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## Dismantling the Literary Fallout Shelter: Encounter Magazine and the Creative Ethos of the Cold War Writer

Joshua Parkin Corner  
*Bard College*

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Bard

# **DISMANTLING THE LITERARY FALLOUT SHELTER**

*Encounter Magazine* and the Creative Ethos of the  
Cold War Writer

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
by  
Joshua Parkin Corner

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
April 2014



*for Tamar Kaplan and Omar Pound*

*i migliori fabbri*



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And as for you, if you’re reading this, you certainly deserve my thanks.

With love and respect,

Joshua Corner  
April 29, 2014  
Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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# INTRODUCTION

## Beyond Propaganda

Towards a Holistic View of *Encounter*

“A review is also a way of talking with the world, and, if worth listening to at all, alive with a sense of conversation, a feeling for the continuous dialogue which alone, in our days of agitated pictures and violent excitements, can sustain an imaginative interest in words and texts.”

—Melvin J. Lasky, 1963<sup>1</sup>

Every person who reads a magazine regularly surely has a favorite element or feature that they cherish above all other components of the periodical. One might think of that axiomatic youth who, if we take him at his word, reads *Playboy* “for the articles.” My mother, for instance, loves the cartoons in *The New Yorker*, and although she has long maintained a subscription, I have yet to find her reading anything in the magazine other than the captions of the cartoons. If you were to ask subscribers to *National Geographic* to describe the publication, the majority of responses would likely mention its photographs. These features—whether they be cartoons, articles, or photographs—are the commodities that define a magazine in the mind of the reader, and are, in many cases, the reason why an individual continue to subscribe to a given publication. These beloved features not only determine how the reader interacts with a magazine, but can, perhaps, lead the reader towards a rather reductive appreciation of the publication’s character—what it stands for, and what it is trying to accomplish.

Such has been the fate of *Encounter*, a British literary magazine that debuted in October of 1953 that has been retroactively reduced in the mind of the public to a symbol of Western Cold War

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<sup>1</sup> Mevin J. Lasky, preface to *Encounters: An Anthology from the First Ten Years of Encounter Magazine*, ed. Stephen Spender et al. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), xiii.

propaganda. For fourteen years, the monthly collections of poems, stories, articles, and criticism printed in *Encounter* were devoured by an eager readership composed of European and American intellectuals and the educated elite. Yet *Encounter*, along with its sponsors, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, had been supported and funded by the Central Intelligence Agency as part of a large-scale yet clandestine effort to convince the world's intellectuals of the evils of political neutralism and convert them to the side of anti-Communism.<sup>2</sup> This was all carried out in secrecy, of course, and like any covert operation, the public was never supposed to find out about the intelligence community's grand plan to fight the Cold War "with ideas instead of bombs," as former CIA employee Thomas Braden described the scheme.<sup>3</sup> But between 1966 and 1967, rumors began to circulate about the source of *Encounter*'s funding, and as more evidence was revealed, the Western bloc realized that America's intelligence agency had, in fact, been dabbling in the affairs of the cultural elite for the past decade and a half.<sup>4</sup>

Thus *Encounter*, although it quietly continued to publish issues until 1990, receded from the public eye in the years that followed the scandal. The writers and thinkers involved with the publication, almost all of whom were unaware of the covert operation they were taking part in, seemed eager to forget about the whole affair. Following the revelations regarding the publication's connection to the CIA, the legacy of the magazine was tarnished beyond repair. Many scholars have since studied how *Encounter* exists as an article of 'propaganda,' despite the insistence of figures such as Irving Kristol, who served as co-editor of the magazine between 1953 and 1967, that there was "no trace" of "anything resembling political censorship of *Encounter* by its sponsors."<sup>5</sup> By "sponsors," Kristol primarily means the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a transnational coalition of

<sup>2</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Braden, "I'm glad the CIA is 'immoral,'" *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 20, 1967, 10 – 14.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 220 – 230.

<sup>5</sup> Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 17.

intellectuals described by one critic as the “centerpiece of a global anticommunist propaganda campaign conceived, implemented and directed by the United States Government.”<sup>6</sup> Most contemporary readers of *Encounter*, armed with full knowledge of this aspect of *Encounter’s* history, will feel an urge to mine the magazine for its politics, scanning each article and essay for undiscovered caches of propagandistic material.

The truth is that there was, in fact, a decidedly political and ideological bent to much of what was published in the magazine; it would be foolish to claim otherwise of a magazine in which the first page of its first issue happily proclaimed “the destruction of the Marxist-Leninist creed.”<sup>7</sup> *Encounter* did indeed encourage, if not outright demand, its readers to adopt certain political viewpoints. Yet something of great value has been lost as the publication has become synonymous with “propaganda.” The magazine was more than a political entity—it published polemics against Communism, but it also featured travelogues, short stories, poems, and art criticism. Out of this complex arrangement of literary forms and material emerges a picture of a magazine that, in addition to asking something of its readers politically, encouraged certain modes of literary and cultural practice. Put another way, the magazine’s politics functioned on a deeper level; it was also home to an apolitical literary space that lacked explicit ideology but carried a nebulous call to action.

In the realm of literary culture, the magazine promoted a model of socially engaged authorship. It asked the reader—understood to be a cosmopolitan intellectual—to become a cultural participant. For the magazine, to be a member of the cultural elite meant that one had a duty to engage with the world outside of their immediate social circumstance. In a literary context, this notion of responsibility meant that the writer had an obligation to allow both himself and his work to become part of the larger cultural fabric; it was not, in other words, an art for art’s sake mentality

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<sup>6</sup> Russell H. Bartley, “The Piper Played to Us All: Orchestrating the Cultural Cold War in the USA, Europe, and Latin America,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 14, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 574.

<sup>7</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 1.

that the magazine sought to nurture. The rise of New Criticism during the preceding decades had envisioned literature as “a hermetically sealed cultural enclave.”<sup>8</sup> Authors like T.S. Eliot thought of texts as “independent [from] religious effect, or moral, or political and social.”<sup>9</sup> *Encounter* might be read as a kind of response to New Criticism, encompassing a viewpoint in which the author ought to create works that, rather than being independent from, were directly occupied with religious, moral, political, and social issues. In turn, *Encounter*’s editors worked to create a value system whereby the adoption of this engaged attitude was associated with literary merit. That is to say, the magazine espoused the virtues of nearly the exact opposite of New Criticism, as it argued that “literature both influences and is influenced by its cultural enclave,”<sup>10</sup> and congratulated those authors who shared this conviction.

There thus can be found in the magazine’s seemingly apolitical content, such as its commentary on cultural or literary matters, a politics. The mode of socially engaged authorship promoted in *Encounter* may not have commanded the author to become an anti-Communist ideologue or ‘Cold Warrior,’ but it did leave room for the author to communicate political ideas through literary texts in a way that the New Critics would have certainly frowned upon. This project seeks to incorporate a discussion of the literary ethos of both the magazine and its editors into the ongoing discourse regarding its geopolitical significance during the Cold War. By moving away from a characterization of the magazine’s contents as largely propagandistic, and turning a critical gaze to the articulation of seemingly non-political issues in *Encounter*, the contemporary reader and scholar can gain a more holistic understanding of how the publication functioned as an outlet for intellectual energies at the height of the Cold War.

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<sup>8</sup> Guy Sircello, “The Poetry of Theory: Reflections on after the New Criticism,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 396.

<sup>9</sup> John Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism and After*, ed. Thomas Daniel Young (Connecticut: New Directions, 1941), 138.  
<sup>10</sup> Sircello, “The Poetry of Theory,” 396.

The first chapter of this project begins with a history of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the creation of *Encounter*, then focuses on examining how the contents of the magazine's inaugural issue established and testified to the foundational principles of its model of socially engaged authorship. The first chapter also investigates the editorial and creative ethos of Stephen Spender, the British co-editor of the magazine; Spender's writing, both in *Encounter* and elsewhere, illustrates a commitment to the notion of the author as an active cultural participant and sheds light upon what he considered to be the goals of the magazine.

The second chapter opens with an investigation of the magazine's approach to questions of nationality and statehood, and explores the humanist rhetoric used by the magazine to code foreign spaces. *Encounter* published a vast number of travelogues, and this second chapter considers how these texts function within the framework of the magazine's model of socially engaged authorship, and, furthermore, looks at how the travelogue operates as a creative space for the author in *Encounter*. The central texts in this chapter are pieces of travel writing from the magazine by Richard Wright, William Faulkner, and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, although travelogues from several other authors are analyzed as well.

The final chapter studies how the edifice of American literature was presented and defined in *Encounter*, and examines the relationships between the different types of literary texts written by American authors in the magazine and the editorial preferences of the two American co-editors, Irving Kristol and Melvin Lasky. In addition, the third chapter argues that there were two distinct phases to the magazine as literary entity, with the beginning and end points of each phase marked by the arrival and departure of Irving Kristol and Melvin Lasky; Kristol served as co-editor from 1953 to December of 1958, at which point he was replaced by Lasky, who would remain as an editor of the magazine until its final issue was published in September of 1990. This final chapter examines

not only the individual literary tastes of both Kristol and Lasky, but considers how the two editors conceived of the duties and responsibilities of literary authorship

I will be the first to admit that there are counterexamples to the arguments I make in this project. This is the great danger of studying a literary magazine—even in a single issue, there is such an abundance of voices and differing opinions that it is hard to determine what values or attitudes, if any, can be attributed to the editors or to the magazine as a whole. For instance, I argue in the first chapter that the excerpts from Virginia Woolf's diary published in the first issue of *Encounter* reject the narcissism of authorship and the notion of a “literary personality,” and conclude that this rejection is a crucial component of the magazine’s core literary value system. But one could turn to the first line of Jack Kerouac’s piece “Beatific,” published in the magazine’s August 1959 issue, where Kerouac writes, “This necessarily’ll have to be about myself.”<sup>11</sup> While Woolf repudiates the solipsistic author, Kerouac proudly announces that he is, by virtue of necessity, the primary subject of his own text. The two ideas, upon first examination, seem directly contradictory to one another. Which one is more important? Does the presence of Kerouac’s statement in the magazine negate the importance of Woolf’s assertions? Whose words and thoughts matter more?

This problem of conflicting sentiments cannot be solved in full, especially when assessing fourteen years worth of printed material. I have tried to limit the potential for confusion and discord by focusing on identifying the patterns in the magazine’s contents. In other words, I have attempted to locate those subjects, topics and ideas that reappear month after month, and, accordingly, treat these recurring themes as the central concerns of the magazine at large. I have also relied heavily upon other written material produced by Spender, Kristol, and Lasky, as these journal entries, articles, and books, when combined with various pieces of biographical information about the

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<sup>11</sup> Jack Kerouac, “Beatific: On the Origins of a Generation,” *Encounter* 13, no. 2 (August 1959): 56.

editors, provide us with hints as to the purpose or significance of publishing certain authors or articles in *Encounter*.

I am not surprised that the world of arts and letters has been content to let the legacy of *Encounter* suffer. After all, between 1953 and 1967, many of the best and brightest writers, critics, philosophers, and public intellectuals from across the globe unknowingly participated in the global dissemination of pro-Western ideology. It is fair to label certain parts of *Encounter* as ‘propaganda,’ and I have no interest in apologizing for those parts or pretending they do not exist. I am interested, rather, in expanding the critical discussion of *Encounter* to encompass the publication’s vast grey area, the textual space that is devoid of overt politics yet contains implicit ideological undertones, for perhaps no other reason than that I believe this grey area is where the magazine’s richest substance lies. *Encounter* published writing by Vladimir Nabokov and Aldous Huxley, Richard Wright and W.H. Auden, Clement Greenberg and Sidney Hook, Anthony Burgess and Jorge Luis Borges, Arthur Koestler and Lionel Trilling, Bertrand Russell and Hannah Arendt, Wyndham Lewis and William Faulkner. To forget that *Encounter* was more than a tool for promoting Western interests abroad is to ignore one of the most vibrant sites of intellectual and literary discourse in the twentieth century.

# I

## “No Ulterior Justification”

The First Issue of *Encounter* and the Socially Engaged Author

I have in mind also the dangers which may come from official encouragement and patronage of the arts; the dangers to which men of letters would be exposed, if they became, in their professional capacity, servants of the State.

—T.S. Eliot, “The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe,” 1945<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual in any age is like a seismograph that registers even the most incipient changes in the world around it. Education and training cultivate his faculties, and his developed imagination adds to his sensitivity. He not only reflects the changes around him but, by his imaginative advocacy, even intensifies them.

—Prabhakar Padhye, 1955 Congress for Cultural Freedom conference in Burma<sup>2</sup>

It was near the end of October in 1953 when the first issue of *Encounter*, a monthly periodical based out of London, began to appear on the racks of newsstands and bookstores in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, South Africa, and India.<sup>3</sup> The magazine, with a front cover consisting solely of green and black text set against a plain white background, might have looked out of place on a shelf full of copies of *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, whose colorfully illustrated covers look almost gaudy in comparison. *Encounter*’s title was proclaimed in large green letters at the top of the page, along with a description of its contents: “LITERATURE – ARTS – POLITICS.” Underneath the header was a slightly abridged list of the articles and their authors,

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, “The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe,” *Sewanee Review* 53, no. 3 (1945): 341.

<sup>2</sup> Prabhakar Padhye, “The Situation of the Intellectual,” in *Cultural Freedom in Asia: the proceedings of a conference held at Rangoon, Burma, on February 17, 18, 19 & 20, 1955, and convened by the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Society for the Extension of Democratic Ideals*, ed. Herbert Passin (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1956), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew N. Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 53.

boasting a formidable roster of well-known literary figures, including Virginia Woolf, Albert Camus, and Christopher Isherwood, among others. The magazine seemed designed to pique the interest of Europe's intellectual elite, with the enticing literary pedigree showcased on the cover asserting an aura of highbrow authority that no doubt attracted the attentions of a learned audience. Those who happened upon the October 1953 issue of *Encounter* while browsing the periodicals section were presented with a journal that went to great lengths to portray itself as a forum built both by and for a global network of intellectuals. The first volume of *Encounter* can be read as a mission statement, a collection of texts that highlight the magazine's literary sensibilities and its creative ethos. These declarations of intent in the October of 1953 issue contain the outline for a model of authorship and artistic production that would come to define the pages of *Encounter* for years to come.

If a reader had picked up the first issue of *Encounter* and flipped to the table of contents, his or her eyes might have drifted to a small disclaimer, printed in italics, near the bottom of the page: "*The views expressed in the pages of ENCOUNTER are to be attributed to the writers, not to the sponsors.*"<sup>4</sup> There is, of course, nothing particularly surprising about the presence of a disclaimer, given that many periodicals and books feature similar statements from their publishers or editors. The reader of *Encounter* in 1953 was presumably more drawn towards the names of the authors listed in the magazine's table of contents than the unassuming and easily ignored disclaimer nestled beneath. Those who were curious about the identity of the publication's "sponsors" would not have had to look far, as the editorial that opens the issue names a group called the Congress for Cultural Freedom as the source of financial support for *Encounter*. Yet after April of 1966, when the *New York Times* reported that *Encounter* had received funding from America's Central Intelligence agency, the contemporary reader of the magazine's first edition might be tempted to view the disclaimer as the

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<sup>4</sup> *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 3.

most salient part of the page rather than the least.<sup>5</sup> The scope and magnitude of the CIA's involvement in *Encounter*—and, moreover, the agency's hand in the creation of the magazine's "sponsors," the Congress for Cultural Freedom—was slowly revealed over the course of 1966 and 1967. Historian Frances Stonor Saunders offers a concise summary of what would eventually become known to the public:

During the height of the Cold War, the US government committed vast resources to a secret programme of cultural propaganda...it was managed, in great secrecy, by...the Central Intelligence Agency. The centerpiece of this covert campaign was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, run by CIA agent Michael Josselson from 1950 til 1967...Its mission was to nudge the intelligentsia of western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism and towards a view more accommodating of 'the American way.'<sup>6</sup>

The CIA's intended 'nudging' of the intellectual elite was, as Saunders points out, political in nature. Whether this ideological shift was successfully orchestrated or not is a matter that has been taken up with great interest by many scholars, but will not be the focus here. Instead, this chapter considers how the efforts of the American intelligence community were, through *Encounter*, responsible for the development of a transnational literary discourse on the social responsibilities of authorship. The first issue of *Encounter* constitutes a formalized starting point for the emergence of this dialogue. The contents of the magazine's inaugural volume propose a model of artistic appreciation and creation in which the value of a text is attached to a writer's willingness to engage with the non-literary world. In this model, the author is imagined as an artistic entity who writes for an audience comprised not only of other authors. Likewise, according to this schema, literature of merit is created by those authors who, to borrow the phrasing from the editorial in the October 1953 issue, have "a respect for that part of the human endeavor that goes by the name of culture."<sup>7</sup> The author's "respect" for a world beyond the written page, and, in turn, his engagement with that world, is what *Encounter* suggests to be the source of literature's vitality.

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<sup>5</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 371.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>7</sup> "After the Apocalypse," *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 1.

## THE BERLIN CONFERENCE AND THE BIRTH OF A PERIODICAL

There would be no *Encounter* without the financial and organizational support of the aforementioned Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), a group formed in June of 1950 at a conference in West Berlin.<sup>8</sup> The conference in Berlin had been designed and funded by the Central Intelligence Agency,<sup>9</sup> who had chosen the location due to what American historian Christopher Lasch describes as West Berlin's unique status "as an outpost of Western Power in Communist East Europe and one of the principal foci and symbols of the cold war."<sup>10</sup> The decision to hold the conference in this ideologically charged space was, Lasch argues, a continuation of "the official American policy of making Berlin a showcase of 'freedom.'" The Berlin conference was a performance of a certain brand of postwar transnational intellectual society, parading some of the world's most celebrated thinkers, artists, and public figures in front of an audience made up of their absent peers. The conference, in short, represented a unification of American and European intellectual interests and concerns.<sup>11</sup> Figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Upton Sinclair offered their public support for the meeting.<sup>12</sup> The group of "delegates," as the organizers dubbed the carefully selected assortment of public intellectuals and literati flown in from around the globe, included Tennessee Williams, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Arthur Koestler, André Malraux, James T. Farrell, Franco Lombardi, and film actor Robert Montgomery.<sup>13</sup> An international coalition of world-renowned philosophers—John Dewey, Benedetto Croce, Bertrand Russell, Karl Jaspers, and Jacques

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<sup>8</sup> Giles Scott-Smith, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the End of Ideology and the 1955 Milan Conference: 'Defining the Parameters of Discourse,'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 3 (July 2002): 437.

<sup>9</sup> Richard C.S. Trahair and Robert Lawrence Miller, *Encyclopedia of Cold War Espionage, Spies, and Secret Operations* (New York: Enigma Books, 2009), 276 – 278.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and Post-war American Hegemony* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 102.

<sup>12</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 72 – 84.

Maritain—were appointed as the “honorary chairmen” of the event.<sup>14</sup> Benedetto Croce had opposed Mussolini, Bertrand Russell had been awarded the Novel Prize in Mathematics, and Karl Jaspers was one of the founders of existentialism and had been a vocal critic of the Third Reich.<sup>15</sup> John Dewey, the American pragmatist, could perhaps be described as the champion of Western democratic virtues. It was, historian Peter Coleman writes, a symbolic handful of individuals that “exemplified the spirit of the occasion.”<sup>16</sup> As some of the era’s most celebrated artists and thinkers flocked to Berlin’s Tatiana Palace, the personal histories of the honorary chairmen erased the possibility for there to be any doubt regarding the conference’s loyalty to liberalism, democracy, and the freedom of thought.

On June 30, after several days of heated presentations and debates on philosophy, science, ideology, and the atomic bomb, the Berlin conference drew to a close as Hungarian-British author Arthur Koestler stood before a crowd of 15,000 gathered in the Funkturm Sporthalle and announced in German: “Friends, freedom has seized the offensive!”<sup>17</sup> Koestler, one of the handful of individuals involved in the Congress for Cultural Freedom who was entirely aware of the CIA’s funding, began to read the “Freedom Manifesto” to his audience, a fourteen-point document he and a group of friends had written the night before.<sup>18</sup> The Freedom Manifesto would quickly be adopted as the “moral and philosophical cornerstone of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.”<sup>19</sup> The Freedom Manifesto borrows the phrasing of America’s Declaration of Independence and begins: “We hold it to be self-evident that intellectual freedom is one of the inalienable rights of man.”<sup>20</sup> The philosophical tenor of the opening eventually gives way to a more explicit discussion of ideology, as

<sup>14</sup> Michael Warner, “Origins of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1949 – 1950,” *Studies in Intelligence* 38, no. 5 (1995): 89 – 98.

<sup>15</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 21 – 22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>18</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 394 – 395.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Koestler, “Manifesto of the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” in *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 167 – 168.

Article 11 concludes that “the theory and practice of the totalitarian state” is “the greatest challenge which man has been called on to meet in the course of civilized history.”<sup>21</sup> The Freedom Manifesto’s attack on totalitarianism does not make any specific mention of Stalin, the Soviet Union, or, for that matter, any individuals or states. The vagueness at play in the document would help to define how the Congress for Cultural Freedom and *Encounter* framed the Cold War. Neither the organization nor the magazine had any interest in discussing geopolitical machinations or nuclear strategy. Instead, the Cold War was coded as a humanist struggle, with terms like “totalitarianism” rehabilitated to fit more comfortably inside of a philosophical discourse on “freedom” and “liberty.” This abstract rendering of the Cold War would prove to be the key to the success of the CCF and *Encounter* for a very simple reason: it appealed to artists and intellectuals in a way that arguments over foreign policy and missile placement could not.

The CIA quickly capitalized on the momentum generated by the Berlin conference to establish the Congress for Cultural Freedom as a “permanent entity,” allocating approximately \$200,000 to cover the administrative costs for the fledgling organization’s first year of operation.<sup>22</sup> The idea for *Encounter* would surface around this time, as a meeting between American and British intelligence officials in early 1951 found both groups in agreement that a “high-level publication” had the potential to correct the absence of “intellectual anti-Communism” in Europe.<sup>23</sup> As the year drew to a close, the plan had been approved, and in the late spring of 1952, British and American intelligence agencies began to look for a suitable pair of candidates, one from each of the two countries, to lead their “new highbrow magazine.”<sup>24</sup> Neither of the two editors were to be made aware of the connections between their enterprise and the intelligence world. Stephen Spender, an English poet who had joined the Communist Party for a handful of weeks during the 1930s, was

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<sup>21</sup> Koestler, “Manifesto,” 168.

