



Beyond the cultural Cold War: *Encounter* and the post-war emergence of Anglo-American conservatism

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Abstract

Unlike the other leading intellectual journals of the mid-twentieth century, such as *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*, the Anglo-American publication *Encounter* has received relatively little scholarly attention. Where scholarship has engaged with *Encounter*, it has largely focused on its links to the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and the cultural Cold War. This article seeks to move beyond these important perspectives, instead framing *Encounter*'s significance in relation to more recent historiography, which has stressed the importance of considering the journal and its ideas in their own right. To do so, the article analyses the intellectual contexts provided by the transatlantic history of conservatism. In particular, an examination of the articles published during *Encounter*'s formative years, 1953 to 1958, shows the complexity of intellectual relations in the 1950s, gives evidence of the early growth of conservative views in intellectual circles, and provides a greater understanding of these intellectuals' attitudes to foreign policy and the Cold War. The article ultimately argues that by moving away from the context of the cultural Cold War we can see the increasingly conservative nature of the ideas discussed in *Encounter* and thus provides a fresh perspective on the development of conservatism in Anglo-American intellectual circles.

Keywords Cultural Cold War · Conservatism · Congress for Cultural Freedom · *Encounter* · Intellectual networks

A “little magazine” is more intensively read (and circulated) than the big commercial magazines, being a more individual expression and so appealing with special force to other individuals of like minds.¹

Writing in *Encounter* in 1957, during his temporary editorship, Dwight Macdonald reflected that what made the ‘little magazine’ so exceptional was its ability to

¹ Dwight Macdonald, ‘Politics Past (2),’ *Encounter* 8, no. 4 (1957): 67.

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bring together ‘individuals of like minds’. But what did it mean to be like-minded in the mid-twentieth century, and to what extent were the Anglo-American intellectuals associated with *Encounter* a homogenous community? In literary matters these transatlantic thinkers were committed to the promotion of modernism and frequently published material by figures such as C. Day Lewis and W.H. Auden.² Meanwhile, in the realm of politics, it has been assumed that it was anti-communism that welded the intellectuals together.³ *Encounter* was launched in 1953 by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an organisation dedicated to preventing fellow-travelling, under the joint editorship of British poet Stephen Spender and New York intellectual Irving Kristol.⁴ The journal ran until 1991 and was the most important cultural contribution of the CCF to post-war culture, selling 16,000 copies a year by 1958.⁵ Furthermore, *Encounter* boasted a readership across Britain, America, Africa and Asia.⁶ The magazine became infamous in 1967 when it was revealed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been secretly funding *Encounter* via the CCF.⁷ This controversial history has provided the reasoning behind assumptions about its anti-communist editorial line. However, in reality, the intellectual community surrounding *Encounter* was linked by a great deal of other shared concerns.

This study examines the articles published in the magazine during its formative years, 1953 to 1958, and, in doing so, argues that *Encounter* demonstrates the

² Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists, Art, Literature and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 149; Aurélie Godet, ‘Cradle of Transatlantic Anti-Communism: The Early Years of *Encounter* (1953–1958),’ in *Transatlantic Intellectual Networks, 1914–1964*, ed. Hans Bak and Céline Mansanti (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 130.

³ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper? The CIA and The Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999).

⁴ Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, The British Left and The Cold War: Calling The Tune?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 262; Volker Berghahn, *America and The Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Sheppard Stone Between Philanthropy, Academy and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 108–142; 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. 2 (2000): 263, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/261207>.

⁵ By comparison, *Partisan Review*, the leading intellectual journal published in the Cold War era, had a circulation of 10,000 copies. See: Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and The Political Economy of American Hegemony 1945–1955* (London: Routledge, 2002), 127–129; Richard. H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940 s and 1950 s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 123; Sarah Miller Harris, *The CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in The Early Cold War: The Limits of Making Common Cause* (London: Routledge, 2016), 32.9, British Library e-book.

⁶ An initial aim of *Encounter* was to combat Asian neutralism. The Eisenhower presidential campaign denounced Truman’s Asia Last policy which prioritised anti-communism in Europe at the expense of Asia. Given that British prestige was at its peak amongst Asian intellectuals, despite the end of British rule on the continent, *Encounter* was viewed as a means to eradicate this impartiality. Little headway on the issue was made and the project was abandoned by the late 1950s. However, the attempt demonstrated how America utilised remnants of the British Empire to establish its own cultural hegemony in the global Cold War see, Miller Harris, *The CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom*; Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Lerg, (eds.) *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁷ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3–8.



complexity of intellectual relations in the 1950s, gives evidence of the early growth of conservative views in intellectual circles, and provides a greater understanding of intellectuals' attitudes to foreign policy in the Cold War.⁸ Thus, *Encounter* is historically significant because it aids comprehension of Cold War trends at play in intellectual communities on both sides of the Atlantic, and indicates that it was not simply anti-communism that made these figures, to use Macdonald's phrase, of 'like mind'.

Despite the infamy of its funding, literature on 'little magazines' has tended to overlook *Encounter*, focusing instead on *Partisan Review* and its contributors.⁹ Biographical work on those involved in the publication of the magazine has attempted to draw notice to *Encounter*.¹⁰ However, Melvin Lasky, the editor of *Encounter* from 1958 until 1991, lacks a biography and attention to Irving Kristol is centred around his involvement later in the twentieth century in the neoconservative movement.¹¹ Where attention is paid to *Encounter*, it has primarily been provided by studies concerning the CCF. The central focus of these analyses has remained the covert funding of the magazine.¹² Recent scholarship has begun to address this problem by providing a greater focus on the cultural products of the Congress.¹³ Leading cultural Cold War historians Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg have argued for a focus on the reception and contribution to Congress publications in order to open up a new chapter of research on the CCF.¹⁴ As part of this effort, Jason Harding

⁸ Since this article deals with the early years of the journal, documents from the *Encounter* Archive have not been consulted as the collection relates to Melvin Lasky's editorship, which falls outside of the chronological scope of this analysis. Howard Gotlieb Archive Research Center, 'The Inventory of the Encounter Magazine Collection', http://archives.bu.edu/finding-aid/finding_aid_121936.pdf.

⁹ Terry. A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle, 1934–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in PostWar America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Alan. M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930 s to the 1980 s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender: A Literary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

¹¹ Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?*, 420; Michael Hochgeschwender, 'Der Monat and the Congress for Cultural Freedom,' in *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 88; Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Origins of a Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 85–112.

¹² Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Knopf, 1969); Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?*; Wilford, *The CIA*, 264.

