

**A View on the Greek Dictatorship from the “Lighthouse” of *The New York Review of Books*
(1967–1974)¹**

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Abstract

The New York Review of Books’ coverage of the Greek military dictatorship of 1967–1974 connected the emergence of the right-wing regime to the turbulent sociopolitical sphere of the 1960s and 1970s in America. The Review’s analysis of events taking place in Greece, as well as its focus on two prominent Greek poets, George Seferis and C.P. Cavafy, was caught in the crossfire of disputes of intellectual legitimacy and served two interrelated purposes: to criticize American overseas aggression from an ideological position affiliated with the New Left, on the one hand, and to exemplify this position by bringing forward artistic and intellectual manifestations of antiauthoritarianism, on the other. By extrapolating in this way the case of Greece toward a critical surveillance of opportunistic Western agendas and their links to humanitarian crises overseas, the Review’s erudite contributors at once shed light on the junta’s relevance to timely concerns and coopted its repercussions to reflect upon American intellectualism and its shortcomings.

Introduction

In 2006, The National Book Foundation awarded the Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community to the founders of *The New York Review of Books* for contributing to

the cultural landscape a journal which “raised reviewing to an art and made the discussion of books a lively, provocative and intellectual activity” (National Book Foundation 2006). First published in 1963, the *Review* had set out to address a noticeable lacuna in American cultural journalism: the lack of a stimulating weekly literary review, similar in scope to those based in European metropolitan centers. The place that the journal aimed to occupy within the cultural establishment was prefigured by Elizabeth Hardwick, a cofounder of the *Review*, in an earlier piece lamenting the “decline of book reviewing” in America. Hardwick highlighted the need for new outlets which would transcend the reigning trend of superficiality by publishing “the unusual, the difficult, the lengthy, the intransigent, and above all, the *interesting*”—a quality which she foresaw would guarantee a readership (Hardwick 1959, 143).

The very title, *New York Review of Books*, demonstrated the emphasis placed on book reviewing upon its creation. However, a volatile intellectual landscape, shifting under the pressure of acute political challenges, gradually effected a series of protean transformations of its identity from a *belles lettres* sanctuary to a medium committed to surveying the domestic and foreign policy of the US (Nobile 1974, 4). Public awareness of domestic inequalities and of the repercussions of America’s military interventions in Vietnam and elsewhere manifested themselves in the civil rights struggles of the mid-1960s and in the proliferation of concerns about human rights and humanitarian issues abroad at the turn of the decade. Set against this turbulent backdrop, the *Review* departed from book criticism to host a growing number of articles, reportage, and opinion pieces that moved in increasingly politicized directions.

The polarized reception of the journal over the first decade of its publication was outspoken about the tensions in which it was enmeshed, and which had resulted in the formation of distinct ideological camps within the circles of the New York intelligentsia. The *Review*’s merging of a

consistent critique of America's foreign affairs with critical analyses on matters of morality, universal consciousness, and intellectual responsibility was a refreshing addition to cultural publications that existed in a symbiotic relationship with the establishment. Its success "clearly signaled that not all American intellectuals were happy to act as Cold War legitimists orbiting around the national security state" (Saunders 2013, 303), leading the *Review* to become, from the early days of its appearance, associated with radical thought and with the New Left.

At the same time, those hostile to the moralizing proclivities of the *Review*'s contributors, who were perceived as the product of a social and educational privilege that was alien to the activities of grassroots movements, criticized the journal as a "chief theoretical organ of the radical chic" (Wolfe 1970). The term "radical chic" ironized both the political content and writing style of the *Review*. However, it was precisely this correlation that was cast as European-inspired enlightened intellectualism by those who regarded its refashioning positively. The poet Robert Lowell, for example, celebrated the diversification of the *Review*'s focus: "It never was primarily interested in the arts, nor pretended to be. It's a review for commentator and reasoner, an epic *New Statesman*." (Lowell 1972, 34–35). Even in recent years, the socially progressive, versatile identity of the *Review* is still associated with "the arrival of a particular sensibility . . . the engaged, literary, post-war progressive intellectual, who was concerned with civil rights and feminism as well as fiction and poetry and theater" (Haglund, Harris, and Heimbach 2013).

The weaving of current American affairs into the traditional genre of the book review was less a conscious choice of a new direction than it was a response on the part of the *Review*'s acclaimed, politically engaged cohort to growing social and political unease. The call for multilateral writing, at once critical and informative, led the *Review*'s contributors to borrow equally from news reportage, philosophy, literary review, and opinion columns to compose review-essays, or what will be referred

here as the genre of the think piece. I define think piece here as writing that sees literary journalism and news coverage as complementary rather than contrasting endeavors. Whether they embark from the incisive analysis of case studies or literary material, think pieces expertly move to broader explorations in the realm of ideas and politics.² Over the years, the publication of such hybrid, polished, skillful, and highly analytical pieces rendered the *Review* the gold standard of cultural importance for both American-based and international journalists, scholars, and academics. The *Review* swiftly prevailed in the cultural milieu, with a survey attesting to the fact that by 1971 its overall popularity, measured cumulatively across a number of different metrics of influence, far outweighed that of any other major periodical among an elite, educated readership in America (Kadushin, Hover, and Tichy 1971).

