H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Norman Podhoretz**. *Ex-Friends: Falling Out With Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer.* New York: The Free Press, 1999. 244 pp. $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-684-85594-3; $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-893554-17-7.

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**Published on** H-Holocaust (October, 1999)

**Podhoretz in Retirement: A Report on the Mortality of Friendship**

Ex-Friends has been widely reviewed in the mainline print media, but the book may seem a surprising choice to be reviewed in H-Holocaust and H-Antisemitism, since it is natural to assume, especially given the eye-catching title, that it is mostly concerned with literary and political matters, and with that mainstay of memoirs, gossip about the private lives of famous people. Podhoretz does offer his readers some gossipy tidbits (did you know that Hans Morgenthau had an affair, well, maybe, with Hannah Arendt?). And parts of the book, in particular the opening chapter on the poet, Allen Ginsberg, those dealing with the novelist, Norman Mailer, or with the literary critics, Diana and Lionel Trilling, are germane to these lists only in an indirect sense: They illustrate how little antisemitism and the Holocaust preoccupied these particular Jewish luminaries in the decades immediately following WW II. But the chapters devoted to Lillian Hellman and Hannah Arendt offer some intriguing if also troubling information about how current attitudes to the Holocaust came into being, as well as about the evolution and paradoxes of Jewish attitudes to antisemitism. The following remarks, then, have not been composed primarily as a book review covering all aspects of the book but rather as an extended review essay exploring those themes.

This is Podhoretz's third book devoted primarily to autobiographical themes. The first two, *Making It* (1967) and *Breaking Ranks* (1979) were longer (each over 350 pages, while *Ex-Friends* is 235 pages) and more audacious. Although Podhoretz claims that his new book offers his readers new material, except for the first chapter and "few bits and pieces" in the others, he has in fact recycled quite a bit from his earlier books. There are, to be sure, some interesting new details, and twenty or thirty years have passed; inevitably similar information now looks different, sometimes in fascinating ways. All three books, at any rate, are beautifully written and reveal a man, whatever one's general attitude to him, of undeniable talent and sophistication.

Neoconservatives have in recent years been less in the news than they were in the 1970s and 1980s; feelings about them, pro or con, have quieted down. Even their strongest detractors can hardly deny their overall importance, and they themselves can feel something like "mission accomplished," particularly in such areas as American policy toward the Soviet Union and Israel, or in the new respect for the role of the free market and the discredit of leftist economic perspectives. Podhoretz was a major player in that mission, as editor of Commentary magazine from 1960 to 1995, as well as author of six books and hundreds of articles and editorials. Over the years he outraged many; he ranks as one of the most widely reviled neo-conservatives, if not the very most (it's a pretty competitive field). Revealingly, his ex-friend Ginsberg is included in this volume not really because they were once genuinely close but because Ginsberg came to consider Podhoretz – conventional, careerist, stuffy –as symbolizing all that he was rebelling against. In turn Ginsberg serves as a convenient symbol for Podhoretz of the moral nihilism and malignancy that he believes began to eat away at the left from the mid-sixties on. His revulsion for what left-wingers, a large proportion of them Jews, were up to in those years easily exceeds Ginsberg's aversion to neoconservatives, most of whose leading figures are Jewish. Podhoretz writes, for example, of "the cesspool of Haight Ashbury" (48), and he treats his readers to some graphic excepts from Ginsberg's poetic paeans to anal intercourse, fecal odors and all. (54)

This kind of graphic, hard-hitting language, the use of such concepts of leftist filth, decadence, and depravity, cannot help but set off certain alarms. Antisemites write like that. Historically, extreme right-wingers have seen Jews as particularly dangerous to a Christian moral order and to social peace; Jews were believed to be de-

structively dissident, unpatriotic, and unusually prone to sympathy for Communism. Jews were also believed to be heavily involved in such morally damaging activities as the liquor trade, pornography, and prostitution. Not long ago the so-called paleoconservatives aligned with William F. Buckley's National Review regularly made comments about Jewish destructiveness, vengefulness, and leftist inclinations. In reaction to Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1961, the National Review referred to the "Hate Germany movement" that was instigated by the Israelis and supported by American Jews. "It is all there: the bitterness, the refusal to forgive, the advancement of Communist aims." A minister of the time wrote that he could see little ethical difference between the hate of the "Jew-pursuing Nazi and the Nazi-pursuing Jew," and a Catholic observer alluded to "some influential people who – like Shylock of old – demand their pound of flesh."[1]

For Jews to move to the right, inevitably edging toward alliances with other right-wing forces, was not entirely unprecedented in modern Jewish history, but it could not be considered an entirely comfortable direction, at least not for the great majority of the American Jewish population. It did not help that the so-called "moral equivalence" argument (Nazism and Communism are morally the same) was favored by the neocons, including Podhoretz. If Nazis and Communists are basically the same, did that not suggest that Communists in the 1930s through the 1950s, significant numbers of Jews among them, should have been, like Nazis, put in jail, if not sentenced to death, as Eichmann was? And even those Communists who had not participated directly in mass murder but simply defended Stalin and the Soviet Union as "progressive" – were they not to be shunned and abhorred, treated as Nazi sympathizers who themselves did not murder have been treated? Of course, two Jewish Communists, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, were put to death – charged, to be sure, with more than being Communists, but the pain that trial caused American Jews suggests something of the treacherous symbolism, the Pandora's Box, of equating Nazism and Communism, given the extent to which McCarthyism could feed on it.