¹³ David Cauter, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 616–617; Miller Harris, *The CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom*; Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 83–116; Berghahn, *America and The Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe*; Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*, 176–178.

¹⁴ Scott-Smith and Lerg, (eds.) *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War*.



considered *Encounter* exclusively and attempted to understand its relationship with the CCF and the potential impact of the journal on its audience.¹⁵ Aurélie Godet has also sought to re-examine the significance of *Encounter* and has highlighted its importance in laying the groundwork for the so-called ‘special relationship’ between America and Britain at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁶ This article builds upon recent consideration of the journal in its own right to further the understanding of this important publication.

Since the history of the CCF and the funding scandal have already been dealt with at length, these events will not be retold in this article. Instead, it draws on the recent historiography of conservatism to move beyond *Encounter*’s funding crisis.¹⁷ Alan Brinkley’s 1994 declaration that conservatism was a scholarly orphan sparked a wave of new historical writing on the topic.¹⁸ This historiography challenged the ‘liberal consensus’ and expanded the elite focus of George Nash’s authoritative account of early conservatism.¹⁹ This newer scholarship has demonstrated the multi-dimensional nature of conservatism, which encompasses constituencies as varied as libertarians, traditionalists and the religious right, and stressed that the link between these varied groups was anti-communism.²⁰ In intellectual history, studies such as Michael Kimmage’s analysis of Whittaker Chambers and Lionel Trilling have demonstrated how anti-communism allowed for conservatism to develop in conversation

¹⁵ Jason Harding, ‘“Our greatest Asset”: Encounter Magazine and the Congress for Cultural Freedom,’ in *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 107–125.

¹⁶ In the post-war period, Britain considered itself the bridge between Western Europe and America because of the countries’ shared history, language and hawkish anti-communist foreign policy. This heritage combined with the Anglo-American editorial arrangement means that *Encounter*, unlike the other journals of the CCF where the barriers of language and culture prevented a free-flow of ideas, is uniquely positioned to explore the issue of ideological convergence. For the peculiarities of the Anglo-American relationship see, Geoffrey Warner, ‘The Anglo-American Special Relationship,’ *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 4 (1989): 479–499; Kathleen Burk, ‘The Anglo-American “Special Relationship” in the Atlantic Context During the Late 1940s and 1950s,’ in *Defining the Atlantic Community: Culture, Intellectuals and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. Marco Mariano, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 149–160; Marc J. Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain, and International Communism, 1945–1950* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009); Godet, ‘Cradle of Transatlantic Anti-Communism’.

¹⁷ David Caute ‘Foreword’ in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945–60*, ed. Hans Krabben-dam and Giles Scott Smith (London: Frank Cass, 2003), ix; Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 617.

¹⁸ Alan Brinkley, ‘The Problem of American Conservatism,’ *The American Historical Review* 99, no.2 (April 1994), 409–429, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2617281>.

¹⁹ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement for the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Jennifer Burns, ‘Review: In Retrospect: George Nash’s “The Conservative Intellectual in America since 1945,”’ *Reviews in American History* 32, no.3 (September 2004): 447–462, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30031428>; Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 10–19; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).



with liberalism.²¹ Julian E. Zelizer has urged for more studies to consider this development to better explain the conservative ascendancy.²² Meanwhile, Kim Phillips-Fein has posited that the transnational turn in scholarship may provide useful insights into the development of conservatism across the West.²³ Since *Encounter* was a transatlantic, liberal publication, with a voice that turned increasingly conservative over time, it offers the chance to build on this scholarship.

To do so, it is first necessary to clarify the term conservatism. As this historiographical sketch has made clear, conservatism, as both a political ideology and social movement, was multifaceted and as such at times appeared contradictory. In fact, recent observers of conservatism, such as Patrick Allitt, have noted the fluid nature of conservatism and, how its meaning has developed over time in response to new political threats.²⁴ Thus, agreement over the definition of conservatism has been problematic. However, in general, recent scholarship has understood conservative thought in the mid-twentieth century to be centrally concerned with anti-communism, laissez-faire economics, a commitment to traditional mores and, in the Anglo-American context, the concern of this article, a Burkean sense of liberty.²⁵ Using this definition of conservatism, this article will outline how the intellectuals surrounding *Encounter* rejected radical politics, before exploring the increased presence of conservative thought in the journal and its handling of class issues. Finally, it provides a discussion of the community's promotion of democracy, which complicates the view that it was guilty of collusion with the CIA. By going beyond the cultural Cold War, the article demonstrates the, as yet overlooked, significance of *Encounter* in the development of post-war conservatism in Anglo-American politics.

Disavowal of radicalism

Encounter's editors, Stephen Spender, Irving Kristol, and later Dwight Macdonald had all been involved in communist movements during the 1930s, whilst their contacts such as Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler, and Mary McCarthy had also been strongly connected with radical politics.²⁶ An examination of *Encounter* shows how the Non-Communist Left (NCL) spurned their radicalism. Yet, this analysis also reveals that the cause of this trajectory was as much to do with the reconciliation

²¹ Michael Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn: Lionel Trilling, Whittaker Chambers, and the Lessons of Anti-Communism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²² Julian E. Zelizer, 'Rethinking the History of American Conservatism,' *Reviews in American History* 38, no.2 (June 2010): 388, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40865368>.

²³ Kim Phillips-Fein, 'Conservatism A State of the Field,' *The Journal of American History* 98, no.3 (December 2011): 742, <https://jstor.org/stable/41510116>.

²⁴ Allitt, *The Conservatives*, 1–5.

²⁵ Phillips-Fein, 'Conservatism A State of the Field,' 727; Drew Maciag, *Edmund Burke in America: The Contested Career of the Father of Modern Conservatism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*, 88.



with national culture as it was anti-communism, which the New Left would later charge.²⁷

In 1955, *Encounter* launched a series called ‘The Intellectuals’ which sought to investigate the contemporary intellectual condition across the West. Writing on the British intellectual scene, the influential American sociologist, Edward Shils, concluded that ‘outside of the China of the Mandarins, no great society has ever had a body of intellectuals so integrated with, and so congenial to, its ruling class.’²⁸ Thus, British intellectuals had reconciled with the state. This reconciliation was a considerable change in attitude as, according to Shils, during the interwar years British intellectual feeling had been characterised by a ‘repugnance for its dreary, unjust, and uncultured society, with its important ruling classes and its dull puritanical middle classes.’²⁹ Shils’ assessment suggested that this drastic change in outlook was a consequence of the Second World War and the rise of pluralistic culture in Britain.³⁰ The careers of figures such as Spender who, having briefly joined the Communist Party in the 1930s, went on to reconcile himself with British culture and to work for the British Government in the Second World War exemplified his analysis and confirmed that many intellectuals rejected radicalism.³¹