<sup>22</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 167 – 169.

chosen to be the British editor as much on the basis of his connections in the literary world as for the symbolic importance of his brief flirtation with and subsequent disavowal of communism.<sup>25</sup> Irving Kristol, a former Trotskyist and World War II veteran who had worked on the staff of the American monthly political magazine *Commentary*, was selected as Spender's American counterpart.<sup>26</sup> Journalist Neil Berry writes that "Spender lent his fame and English literary prestige to the enterprise [and] Kristol brought [a] brand of tough-minded political and cultural discussion."<sup>27</sup> In March of 1953, Spender and Kristol began to collect material for the first issue, and, by June of the same year, they had set up an office in London. A number of fairly dreadful options were considered for the title of the publication, including *Turning Point* and *Writing and Freedom*, but by the time Kristol and Spender opened their London headquarters, the magazine had been christened *Encounter*.<sup>28</sup>

The CIA funneled \$40,000 to Spender and Kristol through the Fairfield Foundation to pay for the first twelve months of printing bills and other expenses.<sup>29</sup> Over the next fourteen years, the investment would yield results far beyond what the American intelligence community could have hoped for during the chaotic aftermath of the Berlin conference. *Encounter* was among the most successful of the Western world's Cold War cultural operations, perhaps second only to the CIA's relentless promotion of Abstract Expressionist painting, which brought canvases filled with dots and splashes of color to art galleries around the globe and made Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko household names.<sup>30</sup> Michael Josselson, the CIA agent who served as Congress for Cultural Freedom's Administrative Secretary for the entire duration of the organization's existence, referred to *Encounter* as "our greatest asset."<sup>31</sup> *Encounter* was not an "asset" to Josselson and the rest of the American intelligence community simply because it somehow attempted to force global intellectual

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<sup>25</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 167 – 173.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>27</sup> Neil Berry, "Encounter," *The Antioch Review* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 194.

<sup>28</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 176.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 252 – 278.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 166.

society to condemn communism, but, rather, because of the magazine's unique ability to challenge the hermetic tendencies of the cultural elite. *Encounter* did not bring the Cold War to the attention of the world of arts and letters through the constant application of ideological reprimand or sermonizing. Instead, it was an "asset" in the intelligence community's fight against communism because the journal was able to establish itself as the premier venue for intellectual discourse of all shapes and sizes. Articles on emerging trends in Japanese poetry were placed alongside pieces about the threat of nuclear annihilation. *Encounter* did not allow the reader to remain exclusively interested in matters of literature or politics or science. Indeed, *Encounter* was successful partially because of its resistance to becoming a niche magazine. Saunders describes it as having "held a central position in post-war intellectual history...it could be as lively and bitchy as a literary cocktail party."<sup>32</sup> Political theorist Giles Scott-Smith considers *Encounter* to have been "a hegemonic journal of some sophistication, and it should be regarded as a remarkable piece of cultural production from the conditions of Cold War orthodoxy."<sup>33</sup> For some critics, the ties between *Encounter* and the Western cultural warfare apparatus have made it difficult to approach the magazine on terms that allow for its role in shaping the literary texture of the period to assume the same degree of importance afforded to its political significance. Yet *Encounter* did not appeal to Europe's intelligentsia because it bombarded them with a monthly collection of political moralizing. Rather, the cultural elite embraced the magazine because it allowed them to become vocal participants in an ongoing discussion about their own function and position in society.

## THE POST-APOCALYPTIC INTELLECTUAL?

The editorial that opens the debut issue of *Encounter*, "After the Apocalypse," is attributed on the cover to "The Editors," presumably meaning that the piece was a combined effort on the part of

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<sup>32</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*, 132.

Spender and Kristol. “After the Apocalypse” begins with a series of rhetorical questions: “Is it our fancy, or does this first issue of *Encounter* appear in a good season? [...] Has the apocalypse we were waiting for come and gone – a pseudo-apocalypse of pseudo-prophets?”<sup>34</sup> The editorial quickly drops any pretense of subtlety with regard to what and who are being referred to, as the “pseudo-prophets” are identified as “Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin,” whose deaths have brought an end to “the mythologies of an epoch.”<sup>35</sup> The grouping of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin is presented with a casual abruptness, as though the logic for why the three are attached is abundantly self-evident, and that no explanation would be needed for a categorization of the three leaders as similar that, had it appeared ten years previous, would likely have been met with skepticism or outright ridicule. Thus, *Encounter* offers no explanation, framing the association between Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin as one that would be clear to anyone who has been paying any attention at all.

The editorial continues by arguing that the “last surviving fable was exposed only yesterday,” with uprisings of East German and Czechoslovakian factory workers providing proof of “the destruction of the Marxist-Leninist creed.”<sup>36</sup> The editorial identifies the “Marxist-Leninist creed” as one of the “fables” and “mythologies,” and this diagnosis serves to reject the notion that ideology is merely a belief or opinion, and is, instead, located within a more objective, almost scientific, sphere where its principles can be judged as either true or false. For the editors of *Encounter*, the destruction of Communism has ushered in a new era of possibility where “[n]ow, perhaps, words will once again mean what they say.”<sup>37</sup> Spender and Kristol’s conclusion that “the Marxist-Leninist creed” has been destroyed was somewhat premature, as both the Soviet Union and the Communist Party were still very much in existence in October of 1953. But, similar to the editorial’s casual grouping of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, “After the Apocalypse” presents this alleged “destruction” as not only

<sup>34</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

obvious, but beyond question. *Encounter*, having framed ideology as a system that demands objective analysis, claims the authority to conclude that the Marxist-Leninist creed is deceased, whether or not the Kremlin was still standing.

The editorial does not, however, explicitly argue that democracy is poised to fill the void formerly occupied by the “fable” of the communist state, opting instead to suggest that *Encounter* is making its entrance during a sociopolitical moment that marks the beginning of a new period of enlightenment for mankind, where “words will once again mean what they say” and progress will, at long last, be possible. As journalist Neil Berry notes, British magazines, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, have been “caught up in an epoch-making corporate endeavor to bring to fruition a mature society, a ‘rational and ‘enlightened’ …beacon of progress to the rest of the world.”<sup>38</sup> The philosophical abstraction of Arthur Koestler’s Freedom Manifesto echoes here, as *Encounter* reconceptualizes the Cold War as a conflict with significance beyond nuclear weapons and missile silos; it is a cultural struggle that, as Koestler told the crowd in Berlin, is “the greatest challenge which man has been called on to meet in the course of civilized history.”<sup>39</sup> When *TIME* publisher Henry Luce wrote about the need to “stop Hitler” in his influential 1941 essay “The American Century,” he commented:

[I]f we cannot state [America’s] war aims in terms of vastly distant geography, shall we use some big words like Democracy and Freedom and Justice? Yes, we can use the big words. The President has already used them. And perhaps had better get used to using them again. Maybe they do mean something – about the future as well as the past.<sup>40</sup>

The perspective on the Cold War offered by *Encounter*, both in “After the Apocalypse” and elsewhere, is a manifestation of Luce’s desire for wartime discourse to reflect the humanist idealism of Western principles. And, as hoped for in “The American Century,” Spender and Kristol appear to believe their own gospel, with their lofty rhetoric supported by a strength of conviction that, to

<sup>38</sup> Neil Berry, *Articles of Faith: The Story of British Intellectual Journalism* (London: Waywiser, 2002), 20.

<sup>39</sup> Koestler, “Manifesto,” 168.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Luce, “The American Century,” *Life* 10, no. 7 (February 17, 1941): 63.

borrow Luce's phrasing, the "big words" of their editorial "do mean something." The magazine is, according to Spender and Kristol, more interested in "the reconciliation of equality with liberty"<sup>41</sup> than the military and political strategy preferred by Washington and Moscow.

The editorial's argument that a new age of truth and progress will emerge out of the ashes of Communism is accompanied by a curious caveat found near its end: "Appearing at this time,...*Encounter* seeks to promote no 'line,' though its editors have opinions they will not hesitate to express."<sup>42</sup> This self-classification of *Encounter* as a non-partisan entity is certainly worthy of some skepticism, but there is a certain apolitical positioning taking place here that, considered alongside the magazine's stated focus on the ethical and theoretical implications of Cold War politics, foreshadows a piece written by sociologist Edward Shils for the November 1955 issue of *Encounter* titled "The End of Ideology?"<sup>43</sup> Shils was not the only one to use the phrase—French philosopher Raymond Aron published a book in 1955 that sported a chapter with the same name as the article in *Encounter* (including the quotation mark), and American sociologist Daniel Bell would bring the idea to a mass audience with his popular 1960 book *The End of Ideology*.<sup>44</sup>

The end of ideology was a theoretical approach to global affairs characterized by a belief in the "wrongness of dividing the world into the powers of light and the powers of darkness," the need for "[r]ejecting the dogmas of both Communism and anti-Communism [and] factual and calm examination of totalitarian regimes," as well as "building... an international community of intellectuals based on civility."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, "After the Apocalypse" seems to embody the gospel that Shils, Aron, and Bell would evangelize, albeit each doing so in a slightly different manner, over the course of the following decade, as the editorial in *Encounter* critiques the Soviet bloc for its anti-

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<sup>41</sup> "After the Apocalypse," 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Shils, "The End of Ideology?" *Encounter* 26, no. 5 (November 1955): 52 - 58

<sup>44</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 54.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 54 – 55.

factual employment of “fables” and “mythologies,” and articulates a desire to move beyond a global political discourse of rabid dogmatism. The Congress for Cultural Freedom had begun cultivating its “international community of intellectuals” with the Berlin conference, and *Encounter* was the next step of the project. Indeed, the pointed references to John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, and the other “founding chairmen” of the CCF in “After the Apocalypse” recall the intellectual pageantry of the Berlin conference. Drawing authority from the implicit support of Dewey, Russell, and the rest of the CCF’s figureheads, the editorial arrives at the conclusion that “[i]t is natural...that *Encounter* should try to represent... this community,” and “it should aim, not at the slurring over of differences of opinion, but rather at the uninhibited exploration of them.”<sup>46</sup> *Encounter* paints a rosy picture of the global cultural elite as a cohesive association of thinkers who function as the primary mechanism through which human progress can be attained, but it also wriggles itself into the foreground of this portrait of transcontinental intellectual culture. The magazine’s statement of purpose in “After the Apocalypse” casts *Encounter* as the singular vehicle, the “natural” representative, of the recently anointed cultural vanguard of civically engaged society.

In 1967, after the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in *Encounter* became public knowledge, Irish author Conor Cruise O’Brien offered a particularly cynical reflection on the political and artistic ethos found in “After the Apocalypse.” O’Brien suggested that the claim of “promot[ing] no line” made in the 1953 editorial was a poorly-executed attempt to give the “impression that its anti-communist and pro-capitalist propaganda is not propaganda at all, but the spontaneous and almost uniform reaction of the culturally free, of truly civilized people.”<sup>47</sup> O’Brien is not wrong, but his criticism exemplifies the ease with which the contemporary reader of *Encounter* might dismiss its contents as being solely propaganda. Although the claim that *Encounter* exists to “promote no line” appears to contradict the political implications of “After the Apocalypse,” the

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<sup>46</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>47</sup> C.C. O’Brien, *Writers and Politics: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 170.

goals of the journal also included “representing [the] community” of writers, thinkers, and those that participate in “that part of the human endeavor that goes by the name of culture.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the first issues of *Encounter*, as Scott-Smith suggests, show the magazine intent on appearing as “the dominant culture” and “the centre of the zeitgeist.”<sup>49</sup> Spender and Kristol certainly hoped for their magazine to achieve this level of prestige, as would the editors of any magazine.

For the world of literature, *Encounter* pursued a project of selective canonization that, postcolonial literary critic Andrew Rubin’s analysis suggests, “in some cases silence[d] and marginalize[d] writers” whose work was perceived to fall on the wrong side of the cold war global binary.<sup>50</sup> However, the process of literary canonization at work in *Encounter* expressed a preference for certain modes of intellectual behavior and artistic values to its audience. The journal sought to establish what might be called a ‘code of authorial conduct’, a redefinition of the relationships between writers, their peers, the world at large, and the production and consumption of literary text itself. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the CIA sponsors of *Encounter*, and perhaps Spender and Kristol as well, recognized that any attempt to shift the cultural elite away from Communism would first require orchestrating a broader, apolitical shift in the tastes and principles of the intellectual class. The essays, short stories, and criticism published in *Encounter* between 1953 and public discovery of the magazine’s connections to the CIA in 1967 show how the magazine’s attempt to influence politics through art was accompanied by the encouragement of a set of literary practices and aesthetics. *Encounter* would not produce anything quite so recognizable as the CIA’s patronage of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko did. *Encounter* did not give birth to an immediately discernable literary style, but the journal’s professed aspiration to “regard literature and the arts as

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<sup>48</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>49</sup> Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*, 132.

<sup>50</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 8.

values in themselves, in need of no ulterior justification”<sup>51</sup> is at odds with its effort to selectively value certain methods of literary and artistic expression.

The model of authorship promoted in *Encounter* is attached to the notion that there is a specific “place [for] man and the arts in an industrial civilization,”<sup>52</sup> and this conceptual “place” is one where the writer has a responsibility to engage with the social fabric of contemporary life through their work. Moreover, the magazine suggests that artistic merit emerges out of a writer’s willingness to allow the realities of “industrial civilization” to guide and inform the mechanics of literary production. For *Encounter*, the sociopolitical moment of its arrival is one in which both an author and his work must somehow actively participate in the larger arena of culture in order to hold value. The characterization of literature as a social document reflects the magazine’s insistence on the symbiotic nature of the relationship between art and culture; they are interdependent entities, and, as such, both must have dealings with the other in order for either to thrive. It is, in essence, a feedback loop: literature must be in contact with culture, culture must interact with literature, and so on.

A collection of Virginia Woolf’s diary entries was published in the first issue of *Encounter*, and the late English writer is described in the “About our Authors” section of the periodical as “our literary heritage, which we either accept or rebel against, but which is indubitably – and creatively – there.”<sup>53</sup> Although the magazine goes to great lengths to appear as a distinctly contemporary publication, emerging after a figurative apocalypse, *Encounter* was also deeply concerned with the relationship it has to the literary past. The frequent appearance of authors such as Virginia Woolf in *Encounter* gave the magazine an opportunity to cast itself as both a beacon of the avant-garde as well as the cultural custodian of Europe’s past, synthesizing the innovative with the authoritative and

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<sup>51</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “About our Authors,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 80.

placing them into dialogue with one another. For some, as Andrew Rubin notes, the journal's first issues were perceived to be "an anachronistic and lifeless reenactment of prewar writing,"<sup>54</sup> but the inclusion of these authors from decades prior lend *Encounter* a degree of credibility that allows its enthusiasm for the contemporary author to be subsidized by the literary greatness of their predecessors.

### THE VIRTUES AND VICES OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

The magazine's curious juxtaposition of past and present is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the placement of Virginia Woolf's diary entries as the first piece in the first issue of the magazine after the opening editorial. Woolf's diaries, as published by The Hogarth Press beginning in 1978, span five volumes, beginning with her first entry in 1915 and ending before her death in 1941. All told, the full collection amounts to just shy of 2,000 pages of written material. The prospect of selecting the most important or the most interesting entries is, given the sheer abundance of possibilities, no easy task. Despite the enormity of the source material, *Encounter* printed seven pages from Woolf's diaries, selected from the period between 1926 and 1933, and these previously unpublished writings served as the first full-length feature in the journal. The results of any attempt to abridge a large piece of writing will be governed by whatever the editor has taken to be its most crucial themes, ideas, and concepts. As far as the selections from Woolf's diaries in *Encounter* are concerned, the limited amount of space available would mean that the editor had to be especially careful to choose excerpts that, when put together, offered the illusion of a unified—or at least tangentially related—whole. There was an advertisement in the first issue of *Encounter* from the Hogarth Press for "A Writer's Diary," an upcoming collection of entries from Woolf's diaries compiled by Leonard Woolf, her husband. According to the advertisement, "A Writer's Diary"

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<sup>54</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 55.

consists of “those passages which refer to [Virginia Woolf’s] own writing or throw light on her creative and critical methods and powers.”<sup>55</sup> Although it is unclear whether the diary entries published in *Encounter* had been selected from this forthcoming volume or were the result of a separate editorial undertaking by Leonard Woolf, the description of “A Writer’s Diary” in the advertisement seems to be an equally apt summary of the Virginia Woolf diary entries found in the October 1953 issue.

Before considering the portrayal of Woolf’s “creative and critical methods and powers” in *Encounter*, it is worth noting that a number of the diary excerpts show Woolf writing about her interactions with fellow writers; the first entry is about having tea with Thomas Hardy, and the names of well-known authors appear on every page—Siegfried Sassoon, Aldous Huxley, Bernard Shaw, and Shakespeare, to name a few. The diary entries can be read as a manifestation of the magazine’s desire to “represent [the] community” expressed in “After the Apocalypse,” with Woolf’s experiences as an active participant in the literary world presented to the reader as a contributing factor to her success as a writer. Yet the entries featured in “Pages from a Diary,” as the collection of entries are titled in *Encounter*, also highlight the instances where Woolf provides commentary on how her contemporaries understand both themselves and their position within society, doling out approval and disapproval in equal measure. She is, for example, “impressed” with Thomas Hardy due to his lack of “respect for rank or extreme simplicity” and “his freedom, ease, and vitality.”<sup>56</sup> The death of English writer Arnold Bennett leaves Woolf feeling “sadder than [she] should have supposed,” and the short list of Bennett’s positive attributes she provides quickly becomes a catalogue of his faults, as Woolf concludes that Bennett was “deluded by splendour and success” and had “a shopkeeper’s view of literature.”<sup>57</sup> The editorial arrangement of Woolf’s diary

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<sup>55</sup> “Advertisement for The Hogarth Press,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 60.

<sup>56</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Pages from a Diary,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

emphasizes these moments of criticism; in addition to implicitly commanding her active role in the social world of literature, the magazine implicitly identifies Woolf's desire to examine the animating impulses of other writers to be one of the sources of her strength as a writer.

Spender, whose appointment to *Encounter* was partially decided on the basis of his connections to the English literary scene,<sup>58</sup> had visited Woolf in 1939, and his own diary entry about the visit notes that Woolf "was pleased that I kept a journal because she said she found it was the only thing she could do...[s]he talked also about the danger of creating a literary personality for oneself. Her dislike of self-importance links up with her dislike the egotism of successful men."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Woolf's critiques of her fellow writers in "Pages from a Diary" are driven by the same distaste for vanity that Spender ascribed to her in 1939, as made clear in her thoughts on British author Maurice Baring's novel *C* in an entry she titled "Second-Rate Art": "He can only do one thing; himself to wit; charming, clean, modest, sensitive Englishman... [and] all is...light, sure, proportioned, affecting even; told in so well bred a manner that nothing is exaggerated, all related, proportioned."<sup>60</sup> The failure of Baring, as Woolf understands it, is his use of writing as a vehicle through which to develop a "literary personality" of the sort she had discussed with Stephen Spender in 1939. For Woolf, Baring's novel is an exercise in vanity, the prose serves solely to portray the author as "charming, clean, [and] modest."<sup>61</sup> Woolf does not critique the quality of Baring's writing, and notes that she could "read [it] forever," but its fatal flaw is that "outside that radius and it does not carry far nor illumine much."<sup>62</sup> Woolf's critique of Baring offers a qualitative evaluation of what the components of literary greatness are, and her formulation suggests that texts must offer something of significance, whatever that might be, to the greater public. In another diary entry

<sup>58</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 167 – 173.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Spender, "20 October, 1939," in *Stephen Spender: Journals 1939 – 1983*, ed. John Goldsmith (New York: Random House, 1986), 49 – 50.

<sup>60</sup> Woolf, "Pages from a Diary," 9.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 9.

published in *Encounter*, Woolf claims to “scarcely ever read” writing by living people due to the fact that “it adds nothing to one’s vision of life.”<sup>63</sup> Woolf’s assessment of the contemporary author is, in other words, that these writers fail to provide the reader with any actionable insight.

To be clear, “Pages from a Diary” does not show Woolf arguing in favor of the activist novel or claiming that all good fiction ought to be political, but she does speak to the idea that literature can and should perform a certain set of social tasks, and that good writers are those who seek to “illumine” something for their readers through their work. In this sense, Woolf’s diary challenges the editor’s notion to “regard literature and the arts as values in themselves, in need of no ulterior justification.”<sup>64</sup> For Woolf here, literature does not justify itself by the mere fact of its presence, and there is nothing of value to be found in the author who writes for the purpose of improving their station in life. The criticisms of Baring’s novel in “Pages from a Diary” does not directly oppose an ‘art for art’s sake’ mentality, but Woolf affirms the importance of writing that is engaged in a dialogue with a world beyond the author and outside of the printed page. The emphasis on artistic engagement found in “Pages from a Diary” is a far cry from political, but *Encounter* was, as political theorist Giles Scott-Smith writes, focused on trying to “persuade readers to recognize the follies of neutralism.”<sup>65</sup> Yet, as Andrew Rubin argues, *Encounter* “did not dwell on the subject of anticomunism, nor did it place an explicit emphasis on the absence of the autonomy of the Eastern European or Soviet writer.”<sup>66</sup> In a fashion similar to the Freedom Manifesto’s humanist evaluation of the Cold War, Virginia Woolf’s autopsy of Maurice Baring translates a critique of neutralism into literary terms. The creative mediocrity of Baring is presented as an inevitable outcome for any author who fails to treat his work as an opportunity to supply the reader with something that contributes to “one’s vision of life,” offers a new awareness, insight, or perspective.

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<sup>63</sup> Woolf, “Pages from a Diary,” 8.

<sup>64</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>65</sup> Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*, 129.

<sup>66</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 53.

Woolf makes no judgment as to whether or not this role of cultural messenger means the author can or should address political issues, but her model contains a rejection the idea that the intellectual community ought to be unconcerned or uninterested in certain matters—indeed, Woolf believes they ought to be concerned and interested in anything and everything.

The second issue of *Encounter* begins with a guest editorial by Italian author Nicola Chiaromonte, who argues that “[t]he duty that no intellectual can shirk without degrading himself is the duty to expose fictions and to refuse to call ‘useful lies’ truths.”<sup>67</sup> Chiaromonte attributes the rise of “fantastic fictions” such as Communism to the slow departure of a “will to question” in the intellectual class.<sup>68</sup> Woolf, in “Pages from a Diary,” shares Chiaromonte’s belief that a writer has a “duty,” as her distaste for Baring’s novel is driven by the way in which his ego has stripped him of a “will to question” anything of substance in his writing, and replaced any notion of duty to the outside world a self-serving interest in perpetuating his own literary personality. An equally troubling fact for Woolf is that “entirely second-rate work like [Baring’s novel] is poured out in profusion by at least 20 people yearly.”<sup>69</sup> Chiaromonte offers an answer to Woolf’s problem, albeit indirectly, in the November 1953 issue of *Encounter*, suggesting that intellectuals have lost the “will to question.” Woolf’s critique of the popularity enjoyed by authors like Baring retroactively becomes a piece of evidence for next month’s editorial. The magazine format is, on the whole, prone to accidental intertextuality, but this fleeting connection between Woolf’s diary entries and Chiaromonte’s essay is an important illustration of how, although *Encounter* was created as a tool for purposefully deceptive cultural warfare, the journal was capable of producing authentic moments of intellectual dialogue.