More will be said below about the issue of moral equivalence, but there is no denying that a majority of Jews in America, as in most countries of Europe, have long stood proudly on the left (mostly the moderate rather than radical left, it should be said) even after a phenomenal upward mobility. There is similarly no denying – most Jews take pride in it –that Jews have been prominent in support of gay rights and other such hot-button issues as abortion that the Right associates with moral depravity. Indeed, American Jews have notably spoken up in support of a wide variety of unpopular causes and in defense of various social pariahs, just as the Christian right has generally opposed or damned them. The left that Podhoretz himself attacks in this book is almost exclusively a Jewish left; all of the ex-friends featured in the chapters of Ex-Friends are Jewish, as are the scores of others who make various cameo appearances. A natural question arises: Is there then something specifically Jewish about this American left that Podhoretz considers so cancerous? Do Jews have a special responsibility for the ravages, moral and otherwise, of the sixties and seventies?

Podhoretz, like most neoconservatives, avoids that question, or brushes it aside as unworthy of a serious response. One Jewish ex-radical neo-conservative has, however, offered some searing testimony in that regard: "It was not my parents' idealism that elicited fear and provoked hostility from the goyim. It was their hostility toward the goyim, and indeed everything the goyim held dear, that incited the hostility back." Leftist passion "is a mirror of the dark center of the radical heart: not compassion but resentment . . . not the longing for justice but the desire for revenge."[2] Podhoretz does touch indirectly on the issue of a special Jewish role in the left by emphasizing a related point: The proclivity of Jews to be overly critical of themselves ("self-hatred") and the grave danger that excessive self-criticism has presented to American Jews in the twentieth century; he believes a related self-hatred began by the mid-1960s to infect the American left in general. Leftist self-hatred –for being American, or affluent, or white – was related to the sympathy of the New Left for Communism (a sympathy that was really more a revulsion from "Amerika") or for the revolutionary peoples of the Third World (struggling to free themselves from American imperialism). Indeed, the self-hatred of the left also often involved its becoming antisemitic, and so as far as Podhoretz and other neoconservatives were concerned, the danger to Jews, and especially to the state of Israel, was no longer primarily from the right but from the left – and, again, from leftist, destructively critical, self-hating Jews to a very prominent degree.

It can come as no surprise that leftists have replied in kind, typically dismissing Podhoretz as a hypocrite and an opportunistic sellout. Jews on the left have in particular reviled him as a betrayer of central Jewish traditions; he is a "Jew without mercy." That phrase was adopted by Earl Shorris as the title of his 1982 book attacking the neo-conservatives.[3] He charged that these "new" Jews were finally not real Jews because they no longer iden-

tified with the oppressed. By "making it," Podhoretz became for his detractors the Sammy Glick of the intellectual set, driven by raw ambition, sucking up to those in power, and in effect shouting "to hell with rachmones; the poor should get off their duffs already!" Aside from their alleged disdain for the economic underclass, the neoconservatives have been charged with lacking genuine or credible sympathy on a range of issues, prominent among them the plight of homosexuals, the sexist oppression experienced by women, or the racism faced by people of color (although paradoxically, those Jews considered "most Jewish" in a traditional religious sense, the ultra-Orthodox, have been charged similarly with a lack of sympathy in just those areas).

Podhoretz's admirers see him, quite the contrary, as he presents himself: a man fighting at considerable personal cost against the ever more threatening currents of the late 1960s. And he perceived a wide range of threats – to public order and private property, to public education, to Israel, to American interests throughout the world, particularly from an expansionist Soviet Union, and even to the life of the mind, given the anti-intellectualism of the radical left. One man's renegade is of course another's prophet, and Podhoretz did often bring to these controversies a prophet's passion. Or perhaps a zealot's excesses: In 1969, Podhoretz charged a journalist with wanting "to shove the Jewish people back into the gas ovens."[4] What had the journalist done to earn this monstrous charge? He had written in support of black community control of schools.

Tony Judt, in a recent review of Peter Novick's The Holocaust in American Life, complains that "poor Norman Podhoretz is wheeled out time and again to illustrate the unwisdom of invoking the Holocaust whenever you want to cast aspersions on your critics."[5] Whether or not he has made cheap shots in Podhoretz's regard, Novick surely has a point that overuse of the Holocaust imagery has contributed to a degradation in the quality of discussions involving Jews in America, and it is only fair to inquire into Podhoretz's role, as a prominent and respected intellectual, in that process. As Novick observes, "Once one starts using imagery from that most extreme of events, it becomes impossible to say anything moderate, balanced, or nuanced; the very language carries you along to hyperbole. . . . Anyone who scoffed at the idea that there were dangerous portents in American society had not learned 'the lessons of the Holocaust.'"[6]

Any reader of Podhoretz's autobiographical volumes might readily assume that he would agree heartily with the need for nuanced, careful judgments; he time and again laments the anti-intellectualism of at least a major element of the left, and the prevailing tone of his writing is anything but simplistic. He has led an enviably rich life, making friends – for a while at least – not only with a large number of prominent writers and intellectuals but all manner of politicos and glitterati, as far afield as Jackie Kennedy. Many of them, including Jackie, eventually stopped inviting him to dinner (Making It was more than she could stomach), but with enemies like those, who needs friends? Above all, the personal charm of the man, at least when he wants to turn it on, seems undeniable; his recent [Feb. 1999] appearance, discussing his book, on C-Span2 offered further evidence for those who doubt it. But one has to ask, is this avuncular, urbane, and sometimes self-mocking individual the same "poor Norman" alluded to by Tony Judt – the "back into the gas ovens!" Norman? Will the real Norman please stand up?