In the second instalment of the series, Marcus Cunliffe, the first American Studies lecturer in Britain, observed a similar trend across the Atlantic. Cunliffe noted how prominent American intellectuals had reconciled themselves to the state.³² He attributed this change to the Alger Hiss case. In 1948, Hiss, a State Department employee, was charged with perjury for denying the claims of spying for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) made against him.³³ The case challenged the belief that all communists were innocent, and consequently, Cunliffe argued that ‘intellectual after intellectual changed his mind.’³⁴ However, *Partisan Review* editor William Phillips disagreed and believed that the intellectuals were less radical because they had become more accepting of American culture.³⁵ Phillips’ assessment was based on the *Partisan Review* symposium ‘Our Country and Our Culture’ in which contributors such as David Riesman, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Lionel Trilling deemed American culture to have become less vulgar and signalled their departure from

²⁷ Berghahn, *America and The Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe*, 18.

²⁸ Roy MacLeod, ‘Consensus, Civility, Community: *Minerva* and the Vision of Edward Shils,’ in *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 45–68; Edward Shils, ‘The Intellectuals: I. Great Britain,’ *Encounter* 4, no. 4 (1955): 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ Stephen Spender, *World Within World: The Autobiography of Stephen Spender* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 181; Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 147.

³² Marcus Cunliffe, ‘The Intellectuals: II. The United States,’ *Encounter* 5, no. 4 (1955): 23; Harding, ‘Our greatest Asset,’ 114.

³³ Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 51.

³⁴ Cunliffe, ‘The Intellectuals,’ 31.

³⁵ William Phillips, ‘The American Intellectuals,’ *Encounter* 4, no.5 (1955): 74–75.



non-conformism.³⁶ Despite disagreeing over the cause of de-radicalisation amongst American thinkers, both Phillips and Cunliffe agreed that American intellectuals were moving away from their radical pasts, just like their British counterparts.

Personal testimonies in *Encounter* provided further evidence of the abandonment of radicalism. Writer and former *Partisan Review* editorial board member Mary McCarthy played down her involvement with radical politics in her account of the 1930s.³⁷ McCarthy claimed that she ‘joined the anti-Communist movement without meaning to’ when she referenced her involvement with Trotskyism in the late 1930s.³⁸ McCarthy furthered this sentiment of chance when she called the entire affair an ‘accident.’³⁹ Her tone was dismissive and suggested that McCarthy had never possessed a true allegiance to the anti-Stalinists with whom she grouped together to defend Trotsky in 1936.⁴⁰ Moreover, when discussing her decision not to join the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), McCarthy declared, ‘I cannot elicit any specific reason why I did not join the Party’ which was apparently evidence of the fact that she ‘was never really contemplating it.’⁴¹ However, McCarthy previously wrote, ‘for me, the Communist Party was the party, even though I did not join it’ and this emphasis on the significance of the CPUSA made her declaration that she was only half-heartedly involved in radical left-wing politics implausible.⁴² McCarthy therefore attempted to downplay her communist associations and expressed her desire to situate herself in a less radical political position.

Similarly, during his time editing *Encounter*, Dwight Macdonald published a two-part article which signalled that he had deserted radical politics. Macdonald wrote that in the 1930s ‘political interest, nay commitment, was an essential part of the equipment of The Compleat Thinker’ which demonstrated that left-wing politics was at the very core of writers’ concerns.⁴³ However, Macdonald also posited that, ‘things have changed. We are less interested today in radical politics - that is, parties, programmes, ideologies that assume a radical (in the sense of going to the roots) reconstruction of the old order.’⁴⁴ Given that as late as 1941 Macdonald remained a Trotskyist, his inclusion of himself in this assessment through the term ‘we’ demonstrated the all-encompassing nature of the transition away from radical politics.⁴⁵ Macdonald further asserted that he had abandoned radicalism in his statement, ‘since the imperfect democracy of the West is clearly a lesser evil than the perfect tyrant of the Communists, we have chosen the West.’⁴⁶ This statement showed not

³⁶ Norman Mailer et al., ‘Our Country and Our Culture,’ in *A Partisan Century: Political Writings from Partisan Review*, ed. Edith Kurzweil (New York: Columbia University press, 1996), 115–136.

³⁷ Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 73.

³⁸ Mary McCarthy, ‘My Confession,’ *Encounter* 2, no.2 (1954): p.44.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 55.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 55.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 51.

⁴² *Ibid*, 49.

⁴³ Dwight Macdonald, ‘Politics Past (1),’ *Encounter* 8, no.3 (1957): 38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 46; Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 92.

⁴⁶ Macdonald, ‘Politics Past (1),’ 39.



only that Macdonald was disillusioned with communism but that he was no longer interested in overthrowing the ‘old order’ represented by American capitalism. Macdonald’s abandonment of radicalism appeared to be tinged with very little regret: he reflected that at *The New Yorker*, his new home as a regular contributor, ‘I have been able to write the kind of social-cultural reportage and analysis that now interests me more than political writing.’⁴⁷ Thus, Macdonald was not just choosing the lesser of two evils but was actually bored with radical politics. The inclusion of this explicit abandonment of previous radicalism, along with McCarthy’s article, demonstrated that *Encounter* was a forum for intellectuals who were increasingly supportive of their states and gives weight to arguments that liberal anti-communism laid the groundwork for the shift towards neo-conservatism.⁴⁸

The rejection of radical politics did not, however, mean that the intellectuals agreed on how to fight communism, and nowhere was this clearer than in discussions of McCarthyism. The Red Scare began in the late 1940s when the House of Un-American Activities began investigating communists and reached full blown repression in 1950 when Senator Joseph McCarthy launched his campaign in Wheeling, West Virginia to rid the State Department of Communists.⁴⁹ In Fyvel’s 1954 discussion of the Harry Dexter White Case, he argued that what appalled British intellectuals was not Dexter White’s betrayal (White was a government economist accused of stealing documents for the Soviets), but rather that, ‘Senator McCarthy and his associates should have been able to magnify this nuisance value into something like mortal danger to the Republic’ which demonstrated his disgust at the excesses of American anti-communism.⁵⁰ However, American intellectuals also disdained McCarthyism. Leslie Fiedler branded McCarthy a ‘buffoon and villain’ and urged that fight against McCarthy carry on which demonstrated the dislike of the Senator stretched across the Atlantic.⁵¹

Other contributors expressed more apologetic views towards McCarthyism. British journalist, P.G. Worsthorne, who moved from the *Times* to the *Daily Telegraph* as a result of his support for Senator McCarthy, reminded his audience that McCarthyism was ‘not new and not even stronger than it had been in the past’ suggesting that there was nothing to fear.⁵² American sociologist, Daniel Bell concurred and proposed that these anxieties were the price paid for ‘an open society.’⁵³ Fellow

⁴⁷ Macdonald, ‘Politics Past (2),’ 69.

