

THE INTELLECTUAL RESISTANCE IN EUROPE

by James D. Wilkinson

(Harvard University Press; x + 358 pp.; \$20.00)

Edward J. Curtin, Jr.

As this century attests, wars come in cycles, interrupted only by false peace. Few expect the next outbreak of war, no matter how obvious. The illusion persists that "things have changed," that lessons have been learned. Yet one clear-eyed look at the world tells us otherwise; we now live in a state of permanent war that was once called "cold."

James Wilkinson has given us just such a lucid look at the past. This intellectual history of the moral struggles of small numbers of French, German, and Italian resisters during and after World War II saddens but instructs. It is a story of the triumph of the human spirit in times of great crisis and of the reascendance of the spiritually bankrupt and virulent old order in the days immediately following. Wilkinson tells this dispiriting tale in a straightforward and clear manner. He offers no hint of a solution, but we probably shouldn't have expected one. What he does is help us to remember a lost cause and the people who fought for it.

As the war moved toward an end and the liberation of France was at hand, Albert Camus wrote: "One cannot imagine that men who have fought for four years in silence and for days on end in the tumult...of gunfire will agree to the return of resignation and injustice under any form." An élite of French intellectuals in the Resistance, led by Camus, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty, did not so resign themselves but struggled to move, in the words of the underground newspaper *Combat*, "from resistance to revolution." But the forces of the conservative order quickly took advantage of the vacuum left by the war's end and, with popular support, swept aside the moral exhortations of the resisters. The spiritual decay that had fueled the doubts and disorders of the '20s and '30s and which had led to the war and French capitulation was fast forgotten in a renewal of traditional ways of thinking. Writes Wilkinson:

"Whereas, the Resistance remained committed to substituting 'new men' for prewar leaders at all levels of the provisional government, de Gaulle was more concerned with French unity than with revolutionary justice." And De Gaulle, of course, back from wartime exile in London, won the day.

The intellectuals, who had been among the first active resisters to German occupation, could not gain the allegiance of most of the French or implement the ideals for which they had fought so hard. Following a pattern that also emerged in Italy and Germany, they gave up hope of an immediate social transformation and took on the role of journalistic and literary gadflies. What was impossible to achieve directly they hoped to generate indirectly through the influence of their writings. But as the country was caught up in the cold war and the French struggled to extricate themselves from the material privations of the war years, the "existential offensive" that was meant to carry on the Resistance legacy of freedom and responsibility rallied very few. Many saw it—wrongly—as a philosophy of gloom and despair.

The ironic truth is that the Resistance intellectuals were too optimistic in thinking they could overcome the powerful forces of conservatism through moral suasion or create a true democracy by appeals to reason in a world of growing statism ruled by power and naked violence. By late 1948 they had come to see their role as primarily defensive. With the cold war in full swing, Sartre was forced to admit: "We cannot do very much save to denounce oppression every time and in whatever form it occurs."

In Germany the dilemmas were different, though in many ways the postwar results were similar. "It was in Nazi Germany that intellectuals were forced most dramatically to reevaluate the beliefs and aspirations that had guided their critique of European soci-

ety during the late 1920s," Wilkinson notes. The Nazis had come to power with the claim that they alone could provide the moral and social revolution to counteract the "corrupt" Weimar years. Many of those who opposed this program chose to leave at an early date, as in the "great migration" of 1933. Those who stayed on were far more isolated and persecuted than their French or Italian counterparts and were never able to develop a coherent resistance movement.

Some Germans elected resistance by "inner emigration," subtly holding themselves aloof for spiritual self-preservation. They did not create an underground press but took up a shadowy form of writing between the lines, secretly affirming traditional values. Unlike the French, they saw compromise as necessary. But even while advocating traditional values, Wilkinson reports, "the question of why this ideal had proven powerless to prevent Hitler's rise was seldom asked."

Others, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer upon his return to Germany in 1939, took a more active role in resisting the regime. Their chances for victory were slight; but, often inspired by Christian principles, they followed a path of redemptive action that frequently led to death. There were young intellectuals in the Wehrmacht who also opposed Hitler but were caught in the dilemma of betraying either their principles or their homeland.