With any memoir, a central question must be: "How accurate and how honest?" In recent years, memoirists as different as Albert Speer and Elie Wiesel have been charged with what Winston Churchill once called "terminological inexactitudes" (when he was forbidden to use the 'l' word in parliament) or what Huck Finn referred to as "stretchers." Podhoretz, in that familiar tradition of memoirists, obviously strives to make himself look good. But is he, as it were, remaking it? The book opens with this disarming sentence: "I have often said that if I wish to name-drop, I have only to list my ex-friends." He added on C-Span2 that he has lost "hundreds of them." Brave words and quite a record, suggesting an uncommon self-assurance and a lack of regret or ruefulness (how many people could speak of hundreds of former friends without at least some sense of self doubt?). Later in the book he writes even more defiantly that "I never stop counting [my] blessings . . . since I shouldered the burden of challenging the regnant leftist culture that pollutes the spiritual and cultural air we all breathe, and I do so with all my heart and all my soul and all my might." (21)

Still, these legions of former friends were a diverse company, by no means all Weathermen terrorists or Ginsberg moral nihilists. One has to wonder how they all fit into the "regnant leftist culture." More to the point, one wonders, looking back now as the century is about to end, if they were all consistently wrong about everything, while Podhoretz and the neocons were consistently right. His language suggests more than mere tactical differences or normal political jabs and punches – he refers to pollution, sewers and cesspools. Did the country in truth go completely in the wrong direction in those years in regard, for example, to attitudes to gays,

women's rights, and minorities, and are we now in all ways worse for the change? Is there not finally some profound ambiguity to the outcome of those passionate and bewildering years, even granting the all-too obvious excesses and blunders on the left? Metternich once reflected: "I cannot help telling myself twenty times a day: How right I am and how very wrong are all the others." If indeed Podhoretz is able to enjoy such Metternichean certainties, he has triumphed remarkably –heroically?-(believably?) – over the man who once wrote that he was "much given to anxiety," and was in particular "disadvantaged in the world of power by a childish desire for everyone to love me and a terror of making enemies."[7]

Podhoretz's present rock-hard moral certainties are hard to detect in his account of his long friendship with Lillian Hellman – quite the contrary, it is a story of human weakness, moral ambiguities, and wide-ranging paradoxes. That tangled narrative reveals interesting details of another, which is even more convoluted and, to many observers, deeply disturbing: The story of how Anne Frank came to be one of the most universally recognized icons of the twentieth century. It is disturbing to some because the story of Anne Frank that the world has come to know is romanticized, bowdlerized, and "de-Judaized." The process of remaking Anne, as it were, bothers Cynthia Ozick so much that she wrote in the New Yorker that it might have been better if Anne's diary had been "burned, vanished, lost" rather than her story being so offensively misrepresented.8 That misrepresentation had much to do with the well documented role of Lillian Hellman, while she and Podhoretz were still close friends. It was a misrepresentation – and here is a revealing point – that little troubled him at the time.

The Hellman-Podhoretz friendship started in 1957, more than a decade before he turned to the right, yet even so the beginnings did not appear at all auspicious. The story as narrated in Ex-Friends has already been told in Breaking Ranks: his being incredulous when catching sight of her at a cocktail party hosted by Lionel and Diana Trilling, for "it was hard to imagine the Trillings associating with her, . . . [she] was the kind of [middlebrow] writer for whom literary intellectuals like the Trillings generally felt disdain and even contempt." But "this cultural divide . . . was nothing compared to the fact that Lillian was . . . a 'Stalinist,"' That was the preferred term in these circles to 'Communist,' since many of those now democratic leftists had themselves once been Communists, and most still held the red-baiting of the 1950s in horror.[9]

Whatever her middlebrow perspectives and unsavory political associations, Hellman and Podhoretz became, as he writes, "fast friends almost immediately." What was the attraction? Friendships often have unaccountable aspects, but there were some obvious enticements, especially for a fiercely ambitious young man who would later write Making It: She was famous, well-connected, and affluent. Mixing in her circles "was heady, it was exciting, and it was fun." But "the most fun of all –playful, mischievous, bitchy, earthy, and always up for a laugh – was Lillian herself." (118)

Lillian's lively qualities, it must be said, were at times expressed in ways that may startle current Podhoretz admirers. She harbored a barely disguised hatred for the state of Israel, and she often exhibited a "streak of Jewish anti-Semitism, [including] . . . cracks . . . about some 'kike' or another." Looking back, Podhoretz reports – yet again a revealing point – that he found these attitudes an "irritant" to the friendship, but he "never took [them] to heart." (123-4) He presumably also never once charged her with wanting to push the Jewish people back into the gas ovens.

Hostility to Israel and discomfort with Jewishness were not uncommon in Podhoretz's circles. His mentor, Lionel Trilling, whom Podhoretz describes as the most intelligent man he has ever met – again, in a pretty competitive field – had "violently negative feelings" about Judaism and Jewishness, especially in their Eastern European varieties. Diana's sentiments were, if possible, even more negative. Lionel once wrote that he would "resent it if a critic of my work were to discover in it either faults or virtues which he called Jewish." (92) But Podhoretz, as he describes himself at that time, comes across as anything but the stuffy conformist and the prickly partisan in regard to Jewish issues that so many later considered him to be. Indeed, he writes that he too was uncomfortable with Jewish particularism, and in an essay published in 1963 he admitted that he suffered doubts about the meaning of Jewish survival. (He "often wondered whether . . . [Jewish] survival as a distinct group was worth one hair on the head of a single infant.")[10] He concluded that acclaimed essay with these words: "I believe that the wholesale merging of the two races [Black and White] is the most desirable alternative for everyone concerned. . . . The Negro problem can be solved in this country in no other way." These were not, need it be said, the kinds of remarks favored in Commentary magazine in subsequent years.