⁴⁸ Mark Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1997), 31; Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn*, 294–395.

⁴⁹ Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left Since The Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 52–53.

⁵⁰ T.R. Fyvel, ‘The Broken Dialogue,’ *Encounter* 2, no. 4, (1954): 47; Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1998), 172–175. For a discussion of the varied responses to anti-communism in Britain and American see, Jennifer Luff, ‘Labor Anticommunism in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, 1920–49,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 no.1 (2018): 109–133.

⁵¹ Leslie Fiedler, ‘McCarthy,’ *Encounter* 3, no.2 (1954): 11.

⁵² Roy Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* (London: Pan Books, 2004), 524–525; P.G. Worsthorne, ‘America- Conscience or Shield?’ *Encounter* 3, no.5, (1954): 22.

⁵³ Daniel Bell, ‘Letter from New York: Passion and Politics in America,’ *Encounter* 6, no.1 (1956): 61.



American, Richard Rovere went further and argued that McCarthy was a great demagogue and failed to condemn McCarthy's red-baiting writing that, the senator, 'operated far outside the framework of American political morality. This is not to say that he was immoral or amoral rather than moral; it is rather to say that he ignored the conventions of American politics.'⁵⁴ Given the level of red-baiting engaged in by McCarthy, Rovere's judgement of the senator was highly tolerant of his actions. *Encounter's* acceptance of hard-line anti-communism in 1950s' American politics was not unexpected, given that Kristol, although not a McCarthyite, held unfavourable views towards communists.⁵⁵ Yet, even considering this context, Rovere's treatment of McCarthy as a grand historical figure chafed against Fiedler's assessment and Rovere's later more critical biography of McCarthy.⁵⁶ Thus, whilst united in its fight against communists, intellectuals, regardless of nationality, were split over the appropriate level of anti-communism, indicating the heterogeneous nature of the community.

The rise of conservatism

Encounter did not only cover the gradual abandonment of radicalism by its writers. It also charted the rise of conservatism. In 1956 the journal's editorial declared, 'We have heard a great deal both in England and America about the "conservative revival" in politics, which is supposedly the latest thing in intellectual circles'. The editorial was unclear about what the revival was but argued that 'something must be happening' because of the number of academics who believed it.⁵⁷ The editorial was not the first time *Encounter* had suggested that conservatism was on the rise. American historian Clinton Rossiter's 'The Anatomy of American Conservatism' had addressed the right-wing ascendancy. Rossiter argued that 'signs of this conservatism are everywhere' which signalled it was no longer a fringe movement in a political climate obsessed with New Deal liberalism.⁵⁸ Rossiter not only recognised the phenomenon but dealt with the variations in the movement. He claimed that 'the philosophy of individualism' and its advocates associated with Ayn Rand were 'not really conservatives at all.'⁵⁹ Instead Rossiter saw conservatism as comprised of religious fundamentalists, middle-conservatives and the liberal conservatives.⁶⁰ In relation to intellectual circles, Rossiter believed that conservatives were a 'minority'

⁵⁴ Richard H. Rovere, 'The Last Days of Joe McCarthy: Great Was His Fall,' *Encounter* 11, no.6 (1958): 48.

⁵⁵ He argued that communists had no right to be employed by the State Department. Irving Kristol, "'Civil Liberties,": 1952- A Study In Confusion,' *Commentary* 13, no.3 (1952): 228–236.

⁵⁶ Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁵⁷ Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, 'This Month's *Encounter*: The "New Conservatism,"' *Encounter* 6, no.1 (1956), 2.

⁵⁸ Clinton Rossiter, 'Letter From America: The Anatomy of American Conservatism,' *Encounter* 3, no. 4, (1955): 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 48.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 49.



but that the movement ‘was steadily growing in members and influence.’⁶¹ He concluded that ‘the full weight of American conservatism - certainly its middle and liberal groups - is too badly needed in the fight for democratic freedom to permit this sad breach to remain unclosed.’⁶² Thus, not only did *Encounter* give serious consideration to the early conservative movement, it also aided its legitimisation as an ally in the anti-communist fight.

Philosopher Richard Wollheim’s analysis of British politics also suggested, like the July 1956 editorial, that something was changing. Wollheim disagreed that there had ‘been a considerable shift of political allegiance amongst the intellectuals of this country from the Left to the Right’ and claimed that this was a ‘myth’ which challenged the conception by other contributors to *Encounter* that right-wing politics were on the ascent.⁶³ He argued that the intellectual move away from politics had caused this assumption, but this had occurred ‘without any corresponding gain of strength to the Right.’⁶⁴ Yet, he still recognised ‘the feeling that more socialism will mean too much power for bureaucracy.’⁶⁵ His reference to the dissatisfaction with socialism alluded to the contemporary British political landscape. In 1951, Winston Churchill led the Conservatives to power by winning over the middle classes who were increasingly frustrated with Labour’s increased state control, high taxes and focus on economic planning, showing that the discontent with socialism was not isolated to the intellectual circles.⁶⁶ The article also conceded that the literature of the Left made ‘a rather lowering impression’ in comparison with the Right which was ‘one of energy and purposiveness.’⁶⁷ This acknowledged that even if Wollheim did not believe in the growth of right-wing politics, the movement was vibrant. Moreover, when he asked if there really was a new conservatism, he answered that it was ‘far from clear.’⁶⁸ Such a conclusion, especially when combined with the period’s national politics, scarcely suggested that nothing was happening. Thus, Wollheim implicitly recognised that the roots of a new conservative movement were taking hold in Britain.

Additionally, *Encounter* provided conservatism with a mouthpiece, allowing, for example, a range of conservative economic opinions to be voiced. In 1956, Peter Wiles, questioned whether trades unions were necessary.⁶⁹ He ultimately conceded that they were ‘a necessary evil’ but was far from flattering about the role they played in society. He wrote, ‘it is truly amazing that anyone should impose

⁶¹ Ibid, 53.

⁶² Ibid, 53.