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<sup>67</sup> Nicola Chiaromonte, “The Will to Question,” *Encounter* 1, no. 2 (November 1953): 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>69</sup> Woolf, “Pages from a Diary,” 8.

## SPENDER'S EDITORIAL EYE

The prominence of Woolf's diary entries in *Encounter* might give the impression that the magazine's debut was something of a Eurocentric affair, but the first issue, as the opening editorial proudly informed its readers, featured the work of contributors from "six different countries."<sup>70</sup> Yet, as far as literature is concerned, the October 1953 issue does showcase an undeniable preference for the European side of the Atlantic. Of the handful of Americans who appeared in the issue, none wrote about literature; Irving Kristol's article is about attending a Congress for Cultural Freedom conference for scientists, sociologist Nathan Glazer wrote about America's fascination with public opinion polling, and, although known for his literary criticism, Leslie Fielder's piece was an essay on the executions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.<sup>71</sup> In the inaugural issue of *Encounter* at least, America exists primarily as a subject and source for political and cultural commentary, while Europe is constructed as a more artistic and literary space. The interests and backgrounds of the two editors are somewhat responsible for this division of content along lines of nationality; Kristol, the American, boasted a resumé that favored politics far more than it did the arts, and Spender was far more concerned with Europe's poetry scene than he ever was with its political landscape. John Sutherland notes in his biography of Spender, Kristol "tended to commission contributions concerned with big ideas, politics or current affairs" whereas Spender solicited contributors from "his circle of literary and personal acquaintance."<sup>72</sup>

While American authors were not responsible for any of the poetry or fiction featured in the first issue of *Encounter*, this does not mean that the voice of American literature is entirely absent from its pages. In fact, Spender wrote a short piece of literary criticism for the October 1953 issue titled "American Diction v. American Poetry." Spender begins the article with a description of how

<sup>70</sup> "After the Apocalypse," 1.

<sup>71</sup> Discussed below.

<sup>72</sup> John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender: A Literary Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), 371.

American poetry, unlike much of American prose, has not embraced “normal American parlance,” and that the poetry of Wallace Stevens, whom “most English critics would consider American to the point where his imagination even baffles the English reader,” contains diction “far more in common with a recently published and most promising English poet – Miss Elizabeth Jennings – than with [the] features [that] strike English eyes as odd.”<sup>73</sup> Spender’s attempt to define “normal American parlance” leads him into somewhat dodgy territory, including his suggestion that “almost any passage” from *TIME* magazine contains the same “language with which Shakespeare quite often peps up narratives of background action told by bearded lords in his historical plays.”<sup>74</sup> Spender eventually arrives at a far more modest conclusion: that American speech is defined mostly by “a mechanical heightening and sensationalizing of the language (with a resulting loss of subtlety)” and an overriding tendency to rely on psychology and ideology to explain human behavior.<sup>75</sup> Spender’s views on American prose are certainly harsh at times—he believes “American” and English are two entirely different languages—but Spender is also eager to praise “the most consciously American poets,” whom he names as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, Allen Tate, Wallace Stevens, Archibald MacLeish, Randall Jarrell, and E.E. Cummings. Spender argues that these poets, although clinging to some of their country’s “idiomatic idiosyncracies,” all write in the same “noble and elevated style” as their British peers.<sup>76</sup> Although Spender is steadfast in his belief that the literary traditions of the two nations share some common ground, he is not claiming that there are no meaningful differences between the poetry of America and Britain. Since it is not style that distinguishes American poetry from that written on the other side of the Atlantic, Spender tasks himself with identifying the

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<sup>73</sup> Stephen Spender, “American Diction v. American Poetry,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 61.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

properties that are “peculiarly American about American poetry.”<sup>77</sup> His conclusion is worth reprinting in full:

The very American thing is, I think, the poet’s attitude to culture. Although he may think of himself as belonging – rather self-consciously – to a cultural tradition, part American, part European – the American poet still more thinks of himself as creating and demonstrating culture in each poem. Each poem is, as it were, a cultural act, a manifesto. This in itself is an attitude that demands an elevated style.

The English poet thinks of himself as existing within a cultural tradition...he cannot get outside of it and view it from there. The Americans are—to an extent which, though it may be small, is decisive—outside it. They *use* the tradition instead of being contained within it like flies in amber. That is the great contribution of the American criticism of the young Eliot and the young Pound: they could look on the tradition as a thing to be used and not as a stream in which to swim or be drowned.<sup>78</sup>

Spender adds his own voice to the magazine’s endorsement of lively artistic participation and engagement in the cultural landscape, and, echoing the entries from Woolf’s diaries on Maurice Baring, he argues that the literary value of American poetry is increased by this “attitude to culture.”

The article embodies precisely those qualities that define how *Encounter* understands the role of the writer within the context of the Cold War. Spender does not champion the virtues of nationalism or Western civilization, and he does not claim that the artist ought to address politics through their work, but his vision of the ideal relationship between writers and their “cultural traditions” is not entirely devoid of political implications. The political logic to the magazine’s discourse of artistic engagement can be outlined as follows. Firstly, Spender argues that a “certain attitude to culture” can imbue a writer’s creations with literary merit. Secondly, this attitude is defined by an eagerness to “use”—to actively absorb and contribute to—both cultural tradition and culture itself. Thirdly, the conflict between communism and democracy was at the heart of the Cold War, and, as such, Western culture was a hyperpolitical environment. Thus, the writer, by virtue of having an attitude that requires their participation in this hyperpoliticized culture, must concern themselves with matters of political significance. The individual may choose to express their interests

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<sup>77</sup> Spender, “American Diction,” 64.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

and opinions privately or publicly, but their “attitude to culture” means that they are no longer able to ignore the geopolitical context of their existence.

However, the political logic to Spender’s analysis is developed with a sense of ideological neutrality. There are no political statements to be found in “American Diction v. American Poetry.” There is, in fact, nothing in the article that even acknowledges the existence of a global ideological conflict. Nowhere is the absence of politics more strongly felt in the article than in Spender’s celebration of Ezra Pound’s work as a testament to the virtues of how the American poet approaches culture.<sup>79</sup> During World War II, Pound had delivered a series of radio broadcasts on behalf of Italy’s Fascist government, filling the airwaves with a mixture of his anti-Semitic ravings and declarations of support for the leadership of Mussolini and Hitler. Among those listening to Pound’s broadcasts was the United States government, and in 1943, following the surrender of Italy, the poet was captured by Allied troops and extradited to America, where he was charged with treason.<sup>80</sup> Although Pound was declared legally insane, and therefore unfit to stand trial for the treason charges, he was committed to a federal asylum in 1946.<sup>81</sup> The relative calm of Pound’s stay in the mental hospital was interrupted in 1949, when the Fellows of the Library of Congress, a committee of poets that included T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Robert Lowell, and Louise Bogan, announced that Pound was to be the first recipient of a new literary prize, the Bollingen Award for Poetry.<sup>82</sup> On January 20, 1949, the day after Pound was announced as the winner of the Bollingen Prize, the front-page of *The New York Times* bore large, angry letters that spelled out the following headline: “Pound, In Mental Clinic, Wins Prize for Poetry Penned in Treason Cell.” The debate over the Bollingen Prize was a near-constant presence in newspapers and magazines during the months

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<sup>79</sup> Spender, “American Diction,” 64.

<sup>80</sup> William McGuire, “The Bollingen Foundation: Ezra Pound and the Prize in Poetry,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 40, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 19.

<sup>81</sup> Karen Lieck, “Ezra Pound v. ‘The Saturday Review of Literature,’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 2 (Winter, 2001 – 2002): 19.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 19 – 20.

that followed, and the sheer ubiquity of the coverage left the American public with little choice but to pay attention.<sup>83</sup> Unsurprisingly, the idea of awarding a government-sponsored prize to a mentally ill Fascist traitor elicited outrage from most. In August of 1949, the United States Congress passed a resolution instructing the Library of Congress to immediately discontinue giving any and all awards or prizes.<sup>84</sup> One critic, reflecting on the controversy ten years afterwards, wrote:

The questions the Bollingen controversy raised will not lie still ten years after:

1. To what degree was the poet sane?
2. To what degree was he guilty of treason?
3. Do the *Pisan Cantos* constitute a considerable poetic achievement?
4. What about the poet's duty to society?<sup>85</sup>

By the time the Bollingen Prize affair drew to a close at the end of 1949, the public view of Pound's literary legacy, already tarnished, had become permanently inseparable from his political and ideological history. Indeed, if the vast assortment of books, articles, and scholarship written on Pound agree on one thing, albeit unintentionally, it is that any discussion of Pound's poetry will have to broach the subject of Pound's politics.

The first issue of *Encounter* was published ten years after Pound's indictment for treason and a mere four after a United States Congressman publicly argued that the *Pisan Cantos* "contain obscenities to an excessive degree" and ought not to be tolerated.<sup>86</sup> The treason charges and the Bollingen Prize controversy remained fresh in the public consciousness. Nonetheless, the reader of *Encounter* in October of 1953 stumbles upon Stephen Spender, the English poet unknowingly employed by the United States government, congratulating Pound for "creating and demonstrating culture in each poem" and making no mention of the disgraced poet's politics.<sup>87</sup> Spender's advocacy

<sup>83</sup> Lieck, "Ezra Pound," 19 – 37.

<sup>84</sup> McGuire, "The Bollingen Foundation," 24.

<sup>85</sup> Paul A. Olson, "The Bollingen Controversy Ten Years After: Criticism and Content," *Prairie Schooner* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1959): 225.

<sup>86</sup> Lieck, "Ezra Pound," 30.

<sup>87</sup> The admiration Spender expresses for Pound's writing in the article is made all the more strange in light of a diary entry he wrote in January of 1953: "I don't think Ezra Pound is a very intelligent man. He has a serious, craftmanly

for Pound in the first issue of *Encounter* attests to the complexity of the magazine's relationship with literature; the political logic to the journal's treatment of authorship is a recurring presence, but these ideological undertones are tempered by its powerful urge towards a conception of literature that is not necessarily apolitical, but, rather, considers the more pressing issue to be the author's awareness of their reading public.

*Encounter* had been designed, in part, to fill the void left in the absence of *Horizon*, a London based literary magazine that had succumbed to financial difficulties in 1950.<sup>88</sup> The editors of *Horizon* included Stephen Spender, who had been one of the founders of the publication in 1939 alongside English writer and critic Cyril Connolly.<sup>89</sup> *Horizon* would, on occasion, publish writing from Spender, although his name appeared on the table of contents page far less frequently than it would in *Encounter*. Among the collection of his articles for *Horizon* is a piece from the March 1949 issue titled "The Situation of the American Writer," in which Spender, after having returned from an eighteen month stay in the country, offers his analysis of the characteristics that define its literary scene. Spender writes:

One can foresee a day when American literature might be divided into two channels: the commercialized success and the subsidized commercial failure...it would tend to increase a division which is already apparent, of American writing, on the one hand into that which can be exploited by the Book Clubs and Hollywood transformed into something which sells to a wide public for other than literary reasons; and on the other hand into that which is highly intellectualized, critical in spirit, hermetic, self-conscious, writing by writers for writers communicating in a highly allusive idiom with each other.<sup>90</sup>

For Spender, the best American writers are those who possess a creative perspective that is rooted in the elusive middle-ground between the narcissism of academic isolation and a "Hollywoodized" lack of substance; it is, in short, a careful balancing act that lends the author "a loneliness of clarity free

attitude towards poetry, but...he tries to make a virtue, of what are really the vices, of a very egoistic abrupt style [and] his general ideas about poetry are negative, barren and dry." Spender, *Journals*, 111 – 112.

<sup>88</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 166.

<sup>89</sup> Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, 252 – 259.

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Spender, "The Situation of the American Writer," *Horizon* 19, no. 111 (March 1949): 167.

[from] insidious intellectual connexion” and the capacity to avoid an “acceptance of the separation of the writer’s particular situation from all others.”<sup>91</sup> Albert Camus, in an article he wrote for the March 1954 issue of *Encounter* titled “The Artist in Prison,” echoes the thesis of Spender’s *Horizon* article, although Camus foregoes the mild-mannered politeness of Spender’s argument in favor of a more direct challenge to the contemporary artist. Camus rages against the idea that an artist’s creative faculties thrive when the artist is isolated from the non-artistic or non-literary spheres of existence. He writes: “How many artists arrogantly refuse to be ordinary men! Yet this very ordinariness might have been enough to give them the authentic talent they could never have achieved without it...The art which refuses the truth of everyday life loses its vitality.”<sup>92</sup> The ivory tower holds neither comfort nor creativity. A writer who is content to surround himself with only the company of other writers and distances himself from “everyday life” at every opportunity will produce works of literature that are devoid of both beauty and substance.

The article in *Horizon* grants a rare opportunity to the contemporary critic, allowing the discussion of Spender’s editorial impulses and preferences to be temporarily divorced from the sphere of politics and ideology. The post-1967 reader of *Encounter* will almost certainly be aware of the journal’s connections to the CIA, and this knowledge can, in turn, retroactively infuse its contents, and the editors responsible for their inclusion, with political subtext. However, those beliefs expressed by both the Stephen Spender of 1949 and the Stephen Spender of 1953 ought to be regarded as relatively safe from the influence of the CIA. In both “American Diction v. American Poetry” and “The Situation of the American Writer,” Spender displays a preference not for politically-astute literature, but, rather, for writing that is committed to the project of culture; that is, a love for those authors who, as he writes in *Horizon*, “believe in the mission [of] civilization” and embrace the fact that “the existence of literature depends on a readers’ as well as a writers’

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<sup>91</sup> Spender, “The Situation of the American Writer,” 178.

<sup>92</sup> Albert Camus, “The Artist in Prison,” *Encounter* 2, no. 3 (March 1954): 28.

situation.”<sup>93</sup> The literary content of the periodical was, as Spender’s biographer writes, the product of Spender’s artistic sensibilities and preferences,<sup>94</sup> although Irving Kristol did contribute to this facet of the publication.<sup>95</sup> The two articles on American writing, although published three years apart from one another, articulate Spender’s love for material that shares his fascination with the issue of literature’s participation in culture. Indeed, Spender believes that this quality is the very basis of almost all great works of literature.

Although Kristol’s mind was far more predisposed to politics his co-editor’s, he did share Spender’s interest in evaluating the boundaries and components of culture. When the first issue of *Encounter* was being prepared, CIA agent Michael Josselson wrote to Kristol to share his concerns over a perceived lack of political subject matter in the line-up. Kristol’s response not only describes his own editorial objectives, but also inadvertently summarizes Spender’s views on the importance of socially engaged authorship: “I’m not sure about your cryptic remark about the ‘political contents’ living up to expectations. The magazine, obviously, should be a ‘cultural’ periodical—with politics taken, along with literature, art, philosophy, etc. as an intrinsic part of culture, as indeed it is.”<sup>96</sup> Spender and Kristol interpret the need for a writer to be “an intrinsic part of culture” as a natural phenomenon, as though separating the author and the social context of their existence would violate the very order of the universe. Although *Encounter* would, from its first issue until the destruction of its intellectual credibility in 1966, privilege a brand of literature that shares this understanding, it avoids becoming a self-congratulatory collection of text; that is, the periodical is not monomaniacally fixated on somehow proving the obviousness of its model for artistic engagement. *Encounter* thus pursued a literary project that sought to assess how ideas of authorial participation functioned in the hands of the writer, substituting a constant self-congratulation of its own thesis with a willingness to

<sup>93</sup> Spender, “The Situation of the American Writer,” 178.

<sup>94</sup> Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, 371 – 372.

<sup>95</sup> Kristol’s involvement with the literary elements of *Encounter* is discussed at greater length in Chapter Three.

<sup>96</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 178 – 179.

complicate the model. October of 1953 marks the cautious first steps of an inward gazing revolution that sought to re-define what it meant to be a part of the intellectual class.

### AFTER “AFTER THE APOCALYPSE”

The legacy of *Horizon* was noticeable even before *Encounter* began to circulate. Kristol and Spender had decided that ten thousand copies of the first issue would be printed, a number chosen because the sales figures of *Horizon* had reached this point several times during its ten years of existence.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, the absence of *Horizon*—and the subsequent failure for any English language cultural journals to take its place—meant that it was all but impossible for the debut of *Encounter* to be received with indifference.<sup>98</sup> It seems as though the entire European intellectual scene was determined to offer its opinion about the new periodical, many of which were published in newspapers and other British magazines. Anthony Hartley wrote in the *Spectator* that there was “something of the pomposity of official culture” to *Encounter*; a columnist for the *Sunday Times* labeled the magazine “the police-review of American-occupied countries”; and a review in the *Listener* complained that there is “no article in the present number which will provoke any reader to burn it...None of the articles are politically subversive [and] all are safe reading for the children.”<sup>99</sup> British author Philip Toynbee described the appearance of *Encounter* as “brilliant and encouraging” in *The Observer*, but fellow English writer Graham Hough lamented that the magazine “had no sense of direction at all...No drive, no community feeling, none of that sense of personality in diversity that makes a periodical live.”<sup>100</sup> Even those who were involved in the magazine felt the need to pass judgment, as Christopher Isherwood, whose writing was featured in the issue, cautiously declared it “exciting and unstuffy,” and Leonard Woolf, who had provided the excerpts from his late wife’s

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<sup>97</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 65.

<sup>98</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 186.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 187 – 188.

<sup>100</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 66.

diary, added an equally bland review to the mix, calling *Encounter* an “above the average” publication.<sup>101</sup> The most scathing review was from Mary McCarthy, who asked Hannah Arendt if she had read *Encounter* yet, then said, “It is surely the most vapid thing yet, like a college magazine got out by long-dead and putrefying undergraduates.”<sup>102</sup>

Yet, much of the discussion regarding *Encounter* in the days following its initial release centered not on its literary works, but rather on Leslie Fielder’s article on the recent execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, a married couple convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. Fielder’s treatment of the couple in the piece had been nothing short of outright contempt; he scoffed at the idea of their martyrdom, claimed that the Communist Party had engaged in a “moral blackmail” of liberal Americans, and, among other harsh words, decreed that the Rosenbergs were “unattractive and vindictive” people who had become “official clichés” and willingly “dehumanized” themselves in the process.<sup>103</sup> Letters about the Fielder piece began to arrive at the London headquarters of *Encounter*, including novelist E.M. Forster, whose letter voiced objections, “not to [the article’s] factual findings, but for the contempt and severity with which it treats Ethel Rosenberg’s last days...I wonder how [Fielder] will act if he is ever condemned to death?”<sup>104</sup> It was, many readers believed, a decidedly cruel piece of writing, and Spender wondered whether the article on the Rosenbergs represented “the kind of Trojan Horse contained within *Encounter*.<sup>105</sup> This was not a sudden change of heart for Spender, who had been privately voicing his reservations about the Fielder article to friends during the months leading up to October. Eventually, after the October release of *Encounter*, Spender mused that the article was perhaps useful for “letting British readers

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<sup>101</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 186.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>103</sup> Leslie A. Fielder, “A Postscript to the Rosenberg Case,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 12 – 21.

<sup>104</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 186.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 187.

know just how awful a certain type of American intellectual could be.”<sup>106</sup> Spender’s journey from hesitancy, concern, to relative indifference with regard to the Fielder piece is indicative of a slowly dawning realization of the magazine’s potential; although *Encounter* might be a “Trojan Horse,” Spender, unknowingly aligning his own fate with that of the citizens of Troy in Virgil’s poem, believed that *Encounter* could become the great beacon of purity for intellectual discourse in Europe. The magazine could be a place where even those writers he found to be unsavory, such as Fielder, were allowed to freely voice their opinions to an audience, a transatlantic theater for Western intelligentsia where the cost of admission was acceptance of the fact that one would be standing in front of an audience that had been given full license to talk, heckle, and respond both during and after any performance.

The Rosenberg article did not leave a lasting stain on the reputation of *Encounter*, but the blatant politics of Fielder’s piece seemed, at least for T.S. Eliot, suspiciously American. After reading the Fielder piece, Eliot wrote a letter to Spender, informing the British poet of his doubts about *Encounter*. Eliot concluded the correspondence by questioning the value of *Encounter* on the grounds that the journal was “obviously published under American auspices.”<sup>107</sup> Whether or not the controversy surrounding the Rosenberg article contributed to sales of the magazine, the first issue of *Encounter* attracted the attention of precisely the sort of audience its editors had hoped it would find its way into the hands of—the authors, novelists, philosophers, and public intellectuals of Europe and America. These readers were not only buying copies of the journal and discussing it with one another, but publicly debating it and offering commentary.

The magazine’s entire run of ten thousand copies sold out in a week.<sup>108</sup> The response to the first issue *Encounter* made it clear that the world of arts and letters was keen to explore, or at least

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<sup>106</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 188.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 186 – 187.

<sup>108</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 66.

consider, the possibilities for life in the post-apocalyptic heralded by journal's opening editorial. Even Mary McCarthy, a mere three months after voicing her disgust at the October 1953 issue to Hannah Arendt, would end up contributing to *Encounter*, writing an article titled "My Confession" for the February 1954 edition. The title of McCarthy's piece is, it seems, an apt representation for the kind of intellectual discourse promoted in *Encounter*. The magazine was a forum that encouraged the author to reflect on what it meant to be an author, and, moreover, whether that carried any responsibilities with it. *Encounter* asked, like the critic reflecting on the Bollingen Prize controversy wrote in 1959, "What about the poet's duty to society?"<sup>109</sup> The magazine was an artistic space governed by impulses that were suggested to a reader before he had even picked up the journal. *Encounter*, sitting on a rack of magazines, competed for attention by announcing its contents to onlookers: "LITERATURE-ARTS-POLITICS." Here, hiding in plain sight, is the central premise of *Encounter*. The worlds of literature, arts, and politics are in a state of frenzied and constant collision with one another in the journal. The three strains of thought, often kept separate for the sake of convenience, are granted the freedom to cross-fertilize and intermingle with their companions underneath *Encounter*'s all-encompassing banner of culture.

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<sup>109</sup> Olson, "The Bollingen Controversy Ten Years After," 225.

# II

## Against an Abstract Geography

The Travelogue and the Traveler-Writer in *Encounter*

“We fill ourselves with ancient learning, install ourselves the best we can in Greek, in Punic, in Roman houses, only that we may wiselier see French, English and American houses and modes of living. In like manner we see literature best from the midst of wild nature, or from the din of affairs, or from a high religion.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” 1841<sup>1</sup>

“Why be seduced by something as small as a front door in another country? Why fall in love with a place because it has trams and its people seldom have curtains in their homes? However absurd the intense reactions provoked by such small (and mute) foreign elements may seem, the pattern is at least familiar from our personal lives...To condemn ourselves for these minute concerns is to ignore how rich in meaning details are.”

—Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, 2002<sup>2</sup>

There was undoubtedly an element of wishful thinking behind Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol’s diagnosis of “the nation” as “plainly an anachronism” in the editorial that opened the October 1953 issue of *Encounter*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the integrity of their sentiment is called into question in the next paragraph, where Spender and Kristol announce with pride that “the contributors to the first number [come] from six countries.”<sup>4</sup> And only a page away, at the bottom of the same issue’s table of contents, the magazine’s yearly subscription rates for each of its distribution areas are listed—India, Great Britain, Australia, South Africa, the United States, and Canada.<sup>5</sup> The contemporary

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles,” in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 232.

<sup>2</sup> Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (New York: Vintage International, 2004), 75.

<sup>3</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Table of Contents,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 3.

reader of *Encounter*, assisted by the vantage point of history, cannot help but regard Kristol and Spender's assertion that 1953 marked the beginning of a post-national era as relatively dubious. The Cold War did not, suffice to say, destroy the concept of the nation. While global nuclear annihilation would have certainly extinguished any notion of statehood along with the entirety of humankind, the warheads of the world's missile silos never made good on their atomic threat. The gradual increase in the number of United Nations Member States between the late 1940s and the early 1990s might lead one to conclude that the conflict between the Western and Eastern blocs was accompanied, rather, by a further entrenchment of national sovereignty as a fundamental principle of international relations. Yet the Cold War was still in a state of infancy when Spender and Kristol penned their October 1953 editorial, and the geopolitical realities of this particular moment—the Korean War had drawn to a close only months prior, bringing an end to a period of international nuclear brinkmanship<sup>6</sup>—may have pushed the two editors towards a certain brand of overeager optimism. Spender and Kristol's report on the death of the nation-state was, at any rate, greatly exaggerated.

However, the magazine's early issues did feature writing that seems to have taken cues from Spender and Kristol's assertion that the state was “plainly an anachronism.” These pieces opted for a softer tone than the polemical “After the Apocalypse,” and critiqued the nation's status as a singular explanatory force; that is, these authors argued against the notion that an assortment of facts, figures, and encyclopedic data about a state could capture the essence of that state's existence. Swiss author Denis de Rougemont, in a travelogue published in the first issue of *Encounter*, describes how Bombay, the “gate to India,” possesses “the architecture and swarming traffic of a great Western city,” an incongruity that elicits “a mild frustration of [his] sense of the exotic.”<sup>7</sup> De Rougemont pauses, and he notes that “only Westerners seem to seek out the foreign, the unfamiliar, for its own

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Friedman, “Nuclear Blackmail and the End of the Korean War,” *Modern China* 1, no. 1 (January 1975): 75.

<sup>7</sup> Denis de Rougemont, “Looking for India,” *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (October 1953): 36.

sake, and are disappointed at finding it not as pure and disconcerting as they had dreamed.”<sup>8</sup> The significance of India’s official boundaries is, for de Rougemont, diminished by the presence of what he perceives to be an abundance of inherently Western qualities; the buildings in Bombay are reminiscent of those in Europe, and the roads are populated with “huge American cars.”<sup>9</sup> If the state is meant to establish geographical and social delineations between a given territory and the rest of the world, then what de Rougemont sees in Bombay serves to contradict the notion that a state can be successful by virtue of its mere existence. That is, a state is not a state simply because either an internal or external entity bestowed that title upon it. The customs officials of India are the guardians of a country recently divorced from its British colonizers, and take “more than an hour to impress...the proof of [their] sovereignty,” writes de Rougemont.<sup>10</sup> But the “proof” of India’s independence provided by this apparatus of statehood is quickly overshadowed by the Western cityscape that confronts de Rougemont as he leaves the airport, his “frustrated sense of the exotic.” India is a country, and Bombay a city within it, but de Rougemont’s analysis suggests that these labels lack the substance they claim to possess. India’s sovereignty, a supposedly definitive quality, cannot explain the Western cultural aesthetic of Bombay, its “huge American cars” and European-style buildings. For de Rougemont, India has borders, but in name only; that is, if Bombay truly was the “gate to India,” then foreign cultural elements would not be granted access. What renders the nation anachronistic for de Rougemont is the contrast between India’s successful imposition of geographical demarcations and the fact that these boundaries do not extend to the realm of culture. De Rougemont understands statehood to be an important institution, unlikely to be eradicated in the foreseeable future, but he does suggest that there is a certain ambiguity regarding the Western flavor of Indian culture that the formalized doctrine of sovereignty cannot account for. And, as far

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<sup>8</sup> De Rougemont, “Looking for India,” 36.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

as both *Encounter* and de Rougemont are concerned, the cultural—the “LITERATURE-ARTS-POLITICS” of the magazine’s front cover—is the worthiest object for intellectual consideration.

The travel narratives featured in *Encounter* throughout the 1950s and 1960s demonstrate its preference for cultural matters as well as the magazine’s ongoing commitment to Spender’s model of authorial participation. In these texts, the author flees the comforts of home, spends days or weeks in a foreign land, and then returns to write a report on his experiences abroad for *Encounter*. There are variations in the form and style of *Encounter*’s travel narratives, but these texts explore the limits and possibilities of the magazine’s theory of the author as a cultural participant. Literary critic Carl Thompson argues that during the nineteenth century there were some authors who were able to write travel narratives that incorporated “genuinely new scientific and ethnographic information...within a narrative that simultaneously gave literary pleasure to the reader.”<sup>11</sup> This “synthesis” of style, Thompson explains, became increasingly rare as the twentieth century began, and had all but disappeared by the end of the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> The travelogues of *Encounter* represent a return to that hybridized form of the nineteenth century, as the magazine’s travel writing translates the academic spirit of rigorous investigation into a more literary form. The writer recounts his journey to a foreign nation so that the reader may become more informed about the place in question. Yet the author of the travelogue in *Encounter* does not sacrifice literary ambition in the hope that it would allow him to speak more freely or with greater accuracy. In fact, the opposite is the case, as the magazine’s travelogues are often structured as personal narratives, and treat the author’s subjectivity as the source of their reportage’s ethnographic value. The travelogue functions as a unique creative space in *Encounter*, endorsing certain literary values and aesthetic qualities through the position of authority it affords to the author’s subjectivity and individualized perspective.

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<sup>11</sup> Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing, The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 60.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 60.

## DECODING THE NATION

The catalogue of *Encounter* is littered with pieces that, like de Rougemont's "Looking for India," approach questions of nationality and statehood from a more culturally oriented perspective. Select a random volume of the magazine off of a shelf, and turn to the table of contents page; there, nestled amongst the book reviews, short stories, essays, and poems, one finds titles such as "A V.I.P. in Morocco"<sup>13</sup> or "Conversations in Moscow."<sup>14</sup> If the editors of *Encounter* regard the nation-state as an "anachronism," a no longer needed remnant of the past, then there would be no reason for the nation to be such a pervasive topic of discussion in the magazine. Yet without exception, every issue of *Encounter* featured at least one article, often more, that examined the political, literary, or artistic conditions of life—the cultural realities—in a given state. Much like how *The New Yorker* published, and continues to publish, its "The Talk of the Town" section in each issue, *Encounter* had its own recurring monthly features, a section titled "Letter[s] from..." being one of them. A different country or city would replace the ellipses in each month's section, and the feature consisted of writing either by residents of the country or reportage from authors and critics who had recently visited. On the occasions when only a single correspondent from the country provided content for the section, it became "Letter from..." but the plural version was far more common, as usually two, and often three, writers would have work published in the feature. The section's title is somewhat misleading, as the "Letter[s] from..." in *Encounter* rarely took the form of actual letters. Instead, the feature housed a mixture of individually titled short thought pieces and full-length articles that offered commentary on or addressed some particular facet of that month's country. In the March 1955 issue, for example, the section was dubbed "Letter from Saigon," and the singular contribution

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<sup>13</sup> Peregrine Worsthorne, "A V.I.P. in Morocco," *Encounter* 10, no. 1 (January 1958): 13 – 17.

<sup>14</sup> Gerd Ruge, "Conversation in Moscow," *Encounter* 11, no. 4 (October 1958): 20 – 31.

was “Passage to Freedom,” a first-hand account of refugees being evacuated in Vietnam written by Swiss journalist Peter Schmid.<sup>15</sup>

While the section often dealt with politics and current affairs, on occasion it delved into discussions of literature. In May of 1954, with Sweden as the month’s featured country, British author George Mikes penned a ten-page humorous essay on the Nobel Prize, ending with a concession “the only reliable information I can give about this year’s award is that I am not going to get it.”<sup>16</sup> Although the “Letter[s] from...” section was discontinued as a regular feature in 1956, its existence during the formative years of the magazine sheds light upon the true import of Spender and Kristol’s designation of the nation as an “anachronism.” The two editors did not deny the existence of global geography, nor did they argue against the value of the state as a formalized institution. Instead, Spender and Kristol conceive of the discourse surrounding nation-state, as opposed to the concept itself, as anachronistic. They sought to shift the conversation about the nation away from an approach they perceived to be superficial—the mere facts of sovereignty, the exact dimensions of a state’s borders, and all else that might fall under a country’s encyclopedia entry. In Denis de Rougemont’s travelogue, he describes how a customs officer “[felt] the need for something more familiar,” and asked de Rougemont where he would be staying during his time in India; De Rougemont replies, informing the official that he will be staying at the Taj Mahal. This response is greeted with “a smile of relief” from the customs officer.<sup>17</sup> Spender and Kristol have no love for discussions of a nation that solely touch on the “familiar.” They see no need for more ink to be spilled writing about a country’s landmarks and monuments. Instead, the writer must penetrate these skin-deep portraits of a country, look for something beyond the monuments and state officials of these vast nebulous lands, and avoid reportage that, because it confirms what is already known or

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Schmid, “Passage to Freedom,” *Encounter* 4, no. 3 (March 1955): 40.

<sup>16</sup> George Mikes, “Letters from Sweden: Little America, Half Asleep,” *Encounter* 2, no. 5 (May 1954): 55.

<sup>17</sup> De Rougemont, “Looking for India,” 36.

suspected about the area in question, induces a “smile of relief” in the reader. The duty of the author in *Encounter* is, in short, to report on the nation as perceived through the stratum of culture.

The travelogues that emerge out of this emphasis on perceiving the nation as a cultural unit attempt to locate the unique qualities of a given state. In April of 1960, the magazine published “Out of Africa,” Ezekiel Mphahlele’s reflections on the “peculiar problems of the African writer.”<sup>18</sup> In November of 1962, there was novelist Keith Botsford’s “Conversation in Brazil,” a transcript of an interview Botsford conducted with Brazilian historian and social philosopher Gilberto Freyre in an attempt to “illuminate some of the puzzling political and cultural background” of South America.<sup>19</sup> Yet there are seemingly two contradictory impulses that guide *Encounter*’s approach to the discussion of non-Western countries. The first impulse is towards pointing out how the country resembles the author’s own homeland, as the text stresses the lack of any immediately meaningful cultural difference between the nation in question and its Western counterparts. Denis de Rougemont’s “frustrated sense of the exotic” in India is a good example of this trope. The other impulse, and the one that it seems *Encounter* gravitated towards more frequently, manifests in the author’s effort to highlight the profound foreignness of the country. Melvin Lasky, who had played an integral part in the formation of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and would replace Irving Kristol as Stephen Spender’s co-editor in 1958,<sup>20</sup> wrote a two-part travelogue for *Encounter* in 1953 called “A Sentimental Traveller in Japan,” the first installment of which was published in November of that year. In Tokyo, Lasky notices that most of the faces in the crowd are covered by white face masks, presumably due to a recent flu epidemic. Lasky writes: “How very Japanese! I thought, ‘this sense of personal discipline, of social obligation, the almost superstitious dedication to the ways of modern

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<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel Mphahlele, “Out of Africa,” *Encounter* 14, no. 4 (April 1960): 61 – 63.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Botsford, “Conversation in Brazil,” *Encounter* 19, no. 5 (November 1962): 33.

<sup>20</sup> Giles Scott-Smith, “‘A Radical Democratic Political Offensive’: Melvin J. Lasky, *Der Monat*, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (April 2000): 264, 276.

man!”<sup>21</sup> To re-appropriate de Rougemont’s language, Lasky’s “sense of the exotic” is fully gratified. His sense of wonderment at this “very Japanese” practice is due to a belief that something similar would never occur in the Western world.

*Encounter* is interested in both the sameness and the foreignness of non-European nations; that is, there is no general rule to be applied, no mutual exclusivity clause, as the magazine demonstrates, somewhat paradoxically, a fondness for each type of reportage simultaneously. Indeed, in a single article, there is often an oscillation between the two modes of thought, such as with Brian Crozier’s “Latin American Journey,” a travelogue published in the December 1964 issue of *Encounter*. Crozier, standing in a public park in Chile, observes a group of teenagers standing in a corner “who could have been dropped into equivalent crowds in London and Paris without provoking raised eyebrows” but “were beating Chilean drums and dancing the traditional *cueca*.<sup>22</sup> Given that Crozier is able to jump, in the space of a single sentence, between a recognition of Chile’s foreignness and its sameness, it is evident that an attempt to pin down the approach of every author featured in *Encounter* to one inclination or the other would yield little more than paradox and uncertainty. Far less ambiguous in the magazine’s treatment of nationality, however, is the privileged position it affords the Western author who writes about foreign countries. Scholars Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan have argued that the majority of twentieth century travel narratives “rely upon the authority of the witness,”<sup>23</sup> and the travelogues published in *Encounter* are no exception. The author’s individual viewpoint is accepted as the primary mechanism of observation, and it is this willful acceptance of subjectivity that generates the cultural reading of nationhood found in the magazine.

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<sup>21</sup> Melvin J. Lasky, “A Sentimental Traveller in Japan (I),” *Encounter* 1, no. 2 (November 1953): 5.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Crozier, “Latin American Journey,” *Encounter* 23, no. 6 (December 1964): 27.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 16.

The journal opened its January 1957 issue with a travelogue written by American author Dwight Macdonald<sup>24</sup> titled “Ten Days in Cairo.” Macdonald explains how he “boarded a plane for Egypt” because it was “a country we—the editors of *Encounter* and myself—had decided might make an interesting subject for reportage.”<sup>25</sup> The article was, Macdonald writes, supposed to be “focused on the so-called Nasser Revolution, that is, the social and cultural aspects of life under the current régime.”<sup>26</sup> Yet what ended up being published in *Encounter* was, by Macdonald’s own admission, of a far less geopolitical bent than was originally planned. Macdonald arrived in Cairo a mere two days before a period of civil unrest began, as “Israelis attacked [and] British planes began bombing the outskirts of the city.”<sup>27</sup> The piece was conceived of as a fundamentally journalistic enterprise; Macdonald was to investigate the political conditions of the country in order to bring the “social and cultural aspects” of Egypt to be incorporated into his findings. Another author, writing for a different publication, might have treated the country’s violent political turmoil as an opportunity to engage in gritty, boots-on-the-ground reportage and produce a piece of writing of the sort that can make a journalist’s career. Macdonald easily could have eschewed an analysis of day-to-day life in Egypt and opted to document the locations of missile strikes or provide blow-by-blow accounts of firefights instead.

Macdonald instead clings to the human element of the piece. He is not preoccupied with explosions, political upheaval, or foreign invasions. Rather than providing the reader with an ‘inside view’ of a nation under siege, Macdonald opts for a comparatively mundane account of his time in Egypt. He writes in his introduction: “[I cannot] pretend to give any balanced or even mildly authoritative view of the Nasser Revolution or of the Egyptian problems. But I did see a few people

<sup>24</sup> Dwight Macdonald was on the editorial staff of *Encounter* between 1956 and 1957, and he described the experience as “pleasurable.” Gregory D. Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the Politics Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 226.

<sup>25</sup> Dwight Macdonald, “Ten Days in Cairo,” *Encounter* 8, no. 1 (January 1957): 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

and did have a few experiences and a great many impressions.”<sup>28</sup> The article is composed of selected journal entries from the time of Macdonald’s visit. These excerpts include information such as the time Macdonald wakes up in the morning. He describes trolley-cars in gripping detail, and there is a lengthy paragraph about the different types of chandeliers for sale in a department store—everything “from cheap Mickey Mouse ones at £3 to huge crystal affairs at £1,000.”<sup>29</sup> Macdonald does not discount the merits of a “balanced” or “authoritative” account of the Nasser Revolution, but discerns there to be something of at least equal value found in these observations of the everyday. The travelogue is focused on the banal, and through this choice of subject, Macdonald articulates an understanding of authorial duty that is distinguished from that of the journalist or the news organization. Strategic analyses of bombing runs and debates over foreign policy are not useless or irrelevant, but Macdonald suggests that there are more to newsworthy events than these factually driven discussions are able to capture. An article in a mainstream newspaper about the Nasser Revolution could be as “balanced” and “authoritative” as possible, but this insistence on objectivity would necessarily exclude those elements of the story that allow the reader to feel as though the events in question actually happened. For Macdonald, then, the task of the intellectual abroad is to convey the information that a strictly journalistic account of Egypt would ignore; the different types of light fixtures available in Cairo’s stores and the fact that the city’s trolley cars are “old-fashioned.”<sup>30</sup> In one section of the travelogue, Macdonald relates how he heard two explosions in the street from his hotel room, but did not go out to investigate because “a crowd is not at all where I want to be these days.”<sup>31</sup> A clear distinction between the duties of the intellectual and those of the news agent is drawn; both Macdonald’s choice to remain inside the hotel room and an objective news report on the nearby explosions are informed by the same reality. A newspaper

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<sup>28</sup> Macdonald, “Ten Days in Cairo,” 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 10.

article would relay how many were injured or what buildings were damaged, but Macdonald reshapes the event into a human narrative, and injects the situation with a powerful sense of fear and gravitas.

It is useful to compare how *Encounter* and a standard daily newspaper regard their authors. With the exception of the editorials section, the newspaper journalist works carefully to craft prose that hides his identity from the reader. Ideally, the byline in a newspaper should serve as the sole proof that the author ever in fact wrote the article in question; this fragment of text is where his identity begins and ends. The reader of *Encounter* finds numerous texts where the author makes himself known to the reader: travelogues, diary entries, and personal narratives. There are no detached histories or objective biographies. Brian Crozier is himself the one who goes on the “Latin American Journey” of his 1964 piece’s title, and, likewise, Lasky’s “Sentimental Traveller in Japan” is none other than himself. At the same time, these texts do not drift to the opposite extreme of the spectrum, where the author would be the sole subject of the work. The author is, rather, a kind of vehicle for cultural observation. Macdonald mentions how he “was offered coffee at every interview” he conducted in Egypt, and believes this to be “a pleasant custom,” but “the unpleasant Westerner wonders whether the coffee-servers couldn’t be better employed in a country as poor as this.”<sup>32</sup> Moments such as these, both in Macdonald’s piece and the others discussed thus far, are a synthesis of the experiential and the quasi-empirical; they are ethnographic affairs encased in personal narratives. The ‘larger’ cultural commentary presented to the reader stems from the author’s documentation of more minute manifestations of culture. In other words, Macdonald would not have been able to speculate about the economic efficiency of Egypt’s workforce had he not been offered coffee by an innumerable cast of waiters.

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<sup>32</sup> Macdonald, “Ten Days in Cairo,” 14.

## THE WRITER IN THE FOREGROUND

Over the course of the 1950s, American author Richard Wright penned four books of non-fiction travel writing: *Black Power* in 1954, *The Color Curtain* in 1956, and both *White Man Listen!* and *Pagan Spain* in 1957.<sup>33</sup> An excerpt from the first of these, *Black Power*, was published in the September 1954 issue of *Encounter* under the title ““What is Africa to Me?” Some impressions of a visit to the Gold Coast.”<sup>34</sup> The selection from Wright’s book was billed in the “About our Authors” section of the issue as a “report on the Gold Coast” of Africa.<sup>35</sup> Yet there is a discrepancy between the official connotations of this description and the sense of the personal conveyed by the “Me” of the article’s title. There is a further tension between the piece’s formal and intimate sensibilities, as the magazine’s choice to label Wright’s article as a “report” clashes with his designation of it as a collection of “impressions” about the country. Travel writing is a genre that, scholars Patrick Holland and Graham Huggans argue, “enjoys an intermediary status between subjective inquiry and objective documentation,”<sup>36</sup> and Wright’s text occupies this middle ground between straightforward reportage and personal narrative. The excerpt from *Black Power* is both a “report” and a series of “impressions” simultaneously, yet it is the subjective viewpoint—Wright’s “impressions”—that are the basis of any “objective documentation” in the piece.

The first section of the travelogue is a conversation between Wright, his wife Ellen Wright, and Dorothy Padmore, the spouse of George Padmore, a journalist and leading figure of the Pan-African movement.<sup>37</sup> After Dorothy suggests that Wright take a trip to Africa, the following exchange occurs:

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<sup>33</sup> Cornel West, introduction to *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power, The Color Curtain, and White Man Listen!* by Richard Wright (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), viii.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Wright, ““What is Africa to Me?” Some impressions of a visit to the Gold Coast,” *Encounter* 3, no. 3 (September 1954): 22.

<sup>35</sup> “About our Authors,” *Encounter* 3, no. 3 (September 1954): 80.

<sup>36</sup> Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Jerry W. Ward and Robert J. Butler, *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 295 – 296.

"Kwame Nkrumah, the Prime Minister [of the Gold Coast], is going to table his motion for self-government in July," Dorothy said.

"It would be a great experience for you," my wife said.<sup>38</sup>

The brief dialogue highlights what Wright understands to be the two competing motivations for his journey to Africa. On the one hand, the political and cultural affairs of the Gold Coast would be a worthy topic for any social critic, and even more so for Wright, an avowed anti-imperialist with a powerful interest in the Pan-African movement.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Wright also recognizes that a visit to the land that would, in 1957, become the country of Ghana possesses the potential to provoke a critical examination of the relationship between his own identity and his African ancestry. It is this latter prospect that evidently holds the most appeal for him. After Dorothy and his wife urge him to take the trip, Wright wonders: "Africa was a vast continent full of 'my people' [but] had three hundred years imposed a psychological distance between me and the 'racial stock' from which I had sprung? [...] Would the Africans regard me as a lost brother who had returned?"<sup>40</sup> These questions mark the end of the first section, and, much like how Dwight Macdonald confesses that he cannot give his reader a "balanced or even mildly authoritative view" of Egypt,<sup>41</sup> Wright clarifies his intentions to the reader. But while Macdonald was essentially forced to re-evaluate the objectives of his visit to Egypt due to the circumstances of his arrival, Wright sets off on his journey to the Gold Coast knowing that the subjects of his investigation are to be far more personal than they are political.

Cornel West has argued that in Richard Wright's travel writing, including *Black Power*, Wright "honestly acknowledges that he the traveler is the guide and measure of what we see and how we see."<sup>42</sup> What West discerns about Wright's approach to the travel narrative is evident in Wright's

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<sup>38</sup> Wright, "What is Africa to Me?" 22.