By 1967, when a military *coup d'état* in Greece led to the establishment of a seven-year dictatorship in the country, the *Review* already had offered a platform for the advocates of black power to challenge embedded ideas of white supremacy (Carmichael 1966), played an active role in the coverage of student riots, and become “a flagship for intellectual opposition to the Vietnam War” (Saunders 2013, 304). Vital to this trajectory in exposing systemic violence and racial discrimination, the think piece constituted a new discursive arena for intellectuals to test state-produced justifications for overseas military interventions and to broach global humanitarian crises. Fueling the widespread discontent which led to mounting suspicion of US support of anticommunist governments, the *Review*’s scrutiny of crises unravelling in countries that maintained diplomatic ties to America extended to Greece and its authoritarian regime. A case-in-point of the destructive ways in which the US exerted its power abroad, the Greek dictatorship exemplified the vice of imperialism and bolstered the journal’s dissenting view during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Driven by their vested interests in Greece, an allied NATO member of geopolitical significance amidst neighboring communist countries in the Balkans, the successive administrations of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon reacted ambiguously to the seizure of power by the right-wing colonels and the resultant curtailment of civil liberties in the country. While the coup was in line with America's anticommunism, it stood in direct conflict with the nation's espousal of democratic values. When faced with the decision to provide military aid to the dictatorial regime or a withdrawal of support, the US government was challenged not only on the level of foreign strategy but also in terms of political rhetoric. As news about the torture and violence employed by the junta spread, governmental strategists attempted a balancing act: to renounce the regime's methods while safeguarding the political stability and order that would serve the Cold War agenda (Renouard 2016, 36, 53). But contrary to earlier years, when appeals to national security had served to legitimize US geostrategic interventions, in the 1970s a transatlantic movement against overseas suffering gathered force (Renouard 2016, 22), buttressed by the involvement of the intelligentsia in debates on the relationship of power, nationalism, and human values. The Greek case consolidated the *Review's* efforts to uncover the insincerities of the United States' crusade to combat totalitarianism and safeguard freedom. Set alongside pieces tackling questions as broad as whether there was such a thing as "hope for man," (Heilbroner 1974), the *Review's* essays on Greek political events unraveled as yet another symptom of post-McCarthy depression. While the Greek dictatorship did not figure prominently among the investigative reportages in the *Review's* pages, it counted among the concerns preoccupying the left, which constellated around the decline of human rights, the repetitive history of violence and oppression, and the position of intellectuals *vis-à-vis* authority and injustice.

Key to the discursive reinforcement of the leftist campaign launched in the US in the name of anti-imperialism and the safeguarding of human rights were debates on the Greek dictatorship and on

Greek literary authors George Seferis and C. P. Cavafy, who were rendered emblematic of the struggle toward truth and justice in the shadow of the junta. The debates were framed initially in the *Review*'s lively "Letters" section—which was described by *The Washington Post* as "the closest thing the intellectual world has to bare-knuckle boxing" (Schudel 2006), publishing precise, direct, and polemical interventions that illuminated the particularities of the events taking place in Greece—and in think pieces that developed the bigger, progressively more critical picture. The antitotalitarian positioning of their authors was increasingly through time projected on humanitarian concerns, even before conclusive evidence on the torture practices employed by the colonels became widely available, and eventually occasioned inward reflection on American intellectualism and its own agenda in an era of Western imperialism.

Assessing responsibilities: Internal apathy versus American culpability

In a letter sent to the editors of the *New York Review of Books* on 12 October 1967, Minas Savvas, a scholar of Greek literature at the University of Santa Barbara, expressed outrage for the "Crime of Silence" committed against Greece.³ According to him, the *coup d'état* of 21 April 1967 had gone altogether unnoticed by the international intellectual community. Highlighting the irony that the cradle of democracy was being stripped of its democratic values—a twist bound to become a common *topos* in the emotional language employed to mobilize antijunta sentiments—Savvas observed the forgetfulness of American intellectuals, who despite inheriting the legacy of the "mother of Western culture" remained as passive onlookers to the outrageous censorship and imprisonment of Greek writers; according to him, in fact, the intellectual community had chosen to focus instead on more "politically and conveniently interesting" victims of similar practices in other countries (Savvas 1967).

The letter received immediate response from Robert Halsband, a scholar of English literature, who sought to clarify the position of PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) International in the light of Savvas's allegations. Halsband counteracted Savvas's claim by stating that the PEN Congress was "not guilty," for it had condemned the actions of the new regime in a unanimous resolution proposed in September 1967. Moreover, it had called upon the Greek Government "to release the writers Ritsos, Angeli, Demetriou, Frangopoulos and Glezos and many others imprisoned without trial on the islands of Yioura and Folegandros" (Halsband 1967). To drive his point home, Savvas proceeded to explain in a second letter that he was referring to grander gestures, in particular to the "most impressive list of 120 artists and writers" who had protested against the imprisonment of anticommunist writers in Russia with an open letter published in 1965 by the *Partisan Review* (Savvas 1968). As Savvas reiterated in this letter, sidestepping the Greek case in favor of less politically controversial cases epitomized the contradiction of the West's frequently expressed indebtedness to the great classical tradition and its indifference toward the country's modern condition.