Podhoretz, too, harbored some fairly heretical thoughts about Israel and the Israelis. After his first visit, he wrote to Lionel Trilling that the Israelis, "despite their

really extraordinary achievements [are] a very unattractive people. . . . They're gratuitously surly and boorish." Such reflections must have been especially troubling to someone who hoped that the state of Israel could repair "the ravages done to the Jewish personality by two thousand years of Diaspora." (156) His reservations about Israelis at any rate provide further insight into how Podhoretz and Hellman could have maintained their close friendship for as long as they did. He was, in short, a strikingly different man.

Still, there were always a number of awkward aspects to the friendship. He had a low opinion of the artistic quality of her work but could not bring himself to be honest with her about it, understanding full well that dishonesty – that is, praise – was a price to be paid for preserving the friendship. There was a certain ironic justice to it all: She herself was dishonest – chronically, at times blatantly. There would have been a nice symmetry to it all if she had also hidden from him her negative opinions of his writing, but we have no evidence of that. What we do have ample evidence of is how she twisted events and personalities to make herself emerge as a person of courage and principle. Podhoretz thinks that Mary McCarthy may have exaggerated a bit in her celebrated quip ("every word [Hellman] writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the"'), but he came to recognize that a great deal of what she wrote about herself "could only be interpreted as deliberate lies." (121-22) Still, the Podhoretz-Hellman friendship endured, the lies passed over (though some of the worst, it should be said, came after they were no longer friends).

That a woman so dishonest and self-serving as Hellman should have played the role she did in the fabrication of the popular image of Anne Frank, through an enormously successful play that later became popular movie, can only be termed disconcerting. Here Hellman's Stalinism emerges as a key issue. Her exact relationship to the Communist Party remains uncertain; she may have been a member for only a brief period, but she undoubtedly remained a "fellow traveler" for much longer. The main point is that she had a Stalinist's aversion to Jewish particularism, one that went well beyond Podhoretz's own, or the familiar distaste for seeming "too Jewish" that was so common among many of her German-Jewish background. She had no use for the play composed by Meyer Levin about Anne Frank. Prominent among its flaws, she argued, was Levin's preoccupation with Jewish themes, which she plausibly maintained would be fatal to its commercial success. At any rate, she used her good offices (perhaps not the best term) to hurry along the process by which two non-Jews, successful commercial playwrights, were given the job of presenting Anne Frank to the world on stage.

The rest, as they say, is history. The universalizing, and de-Judaizing, of Anne Frank's diary has been explored in a number of articles and books, most notably in Cynthia Ozick's above-mentioned New Yorker piece and in Lawrence Graver's study of Meyer Levin, *An Obsession with Anne Frank* (1996). The actual process by which Jewish qualities were excised from the diary in writing the play is described in meticulous detail by Ralph Melnick, in *The Stolen Legacy of Anne Frank* (1998), a more sympathetic portrayal of Levin than is to be found in Graver. The strength and prominence of Anne Frank's Jewish identity are certainly debatable, but there is little question that even before Hellman's efforts, the diary itself had been bowdlerized – and first of all by her father, Otto Frank.

Otto deleted certain passages for perfectly understandable reasons. For example, he removed some graphic passages dealing with Anne's emerging sexual awareness – this was, after all, the fifties. He similarly sought to tone down the bitter, wounding remarks that Anne made about her mother – these were, after all, her teenage years, and her mother subsequently perished in the Holocaust. But Otto, too, was much concerned with universal themes and notably cautious about emphasizing Jewishness "too much." The play and then the movie evolved yet further than the diary, with no real objections from him, in the direction of focusing on Anne as a universal rather than as a specifically Jewish victim. Most strikingly the play and movie took large liberties in presenting an uplifting story, one with redemptive "lessons" about the human condition. Such revisions were no doubt defensible commercially and again not contrary to Otto's wishes. But they were, to say the least, difficult to reconcile with this bleak and ugly tragedy, and, more to the point, with this undeniably Jewish tragedy.

Against Levin, Melnick, Ozick and others who bemoan how this Jewish tragedy was misrepresented, it might be argued that a watered-down yet highly popular story of Anne Frank was finally better than a story neglected or ignored, just as pop history, for all its simplifications, can serve to awaken an interest where little existed before. Such an awakened interest can then develop in more serious directions. In spite of the many dubious aspects of Spielberg's Schindler's List, it did bring the Holocaust to a wide audience in ways that are hard to dismiss as in all regards without merit. And, revealingly, some of the same problems loom in it as in the presentation of Anne Frank, in particular the upbeat quality

given to what was anything but an upbeat reality. Similarly, there is the problem of how representative these stories can be considered. The surprising and finally baffling actions of a corrupt man but "good German" (and Nazi party member), or the travails of a family in hiding are remote from the obscene horrors that are at the heart of the Holocaust.

There is the related and no less difficult issue of whether even the Jewish public was ready in the 1950s for a more truthful and somber play about Anne Frank. Raul Hilberg recounts that in 1989 it was explained to him that his *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) "had been published too early."[11] His extraordinary and in many regards path-breaking book thus received scant attention at first, and much of that attention consisted of outraged, angry dismissal. Similar considerations certainly seem relevant for the timing of the appearance of a play about a "too Jewish" Anne Frank: If such a play, rather than the now familiar one, had been offered to the public, it is a fair guess that it would have opened to mixed reviews and half-filled houses, and would have closed after a few performances.

