⁹⁵ What they shared, we will return to later in this chapter; for now, more of their varied backgrounds.

Born in 1906 New York, Dwight Macdonald—unlike Phillips and Rahv—descended from a long line of American-born ancestors.¹⁹⁶ Also unlike his soon-to-be colleagues, all-too rooted in the Old World, alien to the ways of the New World, Macdonald was raised in a relatively affluent middle-class home. His father was a lawyer and his mother the daughter of a rich Brooklyn merchant. So that rather than receiving his education primarily in the lower-class streets and slums of greater New York, Macdonald attended the Collegiate School in Manhattan, the Barnard School for Boys, and Phillips Exeter Academy. At Phillips Exeter, located in southern New Hampshire, still retaining its 18th century New England charm, he was the founder of

¹⁹⁴ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 48; Phillips, “How ‘Partisan Review’ Began,” 45.

¹⁹⁵ William Phillips and Phillip Rahv, “In Retrospect,” 682-683.

¹⁹⁶ This biographical portrait is based largely on Dwight Macdonald’s autobiographical account laid out in his “Introduction” to *Politics Past: Essays in Political Criticism* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 3-31. The essay was originally written in March-April 1957, and appeared then in *Encounter* magazine. All quotations are taken from there. Also helpful was Diana Trilling’s series of two interviews conducted in the spring of 1979 as part of a series on the literary culture of New York. Excerpts from those interviews are included in Ed. William Phillips’s *Partisan Review: The 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Stein and Day, 1985). See Diana Trilling, “An Interview with Dwight Macdonald,” 312-332. Also, see, James Gilbert’s sketch in *Writers and Partisans*, 168-173. For my purposes, the most resourceful section was the section on his family background and upbringing in pgs. 168-169, based primarily on Norman Levy’s unpublished Master’s Thesis, “The Radicalization of Dwight Macdonald,” University of Wisconsin, 1966. An additional general resource includes: Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Critical American: The Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1984).

an extremely exclusive club called *The Hedonists*. Their writing paper bore the motto, “*Pour Epater les Bourgeois*,”¹⁹⁷ and boldly running down the margin, it read: “CYNICISM, ESTHETICISM, CRITICISM, PESSIMISM.” Their cultural heroes were Oscar Wilde and H. L. Mencken. Needless to say, Macdonald would write in his autobiographical essay introducing his anthology of essays, *Politics Past*: “[We] wore monocles and purple batik club-ties at meetings, carried canes as much as we dared, and mimeographed two numbers of *Masquerade*, a magazine of extreme precocity.” Macdonald next went on to Yale where he studied history, edited the *Yale Record*, wrote for the *Yale News*, and became managing editor of the *Yale Literary Magazine* alongside his friends, F. W. Dupee and George L. K. Morris.

Upon graduation in 1928, he became a member of the executive training squad at Macy’s department store, where he earned \$30 a week. His plan was “to make a lot of money rapidly and retire to write literary criticism.” But, “appalled” by the ferocity of inter-executive competition, lacking sufficient business talent, and incapable of taking the job seriously, Macdonald resigned after six months, just upon being offered a job at the necktie counter after completion of the training program. After an unemployed and depressing couple of months, he got a writing job on Henry Luce’s *Fortune* magazine, a business monthly inaugurated just after the stock-market collapse in the fall of 1929. Around this period, you will recall, he also co-founded and edited with Dupee *Miscellany* magazine, as well as writing chiefly on film and cultural criticism for the *Symposium*. The Depression, however, as it had done for many other writers, radicalized him. He did not then make the turn all the way to the radical left, but he noted that the New Deal was “inspiring” to him and that he, along

¹⁹⁷ Literally meaning: To shock / wow the bourgeoisie.

with his fellow writers on *Fortune*, were becoming “increasingly liberal,” much to the dismay of Luce. But Macdonald’s desire to cover Roosevelt’s farm program, the NRA, the CIO, the Wagner Act, unemployment and social security—basically, anything but business—Luce tolerated, as he recognized that it was then hot news for the interested public. Compromise and pragmatic concession endured for a number of years until the spring of 1936, when Macdonald resigned in protest over the “bowdlerization” of a series of articles he had written on the U.S. Steel Corporation. Macdonald noted that his resignation was made easier by his having “grown tired of writing for *Fortune*,” which was stimulating when he was learning the craft, but “whose mental horizon now seemed restrictive.” For in the meantime he had begun to read Marx, Lenin, and (“at last!”) Trotsky.

He became a “mild fellow traveler” in mid-to-late 1936, because the Communists alone on the American left, reasoned Macdonald, seemed to be “doing something.” Then, in no time at all, Macdonald began to waver when in the late winter of 1937 he read *The Case of the Anti-Soviet Center*, which provided the verbatim transcript of the second Moscow Trial. Initially, he admitted to being somewhat persuaded by the Soviet account of the Trials, but that he soon began to “notice contradictions, lack of motivation, and absence of supporting evidence.” Was it not absurd to imagine Trotsky in cohorts with Hitler and Mussolini, conspiring for Stalin’s head and for the restoration of capitalism in Russia? After writing a five-page letter-to-the-editor of *The New Republic*, attacking their hypocritical line of “suspending judgment until more conclusive evidence is produced,” while endorsing the essentials of the prosecution, he accepted an invitation to join the Committee for

the Defense of Leon Trotsky. Assessing the larger import of the “Trotsky Committee,” Macdonald wrote that it had “attracted an extraordinary roster of intellectuals,” that from then on “the Stalinist cultural front was never the same again.” What he failed to mention was that from then on the left-wing anti-Stalinist cultural front was never the same again, either.

Indeed, it was through the Trotsky Committee meetings that Mary McCarthy—born in Seattle 1912, then but a little known Vassar graduate, and occasional reviewer for the *Nation* and the *New Republic*—had come to know the “PR boys,” her way of saying, Phillips and Rahv.¹⁹⁸ In the future great novelist’s words, from a 1961 Paris interview:

They hadn’t yet revived the *Partisan Review*, but they were both on the Trotsky committee, at least Philip was. We—the committee, that is—used to meet in Farrell’s apartment. I remember once when we met on St. Valentine’s Day and I thought, Oh, this is so strange, because I’m the only person in this room who realizes that it’s Valentine’s Day. It was true! I had a lot of rather rich Stalinist friends, and I was always on the defensive with them, about the Moscow trial question, Trotsky and so on. So I had to inform myself, really, in order to conduct the argument. I found that I was reading more and more, getting more and more involved in this business.¹⁹⁹

She would also come to be more and more involved in the personal business of Phillip Rahv. After meeting in that spring of 1937, they lived together during the summer in a friend’s apartment before finally moving into their own apartment in the following fall.²⁰⁰ When the first issue of the re-launched *PR* hit the newsstands in

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Sifton, Interviewer. “Mary McCarthy, The Art of Fiction,” *Paris Review*, 27 (Winter-Spring 1962), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4618/the-art-of-fiction-no-27-mary-mccarthy>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 73. For more regarding the intimacies of her biography, see Doris Grumbach’s revealing portrait of Mary McCarthy in *The Company She Kept* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1967). More general autobiographical accounts can be found in a number of McCarthy’s works, including: “My Confession,” *Encounter* II (February 1954), *Memories of a Catholic Girl* (New York: Harvest, 1957), *On the Contrary: Articles of Belief, 1946-1961* (New York: Noonday, 1962),

December 1937, she was listed as one of its editors, and put in charge of the section on theater criticism. Presumably, it was because she had once been married to an actor—Harold Johnsrud, from 1933-1936—and was therefore “supposed to know something about theater.”²⁰¹ But, though Phillips has acknowledged that McCarthy, a friend of Dupee and Macdonald, and since having met Phillips and Rahv, had “wanted to join with us,”²⁰² and that she was “remarkably intelligent and astute, a first-rate prose talent, utterly committed to what she thought was right and honest regardless of the consequences,”²⁰³ McCarthy admitted that she was only accepted into the group unwittingly. “Unwittingly, as an editor,” she recalled, “because I had a minute ‘name’ and was the girlfriend of one of the ‘boys,’ who had issued a ukase on my behalf.”²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, McCarthy was clearly a pivotal player in the pre-history of the magazine, contributing her knack for the dramatics in the formative group’s opposition at the Second American Writer’s Congress in June 1937.

By this point, too, it should be clear, everything was in order for *PR*’s re-launch. The editorial staff had seemingly been set with Phillips and Rahv, joined by McCarthy, alongside the Yale contingent of Macdonald, Dupee, and George L. K. Morris. Morris, born in 1905, was like Macdonald descended from a long line of American ancestors, even a descendant of General Lewis Morris, signer of the

“Introduction” to *Mary McCarthy’s Theatre Chronicles, 1937-1962* (New York,: iUniverse, 1963), *How I Grew* (New York: Harvest Books, 1987). Finally, briefer accounts are available, online, in a “Biographical Sketch” provided by the Vassar College Libraries Special Collection on Mary McCarthy, <http://specialcollections.vassar.edu/exhibit-highlights/marymccarthy/mmbio.html>; and, in Michiko Kakutani’s obituary for the *New York Times*, “Mary McCarthy, 77, Is Dead: Novelist, Memoirist and Critic,” http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/26/specials/mccarthy-obit.html?_r=1.

²⁰¹ Cited in Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 73.

²⁰² Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 70.

²⁰³ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 48.

²⁰⁴ Cited in Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 296, footnote 34, from Mary McCarthy, “Introduction,” *Mary McCarthy’s Theatre Chronicles, 1937-1962*.

Declaration of Independence.²⁰⁵ He attended Yale, studied art and literature there, and befriended Dupee and Macdonald. Together, the three of them, as noted earlier, edited the *Yale Literary Magazine* and founded and edited *The Miscellany* upon graduation in New York. Albert Eugene Gallatin (1881-1952)—the great-grandson of Albert Gallatin (1761-1849), former Secretary of the Treasury and subsequent founder of the New York History Society and New York University—was the distant cousin who introduced and converted Morris to modern abstraction. In art historian Carol Ockman’s assessment, it was Morris’s early relationship with Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Fernard Leger, Jean Arp, Jean Helion, among others, that “enabled him to function as a liaison during the 1930s and 1940s between the European avant-garde and the burgeoning abstract art movement in this country.”²⁰⁶ He went on to become one of the founding members of the organization of American Abstract Artists in 1936, and to found, along with Gallatin and a few others, the Parisian-based international art journal, *Plastique*, in 1937. Dupee and Macdonald thus thought that Morris—“shy and modest, but firm in his ideas about modern art”²⁰⁷—would be interested in joining the *PR* board. Perhaps most important, though, in Dwight

²⁰⁵ There is not a lot of information on George L. K. Morris, and clearly nothing resembling the lot of information on the rest of the board. I was able to locate two brief biographical sketches: one, provided by The Park Avenue Cubists, <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/park%20avenue/morriscombo.htm>; the other, by Hollis Taggart Galleries, http://www.hollistaggart.com/artists/biography/george_l_k_morris/. More thorough accounts are provided in editor and publisher, Paul Anbinder’s *American Dreams: American Art to 1950 in the Williams College Museum of Art* (New York: Hudson Hill, 2001), 176-181; and, in Debra Bricker Balken and Deborah Menaker Rothschild’s *Suzy Frelinghuysen & George L. K. Morris: Abstract American Artists: Aspects of Their Work & Collection* (New York: Williams College Museum of Art, 1994).

²⁰⁶ Carol Ockman, “George Lovett Kingsland Morris (1905-1975),” in Paul Anbinder’s *American Dreams: American Art to 1950 in the Williams College Museum of Art*, 176.

²⁰⁷ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 48.

Macdonald's words, "Morris was the guy that had the money."²⁰⁸ The way Phillips put it, Morris was the magazine's first "angel,"²⁰⁹ without whom not. But he also did not care much for the real stuff of politics. He would become *PR*'s art editor at its re-founding and amply provide the funds, but was not around for their first actual confrontation with the Communist Party.

This key event in *PR*'s pre-history took place on Sunday, the 6th of June 1937, in New York City at the Second American Writer's Congress.²¹⁰ Granville Hicks—the repentant American Marxist novelist and critic, author of the influential 1933 publication, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature since the Civil War*, who preceded Dupee as the literary editor of the *New Masses*, and had his "Kronstadt" in 1939 in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet Pact upon learning of "The Blind Alley of Marxism"²¹¹—recalled that day nearly thirty years later as "a very sad episode."²¹² In his words, "They picked out the session on criticism in the second Congress over which I was presiding to make a kind of demonstration. And they made it."²¹³ The demonstration Hicks refers to is the planned opposition of a "small, dissident and noisy band" made up of Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, Eleanor Clark, Fred Dupee, Rahv and Phillips.²¹⁴ To be sure, this was the emergent *PR* editorial board, in this particular case, "pushed or propelled," according to Phillips, "by Mary McCarthy and Dwight Macdonald." As the rest of them saw it, "it was silly and a

²⁰⁸ Cited in Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 72, from the author's interview with Macdonald on 12/3/76.

²⁰⁹ William Phillips quoted in "Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress," *American Scholar*, Summer 1966, 509.

²¹⁰ For the full account of the printed proceedings at the Second American Writers' Congress, see ed. Henry Hart's *The Writer in a Changing World* (New York: Equinox Cooperative Press, 1937).

²¹¹ See Granville Hicks's 1940 article for the *Nation*, "The Blind Alley of Marxism."

²¹² Granville Hicks quoted in "Thirty Years Later," 508.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Phillips quoted in "Thirty Years Later," 509.

waste of time to go into this conference and be critical, and be steamrolled. . . . [but] McCarthy and Macdonald felt it was immoral not to express our opposition to the way the meeting was run.”²¹⁵ For the fact was the Communist Party was dominating the Congress, crushing any possibility for the free exchange of critical intellectuals engaged in radical discussion. The Congress, therefore, represented precisely the problem of the Party and its relationship with writers—thereby displaying the larger problem of the relationship of writers to politics writ large.

And for their outburst at the Congress, the Communist Party swiftly retaliated. The next day Dupee was expelled from the Party, and Rahv and Phillips—now identified with Macdonald and his gang of Trotskyite rebels—were suddenly pegged as renegades. Rahv, a member of the Party at the time, was also expelled. While Edna, Phillips’s wife, was expelled after refusing their offer to remain in the Party on the condition of leaving her husband. But no matter, for with Morris’s first contribution of some three hundred dollars, the course was set for *Partisan* renewal.²¹⁶ Though break was now conclusive, the task that lay ahead was still considerable, and prior to the first issue hitting newsstands in December—even for some time thereafter—*PR* dissidents had to endure the full barrage of Communist counter-attack and feud.

COMMUNIST COUNTER-ATTACK: TROTSKYIST SCHEMERS EXPOSED

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 180-181; Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 105-106, 114-115; “Trotskyist Schemers Exposed,” *Daily Worker* (October 19, 1937), 2; “We Reply,” *New Masses* 25 (October 19, 1937), 21.

Like Mike Gold's February 1936 assault on the integrity and overbearing intellectualism of *Partisan Review & Anvil*, the editor of the *New Masses* re-launched his attack in mid-December 1936 in a similar fashion. He did so in a piece for the *New Masses*, titled, "Migratory Intellectuals,"²¹⁷ with the longwinded subtitle, "Being some remarks on those self-styled best friends who, because they effect no happy marriage of theory to practice, have now become our severest critics." Those he specifically targeted were Sidney Hook, and, also like the last time, James T. Farrell. He pegged them as part of "a little group of Phi Beta Kappa Trotskyites," and as "New York coffee-pot intellectuals." In Gold's depiction, these ex-Communist super-Leftists were at bottom, vain, careerist, stubborn and proud—migratory intellectuals disloyal to labor—beholden only to the intellectuals as a class unto themselves. They envisioned a new world where brain would direct brawn and when their programs were not immediately accepted, they went away feeling injured and insulted. In the end, then, Gold faulted them for their "simple inability to accept the internal discipline of any organization." Thus, their intellectual disposition, all-too prone to a form of critical skepticism, ultimately stirred up a "will-to-confusion" that found expression in disbelief in the one instrument in history capable of liberating humanity—i.e. the Communist Party. So when *Partisan Review* made public their announcement to resume publication in November 1937, "in a new format and edited by a new board," with "no commitments, either tacit or avowed, to any political party or group" free from "political dogmatism" and seeking to revive the "integrity" of the left cultural movement, Gold simply shifted this same familiar sentiment to Dupee,

²¹⁷ Michael Gold, "Migratory Intellectuals," *New Masses* 21 (December 15, 1936), 27-29.

Macdonald, McCarthy, Phillips and Rahv.²¹⁸ This time, however, he added the significant epithet: Trotskyist.

The piece that began the immediate feud was published 14 September 1937 in the *New Masses*, under the titled, “Falsely Labeled Goods.”²¹⁹ It opens with a brief history of the magazine: the magazine being founded in February 1934 as the organ of the John Reed Club of New York. That is followed by excerpts from their first editorial statement: including their proposal to concentrate on creative and critical literature from the viewpoint of the revolutionary working class, to join the workers’ struggle on the literary-cultural front, and to join with workers and intellectuals in the struggle against imperialism, war, fascism, national and racial oppression, and capitalism—in support and defense of the Soviet Union. They close out their synopsis with a list of some among its original editors and contributors: including Joseph Freeman, Sender Garlin, Milton Howard, Joshua Kunitz, Louis Lozowick, Grace Lumpkin, Ben Field, Granville Hicks, and, needless to say, Wallace Phelps [William Phillips] and Phillip Rahv. What follows is a comparison of the statements from the original editorial with the most recent announcement that *Partisan Review* “resumes publication” in November 1937.

The phrase, “resumes publication,” the *New Masses* bluntly called a euphemism, for in their assessment an entirely new magazine was being founded. They asserted: “its editors are taking an old name with slight regard for what that name once stood for. . . . Indeed, it will attack the policies upheld by the magazine which once bore the name and the authors who made the name worth stealing.” As

²¹⁸ “Falsely Labeled Goods,” Editorial, *New Masses* 24 (September 14, 1937), 9-10.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

support for their claims they note the recent record of activism among several of the new editors. With the sting of their dissent at the Second American Writers' Congress still relatively fresh, the *New Masses* mentions their outright opposition and attacks on the integrity of the Communist Party, the Popular Front, the League of American Writers, and the Soviet Union; while also mentioning their "extreme fondness" for Leon Trotsky, the P.O.U.M., and the Trotsky Defense Committee. "No matter what attempts at camouflage may be made," therefore, "there is no reason to suppose that the present activities of the editors do not clearly outline the future policies of the magazine."

A month later, Mike Gold—to begin with probably responsible for the previous *New Masses* editorial and allegation—further chimed in, in his column in the *Daily Worker*, titled, "Change the World": "A Literary Snake Sheds His Skin For Trotsky."²²⁰ The subject is Phillip Rahv and his recent slew of book reviews published for *The Nation*. Gold's attack, ultimately, is that Rahv is a Trotskyite posing as a literary critic in cohorts with "that respectable liberal weekly," *The Nation*. Both are therefore the target of Gold's scorn, but Rahv even more so. Gold notes that "Rahv had a brief opportunistic career around the literary fringes of the Communist Party. . . . [But that] he, and his partner Phelps [Phillips], who form a sort of Potash and Perlmutter combination, discovered they could not be the generals they wanted to be." It was then, according to Gold, that they turned to Trotskyism, for the "bourgeois literary world prefers Trotskyites to Communists, and it is easier to climb by this newest form of red-baiting."

²²⁰ Mike Gold, "A Literary Snake Sheds His Skin for Trotsky," *Daily Worker* (October 12, 1937), 7.

The Trotskyist schemers were now exposed, both in the columns of the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses*. And again, this time in the October 19th issue of the *Daily Worker*, the Communists railed against the new editorial board:

They now hope to mislead, in true Trotzkyist style, the former readers and supporters of the former “Partisan Review” into subscribing for their Trotzkyist magazine. They appropriate the name. They blandly state that it will be “Partisan Review . . . (which) not having appeared for a year, resumes publication . . . in a new format and edited by a new board.” They promise to honor “subscriptions to the old Partisan Review.”

Their masquerading schemes will not stand the light of publicity.²²¹

On the same day, their feud saw “the light of publicity” in several pages throughout the *New Masses*—much to the consternation of a high-ranking Party official, the Communist Party’s “cultural commissar,” Polish-born American, Jerome Isaac Romain, better known by his party alias, V. J. Jerome, who would later be prosecuted and convicted in 1953 under the Smith Act, serving three years at Lewisburg Penitentiary from 1954-1957.²²²

PROTEST AND REPLY

On October 19th the *New Masses* printed a letter addressed to them by Phillips and Rahv, simply titled, “A Protest.”²²³ The two current and former editors of *Partisan Review* took direct issue with the accusation that they had “stolen” the magazine for ulterior purposes, protesting on three grounds: first, that from 1934-1936 *PR* had undergone a number of changes of policy and of editorial composition, so that the

²²¹ “Trotzkyist Schemers Exposed,” *Daily Worker* (October 19, 1937), 2.

²²² This brief biographical sketch is based on the one supplied by Yale University Library, where Jerome’s Papers are held: http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/jerome/bio.htm.

²²³ William Phillips and Phillip Rahv, “A Protest,” *New Masses* 25, 4 (October 19, 1937), 21.

current transformation is not unprecedented and neither outside of their own due privilege; second, that despite having been initially a John Reed Club publication, after the Club's dissolution in 1935, the magazine continued publication under semi-independent auspices, even if then under the supervision and sponsorship of the Communist Party; and third, thus related to the second point, was that the October 1936 issue, which marked its last appearance prior to folding, carried under its editorial masthead only three names—those of Alan Calmer, William Phillips, and Phillip Rahv. This was important, because in their assessment it shows that “ownership and management were completely in the hands of these three individuals,” two of whom still remained on the current board, while the third—Alan Calmer—had only declined after first being invited to remain. “From whom, then, was the name of the magazine stolen?” they asked. “Surely not from ourselves?”

But the more fundamental issue, as Phillips and Rahv understood it, was this: “whether left-wing literature and Marxist criticism shall be free to develop organically, instead of becoming a ready tool of factional interests and polemics.” Moving on to the counter-offensive, Phillips and Rahv first downplayed the gravity of their alleged break, and asserted that the *New Masses* was mistaken in equating their own outlook with that of the old *Partisan Review*. For there had always been a critical wedge separating the two. In their formulation, the two were constantly at loggerheads on the cultural problems of revolutionary literature, and, to be sure, they reminded everyone that *PR* was started against the initial and continued opposition of the *New Masses*. The way they specifically phrased it in their letter to the *New Masses* is as follows: “What distinguished *Partisan Review* from the *New Masses* was

our struggle to free revolutionary literature from domination by the immediate strategy of a political party. The *New Masses*, on the other hand, has always been part and parcel of the very tendency which the *Partisan Review* was fighting.” The political issues raised by the *New Masses*—those regarding several of the new *PR* editors’ alleged and apparent support for the P.O.U.M. and the Trotsky Committee—simply obscured the more fundamental issue, and was therefore irrelevant.

In the *New Masses* reply which would accompany Phillips and Rahv’s protest,²²⁴ the Communist periodical begged to differ. They repeated what was for them the central issue: i.e., the fundamentally political issue that since its folding in October 1936 Phillips and Rahv have changed their political position from Communism to Trotskyism. And, they reasoned: “To suggest that these facts are irrelevant is to be either disingenuous or stupid.” The way the *New Masses* saw it, not only—or merely—was *Partisan Review* undergoing a change in policy, “it is now being used for purposes utterly opposed to those for which it was founded and maintained.” Contrary, therefore, to the vision the *PR* editors had outlined in their protest and in their announcement of the coming resumption of their little magazine, Phillips and Rahv, Dupee, Macdonald, McCarthy and Morris had become every bit as much “a ready tool of [Trotskyite] factional interests and polemics.”

Never mind that the players in this debate—namely, the *New Masses* and *Partisan Review*, or, let us say, Mike Gold and Phillips and Rahv—seem to have been speaking passed each other, we return to that possibility later, Granville Hicks and V. F. Jerome also contributed fuel to the fire. In Granville Hicks’s “Review and

²²⁴ “We Reply,” *New Masses* 25, 4 (October 19, 1937), 21.

Comment,”²²⁵ on “Those who quibble, bicker, nag and deny,” he attacks Phillips’s and Rahv’s criticism not so much because they are false as because they are unimportant. For, according to Hicks, their position that the party line has ruined left-wing literature is absurd. “The party-line theory, though convenient for part enemies, does not hold water,” Simply stated, then, as Hicks argues it: there is no party line!²²⁶

²²⁵ Granville Hicks, “Review and Comment: Those Who Quibble, Bicker, Nag, and Deny,” *New Masses* 25, 4 (October 19, 1937), 22-23.

²²⁶ Interestingly, more than a few revisionist literary historians have of relatively late re-emphasized Hicks’s position that there was no party line on literature; that indeed a “relative, pale sort of autonomy” existed for communist writers, artists and poets. Regarding the matter, Harvey Teres cites Daniel Aron: “That *The New Masses*, as well as many other proletarian magazines, puffed up ineptly written revolutionary books is . . . true. Yet it is misleading to say that in 1934 and 1935 the party ‘dominated’ leftist critics and required them to make literary evaluations repellent to *Partisan Review*. Such a conclusion rests upon two faulty assumptions: that the party, then and after, deeply concerned itself with writers and writing, and that radical writers formed a cohesive and malleable group. Naturally, party functionaries hoped to organize writers and to induce them to support policies in line with the official party position, but party leaders like Browder valued writers for their prestige and popularity rather than for the purity of their Marxism or intrinsic literary merit. Mass movements, labor, unemployment—these were the throbbing issues” (Teres, *Renewing the Left*, 275-276, endnote 46). In Chapter 10 of *Renewing the Left*, “Preserving Living Culture’: The 1960s and Beyond,” Teres also discusses Cary Nelson’s *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989) and Barbara Foley’s *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University, 1993), arguing that while supplying an “important corrective to the notion that the Party and its culture were monolithic,” Nelson and Foley “exaggerate the actual diversity of content, form, and quality found in the poetry produced within this milieu [i.e., proletarian literature],” 276. Another work that effectively sets to deconstruct the “myth” of *Partisan Review*’s outstanding originality is James F. Murphy’s *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois, 1991). Introducing that work, Cary Nelson writes: “The myth that has dominated American historiography for fifty years is that subtle analysis of the relations between art and politics only began with the editors of the original *Partisan Review*’s criticism of ‘leftism’ between 1934 and 1936, . . . The Party’s contributions to the debates of the period, so we have been repeatedly told, were simplistic, unreflective, and uniform. Yet the Party in America actually often lacked a clear policy in regard to art and literature. For a time, the Party expected writers to show a definite revolutionary commitment but left open the decision about what form and style that commitment should take. This left considerable room for differences about aims, methods, and intended audiences for revolutionary art” (x). Basing his case upon a reading of *The Daily Worker* and *New Masses*, among other communist publications of the period, Murphy claims that “those who broke with the Party [e.g., *Partisan Review*] thus added little to the wide range of positions already articulated in Party publications both here and abroad” (x). Murphy’s book is thus another “important corrective” to what he calls “the most glaring misinterpretation in the writing of recent American literary history” (195). Nevertheless, while emphasizing throughout his work *PR*’s lack of originality (and worse, their duplicitous and self-interested behavior), he absolutely emphasizes that the subversive role played by the magazine in Communist cultural politics was and is “indisputable” (184). Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to ignore the overarching veracity of *PR*’s claim. Obviously, politics is bound to distort perceptions in this discussion but *New Masses* intellectuals were literary Stalinists—even if there was no “official policy,” there was one in practice wrought through various forms of censorship and manipulation. One last work perhaps worth mentioning is James D. Bloom’s *Left Letters: The*

To support his claim he even cites Earl Browder, the Communist Party USA's General Secretary from 1934-1945, and adds that "the facts bear him out." Nevertheless, he also adds: "It is conceivable that one or two writers pumped up a kind of artificial cheerfulness in response to the repeated assertion by myself and others that Communist literature ought to be able to reflect the Communist hope; but it is more likely that even these writers were led astray by their own feelings and not by critical admonitions." Elsewhere in his essay he also mentions the possibility that "our criticism [may] have had some harmful effects. . . . Slogans have sometimes been substituted for reality, and stereotyped situations for data of experience." But the key fact remained: he was steadfast in his support for Communism; this was not the case with Phillips and Rahv. For all their quips against sectarianism, as Hicks saw it, they were in reality the sectarians, the one's "who quibble, and bicker, and nag, and deny."

In that same issue, additionally serving as an effective introductory piece, V. J. Jerome came out blasting: "No Quarter to Trotzkyists—Literary or Otherwise."²²⁷ Trotskyism is here depicted as a sham, a lie—as equal to or worse than fascism. It is also characterized as something of a dangerous halfway house. In Jerome's words, Trotskyism is "a convenient exit from the revolutionary fold and a cover under 'left' verbiage for the return to reaction, which today is inseparable from the promotion of Fascism." Trotskyist turncoats and imposters, including "the Farrells and the Lionel Abels and the Rahvs," must therefore be seen for what they are: as men of "the same

Culture Wars of Mike Gold and Joseph Freeman (1992). In Bloom's estimate: "As part of this recovery, Cold War views of these writers' works . . . as crude, sentimental agitprop, need to be reconsidered and perhaps revised" (6).

²²⁷ V. J. Jerome, "No Quarter to Trotzkyists—Literary or Otherwise," *New Masses* 25, 4 (October 19, 1937), 6.

ilk that murdered Kirov, that turned the guns on the backs of Loyalist civilians in Spain and betrayed the army's front line, that have been caught red-handed in plots with the Gestapo and Japanese militarists to dismember the Soviet Union." The literary-cultural wars are thus political, indeed are extremely political wars of the first order. Jerome therefore writes with amazement and wonder, aghast that the *New Masses* would voluntarily open the pages of their revolutionary publication for counter-revolutionary press and publicity. In his assessment, this is not a mere "literary affair requiring observation of bourgeois niceties." There must be no quarter for Fascism and Trotskyism—literary or otherwise.

This brought to a close the immediate feud. *Partisan Review* hit newsstands in December, only a couple months later, though nothing had seemingly here been resolved. The two opposing camps were speaking passed each other: with one side emphasizing the fundamentally cultural issue; the other side emphasizing the fundamentally political one. To the Communists, in the end, it simply did not matter that *PR*'s was a calling for a new, "unattached," "non-partisan," "unaffiliated," and "experimental" literary magazine. Peel back a layer or two, and their "independent" and "dissident" criticism shed its skin for Trotskyism. What mattered was the fact that their activism of late were all in the Trotskyist vein—opposition at the Second American Writers' Congress, attack on the Popular Front, on the LAW and the USSR, and support for the POUM and Leon Trotsky. In their protest to the *New Masses*, Phillips and Rahv simply suggested restraint: "Finally, may we suggest that

you restrain your zeal to attack the new *Partisan Review* and your haste to invent policies for it, until such time as the magazine appears?”²²⁸

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN A POLITICAL DECADE

The *New Masses* did not wait until December 1937 to attack what they saw as *Partisan* apostasy and renegacy—neither did they feel the need for restraint. They knew precisely who and what they were dealing with in Phillips and Rahv, Macdonald and Dupee, and others of their literary, intellectual ilk. And in a certain sense, the founding co-editors of *Partisan Review* had for some time been rather transparent in their criticism of the literary politics of the Communist Party. Though backed, sponsored and financed by the Communists, within the pages of *PR* Phillips and Rahv offered an internal critique of the sectarian nature of crude proletarian literature—literary leftism pegged as an infantile disorder—that would become a critique of the tendentious and mediocre literature of the Popular Front. This critique by 1936-1937 would evolve into their radical calling for unadulterated literary independence; this, however, only after they determined that the totalitarian trend was inherent within the movement and could no longer be combated from within. The confluence of their initial cultural alienation very much from within the movement with the seeming reaction and parochialism of the Popular Front—together with the shock of the Moscow Trials—marked the bridge to their next phase of literary independence, expressive of their cultural and political disenchantment from without

²²⁸ Phillips and Rahv, “A Protest,” 21.

the movement. No longer would *PR* stand idly by, prostrate at the vulgarization of literature.