<sup>39</sup> Ward and Butler, *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, "What is Africa to Me?" 22 – 23.

<sup>41</sup> Macdonald, "Ten Days in Cairo," 3.

<sup>42</sup> West, introduction, ix.

unwillingness to deviate, even for a moment, from a first-person perspective in “What is Africa to Me?”<sup>43</sup> There are no paragraphs of historical summary, and on the incredibly rare occasions where Wright does permit his narrative voice to travel outside of the boundaries of his own immediate experiences, he does so cautiously. In one section of the text, Wright observes a “pagan chief” perform a ritual in which a bowl of corn wine is passed from person to person, each participant taking three sips from the vessel before handing it to the next. Although Wright’s description of the event never extends past the threshold of his direct observations and is firmly grounded in the present-tense, a brief parenthetical remark is inserted at the end of the ritual: “(Three is the lucky number among many Africans of the Gold Coast.)”<sup>44</sup> This fleeting inclusion of external scholarly information, parenthetically severed from the rest of the text, imbues the passage with something akin to embarrassment, as though Wright regrets making even this smallest of departures from the tangibility that defines the travelogue’s narrative voice. Furthermore, the content of the parenthetical remark is a foray into the journalistic realm of self-contained and verifiable fact, and it stands in stark contrast to the rest of travelogue’s veneration of experiential knowledge.

Wright’s travelogue, along with the majority of travel literature in *Encounter*, can be read as a manifestation of the socially engaged mode of authorship promoted by the journal. The privilege Wright affords his own point of view in the travelogue could also be interpreted as precisely the sort of authorial narcissism rejected by the literary sensibilities of Virginia Woolf, Stephen Spender, and the publication’s general editorial ethos.<sup>44</sup> The excerpt from *Black Power* illustrates how the magazine grants the writer permission to indulge in a particular form of preoccupation with the self if, and only if, this inward gaze yields something of value to the reader and not simply the writer. African scholar Ngwarsungu Chiwengo argues that Wright’s “voyage [in *Black Power*] is not about discovering the Other in the Ghanaian ‘contact zone’ or reassessing the self and home; rather, it is

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<sup>43</sup> Wright, “What is Africa to Me?” 26.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter 1.

about understanding the moment of severance, searching for the self in one's original historical place of reference.”<sup>45</sup> Wright is investigating this “self,” Chiwengo explains, because “it is only by looking at the African through the eyes of the African American that America will truly comprehend” the mechanisms driving the social construction of African American identity.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the purpose of the book, Wright states in his introduction to *Black Power*, is to “provide Western readers with some insight into what it is going to happen in Africa, so that, when it does happen, they will be able to understand it.”<sup>47</sup> Wright sacrifices the privacy of his psychological landscape to the “Western reader” in an attempt to equip this audience with the necessary tools for considering the relationship between Africa and those who have inherited the continent’s colonial past. The excerpt from *Black Power* in *Encounter* ends on a remarkably bleak note, as Wright walks away from a compound full of dancing men and women, watching them over his shoulder before a young man closes the wooden gate and he concludes: “I had understood nothing. I was black and they were black, but my blackness did not help me.”<sup>48</sup> While Wright has “understood nothing,” the Western readers of *Encounter* will invariably finish the article and understand more about Africa than they did before they opened the magazine’s September 1954 issue. The goal of a travel narrative, American scholar Mary Baine Campbell explains, is not necessarily to document the author’s personal growth for the reader, but to have “an impact on other (culturally or socially produced) psyches.”<sup>49</sup> Wright claims to remain in a state of ignorance at the end of “‘What is Africa to Me?’” but he does so in an almost theatrical fashion; his feigned ignorance forces the reader to inspect the condition of their “psyche” and consider the state of their own knowledge. Wright’s text pushes the

<sup>45</sup> Ngwarsungu Chiwengo, “Gazing Through the Screen: Richard Wright’s Africa,” in *Richard Wright’s Travel Writings: New Reflections*, ed. Virginia Whatley Smith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001): 22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power, The Color Curtain, and White Man Listen!* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 13 – 14.

<sup>48</sup> Wright, “‘What is Africa to Me?’” 31.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Baine Campbell, “Travel writing and its theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme et al. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 273.

reader towards self-reflection, and, in turn, instructs the reader to recognize the article's contributions to their understanding of the African continent.

As evidenced by Wright's use of the first-person to develop an ethnographic social commentary, the travelogues in *Encounter* collapse the distance between the subjective aesthetics of the literary form and the pure objectivity often pursued by non-fiction. The anecdotalism of a narrative such as Wright's *Black Power* produces what Carl Thompson calls "literary pleasure,"<sup>50</sup> but does not limit the scope of the text or prevent it from addressing concerns . In August of 1954, only a month before the excerpt from *Black Power* was published in *Encounter*, the journal featured another piece of travel writing on Africa: John Muggeridge's "A Subaltern in Kenya."<sup>51</sup> The word "subaltern" was adopted by postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Spivak in the 1970s as a way of referring to those individuals who were subordinated by the perpetrators of colonialism and other dominant social groups.<sup>52</sup> Here, however, Muggeridge uses the other definition of the word: a "subaltern" is a junior officer in the armed forces, usually one rank below that of captain.<sup>53</sup> John Muggeridge, the son of prolific English author and public intellectual Malcolm Muggeridge, served in the British Army, and was dispatched to Kenya in December of 1952 to aid in the United Kingdom's efforts to quell the Mau Mau Rebellion.<sup>54</sup> He was, in short, nearly the exact opposite of what a postcolonial critic would call a "subaltern." As a member of the British Army who managed colonial affairs through the use of violence, Muggeridge is unquestionably a member of a dominant

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 60.

<sup>51</sup> John Muggeridge, "A Subaltern in Kenya," *Encounter* 3, no. 2 (August 1954): 24.

<sup>52</sup> Although the field of Subaltern Studies has shifted its critical focus numerous times since its inception, historian Gyan Prakash explains that it is primarily concerned with "demonstrating how the agency of the subaltern in history had been denied by elite perspectives anchored in colonialist, nationalist, and/or Marxist narratives." Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1476.

<sup>53</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "subaltern," Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192439> (accessed March 18, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Branch summarizes the events of the Mau Mau Rebellion as follows: "Between 1952 and 1960, the British colonial government of Kenya waged a violent counter-insurgency campaign against the Mau Mau rebels." The Mau Mau was a collection of loosely affiliated groups composed of the Kikuyu ethnic majority in Kenya and sought an end to British rule in the country. Daniel Branch, "The Enemy Within: Loyalists and the War against Mau Mau in Kenya," *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 2 (2007): 291 – 315.

social group. Yet Muggeridge's designation of himself as a "subaltern" in the title of the piece is an admission of his own shortcomings, and self-deprecation of this sort is, according to the scholarship of Holland and Huggan, "a useful strategy of self-protection—as if the writer, in revealing his/her faults, might be relieved of social responsibilities."<sup>55</sup> By making it known that he is merely a "subaltern," a junior officer, Muggeridge not only absolves himself of responsibility for British imperialism, but establishes the authenticity of his narrative. Muggeridge's title implicitly attests to the validity of its contents, as a report on the country from a "subaltern" would, the reader can presume, be far more reliable than a report from a senior officer, who would undoubtedly be more obligated to present an untarnished image of the British Army. "A Subaltern in Kenya" is a boots-on-the-ground view of the country, not a government report.

Muggeridge's essay is an account of his fourteen-month-long tour of duty in the African country, written for *Encounter* upon his return to England and published in the magazine's August 1954 issue. Muggeridge opens his travelogue with a confession:

Before I was posted to Kenya my knowledge of that sad but beautiful country was based partly on School Certificate Geography, and partly on the first newspaper reports about the outbreak of Mau Mau terrorism. I had learnt that Nairobi was its capital, that there was a port at Mombasa and that somewhere within its boundaries was a high plateau comparable, I thought, to Northern Scotland.<sup>56</sup>

Wright would likely characterize Muggeridge's attitude as representative of the need for a book such as *Black Power*. Before his military service in Kenya, Muggeridge was a Westerner who "knowledge" of the African continent consisted of nebulous and inapplicable renderings of reality: maps, faint recollections of lessons taught in school, and broad generalizations of the sort that one would find in an encyclopedia entry on Kenya. Muggeridge introduces his article in *Encounter* as an attempt to capture his "impressions" of a war fought "against a people whose existence I had previously been scarcely aware in a country which hitherto had meant nothing more to me than a red patch on the

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<sup>55</sup> Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Muggeridge, "A Subaltern in Kenya," 24.

east coast of a map of Africa.”<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting the reappearance of the word “impressions” as a descriptor of the travelogue, given the identical self-classification in the subtitle of Wright’s ““What is Africa to Me?”” as well as in the text of “Ten Days in Cairo,” where Dwight Macdonald modestly interprets his time spent in Egypt as “a few experiences and a great many impressions.”<sup>58</sup> In *Encounter*, the categorization of the travelogue as an “impression” can be read as a means by which the writer informs or reminds the reader of the subjectivity of what is to follow. Muggeridge’s travelogue is, by his own admission, not attempting to impart to the reader any empirical knowledge of Kenya—like Macdonald, Muggeridge distances himself from the claim of being “authoritative.”<sup>59</sup> Muggeridge’s article is a personal narrative that documents the daily life of both residents and foreigners in Kenya during the Mau Mau Rebellion. He aims to paint a portrait of the country for his reader that looks beyond the “red patch on the east coast of the map of Africa” to capture a more nuanced and authentic sense of what Kenya truly is.<sup>60</sup>

The author does not have to sacrifice the uniqueness of his own perspective in order to embrace *Encounter*’s mode of socially engaged writing. In fact, the editors of *Encounter* do not necessarily believe that an author should, whether writing a travelogue or a work of fiction, strive to be encyclopedic or objective. In the first issue of *Encounter*, Stephen Spender ignores Ezra Pound’s anti-Semitism in his article “American Diction vs. American Poetry.”<sup>61</sup> Spender chooses to look past the ideologically dubious nature of some of Pound’s writing because his poetry possesses a “certain attitude to culture” and literary tradition that permits for more creative flexibility and, in turn, originality than that of Pound’s English contemporaries.<sup>62</sup> There are echoes of Spender’s thesis on Pound that can be detected in the magazine’s travel narratives. The author of these texts has no

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<sup>57</sup> Muggeridge, “A Subaltern in Kenya,” 24.

<sup>58</sup> Macdonald, “Ten Days in Cairo,” 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>60</sup> Muggeridge, “A Subaltern in Kenya,” 24.

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of Spender’s article.

<sup>62</sup> Spender, “American Diction,” 64 – 65.

obligation to chase objective journalism or promote any specific dogma or ideology; as with Spender's love of Pound, what matters for the writer of the travelogue is whether they are able to ability to cast a subjective and genuine critical gaze upon the country or region that they have adopted as their subject. For *Encounter*, subjective authorship makes it possible for the writer to deliver a vision of reality than manages to be more tangible and accurate than anything strictly objective could ever hope to. John Muggeridge recounts how his company found a local chief "lying in a pool of blood outside the charred remains of his hut," his corpse "horribly mutilated by the Mau Mau."<sup>63</sup> As Muggeridge knew before his arrival in Kenya, the country's capital is Nairobi, but the experiences Muggeridge relates to the reader in "A Subaltern in Kenya" offer an otherwise absent context to this geographical reality.

At the end of *Encounter*'s excerpt from *Black Power*, Richard Wright laments that he has "understood nothing."<sup>64</sup> Although Wright's claim of ignorance is, in part, meant to induce a moment of self-reflection in his reader, there is an air of true melancholy to the passage. Wright seems to grapple with the ultimate futility of his visit to the Gold Coast. He has accomplished nothing; there are still problems in the country, he is still unclear about his personal connection to his African ancestry, and all he has done is recount these problems to the reader. Muggeridge concludes his own travel narrative with an equally bleak comment on his tour of duty:

I left Kenya as I found it, dried up and blistered by the sun, waiting impatiently for the rains to break...The Europeans were more resigned to the emergency, yet more determined to put an end to it at any cost. Africans were still fearful of both Mau Mau and Government.<sup>65</sup>

These confessions of impotence, positioned at the end of the end of each, speak to the limits of the author's ability to function as a cultural participant in a land other than his own. The writer can observe the land, have conversations with local residents, and witness political turmoil. The

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<sup>63</sup> Muggeridge, "A Subaltern in Kenya," 27.

<sup>64</sup> Wright, "What is Africa to Me?" 31.

<sup>65</sup> Muggeridge, "A Subaltern in Kenya," 30.

magazine will bring these experiences and whatever commentary accompanies them to the reader. But the author of the travel narrative remains a spectator, and cannot alter the cultural realities they document and dissect in their writing. The travel narrative does not create change in a country by the sheer force of its existence. While Spender and his peers encourage the author to depart from the familiar and engage with the foreign, the author's responsibility is to dispense new and different forms of knowledge about the nation they write about. *Encounter* does not expect the writer to fix the ills of the world. The job of the traveler-writer published in *Encounter* is to serve as a subjective recording device. They are, as per the hope of Spender and others, cultural participants, but they stand at the fringes of the scenes they observe.

### THE TRAVELOGUE AND ITS LITERARY (DIS)CONTENTS

In April of 1959, five years after Muggeridge and Wright published their travelogues in *Encounter*, American political scientist and historian George F. Kennan wrote an article for the magazine titled “History as Literature.” In the piece, Kennan outlines the symbiotic relationship between the literary and the historical, and argues that there is a pressing need for both intellectuals and a wider public to recognize this interplay but simultaneously acknowledge the unique capabilities of each mode of thought:

The literary artist needs the historian to keep him usefully close to the known and the possible. The historian needs the poet as a reminder of the inner world of his own clients, as an admonishment never to forget that he is dealing with real people, with phenomena whose true sources are individual, with impulses which are only outward reflections of the wonder, the anarchy, the tenderness, and the brutality of the individual human soul.<sup>66</sup>

For Kennan, the ideal “literary artist” is the author whose writing manages to retain the subject’s sense of humanity, of “real people,” without excessive deviation from concrete fact. The category of travel writing achieves this marriage of the literary and the historical in a fashion that no other

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<sup>66</sup> George F. Kennan, “History as Literature,” *Encounter* 12, no. 4 (April 1959): 16.

medium can. The author, of course, cannot invent outright fictions about the land he writes about, but the subjectivity of the travel narrative permits him to make small adjustments to the truth where he finds it necessary to do so. Of course, these alterations must be small enough so that the writer will not be caught in the act; Richard Wright and John Muggeridge presumably take liberties of this sort in the writing of theirs that was published in *Encounter*—a piece of dialogue might be altered, or the chronological structure of events adjusted. As British literary critic Peter Hulme has argued, the conventions of travel writing have conditioned the reader to both expect and accept these minor embellishments.<sup>67</sup> Although Kennan understands these two modes of thought to be in a state of opposition to one another, the two travelogues successfully balance the literary and the historical. Wright and Muggeridge produce texts that are focused squarely on the human element, but never roam too far from the political and historical context of their respective subjects. Wright's conversation with Kwame Nkrumah, the Prime Minister of the Gold Coast, perhaps one of the strangest interviews ever conducted with a head-of-state, is an example of how his travel narrative navigates the tension between the humanist and the politico-historical:

“What’s going to happen in July?” I asked, referring to the coming meeting of the Legislative Assembly. The Prime Minister threw back his head and laughed. I got used, in time, to that African laughter...it was a way of indicating that, though they were not going to take you into their confidence, their attitude was not based upon anything hostile. “You’ll have to wait and see,” he told me.<sup>68</sup>

Here, Wright gently probes the Prime Minister for political information, assuming a journalistic posture for a moment as he asks the question. But Wright, before he even includes the Prime Minister’s lack of an answer, begins to describe “that African laughter” and its connotations. Wright’s cultural analysis in the passage shows him as he assumes the position of Kennan’s “poet,” as Wright’s description of the Prime Minister’s laugh remind his reader of the humanity of the

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<sup>67</sup> Peter Hulme, “Travelling to write (1940 – 2000),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme et al. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 99.

<sup>68</sup> Wright, “What is Africa to Me?” 24.

situation. In ““What is Africa to Me?”” Richard Wright plays the competing roles of both “historian” and “poet,” albeit with an undeniable preference for the latter role. Yet this synthesis, however imbalanced, remains a synthesis—neither the historical nor the poetic mode of thought can be said to fully dominate the other in Wright’s travel narrative.

Wright’s tendency towards the poetic is matched by the more historical impulse evident in Muggeridge’s prose. In one passage from “A Subaltern in Kenya,” Muggeridge writes:

The Kikuyu reserve must certainly include some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. On the equator, 4,000 feet is the perfect height above sea-level. Bananas, pineapples, paw-paw, oranges, and grape fruit [sic] flourish—yet the climate is not unbearably hot.<sup>69</sup>

Muggeridge’s initial subject is the beauty of the land, but his attention to what Kennan would label an “outward reflection” of humanity’s inner sense “wonder”<sup>70</sup> does not linger, and Muggeridge outlines the sources of the aesthetic pleasure in a fashion that identifies him as being more inclined to perform the duties of the “historian” than those of the “poet.” While Wright moves from politics to poetics, Muggeridge begins with poetics but ends with politics—or, more accurately, he ends with an encyclopedic reading of the landscape. Again, the two modes of thought are not wholly commensurable, as Muggeridge prefers the role of “historian,” but, like Wright, Muggeridge is not afraid to assume the alternative mantle, becoming a temporary “poet.”

Not all of the travel writing in *Encounter* was able to achieve even the imperfect balancing acts of ““What is Africa to Me?”” and “A Subaltern in Kenya.” That is, some travelogues published in the magazine were far more literary than they are historical. And, of course, there were some pieces that displayed a clear and unyielding preference for the politico-historical approach to travel writing. This latter category of travel narrative, scholar Carl Thompson argues, utilizes “a more impersonal and dispassionate prose style,”<sup>71</sup> and the perfect example of such a piece in *Encounter*

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<sup>69</sup> Muggeridge, “A Subaltern in Kenya,” 25.

<sup>70</sup> Kennan, “History as Literature,” 16.

<sup>71</sup> Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 88.

would be British music critic William Glock's "A Music Festival in Rome," published in the magazine's June 1954 issue.<sup>72</sup> The article is, as its title partially suggests, ostensibly about a music festival in Rome sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom that Glock attended. But there is only the faintest glimmer of Glock's personality to be found in the scant three pages that constitute the article's totality, and, apart from a handful of moments, Glock essentially ignores the fact that the musical festival took place in Rome. There is a single instance where Glock overtly makes his feelings on a subject known to the reader, and it occupies but one short sentence: "I hope [German composer Giselher Klebe's] Overture will be heard again, even if it turns out to be no more than an interesting experiment."<sup>73</sup> The bulk of the article consists of Glock's fairly obtuse observations about the use of the "twelve-tone method" at the festival, but these musings are mostly academic in nature, and lack any subjective flair. Glock's prose remains resolutely detached and emotionless throughout the article; for example, his commentary on the performance of *Septet*, a new composition by Igor Stravinsky, at the festival is as follows:

Stravinsky's interest in [Austrian composer Anton] Webern has been known for some time...[but] in the *Septet*, Stravinsky goes much further, even including some of the typical outlines and instrumentation of Webern's music.... Stravinsky remains Stravinsky, even though the sound is often very hard; hard and rather dry.<sup>74</sup>

Glock offers the reader an opinion on the Stravinsky piece, but the opinion lacks any of the humanist perspective that defines Wright and Muggeridge's articles. Stravinsky's music may be "hard and rather dry," but Glock dwells neither on the beauty of the piece nor on how its specific tonal qualities might serve to illustrate something other than the development of Stravinsky's work. He rather lamely concludes that Stravinsky's recent compositions have succeeded in "bringing together two supposedly irreconcilable schools of thought...[this] will always stand to his credit and may well

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<sup>72</sup> William Glock, "Music Festival in Rome," *Encounter* 2, no. 6 (June 1954): 60 – 63.

<sup>73</sup> Glock, "Music Festival in Rome," 60.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 62.

prove a turning point of great historical significance.”<sup>75</sup> Glock’s article is, presumably, of some interest to those who have a fondness for classical music, but this exclusivity is what renders it, and articles similar to it, an exception. Glock does not generate a piece of reportage that seeks to make a discussion about a classical music festival interesting to an audience composed of those other than ardent classical music fans. Glock’s failure to engage with a broader audience by bringing classical music into the magazine’s nigh all-encompassing discursive realm of culture is a fault he shares with the authors of the other travel narratives in *Encounter* that, regardless of whether they are writing about classical music or current affairs, wholly embrace the politico-historical approach.

While Glock’s article embodies the attitude of the “historian,” there are also pieces of travel writing in *Encounter* where the authors employ a far more literary methodology. These texts eschew the imperfect balance of the literary and politico-historical account in favor of something far more experimental. In May of 1964, *Encounter* published Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s “Open City: Letter from Delhi.”<sup>76</sup> Although her name might lead one to believe Jhabvala was a native of India,<sup>77</sup> she was, in fact, a German-born Jew who survived the Holocaust and moved to Britain in 1939, relocated to India in 1951 after her marriage, then moved to America in 1975.<sup>78</sup> The other reason why a reader might be led to think that Jhabvala was born in India is the opening line of her article: “All through the winter there is a stream of foreign visitors.”<sup>79</sup> Here, Jhabvala strongly implies that she is not one of these outsiders, who arrive in Delhi to “hold conferences and go shopping and admire Indian architecture, art, culture, food, tradition, and whatever else there is to admire.”<sup>80</sup> The fact that

<sup>75</sup> Glock, “Music Festival in Rome,” 63.

<sup>76</sup> Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, “Open City: Letter from Delhi,” *Encounter* 12, no. 5 (May 1964): 40 – 44.

<sup>77</sup> The magazine credits her as “R. Prawer Jhabvala.” The decision to replace her first name with an initial is unique in the sense that she uses her full name—that is, she includes the “Ruth”—in the rest of her body of work. By dropping her distinctly European first name, it seems as though the magazine tries to make Jhabvala appear as a native-born Indian, which she is not.

<sup>78</sup> Judie Newman, “Retrofitting the Raj: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and the Uses and Abuses of the Past,” in *British Women Writing Fiction*, ed. Abby H.P. Werlock (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 71.

<sup>79</sup> Jhabvala, “Open City,” 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Jhabvala suggests that she is not a “foreign visitor” makes the text defy easy categorization as a travel narrative. Yet her biography dictates that she is, strictly speaking, a non-native, but it is perhaps safer to say that she is a ‘foreign resident,’ and not one of the “foreign visitors” she describes. Jhabvala has the authority to speak as an insider, but also possesses the perspective of an outsider.