Podhoretz's own account offers support for "the world was not ready" argument. He was hardly unaware of or insensitive to Jewish issues, yet he writes that he was "not especially bothered by the role Lillian played in the de-Judaization of the stage version of The Diary of Anne Frank," largely because of the sensational commercial success of the play. Meyer Levin tried to enlist Podhoretz, as so many others, in his cause but was unsuccessful, in no small part because Levin seemed to Podhoretz "more than a little paranoid," a common judgment, it must be said, even by those sympathetic to him. Podhoretz writes that "in retrospect, I think Levin had a good case." (124) Probably most observers would now agree that Levin had a case, but few would be so bold as to say that the merits of that case should have been obvious to all sensitive observers at the time – or that his play effectively presented that case.

Podhoretz's account of the immediate postwar years gives further evidence, though not quite so explicitly recognized by him, of how Europe and America were "not yet ready" to deal with the Holocaust: He spent most of his time in the army in Germany, less than a decade after the end of the war, explaining the dangers of Communism, not of Nazism or antisemitism, to American troops. Novick's Holocaust in American Life describes how the Cold War pushed the Holocaust aside, as it were, since German support against the Soviets was essential and there was no point to accusing and weakening our German ally.[12] Given his later career, Podhoretz's own activities at this time offer a particularly strong support to Novick's point.

By his own account, Podhoretz's friendship with Hannah Arendt was slower in forming – he thought she would never call! – less close, and considerably less fun-filled than his friendship with Lillian Hellman. But the more important difference was in his deep respect for Arendt. "Of all my [intellectual] elders . . . , there was none for whom I had a higher regard than Hannah. The intellectual quality I prized most at that stage of my life was brilliance, by which I mean the virtuosic ability to put ideas together in such a new and surprising combination that even if one disagreed with what was being said, one was excited and illuminated." (142-43) Early in their friendship he resigned in disgust from Commentary's staff (before he later returned as editor, in 1960) because one of her "brilliant" pieces, having to do with the struggle for civil rights in the South, was judged to be too much at variance with liberal and Jewish opinion to be published in Commentary at that time. But his readiness to stand up for brilliance soon enough received another test, one that escalated into one of the most emotional affairs in the world of American Jews after WW II. It was also one that may be considered a revealing signpost in the process by which a wide public came to understand the Nazi Final Solution to the Jewish Question.

After the Israelis captured Adolf Eichmann and put him on trial in 1961, Arendt wrote a series of articles in The New Yorker, beginning in 1962, and then combined them into a book, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, in 1963. What was in those articles and book to bring forth such a storm of protest and indignation? The affair has some puzzling aspects, even to this day, especially the extent to which Arendt was charged with beliefs and statements that were wildly inaccurate. Revealingly, Podhoretz – who, as will be explored below, this time lost his taste for brilliance and joined the fray in attacking her –recognizes in *Ex-Friends* that the affair spiraled out of control and that "many of the criticisms were either wrong or unfair, sometimes to the extreme of outright defamation."(160) In trying to account for these reactions, perhaps the most important point to be made is that she was reaching an audience not previously reached; Jews had debated among themselves many of the matters she now discussed, including charges that Jewish leaders had cooperated with the Nazis and that Jews went meekly to their deaths, but not in a journal like The New Yorker – a shande far di goyim!

Most of those who have studied this contretemps concur that Arendt's love of grand theory was accompanied by carelessness with details. She had penchant for forced or arcane distinctions, reveled in paradox, and delighted in being provocative – all complicated by the kind of imperious tone that when used by a German Jew drove Eastern European Jews to distraction. She did not suffer fools gladly, and she seemed to many observers to be particularly impatient with Jewish fools. Even putting the best light on it, as Walt Rostow did at the time, she had no more tolerance for "Jewish pomp, folly, xenophobia, and hypocrisy than for any other variety."[13] That could easily be perceived as lacking sympathy for the sufferings of the Jews. In the opening pages of Eichmann in Jerusalem, she worked in sardonic remarks about Israel, touching on topics that were practically taboo at the time (e.g., how the Israelis, as the Nazis, outlawed intermarriage, or how the Law of the Return, basing the right to immigration on Jewish descent, was the kind of "racist" law vehemently opposed by American Jews for the United States). She described Eichmann's trial as in origin a show trial, initiated and stage-managed by the then prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. It was a trial, moreover, in which the prosecution was allowed to introduce mounds of irrelevant evidence and witness after witness who had had no contact with Eichmann. As she pointed out, the prosecution built a large part of its case on what the Jews had suffered in general, not on what Eichmann had done in particular – again, procedures that would not be allowed American courts of law.