Shortly after the publication of Savvas's original letter, the first in a number of think pieces on Greece appeared in the *Review*. However, this did not come as a despairing protest or an unequivocal indictment of the dictatorship. Rather, in his "Letter from Greece," Ronald Steel, who was a well-traveled, ideologically neutral diplomatic correspondent for the *Review* (also known for other so-called trouble spot think pieces such as "Letter from Havana" and "Letter from Oakland"), offered a cautious overview of the Greek dictatorship six months after the coup. Steel's piece accounted for the vice of the regime as much as it attempted to uncover its potential virtues in comparison to the old, corrupt "parliamentary game."

In his reportage, Steel spoke of a regime "obsessively worried about its image," "crude," "nasty," "ludicrous," and "occasionally comic"; he described the Colonels as "unsophisticated

provincials,” who adopted repressive measures incongruent with the democratic principles they purported to defend; and he mentioned the suspension of the freedom of speech, imprisonment of citizens on the basis of vague accusations, and elimination of every source of opposition. But even as he identified the military rule as a “plague,” Steel factored internal complicity as crucial to the regime’s survival. He observed the widespread inaction in the country, which he eventually attributed to the measures adopted by the Colonels to make the regime palatable to the public: plans to boost the economy with private investment and salary increases, as well as the promise to end the interminable struggle between right, left, and the king. A possible uprising, Steel suggested, was undermined by complacency. For the Greek population, the junta seemed to carry a promise to “put things in order.” “The majority of the Greek people,” he concluded, “are ready, perhaps too ready, to give the colonels the benefit of the doubt, and their acquiescence to military rule is in itself an indictment of the inadequacies of the parliamentary system it replaced” (Steel 1967).

Written at a crucial historical moment, this early account of the dictatorship sparked debate among intellectuals who found the US accountable for the endorsement and military support of the junta. Steel had alluded only in passing to the Cold War subtexts underpinning the encouragement of anticommunist dictatorships around the world, including Greece, despite the widespread protests against the Vietnam War, the most notorious in a series of interventionist military actions that the US took in its war against communism. This spirit of opposition against US foreign policy came to be reflected in the *Review*’s “Letters.” Provoked by Steel’s piece, Gerald Gutenschwager, a scholar of international development, joined the debate on Greece with a letter alerting the *Review*’s readers to politically irresponsible rhetoric. He criticized Steel both for implying that Greeks “brought it upon themselves” and for speculating on the junta’s ability to resolve corruption or bring about economic growth. According to Gutenschwager, the detrimental effects of the CIA’s covert manipulation of

Greek internal affairs, as well as the widespread terrorism that left Greeks unable to plot resistance movements, had been touched on too lightly by Steel (Gutenschwager 1968). Nora Plesofsky (1968) was similarly attentive to Steel's circumvention of condemnation; she argued in a letter of response that treating the Greek political climate from which the coup emerged as "a special case" obscured the Colonels' subscription to mainstream fascism.

In a think piece entitled "A Greek Tragedy" (1968), Philip Williams adopted a middle-ground position that considered both the ill-conceived internal political maneuvers of the right and the king that preceded the coup and the enabling climate created externally by US policies and the Allied Forces. Williams offered a balanced approach to the political developments in Greece that saw the junta as the culmination of subtle manifestations of both Greek and Western state oppression. His piece anticipated the conceptual shift after 1969, when international attention turned to news of the regime's censorship, political detentions, and torture practices. Increasingly thereafter, reactions to the dictatorship in Greece mirrored the unforgiving accounts of Western imperialism outlined by influential contributors to the *Review*, which pointed to the country's human rights violations and raised them as a matter of major concern for the American people and their government.

This ongoing debate on Greece through the *Review* made it a suitable alternative to other mainstream new sources for discussing the junta and its atrocities. In 1967, a few months after the colonels seized power in Greece, Amnesty International's Secretariat in London commissioned an investigation of the Greek government's announced amnesty for political prisoners. The report, authored by two attorneys and published on 27 January 1968, made mention of torture "as a widespread practice" that was employed "deliberately and officially" by the junta (Amnesty International 1968, 2). Despite listing 18 techniques of torture, however, the report provided insufficient substantiation for its claims, which rendered it vulnerable to skepticism and even

accusations of propaganda (Keys 2012, 206). The incredulity the report inspired among sectors of conservative readers and junta sympathizers—as well as the Greek government’s consistent attempt to undermine its findings—did not deter the *Review* from publishing a letter authored by members of Amnesty International, which made claim to human rights’ violations and to “the unspeakable treatment of political prisoners by the present Greek government” (Morris et al. 1969). The Amnesty letter, written as a protest against the publication of a 16-page supplement promoting tourism in Greece published by *The New York Times* on 23 February 1969 (Figures 1–2), drew attention to the “shoals of prisoners . . . held without charges or trial of any kind, merely on suspicion of being opposed to the military regime in power, and where the conditions are so appalling that many men and women have gone insane from suffering” (Morris et al. 1969). The *Times* had declined to publish the intervention, leading the Amnesty members to draw a historical parallel in the *Review*’s pages as a means of highlighting the newspaper’s unsavory editorial practice: “Would *The New York Times* have printed similar Sunday supplements in the late Thirties extolling the beauty of sunny Bavaria?” (Morris et al. 1969).