The tourists that Jhabvala describes in her introduction “all seem to have this in common, that they feel a deep personal concern for India’s problems; they see that something is out of joint and are eager, in a really nice, completely unselfish way, to help set it right.”<sup>81</sup> A comparison to Denis de Rougemont’s 1953 essay “Looking for India” is warranted, not only because the two authors share a subject, but due to the uncanny similarities between the visitor’s “deep personal concern for India’s problems” and the final words of de Rougemont’s travel narrative: “The West has problems. India *is* problems.”<sup>82</sup> Jhabvala’s text can be read as a self-reflexive travel narrative, as she outlines the visit of an archetypal “foreign visitor” by describing the various stops on an imagined journey through Delhi; she provides a scathing commentary on individuals such as de Rougemont, critiquing the feigned “deep personal concern for India” and their belief in the ability to solve the problems of the country through a superficial piece of reportage. “Let us pretend that we are a very lucky foreign visitor indeed,” she writes, “who has had an introduction” to a high-ranking local official and received an invitation to Sunday lunch.<sup>83</sup> Much of the narrative takes place from the perspective of “our foreign visitor,” as she calls her archetypal formulation of Delhi’s tourists. This use of an imagined scenario is not atypical of Jhabvala’s work, as her autobiography, “My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past,” is, in her own words, a work of fiction. She writes in the preface to the book:

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<sup>81</sup> Jhabvala, “Open City,” 40.

<sup>82</sup> De Rougemont, “Looking for India,” 42.

<sup>83</sup> Jhabvala, “Open City,” 41.

These chapters are potentially autobiographical: even when something didn't actually happen to me, it might have done so. Every situation was one I could have been in myself, and sometimes, to some extent, was.<sup>84</sup>

The imagined foreign visitor of “Open City” is of a similar nature; Jhabvala transparently constructs this fictional character because she believes it to be a “potentially” true portrait of the traveler to India.

Although “Open City” is a self-reflexive travel narrative, one must be cautious to avoid a reductive categorization of the piece as merely a critique of cultural reportage as a practice. Jhabvala certainly does not hesitate to argue that this hypothetical foreign visitor will leave India without a true sense of what life in the country is like. They will attend the government official’s “lovely party” and have a “most sumptuous tea” at the house of another local.<sup>85</sup> But, as Jhabvala writes in her conclusion, “there is no way of finding out what [India] is all about except by living here for a long time and with patience.”<sup>86</sup> What Jhabvala suggests is that the act of cultural reportage, as practiced by those such as Denis de Rougemont, can fall victim to the same totalizing excess as that of the nation; that is, she believes that these reports on other countries fail to penetrate the superficial, but are not aware of this shortcoming. Yet she incorporates her own ethnographic account of India into her criticisms, as is evident in the following passage:

What chance has the short-term visitor of ever guessing that the Additional Secretary...still sometimes consults his family astrologer? Or that the repressed looking ladies...are strong-minded, vigorous women whose rule over their households is undisputed...? And...can he ever guess what went on in the adjacent room [or] what was whispered behind the door?<sup>87</sup>

Jhabvala's critique of the traveler-writer is apparent, but her text also offers genuine insight into the culture of India. She not only points out the defects of the Indian travel narrative, but seeks to correct its faults by filling in some of the apparent informational gaps—yet she does so, of course,

<sup>84</sup> Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004), vii.

<sup>85</sup> Jhabvala, “Open City,” 42 – 44.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

while understanding that it would be a fool's errand to try and deliver a complete or totalizing account of any country. She even accidentally takes a jab at the likes of William Glock: "Anyone can buy a ticket [for a musical recital]...The foreigner sits and listens to the music [but] then he leaves for his next engagement...[And] then the musician *really* starts to play."<sup>88</sup> Jhabvala's "Open City" is a quintessentially literary travel narrative, and both her critique and her insights are the products of the dramatic license she takes in the article. Had she adopted the objective pose of the "historian" or relied on the same marriage of politics and poetics as Wright and Muggeridge, Jhabvala could not have produced both critique and ethnographic simultaneously.

### **SUBJECTIVITY AND AUTHENTICITY IN *ENCOUNTER'S* TRAVEL NARRATIVES**

There are two aspects of Jhabvala's "Open City" that deserve particular attention. The first of these qualities is her relative absence from the piece. By absence, I mean that Jhabvala's text is undeniably the result of her own experiences in India, but, especially if compared to the excerpt from Wright's *Black Power*, there is nothing that directly indicates Jhabvala's physical inhabitance of space. The word "I" does not appear anywhere in "Open City," and the narrative is firmly grounded in the third-person. Yet the author is present as a quasi-omniscient observer, and her phantom-like presence guides the narrative. The reader is constantly aware, in other words, that Jhabvala exists, albeit through implication. The second characteristic worth noting is how Jhabvala blurs the lines between fact and fiction. The "foreign visitor" who she describes is, as discussed above, an imagined archetype of her own construction. But despite this fictive subject, there are plenty of facts in "Open City." Jhabvala mentions, for instance, that the house of the local official, the site of the Sunday lunch attended by "our foreign visitor," was one of the residencies that had formerly belonged to

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<sup>88</sup> Jhabvala, "Open City," 44, italics in original.

“British civil servants,” but had now been “acquired by the government and...allotted to Ministers and other high-ranking politicians.”<sup>89</sup>

Although there are other similarities, it is these two characteristics that Jhabvala’s “Open City” shares with another text published in *Encounter*, William Faulkner’s “Mississippi.” Faulkner’s article, featured in the magazine’s October 1954 issue, was originally printed in *Holiday* magazine several months prior.<sup>90</sup> In its own words, *Holiday* was not “an organ of the intellectuals,” but was, rather, “a magazine of civilized entertainment,” dedicated to “spurring the leisure-time interests of a sizable number of moderately well-heeled Americans.”<sup>91</sup> The magazine published articles about skiing in Norway. William Faulkner’s drunken exploits included an incident where he narrowly avoided crashing an airplane he was piloting into a grove of trees.<sup>92</sup> He was, to put it lightly, not exactly the sort of author usually featured in *Holiday*. *Encounter*, the magazine that boasted of its connections to John Dewey and Bertrand Russell in its opening issue,<sup>93</sup> is perhaps the exact opposite of the light-hearted travel magazine that Faulkner’s piece was originally printed in, and *Encounter* was certainly a better fit for the sort of author and person that Faulkner was. “Mississippi,” like Jhabvala’s “Open City,” defies easy categorization. While neither texts is a travel narrative in the conventional fashion, as they are written by residents of their respective locales, Faulkner and Jhabvala both aim give their readers a sense of the experience that a traveler would have. “Mississippi” is, one scholar writes, “a kind of walk around the state,”<sup>94</sup> and the same could be said of Jhabvala’s “Open City.” These texts can best be labeled as ‘self-reflexive’ travel narratives, and, although the term does not capture the full scope of either author’s intentions, it is sufficient for our purposes.

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<sup>89</sup> Jhabvala, “Open City,” 41.

<sup>90</sup> Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 326.

<sup>91</sup> Clifton Fadiman, introduction to *Ten Years of Holiday: Selected by the Editors of Holiday Magazine* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), viii.

<sup>92</sup> Williamson, *William Faulkner*, 286.

<sup>93</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

<sup>94</sup> Williamson, *William Faulkner*, 327.

There are, essentially, two phases to Faulkner's article. In the first phase, Faulkner provides a broad overview of what Joel Williamson, Faulkner's biographer, describes as "Mississippi's deep history and richly varied geography,"<sup>95</sup> evidenced by Faulkner's opening lines: "Mississippi begins in the lobby of a Memphis, Tennessee, hotel, and extends south to the Gulf of Mexico...In the beginning it was virgin—to the west, the alluvial swamps..."<sup>96</sup> During the second phase, however, Faulkner directs his attention towards a particular subject: a "child," sometimes referred to as "a boy" or "the boy."<sup>97</sup> The narrative chronicles the child's transformation from an infant into a "young man," who is then "middle-aged now, or anyway middle-aging."<sup>98</sup> After the character arrives at this last stage, Faulkner's narrator mentions, in a rather offhand fashion, that the "middle-aging man" is "now a professional fiction writer."<sup>99</sup> Here, the reader receives the first of several clues as to the identity of the character—he is none other than William Faulkner himself. It is worth stressing the subtlety with which Faulkner includes himself in the narrative, as it is only implied in a handful of moments in the actual text, such as when a visitor to the house of the "middle-aging man" refers to the character as "Mr. Bill."<sup>100</sup> Like Jhabvala, Faulkner is reluctant to put himself in the spotlight. Yet both authors grant their authorial personas permission to occupy the texts, albeit in somewhat different ways; Jhabvala implies her presence to the reader, and Faulkner presents himself in disguise.

There is, too, an uncanny similarity between how the two authors conceive of the autobiographical project. As Jhabvala mentions in the introduction to *My Nine Lives*, her autobiography, the contents are "potentially autobiographical: even when something didn't actually

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<sup>95</sup> Williamson, *William Faulkner*, 327.

<sup>96</sup> William Faulkner, "Mississippi," *Encounter* 3, no. 4 (October 1954): 3.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 12 – 13.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 13.

happen to me, it might have done so.”<sup>101</sup> In 1951, a year after Faulkner won the Nobel Prize in Literature, he decided that he wanted to write his memoirs, but, as Williamson notes, “he quickly withdrew from such a clear commitment to bold fact,” and wrote to a friend: “That is, it will be a book in the shape of a biography but actually about half fiction...based on actual happenings, but ‘improved’ where fiction would help.”<sup>102</sup> Faulkner never wrote his memoirs, but three years later, he published “Mississippi,” which one scholar describes as his “most elaborate foray into autobiography.”<sup>103</sup> The parallels between how the two authors conceive of their autobiographies illustrate the notion that the fictive, or take small liberties with the factual, can, to borrow Faulkner’s words, “improve” the truth. In *Encounter*, Faulkner’s piece is preceded by an editor’s note, and this preface reads in part:

There is, of course, in literal fact a state of Mississippi, with a gross area of 48,000 square miles...and a population of a little more than 2,000,000. It is about this home state of his that Faulkner is here writing. But not only about this state—he is also writing about a Mississippi which exists in art as well as in fact. It is *his* Mississippi which he here describes, and if it is not quite identical with the geographer’s or the historian’s, it is certainly no less real, and is perhaps more so.<sup>104</sup>

As with Muggeridge’s attempt to create an image of Kenya that surpasses the encyclopedic, the editor’s note highlights how Faulkner’s article envisions a Mississippi that transcends the “literal fact[s]” of its existence. This preface, presumably penned by the literary-minded Spender and not Kristol, offers a nod of approval at Faulkner’s attempt to “improve” the truth. Furthermore, the editors contend that Faulkner’s representation of Mississippi is “perhaps more” real than that of “the geographer’s or the historian’s.” Like Dwight Macdonald, Richard Wright, and the other authors discussed in this chapter, Faulkner willingly refuses the comforts of fact in order to pursue a more accurate, ethnographically-minded conception of his subject. The editor’s note shows how the

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<sup>101</sup> Jhabvala, *My Nine Lives*, vii.

<sup>102</sup> Williamson, *William Faulkner*, 326.

<sup>103</sup> Noel Polk, “Faulkner’s Non-Fiction,” in *A Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Richard C. Moreland, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 418.

<sup>104</sup> Faulkner, “Mississippi,” 3.

magazine explicitly recognizes that this methodology, wherein cultural insight is provided at the expense of empirical fact, is the genesis of truthful depictions of a given nation, region, or land.

One might wonder why, instead of printing Faulkner and Jhabvala's experimental travel narratives, the editors did not just seek out exemplary but more traditional works within the genre? There are several factors at play, it seems. The first can be found in the pages of *Encounter* itself, as the editors wrote in their preface to the magazine's April 1955 issue that "there is, for instance, a great deal of rubbish being written about China, both by people who have been there and by people who haven't."<sup>105</sup> Although they conceded that there was an equally substantial amount of "rubbish" being written about "America, France, Germany, or India," the editors concluded with an implicit request for "sensible writing...about these other countries."<sup>106</sup> Those responsible for finding the content of *Encounter* recognized, in other words, that there was a need to rehabilitate travel writing. Presumably then, the travelogues the editors chose to publish were emblematic of the "sensible writing" they expressed a desire for, as it is safe to say that neither Spender nor Kristol would deliberately include material that they regarded as "rubbish."

A cynical reader might argue that the travelogues in *Encounter* allowed the CIA to manipulate the discourse surrounding non-Western nations for political or ideological purposes. Postcolonial literary critic Andrew Rubin is certainly one such reader, as he compares the various ethnographic efforts of the Congress for Cultural Freedom to the "scientists and scholars" Napoleon sent to study Egypt before he invaded the country.<sup>107</sup> Rubin claims that this "strategy of analyzing the cultural disposition" of native residents "exercises power so that each aspect of human behavior can be reduced and objectified into particular categories that can be administered, observed, controlled,

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<sup>105</sup> "This Month's Encounter," *Encounter* 4, no. 4 (April 1955): 2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 6.

and manipulated.”<sup>108</sup> Yet Rubin makes a slight overreach in suggesting that the motives of the magazine’s traveler-writers were universally disingenuous. John Muggeridge could be accused of promoting pro-imperialist viewpoints in “A Subaltern in Kenya.” But there is no basis to assert that Richard Wright, who sneered at the notion that “Western man...has a godlike right to determine and time the development of mankind,”<sup>109</sup> was making an argument in favor of colonialism when he wrote *Black Power*. Rubin ignores the possibility that these writers could have produced legitimate and accurate depictions of their regional subjects, and the validity of the cultural reportage found in *Encounter* is dismissed wholesale. Of course, there were certainly political or ideological motives that likely influenced the work of particular authors featured in the magazine, but the travel narratives, taken as a whole, were the result of an effort by the editors to bring more “sensible writing” about non-Western countries to a wider audience. As to what exactly constitutes “sensible writing” for Spender and the others, the travelogues published in *Encounter* interrogated the function of the nation in contemporary life by returning to the anthropological methodologies of the nineteenth century; to use scholar Carl Thompson’s words again, the authors incorporated “genuinely new scientific and ethnographic information...within a narrative that simultaneously gave literary pleasure to the reader.”<sup>110</sup> The cultural insights in these texts were invariably shaped by the ideological concerns of the Cold War, but the writing demonstrated a profound respect for the humanity of its subjects. The almost innumerable travelogues in *Encounter* illustrate a determined effort to bring about a more accommodating vision of the institute of nationhood, one that avoided the traditional signifiers of the state—borders, landmarks, maps—and focused on what it understood to be more truthful manifestations of the local and regional. In this sense, the magazine was engaged in a bitter struggle with the global binary of the Cold War; there was more to the

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<sup>108</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 7.

<sup>109</sup> Wright, *Black Power*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 60.

nation, as far as *Encounter* was concerned, than whether it was Communist or non-Communist. The magazine did not ignore the geopolitics of the era, but *Encounter* left in-depth coverage of the subject to other publications and individuals.

The author of the travelogue in *Encounter* was, furthermore, afforded a unique opportunity to practice an especially self-reflexive form of writing. For a magazine that rejected authorial narcissism and sought to cultivate a sense of the writer's duty to society, the travelogue was one of the few creative spaces it provided in which the author was permitted to talk about himself through his writing. Dwight Macdonald can, for instance, inform the reader of *Encounter* about what time he woke up while he was in Egypt because this information a necessary, albeit tangential, element of the travelogue's vivid picture of human life in the country. In "What is Africa to Me?" Richard Wright explores his personal relationship to his African ancestry, and relies upon an entirely subjective narrative voice, but the self-centeredness of the piece is what allows the text to present a more nuanced understanding of Africa to a Western audience. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and William Faulkner use the travelogue format as a mechanism to force the outside viewer of their respective subjects—that is, the reader—to temporarily adopt an insider's viewpoint. *Encounter* eschews an insistence on objectivity in its travelogues, and, instead, relies on the authenticity of the writer's subjective experiences to convey the cultural realities of foreign space. There is a great deal of faith placed in the writer, and, in turn, a great deal of responsibility is bestowed upon him. The author's subjectivity is recognized as the source of accurate reportage, and, with this recognition, the magazine bred a certain brand of cultural investigation that placed a premium on the ability of the author to engage with culture on the level of both the mundane and the extraordinary.

# III

## “American Ghosts”

### The Literary Frontier Across the Atlantic

“American literature is immature, but it has, in prose and verse alike, a savor of its own, and we have often thought that this might be a theme for various interesting reflections.”

—Henry James, 1875<sup>1</sup>

“Well, if there truly are young artists (for writers are not enough; there must be architects and painters as well) preparing a renascence, what would we wish them?...[W]e hope they remember that the idea of a renascence, though expressed by individuals with a personal passion, is also social. It aims at transforming the outward living scene, the Modern City, and not just at creating the interior world of ‘cerebral’ art.”

—Stephen Spender, editorial in the December 1953 issue of *Encounter*<sup>2</sup>

At a meeting in London during 1952, as British and American intelligence officials began to outline the specifics of their plan for the magazine that would soon become *Encounter*, it became apparent that neither organization wanted to leave the project solely in the hands of the other.<sup>3</sup> It was, after some discussion, agreed upon that each agency would play a small role in overseeing the finances and operations of the publication.<sup>4</sup> One of the results of this cooperation between America’s Central Intelligence Agency and their British counterpart, the Secret Intelligence Service, was that, as the editorial in the magazine’s debut issue informed readers, *Encounter* was to be an “international magazine, with a British and an American editor.”<sup>5</sup> Irving Kristol was, of course, the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James, *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. James E. Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Spender, “Editorial: Ghosts of a Renascence,” *Encounter* 1, no. 3 (December 1953): 3. Spender is the one responsible for the atypical spelling of “renaissance” as “renascence,” and, although the former spelling is by far the more commonly used variant, both have the same meaning.

<sup>3</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 168 – 170.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “After the Apocalypse,” 1.

first American co-editor of the publication, and his talents and interests, especially in the realm of politics, shaped the magazine's early years. Kristol was replaced, however, in 1958 by Melvin Lasky, a Congress for Cultural Freedom insider who, like Kristol, was an outspoken anti-Communist and political commentator.<sup>6</sup> Spender, who served as co-editor to both Kristol and Lasky, is generally thought of as having been responsible for the magazine's literary content.<sup>7</sup> Yet the division of editorial labor was not quite so neat as one might be lead to think; that is, Kristol and Lasky did not limit themselves solely to the political side of the publication, and, likewise, Spender's editorial duties extended beyond the realm of literature.

*Encounter* was, of course, published under the auspices of the American intelligence community, and this fact has defined its legacy since the public discovered the source of the magazine's funding in 1967. Given the credentials and histories of Kristol and Lasky, it is admittedly easy to generalize the American voice of *Encounter* as primarily political, dominated by articles like Leslie Fielder's commentary on the Rosenberg trial from the magazine's first issue. But *Encounter* slowly carved out a space for American literature in its pages, and this development can partially be attributed to how Kristol, and, later, Lasky, conceived of the role and function of arts and letters in not only the magazine, but the world at large. By dividing the history of *Encounter* into two periods—the Spender-Kristol years and the Spender-Lasky years—and identifying the idiosyncrasies and tendencies of each era, one can chart the trajectory of how American literature was represented in the magazine. The texts from authors in the United States may not have been flag-waving exercises in patriotism, but they nonetheless functioned as cultural ambassadors, and, in addition to affirming the magazine's mode of socially engaged authorship, highlighted the artistic freedom of the American writer. Furthermore, those pieces of fiction and poetry that were explicitly set in America, especially during the Kristol years, demonstrated a tendency towards depictions of the mundane and

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<sup>6</sup> Berry, "Encounter," 197 – 200.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 194.

everyday, and, in doing so, expressed a markedly different vision of life in the country than that to which the European reader of *Encounter* would have been accustomed.

### THE SPENDER-KRISTOL YEARS

If one looks at Irving Kristol's career before he became the co-editor of *Encounter*, it seems as though he had been slowly preparing for the position since the early 1940s, when he was involved in the ex-Trotskyist magazine *Enquiry*.<sup>8</sup> Like *Encounter*, the cover of *Enquiry* loudly proclaimed the nature of its contents: "A Journal of Independent Radical Thought."<sup>9</sup> Kristol founded the magazine in 1942 with several friends, and although *Enquiry* only published eight issues, it served as his introduction to the world of publishing.<sup>10</sup> After serving in the military during World War Two, Kristol lived in England for two years, but in 1947, he returned to the United States and became an assistant editor of *Commentary*, a monthly periodical based out of New York. *Commentary* had been founded in 1946 with the financial support of the American Jewish Committee, and, as critic Walter Goodman notes, "it quickly became known for its acute analyses of the changing nature of Jewish life in [America]."<sup>11</sup> Yet like Kristol himself, *Commentary* was drawn towards political issues, and many of its articles, particularly those written by both Kristol and future *Encounter* contributor Leslie Fielder, voiced a strong anti-Communist message.<sup>12</sup> In 1951, Irving Kristol was selected to serve as the Executive Director of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, the official stateside branch of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.<sup>13</sup> The search for the American editor of the Congress' "new highbrow magazine" began in 1952.<sup>14</sup> Kristol was immediately identified as the American candidate for the position. He had experience working on magazines, was involved in the American

<sup>8</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Berman, "Irving Kristol's Brute Reason," *The New York Times*, January 30, 2011, Sunday Book Review.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Goodman, "On the (N.Y.) Literary Left," *The Antioch Review* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 68.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 169.

branch of the CCF, and was outspoken on the same political issues that the Congress sought to promote. Kristol was, in short, the ideal man for the job. He eagerly accepted the offer, and moved across the Atlantic to begin collecting material for the first issue of the then-unnamed publication in March of 1953.

The English intelligence officials, as they laid out their plans for the magazine with the CIA, insisted that their new publication, in addition to being staffed by editors from both countries, be composed of both political and literary material.<sup>15</sup> Kristol filled the role of the American, and, as scholar Neil Berry notes, was chiefly responsible for the political content in *Encounter*.<sup>16</sup> Spender was, although not wholly disinterested in politics, a poet by trade, and offered his “English cultural prestige” to the magazine, as well as, perhaps more importantly, a host of connections to the world of literature.<sup>17</sup> There was, it seems, a clear idea of who would handle what in mind with the selection of the two—Spender would handle the literature, and Kristol the politics. Yet the literary and the political substance of the magazine cannot, respectively, be attributed wholesale to either of the two editors; that is, the shared editorial responsibilities meant that Spender, regardless of his preference for literature, had a hand in shaping the political content,<sup>18</sup> and, likewise, Kristol inevitably played a part in developing the literary voice of the publication. Kristol’s approach to literature, then, must be considered in order to understand the literary tone and substance of the magazine during his tenure as an editor.

In the introduction to a compilation of Irving Kristol’s essays, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Kristol’s wife, describes her spouse as “engaging in disputes about the Marxist dialectic or the prospects of international revolution” while simultaneously devouring the work of D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and Franz Kafka, whom she dubs the “fashionable ‘modernist’ writers” of

<sup>15</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Berry, “Encounter,” 194.