In retrospect the extent to which Arendt was riding for a fall may seem obvious; her writing was dangerously prone to misunderstanding, especially now that she was addressing not only non-Jews but a much wider audience than those intellectually ambitious types who had admiringly struggled through the dense and sometimes bizarre 500 pages of *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* But even those who understood her reasonably well at times angrily disagreed with what she wrote in this book. And, finally, even those admirers who were willing to give her every benefit of the doubt were occasionally baffled or put off by some of her language. Who, to this day, is entirely confident that they understand what Arendt meant by the "banality of evil" (or, as she more amply and engagingly formulated it in the closing lines of her book, the "fearsome, word-and-thought defying banality of evil") [14]? Anyone who thinks they do may be interested to learn that the philosopher Karl Jaspers, her most respected intellectual mentor and close personal friend, wrote her privately about his own reservations and puzzlement concerning the term. Indeed, she herself later recognized, in a private letter, that at the time of writing the book, the term had implications she had by no means thought through.[15]

Podhoretz in Ex-Friends does not much delve into these elusive issues, nor is he ostensibly much interested, even now, in exploring the possibility that there were finally some merits to Arendt's musings about Eichmann. It's a pity, but perhaps understandable, since, to repeat, memoirists normally try to avoid making themselves look bad, and in this episode it is difficult to see how he might be made to look particularly good, at least insofar as he fancies himself an intellectual who can, standing knowledgeably above blind passion and prejudice, lay credible claim to show the way to others. Central to Arendt's musings was an issue of continuing concern to students of the Holocaust and antisemitism, one that in turn touches on a nettlesome aspect of the nature of historical understanding. Arendt bent her considerable talents in an effort to "understand" Eichmann, in the process confronting this old question: Does historical imagination unavoidably involve one in "sympathy" for the protagonists under study, whether they were virtuous or evil? And is such sympathy finally legitimate in examining extreme examples, in this case Nazis or other varieties of anti-Semites? For many perhaps most readers and authors, the answer to the second question is an emphatic No.

What then should the historical narrative involve?- Again, the answer for many is "describe and condemn" – and, please, no more than that! Any effort to enter imaginatively and openly into the moral universe of an Eichmann or a Hitler is morally treacherous, permanently and properly terra incognita. The Nazis were moral monsters rightly relegated to Haman's realm: We may stamp our feet and make noises at them to show our revulsion, but we must reject the notion of trying to understand them as human beings. In short, the irreducible mystery surrounding such evil must remain; historical analysis must not be allowed to weaken moral outrage.

Interestingly, this stance is close to Arendt's own in The Origins of Totalitarianism, where she defined "radical evil" as "rooted in motives so base as to be beyond human comprehension."[16] In *The Awakening*, Primo Levi wrote, "Perhaps one cannot, what is more must not, understand what happened, because to understand is almost to justify. . . . No normal human being will ever be able to identify with Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Eichmann and endless others. This dismays us and at the same time gives us a sense of relief."[17] However – and here is a central, often neglected point – it was precisely

in following the trial and reading about Eichmann that Arendt came to doubt the validity of her own earlier conception of radical evil, which in turn meant a reconsideration of the issue of whether it could be understood.

In Podhoretz's article "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance," (Commentary, Sept. 1963) the issue of the permissible scope of "understanding," of historical imagination is central. So too is a related and if possibly even more difficult question: In studying victim and victimizer is it ever permissible to speak of an interplay, of degrees of mutual responsibility? For the "describe-and-condemn" school there is again a trenchant answer, especially when dealing with the relations of antisemite and Jew: Never! In his article Podhoretz bemoaned the lack of black-and-white moral clarity in Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial; in her "perverse" pursuit of paradox and ambiguity, she had the audacity, on the one hand, to describe this Nazi as banal and, on the other, the Jews as complicit in their own destruction. In Eichmann's case, in short, she tried to be "sympathetic" in the sense of struggling to understand his mental processes as those of a normal or banal human being, while she seemed uninterested in a comparable effort in regard to the Jewish victim. Her account, Podhoretz ironically intoned, had "all the appearance of 'ruthless honesty' and all the marks of profundity. . . . But if this version of hers can from one point of view be considered more interesting, can it by the same token be considered truer, or more illuminating. . . ? Is the gain she achieves in literary interest a matter of titillation, or is it a gain to the understanding?" (201-02). His answer was flatly "No gain." How then did he think we are to understand the confrontation of Nazi and Jew? As far as Podhoretz in this article is concerned, what Jews or Jewish leaders did or failed to do in confronting the Nazis did not matter "in the slightest to the final result. Murderers with the power to murder descended upon a defenseless people and murdered a large part of it. What else is there to say?" (205)

What else indeed? Undoubtedly Podhoretz had a point about the imbalance, or at least the seeming imbalance, of sympathy in Arendt's account. Yet even granting her sins of presentation, the know-nothing implications of his words suggest that it may have been "poor Norman" speaking here. Was there really nothing else to say? Was the story indeed so simple as, in his terms, "monstrous Nazi" and "virtuous martyr"? Was the evil of Eichmann's character so patent that to express puzzlement about him, astonishment at his apparent normality, morally reprehensible? Revealingly, even one of those who first reacted negatively to Arendt's book, Arthur Hertzberg, later wrote her privately that "there are issues to be discussed, and . . . you raised almost all of them, but so far the discussion has not been equal to the searing dignity of the subject, or the seriousness of your analysis, which has been treated quite unfairly by almost everyone, and certainly by me in a few paragraphs."[18]

It is finally hard to understand how a man of Podhoretz's intelligence and sophistication could have assumed, with complete inner sincerity, such an ultimately dogmatic and anti-intellectual stance. In particular it is difficult to understand how he could have continued, again, with complete inner conviction, to maintain that he was entirely right and she entirely wrong. Raul Hilberg, from whose book Arendt learned much of what she wrote about the "collaborationist" role of the Jewish councils, had also been bitterly criticized – indeed defamed and crudely misrepresented, much as she had been. In his view, it was the watchdogs of Historical Correctness, reflecting the "main current of Jewish thought" at the time, that were responsible: "Modern Jews know, like their ancient forebears, the hazard of giving the perpetrators a face, endowing them with identity and thought, allowing them a modicum of doubt or regret, of making them human. Remember only what they did" – describe and condemn. He continues, "And what have I done? I insisted on delving into forbidden territory and presenting Amalek with all his features as an aggregate of German functionaries." Similarly, he believed that he encountered hostility from leading Jewish figures because he had failed to recognize that "the Jewish victims must be seen as heroic."[19]