By war's end the surviving German resisters turned their sights to guiding public opinion toward honest self-appraisal and moral insight. Guilt had to be faced, the causes of the catastrophe understood. Perhaps the economic collapse would bring about a new beginning.

But here, as in France, the exhortations of a moral élite generally fell on deaf ears. Resurgent conservatism and the cold war intervened; the latter's effect on Germany was more direct than elsewhere. The intellectuals assumed a defensive posture. Finding they had few followers, they withdrew to the liberating hope of literature and private virtues.

German "recovery was achieved through policies that ignored the intellectuals' demands for socialist planning," writes Wilkinson. Aided by the Marshall Plan, the "economic miracle" recreated a powerful capitalist economy. Restoration was in full swing and

the intellectuals' role was reduced to that of permanent opposition.

Italian anti-Fascist intellectuals also failed ultimately to play a major role in shaping postwar events. Like the German resisters, they had opposed a dictatorship that initially enjoyed wide support; like the French, they suffered occupation by the Nazis and developed an organized and armed resistance. At the war's close they even managed to have elected as prime minister one of their own, Ferruccio Parri, a Resistance leader from Milan dedicated to fundamental reforms. He lasted only five months, however, forced out by vested interests and lack of Allied support. With the aid of the Allies, the old order returned.

By January, 1946, Italy's intellectuals—Pavese, Silone, Vittorini, Levi, et al.—had become disillusioned. "Their last line of defense," Wilkinson writes, "remained the journalism to which the intellectuals in France and Germany also retreated." Distrusting the state, now contemptuous of the United States, they saw little cause for hope.

This is our legacy, and its terms are documented precisely by Wilkinson. How might things have been done differently and with a different result? Wilkinson doesn't say. He notes, however, that in general the European resisters were overly optimistic and naive, too moralistic. They saw things in terms of black and white and, anarchists at heart, showed a deep hostility to the state. They failed to understand the nature of social compromise and were not concerned enough with the need to transform existing institutions.

All of this is true in retrospect. But what were the alternatives? To despair of reason? To compromise truths for which they had fought so hard? To emphasize the gray areas of moral confusion behind which most people hide? To trust the state, when so much of postwar policy was directed by the victors, who were bent on immediately restoring the old order? While obviously sympathizing with these leftist intellectual resisters, Wilkinson is charging that they were too extreme, that there was an efficacious way to work within the system. This is highly debatable.

What is not debatable is the continuing need for moral and intellectual resistance to the warfare state. This book reminds us that opposition, not accommodation, is the genuine task of intellectuals. It is worth remembering.

NATURE AND CULTURE: AMERICAN LANDSCAPE AND PAINTING, 1825-1875

by **Barbara Novak**

(Oxford University Press; 323 pp.; \$18.95)

Richard A. Rand

A persistent and powerful, if understated, trend in critical writing over the past few decades has been to challenge the deeply held belief, originating in the nineteenth century, that a work of art can be described adequately *within limits*, as of "race, milieu and moment," of form, or of genre. In their own ways, writers as different as Erwin Panofsky, Meyer Schapiro, Robert Rosenblum, and John Russell never tire of showing how, in their quest for fresh and novel combinations, artists love to cross boundaries. This impulse may even extend to the work of the critic himself: In *Zigzag*, a recent scholarly volume containing learned commentaries on Frank Stella, Titian, El Greco, poster art, Ken Venturi, and other subjects, Jean-Claude Lebensztejn has gone so far as to make the book, through a

dazzling complex of typographical inventions, into a work of art in its own right. Ever cagey, the inventive mind is never to be caged.

This would not be news to Barbara Novak, who in her *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (1969) showed how painters long regarded as an outgrowth of Boston Harbor or of the Hudson River Valley could as well, and in all historical rigor, be related to painters at work in seventeenth-century Dortrecht and Naples. At first glance her new book, *Nature and Culture*, would seem to deepen that cosmopolitan perspective.

Nature and Culture is a big book, grandly designed and splendidly produced. Conceived as an "interdisciplinary" overview of American landscape painting from 1825 to 1875, it consists of ten chapters organized into four parts, distributed in a sequence that aims at being both thematic and, within certain limits, narrational. Thus, in the first part Miss Novak spells out some general premises about the concepts of "nature" and "culture" as she understands them to be treated in the literature of the time, most notably in

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