<sup>17</sup> Berry, *Articles of Faith*, 174.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of Spender’s editorial practices.

the era.<sup>19</sup> But, by his wife's own admission, Kristol's interest in modernism favored those writers who were "politically reactionary," such as Eliot and Ezra Pound.<sup>20</sup> Kristol was a man whose primary interest lay in politics, and although he may have enjoyed great works of literature, his interest in the subject was piqued during those moments when it became relevant to the sphere of politics. Even before his tenure as an editor at *Encounter*, Kristol viewed literature through the lens of politics. His 1942 review of W.H. Auden's collection of poems *The Double Man* opens with a declaration, as Kristol states that his review will not contain the "congenial attitude" of Auden's other reviewers and he will, instead, "explore certain political problems, incidental to the poetry as such, yet relevant to the attitudes expressed therein."<sup>21</sup> Kristol argues that Auden's earlier poems, when "ideologically viewed," appear "brashly positive" and "possessed of a nasty Stalinist bent."<sup>22</sup> The phrase "ideologically viewed" aptly summarizes of Kristol's approach to literature; the work of poets and authors seemed to enter into his field of vision only if the work either demonstrated an apparent politics or if there was a political purpose that could be extracted from it. In 1952, ten years after his review of Auden's collection was published and a year before he took the editorial position at *Encounter*, Kristol wrote a piece about civil liberties for *Commentary* that opened with a "tantalizing bit of seventeenth-century verse,"<sup>23</sup> but only because those same lines of poetry had been quoted in a recent issue of the *London Times Literary Supplement* that had also featured, "elsewhere in its pages, a review of the English edition of Alan Barth's *The Loyalty of Free Men*," a book about the threat posed to American democracy by McCarthyism. Kristol thought pairing the lines of prose with a discussion of Barth's book was a "fortuitous juxtaposition," and the rest of the text is dedicated to a

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<sup>19</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, introduction to *The Neoconservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942 – 2009*, by Irving Kristol (New York: Basic Books, 2011), xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>21</sup> Irving Kristol, "Auden: The Quality of Doubt," in *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Kristol leaves the passage unattributed. The author of the text is unknown, but he uses these lines as the epitaph: *Heard ye not lately of a man/That went beside his witt/And naked through the city ran/Wrapt in a frantique fitt?*

discussion of McCarthyism and the difficulty of fighting Communism while remaining loyal to the principles of American civil society.<sup>24</sup>

Kristol's essays on Auden and civil liberties offer us a somewhat incomplete image of his relationship with literature, but they point us towards the essential aspects of his approach to the world of arts and letters. He was, firstly, most intrigued by literary writing that was somehow political, either explicitly or implicitly. The notion that Kristol was primarily interested in poetry, as suggested by his choice to review a collection of W.H. Auden's work and the quotation of several lines of verse, certainly finds little argument elsewhere in Kristol's body of work. Kristol reviewed a new translation of Tacitus' histories for *Encounter* in which he argued that part of "what marks the true greatness of a writer is...[the] way he imposes himself on successive generations of readers" and that, furthermore, "most" of these truly great writers "are poets and dramatists" but only "[s]ome are novelists and philosophers."<sup>25</sup> This particular piece was one of the two times that Kristol wrote about literature for *Encounter*, the other occasion being a pair of book reviews, published alongside each other in the July 1954 issue of the journal and given the shared title of "American Ghosts."

Before Kristol delves into his subject matter—American poet Robert Penn Warren's *Brother to Dragons* and Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*—he airs his decidedly grim view on the past and present condition of literature in his native country:

There is surely no other national literature more self-divided than the American, none more incorrigibly Manichean and inwardly destructive. Its Great Tradition is populated not with the petrified and noble dead but with lacerated bodies that do not cease to groan and bleed: Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Twain, James, Dreiser, Hemingway, Faulkner...<sup>26</sup>

Kristol's critique of America's "Great Tradition" carries an implicit argument about the need to replace the canonical "groan" of these long-deceased authors with new voices, and demonstrates

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<sup>24</sup> Irving Kristol, "'Civil Liberties,' 1952: A Study in Confusion," in *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Irving Kristol, "...And People Opening Veins in Baths," *Encounter* 6, no. 5 (May 1956): 84.

<sup>26</sup> Irving Kristol, "American Ghosts," *Encounter* 3, no. 3 (July 1954): 73, ellipses in original.

that Kristol, although not as vocal on the subject as some of his peers, was interested in, and even concerned about, literature's current status and future prospects.

Following this prelude, Kristol offers a nod of approval for Robert Penn Warren's *Brothers to Dragon*, calling it "an epic poem that wrestles furiously with these American ghosts." Here, Kristol posits that Warren is, like him, interested in orchestrating a divorce from the "lacerated bodies" of America's literary past. Although "the verse on occasion gesticulates wildly and loses its footing," Warren "emerges with the honour of having fought a real battle, when it would have been easy (it happens all the time) to avoid the conflict altogether."<sup>27</sup> This last commendation is worth dwelling upon. The model of engaged authorship, as discussed thus far, has been thought of as an argument in favor of literature shifting its aim away from itself and towards the external world. While what Kristol suggests here does not contradict this framework of socially motivated artistic production, it does, however, add a caveat to this impetus. In essence, he argues that literature not only can, but should be willing to engage with itself, on the condition that this self-reflexivity is not the sole purpose or function of the text. Indeed, the rest of Warren's poem falls very much in alignment with the magazine's other criteria for exemplary work. Kristol writes that it "takes as its point of departure a grisly historic incident: the dismemberment and murder, in 1811, of a Negro slave by Lilburne Lewis, nephew of Thomas Jefferson."<sup>28</sup> Warren's text imagines the "moral shock" to Jefferson upon learning of the violent incident, and Kristol concludes: "For Mr. Warren, America is a dark land, because its eyes were blinded at birth by the flash of the Enlightenment. In the end, however, all lands are dark because all souls are dark; true vision is the perception of this darkness."<sup>29</sup> To employ Spender's phraseology from "American Diction v. American Poetry," Kristol admires Warren because the poet conceives of America's cultural tradition "as a thing to be

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<sup>27</sup> Kristol, "American Ghosts," 74.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

used and not as a stream in which to swim or be drowned.”<sup>30</sup> Warren is, again to borrow Spender’s words, “creating and demonstrating culture” with the poem, and has produced a text that, while engaged with America’s literary and political “ghosts,” offers cultural insight to the world at large—America may be a “dark land,” but “all lands are dark,” as Warren writes. Kristol’s discussion of *Brothers to Dragons* illustrates the American author’s conception of poetic duty, and finds it to be much the same as Spender’s.

Kristol’s review of Saul Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March* perhaps tells us as much by what it does not contain as by what it does. First, however, it is worth noting a brief moment near the beginning of the review where Kristol pauses to extol the virtues of the engaged author, writing that Bellow “has neither turned his back on his demons, nor assaulted them outright; he has, as it were, jumped in their midst, bussed them, and inquired if they had read any good books lately.”<sup>31</sup> Here, we find Kristol praising Bellow much as he praised Warren, congratulating the author of *The Adventures of Augie March* for engaging in the world of literature—Bellow asks his demons if “they had read any good books lately”—while simultaneously expanding the scope of his inquiry outside of the self. The protagonist of the book is, Kristol writes, a “common man as uncommon hero.” This is perhaps the embodiment of what Albert Camus meant when he wrote in *Encounter* that the “art which refuses the truth of everyday life loses its vitality.”<sup>32</sup> Camus’ sentiment was as much a part of Spender’s editorial ethos as it seems to be for Kristol here, as Bellow’s willingness to utilize the “common man” as subject is a far cry from any attempt to leave literature detached from the world of the everyday, and Kristol celebrates the resultant “vitality” of the novel.

Yet Kristol’s review of Bellow is barely deserving of the moniker. It consists of a meager five paragraphs, and, apart from the first two, the other three paragraphs consist exclusively of lengthy

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<sup>30</sup> Spender, “American Diction,” 64.

<sup>31</sup> Kristol, “American Ghosts,” 75.

<sup>32</sup> Camus, “The Artist in Prison,” 28.

quotes from what Kristol admits to be “the opening and concluding sentences of the book,” as well as a passage taken from the middle of Bellow’s novel.<sup>33</sup> Kristol writes a single sentence of commentary between each quotation; after one passage, for instance, he writes, “And, at the end,” then includes another lengthy passage. Kristol’s review ends, in fact, with a block quote, and the complete absence of any sort of critical review of the passages selected for inclusion gives one the impression that Kristol composed the review by reading only the first and last pages of the novel, then opening up a random section in the middle and excerpting from an intriguing paragraph, all without reading the book in full. Comparing Kristol’s substantive review of Robert Penn Warren’s *Brothers to Dragons* to his paltry assortment of thoughts on Saul Bellow’s novel showcases yet again the American editor’s preference for works of poetry over prose.

With both Spender and Kristol’s professed fondness for poetry, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of the magazine’s literary content while under the custody of the two editors consisted of verse. While the short story was not an entirely neglected form, it was a far less dominant force in *Encounter* than poetry. The following tables offer us a quantitative view of the magazine’s preference for poetry during the Spender-Kristol years. Of course, a poem takes up far less space in a magazine than a short story does, and it is therefore easier to publish numerous poems in a given issue than it is to publish multiple stories, but the tables are a useful illustrative tool.

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<sup>33</sup> Kristol, “American Ghosts,” 76.

YEAR (# ISSUES PUBLISHED)	1953 (3 issues)	1954 (12 issues)	1955 (12 issues)	1956 (12 issues)	1957 (12 issues)	1958 (11 issues)*
POEMS PUBLISHED (TOTAL)	9	41	44	33	35	47
AVG. POEMS PER ISSUE	3.00	3.42	3.66	2.75	2.92	4.27

YEAR (# ISSUES PUBLISHED)	1953 (3 issues)	1954 (12 issues)	1955 (12 issues)	1956 (12 issues)	1957 (12 issues)	1958 (11 issues)*
STORIES PUBLISHED (TOTAL)**	2	7	7	5	3	6
AVG. STORIES PER ISSUE	1.5	0.58	0.58	0.42	0.25	0.50

\*There were 12 issues of *Encounter* produced in 1958, but Melvin Lasky replaced Kristol as Spender's co-editor for the December 1958 issue.

\*\*For the purpose of consistency, I have only counted those short stories that were billed as such by the publication in the issue's table of contents. Jack Curtis' short story in the July 1954 issue of *Encounter* is listed as "A Day's Work (story)" on the table of contents page, whereas William Faulkner's "Mississippi," a piece that theoretically could be called a short story, lacked the parenthetical descriptor.

The poetry from non-American authors in *Encounter* between 1953 and the end of 1958 was predominantly written by established British writers—the verse of W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender's close friend,<sup>34</sup> appeared frequently in the magazine, as did Cyril Connolly's poetry, whom Spender had founded the publication *Horizon* with in 1940. By contrast, most of the American poets featured in *Encounter* lacked the name recognition of their British counterparts: Arnold Weinstein, Richard Selig, and Howard Griffin, to name a few. Yet *Encounter* did publish several more prominent contemporary American poets during the Spender-Kristol years, including Robert Lowell, Richard Eberhart, Theodore Roethke, and Randall Jarrell. Moreover, the magazine appeared resolute to remain on the cutting edge of the American poetry scene, to detach itself from Kristol's "American ghosts" and present the new and innovative literary voices of the country. Leslie Fielder, the

<sup>34</sup> Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, 1.

American critic responsible for the controversial article on the Rosenberg trial in the first issue of *Encounter*, wrote a scathing article on the “legend” of Walt Whitman published in the January 1955 edition. Fielder argued against Whitman’s popular image as a national literary folk-hero, and insisted that he was not, as many have thought of him as, the voice of American identity, but, rather, “only a man, ridden by anxiety and impotence, by desire and guilt, furtive and stubborn.”<sup>35</sup> With this severance from the nation’s literary past, the magazine leaves the reader with the question posed by Stephen Spender in the debut issue of *Encounter*: “So what is peculiarly American about American poetry today?”<sup>36</sup> The answer, it seems, is found in the contents of the magazine.

The inclusion of Randall Jarrell’s poetry in *Encounter* is a useful starting point, as Jarrell had risen to fame during the 1940s on the merit of his poems about military life, and became, scholar Stephen Burt notes, “the prominent highbrow soldier-poet of America’s war.”<sup>37</sup> Jarrell was, in many ways, the perfect poet for the editors of *Encounter*, as his combination of potentially political subject matter and highly developed style undoubtedly held appeal for both Kristol and Spender respectively. Yet Jarrell, when asked to describe his own poetry for an anthology of American verse, wrote, “Half of my poems are about the war, half are not.”<sup>38</sup> While one might expect that *Encounter* would publish work of his that fell into the former category, neither of the two poems by Jarrell that were featured in the magazine’s August 1954 issue dealt with military service. The first of the two pieces, titled “The Lonely Man,” was written while Jarrell was teaching at Princeton in the early 1950s, and depicts a relatively mundane scene set at the college. The bulk of the poem consists of lines that populate the scene with images: “A cat sits on a pavement by the house / It lets itself be

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<sup>35</sup> Leslie A. Fielder, “Walt Whitman,” *Encounter* 4, no. 1 (January 1955): 41 – 48.

<sup>36</sup> Spender, “American Diction v. American Poetry,” 64.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Burt, *Randall Jarrell and His Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>38</sup> Randall Jarrell, “Answers to Questions,” in *Mid-Century American Poets*, ed. John Ciardi (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1950), 183.

touched, then slides away,” for example, or “How cold it is! Some snow slides from a roof.”<sup>39</sup> The poem is dominated by a calmness that is somewhat uncharacteristic of Jarrell’s work. The tone of “The Lonely Man” appears exceptionally serene when considered alongside his military poems; there is nothing tranquil or scenic about Jarrell’s poem “The Dead Wingman,” published in his 1948 collection *Losses*, where the speaker describes how “[a] plane circles stubbornly: the eyes distending/With hatred and misery and longing, stare/Over the blackening ocean for a corpse.”<sup>40</sup>

“Cinderella,” the other Jarrell poem in *Encounter*, imagines a version of the titular story in which Cinderella has married the prince, but has become an unhappy widower in her old age:

A sullen mother and a reluctant mother,  
She sat all day in silence by the fire.  
Better, later, to stare past her sons’ sons,  
Her daughters’ daughters, and tell stories.<sup>41</sup>

Despite Kristol’s love of politically charged verse, neither of these poems possess anything overtly or implicitly ideological. “The Lonely Man” and “Cinderella” can be said to deal with the banal and the fantastical respectively. Indeed, Spender was likely the editor responsible for the inclusion of the two pieces, given that, in 1948, Spender wrote a review of Jarrell’s collection of poems for *The Nation* in which he praised Jarrell’s “real feeling for humanity,” and concluded that Jarrell was “eminently a ‘modern’ involved in the same problems of humanity as Rilke, and Eluard, and Lorca: writers who seem not to have at all influenced his literary sensibility.”<sup>42</sup> The publication of Jarrell’s poetry in *Encounter* is, in part, a testament to the publication’s desire to present an image of American literature as distinctly new and of the times, given Spender’s use of the word “‘modern’” to describe Jarrell’s poetry. Furthermore, in Jarrell’s retelling of the Cinderella narrative, one can discern echoes of Spender’s admiration of the American poet who “could look on the tradition as a

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<sup>39</sup> Randall Jarrell, “The Lonely Man, *Encounter* 3, no. 2 (August 1954): 22.

<sup>40</sup> Randall Jarrell, “The Dead Wingman,” in Ciardi, *Mid-Century American Poets*, 187.

<sup>41</sup> Randall Jarrell, “Cinderella,” *Encounter* 3, no. 2 (August 1954): 23.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Spender, “Randall Jarrell’s Landscape,” *The Nation*, May 1, 1948, 476.

thing to be *used* and not as a stream in which to swim or be drowned.”<sup>43</sup> That is, Jarrell explores the potentialities of the original folk story through his reimagining of the tale, and, in this way, “Cinderella” can be said to resemble the work of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, both of whom were not only revered by Spender and Kristol, but were poets who borrowed heavily from myth, fable, and history to craft their poetry.

One could also say that Jarrell’s “The Lonely Man,” functions as a quasi-travelogue, in the sense that it provides the European or non-Western reader of *Encounter* with a picture of life’s minutiae in America. Like the travelogues, “The Lonely Man” draws valuable insight from observations of the mundane, as Jarrell’s speaker describes the various animals he interacts with on a street. “A fat spaniel snuffles out to me / And sobers me with his untrusting frown,” he writes in “The Lonely Man,” and in another passage, “A collie bounds into my arms: he is a dog / And, therefore, finds nothing human alien.”<sup>44</sup> Yet near the end, Jarrell’s speaker reflects on his relationship with the caretakers of the pets:

As for the others, those who wake up every day  
And feed these, keep the houses, ride away  
To work—I don’t know them, they don’t know me.  
Are we friends or enemies? Why, who can say?  
We nod to each other sometimes, in humanity.<sup>45</sup>

The setting of the poem is, as scholar Stephen Burt notes, “clearly” Princeton University,<sup>46</sup> but it focuses on the question of inhabiting a space in a similar fashion as Denis de Rougemont does in his “Looking for India” piece in *Encounter*. Jarrell’s emotional distance from his fellow man, or “the others,” as the speaker of the poem calls them, is mixed with the underlying urge to “nod to each other sometimes, in humanity.” This combination of distance and closeness has much in common with how de Rougemont observes that “there are, quite simply, too many people in India” but notes

<sup>43</sup> Spender, “American Diction v. American Poetry,” 65.

<sup>44</sup> Jarrell, “The Lonely Man,” 22.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Burt, *Randall Jarrell*, 10.

his “frustrated sense of the exotic.”<sup>47</sup> That is, both writers grapple with a disconnect from those around them, but find themselves inexplicably drawn to the humanity of the situation; de Rougemont’s “frustrated sense of the exotic” not only expresses his inability to fully experience the exotic, but, by extension, also suggests the inevitable forging of a personal connection with the foreign individual. One could say that de Rougemont, like the speaker of Jarrell’s poem, cannot help but “nod to” the residents of India “in humanity” as he traverses the country. “The Lonely Man” is a portrait of the American town, and Jarrell performs a kind of accidental cultural reportage as he highlights the conflicting feelings of alienation and brotherhood in the mind of the small town resident.

There is a certain congruity between Jarrell’s preoccupation with notions of place and setting “The Lonely Man” and the work of Theodore Roethke, another American poet published in *Encounter*. As literary critic John Felstiner notes, Roethke’s poetry was persistently fascinated with images of the natural and pastoral—Roethke revered “every kind of lowlife,” Felstiner writes, and “sand, stones, dirt, dust, dead leaves, weeds... [and the] slug, worm, fly, mother, midge, [and] wasp” were the foci of his poems.<sup>48</sup> The March 1954 issue of *Encounter* marked the first appearance of Roethke’s verse in the magazine,<sup>49</sup> with a four-part poem of his titled “Words for the Wind” nestled between an article about the Western genre of film and a personal essay by British author J.R. Ackerly. The poem opens with Roethke’s signature use of natural imagery: “Love, love, a lily’s my care / She’s sweeter than a tree.”<sup>50</sup> Comparisons and references to animals and vegetation abound throughout the entirety of “Words for the Wind”; the poem’s speaker mentions a “shallow stream,”

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<sup>47</sup> De Rougemont, “Looking for India,” 36.

<sup>48</sup> John Felstiner, *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 218.

<sup>49</sup> Roethke had written a short piece about meeting Dylan Thomas in New York for the section of *Encounter*’s January 1954 issue dedicated to the late Welsh poet.

<sup>50</sup> Theodore Roethke, “Words for the Wind,” *Encounter* 2, no. 3 (March 1954): 16.

describes how “[t]he stones leap in the stream,” and the fourth part of the poem begins with the following passage:

The breath of the long root,  
 The shy perimeter  
 Of the unfolding rose,  
 The green, the altered leaf,  
 The oyster’s weeping foot,  
 And the incipient star,—  
 Are part of what she is.  
 She wakes the ends of life.<sup>51</sup>

As with Randall Jarrell’s poems, there is nothing even remotely political or ideological about this particular poem. Another poem of Roethke’s, “The Visitant,” was included in *Encounter* several months later. “The Visitant” is markedly similar to “Words for the Wind” as far as its natural subject matter goes, as Roethke’s opening lines make clear: “A cloud moved close. The bulk of the wind shifted. / A tree swayed over water.” Like Jarrell’s poems, both of these Roethke poems act as vehicles for the observation of American culture, although Roethke substitutes Jarrell’s small town for the pastoral.

The third of Roethke’s poems featured in *Encounter* during the Spender-Kristol years was a three-part poem called “The Dying Man,” published in the December 1955 issue. The speaker in the first part of the poem, titled “His Words,” describes how he “heard a dying man / Say to his gathered kin / ‘My soul’s hung out to dry, / Like a fresh salted skin; / I doubt I’ll use it again.’”<sup>52</sup> In the second part of the poem, however, the speaker changes to the titular dying man, who begins the first stanza with: “Caught in the dying light / I thought myself reborn.”<sup>53</sup> And, in the final section of the poem, the same speaker has passed to some form of afterlife, and concludes: “The wall has entered: I must love the wall, / A madman staring at perpetual night. / A spirit raging at the visible.

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<sup>51</sup> Roethke, “Words for the Wind,” 17.

<sup>52</sup> Theodore Roethke, “The Dying Man,” *Encounter* 5, no. 6 (December 1955): 50.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

/ I breathe alone until my dark is bright.”<sup>54</sup> The poem has a clearer narrative than the other of Roethke’s poems featured in the magazine, and this aspect of it is dependent on the strong, albeit interchangeable, presence of an “I” speaker. In 1965, Stephen Spender wrote a critical piece on Roethke’s poetry for a collection of essays about the American poet, and Spender’s insight into the function of the speaker in Roethke’s poems is worth reprinting in full:

More than with many poets, Theodore Roethke’s self, his “I” and his poetry seemed inseparable...The paradox of [Roethke’s] poetry is that while concentrated in the ‘I’ it is not egotistic. The ‘I’ becomes the medium, the conveyor of the material of the not-I...In Roethke the not-I—the things outside him—seem to become him, or he to become them; yet although outside, they come into being through the processes of his profound subjectivity.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, it is curious upon first examination that a magazine otherwise so intent on distancing itself from overly solipsistic authorship would publish Roethke’s work, which, as a particularly snarky critic has suggested, is focused on the self to the point that “[o]ne begins to believe that Roethke must have been using one hand to pleasure himself while the other was writing poems about it.”<sup>56</sup> But Spender’s analysis of the “I” in Roethke’s poetry illustrates that there is, at least in the eyes of the editor of *Encounter*, a certain utilization of the self, as opposed to a primacy of the self, that takes place in Roethke’s work. As with Richard Wright’s travelogue, Roethke presents his self to the reader in an almost sacrificial fashion, using the internal as an almost incidental lens through which the writer allows the reader to view other, more important external objects—most often, in Roethke’s case, these objects were found in the natural world. Although we cannot take Roethke on his word alone, it is worth noting that when asked to write about his own work for an anthology of mid-century American poets, he responded to the editor with a calm but forceful repudiation of authorial narcissism:

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<sup>54</sup> Roethke, “The Dying Man,” 51.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Spender, “The Objective Ego,” in *Theodore Roethke: Essays on the Poetry*, ed. Arnold Stein (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), 1 – 9.