Hilberg surely has a point about how Amalek [the forebear of Haman and the symbol of absolute evil in Jewish tradition] is to be presented, at least according to some Jewish spokesmen, but he does not seem to recognize how much Jewish thought, even in the immediate postwar period, was itself divided about the Jewish victim as hero. As noted above, knowledgeable Jews were aware of Jewish collaboration, and indeed there was no little "blaming the victim": Trials, several spectacular ones, of Jews who had cooperated with the Nazis were held in Israel. And far from stressing Jewish heroism, many Israelis emphasized the opposite – that Galut Jews suffered from cowardice, servility, and other character defects (presumably what Podhoretz had in mind when he wrote of the "the ravages done to the Jewish personality by two thousand years of Diaspora"). Ben-Gurion remarked that the survivors of the Holocaust included "people who would not have survived if they had not been what they were – hard, evil, and selfish people, and

what they underwent there served to destroy what good qualities they had left."[20]

A more hard-bitten interpretation of Podhoretz's article on Arendt might suggest that the real issue was quite simple: As editor of Commentary magazine, witnessing the powerful waves of indignation in response to Arendt's articles and book, he had to recognize that a substantial defense of Arendt would have cost him plenty. Whatever the merits of such an interpretation, it must be recognized that he by no means acquiesced even in that article to all the charges against her; he termed it "stupid" to maintain that she actually defended Eichmann, for example. Finally what motivated Podhoretz to write the article must remain uncertain, perhaps even to himself; the truth may lie in some messy combination of calculation, emotion, principle, and encouragement by others.

After the article appeared, Podhoretz accepted Arendt's rather surprising invitation to meet privately with him and "thrash things out." He writes that she greeted him in a friendly manner, quipping "I may be brilliant but I am not perverse." Later in the conversation she got to the point: "Why did you do it?" She thought she knew. She believed that he had been instructed or strongly encouraged by influential Jews to write a "hit" piece in Commentary. (Podhoretz writes in Ex-Friends, "I had feared that she would think I was put up to it by the AJC, and . . . I was to find out that my fear was well founded.") (170)

Arendt had become convinced that a circle of influential Jews were conspiring to defame and destroy her – not quite the Elders of Zion but in that ballpark, akin perhaps to Hilary Clinton's vast right-wing conspiracy. She was not entirely wrong (nor is Hilary), although "conspiring" is too inflammatory a word, since it was to an important degree an open campaign, several of whose leaders contacted her directly to indicate their plans. It is undeniable that a number of Jewish leaders and organizations, notably the ADL, launched an elaborately coordinated –and "stupid" in Podhoretz's sense – campaign to denounce and defame her as an anti-Semite, a "self-hating Jewess" who had written a "pro-Eichmann series."[21]

A consideration of the methods of the ADL in this case cannot be pleasant for those who identify with ideals of the American Civil Liberties Union, and the large numbers of Jews on both sides of this divide suggest the degree to which this affair split the Jewish community. And it is a lasting division, for this would not be the last instance in which the ADL was believed to show scant regard for the rights of those it defines as defamers and enemies. A decade ago Noam Chomsky, discovering that the ADL had a 150-page record on his activities, "just like an FBI file," charged that "the Anti-Defamation League. . . [has become] actually an organization devoted to trying to defame and intimidate and silence people who criticize current Israeli policies, whatever they may be. . . . If there's any comment in the press which they regard as insufficiently subservient to the party line, there'll be a flood of letters, delegations, protests, threats to withdraw advertising, etc."[22] Chomsky of course ranks as a prime example of the self-hating leftist that Podhoretz so detests, but the question remains whether Chomsky's opinions make it justifiable to use such methods against him or against others the ADL, with its many resources and contacts, deems a danger.

One of the greatest disappointments of these memoirs is that Podhoretz does not provide us with much information about what was actually said in that five-hour discussion – hidden tapes where are you when we really need you? This must have been a fascinating exchange. He writes in *Ex-Friends* that he had already described that conversation in *Breaking Ranks*, but in fact there is little more information about the real content of the discussion in that book than in the present one. And so certain questions must linger, as must doubts about how forthcoming Podhoretz has been about his role in the entire affair, to say nothing of how ambitious he has been in offering interpretations of it.

On balance, Podhoretz's account of his relationship with these two ex-friends, while in many regards intriguing, is in other ways disappointing. He does not finally achieve his goal of making himself look good, particularly since the lacunae, the things not adequately addressed, are all too obvious. One neglected though certainly not completely ignored aspect to the friendship with Hellman has again to do with the issue of sympathy and understanding. Podhoretz laments in *Ex-Friends* the extent to which she won the admiration of the mass public, most dramatically in the Academy Awards ceremonies in the mid-1970s, receiving a prolonged standing ovation "before a television audience of fifty million Americans, myself included." (137) He further laments how many other Communists or Communist sympathizers have never really had to face their past in the way that Nazis and Nazi sympathizers have. This imbalance is particularly lamentable if one accepts the "moral equivalence" argument mentioned above. Podhoretz remarks, "As any reader of the obituary pages could testify, Lillian was not the only old Stalinist to whom this same absolution was extended." Many of them have died and have been celebrated as "progressive" heroes or martyrs dur-

ing the persecutions of the McCarthy period. "Very few of these people were ever held morally to account, and Lillian perhaps least of all of them." (137)