Phillips and Rahv's essay, "Literature in a Political Decade,"²²⁹ published a couple months prior to *PR*'s official re-launching in December 1937 provided further evidence of the depths of their break. And yet in a certain sense, nothing there is radically different from their previous criticism of years past. What does stand out in bold relief, though, is the extent to which they had now come to see the chasm separating themselves from the Communists as a divide between intellectuals and anti-intellectual intellectuals. Indeed, this was the language Mike Gold and his comrades had been speaking for some time—the only difference now was that Phillips and Rahv were explicitly owning it and siding outright with their own new, aspiring generation of radicalized, dissident intellectuals. The Stalinized Communist cause was debunk—not so (as yet) the cause of revolutionary and independent Marxian socialism.

We turn briefly, then, to their essay, "Literature in a Political Decade," for a good summary of *PR*'s emergent position—attacking extremist forms of both left- and right-wing literature for aspiring towards the creation of a "literature of conscience," though in that process tending to stifle "the conscience of literature." As Phillip Rahv wrote earlier that spring, several months after *PR*'s initial folding, Popular Front literature was "nothing but 'infantile leftism' turned upside down."²³⁰ In their depiction, proletarian literature in its conventional form was thus pegged as sectarian and of an anti-intellectual bias. The essay begins with a recounting of the

²²⁹ William Phillips and Phillip Rahv, "Literature in a Political Decade," 170-180.

²³⁰ Phillip Rahv, "Letter to the Editor," *New Masses* 23 (March 30, 1937), 21.

role and impact of communist politics on literature during the 1930s. Though “lean years for the American people,” in literature “they provided a vision of plenty.” As the country became politically radicalized so did the writers become intellectually radicalized. Crisis seemed to augur the dawn of a “golden age” in literature and the arts, and nothing would retard the “expected burst of creative glory.”

Leftist literature took on all the characteristics of a “school.” It now had fixed inner laws, conventions, and tenets. The strike novel appeared. “All of them were saturated with the pathos of exploitation,” wrote Phillips and Rahv, “and for the first time in American fiction the idea of political organization emerged as the dominant element, giving a group of novels their motif, morality, and structural unity.” All of them further stressed the “mechanics of liberation and an absorption in the excitement of discovering the class structure of society.” The theme was likewise transferred to communist theatre and poetry. Implicit in proletarian art and culture, as it was in the lot of Marx’s writings, was that the capitalist crisis and depression meant that we were on the eve of revolution. But when “the eve was transformed into a long vigil,” the banality of the proletarian promise, the tedium of its aspiring forms were discarded “as poets [writers and critics] of a more sober and organic radicalism, who were aware of the responsibilities of the medium and of the realities of the period, began to set the tone of revolutionary verse.” This rebellion against the top-down and-heavy revolutionary tradition was initiated by the “younger critics” of *Partisan* mind, persuasion and sensibility—we might say, by Phillips and Rahv. Theirs was thus a rebellion against the “utilitarian genres” of leftist literature and against the “new

aesthetic code” promulgated by the Granville Hicks’s and Mike Gold’s of the Communist world.

In Phillips and Rahv’s assessment, the American communist literary tradition was “more in the sectarian tradition of Upton Sinclair than in the great [cosmopolitan] tradition of Karl Marx.” The problem, therefore, could not be attributed to Marx; rather, the failures of literary leftism lay at the doorstep of those “vulgarizers of Marxism,” steeped in the “pragmatic patterns and lack of consciousness that dominate the national heritage.” Pragmatism, populism, regionalism and parochialism, a false materialism that exuded its anti-intellectual bias—this was the problem of Americanized Communism and of the Popular Front. Behind all of its methods is an anti-intellectual bias, which “constantly draws literature below urban levels into the sheer ‘idiocy of the village.’” Criticism, as they saw it, was almost “a pure product of the city.” The “literary isolationists of America,” those critics opting for the creation of a “literature in one country,” had thus turned against the means of the intellect and its primary function, instead longing for “retreat to the quietism of rustic life.”

The solution was to be found in a proper return to Marxism—true Marxism, radical at its core. More concretely, this resolution had to occur through the “Europeanization of American literature.” For European, modernist writers like Kafka, Silone, and Malraux “have been able to illuminate those junctions of consciousness where the old and new ways of life come to grips with each other.” As a result of their literary maturity, they have been able to “infuse into ideas the dramatic quality of action.” In America, however, scholasticism and formulaic misappropriations have created a hollow shell of what proletarian literature might

have been or even might become. But, with rebellion now heard on all sides, promising “signs of a new turn are now appearing.”

THE PARTISAN IMAGINATION

Partisan Review's 1937 project for a re-invigoration of the radical temper thus opened the door to countless possibility—at the very least theirs was a calling for a new politics of intellectuals, ironically, wrought through the medium of a literary-cultural magazine. Long affiliated with—indeed originating from—a Communist movement that saw in art an instrument of political propaganda, *PR* now stated the case for unadulterated cultural autonomy. Simultaneous with their case for the separation of politics from literature—thus calling forth the effective divorce of the two—there came thereby their theoretical marriage, or philosophical coupling.

For some time now, to be sure, from their first formative days in the movement, Phillips and Rahv had theorized of the relation between literature and politics. The way they interpreted their “unforgivable sin,” in the eyes of those “commissars of culture,” they had taken seriously the idea of “infusing literary life with a revolutionary spirit.”²³¹ They might, however, have put it differently: I would suggest, rather, the notion of *infusing revolutionary life with a literary spirit*. This latter formulation, at any rate, definitely fits the mission for which the new *PR* had set for itself. As Irving Kristol would put it, several years hence: “The particular mission it set itself—to reconcile a socialist humanism with an individualistic ‘modernism’ in

²³¹ Phillips and Rahv, “In Retrospect,” 681.

the arts. . . .”²³² Furthermore, consider Phillips in 1976: “[To] introduce for the first time the combination of social concern and literary standards that guided a new creative and critical movement.”²³³ And finally, yet another way of putting it, perhaps the most well-known formulation, is Lionel Trilling’s: “[To] organize a new union between our political ideas and our imagination.”²³⁴ On the eve of the magazine’s renewal, the *PR* editorial board now thought of themselves as “truly radical,”²³⁵ and this they meant entirely in the Marxist sense of the word, “radical.” Or at least as they interpreted Marx, which was wholly unto their own.

Among the “Younger Brothers” of the first generation of New York intellectuals, according to Daniel Bell, those in the circle coming of age in the mid and late 1930s,²³⁶ Alfred Kazin sums up one crucial component of the *Partisan* imagination. In his words, “I felt myself to be a radical, not an ideologue.”²³⁷ He also thought of himself, importantly, as a “literary radical,” looking to literature for “strong social argument, intellectual power, [and] human liberation.”²³⁸ It was therefore, wrote Kazin, “the rebels of literature, the great wrestlers-with-God, Thor with his mighty hammer, the poets of unlimited spiritual freedom, whom I loved—Blake, Emerson, Whitman, Nietzsche, Lawrence.”²³⁹ But the founding fathers, so to speak, of *Partisan Review*, while definitely of the same ilk and mentality as Kazin,

²³² Irving Kristol, “Memoirs of a Trotskyist,” *New York Times* (January 23, 1977).

²³³ Phillips, “How *Partisan Review* Began” 45.

²³⁴ Lionel Trilling, “The Function of the Little Magazine,” in L. Trilling’s collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Anchor Books, 1953; originally published by Viking Press in 1950), 95.

²³⁵ Phillips and Rahv, “In Retrospect,” 681.

²³⁶ Daniel Bell, “The ‘Intelligentsia’ in American Society,” in *The Winding Passage*, 127-129.

²³⁷ Alfred Kazin, *Starting Out in the Thirties* (New York: Vintage, 1962); selections and excerpts found in Ed. Neil Jumonville, *The New York Intellectuals Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 17.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

were never as politically indifferent as Kazin was. A literary man, through and through, Kazin very early on grew suspicious of Marxist orthodoxies and tired of Communism. Phillips, Rahv, and Macdonald, however, arrived within and among the political scene. They were not—and never were—politicians, but might be considered more properly as *metaphysicians of politics*. Their concern was with the foundational underpinnings of politics—and this they took to be culture; fundamentally, therefore, in their estimation, politics was ideationally grounded in ideas.

For Phillips and Rahv, both of whom had a long history of active and critical engagement with the Party, the “intellectual vulgarities” of proletarian literature “had their source in the corruption and totalitarian essence of Stalinism itself.”²⁴⁰ “Stalinism,” as a general term for the cultural, socio-economic, and political system that enveloped the Communist movement and Soviet Russia and its satellites, they saw as “afflicted with an incurable disease . . . perverting intellectual life as it had perverted the libertarian ideals of the socialist tradition.”²⁴¹ And behind Stalinism lay the man: Joseph Stalin.

Beyond the fact that they took Stalin to be a morally reprehensible man—grand puppeteer behind the atrocious Moscow Trials and Purges, among countless other scandals and abuses—they saw in Stalin a crude and parochial intellect. Nothing of the caliber of the socialist giants: Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. They came to see Stalin the way Macdonald saw the so-called “captains of industry.” In a 1979 interview with Diana Trilling, Macdonald recounted: “Well, you know, *Fortune* radicalized me, so to speak. I saw what idiots and coarse and stupid people these big

²⁴⁰ Phillips and Rahv, “In Retrospect,” 681.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

captains of industry were They were inferior people.”²⁴² In an autobiographical essay introducing *Politics Past* in 1957, Macdonald wrote likewise: “My undergraduate suspicions were confirmed—the men running our capitalist system were narrow, uncultivated and commonplace; they had a knack for business as unrelated to other qualities as a talent for chess, and they could have been replaced as our ruling class without any damage to our culture by an equal number of citizens picked at random from the phone book.”²⁴³

Throughout the years, already as early as 1934, *Partisan* intellectuals saw themselves as of the cultural elite—as the cultural vanguard of the revolutionary masses. In the inaugural issue, you will recall Phillips’s criticism of Henry Hazlett for his under-emphasis of the central role of critic as guide in creating proletarian literature. Indeed, Phillips took Hazlett to task by stating the case for objective standards in literature. These “truths,” however, were only accessible and apparent to proletarian critics of *PR* persuasion and mind—perhaps even then, save to its own elite, i.e., to Phillips and Rahv. As the years rolled by and the Popular Front brought an end to the dream of proletarian literature, Phillips and Rahv, and the rest of the new editorial board, still saw themselves as of the cultural elite. With the American “progressive” bourgeoisie now in alliance with the American worker and the Communist intellectual, the *Partisan* intellectual once more had to safeguard the path of the avant-garde—in regard to both culture and politics. Thus, Stalinism in the arts, in the state and in the economy were now blasted as retrograde: the *New Masses* intellectual backing it depicted by *Partisan Review* as—just like Stalin—a sectarian,

²⁴² Diana Trilling, “An Interview with Dwight Macdonald,” 314.

²⁴³ Dwight Macdonald, “Introduction,” *Politics Past*, 8.

vulgar-Marxist, driven by pragmatism, populism, parochialism, and a false materialism that exuded both its crudity and its anti-intellectual bias. To *Partisan Review*, politics was a manifest function of cultural disposition. The retrograde and reactionary culture of Stalinism thus manifested itself in a retrograde and reactionary socio-political regime—and, of course, the same was true vice versa. *Partisan Review*, as an apparent coterie of modernist and Trotskyist intellectuals, now understood themselves as in a prime position to effectuate political change wrought through their literary medium.

This was the dream of 1934 renewed and revitalized. And on a grandiose level, theirs was indeed a vision for a radical new politics. To return to Trilling's formulation, cited and excerpted from his essay, "The Function of the Little Magazine":²⁴⁴ *PR*'s project was "to organize a new union between our political ideas and our imagination . . . to force into our definition of politics every human activity and every subtlety of every human activity." Trilling went on to note, "There are manifest dangers in doing this, but greater dangers in not doing it. [For] Unless we insist that politics is imagination and mind, we will learn that imagination and mind are politics, and of a kind that we will not like." The new and twice-born *Partisan Review*, according to Trilling, thus "conceived its particular function to be the making of this necessary insistence . . . [insisting] that the activity of politics be united with the imagination under the aspect of mind." And as Trilling saw it, the Communism of Stalinist persuasion met with a tragic "divorce between politics and the imagination" to the grave extent that all products of mind, art, desire, aesthetics, became woefully

²⁴⁴ Trilling, "The Function of the Little Magazine," 89-99.

predicated on politics, and were thereby effectively eradicated in spirit. *Partisan Review*'s creative and critical—dissident—literary consciousness was unbound.

Chapter 5

The Trotskyist Period: 1937-1939

Our own politics at the time might be summed up as a kind of independent and critical Marxism: independent of all party organizations and programs, and critical insofar as we were inclined to re-examine the entire course of socialism in order to understand its present plight. It goes without saying that we were intransigently anti-Stalinist, and though in some quarters—where people took their cue from the Stalinists—we were quickly stamped as Trotskyite, the truth is that of all the editors only Dwight Macdonald was a member of that party, and he but for a short time. Our editorial position could then be said to have been Trotskyite only in the sense that we mainly agreed with Trotsky’s criticism of the Soviet regime and that we admired him as a great exponent of the Marxist doctrine. . .

But our principal interest, editorially, was in bringing about a rapprochement between the radical tradition on the one hand and the tradition of modern literature on the other—a rapprochement that virtually all left-wing magazines had in the past done their utmost to prevent. It was our idea that this could not be accomplished by converting one tradition to the other, for the result of that could hardly be anything more than a false show of unity. It seemed to us that a reconciliation could be effected only by so modulating the expression of both traditions as to convey a sense at once of the tension between them and of their relevance to each other within the common framework of our civilization.

William Phillips and Phillip Rahv,
“In Retrospect: Ten Years of Partisan Review,”
The Partisan Reader, 1946

THE “NEW” OPENING EDITORIAL STATEMENT

For all their criticism and invective, not to mention exaggeration, unleashed in a barrage of *New Masses* and *Daily Worker* articles aimed at the heads of the new *Partisan Review*, the Communist Party was onto something. Targeting Sidney Hook and James T. Farrell, and pegging them as part of “a little group of Phi Beta Kappa

Trotskyites,” as “New York coffee-pot intellectuals,” Mike Gold’s analysis barely skipped a beat when he extended it in December 1936 to the likes of Dupee, Macdonald, McCarthy, Phillips and Rahv. In Gold’s depiction, these ex-Communist super-Leftists were at bottom, vain, careerist, stubborn and proud—migratory intellectuals disloyal to labor—beholden only to the intellectuals as a class unto themselves. They envisioned a new world where brain would direct brawn and when their programs were not immediately accepted, they went away feeling injured and insulted. In the end, then, Gold faulted them for their “simple inability to accept the internal discipline of any organization.” Thus, their intellectual disposition, all-too prone to a form of critical skepticism, ultimately stirred up a “will-to-confusion” that found expression in disbelief in the one instrument in history capable of liberating humanity—i.e. the Communist Party.

Nearly a year later, in September 1937 on the eve of *Partisan* renewal, and with the sting of their dissent at the Second American Writers’ Congress still relatively fresh, the *New Masses* mentions their outright opposition and attacks on the integrity of the Communist Party, the Popular Front, the League of American Writers, and the Soviet Union; while also mentioning their “extreme fondness” for Leon Trotsky, the P.O.U.M., and the Trotsky Defense Committee. “No matter what attempts at camouflage may be made,” therefore, “there is no reason to suppose that the present activities of the editors [of *Partisan Review*] do not clearly outline the future policies of the magazine.” To the Communists, then, in the end, it simply did not matter that *PR*’s was a calling for a new, “unattached,” “non-partisan,” “unaffiliated,” and “experimental” literary magazine. Peel back a layer or two, and

their “independent” and “dissident” criticism shed its skin for Trotskyism. Again, what mattered was the fact that their activism of late were all in the Trotskyist vein—opposition at the Second American Writers’ Congress, attack on the Popular Front, on the LAW and the USSR, and support for the POUM and Leon Trotsky. In response, voicing their protest to the *New Masses*, Phillips and Rahv simply suggested restraint: “Finally, may we suggest that you restrain your zeal to attack the new *Partisan Review* and your haste to invent policies for it, until such time as the magazine appears?”

And then it indeed appeared, a mere two months later, in December 1937. As the renewed magazine’s founding editorial statement²⁴⁵ it is accordingly quoted below, in full:

As our readers know, the tradition of aestheticism has given way to a literature which, for its origin and final justification, looks beyond itself and deep into the historic process. But the forms of literary editorship, at once exacting and adventurous, which characterized the magazines of aesthetic revolt, were of definite cultural value; and these forms PARTISAN REVIEW will wish to adapt the literature of the new period.

Any magazine, we believe, that aspires to a place in the vanguard of literature today, will be revolutionary in tendency; but we are also convinced that any such magazine will be unequivocally independent. PARTISAN REVIEW is ware of its responsibility to the revolutionary movement in general, but we disclaim obligation to any of its organized political expressions. Indeed we think that the cause of revolutionary literature is best served by a policy of no commitments to any political party. Thus our understanding of the factor of independence is based, not primarily on our differences with any one group, but on the conviction that literature in our period should be free of all factional dependence.

²⁴⁵ Curiously, in *Partisan Review: The 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Stein and Day, 1985), Ed. William Phillips refers to the December 1937 Editorial Statement as the “Original *Partisan Review* Editorial Statement” (12). This is made all the more curious by the fact of the Anniversary Edition’s publication date of 1985—copyright marked 1984 and including essays up to then—since the fifty years would therefore be counted from the original opening date of 1934, not 1937.

There is already a tendency in America for the more conscious social writers to identify with a single organization, the Communist Party; with the result that they grow automatic in their political responses but increasingly less responsible in an artistic sense. And the Party literary critics, equipped with the zeal of vigilantes, begin to consolidate into aggressive political-literary amalgams as many tendencies as possible and to outlaw all dissenting opinion. This projection on the cultural field of factionalism in politics makes for literary cleavages which, in most instances, have little to do with literary issues, and which are more and more provocative of a ruinous bitterness among writers. Formerly associated with the Communist Party, *PARTISAN REVIEW* strove from the first against its drive to equate the interests of literature with those of factional politics. Our reappearance on an independent basis signifies our conviction that the totalitarian trend is inherent in that movement and that it can no longer be combatted from within.

But many other tendencies exist in American letters, and these, we think, are turning from the senseless disciplines of the official Left to shape a new movement. The old movement will continue and, to judge by present indications, it will be reenforced [*sic*] more and more by academicians from the universities, by yesterday's celebrities and today's philistines. Armed to the teeth with slogans of revolutionary prudence, its official critics will revive the petty-bourgeois tradition of gentility, and with each new tragedy on the historic level they will call the louder for a literature of good cheer. Weak in genuine literary authority but equipped with all the economic and publicity powers of an authentic cultural bureaucracy, the old regime will seek to isolate the new by performing upon it the easy surgery of political falsification. Because the writers of the new grouping aspire to independence in politics as well as in art, they will be identified with fascism, sometimes directly, sometimes through the convenient medium of "Trotskyism." Every effort, in short, will be made to excommunicate the new generation, so that their writing and their politics may be regarded as making up a kind of diabolic totality; which would render unnecessary any sort of rational discussion of the merits of either.

Do we exaggerate? On the contrary, our prediction as to the line the old regime will take is based on the first maneuvers of a campaign which has already begun. Already, before it appeared, *PARTISAN REVIEW* has been subjected to a series of attacks in the Communist Party press; already, with no regard to fact—without, indeed, any relevant facts to go by—they have attributed gratuitous political designs to *PARTISAN REVIEW* in an effort to confuse the primarily literary issue between us.

But *PARTISAN REVIEW* aspires to represent a new and dissident generation in American letters; it will not be dislodged from its

independent position by any political campaign against it. And without ignoring the importance of the official movement as a sign of the times we shall know how to estimate its authority in literature. But we shall also distinguish, wherever possible, between the tendencies of this faction itself and the work of writers associated with it. For our editorial accent falls chiefly on culture and its broader social determinants. Conformity to a given social ideology or to a prescribed attitude or technique, will not be asked of our writers. On the contrary, our pages will be open to any tendency which is relevant to literature in our time. Marxism in culture, we think, is first of all an instrument of analysis and evaluation; and if, in the last instance, it prevails over other disciplines, it does so through the medium of democratic controversy. Such is the medium that PARTISAN REVIEW will want to provide in its pages.²⁴⁶

Three main points of the re-vamped *PR* Manifesto should be emphasized. First, is that the editors of the 1937 *Partisan Review* still avowed an allegiance to the radical movement. But this much was further clear: They would “disclaim obligation to any of its organized political expressions.” Therefore, beyond any responsibility owed to revolutionary socialism was the superseding responsibility owed to revolutionary literature—and thus, to revolutionary *litterateurs*. They now called for unadulterated literary and cultural independence, and not least of all, on the grounds that it would best serve the cause of “revolutionary literature.” Second, the conviction that the Soviet Union was totalitarian; as therefore was the Communist Party the corrupt totalitarian instrument of its policies. No longer was it thus deemed possible to combat the “totalitarian trend” from within. Inherent within the movement, the *PR* editors opted for radical dissent from without. And, third—similar to the original 1934 Editorial Statement claiming participation in the political struggle against imperialism, fascism, racism, exploitation, etc., “through [their] specific literary medium”—the new 1937 Editorial Statement opened its pages to a re-invigorated

²⁴⁶ “Editorial Statement,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (December 1937), 3-4

project calling for a novel revolutionary politics of intellectuals wrought through the medium of their literary-cultural magazine. As opposed to the *dictat* of the “cultural commissars” of the CPUSA, *Partisan Review* “aspires to represent a new and dissident generation in American letters,” from which will never be asked conformity to a “given social ideology or to a prescribed attitude or technique.” Open, therefore, to all literary tendencies, they opposed, in William Phillips’s words, nearly fifty years hence, “political reflexes, cultural cant, and literary obfuscation.”²⁴⁷ Their *Partisan* imagination was still steeped in Marxism, but “Marxism in culture . . . [in their assessment, depicted] first of all an instrument of analysis and evaluation,” they determined that if it was to prevail over other disciplines that it must do so through the apparently now inviolate “medium of democratic controversy.”

RIPOSTES: THE NEW MASSES FEUD REVISITED

The *PR* editors understood well that despite their efforts “to shape a new movement,” the old movement would carry on just the same. “Weak in genuine literary authority but equipped with all the economic and publicity powers of an authentic cultural bureaucracy, the old regime will seek to isolate the new by performing upon it the easy surgery of political falsification.” Aspiring to independence in politics as well as in art, they prophesied without exaggeration, they will be identified with fascism, attacked as imperialists, reactionaries, as petty-bourgeois, as literary snakes, as Trotskyist renegades. The “first maneuvers” of this campaign had already begun prior to re-founding—it was therefore sure to follow after its re-founding. As their

²⁴⁷ William Phillips, Ed., *Partisan Review: The 50th Anniversary Edition*, 11.

December 1937 Editorial Statement reminded their readers, “already, with no regard for fact—without, indeed, any relevant facts to go by—they have attributed gratuitous political designs to *Partisan Review* in an effort to confuse the primarily literary issue between us.” Indeed, it was precisely in this light, one emphasizing the “primarily literary” chasm that separated the two camps, that Phillips and Rahv had understood and articulated the grounds of the long-enduring *Partisan Review-New Masses* feud.

The fundamental issue, according to Phillips and Rahv’s letter to the *New Masses*, dated 17 October 1937, and titled “A Protest,” was this: “whether left-wing literature and Marxist criticism shall be free to develop organically, instead of becoming a ready tool of factional interests and polemics.” Moving on to the counter-offensive, Phillips and Rahv first downplayed the gravity of their alleged break, and asserted that the *New Masses* was mistaken in equating their own outlook with that of the old *Partisan Review*. For there had always been a critical wedge separating the two. In their formulation, the two were constantly at loggerheads on the cultural problems of revolutionary literature, and, to be sure, they reminded everyone that *PR* was started against the initial and continued opposition of the *New Masses*. The way they specifically phrased it in their letter is as follows: “What distinguished *Partisan Review* from the *New Masses* was our struggle to free revolutionary literature from domination by the immediate strategy of a political party. The *New Masses*, on the other hand, has always been part and parcel of the very tendency which the *Partisan Review* was fighting.” The political issues raised by the *New Masses*—those regarding several of the new *PR* editors’ alleged and apparent support for the

P.O.U.M. and the Trotsky Committee—simply obscured the more fundamental issue, and was therefore irrelevant.

In the *New Masses* reply which would accompany Phillips and Rahv's protest, the Communist periodical begged to differ. They repeated what was for them the central issue: i.e., the fundamentally political issue that since its folding in October 1936 Phillips and Rahv have changed their political position from Communism to Trotskyism. And, they reasoned: "To suggest that these facts are irrelevant is to be either disingenuous or stupid." The way the *New Masses* saw it, not only—or merely—was *Partisan Review* undergoing a change in policy, "it is now being used for purposes utterly opposed to those for which it was founded and maintained." Contrary, therefore, to the vision the *PR* editors had outlined in their protest and in their announcement of the coming resumption of their little magazine, Phillips and Rahv, Dupee, Macdonald, McCarthy and Morris had become every bit as much "a ready tool of [Trotskyite] factional interests and polemics."

The bitter back-and-forth polemic between the *New Masses* and *Partisan Review* explains the appearance of the "Ripostes" section in the first few issues of the magazine.²⁴⁸ The first riposte, "Independence Plus Literature Equals Fascism,"²⁴⁹ targeted the Party Press for having "savagely, at times hysterically, attacked the magazine and its editors." Equipped with wit and irony, they wrote: "What we, in our innocence, conceived of as a literary magazine has become the organ of the murderers of Kirov. Such is the result of refusing to accept the Party Line in literature." They

²⁴⁸ "Ripostes" appeared in *Partisan Review*, Volume IV, No.'s 1-5 (December 1937-April 1938); and, in Volume V, No. 3 (August-September 1938).

²⁴⁹ "Independence Plus Literature Equals Fascism," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (December 1937), 74-75.

then responded to the claim that the “professed literary aims of *Partisan Review* are merely a smoke screen for its ‘real’ object, which is to spread Trotskyist propaganda.” In response, they proclaimed outright: “we do not consider ourselves ‘Trotskyists.’” Furthermore, they reiterated the notion of *PR*’s re-founding, based in large measure, “precisely to fight the tendency to confuse literature and party politics to struggle against the ‘partyization’ of left-wing letters.” But the Party prefers name-calling—“and what names!”—slander, misconception, deceit, lies and falsification. Closing their opening riposte, they effectively thank the Party Press for supplying them, “gratis, with some excellent examples” of the “degenerative effect of imposing a Party Line on Literature.”

Partisan Review was to be a fundamentally literary and cultural magazine, steering clear of any and all commitments to politics, in the earnest “conviction that literature in our period should be free of all factional dependence.” In other words, at least at the surface, it was to be “non-political.” Interestingly, this is precisely how F. W. Dupee articulated his position to fellow editor Dwight Macdonald, when, in mid-September 1937, he raised concern over *PR* possibly publishing translated excerpts from Andre Gide’s recent French release of *Second Thoughts on the U.S.S.R.* in its inaugural issue. The incipient editorial board was of mixed opinion. Initial excitement soon turned to worry, doubt and reservation. In a letter to Macdonald, dated 18 September 1937, Dupee writes: “The Troys etc. can be counted on to go along with us, and even put up with a lot of nuisance from the Stalinists, providing that we can prove to them that we are *really* non-political. Yet the Gide piece, thought written by

a literary man, is purely political.”²⁵⁰ On the eve of renewal, according to Phillips, encircled by Communists, “in an almost constant state of siege,” their first issue—in their estimation—tended to sobriety.²⁵¹

But just ten days after killing the piece, they decided it would run in the second January 1938 issue of the magazine. James Gilbert and Terry Cooney helped shed some light on their about-face. According to Gilbert, after careful consideration, and despite inevitable anger and censure by the Communists, the divided board decided it was simply too important a piece to ignore. Cooney, however, offers a fuller exposition in linking the timing of the amended decision to the appearance of the 7 December 1937 literary supplement to the *New Masses*. Its lengthy attacks on *PR*, most importantly Mike Gold’s “Notes on the Cultural Front,” continued the Communist assault on the new “small band” of “Trotskyified intellectuals.” They were repeatedly (and familiarly) pegged as renegades, red-baiters, ivory-tower laggards, Communist-haters—this time, what was new, they were also depicted as “nay-sayers to life,” implanted with a frustrated negative psychology and a suspicion of life that became a form of biological inferiority, effectively drawing them in to the camp of reaction and Leon Trotsky. “If Party critics were going to do their worst in any case,” Cooney argues, “the doubting editors may well have reconsidered where the gain would lie in not printing Gide.”²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Cited from the Macdonald Papers in Terry Cooney’s *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 122.

²⁵¹ Phillips, “How ‘Partisan Review’ Began,” 45.

²⁵² Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 197-198; Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 121-122, 123 (quote); Gold, “Notes on the Cultural Front,” *New Masses* 25, 11 (December 7, 1937), 1-5. Gilbert bases his case on two letters and two interviews: Philip Rahv to Andre Gide, November 25, 1937; Edmund Wilson to Fred Dupee, December 2, 1937; and interviews with Dupee and Macdonald claiming that the two of them had initially wanted to go ahead with the printing but that Rahv and Phillips expressed reluctance. Cooney additionally refers to the Farrell Diary, November 30, December

Nevertheless, the first issue appears to have been a great success. “First Issue Reactions,”²⁵³ published in the second “Ripostes” section of the magazine, January 1938, included congratulatory notes from John Dos Passos, Ignazio Silone, Louis M. Hacker, Edmund Wilson, Nathan Asch, and Andre Gide. “Letters to the Editor,”²⁵⁴ too, included the following praise: “There has been a great need for a magazine free from organizational sterility and I hope it will have the great success it deserves.” Ronald Lane Latimer, from New York City, thus acknowledged his admiration and courage in openly stating their principles in their Editorial Statement. Frederick Reustle of Jamaica, N.Y., wrote likewise: “Nothing is more heartening to me than to see the rise of a more critical spirit when so many people are going without reflection into one of the extreme camps.” To be sure, other letters were not of the same kindred spirit. Ben B. Naumoff, of the Labor Research Front, warned of “the bitterness and venom that the C.P. will heap upon you,” referring to their Editorial Statement as a “classic understatement” of what was sure to follow. Finally, there is the opening letter of the section, written by Sol Rubinstein, which must have been published with bitter-sweet amusement. After reading the new 1937 Editorial Statement, Rubinstein begins his letter: “I promptly consigned the issue to the garbage pail,” then explaining that when a “Left” magazine attacks the Communist Party, as theirs does, “the hand of Trotskyism and its Fascist allies are clearly visible.” As a “class-conscious worker,” Trotskyism and all it stands for was abhorrent to Rubenstein, so in due course he requested immediate removal of his name from the mailing list and

10, 1937, to revise Gilbert’s account which suggests “a simpler progression of editorial opinion, more consistent individual views, and a longer delay before the decision to publish was made”

²⁵³ “First Issue Reactions,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1938), 63.

²⁵⁴ “Letters to the Editor,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1938), 62-63.

cancellation of his subscription. “P.S.,” adds Rubinstein, “I just noticed that my garbage pail regurgitated.”

But Stalinists were not the only one’s expressing their apparent disgust. A piece in the same second “Ripostes” section, titled, “The Temptation of Dr. Williams,”²⁵⁵ explained the Communist Party’s current “whispering campaign of slander supplemented by backstairs intrigue,” presented in the interesting case of Dr. William Carlos Williams. Innocently enough, the case began on 20 August 1937 with the *PR* editors requesting that Dr. Williams contribute to their new magazine. After agreeing to contribute some poetry, *Partisan Review* made the announcement and listed William Carlos Williams as one of the contributors to their forthcoming first issue. They were therefore “astonished” to read in the November 16th issue of the *New Masses* a letter from Williams stating that “the *Partisan Review* has no contribution of mine nor will I send them any.” Instead, the *New Masses* announced that Williams was to contribute a study of the writings of H. H. Lewis. Utterly confused, and with the *PR* editors anxious and concerned about the bad press of evidently using Dr. Williams’s name without license, they quickly wrote him to inquire. Williams hastened to reply: “since I found the *New Masses* violently opposed to you on political grounds, so much so that they refused to print me if I remained a contributor to *Partisan Review*, I made my choice in their favor.” Here were *PR*’s worst fears and worries now manifest. They admitted that the “Williams episode” was the *New Masses*’ first triumph. “But what a victory!” they added. “Conditions! Threats! Pressures! These are the tactics of the underworld. And it is not clear from which quarter factionalism in the left-wing literary movement issues.”