⁶³ Richard Wollheim, ‘Old Ideas and New Men: Some Reflections on the Debate between the Left and the Right in Great Britain,’ *Encounter* 7, no. 4 (1956): 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁶ William Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The History of the Continent Since 1945* (London: Profile Books, 2003), 40–66.

⁶⁷ Wollheim, ‘Old Ideas and New Men,’ 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 10.

⁶⁹ Peter Wiles, ‘Are Trade Unions Necessary?’ *Encounter* 7, no.3 (1956): 11; Michael Kaser, ‘Peter John de la Fosse Wiles 1919–1997,’ in *Proceedings of the British Academy 101: Lectures and Memoirs*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 539–553.



this crude, selfish, violent and piecemeal process to contribute to social justice.’⁷⁰ Such negative analysis from a prominent British economist indicated a conservative outlook, given that in the interwar years trade unions were linked to the New Deal in America and, in Britain the Labour Party even appointed trade unionists to the Cabinet in 1945.⁷¹ The inclusion of the economist Milton Friedman signalled the conservative presence even further. In Friedman’s 1957 discussion of the Indian economy, he wrote that he was ‘optimistic despite the Second Five Year Plan.’⁷² Friedman was opposed to the Five-Year Plan because centralised economic planning had ‘yet succeeded in raising the standard of life of the ordinary man’ and that ‘a strong private economic sector is a necessary condition for preserving freedom of the individual.’⁷³ Friedman’s linkage of individual freedom with the economy was strongly associated with conservative rhetoric.

Encounter’s discussion of Vietnam would have found support with conservatives too. In 1956, in an article on the country, P.G. Worsthorne argued that the year’s forthcoming elections should be prevented in order to stop the communists from gaining control.⁷⁴ He argued that the Western commitment to democracy in its diplomacy was actually a ‘heresy.’⁷⁵ Worsthorne justified his argument because he believed that ‘democracy is about who should rule’ whilst ‘liberalism is about how people should rule’ and of the two it was actually liberalism which was more important. For Worsthorne, since liberal principles provided ‘respect for minorities, freedom of speech, and of religion’ and would not be upheld in Vietnam, democracy should have been denied.⁷⁶ Louis J. Halle echoed this judgement and, as a former State Department employee and academic at Geneva’s Graduate Institute of International Politics added great weight to Worsthorne’s argument.⁷⁷ Both Halle and Worsthorne were prepared to subvert the right of a people to govern themselves in order to avoid communists taking power in Vietnam. This denial of self-determination would have found favour with Republicans as much as it would have with Cold War liberals and Democrats.

The increased inclusion of conservative views was also evident in Worsthorne’s treatment of inequality in Britain. Worsthorne pondered the prospect of a classless society and declared that ‘equality, in fact, is replacing religion as the new opiate of the masses.’⁷⁸ The reference to Marx’s famous dictum was suggestive that

⁷⁰ Ibid, 7.

⁷¹ Luff, ‘Labor Anticommunism,’ 110.

⁷² Milton Friedman, ‘The Indian Alternative,’ *Encounter* 8, no.1 (1957): 71.

⁷³ Ibid, 71–72.

⁷⁴ Peregrine Worsthorne, ‘Democracy v. Liberty?’ *Encounter* 6, no.1 (1956): 5–13.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 7–10.

⁷⁷ Louis J. Halle, ‘Discussion: Democracy, Liberty, and Mr. Worsthorne,’ *Encounter* 6, no.5 (1956): 73–76; Bart Barnes, ‘Louis Halle Jr., Naturalist and Author, Dies at 87,’ *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1998, <https://washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1998/08/22/louis-halle-jr-naturalist-and-author-dies-at-87/ba160b98-0c6c-4a04-a3a5-cb38124b783c/>.

⁷⁸ Peregrine Worsthorne, ‘The New Inequality: More Dangerous than the Old?’ *Encounter* 7, no.5 (1956): 27.



Worsthorne disdained equality as much as Marx did religion. The article defended the British class system because:

An upper class may feel superior and a lower class may feel inferior; but how much more rigid and fraternal would society be in which those at the top not only felt but were superior and those at the bottom not only felt but were inferior- and knew it!⁷⁹

Moreover, a classless society, according to Worsthorne, ‘precludes natural integration’ and would be ‘opposed [to] the institution of the family.’⁸⁰ He concluded that ‘at any time’ a ‘classless society is not a good but an evil.’⁸¹ This strong wording made clear that Worsthorne envisaged a class-free society as malevolent. Worsthorne contributed to *Encounter* because of his friendship Kristol, who had by the 1950s begun his interest in conservatism and was responsible for the political content of the magazine.⁸² Therefore, Worsthorne’s conservative outlook was not unexpected. Yet, such an explicit defence of the class system was extremely conservative in nature for a journal intended for liberal discussion and thus adds weight to scholarship which has argued that conservatism developed alongside, and entangled with, liberalism during the 1950s.⁸³

Class vocabularies

Alongside the increasingly positive treatment of conservatism, *Encounter*’s writers also discussed class divisions in Anglo-American society. The clearest evidence of such discussion was Nancy Mitford’s ‘The English Aristocracy’. Mitford sought to explain the distinctions between the upper-middle-class and the upper-class in England and employed Alan Ross’ theory of U and non-U usage of the English language to highlight the differences between them.⁸⁴ ‘U’ stood for upper-class and ‘non-U’ referred to the other classes. The categorisation of individuals into classes on the basis that one may say ‘note paper’ rather than ‘writing paper’ at first glance appeared pedantic at best in a magazine committed to serious ideas, but was further evidence of the intellectuals’ declining radicalism.⁸⁵ Kristol had previously been a Trotskyist, and only twenty years earlier Spender had been committed to

⁷⁹ Ibid, 29.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 32.

⁸¹ Ibid, 34.

⁸² Greenslade, *Press Gang*, 524–525; Peregrine Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory: An Autobiography* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1993), 162; Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision*, 24.

⁸³ Kimmage, *The Conservative Turn*, 1–14.