But is his own attitude to her, expressed in those words, finally consistent or coherent in a deeper sense? Are Nazis and Stalinists, or their defenders and sympathizers, indeed morally equivalent? And if so, how might the Stalinists have been held to account – some sort of Nuremberg trial? Might we then term Communist Party members (or the great majority of the population of Soviet Russia) "willing executioners," or perhaps "monstrous Communists," while their non-Communist victims were "virtuous martyrs" – and are we then to insist that there is simply nothing else to say about the subject, or that to do so is immoral? So many Germans and even Nazis have claimed "We didn't know!" They have not been widely believed. When the same words are pronounced by ex-Communists, especially those Communists in free countries who had ample access to overwhelming evidence in regard to the Stalin era's terror and mass murder, how can they be believed? Germans during the Nazi years obviously had much less ample and reliable sources of information, and we can hardly conclude that doing something about Nazi evil was easier for them than denouncing Stalinist Russia was for American Communists. Simon Wiesenthal is hunting down former Nazis to general applause – and a sense that these men have gotten away with murder for too long – but who is hunting down former Communists, who also have gotten away with murder, with a similar persistence and zeal? Who, indeed, in this country is even suggesting that such be done?

These questions – and many more of a kindred nature that might be posed – point to some of the problems with the moral equivalence argument. Most Americans, and it seems a fair guess, most Jewish Americans, finally do not believe that Nazis and Communists are to be considered moral equivalents, although it's also a fair guess that most of them have not thought about the implications of the question with much tenacity. It seems clear that even many staunch anti-Communists, Podhoretz included, have been able to extend quite a bit of "sympathy" to at least some Communists and fellow travelers; they have been willing, in other words, to try to understand what Communists as human beings believed and to grant that they were in some instances misguided idealists or selfless people of good will. A similar willingness holds far less in regard Nazis or their defenders. How much sympathy can most people, especially those who lived through the Nazi years – and above all Jews – work up for, say, Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot, let alone Hitler and Heydrich? The notion of a misguided but idealistic Nazi is still not received with much enthusiasm in the countries that fought Nazi Germany. Indeed how "understanding" are most Jews, again especially those old enough to remember the late 1930s, to Charles Lindbergh? He was not a nazi, a nazi sympathizer, or even an anti-Semite, but to be sure he was impressed with Nazi power and opposed to committing American forces against Nazi Germany – and is thus seen as lastingly tainted and is hated for his isolationist role (one of course that undoubtedly did anti-Semites to its banners). Podhoretz confesses to an enduring affection for Lillian to the very end of her life. How might it seem if he described a lingering affection for a clever, fun-loving, bitchy, and lying former member of the American Nazi Party or admirer of Nazi Germany?

There is finally not a lot of fresh understanding in *Ex-Friends*, and there is less new information than Podhoretz claims. The merits of the book are real but small scale: The writing is skillful, the overall tone anything but simplistic, and the cast of characters fascinating. But there is a notable lack of a broader, kinder wisdom in this remarkable if also puzzling man, even as he approaches his eighth decade of life. The book does not have, in short, "all the appearance of 'ruthless honesty' and all the marks of profundity." And, we are left to conclude, that's the way he wants it.

NOTES

[1]. Quoted in Peter Novick, The Holocaust in American Life (New York, 1999) 129, 130.

[2]. David Horowitz, *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* (New York, 1997), 44; David Horowitz and Peter Collier, *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the Sixties* (New York, 1996), 309-11.

[3]. Earl Shorris, Jews Without Mercy (New York, 1982). The theme of Jews as standing on the left because of Jewish religious tradition is an old one, recently and knowledgeably covered in Edward S. Shapiro, A Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II (Baltimore and London, 1992), especially in Chapter Seven, "From Culture to Causes."

[4]. Novick, 177.

[5]. The New Republic, July 19 & 26, 1999, p. 38.

[6]. Novick, 177, 178.

[7]. Making It, 300.

[8]. "Who Owns Anne Frank?" The New Yorker, October 6, 1997.

[9]. *Ex-Friends*, 104; compare the account in Breaking Ranks, 315 ff. –certainly more than "bits and pieces" repeated.

[10]. "My Negro Problem – and Ours," Commentary, Feb. 1963, reprinted in Norman Podhoretz, The Commentary Reader (New York, 1966), 376-387.

[11]. Raul Hilberg, The Politics of Memory (Chicago, 1996), 123; the words are those of Judith Sklar, then President of the American Political Science Association.

[12]. The point has been made, though less amply, by a number of historians, among them Shapiro, Time for Healing, Chapter One, The Aftermath of War.

[13]. The Herald Tribune, May 19, 1963.

[14]. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963; revised and enlarged edition, 1964), 252.

[15]. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt, *For Love of the World* (New Haven, 1982), 362 ff.

[16]. Cf. the discussion in Young-Bruehl, Arendt, 369.

[17]. Primo Levi, *The Awakening* (New York, 1965), 213.

[18]. Young-Bruehl, 367.

[19]. Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996), 132-33.

[20]. Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York 1986), 138; cf. Novick, Holocaust, 69

[21]. Novick, 127 ff.

[22]. Noam Chomsky *Language and Politics*, New York, 1988, pp. 642-3.

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**Citation**: Albert S. Lindemann. Review of Podhoretz, Norman, *Ex-Friends: Falling Out With Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer.* H-Holocaust, H-Net Reviews. October, 1999.
**URL**: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3481

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