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Figure 1a The opening page of the New York Times supplement “International Travel 1969” featuring tribute to Greece, published on Sunday, 23 February 1969. *Source: New York Times 1969.*

Figure 1b The supplement’s section “Greece: the Coming Country” was reproduced in the Amnesty’s protest letter (Morris et.al 1969), which appeared under the same title. *Source: New York Times 1969.*

The *Times*’ decision to proceed with the promotional supplement—despite widespread awareness of “the bestialities being committed in the prisons and concentration camps of Greece” (Morris et al. 1969)—provided further ammunition to those preaching against the West’s indifference

to the situation in Greece. And while the *Review*'s response could have reasonably been considered biased at the time in the context of the journal's left-wing sympathies, a resolution of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 15 April 1970 to make public the Amnesty International Report of the Human Rights Commission on the Greek Case validated Amnesty's allegations of torture taking place in Greek prisons through a rigorous and evidence-based report. The report, which had first been leaked in December 1969, found the Greek government guilty of violating most of the basic articles of the European Human Rights Convention, even though compliance was a condition of the country's membership in the Council of Europe (Becket 1970a, 1970b). According to Marios Evriviades, Greece posed a unique challenge for the Council, as it was the first time that a member was functioning under a state of siege, where "human rights were violated as an 'administrative practice' and on massive scale' (Evriviades 1977, 827, which is a review of Conostas 1976). The junta refused to adjust its methods to the standards of the commission, eventually avoiding enforced expulsion only by its voluntary withdrawal from the Council in 1969. Yet Greece remained part of NATO, a membership which, according to Evriviades, raised questions about the Council's power to control the internal behavior of member states and to effect change.

Supported by both the Amnesty's and the European Commission of Human Rights' reports, the *Review* proceeded to publish firsthand testimonies by those directly affected by the regime. This editorial direction was in keeping with the escalation of human rights' concerns during the 1970s, in which context "tales of torture . . . became a nascent liberal human rights coalition's most effective tool in mobilizing public opposition to the Greek junta and, more broadly, in U.S. strategies for fighting the Cold War" (Keys 2012, 202). In 1970, a piece authored under the pseudonym "Y" was translated from Greek to figure under the title "Greece: Cultural Freedom in the Gangster State." The piece described the junta as "a police state supported, not to say enforced, by a world alliance of free

and not-so-free nations,” demonstrating through concrete examples that widespread terrorism and the primitive suppression of civil liberties were an integral part of the paralysis experienced by the Greek people (Y 1970). Y established a direct correlation between a state of enforced silence, desperation, and fear and the country’s faltering cultural life. “After liberty and hope there is little left to lose,” Y grimly observed, noting the trickle-down effect that the death of Greek cultural production, unrelenting press censorship, and constant surveillance had on the educational curriculum and, by extension, on younger generations. In a letter written in response, another contributor signing his text as “Z” confirmed that Y described “very well the agonies, the anxieties, and the desperation of artists and poets of Greece under the whip of the colonels” and offered “a good picture of the present political and cultural climate under the American-made aegis of the fascist minions.” However, Z sought to draw further attention to the historical reasons leading to the “genesis of the *Putsch*,” namely, the polarization created in the Greek political scene by Cold War politics and by the West’s anticommunism. Demonstrating first that the NATO-cultivated systemic hostility toward left-wing and even liberal movements and ideas had nourished the coup, Z then predicted that “any attempt of the State Department—or rather the Pentagon through the CIA—to patch up the political differences and create a pseudo-democratic, palliative solution with a royal crown on top of it . . . is doomed to fail (Z 1970).

That same year, the *Review* published yet another letter by Alexander Panaghoulis, a young Greek who three years earlier had attempted to assassinate the dictator George Papadopoulos in order “to free [his] country from tyranny.” This letter had been smuggled out of prison and forwarded to the journal’s editors:

<NOTE TO COMP: PLEASE FORMAT AS A LETTER>

July, 1970

I invite the American senators who in a recent visit in South Vietnam saw and had the sincerity to make public the Tiger Cage Prisons of the Saigon Government, to visit me in the Army Prison in Boyiati.

Their reward, a new experience on the methods of Fascism in Greece. Perhaps then the humane feelings of their government will be moved so that with the arms that it is sending to the Fascist Junta it will send a cage for me. A healthier cage from the one the junta offers.

I am waiting for them.