²⁵⁵ “The Temptation of Dr. Williams,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1938), 61-62.

In the next issue, in the March 1938 “Ripostes,” *Partisan Review* publicized two other factional quarrels born in the wake of December renewal. This time, however, in a piece titled “Politics and Partisan Review,”²⁵⁶ they were not responding to sworn criticism from the Communist *New Masses* and *Daily Worker*, but to criticism from the Trotskyist *Socialist Appeal* and to what they referred to as “our gentle contemporary,” namely, *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*. They might have guessed that the Trotskyist magazine would criticize their call for unadulterated literary independence with the charge of “ignoring the claims of practical politics.” But they were shocked to find the likes of *Poetry* magazine asking substantially the same question as the Trotskyists: Is the new *Partisan Review* revolutionary?

In *Poetry*’s December 1937 issue, they editorialize as follows:

The question arises . . . whether a magazine professedly revolutionary in character can avoid having some definite political program, either explicit or implied. Taken at its face value, the policy of the *Partisan Review* seems to boil down to this: that literature, for the present, should not lead to action but to more literature. That may or may not be an excellent policy. But is it revolutionary?

Partisan Review responded, in turn, by making explicit their political program. “Our program,” they stated, “is the program of Marxism.” For *PR*, they explained this meant they were for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, for a workers government to supplant it, and for international socialism the world over. As for the role of literature in the revolutionary process, they came right out, “we are frankly skeptical of the old imperatives.” That Marxism was ultimately a guide to action, they readily acknowledged; that it could be a guide to literature, they certainly agreed with. But, “whether literature itself is, can be, or should be, typically a guide to action

²⁵⁶ “Politics and Partisan Review,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (February 1938), February, 61-63.

is one of the problems that *Partisan Review* is dedicated to explore.” This much they knew for certain: “a literature which ‘led to action’ without at the same time leading ‘to more literature,’ would not . . . be literature at all.”

As for the *Socialist Appeal*, they took the new *Partisan Review* to be a telling sign of the times, symbolic of the growing “revolt against Stalinism among the intellectuals.” But the charges remained serious: *PR*’s call for literary independence and unaffiliated political status made them “culpable of ignoring, and thus denying in practice,” the close bond between literature and politics. “So the *Appeal*, by equating independence with indifference,” the *Partisan* editors ridiculed, “lands us in pure estheticism.” As with their break from the Communists, and as with Phillips and Rahv’s mid-January 1937 flirtations with the Socialists,²⁵⁷ the new magazine remained by their independent status. What the Trotskyists wanted, therefore—commitment and allegiance to Trotskyism—*Partisan Review* would not give them. They then published a letter addressed to the *Appeal* by John Wheelwright, who sharply challenged their position that “According to the correct Marxist position, there need be no discord between revolutionary politics and revolutionary literature”—that, in other words, there need be open affiliation between Trotsky’s Fourth International, the international working class, and the *Partisan Review*. Wheelwright again rebuked the Trotskyists: “But you, with high authoritarianism, declare it necessary for a literary circumference to have a political center from which all radiates. O, formal pundit! The *Partisan Review* will get a super-logical center empirically by the methods of objective test, finding chords and diameters of the

²⁵⁷ See “Break” section in Ch. 5 of this dissertation.

circles, spheres and spirals of a reality beyond yours. It must do so without a political center if yours proves unfit.”²⁵⁸

THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED

The irony, of course, is that the re-born 1937 *Partisan Review* shared with Leon Trotsky an entire world of socio-political and cultural insight. Indeed, Trotsky’s influential work, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is it Going?*,²⁵⁹ written during his exile in 1936 Norway and published the following year in Russian, French, and English, could just the same have served as *PR*’s effective statement of editorial policy and aims. For Trotsky’s manifesto called forth the forces of international, revolutionary socialism to overthrow the totalitarian-bureaucratic character of Stalin’s Soviet Bonapartist regime of “fear, lies and flattery,”²⁶⁰ not to mention of exploitation. Trotsky’s was therefore an eminently political critique and analysis of the bureaucratic foundations of history’s first workers’ state—and, obviously, as its title suggests, of its betrayal and usurpation by Stalin. As a Marxist, the basis of his criticism was undergirded by an assessment of the Soviet Union’s social relations, its inherent social contradictions, the growth of new forms of inequality from within, its budding social antagonisms, alongside its ultimate effect on—and relation to and with—the state monopoly of force. But Trotsky was also

²⁵⁸ “In avowing itself hospitable, experimental, democratic, the *Partisan Review* has set its foot on the right road. But it is not enough to have a broad circumference; it is equally necessary to have an ideological and political center from which all the rest logically radiates.” Editorial, *Socialist Appeal*, 4 December 1937, 7.

²⁵⁹ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is it Going?* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972).

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

driven by, as he termed it, the “no less ruinous . . . effect of the ‘totalitarian’ regime upon artistic literature.”²⁶¹

The revolution was thus depicted as a betrayal on several simultaneous fronts: above all, a socio-political and economic betrayal, but its totalitarian policy in the arts was not to be belittled. In the book’s seventh chapter, on “Family, Youth and Culture,”²⁶² Trotsky effectively summarized and restated much of the substance of his 1924 work, *Literature and Revolution*, a well-known and accomplished endeavor in literary criticism. As the man known simply in Bolshevik circles as “the Pen” saw it,²⁶³

Spiritual creativeness demands freedom. The very purpose of communism is to subject nature to technique and technique to plan, and compel the raw material to give unstintingly everything to man that he needs. Far more than that, its highest goal is to free finally and once for all the creative forces of mankind from all pressure, limitation and humiliating dependence. Personal relations, science and art will not know any externally imposed “plan”, nor even any shadow of compulsion. To what degree spiritual creativeness shall be individual or collective will depend entirely upon its creators.

At the same time, Trotsky had no qualms frankly declaring that in a transitional regime—as in revolutionary Russia—it was inevitably going to be a different matter entire. He explained, even “in the hottest years of the civil war [1918-1921], it was clear to the leaders of the revolution that the government could, guided by political

²⁶¹ Ibid., 183.

²⁶² Ibid., 144-185. Subsequent quotations are all from the chapter’s third section, “Nationality and Culture,” pgs. 170-185.

²⁶³ Apparently, so the story goes, at their first meeting Lenin greeted Trotsky with the words, “Ah, the Pen has arrived!” This was in Switzerland in 1902. After escaping that year from his imprisonment in Siberia, Trotsky first landed himself in Samara, Russia, whereupon he was greeted by the *Iskra* group then headed by Gleb Krzhizhanovski. *Iskra*—in exile—would become the official organ of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. Robert Service reports that Krzhizhanovski “called him Pero (‘the Pen’), in tribute to his success as a journalist in Siberia.” (69). It would subsequently become his pen name as he became one of the newspaper’s leading authors. It was an appellation that evidently stuck: to be sure, in some cases it was employed in his favor, to his credit; while in others, to his disfavor, and discredit. See Robert Service’s recent and impressive biography, *Trotsky: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 2009); specifically, see Chapter 7, “Iskra,” 68-77.

considerations, place limitations upon creative freedom, but in no case pretend to the role of commander in the sphere of science, literature and art.” Trotsky’s dialectical understanding of the complexities of art and artistic creation in a revolutionary society—in other words, of the relation of writers and politics—was thus the same in 1936 as it was in 1924: the state might impose the objective and categorical criterion *for or against* the revolution, but it must ensure, ultimately, “complete freedom in the sphere of artistic self-determination.” Tragically, in the current arrangement, what Trotsky saw instead was a “ruling stratum” that considered itself “called not only to control spiritual creation politically, but also to prescribe its roads of development.” All this to the grave effect that the democratic interplay and struggle of artistic tendencies and schools has been virtually eliminated, now made subject and uniform to mere “interpretation of the will of the leaders.” In its stead, again, and to reiterate more emphatically: “There has been created for all groups a general compulsory organization, a kind of concentration camp of artistic literature.”

Partisan Review arguably accepted the gist of this Trotskyist line *in toto*. Nevertheless, as fundamentally intellectuals—rather than practicing revolutionaries—and perhaps after the trauma of Communist affiliation and break, they now opted for unadulterated artistic self-determination, refusing any and all political affiliation, even to a Trotskyist organization for which they might well have admired and sympathized with. But the bottom line remained: *PR* intellectuals found a tremendous appeal in Trotskyism. One critic going so far as to claim that by the mid-1930s, this unique group of anti-Stalinist left-wing intellectuals could no longer be simply characterized as modernists; that, indeed, “their attraction to Trotskyism was far more

decisive and would become clearer as they began to initiate their own literary and political activities.”²⁶⁴ This claim remains to be determined. At the very least, their attraction to Trotskyism was decisive. Before moving on to the back issues during their so-called “Trotskyist Period,” we consider some secondary assessments, along with reminiscences, journal entries, and, the Leon Trotsky-*Partisan Review* Correspondence of 1937-1938. Though the Communist Party had no way of knowing, *Partisan Review* was indeed directly courting “the Pen.”

THE TROTSKYIST CONNECTION

In his autobiography, William Phillips explains his—and *Partisan Review*’s—Trotskyist connection.²⁶⁵ After breaking from the Communists, he had, “of course,” been reading Trotsky and other critics of Stalinism in the opposition press. Acknowledging Trotsky as a “transcendent figure,” he credits the Old Man as writer, historian, and polemicist. In his words, Trotsky “opened the prospect of a condemnation of the Soviet system without abandoning Marxism.” Indeed, to *Partisan Review*, their Trotskyist turn after Communist break represented a return to Leninist revolutionary purity. Trotsky, according to Phillips, “made one finally realize why the Communists were the main obstacle to the realization of democratic socialism.” But he goes on to explain that he was never a “Trotskyite.” “For it was clear from the beginning,” he wrote, “that the Trotskyites were the guardians of their own orthodoxies and that in many respects they were like the Stalinists but without

²⁶⁴ Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 97.

²⁶⁵ Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 43-44.

power.” The only intellectuals in the *Partisan* circle, he claims, that were Trotskyites were James Burnham and Dwight Macdonald, both of whom he suspected became Trotskyites for a brief period because neither of them had earlier been a Stalinist.

When the re-born *Partisan Review* hit newsstands in December of 1937, Macdonald relates in his autobiographical essay, the editorial board openly proclaimed their political independence, though confessed a bias for “revolutionary socialism and against Stalinism.”²⁶⁶ They also defended the “Autonomy of Culture,” judging literature according to “intrinsic merit rather than ideology.” Macdonald then goes on to explain the attraction of the Trotskyist movement to people like him. As he understood it, intellectuals gravitated to Trotskyism because at the time it was the most revolutionary of the “sizeable” left-wing groups, because Trotsky stood to benefit from the “moral shock” of the Moscow Trials, and because of its “high level” (which must refer to its headiness, as opposed to the base vulgarity of the Stalinist movement). Above all, however, akin to Phillips’s depiction of Trotsky as a transcendent figure,²⁶⁷ Macdonald credited its success by virtue of being led by Trotsky, himself, “whose career showed that intellectuals, too, could make history.”

Mary McCarthy, who, you will recall, entered the *Partisan* circle by way of her involvement with the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky in mid-to-late 1936, once recollected that “the [*PR*] ‘boys’ were ‘too wary of political ties’”—while she saw herself as a “great partisan of Trotsky, who possessed those intellectual traits

²⁶⁶ Macdonald, “Introduction,” *Politics Past*, 12.

²⁶⁷ Elsewhere, in an interview with Dorman published in *Arguing the World*, Phillips said: “Trotsky was a major intellectual figure in a way Stalin wasn’t. He was a major intellectual figure, equivalent to Lenin, and in some ways more of an intellectual than Lenin was, more of a literary critic than Lenin was. But also, Trotsky had the germ of a criticism of the Soviet Union from a radical point of view. And to that extent, we learned something from Trotsky, although we didn’t accept a number of things of his. He was an imposing figure. And he gave us the vocabulary to criticize the Soviet Union without a right-wing point of view.” (74).

of wit, lucidity, and indignation, which I regarded, and still regard, as a touchstone.”²⁶⁸ Likewise, F. W. Dupee, in a 1973 interview with Alan Wald, reminisced that “there’s no question that Leon Trotsky definitely influenced me more than any American did.”²⁶⁹ Other intellectuals at the time, semi-affiliated through their public stand in support of Trotsky included the likes of James T. Farrell, Edmund Wilson, V. F. Calverton, Lionel Trilling, Sidney Hook, Louis Hacker, Max Eastman, John Dos Passos, Lionel Abel, and John Chamberlain.²⁷⁰ Second Generation New York intellectuals, those (so to speak) raised on *Partisan Review*, actually did affiliate, and, among them, Irving Kristol, Irving Howe, Seymour Martin Lipset, Leslie Fiedler, and Nathan Glazer all belonged to the Trotskyist Young People’s Socialist League.²⁷¹

As Irving Kristol, one time Trotskyist turned neo-conservative godfather put it,²⁷²

It would be hard for Jews, most of us coming from poor, working-class families, not to be radical. So we wanted to be radical. On the other hand, many of us realized that the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union was not our conception of what a radical politics was supposed to create. Well, if you wanted to be radical, what was left—Trotskyism or a variant. American socialism just wasn’t radical enough. It was an older, non-Jewish tradition.

Drawn into Trotsky’s orbit, therefore, for a number of reasons, one of Trotsky’s principal biographers, Isaac Deutscher referred to *Partisan Review* as “the centre of

²⁶⁸ Cited in Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 108. The citation is taken from McCarthy, quoted in Doris Grumbach, *The Company She Kept* (New York, 1967), 75.

²⁶⁹ Cited in Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 163.

²⁷⁰ Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 108. Isaac Deutscher, in *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky: 1929-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), adds to the list of those then taken in by Trotskyism, which had become “something of a vogue . . . to leave many marks in American literature,” Charles Malamud, James Rorty, Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, “and many, many others.” (430).

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁷² Cited in Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 109; on the basis of the author’s interview with Kristol on 17 June 1976.

that ‘literary Trotskyism.’” As he understood the appeal, “Trotskyism appeared to them as a fresh breeze breaking into the stuffy air of the left and opening new horizons.” But ultimately, he explained, “the heyday of ‘literary Trotskyism’ was of short duration.” Deutscher concluded his assessment of the *PR* group by castigating them pejoratively as intellectual and literary *Trotskyists* that traveled the Trotskyist-bridge from anti-Stalinist revulsion to anti-Marxist reaction.²⁷³ A more recent biography of the outcast prophet, Bertrand M. Patenaude’s 2009 *Trotsky: Downfall of a Revolutionary* focuses specifically on the last years of Trotsky’s life in exile and details all the preliminaries leading to assassination in 1940 Mexico at the hands of Stalin. Like Deutscher’s assessment of *PR*, Patenaude sees the recast magazine as “the most important rallying point of disillusioned radicals for whom Trotsky became a lodestar.” Also similarly he categorized them as *Trotskyists* rather than Trotskyist—as more in the vein of fellow traveling friends than as due-paying members or comrades. Few, indeed, to reiterate, were actual members of the Trotskyist Party—most in fact were feverishly resistant to open affiliation in the new era of *PR*.²⁷⁴

And yet there should be little doubt that from 1937-1939 the *Partisan Review* passed through its Trotskyist Period, just as during 1934-1936 it had passed through its earlier Stalinist Period.²⁷⁵ Throughout both periods, to be sure, intellectual

²⁷³ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 429-438, 430 (quote), 435 (quote).

²⁷⁴ Patenaude, Bertrand M. *Trotsky: Downfall of a Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 151-158, 152 (quote).

²⁷⁵ James Farrell’s 14 August 1936 diary entry reads: “Rahv and Phillips and now completely disgusted with the official literary left wing set up. I talked with them today on the prospects of dragging *Partisan Review* out from under the boys, forming an alliance with the freer thinking left-wing groups, giving it a vague Trotskyist orientation instead of its present vague Stalinist orientation and thereby giving the magazine the possibility of functioning freely and with more honesty, and with better contributors.” Cited in Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 66.

foundations ran deepest, but the socio-political insight of Trotsky—and his central place in re-founding—should not be understated. For *Partisan Review*'s anti-Communism in 1937, according to James Gilbert, at first gave form through Trotskyism.²⁷⁶ Likewise Clement Greenberg, in his essay, “The Late Thirties in New York,” explained that *PR*'s anti-Stalinism absolutely “started out more or less as ‘Trotskyism.’”²⁷⁷ Where *Partisan Review* ended up is another story—a familiar one—many times told elsewhere; for now we focus on the upstart magazine's initial efforts in courting the man originally born Lev Davidovich Bronstein, better known by his revolutionary alias, Trotsky, and fondly referred to as the Old Man.²⁷⁸

COURTING THE OLD MAN: THE TROTSKY CORRESPONDENCE

Writing on behalf of the editorial board, in a letter dated 7 July 1937 Dwight Macdonald began what would become a two-year *Partisan Review*-Leon Trotsky correspondence.²⁷⁹ Macdonald got straight to the point:

²⁷⁶ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 190.

²⁷⁷ Greenberg, “The Late Thirties in New York,” published in *Art and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 230-235.

²⁷⁸ Evidently Trotsky had nearly 100 aliases. Trotsky [or, Trotskii] was the name of one of his prison guards, when serving time in Odessa. Escaping his first Siberian banishment in 1902 he printed the name “Trotsky” into a fake passport, and that seemed to have been the alias that most stuck. For an online catalogue of some of Trotsky's pseudonyms, see the following website: http://www.trotskyana.net/Leon_Trotsky/Pseudonyms/trotsky_pseudonyms.html.

²⁷⁹ Primary documentation of the correspondence can be found in the Leon Trotsky Archive at Harvard University's Houghton Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and in the Dwight Macdonald Papers at Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library in New Haven, Connecticut. Isaac Deutscher cites amply from the Trotsky Archive in his monumental Trotsky Trilogy: *The Prophet Armed* (1954), *The Prophet Unarmed* (1959), and *The Prophet Outcast* (1963). At the time, it included both an Open and a Closed Section of the archives. When Deutscher therefore refers to Trotsky's correspondence with *PR* in *The Prophet Outcast*, he does on the basis of the Closed Section. Since having opened up entirely, English Professor Harvey Teres, in *Renewing the Left* (1996), was among the first to examine the letters in the detail for which they merit. Historian Terry Cooney, in *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals* (1986), to be sure, also provides a compelling account; his, however, relies on the Macdonald Papers. See Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 430-431; Teres, *Renewing the Left*, 65-73;

Dear Mr. Trotsky,
A group of writers in New York City are reviving the *Partisan Review*.
We are going to publish it monthly as an independent Marxist journal.
The emphasis will be on literature, philosophy, culture in general,
rather than on economics or politics.

We are eager to have you contribute to our pages. . . .²⁸⁰

What precisely Trotsky would contribute, the editors left him at liberty to decide. Macdonald did, however, suggest a few topics: perhaps he could update his classic, *Literature and Revolution*, and apply its principles to the more recent state of Soviet letters; write something on Dostoevsky, Freud, or Silone's new novel, *Bread and Wine*.

A week later, in a letter dated 15 July 1937, Trotsky responded: He would be “very happy to collaborate in a genuine Marxist magazine pitilessly directed against the ideological poisons of the Second and Third International . . . poisons which are no less harmful in the sphere of culture, science and art than in the sphere of economics and politics.”²⁸¹ But prior to any contribution—“collaboration” was his exact word—Trotsky demanded a “programmatic declaration” articulating the magazine's stated aims, purpose and politics. In a letter to Macdonald, dated some few weeks later, Rahv declared Trotsky's letter “ridiculous.”²⁸² Had Trotsky been another, the correspondence might have ended right then and there. But they recognized that in Trotsky they were not dealing with just anybody. On 23 August 1937 they sent a second letter in response. Macdonald again writing on behalf of the board reiterated the fact they theirs would be “exclusively a cultural organ . . .

Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 127-132. Having neither Russian expertise nor—more importantly—financial support, I rely heavily on theirs. Patenaude, too, in *Trotsky* (2009), cites briefly on the matter from the Trotsky Archives; see 155-157.

²⁸⁰ The gist of this letter is presented entire in Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 73.

²⁸¹ Cited in Bertrand M. Patenaude, *Trotsky: Downfall of a Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 155-156.

²⁸² Cited in Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 128. The letter was dated 4 August 1937.

ideological in character, rather than political.” They were not to be affiliated with a political party line and therefore would not provide, either, positions on questions of political strategy and/or matters of political controversy. Professing to be anti-Stalinists committed to a true Leninist party to replace the corrupted Stalinist Comintern, they explained, however, that “as editors of a literary periodical we cannot impose such ideas on the literary contents, although our political ideas do shape—in some ways—our work as editors.”²⁸³ Trotsky, in a letter dated 11 September 1937, found *PR*’s response far too vague. Before deciding “if and how far we can go along,” Trotsky wanted to see the magazine in print.²⁸⁴ Needless to say, the *Partisan* editors were upset and frustrated by the whole affair. But they were not through courting Trotsky yet.

A LITERARY MONTHLY

For now, though, they had their sights set on the forthcoming inaugural issue of the new *Partisan Review* then not yet quite ready to hit the press in but a short couple of months. They could not therefore allow themselves more than what they deemed was sufficient attention to the matter. Perhaps more important was the editors’ critical independence—their *Partisan* literary imagination. Irving Howe explains the matter at greater length:

[The] hope that they could find another ideological system, some cleaned 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

²⁸³ Cited in Teres, *Renewing the Left*, 67.

²⁸⁴ Cited in Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 129; Patenaude, *Trotsky*, 156.

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.²⁸⁵

But *PR*'s abandonment of the revolutionary mantle came only after total disillusionment. In 1937, their precise—if sometimes inexact—combination of literary modernism with an independent Marxist politics—one stretching toward the guiding light of Leon Trotsky—provided a cogent and fertile “combination of system and independence.”²⁸⁶ It was clear to them, however, that, to quote William Phillips agreeing with Trotsky's later criticism, “We weren't true revolutionaries anymore—assuming that one knew what a true revolutionary was anyway.”²⁸⁷ Their radical and at points revolutionary literary monthly, introducing “for the first time the combination of social concern and literary standards that guided a new creative and critical movement,” that would become the organ of a “new community,” the community of New York intellectuals, began in December 1937.²⁸⁸

Volume IV, No. 1, December 1937

The first issue of the new *Partisan Review*, “A Literary Monthly,” and published independently at 22 East 17 Street, New York, N.Y., hit newsstands in December

²⁸⁵ Irving Howe, “The New York Intellectuals: A Chronicle & A Critique,” *Commentary* Vol. 46, No. 4, 32.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁸⁷ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 75.

²⁸⁸ Phillips, “How ‘Partisan Review’ Began,” 45; Phillips, *A Partisan View*, 51; Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 73.

1937. Seventy-six pages in length, it consisted of the opening editorial, two pieces of fiction, three poems (one of which was accompanied by etchings), one theater review, seven book reviews, three essays, and a new but short-lived polemical section titled “Ripostes,” to respond to ongoing attacks in the Communist (and now sometimes non-Communist) media on the character and integrity of *Partisan Review*.²⁸⁹ The founding editorial board, a “remarkably aggressive and varied board,” included F. W. Dupee, Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, George L. K. Morris, William Phillips, and Philip Rahv. The list of contributors they managed to assemble for their upstart literary monthly was impressive: prose from Wallace Stevens and James Agee; verse from Pablo Picasso, accompanied by several of his etchings to compose the artist’s first examples of politically-inspired art; short stories from Delmore Schwartz and James T. Farrell; book reviews from Sidney Hook, Philip Rahv, William Troy, F. W. Dupee, George L. K. Morris, Lionel Trilling, and Arthur Mizener; a theater review from Mary McCarthy; and essays by Lionel Abel and Dwight Macdonald, not to mention, Edmund Wilson, whose “blend of avant-garde culture and social

²⁸⁹ The fiction included “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,” by Delmore Schwartz; and, “Mrs. O’Flaherty and Lizz,” a section excerpted from a novel in progress by James T. Farrell. The poems included “The Dwarf,” by Wallace Stevens; “Lyrics,” by James Agee; “Dreams and Lies of Franco,” a prose poem, by Pablo Picasso, that was accompanied by several etchings to compose the artist’s first examples of politically-inspired art. The theater review, “Theater Chronicle,” by Mary McCarthy, included reviews of Ben Hecht’s *To Quito and Back* and Maxwell Anderson’s *The Star-Wagon*. The book reviews included Sidney Hook’s “The Technique of Mystification,” a review of *Attitudes Toward History*, by Kenneth Burke; Philip Rahv’s “The Social Muse and the Great Kudu,” a review of *To Have and Have Not*, by Ernest Hemingway; William Troy’s “The Symbolism of Zola,” a review of *Germinal*, by Emile Zola; F. W. Dupee’s “The Fabulous and the Familiar,” a review of *The Trial*, by Franz Kafka; George L. K. Morris’s “Modernism in England,” a review of *Circle*, by J. L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, and N. Gabo; Lionel Trilling’s “Marxism in Limbo,” a review of *Europa in Limbo*, by Robert Briffault; and, Arthur Mizener, a review of *New Attitudes*, by Horace Gregory. The essays included “Flaubert’s Politics,” based on an article which had earlier appeared in the *Herald-Tribune* book supplement, 21 February 1932, by Edmund Wilson; “Ignazio Silone,” by Lionel Abel; and, “Laugh and Lie Down,” by Dwight Macdonald. “Ripostes” included “Independence Plus Literature Equals Fascism,” “That Man is Here Again,” and “Culture as Conspirator.”

radicalism”²⁹⁰ spoke directly to the type of literary activism that the *Partisan* editors aspired to.

Unable to land Leon Trotsky, the great Bolshevik intellectual, *PR* thus made due with the great American man of letters, Edmund Wilson.²⁹¹ His essay, “Flaubert’s Politics,”²⁹² based on an article which had earlier appeared in the 21 February 1932 *Herald-Tribune* book supplement, provided the reborn little magazine with something akin to vindication of their project—while shedding light on their incipient editorial direction and novel “political” line. For Wilson’s imaginative essay pleads the case for a critical turn pulling away from Marxist socio-political insight and towards Flaubert’s alternate model of moral and artistic social criticism. For Flaubert’s offering—as opposed to Marx’s—is built on the complexities of human nature, instinct and emotion rather than the flawed, allegedly scientific precipice of Marxist sociological analysis. Like the new *Partisan Review*, Flaubert’s intellectual politics argues for an art form—and an artist—that is first and foremost committed to art—and artists. But in so being true to itself, it can simultaneously fulfill its true function:

²⁹⁰ Irving Howe explained that “for many young Americans who reached the crucial years of mid-adolescence in the Thirties,” Edmund Wilson was someone to be admired and emulated. “Remembering our admiration for Wilson’s blend of avant-garde culture and social radicalism,” adds Howe, “we can easily understand why we thought of him as the kind of intellectual we too should like to become.” Cited in Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 79-80.

²⁹¹ David Laskin, in his dramatic literary biography, *Partisans: Marriage, Politics, and Betrayal Among the New York Intellectuals* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), recounts Rahv’s “obsession” with Wilson and with publishing his work in *PR*; also, the extent to which doing so would be a “big catch” for *PR*. Laskin writes, “Wilson, at forty-two years of age, had already left his mark on two decades of American literature. He had published widely and deeply on everything from symbolist poetry to the Scottsboro trial; he had written an influential novel of the 1920s, *I Thought of Daisy*, along with plays, poetry, reviews, and social criticism. He knew just about everyone on the literary scene—F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Louise Bogan, Dawn Powell, and Edna St. Vincent Mallay were among his intimates—and he even had a cordially combative relationship with conservative Southern poet Allen Tate. Wilson, like most of his fellow American writers and intellectuals, had taken a sharp turn leftward during the 1930s, and by the end of the decade his politics were more or less aligned with those of *PR* The learned, respected, left-leaning Wilson would be a big catch for the resuscitated magazine, and the editors did everything they could to land him. Rahv, in particular, was obsessed with Wilson: obsessed with publishing him” (49).

²⁹² Edmund Wilson, “Flaubert’s Politics,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (December 1937), 13-24.

i.e., its socio-political function of epic historical and moral necessity, of humanizing the world, entire.

Turning specifically to the essay, Wilson begins by setting the historical context. Flaubert's lifetime (1821-1880) was a time "of alternating republics and monarchies, of bogus emperors and defeated revolutions, when political ideas were in confusion." During these tumultuous decades, there nevertheless arose a "considerable group of the novelists and poets." These were intellectuals holding regnant social and political issues in contempt and staking their careers on "art as an end [unto] itself." The artist's conception of their relation to society was thus expressed in opposition and damnation of the bourgeoisie, and art was thereby created in defiance of him and his attempt to bourgeoisify (or, we might say, anachronistically, to commodify) the world. After all the revolutions—and so-called revolutionaries—proved themselves corrupt and villainous, disillusion with and indifference to politics ultimately settled in. Wilson, citing the Goncourts in their journal—a position, he notes, of which Flaubert fully shared—then describes the emergent literary attitude as follows:

"You come to see that you must not die for any cause, that you must live with any government that exists, no matter how antipathetic it may be to you—you must believe in nothing but art and profess only literature. All the rest is a lie and a booby trap."

Translating the entry, Wilson explains: "In the field of art, at least, it was possible, by heroic effort, to prevent the depreciation of values." Flaubert's solution—especially after the grave lessons of the Paris Commune—was to shift the onus of salvation onto a "*legitimate aristocracy*," in other words, onto an intellectual elite of artists and writers.

Wilson concludes his essay in the following spectacular fashion, in a manner that must have impressed but nevertheless alarmed some of the *Partisan* editors who were professed partisans of revolutionary—i.e., Marxist—socialism:

Today we must recognize that Flaubert had observed something of which Marx was not aware. We have had the opportunity to see how even a socialism which has come to power as the result of a proletarian revolution has bred a political police of almost unprecedented ruthlessness and pervasiveness—how the socialism of Marx himself, with its emphasis on dictatorship rather than on democratic processes, has contributed to produce this disaster. Here Flaubert, who believed that the artist should aim to be without social convictions, has been able to judge the tendencies of political doctrines as the greatest of doctrinaires could not; and here the role chosen by Flaubert is justified.

To make up likewise for Trotsky's refusal, *Partisan Review* needed someone to write on Ignazio Silone's new book, *Bread and Wine*. They found that contribution in fellow Trotskyist Lionel Abel. Lionel Abel's "Ignazio Silone"²⁹³ helps shed further light on the directions evidently being charted by way of *PR*'s radical literary political agenda: i.e., their apparent project to bring morality back to politics by way of literature; or, in other words, to reconcile the Machiavellian divorce between politics and ethics that tragically ended in Stalinist betrayal of the revolution, but—and this is key—to do so by way of a refined Marxist reconciliation of seeming opposites rather than its abandonment.

In his discussion of Silone's earlier novel, *Fontamara*, and his more recent, *Bread and Wine*, Abel explains that in the latter as opposed to the former, the "human center of revolutionary gravity has shifted . . . from consciousness to the heart."

²⁹³ Lionel Abel, "Ignazio Silone," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (December 1937), 33-39. This marked the first essay in a series on modern literary figures. The next few respective issues included essays on D. H. Lawrence (January 1938), Henry James (February 1938), Andre Malraux (March 1938), John Dos Passos (April 1938), Thomas Mann (May 1938), Fyodor Dostoevsky (July 1938), and Ernest Hemingway (Winter 1939).

Indeed, as Abel sees it, Silone's new literary politics—as presented through his protagonist, Spina—is expressive of a turning away (as in *Fontamara*) from the city, politics, and theory, and one now directed toward (as in *Bread and Wine*) the country, ethics, and the heart. Abel then makes clear to add that Silone is not Spina; that in the case of the Italian dissident, author must be distinguished from hero. For the fact is, Abel attests, “No man is more friendly to the friendliness of the town for the country, of ethics for politics, of theory for the heart, than is Ignazio Silone.”