⁸⁴ Nancy Mitford, ‘The English Aristocracy,’ *Encounter* 5, no.3, (1955): 5–12. For a discussion of English language usage, see Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 477–517.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 6; Worsthorne, *Tricks of Memory*, 162.



revolutionary class struggle.⁸⁶ Spender had critiqued capitalism for being a system which was ‘incapable of either employing the workers, or, if they were un-employed, preventing them from almost starving’ and simultaneously ‘supported the cultivated leisured class.’⁸⁷ Such direct language was a serious rebuke of capitalism and chafed against Spender’s later view, that Mitford’s article was a great addition to *Encounter*, since Mitford treated class so flippantly.⁸⁸

Mitford’s article became an instant classic. Demand for it was so strong that the editors had to issue an apology to ‘readers and would-be readers for having been unable to fulfil their many requests for copies.’⁸⁹ However, reader response to the article was overwhelmingly British. Letters in the comment pages came from British subscribers and the intellectual response to the article reflected the same trend.⁹⁰ It was English novelist, Evelyn Waugh, who responded to the article at length. Waugh took umbrage at Mitford’s fictional family employed to show that the upper-class were not interested in making money, having so few children because in his view ‘birth control is flagrantly middle-class.’⁹¹ Waugh’s derision of the middle-class in his glib comment was a reflection of old-fashioned English class stereotypes. Likewise, Deborah Devonshire’s (Mitford’s sister) reply to Waugh demonstrated the traditional values at play. Waugh had called Mitford ‘Queen of the Hons’ to demonstrate she was an aristocrat.⁹² Devonshire retorted that Mitford ‘was the dreaded leader of the rival organisation, the Horrible Counter-Hons’ and that in their childhood language Honnish ‘Hon meant Hen’ and thus had nothing to do with social positions.⁹³ The discussion was full of elite inside jokes which were centred around the aristocracy.

Moreover, the New York intellectuals were baffled by the article.⁹⁴ Kristol reflected that he was surprised by the popularity of the piece and it was not the kind of writing the journal had intended to publish, further demonstrating the American confusion.⁹⁵ Perhaps, as Kristol noted, this bewilderment stemmed from the fact that American intellectuals had little contact with conservatives except ex-radicals.⁹⁶ The inclusion of this European conception of conservatism is revealing because it suggests that the developing conservative movement was not born of anti-communism alone and that British intellectuals played a role in the forging of a wider

⁸⁶ Irving Kristol, ‘Memoirs of a Trotskyist,’ in *Neo-Conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, ed. Irving Kristol (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks), 469–480.

⁸⁷ Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People, 1933–1970* (New York: Random House, 1978), 22.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸⁹ Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, ‘Editorial Note,’ *Encounter* 5, no.5 (1955): 11.

⁹⁰ George Mikes *et. al.*, ‘Comment: The English Aristocracy,’ *Encounter* 5, no.5 (1955): 61–62.

⁹¹ Evelyn Waugh, ‘An Open Letter to the Honourable Mrs Peter Rudd (Nancy Mitford) On a Very Serious Subject from Evelyn Waugh,’ *Encounter* 5, no.6 (1955): 13–16.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹³ Devonshire Deborah, ‘Comment: U and Non-U,’ *Encounter* 6, no.2 (1956): 67.

⁹⁴ Wilford, *The CIA*, 268.

⁹⁵ Irving Kristol, ‘An Autobiographical Memoir,’ in *Neo-Conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, ed. Irving Kristol (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks), 23.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.



transatlantic conservatism, if only by exposing Americans to this heritage. Thus, *Encounter* offers insight into the early development of conservatism, its multifaceted nature and, the transnational aspects of conservatism which Kim Phillips-Fein has urged scholarship to investigate.⁹⁷ Additionally, the British nature of the article gives weight to Hugh Wilford's conclusion that European intellectuals were able to appropriate *Encounter* for their own interests and downplays the claim that the CIA controlled the magazine's editorial line.⁹⁸

Defence of democracy

The alliance between the American Government and intellectuals has also led to a reoccurring question: were the Cold War intellectuals motivated by genuine conviction or were they involved in a conspiracy?⁹⁹ Scholars who have arrived at the latter conclusion have cited *Encounter*'s failure to critique American foreign policy as evidence of the conspiracy.¹⁰⁰ A consideration of the articles in *Encounter* dealing with the Soviet Bloc complicates this conception.

On 5 March 1953, just months before *Encounter* began publication, Stalin died. Subsequently, many articles in the journal explored what the Soviet change in leadership really meant for the USSR. Interest was particularly strong following the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 when Khrushchev repudiated Stalin for his brutal crimes.¹⁰¹ A series called 'After Stalin ... A Symposium' presented an apprehensive evaluation of the Soviet political situation. Macdonald was the most positive towards the developments in the Soviet Union arguing that reform had gone too far to be rolled back by the government, but he was unsure of what this would mean for the Eastern Bloc.¹⁰² This viewpoint reinforced Richard Lowenthal's argument that though the regime remained, the 'dissolution of Stalinism continue[d].'¹⁰³ However, this optimism was not widely shared. Other scholars believed that the regime was fundamentally unchanged. Ignazio Silone posited that 'the objective' of the government 'remains and will continue essentially the same.'¹⁰⁴ Leslie C. Stevens recognised that the regime remained unchanged because there was 'no room for political power outside of the Party' which showed how far off the Soviet Union

⁹⁷ Phillips-Fein, 'Conservatism A State of the Field,' 742; Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 531.

⁹⁸ Wilford, *The CIA*, 270; Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?*.

⁹⁹ Matthew Spender, 'Preface,' in *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Legg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), v–xi.

¹⁰⁰ Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?*, 16; Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 73; Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, p.683; Wilford, *The CIA*, 289.

¹⁰¹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy 1938–1970* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 250.

¹⁰² Dwight Macdonald, 'After Stalin... A Symposium: "A Worthy Pioneer,"' *Encounter* 6, no.6 (1956): 41–43.

¹⁰³ Richard Lowenthal, 'Russia in Flux: II Peace and Mr. Khrushchev,' *Encounter* 5, no. 4 (1955): 49.

¹⁰⁴ Ignazio Silone, 'After Stalin... A Symposium: Nine Points,' *Encounter* 6, no.6 (1956): 45.



remained from democracy.¹⁰⁵ Halle even believed that ‘a single ruler, another Stalin or Augustus’ would emerge at some point, indicating that the more lenient political landscape was not permanent and that the tyrannous dictatorship remained.¹⁰⁶ Thus, despite minor variations, the symposium depicted the regime as immoral and undemocratic.