Alexander B. Panaghoulis (Panaghoulis and Pappas 1970)

The letter appeared under the title “Vietnamizing Greeks,” its wording openly framing the Greek junta beyond local sociohistorical particularities and as part of a series of infamous American agendas of foreign intervention. Disillusioned accounts of internal responsibility and a state of apathy gradually gave way to approaches openly challenging the West’s interventions, with think pieces critical of US imperialist aggressions corroborating the immediacy of letters portraying Greeks as caught in the web of a larger power game (Arendt 1968; Forrest 1970). The fact that some of the letter writers chose not to disclose their identity pointed to the intimidation strategies employed by the regime, heightening awareness of Greece’s plight and alerting readers to the extent to which freedom of speech was being suspended in the country. While the government’s efforts to eradicate opposition to the regime through censorship, imprisonment, and exile were not unprecedented, firsthand accounts by Greek witnesses served as an additional reminder of the silencing of Greek intellectuals in

contrast to the West's comparative freedom to speak out against repressive, tyrannical measures. The *Review*'s contributors had already been turning this contrast between enforced silence under authoritarian rule and vocalization within the dissenting discursive space of the *Review* toward themselves and the privilege they enjoyed as part of the West: besides using think pieces to expose the West's complicity, they were now reflecting upon the connotations this complicity carried in terms of the responsibility of Western intellectuals, including their own.

The Review as "Republic of Letters"

The year of the Greek coup had coincided with the major contribution of Noam Chomsky, Professor of Linguistics at MIT, to the public debate on US foreign policy. Published in 1967 by the *Review*, Chomsky's "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" (Figure 3) led to the publication of his influential book *American Power and the New Mandarins* (1969) and shaped the discursive environment of the American dissent movement. In his essay, Chomsky argued that due to the privilege intellectuals enjoyed in the Western world, they had a share in the responsibility for atrocities committed in the twentieth century. While unconstrained political power, exploitation, and "disregard for the lower orders" was not new, Chomsky observed, the disinterest exhibited by intellectuals in unveiling truths, in questioning motives, and in uncovering deceit had become increasingly concerning since the beginning of the Vietnam War (Chomsky 1967). Chomsky explained how scientific methods and technical expertise were employed to annihilate ideas conducive to "the radical transformation of society" by a certain fraction of liberal intellectuals who were ready to override human rights in favor of case-by-case analyses and appeals to rationalizations and pragmatism. These appeals, he argued,

backed up the US Government's unethical policy "in Vietnam, and in the many Vietnams that inevitably lie" (Chomsky 1967).

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Figure 2: The cover of *The New York Review of Books*' 23rd February 1969 issue, featuring Noam Chomsky's "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" as a Special Supplement. *Source*: Chomsky 1969.

Chomsky's generalization of Vietnam as a destructive variety of overlooked overseas US actions that extended beyond the widely acknowledged ramifications of the war echoed the title under which Panagoulis's letter—"Vietnamizing Greeks"—was published. It thus prefigured Greece's newly instituted regime as yet another manifestation of criminal engagement on the part of intellectuals. Indeed, when Chomsky revisited the ways in which the liberal intelligentsia had been actively creating justifications for oppression in his later essay "Foreign Policy and the Intelligentsia" (1978), Greece figured prominently in the essay's epigraph: a quote by Philip Rahv, drawn from his think piece "Left Face," published in the *Review* on the year of the Greek coup (1967). Chomsky and Rahv were aligned in arguing that corporate investment and commercial colonization propelled America's foreign policy. They also both held the elite intelligentsia accountable for obscuring the government's vested interests by propagating a fictional narrative of America's attachment to a set of principles and ideals—such as democracy, good will, freedom, and justice—in accordance with which crimes against humanity could be conceptualized as benign "errors." In the same vein, Rahv's "Left Face" was severely critical of those denying the link between America's "domestic structures" and the country's foreign policy (Rahv 1967), while the short extract Chomsky selected for quotation consisted of the critic's cutting observation of this denial's outcome: to misguide US citizens into believing that their nation's "repeated interventions"—in the form of the "brutal assault of the Vietnamese people" and "the abolition of democracy in Greece by a few crummy colonels wholly

dependent on American arms and loans”—were “mere accidents or mistakes perhaps” (Rahv 1967, quoted in Chomsky 1978, 1). The epigraph, with its focus on the Greek case, set the scene for Chomsky to rebuke intellectuals for shifting the onus of American aggression to its victims and for fostering apathy toward the United States’ blatant disregard for human rights (Chomsky 1978, 36, 37). Even as events taking place in Greece did not dominate in their own right the debates sparked by Chomsky’s “Responsibility of Intellectuals,” this retrospective inclusion suggested their value as a prime example in a continuum of American interference. From this point of view, they were instrumental to the case that Chomsky was making for the moral imperative tethered to the intellectual vocation.

Another think piece, which became notorious for creating upheaval among its presumed targets, was Jason Epstein’s “The CIA and the Intellectuals.” The piece fortified Chomsky’s denunciation of intellectuals’ collusion by identifying the split between the right and the left in terms of intellectuals’ relative willingness to give license to America’s poisonous “philistine expansionism.” Epstein noted that whereas for the left the fact that “the United States should try to impose its national obsessions on the rest of the world seemed positively sinister,” right-wing academics and journalists served the interests of American Cold War policies and worked to extend American power by receiving CIA-backed funding and grants—in the context of relationships with governmental agencies that resembled those of employer-employee (Epstein 1967).