Silone's continued commitment to revolutionary socialism Abel deduces from the author's recent protest of the Moscow trials, his attacks on Soviet justice, and Communist policy, not on the grounds that these policies and this justice were “political” in character, but—to the contrary—on the grounds that they were fundamentally “antithetical” to the wisdom and integrity of Marxist political precept. Abel, however, must still make sense of Spina's expressed “boredom with theory,” and to do so in a way that is not interpreted and equated with a Silonean rejection of theory. This he accomplishes with great reserve, only after admitting that on such matters one cannot be entirely certain: “I relate Spina's boredom with theory to his need for something less abstract than theory Spina's object is moral inspiration, and inspiration is magical and spontaneous. It is natural and human to be bored by theory when the heart is sick and the will dispirited” Thus, in the new political reality—fascism now a tangible fact of everyday life—cultivation of the moral sense and sensibility, of courage, dignity, and individual integrity is imperative.

In a new period of reaction and defeat, writes Abel,

when the class whose historical obligation it is to struggle and conquer is marking time or sunk in apathy—at such times the individual is

severely limited; without personal resources of moral integrity he must inevitably fall in line and support the oppressor. Moral values, like truth and justice, are his inner-line defenses against the servility that accompanies despair. Moral values are his contacts with the great deeds of the past and impulses toward the future—his sensitivities to inspiration. A political party which destroys the moral discrimination between values wants agents, automatons, not men. . . . And it is surely better to be a man than to be an agent of even a revolutionary party.

To be sure, the troubled case of Silone's Spina makes it awfully hard to say Spina does not equally speak for Silone. One thing is certain: Spina "chooses ethics against politics," instead opting for a politics of sincerity, based on principles of truth and justice, and moral discrimination. Silone's politics in *Partisan* expression was thus radical to its very core. For as Abel explained it, a monolithic, so-called "Marxist" party "which destroys the moral discrimination between values, which destroys the individual's personal source of inspiration is that kind of party which will also have a disintegrating effect on the spontaneous revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses—in short cannot be a revolutionary party." Implicit therefore in Abel's essay is a hefty criticism of Stalinism, one calling forth a new politics based on spontaneity, moral inspiration, and directed to the heart.

The same went on the literary front of class politics—the new *Partisan Review* was to stand for the avant-garde in both politics, properly speaking, and literature. Trotskyism came the closest to representing the *Partisan* political stand; but the *Partisan* literary stand was already an old trick, evident even in its formative years of 1934-1936. Opposed to crude proletarian literature—repeatedly depicted as a travesty and base—Lionel Trilling went to town in similarly fashion on Robert

Briffault's *Europa in Limbo*,²⁹⁴ depicting his latest novel as vulgar, splenetic, and dangerous. "We remember," Trilling writes, "that he is trying to educate both his hero and ourselves to revolution." But as a Marxist, Briffault's vulgarity is "doubly culpable." For, in Trilling's assessment,

If there is one thing the dialectic of history teaches it is an attitude on cultural matters the very opposite of the splenetic one. But that attitude is difficult and complex, while the attitude of the spleen and vulgarity is simple and easy. And dangerous: because it is indiscriminate, irresponsible and ignorant of the humanity it seeks to control; because, rejecting all history, it believes that all good was born with itself. It wants not so much a liberated humanity as a sterilized humanity and it would gladly make a wasteland if it could call the silence peace.

Partisan Review, in 1937-1938 more than ever, just as Trilling would come to do most expressively in later years, championed a literature chock-full with "variety, curiosity, and amplitude of means."²⁹⁵

Volume IV, No. 2, January 1938

The second issue was sixty-three pages in length, consisting of two pieces of fiction, two poems, one theater review, a new section which included an art review (accompanied by three copies of the artist under review's work), four book reviews, two essays, an exchange of letters, and "Ripostes," which this time included several letters to the editor, as well.²⁹⁶ The editorial board remained fully intact, with a

²⁹⁴ Lionel Trilling, "Marxism in Limbo," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (December 1937), 70-72.

²⁹⁵ "Is Naturalism Exhausted?" *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (February 1938), 60-61.

²⁹⁶ The fiction included "Migratory Worker," by John Dos Passos; and, "Hurry, Hurry," by Eleanor Clark. The poems included "Love Lies Sleeping," by Elizabeth Bishop; and, "The Ballad of the Children of the Czar," by Delmore Schwartz. The theater review, "Theater Chronicle," by Mary McCarthy, was a review of Clifford Odets's *Golden Boy*. The art review, "Art Chronicle," as George L. K. Morris's column would be called, included a review of a large Hans Arp exhibition recently held at the Museum of Living Art at New York University; the review was accompanied by three copies of

growing list of contributors to the newly emergent *Partisan* “family.” Most important and of enduring value in this issue was the contribution from Andre Gide, “Second Thoughts on the U.S.S.R.”²⁹⁷ For that reason does Edith Kurzweil—widower of William Phillips and later, long-time co-editor with him of *Partisan Review* in the 1980s until its demise in 2003—open the definitive anthology of *PR*’s political writings with this most critical and political of essays.²⁹⁸

As discussed earlier, Gide’s essay—excerpts from his new book, *Retouches a mon Retour de l’U.R.S.S. (Second Thoughts on the U.S.S.R.)*, a follow-up of his heavily criticized *Return from the U.S.S.R.*, which expressed his disillusionment upon return from a well-publicized visit to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1936—was initially shelved by the editorial board for fear of Communist backlash and boycott from fellow-traveling intellectuals. But recognizing the importance of the piece, Gide’s position in line with the *Partisan* standpoint, and facing the inevitable anger and censure from the Communists, the essay for the first time appeared in America in the January pages of *Partisan Review*.

Arp’s work from the exhibition. The book reviews included Harry Levin’s “The Brown Book of Heinrich Heine,” a review of *Heinrich Heine: Paradox and Poet*, by Louis Untermeyer; Meyer Schapiro’s “Populist Realism,” a review of *An Artist in America*, by Thomas Benton; George L. K. Morris’s “Art in the Second Empire,” a review of *The Journal of Eugene Delacroix*, translated from the French by Walter Pach; and, Dwight Macdonald’s *The Tower Beyond Politics*, a review of *Such Counsels You Gave To Me & Other Poems*, by Robinson Jeffers. “An Exchange of Letters,” included *An Exchange* between Kenneth Burke and Sidney Hook; Kenneth Burke opened the exchange in response to Hook’s December 1937 review of his book with his letter titled “Is Mr. Hook a Socialist?”; Hook’s response was titled, “Is Mr. Burke Serious?”. The essays included “The Lawrence Myth,” by William Troy; and, “Second Thoughts on the U.S.S.R.,” by Andre Gide. “Ripostes” included “The Temptation of Dr. Williams,” “A Letter to the Editor,” “And Three More,” and “First Issue Reactions.”²⁹⁷ Andre Gide, “Second Thought on the U.S.S.R.,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1938), 21-28.

²⁹⁸ See *A Partisan Century: Political Writings from Partisan Review*, Ed. Edith Kurzweil (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Following an “Introduction” by Kurzweil, she opens the anthology with the 1937 Editorial Statement, includes the entirety of the “Ripostes” section from the inaugural 1937 issue, and then—as the first essay contribution—provides Andre Gide’s “Second Thoughts on the U.S.S.R.” So, from 1937 to 1994, the *Partisan Century* thus opens with Gide and ends with Vladimir Tismaneanu’s “Romania’s Mystical Revolutionaries.”

Reiterating his disillusionment with Communism, and responding to the critics of his earlier book, *Return from the U.S.S.R.*, Gide asked,

Do you think that the last trials in Moscow and Novosibirsk are going to make me regret having written that sentence that infuriates you: “I doubt whether in any other country today, even in Hitler’s Germany, the spirit is less free, more cramped, more fearful (terrorized), more enserfed”?

Not for a moment; Gide railed against the “definite and undeniable evils” of the Soviet Union. These included: the deportations; the profound and disproportionate poverty of the workers; reconstituted classes and class privileges; the liquidation of democracy; and, the progressive and effective liquidation of the accomplishments of 1917. And he refused to accept “the contradictions (the sophistries) of the dialectic,” in other words, to accept the “evils as provisional pauses on the road to a greater good.”

Gide’s Soviet adventures began with enthusiasm—he was “totally convinced,” prepared to admire the brave new world of Soviet Communism. But upon his arrival, technically a guest not of the government but of the Union of Soviet Writers, he was offered—“*as seductions, mind you*”—all the prerogatives he abominated in the old. Indeed, Gide noted, never before had he traveled in such ostentatious style:

If by train in a private car, otherwise in the best automobiles, always the best rooms in the best hotels, the most plentiful and select table-fare. And what a reception I got! What pains were taken! What attentions were paid me! Everywhere cheered, flattered, pampered, feted. Nothing was considered too good, too exquisite for me. I would have been graceless indeed to have repulsed these advances; I could not; and I retain a marvelous memory of them, and a lively gratitude. But these very favors continually conjured up the idea of privileges, of difference, where I thought to find equality.

Akin to Trotsky's assessment of what is happening in the Soviet Union, though from a remarkably different angle, Gide bemoaned the emergence of "the new bourgeoisie," with all the faults of our own. His conclusion went straight to the point: "The U.S.S.R. is not what we hoped it would be, what it gave promise of being, what it still tries to appear to be; it has betrayed our hopes." Like the newly (re-)formed *Partisan Review*, Gide opted for truth to the Party lies masquerading as truth, and considered his new role—the role, therefore, of like-minded critical intellectuals—to denounce the falsehoods and illusions of Communism. In his words, for which many a *Partisan* intellectual would agree: "I attach myself only to truth; if the Party rejects truth then I must reject the Party."

Meanwhile, a letter dated 20 January 1938 was en route from Leon Trotsky.²⁹⁹ Addressed again to Dwight Macdonald (but intended, of course, for the entire *PR* board), the Bolshevik firebrand wrote in frank and harsh words: "It is my general impression that the editors of *Partisan Review* are capable, educated and intelligent people but *they have nothing to say*." By this point Trotsky had gotten hold of the December 1937 issue in his current settlement in Mexican exile; or, at the least, he was made aware of its contents through his regular correspondence with his socialist, American-based comrades. Indeed, much of his letter speaks directly to their new editorial statement of policy. He saw theirs as a magazine based on "political, cultural and aesthetic *disorientation*." "Independence" and "freedom," in good materialist fashion, he regarded as "empty notions," but granted that in *Partisan* hands they

²⁹⁹ The entirety of the letter is available as "The Future of *Partisan Review*: A Letter to Dwight Macdonald," in *Art and Revolution: Writings on Literature, Politics, and Culture*, Ed. Paul N. Siegel (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), 101-103. The letter was first published in *Fourth International*, March-April 1950.

might come to represent some kind of “actual cultural value.” Nevertheless, it would then be necessary to defend them “with sword, or at least with whip, in hand.” This was why open political affiliation was so pressing. Remember the attack of the Trotskyist organ, *Socialist Appeal*, discussed earlier.³⁰⁰ As Trotsky explained,

Every new artistic or literary tendency (naturalism, symbolism, futurism, cubism, expressionism and so forth and so on) has begun with a “scandal,” breaking the old respected crockery, bruising many established authorities. This flowed not at all solely from publicity seeking (although there was no lack of this). No, these people—artists, as well as literary critics—had something to say. They had friends, they had enemies, they fought, and exactly through this they demonstrated their right to exist.

According to Trotsky, then, *Partisan Review*, engulfed in their battle for literary freedom and independence, obsessed in their drive to respectability, was on the wrong end of a losing battle.³⁰¹ Lacking the least bit of perspective, on the verge of a second world war, Trotsky criticized them for wishing to create “a small cultural monastery, guarding itself from the outside world by skepticism, agnosticism and respectability.”

But perhaps in the case of the Leon Trotsky-*Partisan Review* correspondence of 1937-1938, as with the earlier *Partisan Review*-*New Masses* feud, the two parties might well have simply been speaking past one another. For *PR* now stood seemingly for a very different notion of revolutionism. Phillips said it best: “We weren’t true revolutionaries anymore—assuming that one knew what a true revolutionary was anyway.” Briefly, William Troy’s essay, in the same January 1938 issue, titled, “The Lawrence Myth,”³⁰² speaking of D. H. Lawrence, not of *Partisan Review*,

³⁰⁰ See “Ripostes: The *New Masses* Feud Revisited” section of this chapter.

³⁰¹ Trotsky even wrote in bitter language that attacked their manhood: “You defend yourself from the Stalinists like well-behaved young ladies whom street rowdies insult. ‘Why are we attacked?’ you complain, ‘we want only one thing: to live and let others live.’ Such a policy cannot gain success.”

³⁰² William Troy, “The Lawrence Myth,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1938), 3-13.

nevertheless helps detail the basis of the new magazine's underlying and fundamentally *literary* conception of radicalism:

As a coal miner's son, as a suffering artist, and as an intelligent observer of contemporary life, he could never have been very sympathetic to the ideal of modern bourgeois democracy. All of his work is an implicit, and much of it an explicit, criticism of mass democracy in ideas, emotions, and men. He was a revolutionist, therefore, in the sense that every Bohemian artist under the bourgeois regime has been a revolutionist.

But, from early on in his life, in protest, he was never enticed by Fabian Socialism; as, neither was he later enticed by Soviet Communism. "What he objected to in communism was," according to Troy, "its failure to provide any ideal better than the one to which he had been opposed all along: 'The dead materialism of Marx socialism and soviets [*sic*] seems to me no better than what we've got.'" In fundamentally moral and humanitarian terms, Troy concludes, Lawrence's "*epos* is a damning criticism not only of our socio-economic organization but of our whole culture to its roots." *PR* aspired to the same *epos*.

Yet Trotsky hoped still to maintain ties. Something must have endeared him to *Partisan Review*. For despite "categorically" refusing participation in their proposed symposium on the theme of "What Is Alive and What Is Dead in Marxism?,"³⁰³ and railing against their editorial line in a manner that, he warned, might be interpreted as "sharp, impermissible, and 'sectarian,'" he nevertheless humbly concluded his letter in the following manner: "If . . . you do not consider my

³⁰³ Trotsky regarded the title itself to be "extremely pretentious and at the same time confused." He added: "You phrase the question about Marxism as if you were beginning history from a clean page." Among those invited were Harold Laski, Sidney Hook, Ignazio Silone, Edmund Wilson, John Strachey and Fenner Brockway—most of whom Trotsky contemptuously dismissed as "political corpses," possessed of a "complete incapacity for theoretical thinking."

‘sectarian’ tone a hindrance to a future exchange of opinions then I remain fully at your service.”

Volume IV, No. 3, February 1938

The third issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of two pieces of fiction, eleven poems, one theater review, two art reviews (accompanied by three copies of one of the artist under review’s work), three book reviews, two pieces of reportage, two essays, and “Ripostes,” which included several letters to the editor, as well.³⁰⁴

The most important piece in this issue that merits our attention is Philip Rahv’s “Two Years of Progress—From Waldo Frank to Donald Ogden Stewart.”³⁰⁵

As Philip Rahv’s first essay contribution to the new *PR*, he provides an ironically titled and standout piece attacking the supposed “two years of progress”

³⁰⁴ The fiction included “A Childhood Memory,” by Ignazio Silone; and, “Congressmen—Flowers—Clench,” by Balcomb Greene. The poems included “Dixie Doodle,” by James Agee. And, “A Little Anthology,” including the following ten poems: “Two Poems,” by Wallace Stevens, including “Loneliness in Jersey City” and “Anything Is Beautiful If You Say It Is”; “Testament from the Inheritors of the Waste Land,” by Parker Tyler; “Un Martyr,” by Byron A. Vazakas; “Those Autobiographical Blues,” by Winfield Townley Scott; “The Word is Deed,” by John Wheelwright; “Poem,” by Kenneth Patchen; “Aesthetics in Our Time,” by Harry Roskolenko; “Ode,” by Lionel Abel; “Poem,” and, by Delmore Schwartz. The theater review, Mary McCarthy’s “Versions of Shakespeare,” included contemporary American renditions of *Hamlet* and *Caesar*, by John Gielgud and Orson Welles, respectively. The art reviews, in “Art Chronicle,” by George L. K. Morris, included “The Dreams of Uday Shan-Kar” and “Miro and the Spanish Civil War”; the latter review was accompanied by three copies of Joan Miro’s paintings, all painted in Spain during the Revolution. “Cross-Country” included two pieces of reportage: the first was “D. C.—1938,” by Dwight Macdonald; the second was “Sketches in Little Steel,” by Rose M. Stein. The book reviews, in the “New Verse” section, included Delmore Schwartz’s review of *The Man With The Blue Guitar*, and *Other Stories*, by Wallace Stevens; R. P. Blackmur’s review of *Reading the Spirit*, by Richard Eberhart; and, F. O. Matthiessen’s review of *Poems*, by Louis MacNiece. The essays included “The Last Phase of Henry James,” from a larger study of Henry James, by Edmund Wilson; and, “Two Years of Progress—From Waldo Frank to Donald Ogden Stewart,” by Philip Rahv. “Ripostes” included “Is Naturalism Exhausted?,” “Politics and Partisan Review,” “Mass Criticism,” and “Letters in Brief.”

³⁰⁵ Philip Rahv, “Two Years of Progress—From Waldo Frank to Donald Ogden Stewart,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (February 1938), 22-30.

between the First American Writers Congress in 1935 and the Second American Writers Congress in 1937. Already long skeptical of the Popular Front's conservative supersession of the militancy of Third Period Communism in 1935, Rahv now voiced his open dissent on the grounds of Popular Frontist (Stalinist) betrayal in 1937, denouncing the program and politics of the League of American Writers and their attempt at a "manufactured renaissance" in the arts. So far, to the *Partisan* reader, this was familiar enough terrain; Rahv went further, however, in this time attacking the "moral degeneration" of the Communist Party. What was more, Stalinism, in his assessment, stood in the way of the intellectual's integrity, making the moral and political compromises demanded of him impossible, without at the same time betraying his self and his character. He concluded with a reassertion of Marxist revolutionary purity against Stalin's bureaucratic authoritarianism, depicting the Stalinist movement as a "collectivity of blind faith and accommodation." In its stead: "The collectivity of the Marxist movement aims to raise this tradition [the Enlightenment tradition of critical and independent judgment, of skepticism, of scientific verification] to the level of materialist consistency and conscious political direction."

To be sure, it was a critical essay that might have played a role in the courting of Leon Trotsky had he been readily available to read it. Regardless, the magazine was monthly becoming more overtly political—at least on the negative theoretical grounds of its staunch anti-Stalinism. Therefore, in a letter dated 21 February 1938, Philip Rahv, writing on behalf of *Partisan Review* for the first time in their Trotsky correspondence, addressed the Old Man in a manner "more extensive, more detailed,

and more serious” than any of Macdonald’s previous letters had ever been.³⁰⁶ Trotsky’s latest—admittedly comradely rebuke—scolding *Partisan Review* for its desire to retreat to the comforts of “a small cultural monastery” just might have been enough for the founding co-editor, whom already had considered Trotsky’s initial response to be “ridiculous.” But again, they were not dealing here with just anyone, they were dealing with the Past-President of the Petrograd Soviet and the founder and commander of the Red Army under Civil War, second only to V. I. Lenin. Rahv, nevertheless, was determined to defend his baby.

Yet initially, and surprisingly, Rahv conceded much in Trotsky’s case: “Subject to the tremendous pressure of the American environment towards disorientation and compromise,” Rahv insisted it was “inevitable” that the new magazine should “grope for direction, feel its way towards possible allies, incline to deal somewhat gingerly and experimentally with issues that ideally require a bold and positive approach, and lastly—that . . . it should in some respects have leaned over backward to appear sane, balanced, and (alas!) respectable.” For all its flaws, however, *Partisan Review* was still, according to Rahv—seemingly boastful and written as a proud parent—the “first anti-Stalinist left literary journal in the world.” As an “unprecedented” project in the history of literary and cultural radicalism, set to “the problem of finding the precise relation between the political and the imaginative, the problem of discovering the kind of editorial modulation that will do damage to

³⁰⁶ Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 130. Cooney’s account and analysis of the letter dated 21 February 1938, from which my assessment is based, is provided in pgs. 130-133. Harvey Teres’s account and analysis of the same letter, curiously dated on 1 March 1938, upon which I also rely, is in *Renewing the Left*, 67-69. For what it’s worth, as I explain on pg. 14 (footnote 42), Cooney’s references the Macdonald Papers for details on the Correspondence; whereas, Teres references the Trotsky Archive. Without seeing both of the respective archives at Yale and Harvard, there is no way for me to reasonably date the letter—not that the matter of a week difference matters a great deal, if at all.

neither,”³⁰⁷ Rahv refused to fall back on dogmatic and ideological systems of thought—be they Communist, Fascist, Liberal-Democratic, and/or Trotskyist. In his words, at this juncture, “a correct political line is altogether insufficient”

What was needed now more than ever was a “re-valuation” of Marxist principles. Turning next to a defense of his proposed symposium on the theme of “What Is Alive and What Is Dead in Marxism?,” of which Trotsky “categorically” refused participation, Rahv explained: “Unfortunately, to many people the defeat of the working classes in Russia and Western Europe together with the moral abyss revealed by the Moscow trials are tantamount to a *theoretical* refutation of the basic principles of Marxism. Surely this melancholy fact will not be abolished by the refusal of Marxists to take it into account.” Still affirming *PR*’s belief in the “basic principles,” they refused to force persuasion with “the pride of knowledge.” Remember, as expressed in their 1937 Editorial Statement, “Marxism in culture . . . [or, in other words, theoretical Marxism, was] first of all an instrument of analysis and evaluation.” If it was to prevail over other disciplines then it must do so through the apparently now inviolate “medium of democratic controversy.”

Rahv finally closed his letter by promising in the forthcoming April issue a long editorial reorienting the magazine, “to stiffen its ideological spine.” Now at a fateful and defining turning point in its early history, the task remained of giving the magazine a “firm direction,” of “filling the notions of independence and freedom with

³⁰⁷ See Phillips and Rahv’s essay, “In Retrospect,” for further iteration on this theme: “The problem of the relation between literature and politics is not to be approached abstractly; there are no iron-clad laws regulating this relation; and any attempt to reduce it either to an aesthetic or to a sociological formula is doomed to scholasticism. It is a problem which, as editors, we could meet only from issue to issue as it were, depending on the political situation and on the literary state of mind at any given time.” (684).

an aggressive radical content.” What must have been music to Trotsky’s ears (not to mention his ego), Rahv explained that on these grounds the Old Man’s contributing role would be pivotal.

Volume IV, No. 4, March 1938

The fourth issue was sixty-three pages in length, consisting of one piece of fiction, one poem, five book reviews, two essays, “Ripostes,” which included “Correspondence,” and, included in the “Art Chronicle” section, some personal letters to American artists recently exhibiting in New York.³⁰⁸ The editorial board endured its first shake-up, albeit minor: dropped from the list was Mary McCarthy, with all others remaining aboard.³⁰⁹ Despite no contribution from her in the March 1938 issue,

³⁰⁸ The fiction included “In Prison,” by Elizabeth Bishop. The poems included “Speech from a Forthcoming Play,” by E. E. Cummings. The “Art Chronicle” “Some Personal Letters to American Artists Recently Exhibiting in New York,” included letters from George L. K. Morris to the following American artists: the American Abstract Artists (group); Charles Demuth; Georgia O’Keeffe; and, Peter Blume. The book reviews included Meyer Schapiro’s “Architect’s Utopia,” a review of *Architecture and Modern Life*, by Baker Brownell and Frank Lloyd Wright; Philip Rahv’s “Hard History,” a review of *Life Along the Passaic River*, by William Carlos Williams; James Burnham’s “Capitalism, American Style,” a review of *America’s Sixty Families* and *The Folklore of Capitalism*, by Ferdinand Lundberg and Thurman W. Arnold, respectively; John Wheelwright’s “U. S. 1,” a review of *U.S. 1*, by Muriel Rukeyser; and, Eleanor Clark’s “No More Swans,” a review of *A Southern Harvest*, by Robert Penn Warren. The essays included “The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers,” by William Phillips; and, “Andre Malraux,” by F. W. Dupee. “Ripostes” included “A Note on the New Masses,” by Herbert Solow; and, “Correspondence,” including respective letters to the editors by Katherine Anne Porter and Scott Nearing.

³⁰⁹ Considering that initially McCarthy was only accepted into the group unwittingly—“Unwittingly, as an editor,” she recalled, “because I had a minute ‘name’ and was the girlfriend of one of the ‘boys,’ who had issued a ukase on my behalf”—it is no surprise that once her relationship with Rahv went up in fire, after she left Rahv for Edmund Wilson, that she too would take leave of the magazine. David Laskin recounts the story of McCarthy’s departure, a departure intimately connected with *PR*’s courting of Edmund Wilson. Laskin writes, “Sometime during the autumn of 1937, [the *PR* boys] invited Wilson to lunch in Union Square, bringing McCarthy along as bait (she remembers wearing her ‘best clothes—a black silk dress with tiers of fagoting and, hung from my neck, a long, large silver fox fur’). . . . So McCarthy, Rahv, Fred Dupee, and Dwight Macdonald took Wilson to lunch. And Wilson promised to send along something for the new magazine. But before he did, he had McCarthy out to dinner and then, unknown to Rahv, into his bed.” (Laskin, *Partisans*, 48-49). Shortly thereafter, on 10 February 1938, McCarthy and Wilson were married, which explains her conspicuous absence from the

McCarthy's column, "Theater Chronicle," reemerged in the following April 1938 issue, becoming a regular staple in the magazine for the next two decades. More contributed essays and reviews would span *PR*'s history until her death in 1989, until, to be sure, McCarthy herself became just another one of the "boys." The editorial board now included F. W. Dupee, Dwight Macdonald, George L. K. Morris, William Phillips, and Philip Rahv. Standout among this issue is the first essay contributed by William Phillips to the new *PR*, "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers."³¹⁰

Phillips essay is divided into the following four sections: The Myth; The Heirs; The Fathers; and, The Method. "The Myth" refers to the notion, spread and circulated by all the devices of Communist propaganda, that there exists a "ready-made set of esthetic principles, fashioned by the hand of Marx himself, and known as 'Marxist criticism.'" Phillips dates this egregious distortion as far back even to the days of Marx and Engels, when they themselves had to defend their ideas against its manipulation by so-called "disciples." Phillips cites Marx's well-known line, in reference to the French "Marxists," to whom the materialist conception of history became a substitute for the actual study of history: "All I know is that I am not a Marxist." Similarly, he cites Engels, writing in 1890 that he could not "exempt many of the more recent Marxists . . . for the most wonderful rubbish has been produced from this quarter too." It seems that pretenders—and vulgarizers—in the Marxist trade have a long history, indeed. Fast forward several generations, and in 1938, Phillips sees "The Heirs" of this phony tradition most assuredly writing in the pages

March 1938 issue. Ch. 3 of *Partisans*, titled "Seven Years of Hell," 69-98, details their tumultuous marriage that produced one son, Reuel Wilson. (The earlier quotation is cited in the previous chapter, in a brief biographical portrait of McCarthy in the "Renewal" section.)

³¹⁰ William Phillips, "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (March 1938), 11-21.

of the *New Masses*. So Phillips proceeds to attack the Mike Golds and Granville Hickes of the Communist netherworld.

Under the hypnosis of Third Period Communism, up to about 1935 when Popular Front tactics changed the playing terms of the game, all art and culture became woefully subject to political pressure—all art, in short, became propagandized. Claiming to be the legitimate heirs “of every last nuance of Marx,” in the very name of Marxist orthodoxy, the writers of *New Masses* persuasion sponsored the two doctrines: “art is a weapon” and “build a proletarian literature.” As was to be expected, “the practice was even more absurd than the theory.” In his return to what was a familiar topic in the pages of the old *Partisan Review*—namely, to the issue of crude proletarian literature—Phillips no longer refers to it as a function of “infantile leftism,” of the immaturities of a zealous movement. This time, rather, he sees Stalinism in the arts as “obviously inspired by the political line and the factional needs of the Communist Party.” In this capacity, politics subsuming and swallowing the arts, entire, is a natural function of the Communist literary line, not a matter of its exception. The shift to the Popular Front, marking the abandonment, in Phillips’s assessment, of revolutionary politics, thus “relegated its work-shirt theories of art to the archives of history.” And the “new esthetic position, though it was a complete reversal of the old one, was likewise advanced as Marxist criticism.” Concluding the section, Phillips claims the Communist version of orthodox Marxist criticism is in practice “the pseudonym of orthodoxy. And orthodoxy,” he adds, “to those tender-minded writers who always adapt themselves to the party line, is the passport to Utopia.”

As for “The Fathers,” Marx and Engels were not literary critics—never once, according to Phillips, did they “either state or imply that art is but a class weapon, nor did they sponsor a proletarian art to educate the workers in the theory and tactics of communism.” Actually, the truth was quite to the contrary. You might recall our previous discussion of John Strachey’s speech at The First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, held in Paris, June 21-25, 1935³¹¹ The British Marxist, Strachey, spoke of “Marxism and the Heritage of Culture.” Foremost for our purposes, he noted that Marx was “a very considerable Shakespeare scholar,” his work often amply studded with Shakespearian quotations. And, of course, there was Marx’s “worship” of Balzac. Towards the end of his speech, Strachey remarks that Marx “did not care a fig for Balzac’s political views because, in spite of them Balzac, better than anyone else, revealed and exposed the realities of nineteenth century life in capitalist France.” Anyone who failed to appreciate Balzac was therefore not worthy of their serious consideration. As Phillips and Rahv might have castigated such a man as a literary, infantile leftist, Marx and Engels “quite literally refused to have anything to do with a man because he failed to appreciate Balzac’s *Pere Goriot*.” Literature, in their assessment, had its purpose even—and perhaps especially—in the absence of political dictate and directive.

More critically, however, Marx and Engels concerned themselves with the base of society, the sub-structural core of economics and capital that they saw as governing the super-structural whole of literature and philosophy, the forms of state, law and religion. The same goes for Lenin, another seeming member of “The

³¹¹ See this discussion in “The Popular Front, and The League of American Writers” section in Ch. 3. Specifically, you will find it in Vol., No. 9, October-November 1935.

Fathers.” “Who, then,” asks Phillips, “were the trail-blazers of Marxist criticism?” His answer provides three figures commonly cited—Stalin, Trotsky, and Plechanov—for which we quickly learn, however, that he finds them all to be rather inadequate, a mere clearing of the way before we can “consider even the possibilities of Marxist criticism.” The final section, “The Method,” strikes suddenly at a resolution, providing a new development in the *Partisan* mentality.

Phillips took the position that, in literature, at least, Marxism is “a *method*,” an open, experimental system, therefore, rather than a closed system or a strict, rigid formula “for declaring that *all* ideas inspired by other ways of thinking are false.” Again, here was a *Partisan* reinterpretation of Marxism as great inheritor of the Enlightenment tradition of critical and independent judgment, of skepticism, and of scientific verification. In this light, therefore, “It would be more fruitful . . . to speak of *Marxist criticisms* in the plural, or of *ventures* in Marxist criticism.” This rearticulated theoretical position thus allowed Phillips to put Edmund Wilson’s literary radicalism, despite all efforts to the contrary—recently seen in the opening issue of the new *PR* with his essay on “Flaubert’s Politics,” a critical and imaginative essay turning away from Marxist socio-political insight and towards Flaubert’s alternate model of moral and artistic social criticism—into the same category of literary Marxism to which the revamped revolutionary magazine so aspired.

What then was fundamental to Phillips’s evident marriage of Marxist political philosophy come radical literary theory? In Phillips’s words, of which I quote at length,

To begin with, Marxism is a materialist view of society which regards ideas and values as historical, on the premise that the way men think

and feel is a result of the way they live. And Marxism seeks to alter the way men think and feel by altering the way they live. In this sense, the Marxist philosophy is a radical criticism of society, of its values and the conditions which give birth to and sustain them. But these are, after all, the primary tasks of literary criticism: to analyze and to judge literature; and it is at this point that Marxism is relevant, for it supplies a method not only for finding the social origins of values but also for determining their contemporary significance.