These views were not new; the intellectuals surrounding *Encounter* had long been critical of the USSR. Silone was a contributor to Richard Crossman’s high-profile anti-communist collection *The God That Failed*.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, New York intellectuals such as Macdonald questioned the nature of the Soviet Union in the wake of the 1936 Moscow Trials and turned towards Trotskyism.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the sentiment of the symposium merely demonstrated the intellectuals’ steadfast allegiance to anti-communism. This was not evidence of collusion with the CIA, rather, unfortunately, it was this very commitment which attracted the CIA to the NCL in the first place.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, *The God That Failed* had focused on the stifling cultural landscape of the USSR and *Encounter* continued this attention. In his discussion of Soviet culture in the post-Zhdanov Doctrine era, Walter Z. Laqueur contended that despite ‘encouraging signs’, the change in the Soviet Union did ‘not add up to much.’¹¹⁰ In the realm of painting, he observed that formalism, naturalism, impressionism and modernism were still ‘considered deadly sins’ whilst in literature writers went ‘on writing as they did a year ago.’¹¹¹ This observation showed that the artistic scene was still restricted by the communist preference for Socialist Realism and cultural freedom remained minimal.¹¹²

Articles dealing with Dr. Zhivago in *Encounter* equally stressed the ongoing repression. Pasternak’s novel won the Nobel Prize in 1958, but was prevented from publication in the Soviet Union because he was deemed to have slurred the October Revolution.¹¹³ Max Hayward wrote that the real problem with the novel for authorities was that it destroyed their ‘moral superiority’ and restored ‘the confidence of those who are seeking nothing more than their right to love nature’ and to follow their heart.¹¹⁴ British philosopher, Stuart Hampshire, too, made clear the poor reasoning for the novel’s prohibition, writing that the state was ‘indeed condemned as a degeneration from the revolution’ but that the ‘old regime is shown as corrupting

¹⁰⁵ Leslie C. Stevens, ‘After Stalin... A Symposium: Beneath The Party Line,’ *Encounter* 6, no.6 (1956): 49.

¹⁰⁶ Louis J. Halle, ‘After Stalin... A Symposium: Of Words and Things,’ *Encounter* 6, no.6 (1956): 46.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (Columbia University: New York, 2001).

¹⁰⁸ Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 128–141.

¹⁰⁹ For detailed consideration of how the commitment to anti-communism made intellectuals susceptible to CIA co-optation, see Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals*, 194–210.

¹¹⁰ Walter Z. Laqueur, ‘Russia in Flux: I. The Thaw and After,’ *Encounter* 5, no. 4 (1955): 39.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹² Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Penguin, 2002), 503–504.

¹¹³ Peter Finn and Petra Couvee, *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book* (London: Vintage, 2015), 197–198.

¹¹⁴ Max Hayward, ‘Pasternak’s “Dr. Zhivago”’: “My Greatest Wish, A Quiet Life,”” *Encounter* 10, no.5 (1958): 48.



personal life as deeply.¹¹⁵ Both Hampshire and Hayward confirmed what other authors had already suggested that culture in the USSR was not free.

The Twentieth Party Congress triggered a series of events in Eastern Europe which were to receive considerable attention in *Encounter*. In June 1956, riots broke out in Poland. The rioters demanded the disbandment of the Polish Politburo and in October the independent communist Władysław Gomułka came to power.¹¹⁶ *Encounter* presented a cautiously optimistic outlook on the situation. J.A. Jelenski reported that he had seen ‘surprising freedom on literary and artistic problems’ in Poland.¹¹⁷ However, these liberties did not extend to political freedoms and Jelenski expressed doubt as to the longevity of the artistic autonomy in Poland.¹¹⁸ Peter Wiles believed that tensions between Poland and the Soviet Union over the new freedoms remained so high that a Russo-Polish war was ‘very much on the cards’ which indicated his distrust of the liberalisation process.¹¹⁹ Thus, the intellectual contributors to *Encounter*, whilst pleased that change was taking place, were neither convinced it was genuine nor did they consider it enough to stop fighting for democratic freedoms.

The coverage of the events in Hungary in 1956 demonstrated just how much intellectuals continued to distrust the Soviet Union. Following the success of the Polish abolishment of the Stalinist Government, Hungarian students began to demand changes and Imre Nagy was placed in power. When Nagy announced his intention to leave the Warsaw Pact on 1 November 1956 and with the West embroiled in the Suez Crisis, the Red Army crushed the Hungarian Uprising.¹²⁰ Wiles, a first-hand observer of the events, presented a bleak assessment, writing, ‘The chips are down all round: there is no possibility of restoring a “People’s Democracy.”’¹²¹ The fate of Hungary in the eyes of Wiles was to become a puppet state of the Soviet Union without even the semblance of freedom or independence allowed by a “People’s Democracy” as in other Eastern European states. This statement hammered home to readers the true power of the Soviet Union and reminded them that the communists were interested in power not liberty. Hugh Seton-Watson’s reflection on the crisis explained that Nagy was executed in June 1958 because he was a counter-revolutionary. However, Seton-Watson emphasised that this was communist ‘double-talk’, in other words it was an inflated lie; since a ‘counter-revolution is a violent action that overthrows a revolutionary government and restores the regime that existed before the revolution’ the term more aptly applied to the actions of the Soviets.¹²² By implying that the Soviets were the counter-revolutionaries, Seton-Watson denied

¹¹⁵ Stuart Hampshire, ‘“Doctor Zhivago”: As from a Lost Culture,’ *Encounter* 11, no.5 (1958): 5; Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, 251–252.

¹¹⁷ J.A. Jelenski, ‘Eastern Variations: The Polish “Earthquake”’, *Encounter* 7, no.2 (1956): 34.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Peter Wiles, ‘Two Wandering Satellites: The Polish Hungarian Experience,’ *Encounter* 8, no.1 (1957): 23.

¹²⁰ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 312.

¹²¹ Wiles, ‘Two Wandering Satellites,’ 22; Kaser, ‘Peter John de la Fosse Wiles 1919–1997,’ 539.

¹²² Hugh Seton-Watson, ‘The Fate of Imre Nagy,’ *Encounter* 11, no.2 (1958): 73.



Soviet propaganda which claimed communism was responsible for creating innovative politics and instead showed that the USSR was a destructive world force. Seton-Watson highlighted that the second reason for Nagy's death was that he was guilty of military action against the USSR. According to Seton-Watson, the Soviet Doctrine had two kinds of wars—'just wars and unjust wars'—and the distinction was plain; 'a just war is one waged by the Soviet Union or by any government approved by the Soviet Union.'¹²³ This reasoning showed the brutality and lack of room for dissent behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore, the coverage of events in Eastern Europe, just like the contemplation of post-Stalinist Russia, demonstrated *Encounter's* commitment to encouraging fellow intellectuals to join the democratic struggle and to ignore the cries of change from the Soviet leadership.