Widening the already deeply divisive rift between two factions of the New York intelligentsia, Epstein spoke of a left that acknowledged the apparent “darkness of the moment” and a right which, on the contrary, continued to rationalize the irrational, thus serving the establishment’s interests and upholding profit on the back of shameless exploitation. The *Review* was implicitly grouped by Epstein within the former category. A founder of the *Review*, as well as a contributor and member of its

editorial board, Epstein had high stakes in determining the journal's cultural and political identity. His criticism of those working under the controlling aegis of state or privately funded institutions therefore highlighted by contrast his own intellectual independence as a key representative of a journal that was sustained through sales and charitable donations, free from the ideological manipulation of benefactors.

Since the troubled days of the 1960s, when the *Review* community immersed itself in questions about the past, present, and future of intellectual thought, prominent thinkers of culture and modernity have consistently deliberated the place of intellectuals within their contemporary social and political environments. In 1989, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for example, stated the need to “encourage and promote a reasoned and effective intervention by intellectuals in political life” (Bourdieu 1991, 656) at a time when technocrats were “arrogating themselves ‘intellectual’ authority in order to exercise political power” (657). The ideal intellectual, according to Bourdieu, should be an outsider to systems of power and influence, who at the same time transfuses expertise into meaningful intervention.

Similarly, Edward Said foregrounded the idea of intellectual independence from “governments or corporations” by envisioning in his Reith Lectures an ideal intellectual striving “to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (Said 1994, 11). However, from the perspective of a theorist of global cultural markets and intellectual networks, Bourdieu insisted on a collective preservation of the integrity of the intellectual field, rather than of intellectuals' own thought, against the State and the corrosive infiltration of sponsors or patrons. To this end, he urged the formation of a community of intellectuals committed to defending “the republic of artists, writers, and scientists” with a shared and globally constituted interest “in reason, in disinterestedness, in truth” (661). If Bourdieu's and Said's proposed formulas to resolve the perennial problem of intellectualism versus engaged politics were projected on a future, still unrealized setting, the historian

Timothy Garton Ash assumed the opposite course. In 2013, he looked back in history to find a global alliance—uncannily similar to the one proposed by Bourdieu as an antidote to intellectual dependency and servility to financial institutions during the 1980s—in the *Review*’s ideologically committed cohort. Offering a retrospective overview of the journal’s history on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, Garton Ash saw “a contemporary equivalent of the Enlightenment’s ‘republic of letters’” taking shape in the *Review*’s archive. Often strangers to each other, the members of this republic shared more similarities than differences: they were “writer-rebels and rebel-writers from East and West,” concerned with “human rights” and aligned with “a persistent, stubborn strain of criticizing US policy, at home and abroad, whenever it falls short of the high ideals proclaimed in this country’s own Constitution and by its own leaders” (Garton Ash 2013). By calling to his readers to “think of the *Review* as a lighthouse at the center of the Western world,” Garton Ash drew attention precisely to the way a journal of North American credentials had extended its influence transnationally, reaching writers and readers who shared “the basic values of this modernized version of the Enlightenment.” Garton Ash prefaced his analysis of the unique antiauthoritarian identity of the *Review* with an incident that informed his first contribution to the journal:

It was a bright cold day in 1984 and a conservative American friend was berating me about my article in *The New York Review*. How dare I even think of comparing US policy in Central America with Soviet policy in Central Europe? What kind of whining Chomskyesque relativist had I become? We were just beginning a long car journey. I was his prisoner. On and on went the interrogation. (Garton Ash 2013)

The think piece did in fact resemble a defense of “Chomskyesque relativism,” with Garton Ash expressing his appreciation for a community of thinkers united by dissident proclivities and aligned with the radical intellectual activity longed for by Chomsky in “The Responsibility of Intellectuals.” The *Review*’s accomplishment, in Garton Ash’s estimation, seemed to be precisely the enactment of its polemical view on the intellectual’s duty to focus on truth and to oppose practices that engendered obedience to the deceitful aspects of the status quo. Taking Garton Ash’s suggestion on board would suggest that the *Review*’s presentation of the rise of tyranny in Greece as a direct consequence of the demise of democratic principles in the US did not merely serve informative purposes. Rather, it constituted part of the very fabric of the journal’s intellectual mission to unveil an economy of violence and to present facets of political realities—both internal and external—that were not visible to the naked eye.

George Seferis and C.P. Cavafy as emblems of dissent

The *Review*’s prioritization of the voice of the public intellectual in a variety of configurations—the rebel-thinker, the journalist-philosopher, or the activist-scholar—was at the heart of a cultural outlet that integrated political polemics into book reviewing. It was therefore in keeping with the *Review*’s overall style and content that reflections on the Greek dictatorship and its relevance to universal predicaments were channeled during the same period into the consecration of particular Greek literary figures, singled out in its pages as voices of authentic experience, mediators of timeless lessons-to-be-learned, and elucidators of political tragedies. Seminal among them were George Seferis, the Nobel prize-winning poet and diplomat, and the Alexandrian poet C.P. Cavafy, dead since 1933 but with a long history of Anglophone appreciation threaded into his

literary reputation. The *Review*'s contributors trained their spotlight on these two Greek poets in ways that rendered them emblematic of the struggle toward truth and justice under the shadow of the junta.