Marxist historical-materialism, therefore, the strong emphasis that social context matters and, what was more, is perhaps fundamental—this was the component of Marxism that endured in the *Partisan* mind of William Phillips. But as regards literature, properly speaking, returning to “the fathers” for insight was misplaced, since, as mentioned, they were not literary critics. As Phillips’s first essay already for the old *Partisan Review* had articulated in “The Anatomy of Liberalism,” published in the inaugural February-March 1934 issue, herein lay the *raison d’être* of the *Review*.³¹² Phillips was representative of the cultural vanguard—emphatic of the central role of critic as guide to radical literary life. Only now, the expanse of *PR*’s grasp was seemingly even greater.

No longer concerned with the creation of a mature proletarian literature, in March 1938 Phillips’s magazine stood forth as protector of cultural values and artistic integrity in a time of communist totalitarianism, fascist barbarism, and the coming onslaught of yet another world war. The writer’s first step, brought to light if necessary by the critic, was to “regard literature primarily as a body of perceptions, ideas, feelings and values” Then, a dynamic and robust Marxist-based literary criticism could help in the judgment of those very same values. “For once criticism enters into the swim of social life,” Phillips concludes, “once it takes up the cudgels

³¹² See “The Reed Club Days” section in Ch. 3. More specifically, Vol. 1, No. 1, February-March 1934.

against all modes of academicism which work to freeze the present within itself—when it seeks to affirm, in its own way, the values which literature rescues from society—criticism should share in the imaginative possibilities which literature has always enjoyed.” In Phillips’s assessment, then, the lines between writer and critic are blurred. While at the surface of his argument critics “affirm” the values that writers “rescue” from society, both equally share in the promise of the “imaginative possibilities” of which they encompass.

Meanwhile, Trotsky was coming around to the *Partisan* position—Rahv’s lengthy February letter seems to have convinced the dubious Bolshevik of the importance of their project. Nevertheless, according to Isaac Deutscher, in a letter dated 21 March 1938, Trotsky “reproached the editors with reacting too feebly against the Moscow trials and attempting to remain on friendly terms with the *New Masses*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic*, which either defended the trials or were vague about them.”³¹³ Not surprisingly, Trotsky still insisted on a clearer and sharper *political* line. To Rahv he wrote, “Certain measures are necessary for a struggle against incorrect theory, and others for fighting a cholera epidemic. Stalin is incomparably nearer to cholera than to a false theory. The struggle must be intense, truculent, merciless. An element of ‘fanaticism’ . . . is [thus] salutary.”³¹⁴ But *Partisan Review* was moving away from the extremist political game. Its new literary politics remained radical, to be sure, but it was at present also decisively democratic. This might explain their explicit liking to another couple of Trotsky’s suggestions: i.e., that they should adopt a policy of “critical eclecticism” with regard to literary

³¹³ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 431.

³¹⁴ Cited by Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 431.

schools and methods; and that they should shift their attention from former Marxists to the youth within the overall strategy of addressing the intellectuals for the time being rather than the workers.³¹⁵ Both of which, Trotsky reasoned, will ultimately “fructify the workers’ movement.” Needless to say, *PR* was already moving in this direction independent of any admonition from the Old Man.

Volume IV, No. 5, April 1938

The fifth issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of one piece of fiction, one poem, one theater review, one operatic review, one interview with an artist (accompanied by two copies of the artist’s paintings), three essays, and “Ripostes.”³¹⁶

The editorial board remained the same.

In this issue, Rahv delivered on his promise to Trotsky to issue a long editorial from the editors reorienting the magazine, so to speak, “to stiffen its ideological spine.” As with the third June-July 1934 issue of the magazine, the editorial statement, “Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature,” stood out as the most important piece of the issue, if not of the entire early history of *PR*, for its

³¹⁵ Teres, *Renewing the Left*, 69.

³¹⁶ The fiction included “Drum-Truck Came,” by E. S. Baley. The poems included “Two Poems,” comprised of “Pastoral” and “Ballad,” by D. S. Savage. The theater review, in the “Theater Chronicle” section, titled “Class Angles and Classless Curves,” by Mary McCarthy, included reviews of *Pins and Needles*, a performance at Labor Stage sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union; Marc Blitzstein’s *The Cradle Will Rock*; and, Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*. The operatic review, “*Elektra* and Strauss at the Metropolitan,” in a new section titled “Music Chronicle,” by George L. K. Morris, was a review of Richard Strauss’s *Elektra*, performed the past winter at the Metropolitan Opera of New York, also making mention of two of Strauss’s other operas then too performed, namely, *Salome* and *Rosenkavalier*. The essays included “Trials of the Mind,” by Philip Rahv; “Some Social Uses and Abuses of Semantics,” by Sidney Hook; and, “The America of John Does Passos,” by Lionel Trilling. “Ripostes” included “*Time*’s Fiftieth,” by Dwight Macdonald; and, “Substitution, at Left Tackle: Hemingway for Does Passos,” by Herbert Solow.

effective supplanting of the magazine's opening editorial.³¹⁷ But Rahv's "Trials of the Mind,"³¹⁸ published in this April 1938 issue, while in no way a new editorial statement to supplant the mature and deliberate December 1937 editorial—to be sure, it is an essay written by Rahv's hand, alone—it undoubtedly established a "benchmark" in the evolution of *Partisan Review*.³¹⁹ For with Rahv's essay, the intellectual politics of the recast revolutionary magazine, including its fundamentally negative program of rabid anti-Stalinism and its positive program articulating its unique and idiosyncratic moral and literary approach to politics, is there for the taking with little to no minced words.

Rahv begins the essay in a seeming state of despair and fear for what is to come: "Our days are ceasing to be. We are beginning to live from hour to hour, awaiting the change of headlines. History has seized time in a brutal embrace. We dread the Apocalypse." He recites some ominous newspaper headlines from Nazi Germany—AUSTRIANS KNEEL BEFORE HITLER; NAZIS FLOG THE LABORERES INTO LINE—and then follows through with a readied update on the state of Stalinist Russia: "And in Moscow the State continues to massacre the firstborn of October." In so doing, Rahv, in path-breaking fashion, weds Hitler to Stalin, both now theorized as twin-heads of the same totalitarian monster, standing opposed to the enlightenment tradition of "science and humanism," as best fulfilled and sustained by the modern tradition of Marx. "But now," worries Rahv, "amidst all these ferocious surprises, who has the strength to re-affirm his beliefs, to transcend the feeling that he had been duped?" Indeed, this fear-ridden sentiment was precisely

³¹⁷ See "The Reed Club Days" section in Ch. 3. More specifically, Vol. 1, No. 3, June-July 1934. .

³¹⁸ Philip Rahv, "Trials of the Mind," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 5 (April 1938), 3-11.

³¹⁹ Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 136.

what Trotsky railed against, fearing, himself, that doubt in the veracity and hopefulness of Marxism would soon lead to total disillusion and despair. Reaction, then, was sure to follow.

Stalin, however, in good Trotskyist fashion, stands out as the chief cause of the revolution's betrayal. As head of a historically unprecedented new exploitative society, under the thumb of a bureaucratic caste, Stalin's authority and control is monolithic. The Soviet "*organization*," or, rather, the Soviet system, concentrating within itself both State and Party, exhausts the totality of social and property relations. In Rahv's words, "Everything revolves around the organization, it dominates every aspect of life, it is society's prose as well as its poetry." Facing the reality of Stalinist counter-revolution, the fact of the Moscow trials thus brought with it, for Rahv, an entire recalibration of precisely what it meant to be a radically engaged and morally committed intellectual, as the trials represented not just betrayal, but the so-called "moral collapse of Bolshevism," as well.

In clear trepidation that read palpably, he wrote of the trials and of their larger import: "But it is not only the old Bolsheviks who are on trial—we too, all of us, are in the prisoner's dock. These are trials of the mind and of the human spirit. Their meaning encompass the age." The trials—and the response of critical intellect to them—therefore became symbolic markers of the "supreme tests" to which intellectuals must be placed. "War and revolution," wrote Rahv, "are the most crucial events in the history of humanity; they are the supreme tests of character, of political integrity, of moral fortitude. . . . [It] is by subjecting the behavior of the intellectuals to these supreme tests that we can best judge not only their politics, but their

morality—in fact their culture itself.” Needless to say, the response of Communist sympathizers and those apologists for Stalin, like the *New Masses* men and their ilk, Rahv accused of moral collapse, treason and betrayal. But he also came down harshly on the liberal weeklies, like *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, precisely the magazines that Trotsky, in his March letter still en route to Rahv, insisted on a more forceful opposition. Rahv’s essay thus attacked liberal intellectuals, so-called “progressive” anti-fascist intellectuals, and Popular Frontist intellectuals as betraying the intellectual’s vocation, committing, in Julien Benda’s language, “treason.”

In a hopeless world, with dark days ahead, Rahv called on all critical intellectuals to seek the truths within themselves—above all, to be true to themselves as intellectuals. As Rahv defined “intellectuals,” they are a “special grouping within the middle class, as much infected with its unrest and ambition as with its fright and phantasies.” This implied that when the workers were beaten, as they evidently appeared beaten in 1938, intellectuals would “veer back to their old positions.” No longer seeking alignment with the revolutionary working class, radical intellectuals according to Rahv now found solace in the hands of Stalin, Stalinism providing “both the rationalizations and a portion of the profits.” And in this capacity they have committed treason, betraying the intellectuals’ calling as “the [spiritual] guardians of values.” Culture being their “only real property,” the defense of culture must therefore become the intellectuals’ “official program.” Outright political affiliation, as stated in the December 1937 editorial, would compromise this intellectual line. In Rahv’s concluding remarks, he states, “In this period one cannot accept degrading

techniques and procedures in politics without degrading one's own intellectual discipline, without impairing its worth." Thus explains the *Partisan Review*.

Another essay in this issue, Lionel Trilling's "The America of John Dos Passos"³²⁰ also goes to the root of precisely what *PR*'s new literary political radicalism was to mean. In his critical review essay of John Dos Passos's most recent novel, *U. S. A.*, Trilling articulates the moral approach to politics that would become a staple of his own thinking, as well as *PR*'s. Furthermore, through Dos Passos, Trilling provides a vision of modern literature as moral and political educator of men, and embraces a disillusioned state of despair as superior to the dominant state of liberal and communist false hope and illusion.

The point of departure for Trilling is Malcolm Cowley's and T. K. Whipple's respectively able but flawed and misunderstood reviews of Dos Passos's *U. S. A.* In both Whipple's and Cowley's assessment, the emotional despair in which *U. S. A.* issues is "negative to the point of being politically harmful." To their criticism, Trilling explains,

There are many kinds of despair and what is really important is what goes along with the general emotion denoted by the word. Despair with its wits about it is very different from despair that is stupid; despair that is an abandonment of illusion is very different from despair which generates tender new cynicisms. The "heartbreak" of *Heartbreak House*, for example, is the beginning of a new courage and I can think of no more useful political job for the literary man today than, by the representation of despair, to cauterize the exposed soft tissue of too-easy hope.

The reviewer's mistake, according to Trilling, was to assert that "the despair of a literary work must inevitably engender despair in the reader" when it well might

³²⁰ Lionel Trilling, "The America of John Dos Passos," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 5 (April 1938), 26-32.

serve, instead, as something akin to “catharsis” of already existing despair, as Aristotle once taught us. The catharsis that Trilling had in mind—wrought through the vehicle of a literary despair “with its wits about”—would usher in a reinvigoration of the radical and *liberal* spirit.

Among the *Partisan* intellectuals in 1938, Trilling was unique in seeing the case for a reinvigorated radical temper as ultimately lying on liberal rather than socialist lines.³²¹ When most in the *Partisan* crowd were therefore championing Leon Trotsky, Trilling looked instead to the moral and ethical humanism of John Dewey. Where both camps converged, however, was in the express turning from politics proper to literature and art. As Edmund Wilson’s essay, “Flaubert’s Politics,” discussed earlier in this chapter shows, they moved in major respects away from Marx and in the direction of Flaubert, seeing the great figures of modern literature as political educators of the utmost quality—indeed teaching lessons in democratic life all but hidden to the founder of modern socialism. Trilling’s essay in April 1938 has us similarly turning away from Marx and in the direction of John Dos Passos, seeing the American author as a definite embodiment of “the cultural tradition of the intellectual Left,” but operating as a “conscious corrective” of that same tradition from which he stems. As Trilling explains, Dos Passos’s most important modification of the Leftist tradition was in placing primary importance upon the individual aspects

³²¹ See Michael Kimmage’s recent and impressive 2009 work on Lionel Trilling and Whittaker Chambers, *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers, and the Lessons of Anti-Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). Specifically, on the matter of Trilling’s “First Steps in an Anti-Stalinist World,” on his Kronstadt and the creative energies unleashed by his liberal anti-communism, see Ch. 4, 109-139. Kimmage writes: “It was telling . . . that Trilling’s term of choice as an anti-communist was *liberalism* and not the Left. . . . High art did not need the shield of socialism, in Trilling’s view; it needed artists courageous enough to transcend the pieties of the Left and not just the vulgarities of the Popular Front. The Left had to remake itself and to remake itself along liberal, not socialist, lines.”

of life as distinguished from its collective aspects. Indeed, writes Trilling, “he is almost alone of the novelists of the Left (Silone is the only other one that comes to mind) in saying that the creeds and idealisms of the Left may bring corruption quite as well as the greeds and cynicisms of the established order.”

Thus, opposed to orthodox party-line considerations of “solidarity, discipline and expedience,” leaving otherwise moral and ethical considerations to the ultimate judgment of history, Trilling offers a politics based on character, personal judgment, and moral autonomy. In agreement with Dos Passos, he posits “the barometer of social breakdown” as one based not on material suffering through “economic deprivation,” but always on “moral degeneration through moral choice.” As with Rahv’s account of the Moscow trials—trials of the mind and spirit whose meaning encompassed the age, trials that became the supreme tests of human character, culture, integrity, and moral fortitude—Trilling explains Dos Passos’s brilliance as a writer in seeing objective social conditions as supplying opportunities (or tests) for “personal moral action.” His is therefore a character-based morality looking less to the utility of an action than to the quality of the person performing it. It is a Deweyan moral assumption fit for the complexities of the 1930s, a period marked by its “intense self-consciousness and its uncertain moral codes,” a period of extreme social flux for which reference to personal quality and character do better than ethical consideration of the rightness or wrongness of an indeterminate end. In such uncertain times, Trilling concludes his essay by offering the “modern novel, with its devices for investigating the quality of character, [as] the aesthetic form almost specifically called forth to exercise this modern way of judgment.” At greater length,

The novelist goes where the law cannot go; he tells the truth where the formulations of even the subtlest ethical theorist cannot. He turns the moral values inside out to question the worth of the deed by looking not at its actual outcome but at its tone and style. He is subversive of dominant morality and under his influence we learn to praise what dominant morality condemns; he reminds us that benevolence may be aggression, that the highest idealism may corrupt. Finally, he gives us the models of the examples by which, half consciously, we make our own moral selves.

Volume IV, No. 6, May 1938

The sixth issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of two pieces of fiction, one poem, one theater review, seven book reviews, and two essays.³²² The most important, enduring and theoretically rich of those two essay contributions was William Phillips's "Thomas Mann: Humanism in Exile."³²³ Phillips's essay continued a line of his thinking recently articulated in his March 1938 essay, "The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers," but indeed stretched even further back to September-October 1934, to "Three Generations." In "Three Generations," Phillips, still then writing under the pseudonym, Wallace Phelps, set the Marxian dialectic to work in assessing

³²² The fiction included "The Statues," by Delmore Schwartz; and, "Asleep a King," by Eleanor Clark. The poem was "Marriage and Manners in Manors," by Jackson Mathews. The theater review, in the "Theater Chronicle" section, titled "The Federal Theater Settles Down," by Mary McCarthy, included review of E. P. Conkle's *Prologue to Glory* and William Du Bois' *Haiti*. The book reviews included F. W. Dupee's "Edmund Wilson's Criticism," a review of *The Triple Thinkers: Ten Essays on Literature*, by Edmund Wilson; Eliseo Vivas's "The Dialectic According to Levy," a review of *A Philosophy for a Modern Man*, by H. Levy Alfred; Harry Levin's "Pompes Funebres de Troisieme Classe," a review of *Four French Novelists*, by George Lemaitre; James T. Farrell's "Lynch Patterns," a review of *Uncle Tom's Children*, by Richard Wright; "Two Views of Cummings," which included respective reviews by Philip Horton and Sherry Mangan of *Collected Poems*, by E. E. Cummings; and, Anita Brenner's "Odyssey in a Circle," a review of *Journey Between Wars: Odyssey of a Novelist*, by John Dos Passos. The essays included "Thomas Mann: Humanism in Exile," by William Phillips; and, "Kafka: A Father and Son," excerpts from the opening chapter of Max Brod's biographical study, entitled *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie*.

³²³ William Phillips. "Thomas Mann: Humanism in Exile," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 6 (May 1938), 3-10.

the Dreiser generation, the so-called “lost generation,” and the proletarian generation of writers just recently turned left in the 30s, coming to identify with the proletarian generation but seeing the road to literary maturity running through the literary vanguard that was *Partisan Review*. The trick, as he then expressed it, was not outright rejection of the past, but its critical assimilation—for only the critical assimilation of the literary heritage of the twenties by class-conscious revolutionary writers would result in the *higher synthesis* promised by proletarian art.

Fast-forward a few years and in March 1938 we find Phillips less concerned with the formation of a mature proletarian art form and more concerned with the role of *PR* as protector of cultural values and artistic integrity in a time of communist totalitarianism, fascist barbarism, slated for the coming onslaught of yet another world war. As expressed in “The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers,” a dynamic and robust Marxist-based literary criticism could help in the judgment, affirmation and rescuing of society’s central values. But it must do so on the basis of historical-materialism, emphasizing the importance of structural foundations in the moral and aesthetic degeneration of art, culture and society. Trotsky evidently was successfully laying his marks, to the point that by May 1938, Phillips would attack Thomas Mann’s lofty “humanism in exile” for its ignorance of, and indifference to, the historical sources of the intellectuals’ plight and for his failure to see therein the necessity of a fundamentally political—that is, a revolutionary and Marxist—solution to humanity’s woes.

But Phillips begins his essay by giving all due respect and admiration to Mann—one among the few liberal antifascists raising his voice in protest against the

growing “dictatorship of the lie.” Beyond a general antifascism, though, Phillips sees Mann as a partisan of no political party or program. Mann’s program is an intellectual program: *measure* and *value* are its cardinal principles. Railing against the “new barbarism,” against the “infamous pragmatism”—against surging totalitarianism(s)—Mann pits the “artist, the archetype of the European man, the carrier of the highest traditions and achievements of European civilization.” To this “artist” Mann also attributes the best of the humanist and Christian tradition, seeing artist, humanist, and Christian as one, each independently and taken together as contributing to our “ideals of truth, moral discipline, and creativity.”

Yet Mann’s program is incomplete. “As compared with most of the incitements to action,” writes Phillips, “the program of Thomas Mann is static in its nobility.” Furthermore: “It seeks to restore to the European mind those qualities which made possible its creative glories, which made possible the selection, out of the free exchange of the most diverse intelligences, its permanent treasures.” Again, these qualities are *measure* and *value*. But how can we restore *measure* and *value*? Mann’s “watchful” and “faithful” conscience will not reinvigorate a model humanity, let alone ward off despair. Literary radicalism, then, in the absence of scientific socialism, thus represents the “agony of the individual conscience—one more symptom of the tragic state of our world.” Thomas Mann was therefore moving in the right direction, but had forgotten something crucial that William Phillips and the new *PR* were all too ready to point out. This was the vital role and function of the intellectual in a society on the precipice of barbarism: “to safeguard the dreams and

discoveries of science and art, and to champion some political movement insofar as it fulfills the requirements of an intellectual ideal.”³²⁴

Volume V, No. 1, June 1938

The seventh issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of one piece of fiction, three poems, one theater review, one magazine review, six book reviews, one essay, selected translations of Rosa Luxemburg’s “Letters from Prison,” a “Newsreel” section on “The Death of Luxemburg, and closed with a few brief letters to the editor.³²⁵ Very telling, indeed, were these few “Letters in Brief”³²⁶ addressed to the editors of *Partisan Review*.

³²⁴ Phillips’s essay on “Thomas Mann” triggered a debate in *PR*’s pages that lasted nearly a year and a half. In the Fall 1938 issue, the editors remarked that, “It should hardly be necessary to state that we consider Thomas Mann one of the three or four great figures in modern letters.” The author’s conception of the role, function, and responsibilities of the intellectual was therefore cause for critical inquiry and analysis. All told, the discussion amassed five essays by four contributors, plus two respective comments and replies, in five separate issues starting in May 1938 and ending in Winter 1939. The essays were the following: “Thomas Mann: Humanism in Exile,” by William Phillips (May 1938); “Thomas Mann: Myth and Reason,” by William Troy (June 1938); “Thomas Mann: Myth and Reason” (Part II), by William Troy (July 1938); “William Troy’s Myths,” by James Burnham (August-September 1938); and, “Myth and History,” by Harold Rosenberg. William Troy replied to Burnham’s essay with “A Further Note on Myth” (Fall 1938); and, the editorial board, as mentioned, commented in “This Quarter,” in a section titled, “Reflections on a Non-Political Man” (Fall 1938).

³²⁵ The fiction included “Karl Marx: A Prolet-Play,” by Edmund Wilson. The poems included within, and by, “Two English Poets,” comprised “Country Week-End” and “Musical Box Poem,” by Julian Symons; and, “The Autumn World,” by D. S. Savage. The theater review, in the “Theater Chronicle” section, titled “New Sets for the Old House,” by Mary McCarthy, was a review of Orson Welles’s production of George Bernard Shaw’s *Heartbreak House*, with reference and comparison to Anton Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull*. The magazine review, in the “Magazine Section,” titled “British Periodicals,” by F. W. Dupee, included reviews of *Criterion* and *New Verse*, with reference and comparison made to *The New Statesmen*, *Colosseum*, *Left Review*. The book reviews included James Burnham’s “Criticism and Pseudo-Criticism,” a review of *Literary Opinion in American: A Book of Modern Critical Essays*, edited by Morton Dauwen Zabel; Helen Neville’s “The Sound and the Fury,” a review of *The Unvanquished*, by William Faulkner; Louis M. Hacker’s “Business and Power,” a review of *A History of the Business Man*; Arthur Mizener’s “The Truest Poetrie,” a review of *English Pastoral Poetry*, by William Empson; Tom Prideaux’s “Verse and Prose: 1937,” a review of *New Directions, 1937*, edited by James Laughlin IV; and, Daniel James’s “The 3 Mistrs Harrison,” a review of *Meet Me on the Barricades*, by Charles Yale Harrison. The essay was “Thomas Mann: Myth and Reason,” by William

Opening the section with respective letters from D. S. Savage and Julian Symons, two British poets who had since its renewal contributed to the magazine, it is evident that *PR* was making noise among artists and intellectuals, internationally, across the Atlantic. Savage relates that the magazine is openly being discussed in London among several writers, “who think we ought to have as good a journal over here.” While they do have a “very silly paper” of perhaps similar interest, the *Left Review*, it badly stands to gain from “such a corrective as *Partisan Review* would supply.” Symons chimed in as well, noting that there are very few papers today that have “so clear and integrated a point of view, whose Editors know so well what they’re at.” Sydney Justin Harris, Chicago-based editor of *The Beacon*, commented specifically on Rahv’s recent essay, “Trials of the Mind,” which effectively served as yet another renewal—or clarification—of *PR*’s editorial line. He admitted that the magazine is doing a “splendid job of cleaning house on the left,” but that he can see “no hope . . . from the Trotskyites or other anemic splinters which have no mass base.” Harris’s was a legitimate and perhaps troubling concern, but *PR* was set in its democratic direction. Nevertheless, he closed his letter with all due admiration and comradely support: “you’ll land either in a fascist or in a communist concentration camp. And I’ll probably meet you there.” The final letter was from H. Katz, a San Franciscan reader. Having admired the magazine since its early Communist days, Katz explains that he was never taken in by the attacks launched from the *New Masses* and *Daily Worker* upon *PR*’s renewal in 1937. “But now,” Katz lamented,

Troy. Selected translations by Eleanor Clark included thirteen of Rosa Luxemburg’s “Letters from Prison; and, a “Newsreel” section compiled by Dwight Macdonald on the death of Rosa Luxemburg.
³²⁶ “Letters in Brief,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. V, No. 1 (June 1938), 64.

“after reading several recent numbers I am convinced that your task is to stab all progressive causes in the back.”

Still more telling, however, was the opening feature of the June issue: a lengthy 21-page section presenting, for the first time in English translation, thirteen of Rosa Luxemburg’s “Letters from Prison”³²⁷ to Sonia Liebknecht. For Rosa Luxemburg—born 1870 in Russian Poland, the daughter of a well-to-do Jewish merchant turned agitator, pamphleteer, and revolutionary, who would go on to author *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), to oppose the reformism of the Second International and the national-chauvinism of the German Social Democratic party, who met her death with a shot to the head by German Guard officers in 1919 after being brutally beaten by a mob upon the failed Spartacus League uprising to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in Germany—represented an alternative breed of radical Communism all too akin, for *PR* intellectuals, to Leon Trotsky. To her merit, already in January 1918 after the Bolsheviks crushed the democratically elected Constituent Assembly upon receiving but a quarter of the representative positions, she wrote of a betrayed and bureaucratized Soviet Revolution.³²⁸

Volume V, No. 2, July 1938

³²⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, “Letters from Prison,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. V, No. 1 (June 1938), 3-23.

³²⁸ In a 1918 essay, titled, “The Russian Revolution,” Luxemburg writes: “Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of ‘justice’ but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when ‘freedom’ becomes a special privilege.” The essay is available online, along with many others, at The Rosa Luxemburg Internet Archive at marxists.org: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm>.

The eighth issue was sixty-four pages in length, consisting of one piece of fiction, one review essay, and three critical essays.³²⁹ That Rosa Luxemburg's radically democratic, dissident Communism offered *PR* intellectuals a compelling alternative to Stalin's totalitarian-bureaucratic monster of a politics was reiterated in Philip Rahv's essay, "Dostoevsky and Politics,"³³⁰ published in this July issue of the magazine.

As Rahv understood Stalinism, it was a contemporary form of Jacobinism, divorced from democratic principles, acting "for the masses" instead of with and through them, striving "to manipulate the historic process by means of criminal methods and bureaucratic cunning." Thus opposed to true Marxism, it was retrograde, utopian, and un-scientific. Quoting Luxemburg, Rahv explained that "the Marxist movement" distinguishes itself from the Jacobin and Blanquist types in that it is "the first one in the history of class societies which in all its factors is calculated upon the organization and initiative of the masses."³³¹ But the purchase of Rahv's essay followed less from its overtly negative political assessment of Stalinism than it did

³²⁹ The one piece of fiction was "My Father Brought Winter," by Mary King. The review essay was "Looking Forward to Looking Backward," by Meyer Schapiro, whose point of departure was Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities*. The essays included "Dostoevsky and Politics," by Philip Rahv; "The Soviet Cinema: 1930-1938," by Dwight Macdonald; and, "Thomas Mann: Myth and Reason," by William Troy, the second part to his previous June 1938 essay of the same title.

³³⁰ Philip Rahv, "Dostoevsky and Politics," *Partisan Review*, Vol. V, No. 2 (July 1938), 25-36.

³³¹ Luxemburg, again in "The Russian Revolution" (1918): "Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner of *applying democracy*, not in its *elimination*, but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class—that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm>.

from its positive assessment of “the ideological possibilities of literary art,” in this particular case, as found in Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed*.³³²

Here was yet another of *Partisan Review*’s recent ventures in Marxist criticism. Reminiscent, therefore, of Phillip’s March essay, “The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers,” that unconventionally saw in Wilson’s essay on “Flaubert’s Politics” a category of critical and literary Marxism to which the revamped revolutionary magazine so aspired, Rahv now referred to Dostoevsky’s novel as “reactionary in its abstract content, in its aspect as a system of ideas,” but, as art, as “radical in sensibility and subversive in performance.” This position was all to akin to Rahv’s earlier treatment of T. S. Eliot, not to mention to Marx and Engels’ treatment of Balzac.³³³

Recall John Strachey’s earlier discussion of “Marxism and the Heritage of Culture,” wherein he noted that Marx “did not care a fig for Balzac’s political views because, in spite of them Balzac, better than anyone else, revealed and exposed the realities of nineteenth century life in capitalist France.” Similarly did Rahv see Dostoevsky. Despite being a political reactionary—though not a conservative, according to Rahv—the lessons of *The Possessed* were those being taught by Marxist revolutionaries opposed to the abuses of Stalin. “Of all the novels of Dostoevsky, it is *The Possessed* which now seems closest to us,” wrote Rahv. No longer a “vicious

³³² Rahv refers to Dostoevsky’s novel (1872) as *The Possessed*—this on the basis of the novel’s first English translation by Constance Garnett (1916). Richard Peyear and Larissa Volokhonsky’s recent translation (1995) makes the case for a more precise rendering of Dostoevsky’s intended title as the *Demons*, noting that “The Possessors” or “The Possessing” would also be more appropriate than “The Possessed.” At any rate, the novel today, to be sure, is best translated as *Demons*—two other translations still in circulation, however, are *The Devils* and *The Possessed*.

³³³ See Rahv and Phelps [Phillips], “Criticism,” in *PR*’s April-May 1934 issue; Strachey, “Marxism and the Heritage of Culture,” in *PR*’s October-November 1935 issue; and, Rahv, “A Season in Heaven,” in *Partisan Review and Anvil*, June 1936.

caricature of the socialist movement,” the emergence and reality of Stalinism made Dostoevsky’s story read “prophetic.” *The Possessed* was thus a tragic tale of “those astonishing negations of the revolutionary ideal which have come into existence since Lenin’s death.”

In Rahv’s hands, Dostoevsky’s novel, *The Possessed*, was indeed a revolutionary act of the first order—as was his essay, his literary criticism spelled out on the matter in “Dostoevsky and Politics.” Replacing his earlier conception of “creative contradictions” at work in great art and artists, what he employed in June 1936 in his assessment T. S. Eliot, Rahv now suggested use of Trotsky’s dialectical “law of combined development.” As he understood it, the “law of combined development” explains why a bourgeois revolution occurring in a backwards country—think 1917 Russia—tends to go beyond itself and to be transformed dialectically into a proletarian one. “In one bound it leaps from the status of pupil to the status of teacher,” making up for lost time and outstripping its neighbors, at least politically. Rahv saw no reason why this same “law” could not be applied on the “spiritual plane.” So, he saw the same dynamic at work in Dostoevsky, pointing to “the need of the Russian novelist *to think his way out* from the historical impasse into which backward and catastrophic conditions had driven his country.” In the end, then, Rahv sees the Dostoevskian tension as one between him having a reactionary Slavophilic and mystical politics and his radical artistic and modernist sensibility. Emphasizing the latter, Rahv writes: “Dostoevsky not only renovated the traditional properties of Romanticism, but also discovered inversions and dissociations in human feeling and consciousness which to this day literature has but imperfectly

assimilated.” Dostoevsky’s art form was thus radical; the net effect of his performative content, revolutionary. Like Rahv’s depiction of T. S. Eliot, Dostoevsky was a *Partisan* comrade.

Volume V, No. 3, August-September 1938

The ninth issue was seventy-eight pages in length, consisting of one piece of fiction, three poems, one art review, five essays, “Ripostes,” and a separate “Correspondence” section including various letters to the editor.³³⁴ To the editors, the appearance of Leon Trotsky’s “Art and Politics”³³⁵ in this issue was tremendous cause for celebration. They had been courting the Old Man for over a year now, and the sheer quality of the piece—Trotsky’s first article on literature since a study of Celine published some years prior in the *Atlantic Monthly*³³⁶—had given the upstart magazine still more confidence in their continuing endeavor. And if they had not yet gotten onto the radical map, this piece would definitely open international eyes. Written in the form of “A Letter to the Editors of *Partisan Review*,” the piece reads very much like an additional letter in the Trotsky-*PR* correspondence of 1937-1938.