Encounter supplemented its defence of democracy with the exclusion of criticism of the USA. In 1958, Macdonald's 'America! America!' was rejected by the magazine. Previous articles by Macdonald on American mass culture had already been rejected for being too critical.¹²⁴ However, the 1958 exclusion was explosive. 'America! America!' was written upon Macdonald's return to the USA following his tenure as editor of *Encounter*. The article summarised the problems with American culture, including America's poor manners, violence, its ugly landscape, the lack of community, the cult of youth, imperialism, racial hatred and crude advertising.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the article included an excerpt from *The New Yorker* which heavily criticised the behaviour of the United States Army in Korea.¹²⁶ When the article was rejected by *Encounter*, Macdonald published the piece in *Dissent* with a foreword explicitly stating that the piece was suppressed due to its anti-Americanism and accused the magazine of being a "front office" for the CCF.¹²⁷ Norman Birnbaum attacked *Encounter* in *Universities and New Left Review* and suggested the journal's editorial line was compromised.¹²⁸ Spender, Kristol and Nicolas Nabokov, the secretary of the CCF, stressed that the decision had been made by the editors of *Encounter* alone and Macdonald too conceded this.¹²⁹ Macdonald's private correspondence suggested that he was less convinced by Kristol and Spender's protestations.¹³⁰ Macdonald maintained that the piece was rejected because of the negative slant towards America and saw it as an example of 'touchy national pride.'¹³¹ The

¹²³ Ibid, 73.

¹²⁴ Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, No Date, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Spender 71.

¹²⁵ Dwight Macdonald, 'America! America!' *Dissent* 5, no. 4 (1958): 313–323.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 321–323.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 313.

¹²⁸ Norman Birnbaum, 'An Open Letter to the Congress for Cultural Freedom,' *Universities and Left Review* 5, (1958), http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/ulr/05_05.pdf.

¹²⁹ Macdonald Dwight, 'Congress for Cultural Freedom,' *Universities and Left Review*, 6, (1959): 60, http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/ulr/index_frame.htm; Nicolas Nabokov, 'Congress for Cultural Freedom,' *Universities and Left Review*, 6, (1959): 60, http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/ulr/index_frame.htm; Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, 'Congress for Cultural Freedom,' *Universities and Left Review*, 6, (1959): 60, http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/ulr/index_frame.htm.

¹³⁰ Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, 7 January 1959, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Spender 71.

¹³¹ Dwight Macdonald and Michael Wreszin, *A Moral Temper: The Letters of Dwight Macdonald* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 275.



belief that the piece was deliberately excluded because of its anti-American tone has been taken up in the secondary literature. Christopher Lasch cited the affair as evidence of self-censorship by Spender and Kristol and Frances Stonor Saunders as proof that *Encounter* was controlled by the CIA.¹³² Correspondence between Macdonald, Kristol and Spender is conflicting, and any conclusions drawn over who was responsible for suppressing the article are speculative at best.¹³³ More revealingly, the incident demonstrated that the editors of *Encounter* and figures within the CCF were so committed to preventing neutralism amongst Western intellectuals they were willing to suppress ‘America! America!’ and risk losing the journal’s credibility. This examination challenges the conception that the magazine represented an act of collusion between the figures surrounding the journal and the CIA, as it is clear that the intellectuals were motivated by long-held convictions to fight neutralism. However, these beliefs were not uniform. A lack of consensus over how best to defeat communism drove a wedge between Spender and Kristol. Kristol’s commitment to explicit anti-communism and Spender’s subtler stance resulted in great antagonism.¹³⁴ The divide led to Kristol’s replacement by Melvin Lasky in 1958 and the decline of Spender’s influence over the journal.¹³⁵

Conclusion

This article’s examination of *Encounter* shows the complex nature of anti-communist intellectuals’ affiliations during the post-war period. In particular, *Encounter* draws attention to the development of the Anglo-American political conservatism that was to become so significant on both sides of the Atlantic in the late 1970s and 1980s. *Encounter* chronicled the conservative ascendancy by examining its features and publishing intellectual denunciations of radicalism. Moreover, the magazine legitimised the conservative impulse emerging in intellectual groups by providing a forum for conservative writers to circulate their ideas. Additionally, understanding the conservative content in *Encounter* benefits the comprehension of the transitions made by figures such as Kristol, who moved from Trotskyism to become the founder of neo-conservatism in the 1980s, and shows that the process was gradual and began early. This finding adds weight to assertions that the conservatism of the

¹³² Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 75; Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid The Piper?*, 314.

¹³³ Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, 4 December 1958, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Spender 70; Irving Kristol to Stephen Spender, 4 December 1958, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Spender 70; Stephen Spender to Dwight Macdonald, 25 November 1958, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Spender 70.

¹³⁴ Stephen Spender to Irving Kristol, No Date, Irving Kristol, MS. Spender 71, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford; Irving Kristol to Stephen Spender, 28 February 1953, Irving Kristol, MS. Spender 71, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford; Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, No Date, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Spender 70.

¹³⁵ Stephen Spender to Malcom Muggeridge, 30 July 1958, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Spender 70; Wilford, *The CIA*, 283–290.



1980s was rooted in the 1950s, rather than as a reaction to the political movements of the 1960s.¹³⁶

Furthermore, understanding *Encounter's* content between 1953 and 1958 is an essential component in grappling with the question of intellectual sincerity. *Encounter* revealed a growing disaffection with radicalism, but this did not necessarily mean that intellectuals whole-heartedly supported the Cold War state as it existed in America and Britain. Instead, the articles written on democracy and the USSR were in line with long-held intellectual views which the figures had held since the Moscow Trials. As Macdonald made clear, it was less that the intellectuals supported all American actions and more that it was the lesser evil of the two superpowers. These conclusions demonstrate the pressing need for scholarship to move beyond the debate over whether those involved in the journal were part of a conspiracy and the importance of affording *Encounter* the same attention as *Partisan Review*.

Nevertheless, what remains clear is that *Encounter* was an important forum of transatlantic ideas. Indeed, the fact that its content has been overlooked in favour of the discussion of secret funding is to the detriment of historical understanding of Cold War intellectual networks. That the CIA was the financial backer of *Encounter* is a key part of its history which cannot be ignored. However, the funding should not make the analysis of the journal secondary. Ultimately, *Encounter* tells us too much about the heterogeneous nature of the ex-radical, anti-communist Anglo-American intellectuals of the 1950s and their early forays into conservatism for this to be the case.

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¹³⁶ Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture and the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 77; Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision*, 31; Phillips-Fein, 'Conservatism A State of the Field,' 726; Godet, 'Cradle of Transatlantic Anti-Communism,' 130–132.



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