As critiques of the silencing of intellectuals and of the compromised positions of those funded by governmental institutions proliferated, profiles of artists who resisted authority, signed petitions, and participated in interventions enjoyed greater visibility. The anonymous Y had underlined the internal importance of those either brave or geographically distant enough to vocalize the regressive state of Greece's cultural life and educational system, as well as the erasure of hope rooted in practices of censorship, punishment, and intimidation: "Others will take courage from their statements and from the many protests they have signed at considerable personal risk, just as they themselves took courage from the lone voice of their Nobel Prize winner George Seferis when he spoke out in March last year" (Y 1970). Seferis spoke, it seemed, on behalf of many when his famous antijunta declaration was broadcasted by BBC World in 1969, reaching an international audience:

For months now I have felt, inside me and around me, with increasing intensity, the obligation to speak out about our current situation The longer the anomaly remains, the more the evil grows. I am a man without any political affiliation, and I can therefore speak without fear or passion. I see ahead of me the precipice toward which the oppression that has shrouded the country is leading us. This anomaly must stop. It is a national imperative. (Seferis [1969] 1996–1997, 591)

Seferis's public protest was not only a source of increased morale for those directly affected by the regime but also an international reminder of the state of affairs in the country. When Seferis's poems

were set to music by Mikis Theodorakis—a legendary left-wing composer who had been in prison and under heavy guard for almost three years, his music forbidden and his records destroyed—Seferis came to epitomize the dissident intellectual working under the threat of the regime.

Having already acquired symbolic status as a resistance figure, Seferis contributed a year later to the volume *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα* (Eighteen texts; Seferis et al. 1970), an anthology of antidictatorship writings by Greek poets, prose writers, and scholars. Furthermore, his name was the first to appear in a long list of intellectuals of varied ideological affiliations who signed an antijunta proclamation, circulated in Athens on the 150th anniversary of the Greek War of Independence. This was subsequently published by the *Review* in translation (Seferis et al. 1971). Seferis's role as the mouthpiece of a dissenting outlook on the political situation in Greece became further entrenched, evoking the support of sympathizers, who upon the poet's death created a public plea, written in the form of an obituary, for financial support of political prisoners and their families. The obituary was signed by, among others, Stephen Spender, Isaiah Berlin, Iris Murdoch, and William Plomer and was published by the *Review*; it spoke of Seferis's legacy as a "great poet and great humanist," whose "poetry was imbued with ideals of freedom and justice"; it also referred to his personal life as "clouded by the treatment which the present Greek regime has visited upon so many Greek citizens" and by the "depth of his grief and shame at what was happening in his country" (Berlin et al. 1971).

Seferis's funeral in Greece is to the present day remembered as a moment of public resistance against the junta; it was attended by masses of people singing «Άρνηση» (Denial), one of Seferis's poems set to music by Theodorakis: «Πάνω στην άμμο την ξανθή / γράψαμε τ' όνομά της / ωραία που φύσηξεν ο μπάτης / και σβήστηκε η γραφή» (On the gold sand / we wrote her name; / but the sea-breeze blew / and the writing vanished; Seferis 1995). Published years before the coup in the collection *Στροφή* (Turning point; Seferis 1931), the poem featured an elusive female figure, who was

now reimagined as the incarnation of liberty that had been eliminated by the tyrannical regime. Not only did the plea intend to communicate the symbolic importance of Seferis's funeral, but it also reminded an international audience of the *Review*'s refusal to overlook events taking place in a faraway country.

Nor was it the first time that a number of the plea's signatories intervened in matters of politics. The Sussex University lecturer Peter Calvocoressi had already sent a letter to the journal a year earlier in response to a think piece about Greece, where he castigated US policy with respect to the Greek dictatorship (Calvocoressi 1970). A decade earlier, in 1959, Iris Murdoch, Stephen Spender, and Isaiah Berlin had written to the *London Times* to condemn the state control that set into motion obscenity charges against Vladimir Nobokov's novel *Lolita* (De Grazia 1992, 268). The recurring participation of these recognizable personalities of the arts and letters in initiatives that straddled the arenas of the literary, the legal, and the political now enveloped Greek politics, exemplifying the ways in which a blurring of boundaries between the aesthetic and the ideological was set into motion by the *Review*.

Evidence suggests that Seferis's statement was less spontaneous than was implied by the publicity generated in its name. Listed as an enemy of the Colonels' so-called revolution and denied the renewal of his passport as honorary diplomat, Seferis initially was still hesitant to speak out against the regime. Yet he was reportedly deeply upset after a short stay in the US in December 1968, when the audience at a university talk reproached him for his reluctance. Soon after, Seferis delivered his statement for the BBC.⁴

If the *Review* eagerly contributed to the inflation of the heroic undertones of Seferis's gesture, this served the journal's own aims, as well. The appropriation of Seferis's creative achievement and emblematic status—as a celebrated Modern Greek writer who employed the visibility granted to him

through prestigious international awards and influential connections to make the political “anomaly” (Seferis [1969] 1996–1997, 591) governing his country known to the rest of the world—was valuable in furthering the *Review*’s ambitions in terms of expansive intellectual impact; such a strategy succeeded in imprinting the journal’s opposition to the dictatorship upon the signature of a much revered insider.