³³⁴ The one piece of fiction was “Knoxville: Summer of 1915,” by James Agee. The poems included “The Unbeliever,” “Poem,” and “Quai D’Orleans,” by Elizabeth Bishop. The art review, “Art Chronicle,” included “The Architectural Evolution of Brancusi,” by George L. K. Morris; the review was accompanied by two photographs by Constantin Brancusi of his own work, “Arch at Targu-jiu” and “Column of Temple d’Amour.” The essays included “Art and Politics,” by Leon Trotsky; “The English Literary Left,” by F. W. Dupee; “Marxism in Our Time,” by Victor Serge; “The Soviet Cinema: 1930-1938 (Part II),” by Dwight Macdonald; and, “William Troy’s Myths,” by James Burnham. “Correspondence” included several letters to the editor; and, “Ripostes” included “Exit Transition,” “Lenin Next?” “O Henry!” “Where Is Alexander Woolcott?” “Waldo Frank at the Keyboard,” “Note on Literature and Revolution,” and “Straws in the Wind.”

³³⁵ Leon Trotsky, “Art and Politics,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. V, No. 3 (August-September 1938), 3-10.

³³⁶ See “Celine and Poincare: Novelist and Politician,” printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1935, available in Leon Trotsky, *Art and Revolution: Writings on Literature, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 191-203.

Indeed, we might even consider it the concluding letter of the correspondence. Curiously gone was the least bit of animosity directed at *PR*'s door. To be sure, Trotsky's was an article written fully in tow with the *Partisan* direction and emergent editorial line. Then again, by this point *PR*'s sympathy with the Trotskyists—and their staunch anti-Stalinist politics—was palpable. Trotsky closed his letter dated 18 June 1938 from Mexican exile in Coyoacan with the equivalent of his sincerest of comradely blessings: “May your magazine take its place in the victorious army of socialism and not in a concentration camp!”

All told, “Art and Politics” follows Trotsky's familiar dissident line of opposition to the Stalinist regime on the grounds of socio-political and cultural totalitarianism and bureaucratic betrayal of the revolution. In this particular essay, he focuses on the effect of the Soviet Thermidor on art, seeing its current state as “the frankest expression of the profound decline of the proletarian revolution.” For as official art it resembled the same totalitarian justice of its bureaucratic masters. It was an art form based on lies and deceit, whose goal was expressly political, i.e., exaltation of the ‘leader,’ fabrication of myth. For some time *PR* intellectuals had written of the same degeneration of art under Communism. Most recently, in the same August-September issue, as in the preceding July 1938 issue,³³⁷ Dwight Macdonald wrote on the decline of the Soviet cinema from 1930-1938, finding the clue to this decline in a political rather than an aesthetic direction. Soviet cinema's degeneration went hand-in-hand with what Macdonald called “Military Stalinism,” the period earlier referred to internationally as “Third Period Communism.” In his

³³⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “The Soviet Cinema: 1930-1938,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. V, No. 2 (July 1938), 37-50; Dwight Macdonald, “The Soviet Cinema: 1930-1938 (Part II),” *Partisan Review*, Vol. V, No. 3 (August-September 1938), 37-35-62.

words, “There was forcible collectivization in agriculture and forcible proletarianization in the arts.” Thus, after a “brief but intense flowering” during the Golden Age of Russian cinema from 1925-1929, the grasp of the totalitarian new order engulfed cinema, entire, setting in a wholesale and devastating degeneration throughout.

But where Trotsky’s piece breaks new ground is, surprisingly, in response to a “curious letter” in the June 1938 issue of *PR*. Referring to Sidney Justin Harris’s letter—where he first expresses his sympathy for the magazine, then writes, “I can see no hope, however, from the Trotskyites or other anemic splinters which have no mass base”—Trotsky quickly comes to the defense of so-called “anemic splinters.” As he explains: “Not a single progressive idea has begun with a ‘mass base,’ otherwise it would not have been a progressive idea. It is only in its last stage that the idea finds its masses—if, of course, it answers the needs of progress. All great movements have begun as ‘splinters’ of older movements.” Rather than suffering from anemia, therefore, the great splinters of world history—Christianity, Protestantism, Marxism—“carried within themselves the germs of the great historical movements of tomorrow” and were able to create a mass base precisely because they did not fear isolation. The unstated—yet perhaps obvious—implication is that another such splinter is Trotskyism, or maybe even *Partisan Review* if it should finally align with Trotsky’s Fourth International.

Above all else a revolutionary, Trotsky appropriately ends the article with a call to raise a “new flag” and a “new program,” without which it would be utterly impossible to create a *revolutionary* mass base. But he nevertheless ends by making

clear the troubling connection between radical art and revolutionary politics. In his closing words, he writes,

But a truly revolutionary party is neither able nor willing to take upon itself the task of ‘leading’ and even less of commanding art, either before or after the conquest of power. Such a pretension could only enter the head of a bureaucracy—ignorant and impudent, intoxicated with its totalitarian power—which has become the antithesis of the proletarian revolution. Art, like science, not only does not seek orders, but by its very essence, cannot tolerate them. Artistic creation has its laws—even when it consciously serves a social movement. Truly intellectual creation is incompatible with lies, hypocrisy and the spirit of conformity. Art can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself. . . .

A QUARTERLY OF LITERATURE AND MARXISM

After the August-September issue, Malcolm Cowley—literary editor of the *New Republic* since 1929, indeed the same Malcolm Cowley that had “saved” the *Partisan Review* from what appeared to have been Communist Party orders “to kill” it in 1935 after the dissolution of the John Reed Clubs³³⁸—wrote an article attacking the upstart magazine for betraying its stated editorial policy pursuant of a literature made free of factional dependence. In Cowley’s assessment, published 19 October 1938 in the *New Republic*,³³⁹ *PR* had frozen into a single anti-Soviet and Trotskyite mold, ultimately, then, they were committing the same “literary crimes” they had only recently charged

³³⁸ Malcolm Cowley quoted in “Thirty Years Later,” 509. From an executive committee meeting, Cowley recalls the following: “At one point Trachtenberg said, ‘We’ll tell them to stop publishing the *Partisan Review*.’ I was pretty indignant. ‘They’ve gotten out a good magazine,’ I said, ‘and they’ve done it themselves. Let them go ahead with it.’ After meeting with this opposition from the executive committee, Trachtenberg didn’t carry out what seem to have been party orders to kill *Partisan Review*.”

³³⁹ Malcolm Cowley, “Partisan Review,” *New Republic*, 10/19/38. Available in Ed. Jack Salzman’s *Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings of the 1930’s* (New York: Pegasus, 1967), 297-300.

of their opponents. Cowley went on to cite the *Partisan* position as expressed in the pages of its own organ against the *Partisan Review*, itself: “The blight of political meddling in behalf of narrow party interests makes so much thinking about literature insincere and artificial.” What started out as a literary and cultural magazine whose whole point, according to Cowley, was to “avoid partisanship,” had become increasingly and more overtly political in each of its successive issues. This to the point that in its latest issue for August-September, Cowley counted five anti-Soviet articles out of eight total contributions—a full fifty-eight pages, therefore, out of eighty he found of explicit political content. Worst of all for Cowley, *PR*’s factional spirit had replaced its literary spirit, and in the worst of possible places, making its way into the book reviews and critical essays, making them all but “sneering and superficial.” Needless to say, the *PR* editorial board responded in kind.

The 11 November 1938 issue of the *New Republic* printed *PR*’s response. Since it was a scaled down version of their original letter, down from 1,700 to 1,000 words—according to editorial comment in *PR* the *New Republic* pleaded “limitations of space”—*Partisan Review* printed the letter entire in their Fall 1938 issue. Now re-formatted as “A Quarterly of Literature and Marxism,” Dupee, Macdonald, Morris, Phillips, and Rahv took the occasion as an opportunity to restate their political position as well as to answer Malcolm Cowley. Right from the start, *PR*’s “A Letter to the *New Republic*”³⁴⁰ dismissed Cowley’s article as “a malicious and politically motivated attack masquerading as a matter of literary differences.” They explained that their policy of “no commitments to any party” was never intended to mean that they would stand for a line of Pure Literature. To the contrary, it was always *PR*’s

³⁴⁰ “A Letter to the New Republic,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (Fall 1938), 124-127.

position that the contemporary writer must concern himself with politics if his work was to have any deep and lasting meaning for our time. The board reminded Cowley (their readers and non-readers alike) that he had omitted much of the editorial statement in making his argument. Importantly, the one sentence he certainly did not quote was: “Any magazine, we believe, that aspires to a place in the vanguard of literature today, will be revolutionary in tendency.” They considered this to be clear enough. Though a long list of radical groups—from the Fourth International to the Social Democratic Federation—opposed Stalinism on the same literary and cultural grounds as *Partisan Review*, *PR* never endorsed the political line of any of these groups. Neither had they excluded contributions from any writer or artist on the grounds of their having belonged to (or not belonged to) one of these selfsame groups. Closing their letter, they reiterated their rejection of Cowley’s attempt at political emasculation, seeing in his efforts, at bottom, mere “Red-baiting, C. P. style, no more and no less.”

Nevertheless, over the course of the past year, from *PR*’s renewal in December 1937 to their tenth issue hitting newsstands in the late fall of 1938, they had obviously been moving in a Trotskyist direction. The long-winded Trotsky-*PR* correspondence, while highlighting some express differences between the two camps, goes to show in the end more similarity than outright opposition. Furthermore, the August-September 1938 issue finds Trotsky writing to *Partisan Review* in what can only be seen as a comradely spirit. Then, in the Fall 1938 issue, comes publication of the manifesto of the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art, a Trotskyist outfit founded by Andre Breton and Diego Rivera. A year later, at the start

of the Second World War, Dwight Macdonald would become a member of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). If further indication of *PR*'s political line and sympathies are necessary, there they are. Then again, Macdonald from the get-go had joined from a radically dissident position. Less than a year in and he was already following Max Shachtman's splinter-faction then breaking away from the SWP, and joined them in their formation of the Worker's Party (WP). A year later—totaling all but twenty months in tow—he broke from Trotskyism, entire.

For the time being, however, in the fall of 1938, despite politically hewing to a Trotskyist or Luxemburgian line reasserting the fundamentals of Marxist purity that stood opposed to the reactionary and decrepit core that they saw as Stalinism, they very clearly had begun the process of assessing what is living and what is dead in Marxism.³⁴¹ For the true believers this process seemed sure to open the door to apostasy; while for the critical intellectual of *Partisan* persuasion, attempts at necessary revision seemed but the last remaining hope of eventual reinvigoration. But total war would create total disarray. Questions of literary political direction were for the time being relegated to second tier as politics proper demanded critical attention. In a few short words, *War* was now the issue. This is expressed in the new editorial

³⁴¹ In response to Edmund Wilson's essay, "The Myth of the Marxist Dialectic," published in the Fall 1938 issue of *PR*—an essay that attacks Marx's dialectic as the secular equivalent of "religious myth," seeing its inheritance of the "triad of Hegel . . . [as] simply the old Trinity, taken over from the Christian theology, as the Christians had taken it over from Plato"—William Phillips comes to Marx's defense in his essay, "The Devil Theory of the Dialectic," published in that same Fall 1938 issue of *PR*. Phillips opens by welcoming Wilson's "irreverent and civilized approach" against "those who would mummify Marxism into a system of eternal truths," and thereby lend credence to the popular conception "that Marxism is a variety of religious experience." Phillips then concludes his essay by restating the fundamentals of Marxism as science, indeed, "scientific socialism"—and not as "disguised theology." Thereby, he reasons: "In this sense the text of Marxism is not absolutely fixed, but must be constantly recreated to keep step with the ever-changing world of politics and culture. And at any given time, the question of *what is living and what is dead in Marxism* is not an abstract one, for it can be determined only by applying the old theories to new ideas and situations" (emphasis mine). This articulation of the critical *Partisan* Marxist line is paramount.

section, titled, “This Quarter,” at which point questions of war became paramount in the five issues during which the section ran leading up to the outbreak of war—from the Fall 1938 issue to the Fall 1939 issue of *PR*.

Volume VI, No. 1, Fall 1938

The tenth issue was one-hundred and twenty-seven pages in length, consisting of two pieces of fiction, ten poems, one printing of an original lithograph, nine book reviews, three essays, a manifesto, a new section including the latest news from a Parisian correspondent, “A Letter to the *New Republic*” from the editors of *Partisan Review*, dated 17 October 1938, and a new editorial section titled “This Quarter.”³⁴²

³⁴² The fiction included “The School for Dictators,” a section from Ignazio Silone’s forthcoming book, *The School for Dictators*; and, “Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor,” by Franz Kafka. The poems included “Several Voices Out Of A Cloud,” by Louise Bogan; “The Beggards: Place Edmund Rostand,” by Clark Mills; “Topical Lyrics,” by Robert Fitzgerald; “Sewing Loft,” by William Stephens; “A Little Anthology of British Poets,” edited by D. S. Savage, which included “Poem,” by Dylan Thomas; “Poem,” by R. B. Fuller; “Black Trust,” by Kiedrych Rhys; “Lament & Triumph,” by George Baker; “Kyrie,” by David Gascoyne; and, “Poem,” by Julian Symons. The original lithograph was “Concretion,” by George L. K. Morris, and was printed by Albert Carman. The book reviews included Lionel Trilling’s “Allen Tate as Novelist,” a review of *The Fathers*, by Allen Tate; Eliseo Vivas’s “The Philosophy of Control,” a review of *The Philosophy of the Act*, by George Herbert Mead; Lewis Corey’s “Trilogy in Action,” a review of *No Star is Lost*, by James T. Farrell; Dinsmore Wheeler’s “Cross Country Camera,” a review of *American Photographs*, by Walker Evans; Dwight Macdonald’s “Directions—New or Old?” a review of *New Directions, 1938*, edited by James Laughlin IV; Justin O’Brien’s “General Franco’s Cemeteries,” a review of *Les Grands Cimetières Sous La Lune*, by George Bernanos; and, Mary McCarthy’s “The People’s Choice,” a review of the three novels standing atop The Herald-Tribune *Books* section as of Oct. 23, 1938, *The Yearling*, *My Son, My Son!*, and . . . *and Tell of Time*. The essays included “The Myth of the Marxist Dialectic,” by Edmund Wilson; a response by William Phillips, titled, “The Devil Theory of the Dialectic; and, “A Further Note on Myth,” by William Troy. The “Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art” was signed by Andre Breton and Diego Rivera, and was translated by Dwight Macdonald. The “Paris Letter” was written by Sean Niall and dated 7 October 1938.. “A Letter to the *New Republic*,” dated 17 October 1938 by the Editors of *Partisan Review*, responded to an attack by Malcolm Cowley made public on 19 October 1938. The new editorial section, “This Quarter,” included sections titled “IFIRA,” “Munich and the Intellectuals,” “Communist Comedy,” “Semantics is the Opium of Stuart Chase,” “Jef Last,” “Reflections on A Non-Political Man,” “The Carnegie International,” “Wanted: Free Trade in Ideas,” and “The Henry Saga (continued).”

While “This Quarter” focused mainly on the war question—as we will see in the subsequent section of this chapter—it began with a statement of solidarity with IFIRA³⁴³ (the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art). Beyond mere solidarity, though, *PR*’s announcement was also a call for the formation of an American section of the Federation. The Federation, founded by Andre Breton and Diego Rivera, rejected the Stalinist Third International on political and cultural grounds, and offered a federation of artists and writers, left-wing in tendency, that was free of all organizational dependence. Seeing in revolutionary socialism “the only permanent escape from the barbarism” gaining such rapid momentum the capitalist world over, the IFIRA “Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art”³⁴⁴ reads like it very well might have been written from the pen of any one of the *Partisan* editors, Macdonald—who actually translated the piece from its likely original French rendering—Rahv, Phillips, Dupee, or even Morris. Publication of the federation’s manifesto coupled with their announcement soliciting members in the formation of an American section thus further indicates the direction that *PR* was moving in as world war was fast approaching. In Isaac Deutscher assessment, this was indeed the “moment of the paper’s closest association with Trotsky,”³⁴⁵ as the magazine seemingly opted towards semi-affiliation with the Fourth International.

Partisan Review, however, still saw in its sponsorship of the Trotskyist manifesto continuity with their foundational principles. For above all else, the manifesto’s position was “*complete freedom for art.*” Its stated aims were clear: “The

³⁴³ “IFIRA,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (Fall 1938), 7.

³⁴⁴ Andre Breton and Diego Rivera, “Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (Fall 1938), 7.49-53.

³⁴⁵ Deutscher, *Prophet Outcast*, 431.

independence of art—for the revolution; The revolution—for the complete liberation of art!” This was therefore precisely the rapprochement and reconciliation between a revolutionary politics and a radical culture that they had longed for since inception. Here was true Marxism stated forthright in Trotskyist form: it was anti-totalitarian, actively calling for the overthrow of the betrayed Stalinist revolution and its Thermidorian bureaucratic regime, socialist in its politics and anarchist (or libertarian) in its culture. As formulated, the strength of the intellectuals—in alliance with the revolutionary proletariat and marching arm-in-arm for a brave new world of regenerated man and civilization—once more seemed indomitable.

1939: War is the Issue!

Meanwhile, movements inspired by the IFIRA manifesto were blossoming in France, England, and elsewhere, abroad. But to the great discouragement of the *Partisan* editors, the domestic IFIRA effort proved to be “a resounding flop.”³⁴⁶ With war approaching, *PR* sensed urgency and set to work on another organization of similar Trotskyist inspiration: The League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism.

The league’s “Statement,”³⁴⁷ printed in the Summer 1939 issue of *PR* cannot help but remind one of IFIRA. Theirs was thus an appeal for the formation of a revolutionary league of writers and artists—above all, committed to the defense of intellectual freedom. In its words: “We demand COMPLETE FREEDOM FOR ART

³⁴⁶ Terry Cooney surmises—on the basis of two respective letters from Dwight Macdonald to Paul Dobbs, and from Macdonald to Trotsky, dated 21 November 1938, and 16 August 1938—that only three responses came in. These from: Bertram Wolfe, John Wheelwright, and Paul Dobbs. See *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, 142, 302 (footnote 44).

³⁴⁷ “Statement of the L.C.F.S.,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (Summer 1939), 125-127.

AND SCIENCE. NO DICTATION BY PARTY OR GOVERNMENT.” This, its sponsors saw as synonymous with, and indeed made possible by, revolutionary socialism, and so they railed against its totalitarian debasement in both fascist and Stalinist form. What made the statement unique, however, was its apparent line on the responsibility of intellectuals in light of the coming war. As the organization’s function was “to give publicity to its aims, to provide a forum for cultural discussion, and to campaign against all reactionary tendencies in intellectual life wherever they arise,” the League stood opposed not just to Nazism and Stalinism, but to New Dealism as well. For in the LCFS’s assessment, America’s entry into this war “must give birth to military dictatorship and to forms of intellectual repression far more violent than those evoked by the last war.”

A few months later, now with war unleashed upon the world, the LCFS took matters further, this time speaking in the Fall 1939 issue in stronger language still:³⁴⁸ “Our entry into the war, under the slogan of ‘Stop Hitler!’ would actually result in the immediate introduction of totalitarianism over here. . . . Every branch of our culture will be set back for decades.” With the War Question now the fundamental question asked of intellectuals, the LCFS answered by urging upon all American writers and artists the task of giving voice to “the strong opposition which the great majority of the American people still feel to our entry into the war.” Members of the LCFS included virtually everyone involved in the *Partisan* circle: Lionel Abel, James Burnham, V. F. Calverton, Eleanor Clark, F. W. Dupee, James T. Farrell, Clement Greenberg, Melvin Lasky, Dwight Macdonald, George L. K. Morris, George Novack, William Phillips, Philip Rahv, James Rorty, Harold Rosenberg, Paul Rosenfeld,

³⁴⁸ “War Is The Issue!” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 5 (Fall 1939), 125-127.

Meyer Schapiro, Delmore Schwartz, John Wheelwright, William Carlos Williams, Bertram Wolfe, and more.³⁴⁹ The *Partisan* line in the months leading up to and in the immediate wake of World War II was therefore effectively the Trotskyist line on the War, lending further credence still to the claim that the *Partisan Review* was all-too-partisan to Leon Trotsky.

Their war-position, traceable in their editorial section, “This Quarter,” was clear enough. Already in the Fall 1938 issue, in a piece titled “Munich and the Intellectuals,”³⁵⁰ the *PR* board took the occasion of the “Czech crisis,” in what culminated in the Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland permitted by the Munich Agreement on 29 September 1938, to draw a comparison between the impending war and the last great one coming to a close but twenty years prior. More specifically, the *PR* editorial looked to the apparent function of intellectuals in the face of social catastrophe and world war. As they understood it, *PR* saw their contemporary liberal and radical Popular Front intellectuals “urging upon us the very same social-patriotic policies, the identical supra-class illusion which they claimed the catastrophe of 1914 had taught them to renounce forever.” Despite war temporarily being averted, the nature of the imperialist conflict meant that war was inevitable, a mere matter of time rather than of possibility. But *Partisan Review* should by no means be seen at this juncture as simple appeasers. Their position stood for a resurgence of labor militancy and revolutionary Marxism the world over, warning America to beware of Roosevelt,

³⁴⁹ Others included: Kay Boyle, Eleanor Clark, James Peter Cooney, James A. Decker, David C. DeJong, Paul Dobbs, Charles Henry Ford, Philip H. Gray, Jr., William Gruen, Esther D. Hamill, Robert Hivnor, James Laughlin IV, John McDonald, Charles Malamuth, Sherry Mangan, Ralph Manheim, Alan Mather, Clark Mills, Norman Mini, Culberton Myers, Gilbert Neiman, Helen Neville, Lyman Paine, Kenneth Patchen, Carl Peterson, Arthur Pincus, Fairfield Porter, Kenneth Rexroth, T. C. Robinson, Harry Roskolenko, Winfield T. Scott, Gordon Sylander, and Parker Tyler.

³⁵⁰ “Munich and the Intellectuals,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Fall 1938), 7-10.

of Popular Front tactics, and calling forth a return to the policy of class struggle opposed to the then dominant one of class-alliance and collaboration. Intellectuals were still seen as among the vanguard of the revolutionary masses. In their words: “Once the interests of the mind are no longer confused with the interests of the Soviet bureaucrats, it may again be possible to define political differences without mystification and to revive the original meaning of the socialist doctrine.” The fact that reaction appeared to be everywhere on the ascendant, with Hitler—in the wake of Munich—the current “master of continental Europe,” they laid guilt at the footsteps of the “democratic” collaborators and that particular “political grouping,” the intellectuals. “It would almost seem,” they projected, “that the particular function of the intellectuals is to idealize imperialist wars when they come and to debunk them after they are over.”

Continuing this line of thought in the Winter 1939 issue, again in a “This Quarter” editorial, this time titled, “The Crisis in France,”³⁵¹ it becomes clear that for the *PR* board the only legitimate kind of anti-fascist struggle is revolutionary struggle against the capitalist world order, entire. Evident that war was seen looming on the horizon and that they were pulling even closer to Trotskyist affiliation, they claimed that the “nucleus” of such a revolutionary movement already exists in such militant left-wing organizations as the Lutte de Class, the Pivert Group, and the International Workers Party in France—the last an actual affiliation of the Fourth International. As they concluded the piece: “If a serious revolutionary opposition to fascism crystallizes around these groups, it will need and should get all the material aid that

³⁵¹ “The Crisis in France,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Winter 1939), 3-4.

we in this country who are concerned for the future of European culture and democracy can give it.”

The following “This Quarter” piece in the Spring 1939 issue of *PR*, a lengthy diatribe authored by Dwight Macdonald, titled, “War and the Intellectuals, Act Two,”³⁵² drew yet another parallel between the wars, seeing as uncanny the similar place of American intellectuals in the spring of 1939 as in the spring of 1917. Opening his piece with Randolph Bourne’s 1917 essay, “The War and the Intellectuals,” Macdonald was equally concerned of the “unanimity with which the American intellectuals have thrown their support to the use of the war-technique in the crisis in which America found [and now, finds] herself.” Just change “Belgium” to “Czechoslovakia,” Macdonald reasons, and—here we are—amid Act Two of the tragi-comedy of “War and the Intellectuals.” This meant thereby that the conventional liberal solution would just as equally lay the seeds for a third great war. The only solution to the coming “anti-fascist fascism” was made clear—the Leninist directive of revolutionary defeatism.

Upon outbreak of war, in the final installment of “This Quarter,” in a piece titled “The War of the Neutrals,”³⁵³ *PR* reiterated this position, positing that the only possible basis for a revolutionary opposition to the war is indeed revolutionary defeatism. Their line was captured in the classic Leninist slogan: “Turn the imperialist war into civil war!” They concluded their piece with its summary statement: “The international solidarity of the workers, with the masses in each nation fighting not against their brothers across the border but against their own capitalist

³⁵² Dwight Macdonald, “War and the Intellectuals, Act Two,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (Spring 1939), 3-20.

³⁵³ “The War of the Neutrals,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 5 (Fall 1939), 3-15.

governments, is the only force that can either bring into being real democracy or make war and fascism unnecessary. This is the alternative which our liberals find either too Utopian or too bloodthirsty.” But in short order the trauma of the Second World War would set to dialectical motion the *Partisan*’s movement away from the U.S.S.R and by ways back to its old home place of the U.S.A.

Chapter 6

The Re-Awakening: 1939-1941

Then Stalin signed a pact with Hitler. And it was the shock of this event, I think, which started New York City, bitter and demoralized, back from the U. S. S. R., to America. Certainly it was as hard for the city to leave Russia as it had been to go there. Back home, but not at home, uneasy and ideologically depressed, the city then, like the rest of the world, submitted to shock after shock: the Russia attack on Finland, the Nazi attack on Poland, the defeat of France, the battle of Britain, the assassination of Trotsky, the Nazi attack on Russia, finally Pearl Harbor.

Lionel Abel, "New York City: A Remembrance,"
Dissent, 1961

Dictatorship rests on a sea of blood, an ocean of tears, and a world of suffering—the results of its cruel means. How then can it bring joy or freedom or inner or outer peace? How can fear, force, lies, and misery make a better man?

Louis Fischer, *The God That Failed*, 1949

One has constantly to remind one's self that Trotsky is dead. One had somehow taken it for granted that "the Old Man" would always be there, in Coyoacan, representing the Marxist revolutionary tradition. Even after the wild machine-gun raid organized by the Stalinists earlier in the summer, one's sense of Trotsky's permanence did not change. It seemed natural that he should miraculously escape the storm of bullets. How could a consciousness as lofty and all-embracing as Trotsky's, a career and a personality constructed on such a scale, how could these be dependent on the mere survival of a mortal body? How could a whole culture be murdered?

Dwight Macdonald, "Trotsky Is Dead,"
Partisan Review, 1940

There is, indeed, only one connection with the future of which we can be to any extent sure: our pledge to the critical intellect.

Lionel Trilling, "Elements That Are Wanted,"
Partisan Review, 1940

THE SPECTER OF WORLD WAR

Nearly twenty years later, New York intellectual Lionel Abel—an acclaimed American playwright and essayist, also Jean-Paul Sartre’s authorized translator³⁵⁴—recalled that it was the shock of the Hitler-Stalin Pact signed on 23 August 1939 that started the motion “bitter and demoralized, back from the U. S. S. R., to America.” But it was not just this shocking alliance bringing together the “two monsters” of totalitarianism³⁵⁵ that solidified total disenchantment—it was also the rough tumble of world war. For in short order, over the course of the next two years, as Abel’s quotation in the epigraph mentions, Hitler and Stalin partitioned Poland in October 1939, the Soviets attacked Finland in November, Paris had fallen to the Nazis in June 1940, which was then followed by the air battle for Britain in July, Leon Trotsky, the hero of the radical left, was assassinated in August 1940, Operation Barbarossa brought Nazi attack on Communist Russia in June 1941, and America came under her own Axis attack at Pearl Harbor on the 7th of December, 1941. The issue of war was no longer a question of political purity and abstract theory—it had now become as real as it was ever going to get.

³⁵⁴ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Lionel Abel, 90, Playwright and Essayist,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/25/arts/lionel-abel-90-playwright-and-essayist.html>. Playfully, Gelder closes his obituary in the following manner: “In a 1965 column in The New York Herald Tribune, Dick Schaap wrote: ‘Sartre says Abel is the most intelligent man in New York City. Kenneth Rexroth, the poet-critic, says Abel is the most intelligent man in New York City. Abel himself will not say that he is the most intelligent man in New York City. But he will say that Sartre and Rexroth are both magnificent judges of intellect.’”

³⁵⁵ Irving Howe recalls the few days that followed the Pact as the “most terrible . . . intellectually speaking” of his life. Vindication of their Trotskyist politics did not long endure, as the terror of approaching war quickly ensued. Cited by Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 79.

To Philip Rahv—articulated at length in a November-December 1941 essay, titled, “10 Propositions and 8 Errors,”³⁵⁶ an essay responding to Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald’s earlier July-August 1941 piece, “10 Propositions on the War,”³⁵⁷—the “shattering surprises of the past two years” forced a fundamental recalibration of the *Partisan* line on war. As Rahv now understood the terms of the game, “the war will either be won by the combined might of the Anglo-American imperialism and Stalin’s Red Army, or else it won’t be won at all.” Rahv thus shifted his position—taking *PR*, too, ultimately in tow—to a new realism, a pragmatic politics of the possible that abandoned what he regarded as Greenberg and Macdonald’s “morally absolutist” utopianism. Perhaps seeing relics of his earlier self in their orthodox line on revolutionary defeatism, he wrote of their hopeless dicta which he could not adopt as his own since it was “politically representative of a kind of academic revolutionism which we should have learned to discard long ago.” For Rahv, the issue was clear: *War* had remained the issue.

But to Greenberg and Macdonald, though modern politics revolved on the axis of War, the real issue was war in relation to the social revolution. They merely reiterated lines from before the outbreak of war: that support for the Roosevelt-Churchill war would clear the road for domestic fascism; that only revolutionary socialism could save the world from the coming universal barbarism. Their conclusion: “*All support of whatever kind must be withheld from Churchill and Roosevelt.*” Rahv, however, could no longer abide this Leninist line. Though he held

³⁵⁶ Philip Rahv, “10 Propositions and 8 Errors,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 6 (November-December 1941), 499-506.

³⁵⁷ Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald, “10 Propositions on the War,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 4 (July-August 1941), 271-278.

onto the hopeful possibility of a future socialism, staking himself in ultimate solidarity with the revolutionary working class, and even admitting that this war is still “not yet *our* war,” Rahv nevertheless no longer found any real alternative to support for the Allied war effort. As he saw it, Nazi defeat might recreate the conditions for “progressive action,” but a Nazi victory “would bury the revolution for good.”

While the immediate feud ended in a temporary truce, expressed in the next January-February 1942 issue of *Partisan Review* in “A Statement by the Editors”³⁵⁸—the board now composed of Greenberg, Macdonald, Morris, Phillips, and Rahv—it did not long endure. Restating their future editorial policy in that issue, the board explained that *Partisan Review* can have “no editorial line on the war.” Any line expressed in its pages will solely be the stated position of the matter as individuals. While primarily a cultural magazine, they admit to always having been concerned with politics. And they will continue, indeed, to give space “to radical—in the literal sense of ‘going to the roots’—analysis of social issues and war.” *PR* would therefore remain open to any and all political tendencies, encouraging the “fullest freedom of expression” on the grounds that no intelligent decision can be made “without a full consideration of alternatives.” But, and on this they were all too clear: “Our main task . . . is to preserve cultural values against all types of pressure and coercion.”

How this all played out is rather beside our point, but is a short and interesting story, nevertheless. Clement Greenberg’s last issue as editor for *PR* was in January-February 1943, after which he joined the Army Air Force, serving briefly before being discharged for psychological reasons. Dwight Macdonald would later submit

³⁵⁸ “A Statement by the Editors,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (January-February 1942), 2.

his letter of resignation in July-August 1943.³⁵⁹ As he justified his decision, the divergence between his conception of what the magazine should be and Phillips and Rahv's conception—since by now the board had been reduced to Macdonald, Morris, Phillips, and Rahv—had “become too great to be bridged any longer.” While seeing their divergence as partly cultural, he expressed it as mainly political: “The war . . . has generated sharp political disagreements. Not only has the Marxist position been reduced to a minority of one—myself—but since Pearl Harbor there has been a tendency on the part of some editors to eliminate political discussion entirely.” What Macdonald wanted to do, according to the remaining editors, “was to abandon the cultural policy of P.R. and to transform it into a political magazine with literary trimmings.”³⁶⁰ Presumably, that venture came to fruition a few months later, with the start of Macdonald's new publication—*politics*—that endured from 1944-1949. In September-October 1943, the *PR* board now composed of Morris, Phillips, Rahv, and Delmore Schwartz, remained seemingly committed as before, to, in their words, that “specific modulation achieved in combining socialist ideas with a varied literary and critical content.”