<sup>56</sup> David H. Hirsch, “Theodore Roethke,” *Contemporary Literature* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 245.

You must realize that only a high regard for you as a person induces me to say anything. For don't most statements or credos degenerate into elaborate defenses of one's own sort of thing: into the sales talk, the odious pimping of oneself?...[The poems of mine in this anthology] are not, in any final sense, mine at all...in other words, I am an instrument.<sup>57</sup>

Roethke's poems in *Encounter*, despite their apparent self-centeredness, underscore how the magazine's doctrine of engaged authorship did provide a degree of creative breathing room for the author; they may engage freely with the subject of their choosing, so long as the resultant work is not merely an expression of the self, but, rather, makes use of the self to express the other.

The American literary work that ran in *Encounter* during the Spender-Kristol years could be said to display what we might call a 'politics by omission' with regard to the subject matter. That is, the poems of Randall Jarrell and Theodore Roethke, by virtue of their incidental function as pieces of cultural reportage about life in America, paint a softer image of the country than the magazine's European readers might be likely to see otherwise. The calmness of Roethke's pastoral imagery recalls an almost Emersonian attitude towards the natural world, and Jarrell's poem "The Lonely Man" depicts the American small town as a place of mundane serenity. While this portrait of American life was being painted, however, the Cold War raged on, and for Europeans during the 1950s, America was a locale associated with nuclear submarines, McCarthyism, and NATO. Yet to view the inclusion of these poems as merely propaganda ignores the rich creative ethos that was emanating from *Encounter* during the Spender-Kristol years. Between 1953 and December of 1958, American literature was envisioned in *Encounter* as an entity perched upon the precipice of greatness. Kristol's "American ghosts" were being slowly dismantled, and an overwhelming sense of newness and artistic possibility pervaded the magazine's vision of literary America; the country was home to artistic liberty, as Randall Jarrell was free to write poems about subjects other than war and Theodore Roethke could revel in the natural world. This literary autonomy and burgeoning creative ethos that *Encounter* ascribed to America during the 1950s was juxtaposed to "the drift of modern

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<sup>57</sup> Theodore Roethke, "Open Letter," in Ciardi, *Mid-Century American Poets*, 67.

poetry” in Europe, as English literary critic Herbert Read described the state of affairs on his side of the Atlantic in a January 1955 article for the magazine.<sup>58</sup>

### THE SPENDER-LASKY YEARS

In the November 1958 issue of *Encounter*, the small letters underneath the title of the magazine on the table of contents page read: “Edited by Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol.” A month later, however, the same small letters near the top of the page were the only clue that Irving Kristol had been replaced by Melvin Lasky as the American editor of the publication. For a man as boisterous and outspoken as Kristol, it was a notably quiet departure from the magazine that he had served as co-editor of for the past five years. The truth was, tensions between Kristol and high-ranking members of the Congress for Cultural Freedom had been mounting since 1955, when some, including his future replacement Melvin Lasky, felt as though “*Encounter* wasn’t paying enough attention to Soviet and Eastern bloc affairs,” and that Kristol was to blame for this shortcoming.<sup>59</sup> The possibility of Dwight Macdonald, the author of “Ten Days in Cairo” and other pieces published in the magazine, taking over from Kristol had been considered, but after the Congress met with him in 1955, it was decided that Macdonald was far too unpredictable to be Spender’s co-editor.<sup>60</sup> Spender, too, developed a dislike for Kristol, and, in a letter to CIA agent and CCF member Michael Josselson, voiced his opinion that Kristol was “intensely competitive” and “regards every decision as akin of conflict in which he has to score a victory.”<sup>61</sup> In 1958, Kristol resigned of his own volition, leaving London and *Encounter* for New York to edit another publication: the *Reporter*.<sup>62</sup> Kristol’s new

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<sup>58</sup> Herbert Read, “The Drift of Modern Poetry,” *Encounter* 4, no. 1 (January 1955): 3 – 10.

<sup>59</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 309.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>62</sup> George Watson, “Elegy for a Cold Warrior: Melvin Lasky 1920 – 2004,” *The Sewanee Review* 115, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 650.

position perhaps suited him better than his one at *Encounter*, as the *Reporter* was far more focused on political matters, describing itself as the publication “of facts and ideas, not of news and opinions.”<sup>63</sup>

The CCF thought Lasky would, like Kristol, contribute primarily to the political side of *Encounter*,<sup>64</sup> but even more to the liking of the Congress was the fact that Lasky was an ‘inside man,’ having played a central role in organizing the original 1950 Berlin conference.<sup>65</sup> Lasky had also been responsible for founding *Der Monat* in 1948, a German-language periodical that was, in many ways, a forerunner to *Encounter*. Indeed, the goals of *Der Monat* were, as Frances Stonor Saunders summarizes them, “to construct an ideological bridge between German and American intellectuals, and, as explicitly set forth by Lasky, to ease the passage of American foreign policy interests.”<sup>66</sup> Like *Encounter*, *Der Monat* was covertly funded by the United States government, but Lasky was, in fact, the individual responsible for securing the publication’s financial support. Furthermore, in Lasky’s initial proposal to the American intelligence community for the magazine that would become *Der Monat*, he envisions a publication capable of showing Germany “that behind the official representatives of American democracy lies a great and progressive culture, with a richness of achievement in the arts, in literature, in philosophy, [and] in all aspects of culture.”<sup>67</sup> This vision of the German periodical is one that could, without any adjustments, serve as an equally accurate description of *Encounter*. The first issue of *Der Monat* almost seems to beg the reader of the future to compare the two publications, as among the contributors to the magazine’s debut was none other than Stephen Spender.<sup>68</sup>

Whereas Kristol’s interest in literature primarily lay in poetry, Lasky was far more open-minded as far as both genre and form was concerned; in his 2000 book on newspaper journalism,

<sup>63</sup> P.A.M. Taylor, “Review of ‘Concerned about the Planet: The Reporter Magazine and American Liberalism, 1949 – 1968’ by Martin K. Doudna,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* vol. 441 (January 1979): 214.

<sup>64</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 327.

<sup>65</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> Scott-Smith, “A Radical Democratic Political Offensive,” 269.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 271.

for example, Lasky confesses his love for the crime novels of American writer Elmore Leonard.<sup>69</sup>

With Kristol's review of Saul Bellow, there is reasonable grounds for one to question whether Kristol actually read the book, but, with Lasky, there was never any doubt as to his ability and willingness to pursue literary discussion and debate. Lasky was a prolific writer, and, glancing through his body of work, one finds innumerable references to famous writers, including Dostoevsky,<sup>70</sup> John Updike,<sup>71</sup> Franz Kafka,<sup>72</sup> George Orwell,<sup>73</sup> among many others. Lasky devotes an entire chapter of his 1976 book on ideology to a fairly substantial critical analysis, replete with close reading, of “the political temperament” in William Wordsworth’s poetry.<sup>74</sup> Lasky was exceptionally well-read, and, moreover, he demonstrated an unyielding belief in the value of both literature and literary discourse throughout his career. Perhaps more importantly, Lasky was, alongside Kristol and Spender, another figure who believed deeply in the importance and power of socially engaged literature. In one of his essays from 2000, for instance, Lasky expresses a deep admiration for Tolstoy’s “indictment of Napoleon’s war and peace” and celebrates Proust’s ability to accurately depict the “grand parties and elegant salons” of the era—Lasky was especially impressed that Proust did so without having to leave his “cork-lined apartment in the Boulevard Haussman.”<sup>75</sup> Literature’s power to reflect and participate in social movements was, if the pervasiveness of this idea as a topic of discussion in his six-hundred page book on utopian thought is any indication,<sup>76</sup> one of its most intriguing and endearing qualities for Lasky.

<sup>69</sup> Melvin J. Lasky, *The Language of Journalism*, v. 3 *Media Warfare: The Americanization of Language* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 171.

<sup>70</sup> Melvin J. Lasky, “A Sentimental Traveler in Japan (II),” *Encounter* 1, no. 3 (December 1953): 58.

<sup>71</sup> Lasky, *The Language of Journalism*, 3:168.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Lasky, “A Sentimental Traveler in Japan (II),” 58.

<sup>74</sup> Melvin J. Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution: On the Origins of a Metaphor, or Some Illustrations of the Problem of Political Temperament and Intellectual Climate and How Ideas, Ideals, and Ideologies Have Been Historically Related* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 453 – 468.

<sup>75</sup> Lasky, *The Language of Journalism*, 3:172.

<sup>76</sup> Lasky uses literature as supporting evidence for almost every argument he makes in *Utopia and Revolution*.

*Encounter* continued to publish a great deal of verse after Lasky replaced Kristol, and drew from much the same cast of American poets as it had previously—in fact, during the Spender-Lasky years, six poems by Theodore Roethke were published, twice as many as had been featured during Kristol’s time as co-editor. Another poem by Randall Jarrell was published, and, like the previous two featured in the magazine, the poem—“A Well-to-do Invalid”—is notably devoid of the wartime imagery that Jarrell was and is most famous for.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, much of what can be said about the American poetry in *Encounter* before December of 1958 remains true for the period that followed, as the poems continue to function as rough sketches of life in the country, showcasing both the artistic liberty of the writers and the relative normalcy of America and its inhabitants.

Yet the literary content of *Encounter* was subject to a certain diversification after Lasky became co-editor. While the number of short stories featured in the magazine did not increase dramatically, the short stories *Encounter* did publish were written by more high-profile writers. For instance, Vladimir Nabokov’s “The Vane Sisters,” although first published in the Winter 1958 edition of *The Hudson Review*,<sup>78</sup> was included in *Encounter*’s March 1959 issue.<sup>79</sup> As suggested by the magazine’s offer of “a prize of one guinea to the first five readers to crack the code” on the last page of Nabokov’s story,<sup>80</sup> fiction was a more prominent component of *Encounter* during the Lasky-Spener years. The question of Nabokov’s nationality is a murky one, as the writer was a Russian émigré who had moved to the United States in the early 1940s, but perhaps Nabokov’s own enigmatic answer in a 1966 interview said it best: “I think of myself today as an American writer who has once been a Russian one.”<sup>81</sup> Nabokov can be considered as part of the magazine’s American literary voice, if one recognizes that this categorization of the author does not necessarily

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<sup>77</sup> Randall Jarrell, “A Well-to-do Invalid,” *Encounter* 24, no. 1 (January 1965): 17 – 18.

<sup>78</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, “The Vane Sisters,” *The Hudson Review* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1958 – 1959): 491 – 503.

<sup>79</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, “The Vane Sisters,” *Encounter* 12, no. 3 (March 1959): 3 – 10.

<sup>80</sup> “Authors,” *Encounter* 12, no. 3 (March 1959): 88.

<sup>81</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, “An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov,” interviewed by Alfred Appel, Jr., *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 127.

do his personal history the full justice it deserves. Indeed, his most famous novel, *Lolita*, was set in America, and, at the urging of Melvin Lasky, Nabokov agreed to write a personal essay on the book specifically for *Encounter*. Published in the April 1959 issue of the magazine, a month after “The Vane Sisters” had been featured, Nabokov, as he would in 1966, identifies himself in the essay as “trying to be an American writer.”<sup>82</sup> There is a curious moment in the essay where Nabokov takes a moment to respond to the “charge that some readers have made [that] *Lolita* is anti-American.”<sup>83</sup> Nabokov characterizes such claims as similar to the “idiotic accusation of immorality,” and argues that the novel’s setting was the result of a need for “a certain exhilarating milieu” that America was in a unique position to provide.<sup>84</sup> Yet perhaps the most important part of Nabokov’s defense of the work is his assertion that, in choosing both the location of the novel and its controversial subject matter, he aimed to “claim only the same rights that other American writers enjoy.”<sup>85</sup> Nabokov’s artistic liberty is located within the nation and his defense, even more explicitly than the magazine’s poetry, projects an image of the American writer as in possession of artistic “rights”; that is, he is able to express himself freely and in whatever fashion he so desires. Randall Jarrell does not have to write poetry about war unless he wants to, and Vladimir Nabokov can, likewise, write a novel about a pedophile. This notion of creative freedom was, of course, a central concern for the Western bloc during the Cold War, and was essentially the anti-Communist war cry of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, but Nabokov’s formulation of it only contains politics by implication. Nabokov does not mention Communism or Democracy in his essay, and it is a literary “right” that he claims as an American, not a political one. But this distinction demonstrates precisely how the magazine’s literary content and discourse contained an inherent politics, and was, perhaps even more than the

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<sup>82</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, “On a Book Entitled ‘Lolita,’” *Encounter* 12, no. 4 (April 1959): 75.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

magazine's explicitly political content, one of the reasons that the CIA continued to support the publication for nearly a decade and a half.

The controversy that surrounded Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* took place at roughly the same time as another public debate played out in both America and *Encounter*. The problem at hand was the American "beatnik," or, as Caroline Freud<sup>86</sup> described them in a June 1959 article for *Encounter*, the "polite" philosopher who "sits peacefully in his coffee-house, non-conforming over cappuccino, a safely-licensed anarchist."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Freud's primary objection to the Beats was what she perceived to be their profound lack of anything resembling social engagement; the ideal "Beatnik," she writes, is "the man who sits detached with his own flask in his own hip pocket...the man who doesn't 'wig' (care), the man who finds beatitude in noncommitment."<sup>88</sup> The true "Beatnik," Freud continues, "should be *completely* self-contained and therefore *completely* silent."<sup>89</sup> Freud's commentary on the Beat generation describes a social movement whose ethos is entirely at odds with that promoted by *Encounter*. The "Beatnik," for Freud, is an individual whose very spirit is opposed to the idea of "commitment," whose soul rejects the faintest possibility of participation in a world outside of the self. Kerouac and Ginsberg, whom Freud dubs "the Beat spokesmen,"<sup>90</sup> are architects of a solipsism that, by implication, manifests itself in their writing. Yet Freud claims that the Beatnik's "bold rebellion against American Bourgeois *[sic]* Values is about as dangerous as the three revolutionaries in Orwell's *1984*"<sup>91</sup>—that is, not dangerous at all. However, if we take Freud's depiction of the Beat movement as gospel, there is no mistaking that the "Beatnik" is seen to pose an artistic threat to the mode of socially engaged authorship cherished by the magazine and its editors.

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<sup>86</sup> Caroline Freud is of no relation to Sigmund Freud. I refer to her as Freud in this chapter, and in order to avoid any potential confusion, there is no point at which I mean "Sigmund Freud" when I write "Freud."

<sup>87</sup> Caroline Freud, "Portrait of the Beatnik: Letter from California," *Encounter* 12, no. 6 (June 1959): 42.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 43, italics in original.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 42.

Two months later, in August of 1959, *Encounter* published a lecture from Jack Kerouac as a direct response to Caroline Freud's article—as the editor's note that accompanies the piece describes it, Kerouac's lecture “has offered another view” on the Beat movement.<sup>92</sup> Although Kerouac begins the piece by stating that “[t]his necessarily'll have to be about myself,” making Freud's accusations of narcissism suddenly seem all the more accurate, he quickly challenges the idea that both himself and the Beat movement are intent on remaining detached or silent on social issues:

No, I want to speak *for* things, for the crucifix I speak out, for the Star of Israel I speak out, for the divinest man who ever lived who was a German (Bach) I speak out, for sweet Mohammed I speak out, for Buddha I speak out, for Lao-tse and Chuang-tse I speak out, for D.T. Suzuki I speak out.<sup>93</sup>

In this passage, Kerouac becomes an evangelist of social engagement, full of unapologetic belief and conviction. While Kerouac and Freud each dispute the claims of the other, if one considers the two pieces together, there is a certain cohesion that emerges. That is, the arguments made by both Kerouac and Freud can be said to promote a particular variant or faction of the Beat movement; Freud argues against the “detached” Beatnik, and Kerouac, the apparent “spokesman” of the Beat movement, expresses a desire “to speak *for* things.” Freud’s condemnation and Kerouac’s celebration of the Beats essentially argue the same point, each stressing the need for the author and the individual to commit themselves, in some fashion, to an idea or value system—to be, in other words, invested in the fate of humanity and civilization. And, for the writer, the inevitable consequence of such an investment is precisely the sort of socially engaged literature pursued and published by *Encounter*.

## CONCLUSION

By the 1960s, Stephen Spender had become an ardent supporter of America’s literary scene, and, in particular, admired the Beats. At the turn of the decade, Spender “thought the literary

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<sup>92</sup> Kerouac, “Beatific,” 57.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 58, italics in original.

cultural energies of America were more vital than those of Britain...[and believed that] the other side of the Atlantic was where a poet should now be.”<sup>94</sup> Cyril Connolly had criticized the literary content of the first issue of *Encounter*, arguing that it “might well have appeared in 1938,” with its Anglo-centric emphasis on now-antiquated British authors.<sup>95</sup> While it is true that the magazine’s early years were dominated by British poets and writers, American literature slowly crept into the pages of *Encounter*. With Kristol as Spender’s co-editor, American poetry assumed primacy; a single short story by an American author, the long-forgotten Jack Curtis, was published in *Encounter* during the Spender-Kristol years.<sup>96</sup> After Lasky replaced Kristol, however, and as Spender began to develop an appreciation for America’s “literary cultural energies,” American literature moved into the magazine’s spotlight. In *Encounter*, the country was home to all that was new and exciting in literature. At the dawn of the 1960s, the exorcism of Kristol’s “American ghosts” was, if not complete, fully underway. Yet there were, perhaps, new ghosts that haunted *Encounter*; spectral images from across the Atlantic who, like phantasmagoric literary travel agents, whispered comforting and fantastical stories about their homeland into the ears of the European writer. While the American literature printed in *Encounter* was not political by nature, these texts, regardless of the author’s intentions, were drawn into the ideological vortex of the Cold War. When Nabokov defends his artistic “right[s]” in the article he wrote about *Lolita*, or when Kerouac talks about how he “spent several days around San Francisco going around...to parties, arties, parts, jam sessions, poetry readings, [and] churches,”<sup>97</sup> the magazine implicitly invited the reader to contemplate whether counterparts to these American situations and perspectives existed in the Eastern bloc.

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<sup>94</sup> Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, 430.

<sup>95</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 55 – 56.

<sup>96</sup> Jack Curtis, “A Day’s Work,” *Encounter* 3, no. 1 (July 1954): 25 – 27.

<sup>97</sup> Kerouac, “Beatific,” 57.

# CONCLUSION

## Nuclear Payloads and Publication Meltdowns A Successful Apocalypse?

“The [Congress for Cultural Freedom] was intended to revive and strengthen those dispositions which already inclined in the directions opened by intellectual freedom, but which, if left in isolation, withered through lack of exercise. Persons who lived in political and cultural isolation underwent a withering of their discriminatory intellectual powers.”

—Edward Shils, from the final issue of *Encounter*, September 1990<sup>1</sup>

Among the many reviews of the debut issue of *Encounter* was one published in *Australian Quarterly*, and, like a great deal of the other comments directed towards the new periodical, this particular review thought that *Encounter* showed promise:

One of the aims of *Encounter* is, as reports *The New York Times* Book Supplement, “to disturb the parochial nests where intellectuals all over the world seek shelter.” Let us hope that feathers will fly.<sup>2</sup>

It is a strange feeling to look at the last sentence of the review with the knowledge of the chaos that ensued fourteen years later as the revelations about the CIA’s involvement in *Encounter* circulated. Feathers certainly did fly, but in a vastly different fashion than hoped for by the reviewer in *Australian Quarterly*. Frank Kermode, who had become one of the magazine’s co-editors, remembers that Stephen Spender, after he learned about the source of the magazine’s funding, grew “very agitated and announced that he was going off to look at some picture in the National Gallery to calm himself.”<sup>3</sup> British philosopher Isaiah Berlin, who had regularly contributed to *Encounter* over the years without any suspicion that he was indirectly supporting a covert operation, claimed to be

<sup>1</sup> Edward Shils, “Remembering the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” *Encounter* 85, no. 2 (September 1990): 58.

<sup>2</sup> H.R. Krygier, “Encounter,” *The Australian Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (December 1953): 115.

<sup>3</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 384.

disgusted “that a periodical which claimed to be independent...turned out to be in the pay of American secret Intelligence.”<sup>4</sup> Berlin’s sentiment was common among those who had published work in *Encounter*. Writers such as Hannah Arendt, Dwight Macdonald, and British author Angus Wilson, who was one of the magazine’s most prolific contributors, with 26 pieces of his featured in *Encounter* before the scandal broke, added their signatures to a statement printed by *The Partisan Review* that denounced “secret subsidies to magazines.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, even the Congress for Cultural Freedom took part in its own public flagellation, as the CCF’s Assembly issued a public statement wherein it “affirmed its pride in the achievements of the Congress since its establishment in 1950,” but “condemned in the strongest terms the way in which the CIA had deceived those concerned and had caused their efforts to be called into question.”<sup>6</sup>

It is inconceivable that the editors of any publication would want their magazine to be scorned and mocked as universally as *Encounter* was during the worst days of the scandal. Indeed, Stephen Spender, after his resignation as co-editor, penned an article for the summer issue of *The Partisan Review* titled “Writers and Politics,” where, although there is no mention of *Encounter* or the CIA, he seemed to assume an apologetic stance, writing: “It is only in the circumstances of a moral power vacuum that the English or American writer can justify, to his conscience as an artist, his taking a political stand.”<sup>7</sup> Yet one cannot help but wonder if Spender might have felt an odd sort of satisfaction as he observed the world’s intellectuals publicly voice their opinions—however vicious and harsh those opinions might have been—for the simple reason that these critics were, in a sense, doing precisely what the magazine had been asking them to do for the past fourteen years. Arendt, Macdonald, Wilson, and all those who entered into the fray and renounced *Encounter* were, in that

<sup>4</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 199 – 200.

<sup>5</sup> Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, 230. The great irony in this is that *The Partisan Review* was also receiving secret funding from the American government, with the money channeled through the American Committee for Cultural Freedom.

<sup>6</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 394.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Spender, “Writers and Politics,” *The Partisan Review* 34, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 368.

act of public repudiation, socially engaged. They were unafraid to speak out on political and cultural matters. At best, this may have been a Pyrrhic victory for the editors of *Encounter*, but Spender, Kristol, and Lasky brought the Cold War to the attention of the cultural elite. The magazine offered something less dramatic than the threat of a detonating nuclear weapon, but for those who considered themselves intellectuals, it was as unavoidable as discussions about fallout shelters and radioactive dust, as every month, the new issue was slipped into mailboxes and delivered to newsstands around the world.

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