KRONSTADT REVISITED

What remained of the great socialist project in *Partisan Review* by 1941—let alone 1943? The American journalist Louis Fischer wrote of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 23

³⁵⁹ Dwight Macdonald, “Letter of Resignation,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. X, No. 4 (July-August 1943), 382.

³⁶⁰ “Response to Macdonald's Resignation,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. X, No. 4 (July-August 1943), 382-383.

August 1939 as the signal event that led to his “Kronstadt.” Discussed earlier in Ch. 4, “The Break,” Kronstadt refers to the critical moment of psychological and political break from Soviet Communism. But what counts perhaps even more decisively than the Kronstadt *per se* is the road next traveled. In his essay in *The God That Failed*,³⁶¹ Fischer refers to a certain authoritarian type of ex-Communist that, though they might abandon Communism intellectually nevertheless soon discover their need for an emotional substitute for it. So, they find themselves a “new totalitarianism” fighting Communism with “Communist-like violence and intolerance.” In Fischer’s words, he is therefore “an anti-Communist ‘Communist.’” What counts decisively, then, is that the break is both “creative and socially valuable,” that it is a fundamental change of heart and mind rather than a mere shift in loyalty. This, Fischer reasons, can only occur when it “represents a complete rejection of the methods of dictatorship and a conversion to the ideas of democracy.”

By 1941, to be sure, the foremost of *Partisan* intellectuals, i.e., Phillips and Rahv, had already turned their 1936 Kronstadt in a “creative and socially valuable” direction. Indeed, according to Daniel Bell, “in the United States almost the entire group of serious intellectuals who had been attracted to Marxism had broken with the Communist party by 1940.”³⁶² This uniquely stood opposed to the lot of “serious intellectuals” in Europe, where Bolshevism remained an enduring source of commitment for some time longer. Daniel Aron likewise looks to 1940 as the key date for the death of communism in America. Though the Party had recovered some of its lost prestige as a result of the effective nullification of the Hitler-Stalin Pact by

³⁶¹ Louis Fischer, “Louis Fischer,” *The God That Failed*, 196-228.

³⁶² Daniel Bell, “The Mood of Three Generations,” *The End of Ideology*, 310.

way of the Nazi offensive against the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, Aron notes that “after 1940 . . . [the] Communist literary movement ceased to have much importance.”³⁶³ John Patrick Diggins and Isaac Deutscher see the critical break occurring earlier still, for them both, already in 1939. According to Diggins, “By 1939 much of the American Left had turned against communism of all varieties and had begun to question all political strategies that derived from Marxist premises.”³⁶⁴ And likewise Deutscher: “With the Stalin-Hitler pact and the beginning of hostilities much had changed. . . . Gradually every principle of Marxist-Leninist programme, including dialectics and morality, came again under debate. . . . All the issues under debate were brought to a head before the end of the year 1939.”³⁶⁵ What was fundamental to this group of retreating intellectuals in 1939-1940, according to then Trotskyists James Burnham and Max Shachtman, before the attackers themselves joined in the same retreat shortly thereafter, was opposition to the theology of dialectical materialism, opposition to the Bolshevik creed of one-party dictatorship as the stepping stone to betrayal, and the new contention that Leninism is a stage in the necessary process eventuating in Stalinist totalitarianism—that Lenin is the legitimate father of Stalin.³⁶⁶

IN DEFENSE OF MARXISM

³⁶³ Daniel Aron, *Writers on the Left*, 385.

³⁶⁴ John Patrick Diggins, *Up From Communism*, 178.

³⁶⁵ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 472-473.

³⁶⁶ James Burnham and Max Shachtman, “Intellectuals in Retreat,” *New International* (January 1939).

Burnham and Shachtman thus came to the defense of Marxism in January 1939, with publication of their *New Internationalist* article on the “Intellectuals in Retreat.” Those they attack in that article include Max Eastman, Sidney Hook, Charles Yale Harrison, James Rorty, Edmund Wilson, Philip Rahv, Benjamin Stolberg, James Farrell, and Louis Hacker—together encompassing a group of so-called “radical intellectuals,” in fact, a group more recently and publicly known as “the Trotskyist intellectuals.” Having started off as Communists, or at least as Party sympathizers, some broke sharply with Stalinism as early as 1934, some just recently, before affiliating and semi-affiliating themselves with the Fourth International. This group they then compare with a second group that began as “Stalinist liberals,” having since become “radical anti-Stalinist intellectuals,” that includes John Chamberlain, Louis Adamic, Eugene Lyons, John Dewey, George S. Counts, and Ferdinand Lundberg. The basis of the comparison was in seeing both group’s recent coalescence as Stalinophobic *liberals* in retreat, articulating a theory of communo-fascism that railed “equally against both communism and fascism, against dictatorships whether of the left or the right,” seeing in them both “the Siamese twin main danger.”

Then came the Hitler-Stalin Pact. That same day Max Shachtman submitted motions in the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party moving towards assessment and “*evaluation of the Soviet state* and the perspectives for the future.”³⁶⁷ A week later, amid outbreak of the Second World War, and James Burnham was quickly motioning for a reconsideration of the famous “Russian Question,” regarding the class nature of

³⁶⁷ The quote is from Max Shachtman’s motion on 22 August 1939 at the meeting of the SWP Political Committee. It is cited in George Novack and Joseph Hansen’s “Introduction to the Second Edition” of Leon Trotsky’s *In Defense of Marxism: The Social and Political Contradictions of the Soviet Union* (New York: Pathfinder, 1995), 20.

the Soviet Union and the political nature of the Soviet State. Submitting his document for the plenum meeting of the SWP National Committee in early September, Burnham's "On the Character of the War" took the position that it "is impossible to regard the Soviet Union as a workers state in any sense whatever. . . ." ³⁶⁸ The Soviet Union had now embarked on a new imperialism, as both Poland and Finland would soon further provide evidence for. But Trotsky did not hesitate to come immediately to the defense of Marxism and to its first revolutionary incarnation as the Soviet Union.

In a letter dated 12 September 1939, addressed to James Cannon ³⁶⁹—the first Secretary of the Socialist Workers Party—a week after Burnham's submission, Trotsky details the central ideas of a forthcoming study "on the social character of the USSR in connection with the war question." Most important is Trotsky's contention that either the Stalin State is a "transitory formation," what he had for some time now explained as a degenerate worker's state subject to bureaucratic caste-exploitation following from its backward nature and capitalist-imperialist encirclement, or it is a "new social formation," altogether, this time alluding to an obscure Italian Communist named Bruno Rizzi, and his emergent theory of the Soviet Union as a form of "bureaucratic collectivism" in the same category as the Nazi and Italian fascist regimes and even New Deal America. ³⁷⁰ He warned Cannon against those adopting Rizzi's new heretical line: "Who chooses the second alternative admits, openly or silently, that all the revolutionary potentialities of the world proletariat are exhausted, that the socialist movement is bankrupt, and that the old capitalism is

³⁶⁸ Cited by Novack and Hansen, "Introduction to the Second Edition," *In Defense of Marxism*, 20-21.

³⁶⁹ Leon Trotsky, "Letter to James P. Cannon," *In Defense of Marxism*, 39-40.

³⁷⁰ See Bruno Rizzi, *The Bureaucratization of the World* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

transforming itself into ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ with a new exploiting class.” His was therefore a warning to all those intellectuals in retreat, to the *Partisan* intellectuals—as we will see later in this chapter—as well as most directly to men of Burnham and Shachtman’s ilk in the immediate Trotskyist fold.

Trotsky completed his proposed study a couple weeks later, in a controversial essay, titled, “The USSR in War.”³⁷¹ Its point of departure was the Russian Question. Opening the essay, Trotsky asks, “Is it possible after the conclusion of the German-Soviet pact to consider the USSR a workers state?” His answer was tied up in the outcome of the Second World War. If the war provokes a proletarian revolution that overthrows the Stalinist bureaucracy—presumably, a Trotskyist revolution, we might add—that regenerates Soviet democracy “on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918,” then the question becomes a non-question. The “bureaucratic relapse” will be explained as an “*episodic* relapse” rooted in backward socio-economic and geo-political factors. If, however, the war provokes not revolution but further declension of proletarian power, that is, if the proletariat proves incapable of actually commanding leadership of society, then under these conditions it could actually lead to the growth of “a new exploiting class from the Bonapartist fascist bureaucracy.” Analogously, if the war provokes proletarian revolution in the more advanced capitalist countries and the working class still proves incapable of holding onto power, in turn surrendering it to a privileged bureaucracy as in the Soviet Union, then it would be necessary to recast the rule of bureaucracy in terms congenital to post-capitalism. “Then,” stated in explicit terms that must have come as a great shock to Trotsky’s followers, “it would be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its

³⁷¹ Leon Trotsky, “The USSR in War,” *In Defense of Marxism*, 41-64.

fundamental traits the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploiting regime on an international scale.” And if that proves to be the case—if the Marxist program proves in retrospect to be hopelessly illusive and utopian—then, Trotsky concludes, a “new ‘minimum’ program would be required—for the defense of the interests of the slaves of the totalitarian bureaucratic society.” In the meantime, Trotsky remained committed to defense of the Soviet Union, to defense of its progressive state-driven economy, while concomitantly committed to overthrowing what he still maintained was, as yet, but a corrupt, Stalinist-bureaucratic *caste*.

Burnham and Shachtman were not convinced. Even less convinced were they of Trotsky’s response to the Soviet invasion and subsequent partition of Poland and to their attack on Finland as “progressive.” This led to the contradictory Trotskyist position that the Soviet State was internally reactionary but externally revolutionary. The dialectics at work here were too much to bear. And so under the strain of World War, a sober revision of Marxism led to “schism” within the American Trotskyist movement, soon pegging “Cannonites” (the majority led by James Cannon following the orthodox Trotskyist line) against “Shachtmanites” (the minority following Burnham and Shachtman in breaking away from the Socialist Workers Party to formation of the Workers Party in April 1940). According to Isaac Deutscher, this was the “split” that ruined the Fourth International.³⁷²

³⁷² Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 477. For more on the intra-party polemics that ended in this Trotskyist divorce, also for biographical portraits of James Cannon, Max Shachtman, and James Burnham, see Alan Wald’s *The New York Intellectuals*, specifically, Ch. 6, “Cannonites and Shachtmanites,” 164-192.

THE DEATH OF TROTSKY(ISM)

On 16 April 1940 the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party suspended the Burnham-Shachtman minority faction until such time as they comply with convention decisions reaffirming support for the Fourth International party program. No matter, because by then the minority had set up a separate organization—the Workers Party— with its own headquarters, newspaper, and its own theoretical organ, having taken along with them, the SWP's *New International*.³⁷³ Burnham, however, as co-leader of the group, now all-too-disillusioned by it all, submitting his letter of resignation on 21 May 1940.³⁷⁴

From nearly a year of factional polemics it became clear to Burnham that he could no longer consider himself a Marxist by any stretch of the imagination, believing in virtually none of the essentials of Marxist theory, be it in reformist, Leninist, Stalinist, or Trotskyist variants. He now explicitly rejected: the “philosophy of Marxism,” namely, dialectical materialism; the Marxian theory of “universal history”; Marxian economics; the notion that the Soviet Union can be considered a “workers state,” even if degenerate, instead seeing in it a new exploitative society, what he called “managerial society”³⁷⁵; and, flatly rejecting the Leninist conception of the party as inimical to genuine democracy. All Burnham held to, if indeed he held to

³⁷³ Novack and Hansen, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” *In Defense of Marxism*, 28.

³⁷⁴ James Burnham, “Letter of Resignation of James Burnham from the Workers Party,” *In Defense of Marxism*, 314-321.

³⁷⁵ See James Burnham, “The Theory of the Managerial Revolution,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (May-June 1941), 181-197; also, for the same argument in expanded book form, see James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening In The World* (New York: John Day, 1941).

anything at all, was the notion of “socialism as a moral ideal,” or ethic.³⁷⁶ Burnham thus joined the band of retreating intellectuals he had earlier attacked in his ardent defense of Marxism. For roughly a year and a half later, the Marxist intellectual had grown tired of Marxist politics, seeing nothing left of its promise but failure and betrayal, and not an iota left in its defense.

Meanwhile, Dwight Macdonald, still editing the pages of *Partisan Review*, had followed Burnham into the Workers Party. He remained despite what he calls Burnham’s “sudden evaporation” that came as a “special blow” to him, as Macdonald was then very much taken by Burnham’s more democratic, moralistic, and less orthodox position as compared to Shachtman’s, who remained as head of the Third Camp Workers Party.³⁷⁷ Macdonald remained as a radical dissident from within, explaining that even when he was a member he always felt “a little schizoid about Trotskyism, as about Marxism.”³⁷⁸ His “Trotskyism” soon got the best of him as he started articulating the Rizzian theory of “bureaucratic collectivism” in a series of articles published in *Partisan Review*. These included: “Notes on a Strange War” (May-June 1940), “National Defense: The Case for Socialism” (July-August 1940), “Trotsky is Dead: An Attempt at an Appreciation” (September-October 1940), and “The End of Capitalism in Germany” (May-June 1941).³⁷⁹ Most important was his

³⁷⁶ In “Science and Society: A Reply to Comrade Trotsky,” James Burnham writes: “Yes, I judge a political struggle *morally* as well as politically. Socialism is a moral ideal, which reflective men choose deliberately, by a moral act. Cold and sober scientific analysis convinces me that this ideal dictates an appropriate morality which must govern the struggle for it.” See *In Defense of Marxism*, 283-313.

³⁷⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “Introduction,” *Politics Past*, 20.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁷⁹ Dwight Macdonald, “Notes on a Strange War,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (May-June 1940), 170-175; “National Defense: The Case for Socialism,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (July-August 1940), 250-266; “Trotsky Is Dead: An Attempt at an Appreciation,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 5 (September-October 1940), 339-353; and, “The End of Capitalism in Germany,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (May-June 1941), 198-220.

apparent eulogy of the Old Man, an attempt at an appreciation that lamented the death of their revolutionary and ideological “father,” Leon Trotsky, but that simultaneously saw in his last years the tragedy of Trotsky as political thinker.

Shocked, Macdonald asked, “How could a whole culture be murdered?” To him, it seemed that the assassin’s axe had set to rest an entire chapter of history. For, according to Macdonald, “Trotsky was the one man still living whose name and prestige could have become a rallying-point for a mass revolution,” and as long as he lived, the revolutionary Marxist consciousness endured. What was left by summer and fall of 1940? But perhaps it was not just the death of Trotsky that augured the death of Trotskyism. With all due reverence for the Old Man, Macdonald spoke of Trotsky as his ideological “father,” indeed as the *Partisan* father, who “taught us the political alphabet and first defined for us the problems to be solved, so that even when, in the manner of sons, we came to reject the parental ideas, our very rejection was in the terms he taught us.” Trotsky’s tragic flaw was his orthodoxy. An admitted master in his application of Marxism, he was, however, according to Macdonald, “incapable of examining the instrument itself, of scrutinizing with empirical skepticism the given doctrine.” His rigidity and doctrinarism thus forced him into the Marxist mold: seeing but two alternatives for the Soviet Union—progress to socialism or retrogression to capitalism. The trick was to employ the Marxist methodology, but to scrap the Marxist paradigm, “to reshape the instrument . . . so as to fit the new forms of society that are arising in Russia and Germany.” For Macdonald, Burnham, and Shachtman, this meant that Trotskyism was no longer defensible—that Marxism itself and the working class were now in crisis. The same

should be said for the foremost of *Partisan Review* intellectuals, for both William Phillips and Philip Rahv.

THE INTELLECTUALS' TRADITION

In the May-June 1940 issue of *Partisan Review*, Philip Rahv contributed an editorial comment, titled, "What Is Living and What is Dead."³⁸⁰ It was a long time coming. Already evident as early as the first letters sent from *PR* to Leon Trotsky in the summer of 1937, the editorial board had in mind some form of Marxist revision. Their proposed symposium on the theme, "What Is Alive and What Is Dead in Marxism?", however, Trotsky "categorically" refused to participate in, regarding the title itself to be "extremely pretentious and at the same time confused." He added: "You phrase the question about Marxism as if you were beginning history from a clean page." Among those invited were Harold Laski, Sidney Hook, Ignazio Silone, Edmund Wilson, John Strachey and Fenner Brockway—most of whom Trotsky contemptuously dismissed as "political corpses," possessed of a "complete incapacity for theoretical thinking." Rahv finally went it alone, declaring a "crisis" in Marxism caused primarily by the fact "that everywhere, including the Soviet Union, it is not the social revolution but the counter-revolution which has triumphed." Since 1917, Rahv adds, "the failure of the socialist cause has been continuous and disastrous . . . the Russian victory itself turned into a source of confusion, disillusionment, and outright treachery."

³⁸⁰ Philip Rahv, "What Is Living and What Is Dead," *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (May-June 1940), 175-180.

Rahv was no longer mincing his words. And he realized that in doing so *PR* was literally taking its “ideological lives” into its hands. The results of his initial attempt at revision aimed at reinvigoration was the following: still alive were the theories of class struggle, of the bourgeois state and economy, of imperialist conflicts and analysis of reformist movements, and the theory and strategy of internationalism; declared dead were theories of dialectical materialism, of the vanguard of professional revolutionaries, and the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat for its ultimate negation of democracy. The verdict was still out regarding the revolutionary character of the proletariat. Having thus far failed to act in any decisive fashion, whatsoever, with the objective conditions for revolution having grown at times “rotten-ripe,” he still held onto the hopeful possibility that the workers would one day, soon enough, achieve their own liberation. Nevertheless, those chances now seemed increasingly slim to Rahv, especially as he had come to talk of the increasing self-determination, role and function of the intelligentsia in a radically new light, as he had done in his Summer 1939 essay in *PR*, titled, “Twilight of the Thirties,”³⁸¹

In “Twilight of the Thirties,” Rahv refers to the intelligentsia as a unique and separate intellectual class standing opposed to both bourgeois and proletariat: “Restricted to the realm of technical and spiritual culture, which is their only real property, the intellectuals make their livelihood by preserving the old and by producing the new forms of consciousness.” Rahv provided a similar understanding and definition of the critical intellectual over a year prior, in April 1938, in his essay, “Trials of the Mind.” In that essay, in a hopeless world with dark days ahead, Rahv called on all critical intellectuals to seek the truths within themselves—above all, to

³⁸¹ Philip Rahv, “Twilight of the Thirties,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (Summer 1939), 3-15.

be true to themselves as intellectuals. As Rahv defined “intellectuals,” they are a “special grouping within the middle class, as much infected with its unrest and ambition as with its fright and phantasies.” This implied that when the workers were beaten, as they evidently appeared beaten in 1938 (perhaps even more so in 1939), intellectuals would “veer back to their old positions.” No longer seeking alignment with the revolutionary working class, radical intellectuals according to Rahv now found solace in the hands of Stalin, Stalinism providing “both the rationalizations and a portion of the profits.” (In the summer of 1939, Rahv instead found the intellectuals finding solace in the hands of Roosevelt and his “new nationalism,” celebrating the lost “American way of life,” the so-called “rediscovery of our democratic past.”) And in this capacity they have committed treason, betraying the intellectuals’ calling as “the [spiritual] guardians of values.” Culture being their “only real property,” the defense of culture must therefore become the intellectuals’ “official program.”

Similarly, Rahv, in the summer of 1939, maintained that intellectuals must be partisans of culture and truth—and in this crucial regard, they must act self-interested—for the true interests of intellectuals lay with the lively products and traditions of culture, “their only real property.” Rahv admitted that even if this was part illusion, that is, even if this position was partly mythological, “since the intellectuals remained at bottom as dependent as ever,” being pushed and pulled between capitalist and worker, it was a “necessary myth.”³⁸² For as myth, he

³⁸² Employment of the phrase, “necessary myth,” is not Rahv’s, neither is it Plato’s. In this case, it is Delmore Schwartz’s. In *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, Terry Cooney cites Schwartz’s use of the phrase in a letter dated 5 October 1942 and addressed to Dwight Macdonald: “The initial assumption is that no political position is possible for intellectuals at present. Second, the intellectuals must, as a necessary myth, conceive of themselves as a class, or rather a club, or at any rate, a group which, by the very nature of their profession, have a vested interest in truth, an interest which must be defended more than ever in wartime. . . . This does not strike me as particularly original or enthralling

reasoned, “it encouraged the creation of moral and esthetic values running counter to and often violently critical of the bourgeois spirit.” *Partisan Review* would take this new discovery seriously.

Two years later, amid the distractions of war, William Phillips would contribute “The Intellectuals’ Tradition,”³⁸³ published in the November-December 1941 issue of *PR*, just prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor. In his essay, Phillips saw in the intelligentsia the new clerisy, performing for modern times precisely the function that the church had in the medieval period, i.e., performing its role of “intellectual conservation.” Like Rahv, Phillips defined the intelligentsia as “a distinct occupational grouping within society.” Needless to say, as with Rahv, its actual social position was all too dependent upon the “relative power and prestige of the contending classes.” But through its enduring “institutional stability,” its unification as a self-perpetuating group committed spiritually to art and culture, indeed “thriving on its very anxiety over survival and its consciousness of being an elite,” it has created great feats of modern art and cultural continuity with an intellectuals’ tradition stretching back millennia. In the pages of *Partisan Review* this was a mind-shattering event. To quote James Gilbert’s insightful take on the matter,

The crucial problem first expressed in the dilemma of how to preserve bourgeois art while remaining committed to the destruction of the bourgeoisie through revolution was solved by entirely reformulating the question. It was no longer an issue of “bourgeois” art, for . . . Rahv and Phillips came to believe that no great art was really bourgeois in a bad sense, but rather that the great art of the twentieth century belonged to the intelligentsia, a separate class, and potentially a radical

as a stand; but it is workable, as is made evident by the fact that some fall back on it naturally and of necessity. It is also a position from which one can advance to a political stand whenever such a one is made possible by the movements of the well-known masses.” (314).

³⁸³ William Phillips, “The Intellectuals Tradition,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VIII, No. 6 (November-December 1941), 481-490.

class in its opposition to society, with its own sense of loyalties, of anxieties, and even of property.³⁸⁴

THE NEW VANGUARD

The *Partisan* intellectuals, to now return to Rahv's "Twilight of the Thirties," thus stood poised as "a new vanguard" of dissident artists swimming against the currents of society. As a self-conscious "literary minority," maintaining its identity amid social isolation, economic strain and depression, world war and the looming threat of totalitarianism, they would uphold their individual integrity through the powers of "the probing conscience." As the veritable "organ of a new community,"³⁸⁵ *PR* would thus fulfill its function, utilizing "the possibilities of individual and group secession from, and protest against, the dominant values of our time." As Lionel Trilling framed it, giving voice to the *Partisan* imagination and project in the 1940s perhaps better than any other, their position was to "dissent from the orthodoxies of dissent."³⁸⁶ Alfred Kazin similarly expressed this crucial component: "I felt myself to be a radical, not an ideologue." He also thought of himself as a "literary radical," looking to literature for "strong social argument, intellectual power, [and] human liberation." It was therefore, wrote Kazin, "the rebels of literature, the great wrestlers-with-God,

³⁸⁴ Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans*, 218.

³⁸⁵ In conversation with Joseph Dorman, in *Arguing the World*, William Phillips explained that when they founded *PR* they had envisioned it as "the organ of a new community." To quote Phillips in full: "We dreamed of having a magazine that would create a new community of writers and intellectuals, that would pull together whatever independent, gifted people there were. We saw this magazine as the vehicle of Modernism and radicalism via a community. We thought of it partly as a personal organ, but partly as the organ of a new community. So when one talks of the New York intellectuals, one is talking about a community." (73).

³⁸⁶ Lionel Trilling, "Parrington, Mr. Smith and Reality," *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (January-February, 1940), 24-40.

Thor with his mighty hammer, the poets of unlimited spiritual freedom, whom I loved—Blake, Emerson, Whitman, Nietzsche, Lawrence.”³⁸⁷

But despite Rahv’s radical vision and vocabulary, it soon became evident—seemingly recast yet again on the eve of the Second World War and in the wake of America’s entry following the attack at Pearl Harbor—that the new *Partisan Review* would see its role in the world of culture as, ironically, now, fundamentally conservative. Now seeing in the intellectuals a tradition stretching back millennia, what became paramount above all else was the express carving of a free space for cultivation of the intellectuals’ craft, that is, cultivation of the aesthetic sensibility, and one most conducive for the propagation of the primary produce of the artists’ labor, namely, world culture. The politics of *Partisan Review* would thus turn amid the Second World War and immediately thereafter to the liberalism of the American founding fathers, with Rahv and Phillips, themselves, rediscovering the demo-liberal virtues of the national heritage. Interestingly, just as Burnham had attacked the “intellectuals in retreat” in 1939 only to join them in 1941; so the founding co-editors of *PR* in 1941 joined in the democratic re-awakening then spreading among the American intelligentsia centered in New York City. The roots of this new dialectical turn in the maturation of *Partisan Review* stretch back as far as its origins in 1934, though perhaps in a certain sense it stretches back further still. Again, what was imperative was to find a politics compatible with their fundamentally aesthetic sense of life. This they would ultimately find in liberalism, since liberalism seemed to offer the intellectuals the one thing they truly want and need to survive—i.e., *cultural laissez faire*.

³⁸⁷ See “The Partisan Imagination,” the final sub-section of Ch. 4 of this dissertation.

More immediately, however, we find definite roots in the Fall 1939 issue of *PR*, in an essay by Clement Greenberg, titled, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.”³⁸⁸ Then a Trotskyist, Greenberg railed against the commodification of mass culture, borrowing the German terms, *Kitsch*, to refer to the “official tendency of culture” in Germany, Italy, Russia, and even, America, signaled in the emergence of “popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc. etc.” As such, he depicted kitsch as “mechanical and operated by formulas . . . [changing] according to style, but always remaining the same.” Precisely because it could be churned out mechanically, as “plastic culture,” it lent itself to manipulation as a propagandistic tool of totalitarianism. Opposed to kitsch, Greenberg offered the avant-garde, whose “true and most important function . . . was not to ‘experiment,’ but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence.” Although he never spoke of a so-called intellectuals’ tradition, that was indeed the meaning behind his analysis. For true artists resist the leveling and corrupt tendencies within mass societies, finding solace within themselves and the community. By essay’s end, most important for our purposes, Greenberg’s conclusion provided a sobering reassessment of the precise role of art and culture in relation to revolutionary politics. The Trotskyist critic explained, “Today we no longer look towards socialism for a new culture . . . Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.”

³⁸⁸ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VI, No. 5 (Fall 1939), 34-49.

Remarkably, what Greenberg's position amounted to was Trotsky's position from more than a decade prior, articulated in *Literature and Revolution*, in 1924. You might recall Trotsky's position as the antithesis of the Proletkult position. While the Proletkult refused to have any contact with intellectuals of non-proletarian origins and largely rejected the art and culture of the past, Trotsky, as a "Marxist," could never reject the past. Instead, he saw in the past a usable heritage for which the communist revolution would merely allow for a most remarkable evolutionary development. Thus, wrote Trotsky, "The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in the immediate future is not the abstract formation of a new culture regardless of the absence of a basis for it, but definite culture-bearing, that is, a systematic, planful and, of course, critical imparting to the backward masses of the essential elements of the culture which already exists."³⁸⁹ Only in Greenberg's case, again, though he did not say this explicitly, he was speaking to the possibility of the preservation of culture for the sake of those in its possession, namely, the intellectuals. For it was clear that he had not in mind an imparting of culture to "the masses," as Trotsky had in mind, seeing instead in the masses more or less indifference. Nevertheless, Greenberg articulated his recast position on socialism and culture in 1939, when he and the *Partisan Review* were still believers, even if in the halls of doubt. A few years later, in 1943, and already ex-Trotskyist Greenberg had enlisted in the Army Air Force to keep the world safe for both his cherished culture and the best of democracy.

By 1941, consensus in *Partisan Review* was already that Marxism in its original formulation was a sham—that the Soviet Union with Stalin in command was totalitarian, perhaps just as it would be with Trotsky at its helm in his stead. They

³⁸⁹ See "Literature and Revolution," sub-section of Ch. 2 of this dissertation.

made attempts at revision, but only Lionel Trilling sought revision from the get-go on liberal—rather than socialist—lines. More than any other *Partisan* intellectual, therefore, Trilling turned to the intellectuals' tradition for a critical and radical liberalism set to replace revolutionary socialism, and to hopefully do so in a manner compatible with the ethical and aesthetic vision first promised by Marxism. Of all places, Trilling turned in September-October 1940, in a *Partisan Review* essay, titled, “Elements That Are Wanted,” to the “religious politics” of T. S. Eliot.³⁹⁰ Trilling claimed to say no more than to recommend Eliot's ideas to our attention—he dared not to recommend them to our allegiance, indeed distancing himself from Eliot's belief in moral absolutism. It was, however, his position that Eliot's *Idea of a Christian Society*, proposing a moralistic view of politics, had definite advantages over the Trotskyist (or more generally, the Marxist) view of politics. For Eliot asked of man: “What is the good life?” This the revolutionaries largely forget, and though they begin in morality, their practice ends in despair.

Consideration of life's ultimate ends is deferred until after the revolution when all contradictions will thereby be reconciled. If the goal, however, is never reached, the political ideal never attained—and “all earthy societies are sordidly inadequate beside the ideal”—then we must exercise “charity” in valuing the humanity of the present equally as much as the future. As Trilling would come to express more clearly in 1946, in his “Introduction” to *The Partisan Reader: Ten Years of Partisan Review*—the basis for his essay, “The Function of the Little Magazine,” included in his 1949 collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*—we

³⁹⁰ Lionel Trilling, “Elements That Are Wanted,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, No. 5 (September-October 1940), 367-379.

must “force into our definition of politics every human activity and every subtlety of human activity.”³⁹¹ For life, best comprehended in literature, is infinitely complex, full of possibility and surprise, intensification, variety, difficulty, unfoldment, merit, and worth. Here was, to be sure, the *Partisan* imagination at its best.

Partisan intellectuals must thus aspire to represent an intellectual elite, a veritable new vanguard of critical intellectuals—what Eliot calls the Community of Christians, only here expressed in secular aesthetic form—devoted to the conscience of the nation. In Trilling’s words, theorized amid totalitarian encirclement and approaching World War, “here we are, a very small group and quite obscure; our possibility of action is suspended by events; perhaps we have never been more than vocal and perhaps soon we can hope to be no more than thoughtful; our relations with the future are dark and dubious. There is, indeed, only one connection with the future of which we can be to any extent sure: our pledge to the critical intellect.”

In time, *PR*’s new commitment—tempered by the death of the Communist vision and re-awakened to the promise of a vital and free democratic America—would further sow the seeds of the already emergent and growing self-conscious group today known as the New York intellectuals. Its members, taken together, make up a most impressive list. Among them are included: Lionel Abel, Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, William Barrett, David Bazelon, Daniel Bell, Saul Bellow, James Burnham, Elliot Cohen, Lewis Coser, Midge Decter, F. W. Dupee, Max Eastman, Ralph Ellison, Jason Epstein, James T. Farrell, Lewis Feuer, Leslie Fiedler, Nathan Glazer, Paul Goodman, Clement Greenberg, Michael Harrington, Robert Heilbroner, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Richard Hofstadter, Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin,

³⁹¹ Lionel Trilling, “Introduction,” *The Partisan Reader*, xiv.

Hilton Kramer, Irving Kristol, Melvin Lasky, Seymour Martin Lipset, Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer, C. Wright Mills, Reinhold Niebuhr, William Phillips, Norman Podhoretz, Philip Rahv, David Reisman, Philip Roth, Harold Rosenberg, Isaac Rosenfeld, Meyer Schapiro, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Delmore Schwartz, Philip Selznick, Susan Sontag, Lionel Trilling, Michael Walzer, Robert Warshaw, and Edmund Wilson.³⁹² The magazines *Partisan Review* in turn also helped spawn or undoubtedly contributed towards its development are equally impressive, including: *politics*, *Commentary*, *Dissent*, *National Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The Public Interest*. And just like Trotsky, to many among them their teacher and mentor, they have principally waged their war with pen in hand.

³⁹² The standard genealogy is provided in Daniel Bell's essay, "The 'Intelligentsia' in American Society," in *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys 1960-1980* (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1980), 119-137. There Bell also includes a listing of European intellectuals very much considered within the circle. Foremost among them are: Raymond Aron, Nicola Chiaromonte, Arthur Koestler, and George Orwell.

Chapter 7: Epilogue

In Memoriam: Daniel Bell (1919-2011): Why Bell Matters

You ask me if I'm a neoconservative. What I find amusing is that people who decry a one-dimensional view of society, a one-dimensional view of politics, apply a one-dimensional label to things.

I think I've been consistent all the way through. It's not that my politics haven't changed. Politics is basically a response to particular situations. I think my fundamental values have remained.

I believe there are different realms in the society and there are different principles which underlie these realms. That's why I've called myself a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture. I'm a socialist in economics because I believe that every society has an obligation to give people that degree of decency to allow them to feel that they are citizens in this society. In the realm of economics, the first lien on resources should be that of the community in a redistributive way.

I'm a conservative in culture because I believe in continuity, and I believe in judgment. I don't believe that all opinions in culture are the same as everybody else's opinion. I don't believe that all art is the same. Some things are better than others, and you have to justify why it's better than others, and you have to understand the grounds of justification.

I'm a liberal in politics but liberalism has no fixed dogmas. It has no fixed points, that you can say, "This is the liberal position." It changes because it's an attitude. It's a skepticism. It's a pluralism, it's agnostic.

Daniel Bell, *Arguing the World*, 2000

"So," he wondered aloud, "why are you studying *Partisan Review*?"

I recently had the good fortune of meeting the late Daniel Bell. We met in mid-November in his Cambridge home, spending an afternoon in discussion on a wide array of topics, from *Partisan Review* to Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism to religion, secularism, the sacred, and to the importance of tradition,

and, ultimately, history. The entire discussion seemed to flow of its own accord. The only problem—I soon realized—we had quickly veered far away from my immediate agenda, i.e., questions regarding the social and political thought of *Partisan Review*, the subject of my dissertation. But no matter, because I realized we were engaged in a larger, more important meditation on the life of the mind and, specifically, of the mind's place in life. And there was certainly no way I was going to script the man who was perhaps the “greatest mind in the group” of New York intellectuals,³⁹³ listed among the 25 leading social theorists of the modern era, in the same vicinity as the acknowledged giants of the field—Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Mead, Du Bois, Parsons, Goffman, Garfinkel, and Foucault.³⁹⁴ Michael Walzer's description of the New York Intellectuals is apt: they are writers who feel that “you can't begin to analyze the most recent strike in Detroit without starting from the division of labor in ancient Babylonia. The context is world history and the questions you bring to your analysis are the largest questions: Where are we going? Where have we been?”³⁹⁵ It was indeed that very philosophical inclination that steered our discussion, ultimately, to questions of religion, and then from the universal to the particular—namely, Judaism—and back again, virtually without end.

But let us begin in the beginning. I rang the door bell to Bell's house on Francis Avenue in Cambridge, Mass., at approximately 2 p.m. His home-nurse was polite enough to invite me in even though Prof. Bell had not gotten out of bed all day.

³⁹³ Jacob Weisberg, “Remembering Daniel Bell, 1919-2011: He wrote about everything and was deep about all of it,” *Slate*, updated Jan. 28, 2011, <http://www.slate.com/id/2283003/>.

³⁹⁴ George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

³⁹⁵ Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the World: The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 208.

She asked if he was expecting me, and indeed he was. We had first made contact only about a week earlier. Three short days after sending him a letter with my contact information, he called me, enthusiastically welcoming me to come to his home to meet and discuss my dissertation. When she told him I had arrived—I overheard them upstairs—he said he’d be down shortly. I awaited him eagerly in the living room. When he turned the corner of the stairwell to enter the living room, I was struck by his appearance. It was him, to be sure. But he had grown frail in his elder age and wore a white beard attuned to his bald head. To my untrained eye it appeared he had made a strenuous effort to get down the stairs, and for all I knew he was in great physical pain, perhaps his hips even burning at his every step and move. Setting aside his walker, he gracefully settled into his couch, telling me he had been having trouble walking of late. He took a moment to collect himself, and then asked me, directly, “So, why are you studying *Partisan Review*?”

Just like that, Daniel Bell began my interview. I explained what I thought was the great relevance of their story—i.e. the compelling story of their (mis)adventures in politics during the 1930s to the 50s. For those that don’t know, the intellectual history of the first twenty years of *Partisan Review*—from 1934 to 1953—is a dense period that runs the gamut of twentieth-century political thought. From Communism to Trotskyism to demo-liberalism, and culminating in (for many among them) a new breed of conservatism come the early fifties, its history is the history of thinking and re-thinking “totalitarianism.” It is also a familiar tale of illusion and subsequent disillusionment with communism, yet another to add to the mix of *The God That*

Failed.³⁹⁶ So I went on to add that the editors and its contributing writers blazed a trail in social and political thought, offering novel theories of totalitarianism and sounding post-modern and pragmatic calls for an end to ideological fanaticism. But he stopped me, before I could mention that *PR* intellectuals also offer us a model for what it means to be a responsible intellectual. He stopped me then—and probably would have stopped me earlier had he been less polite—challenging me on my use of the word “relevance.” He didn’t like that word—*relevance*—while I couldn’t have been more proud for finding something relevant in my dissertation topic. (After all, I thought to myself, I’m a political theorist not a historian.) Bell insisted, however, that it was not a question of relevance. As he saw it, it was simply a matter of history, and on the grounds that it is paramount that we know history and the history of our ideas, it had to be studied. Wow. I then recognized that despite his ailing body, Professor Bell’s mind—at 91 years of age—was still remarkably sharp.

I reminded him of his first contribution to *Partisan Review* back in the Fall 1944 edition of the journal. An essay titled “Word Surrealism,”³⁹⁷ Bell argued for the curious emergence of word surrealism in politics during the Second World War. He began with a question, “Is it not characteristic of the ideological confusion of our time that the terms best describing social forms not fully understood are surrealistic combinations in which a negative adjective cancels out the formal meaning?” As he saw it, such terms as *secular religion*, *totalitarian liberal*, *monopolistic competition*, and *democratic corporativism*—the four terms scrutinized by Bell in the essay—were

³⁹⁶ David C. Engerman, “Foreword to the 2001 Edition,” in Richard H. Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), vii-xxxiv .

³⁹⁷ Daniel Bell, “Word Surrealism,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (Fall 1944), 486-488. I refer here to Bell’s first essay contribution; just over a year prior he had reviewed Robert Brady’s *Business As a System of Power* in the July-August 1943 issue of *Partisan Review*, Vol. X, No. 4, 377-380.

“sheer jabberwocky.” “Yet,” he wryly added, “only Alice in the Political Wonderland makes sense today.” The essay is a pleasure to read. Bell concludes: “The last war brought surrealism in art and rationalism in politics; we now have a neo-classical revival in art and the emergence of word surrealism in politics. The secret is locked in the dialectic and Marx lies on his head in the grave.” Little wonder that Bell would become a regular contributor to *PR* throughout the years that would come to span decades, ending publication less than a decade ago, only in 2003 after the death of William Phillips, its last surviving founding co-editor. Indeed, “one of his greatest and most personal essays,”³⁹⁸ as his son, David Avrom Bell, regards it, “First Love and Early Sorrows,”³⁹⁹ appears in a 1981 issue of *Partisan Review*. It is an account of his “first love”—*Marxism*—joining the Yipsels, the Young People’s Socialist League, in 1932 at the age of 13, and of his “early sorrows” after learning *The Truth About the Boylsheviki* (sic), of *The Russian Tragedy* and *The Kronstadt Rebellion*.⁴⁰⁰ “My early sorrows,” wrote Bell, “fortuitous as these were, had come with the awareness of ‘Kronstadt.’ That knowledge, combined with my temperament, made me a lifelong Menshevik—the chooser, almost always, of the lesser evil.”⁴⁰¹ It also led to three maxims that came to rule his intellectual life: the ethic of responsibility, the politics of civility, and the fear of the zealot and the fanatic.

³⁹⁸ David Avrom Bell, “Daniel Bell’s Relevant Distinctions,” in *For Daniel Bell* (privately published *festschrift* edited by Mark Lilla and Leon Wieseltier in 2005), 12.

³⁹⁹ Daniel Bell, “First Love and Early Sorrows,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 4 (1981), 532-551.

⁴⁰⁰ Bell mentions these three works in the essay: the first, a pamphlet written by Emma Goldman just prior to her imprisonment of two years; and the latter two, pamphlets by the anarchist Alexander Berkman. Needless to say, Bell mentions a number of other works given to him by Rudolf Rocker, “the venerable Anarchist leader,” including works by Malatesta, Kropotkin, and still more by Goldman and Berkman—foremost being Berkman’s diary of his years in Russia, 1920-1922, *The Bolshevik Myth*.

⁴⁰¹ Bell, “First Love and Early Sorrows,” 550.

I then pushed on the issue of *Partisan Review*: I wanted to know what it meant for him as a young budding intellectual to publish in *PR*; when had he first read the little magazine; how it was perceived among his friends and colleagues; if it had any role in shaping his socio-political worldview; and, of its role in the fight against Stalinism. In a way, though, I had already known the answers to these questions. Watching Joseph Dorman's documentary of the New York intellectuals, "Arguing the World," you see very clearly how "The Second Generation" spoke of *PR* and with what great reverence they held up "The Elders."⁴⁰² In William Phillips's words, "We dreamed of having a magazine that would create a new community of writers and intellectuals, that would pull together whatever independent, gifted people there were. We saw this magazine as the vehicle of Modernism and radicalism via a community. We thought of it partly as a personal organ, but partly as the organ of a new community. So when one talks of the New York intellectuals, one is talking about a community."⁴⁰³ Bell himself had mentioned elsewhere that in New York during the 1940s the New York intellectuals had come together as a "self-conscious group," ala Budapest just before World War I, Bloomsbury in the 1910s, Paris and Vienna in the 1920s, and Oxford in the 1930s.⁴⁰⁴ *Partisan Review*, to be sure, was the hub around which it all revolved. So I knew that publishing in *PR* was for them an event,

⁴⁰² In "The 'Intelligentsia' in American Society," in *The Winding Passage*, Bell provides a genealogy of those that have come to be known as the New York intellectuals. First generation members—or "The Elders," coming of age in the late 20s and early 30s—included Philip Rahv and William Phillips, Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, Meyer Schapiro, Dwight Macdonald, and Edmund Wilson, among others. The Second Generation, coming of age in the late 30s and early 40s, perhaps the more familiar of the bunch, included Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, and Nathan Glazer, among others. See Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys 1960-1980* (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1980), 119-137. The essay was originally given as a Frank L. Weill lecture at the Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati, as part of its contribution to the U.S. bicentennial celebration in 1976.

⁴⁰³ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 73.

⁴⁰⁴ Bell, "The 'Intelligentsia' in American Society," *The Winding Passage*, 130.

recognition that you had finally arrived. Bell then calmly looked at me, responding in turn, “Yes, it’s true, *Partisan Review* was a big deal. But I always thought *The New Leader* the more influential magazine in terms of the anti-Stalinist struggle.”

There was a lull in the conversation as I began to wonder if perhaps I had chosen the wrong dissertation topic. After all, here was Daniel Bell telling me that what I had long considered to be quite “possibly the most influential little magazine ever,”⁴⁰⁵ had in fact paled in comparison with the *The New Leader*. Then, reminded of its recent demise in August 2010 in its 87th year of publication (*PR* had folded just shy of its 70th birthday), and of its entire archival collection of manuscripts and correspondence now housed as part of Columbia University’s Rare Book & Manuscript Library, I became intrigued. Bell’s role in the history of the *The New Leader* is no secret, though is perhaps less known than his (arguably) lesser involvement with *PR*. As Bell puts it, in 1941 at the “tender age” of 21 years he became *The New Leader*’s managing editor, having first contributed to the magazine in 1938 and becoming a staff writer in 1940. He occupied that position for four years until 1945 to return as a staff writer three years following—from 1948-1958— before beginning what would ultimately make for a prolific career in academia starting as associate professor at Columbia University (1958-1969), then moving on to Harvard in 1969 until his retirement in 1990.

Finding his home in academia may have had something to do with his passion for truth, his feeling of ethical responsibility, and his overarching sense of proportionate justice. Daniel Bell, to be very sure, was a man of reason and measure.

⁴⁰⁵ Melvin Maddocks, “Review: Field Trips among the Intellectuals,” *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Fall, 1982), 569-557.

This might explain his break with the *New Leader* in the late 1940s on the grounds of what some have referred to as the magazine's overly strident Cold War rhetoric.⁴⁰⁶ It might also, however, explain his return, ultimately celebrating the magazine for having taken throughout its many years a principled stand against both fascism and communism and for charting a "moral vision" for humanity.⁴⁰⁷ Daniel Bell was an anti-ideological thinker. Again, this explains both his founding of *The Public Interest* with Irving Kristol in 1965 and his break with it in the 1970s over what he considered to be Kristol's increasingly neo-conservative disposition.

As Irving Kristol explains, "I and Dan Bell and Nat Glazer, we got together and started *The Public Interest*. The only thing I could think to do. I didn't run for office. We started a magazine—on a shoestring. . . . *The Public Interest* was, in its origins, still a liberal magazine but without a liberal ideology."⁴⁰⁸ As Bell put it, it was a magazine determined "to transcend ideology through reasoned public debate and the inquiry into knowledge."⁴⁰⁹ In other words, *The Public Interest* sought to apply the methods of the social sciences to the concrete analysis of public policy. Theirs was a recipe that made for great success. And by the spring of 2005, upon

⁴⁰⁶ In *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*, Neil Jumonville cites the following from a letter written by Dwight Macdonald to Daniel Bell, dated 8 April 1947: "Good for you to break with the *New Leader* . . . (especially as it was such a personal wrench) over their war-drums beating. . . . the neurotic intensity with which those circles pursue a hate-Russia policy is making it easier for the black-rightists to push this country still faster toward something damned unpleasant—as in the red purge now projected in govt offices." See Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 213-214.

⁴⁰⁷ Daniel Bell, "The Moral Vision of 'The New Leader'," *The New Leader*, Vol. LVI, No. 25 (Dec. 24, 1973), 9-12.

⁴⁰⁸ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 157-158.

⁴⁰⁹ Cited in Matt Schudel, "Daniel Bell, 91; sociologist foresaw the rise of the Internet," *Washington Post*, Jan. 27, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/26/AR2011012608911.html>.

closing after “Forty Good Years,”⁴¹⁰ columnist David Brooks could realistically credit the magazine in *The New York Times* for having had “more influence on domestic policy than any other journal in the country—by far.”⁴¹¹

I continued with the interview: “So, it seems that the point of theory is to somehow guide or direct reality, or perhaps better yet to discover reality. What about Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism?” On this topic Bell was curt: “I never liked the theory. Or, I guess you could say I changed my mind very quickly in regard to it.” He added, “Society is never that flattened out. It’s a theory very much in search of reality—grasping for reality—but it comes up far too short.” The problem, then, for the pragmatic Bell was that the theory of totalitarianism left little for the “weary foot-traveler” in search of a guide to civic action and engagement. As a “working tool,” as he put it elsewhere in essay form, it is “too sweeping” and so of little guide to solving the concrete problems of its society—not to mention neglecting the inherent tendency towards “normalization” in all states, even and especially crisis-states.⁴¹²

Looking over my notes, I surveyed my next batch of questions: I had intended to ask about Trotsky; of Trotsky’s intellectual presence in 1930s New York; of *The Revolution Betrayed* and The American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky; of *PR*’s break and re-birth on independent auspices in 1937; of the role and function

⁴¹⁰ Irving Kristol, “Forty Good Years,” *The Public Interest*, May 25, 2005, <http://www.aei.org/article/22580>.

⁴¹¹ Cited in Michael T. Kaufman, “Daniel Bell, Ardent Appraiser of Politics, Economics and Culture, Dies at 91,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 25, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/arts/26bell.html>.

⁴¹² Daniel Bell, “Ten Theories in Search of Reality: The Prediction of Soviet Behavior,” in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 324-325. The essay was originally presented as a paper at the conference on “Changes in Soviet Society,” held at Oxford, England, June, 1957, under the auspices of St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom. It subsequently appeared in *World Politics*, April, 1958.

of intellectuals; etc. But feeling somewhat lost in the headiness of the conversation I was curiously reminded of a parable noted in the preface to Bell's collection of essays and sociological journeys, *The Winding Passage*. "It is a Zen story," that Bell recounts: "Two monks have been circling in the desert for a long time. Finally they sit down. Neither says a word. Sometime later, one speaks: 'My brother is lost.' The other is silent. After a long meditation, he says: 'No. I am not lost. I am here. The Way is lost.'" ⁴¹³ Something had seemingly been pushing me in this direction of discussion, and in Zen-like submission, who was I to resist? I asked if he still agreed with this parable. "Have we lost our Way?"

Bell replied to my question—in signature Jewish fashion—with another question: "If I were to ask you—'Who are you?'—how would you answer?" This classic question of identity Bell had used to introduce his 1961 essay for *Commentary* magazine, titled, "Reflections on Jewish Identity."⁴¹⁴ Sensing the professor was asking a rhetorical question I allowed him to continue in explanation: "If you were to answer 'I am the son of my father' you'd be giving a traditional, pre-modern answer; the modern response, however, is 'I am I'—meaning, I stand alone, I have come out of myself, self-propelled and so on." I now replied: "You do know that my name, Benli, in Hebrew means 'my son.' So that literally I would answer you with my name: I am Benli, son of Oded . . . son of Isaac, son of Eliezer, son of Jacob . . . all the way back to our first forefathers, Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham." "Well," Bell came back, "that's certainly a rare answer; and I assumed you were Jewish,

⁴¹³ Daniel Bell, "Preface," *The Winding Passage*, xxiii.

⁴¹⁴ Daniel Bell, "Reflections on Jewish Identity," in Peter I. Rose, ed., *The Ghetto and Beyond: Essays in Jewish Life in America* (New York: Random House, 1969), 465-476. The essay was originally published in *Commentary*, June 1961. It is also available in *The Winding Passage*, 314-323.

otherwise you wouldn't be interested in these questions and probably wouldn't be here discussing them with me today." I then wondered: What was that unique Jewish quality that led me from my earliest days to question man's place in the world, to questions of the perennial role and function of intellectuals, questions of the relation of art and culture to our preeminently social and political world, questions of radicalism, responsibility, history, truth and justice—all questions that similarly occupied the minds of the New York intellectuals? Was there really such a thing as a Jewish mind?

For Bell and the New York intellectuals, this went without saying. As Irving Howe put it, "Historical consciousness was part of immigrant Jewish life. The immigrant Jews brought with them memories of the old country, legends and stories about things that had happened there, so you absorbed this kind of historical consciousness at the kitchen table. And so history came to one unbidden. It wasn't that I'd made the decision to have historical consciousness, it was that historical consciousness was part of my elemental life, part of my natural being"⁴¹⁵ This notion of a distinct historical consciousness Bell also credits to his having grown up in the Jewish world of 1920s and 30s New York. In his words, "It was a kind of double consciousness. We'd go to school and we'd sing 'My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, land where my fathers died,' and people would say, *Russia*. 'Land of the pilgrim's pride'—*Jerusalem*. 'From every mountainside'—*the Alps*."⁴¹⁶ It was in this historical sense that Bell defined his Judaism. There was simply no escaping one's *Jewishness* (not that he would have wanted to). Indeed, Bell's "whole

⁴¹⁵ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 25.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

life,” as he has described it, has “always been lived in that sense of the tension between the particular and the universal, at times, moving towards one or another pole.”⁴¹⁷

No man stands alone, we could say in his voice. Bell told me he considered it a major deficiency of *Partisan Review* that they never had any proper identification with Judaism. No coincidence then that his favorite group biography of the New York intellectuals was Alexander Bloom’s *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (1986). Bloom’s book is the only one of a fair amount of books on the subject that places their relationship with their Jewish roots at front and center. From its opening chapter, “Young Men from the Provinces”⁴¹⁸—the title referencing an essay in Lionel Trilling’s collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*—it becomes clear that Bloom plans to write about the New York—JEWISH—Intellectuals. There is much focus on ghetto life, life in Brooklyn and the Bronx, the weight of Jewish parental pressures—of fathers and sons—the Talmudic tradition and double-consciousness. Bloom also emphasizes the place of school and education in Jewish life: that Jews inherit a sense of intellectuality from the Biblical and Talmudic tradition; that school became for them the path to success, the road to social class and social prestige, but also the site where the inevitable process of assimilation began. Ultimately, then, Bloom, very much like Bell throughout his life, grapples with the benefits and burdens of the ghetto life and with the benefits and burdens of, what was for many, its abandonment.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁴¹⁸ Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11-27.

For Bell, Judaism could never be abandoned—this was moral imperative. While he told me he did not believe in “the religious,” per se, he did strongly believe in “the sacred.” He mentioned Gershom Scholem as a major influence, and especially his 1941 work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. He mentioned Isaac Rosenfeld’s only novel, the 1946 *Passage from Home*, and how it deeply affected the Jewish intellectuals of his generation. He explained his idiosyncratic understanding of Judaism that began with Ezra and Nehemiah; and how Abraham Joshua Heschel’s understanding of the meaning of Jewish existence perhaps had the most profound effect on his practice. As Heschel understood it, “Judaism is our genesis, not our wisdom Being a Jew is a part of our continued existence. . . . We carry the past in our will. . . . We have immortality in the past.”⁴¹⁹ Ultimately, then, for Heschel—we might ascribe the same to Bell—the task of Jewish philosophy and of Jewish thought is “to set forth the universal relevance of Judaism.”⁴²⁰

Coming to see his self as an alien Jew during his adolescence,⁴²¹ Bell found his way out of the abyss, found his way home⁴²² and reached maturity through the power of the *yizkor*—the remembrance—the sacred link to his Jewish past.⁴²³ Reflecting on his Jewish identity, he wrote, “I write as . . . one who has not faith but memory, and who has run some of its risks. I have found no ‘final’ place, for I have no final answers. I was born in *galut* [exile] and I accept—now gladly, though once in pain—the double burden and the double pleasure of my self-consciousness, the

⁴¹⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of Jewish Existence,” in *Mid-Century: An Anthology of Jewish Life and Culture in Our Times* (New York: The Beechhurst Press, 1955), 89, 93, 94. The essay was originally published in *The Zionist Quarterly*.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴²¹ See Bell’s essay, “A Parable of Alienation,” in *Mid-Century*, 133-151. The essay was originally published in *The Jewish Frontier* in 1946.

⁴²² See Bell’s essay, “The Mood of Three Generations,” in *The End of Ideology*, 299-314.

⁴²³ See Bell’s essay, “Reflections on Jewish Identity,” *The Ghetto and Beyond*, 465-476.

outward life of an American and the inward secret of the Jew. I walk with this sign as a frontlet between my eyes, and it is as visible to some secret others as their sign is to me.”⁴²⁴ In this sense, seeing his self as bound to his past, and emerging from a larger tradition, there arises a notion of continuity, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of respect and responsibility for both the past and the future. This type of resolution is rare for a man with a modern sensibility. For the modern world has uprooted us all, broken ties to our past, and left us with the feeling of utter and absolute loneliness and despair. And “if The Way is lost, all is lost.”⁴²⁵

Without a sense of history we become blind wanderers, subject to the blowing winds of our lost pasts, re-creating the past in all its misery and woe. Bell saw this in the New Left. As he explained it, “these were people who had lost a sense of historical memory. The thirties were sort of lost in the fog, the fifties were confused for them, and they thought they were coming out of themselves. They had no feeling for Stalinism, they had no feelings for things we’d gone through in this way and there was a hubris of being new.”⁴²⁶ Consequently, in their outright rejection of the wisdom of past historical memory—of the “Wisdom of the Fathers”⁴²⁷—the New Left’s politics descended into violence, bloodshed, doctrinarism and utopian yearnings of a caricatured past. Marx’s warning that history repeats itself is appropriate: “first as tragedy, then as farce.”

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 475.

⁴²⁵ Bell, “Preface,” *The Winding Passage*, xxiii.

⁴²⁶ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 133.

⁴²⁷ Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua, the 2nd Century Mishnaic teacher, is reported to have said: “Let the honor of thy pupil be as dear to thee as the honor of thy colleague; that of thy colleague as the fear and reverence of thy teacher, and the fear and reverence of thy teacher as that of the Most High.” *Wisdom of the Fathers*, 4:15.

What Bell provides us with, therefore, as John Patrick Diggins considered the thinker's "balancing act" of contradictory political ideologies, is an eclectic and post-modern "political wisdom born of the woe of historical experience."⁴²⁸ His was critical thought announcing—or rather calling for—the advent of a post-ideological and post-utopian era. It is precisely why, in his sociological "disjuncture of realms," Bell considered himself a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture. In this regard, as Vladimir Tismaneanu put it in a symposium on "Conservative-Liberal-Socialism,"⁴²⁹ Bell's vision is actually none too different from that of the late Polish philosopher's, Lezek Kolakowski (1927-2009), in providing us with the elementary components of the "nascent hybrid and therefore truly dynamic 'conservative-liberal-social-democratic-anti-fascist-anti-communist' International" of critical intellectuals. In Tismaneanu's words, "The new International of critical/democratic/post-ideological/cosmopolitan intellectuals will not advocate any arrogant solutions to humanity's problems, but, at the same time, it will not shy away from recognizing that the roots of barbarism are located at the very core of modernity."⁴³⁰ To be sure, the larger import of Bell's theoretical project aimed at taking us beyond the camps of Auschwitz, the gulags of Siberia, and the killing fields of Phnom Penh. To that end, Bell's eclecticism ran far and wide; his liberal imagination deep. And indeed, Professor Bell, it is in this sense that my dissertation *is* relevant.

But in our afternoon's conversation I never explicitly said that to the late Daniel Bell. Somehow I imagine he understood it—how could he not have? We

⁴²⁸ John Patrick Diggins, "Daniel Bell's Balancing Act," *The New Leader*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 8 (Nov. 4-18, 1996), 14.

⁴²⁹ Martin Krygier, Sean Patrick Eudaily, Karol Edward Soltan, Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Symposium: Conservative-Liberal-Socialism," *The Good Society* 11.1 (2002), 6-25.

⁴³⁰ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "In Praise of Eclecticism," *The Good Society* 11.1 (2002), 24.

continue to study *Partisan Review*, the New York intellectuals, and Daniel Bell precisely because of their sustained relevance. For they provide us with models of how to live our lives with integrity, balance, reason, civility, responsibility and critical judgment, engaging the world in all its imperfections for the sake of *tikkun olam*—the sake of repairing the world. As part of a larger tradition—as our educators—they further teach us of an enlightened way of life that prefers difficulty to doctrine, yearns for the open society rather than the eschaton, and raises the voices of moderation over the ever perennial voices of rage.⁴³¹

Before I left, Professor Bell had me go to his upstairs office and fish down a box that contained a number of purple bounded packets. They were copies of a *festschrift* “For Daniel Bell,” edited by Mark Lilla and Leon Wieseltier in 2005, presumably for his 85th birthday. As a parting gift of sorts, he gave me a copy, jesting that there's probably more information in there about him than I had even wanted to begin with. As he was visibly excited about my project (requesting that I send him the finished version), and seemed to take a liking to me, I had planned on further engaging him through mail, but it evidently was not to be. This essay is my gift to

⁴³¹ In the closing essay to *For Daniel Bell*, “A Passion for Waiting: Liberal Notes on Messianism and the Jews,” pgs. 131-155, Leon Wieseltier writes: “Destiny must be attacked indirectly. We are not enjoined to live climactically. We are enjoined to live significantly. . . . A messiah who is not a revolutionary. Criticism without nihilism. A change that is not an end. Fulfillment without closure. A climax that preserves. A hope that neither lulls nor incites. These are not contradictions. They are, rather, the terms of messianism in Judaism, which is finally not founded on an appetite for crisis.” (152). He adds: “[This] passion for waiting has another name, not a religious one and not a Jewish one. Its name is liberalism. For liberalism is, among other things, a philosophy of patience. It is the great adversary of eschatology; and the great liberal thinkers must therefore be numbered among the great critics of the messianic hunger.” (154). Placed into this mix he puts those responsible for his liberal upbringing: Isaiah Berlin, Lionel Trilling, and Daniel Bell. He then adds, “mutating all the *mutanda* . . . the name of Daniel Bell alongside the names of Maimonides, Nahmanides, the Maharal, and the others in this beautiful Jewish tradition [of patience], for he is one of the sages to whom we are indebted for our ability, may it stand us in good stead, to keep our heads.” (155).

him, another essay—that I write—for Daniel Bell, another essay articulating why Bell matters.⁴³²

⁴³² This epilogue is pending article publication in *Society*, Vol. 48, No. 5, September/October 2011. All due thanks to Jonathan Imber (Editor-in-Chief) and Daniel Mahoney (Book Review Editor) for permission to include this version in my dissertation; also, for their wonderful reception of the piece, as well as for their encouragement throughout.

Postscript

Canadian singer-songwriter, Leonard Cohen, performed in Warsaw on the 22nd of March 1985. Music journalist Daniel Wyszogrodzki wrote of waiting for the concert as if “waiting for a volcano to erupt.” He explained that while the audience listened to Cohen’s beautiful and majestic music, they nevertheless expected some political statement. What everyone wanted to hear, a seemingly embarrassed but sympathetic Wyszogrodzki recounts, was *The Word*, the one word both sacred and forbidden: Solidarity. “He finally said it and the audience erupted like it was more important than any of his own words. Or songs.”

One of those songs Cohen sang that hopeful Friday night was “The Partisan,” his 1969 cover of the Russian-born Anna Marly’s 1943 adaptation of *Chant des Partisans*, the most popular protest song of the Free French Forces during the Second World War. It was widely regarded as a hymn of the anti-Soviet bloc’s first independent trade union that would be paramount in the efforts that culminated in events leading to Soviet Collapse. Lech Walesa, co-founder of Polish Solidarity, considered it his favorite song.⁴³³

⁴³³ Daniel Wyszogrodzki, “Warsaw 1985,” <http://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/warsaw85.html>. Incidentally, Leonard Cohen seems to have his own very real connection with *Partisan Review*, the magazine having published his short story, “Luggage Fire Sale,” in 1969, Vol. 36, No. 1. A video of the Leonard Cohen’s “The Partisan” was uploaded on youtube on 20 July 2008 by majorsnag: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG4ndbhOkpI>. Full lyrics are included there. Incidentally, a video of a live performance of “The Partisan” was uploaded on youtube on 4 January 2007 by votampocosoy. Votampocosoy writes: “I would like to make of this website an anonymous tribute for all the Resistance heroes that may identify themselves with this history. Please leave the name, the date and the place where they lived or died.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2I5UYkcPAY&feature=related>.

The Partisan, by Leonard Cohen

When they poured across the border
I was cautioned to surrender,
this I could not do;
I took my gun and vanished.
I have changed my name so often,
I've lost my wife and children
but I have many friends,
and some of them are with me.

An old woman gave us shelter,
kept us hidden in the garret,
then the soldiers came;
she died without a whisper.

There were three of us this morning
I'm the only one this evening
but I must go on;
the frontiers are my prison.

Oh, the wind, the wind is blowing,
through the graves the wind is blowing,
freedom soon will come;
then we'll come from the shadows.

Les Allemands e'taient chez moi, (The Germans were at my home)
ils me dirent, "Signe toi," (They said, "Sign yourself,")
mais je n'ai pas peur; (But I am not afraid)
j'ai repris mon arme. (I have retaken my weapon.)

J'ai change' cent fois de nom, (I have changed [my] name a hundred times)
j'ai perdu femme et enfants (I have lost [my] wife and children)
mais j'ai tant d'amis; (But I have so many friends)
j'ai la France entie`re. (I have all of France)

Un vieil homme dans un grenier (An old man, in an attic)
pour la nuit nous a cache', (Hid us for the night)
les Allemands l'ont pris; (The Germans captured him)
il est mort sans surprise. (He died without surprise.)

Oh, the wind, the wind is blowing,
through the graves the wind is blowing,
freedom soon will come;
then we'll come from the shadows.

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