The idea of Seferis as an insider to the Greek scene was reinforced by the poet’s decision to remain in the country rather than to find refuge in a place free from the restrictions imposed by the junta. However, it was routine for contributors to the *Review*—many of whom were political exiles themselves—to also figure separation and distance as an empowering position from which to negotiate traumatic events. It was on those grounds that twentieth-century writers and intellectuals seeking poetic expressions on the margins, outside national centers, and beyond patriotic attachments, gravitated toward the Greek Alexandrian poet C.P. Cavafy, who occupied a diasporic position of neither total immersion in nor complete distance from the realities of Greece. As early as 1960, W.H. Auden (who left England and moved to America under the threat of World War II) was writing of the challenge that Cavafy’s poetry posed to fixed ideas of belonging and identity. Cavafy’s poetry was the product of the early twentieth century, yet it was considered topical by Auden in the early 1960s for how it alerted the reader to the disingenuous aspects of patriotism and to nations’ abuse of power, at a time when “the future [was] uncertain enough to make this a real question for . . . all” (Auden 1961, xxi). As a literary authority symbolic of the crossroads between European heritage and the new opportunities offered by the American cultural bloom, Auden was pivotal in generating interest in Cavafy’s poetic relevance, which ultimately flourished following the publication of two essays on Cavafy by Joseph Brodsky and Stephen Spender in the *Review*. Both Brodsky and Spender, who were active during the years of Auden’s immense popularity—what Aidan Wasley terms “The Age of

Auden”—approached Cavafy in ways similar to how Auden himself was viewed by many authors of his generation: as a “totem of thinking dissent” (Wasley 2010, 17). For both authors, Cavafy’s poetics became a plane on which to project ideas about exile, humanism, and subjectivity, rendering the poet himself an embodiment of a countercanonical, antiestablishment position.

If the value of Cavafy’s unconventional rhetoric rested, according to the British author E.M. Forster, upon emphasizing the need for a variety of human types, the Auden generation reviewed this quality from a historical point at which ideas radically challenging the status quo were systematically cultivated. Before moving to the US, Spender—an initiator of the plea in Seferis’s name—had been immersed in the intellectual circles of London and, more specifically, of the Bloomsbury group. Similarly to Forster and Auden, who preceded him, he wrote in the *Review* in 1972 of Cavafy’s masterful poetic handling of the unheroic character.⁵ He recommended Cavafy’s work to the reader for its quality to remain “far from the world of empire, Caesars, principalities, and powers” (Spender 1972), recalling Forster’s view of the poet as a proponent of liberal ideas of tolerance and inclusivity, while also maintaining an open dialogue with Auden’s outlook on Cavafy as an instructive voice from the past, whose poetics unsettled the repetitive histories of systemic violence. Spender’s remark that Cavafy’s “main concern is with those who didn’t go out on the tide, or who were left behind, or swept back by it” (1972) underlined the importance of a poetic worldview that explored the positions of the least powerful. In this way, he read contemporary relevance in Cavafy’s interest in marginalized human types and in his evasion of mainstream poetic themes.

A devoted Auden aficionado and political exile from Russia, the Nobel-winning poet Joseph Brodsky partly attributed Cavafy’s measured detachment from dominant poetic tropes to his residence in Alexandria. Brodsky viewed the poet’s decision to remain in the city as the outcome of his “distaste for mythologizing,” suggesting that Cavafy’s use of memory, as well as his excursions into the past

and his “fragmentary” life—a product and a “reflection” of a cosmopolitan space—exemplified a conversion of dislocation into literary achievement (Brodsky 1977). While Cavafy was not, strictly speaking, a writer in exile, there were striking similarities between Brodsky’s presentation of the exiled writer and the way he perceived Cavafy’s cultural alienation.⁶ For Brodsky, avoiding subservience to emotional extremes was part of the “humanistic function” and “value” of exiled writers: only by profiting from exile’s detachment would they be able to convert a term “famous for its pain” into an enabling condition that could serve as “a warning to any thinking man toying with the idea of an ideal society” (Brodsky 1988). Fully aware of the pitfalls of excessive sentimentality and fixed ideas about belonging, Cavafy secured that his evasions of the “literal” city in favor of the “sensual” one were “neither an escape from reality nor a sublimation of it” (Brodsky 1977). Treading a similar path to Spender, Brodsky regarded Cavafy as first and foremost “a poet of contemplation” (1977), who introduced the possibility of critical reflection upon history and society from a distance incompatible with personal investment in causes. Brodsky’s interest in the nuances of Cavafy’s positionality, together with the way this was translated in his poetry, was a manifestation of his belief in the author’s low profile as a means of circumventing overstated narratives. He considered the “neutrality of tone” indispensable to the artist’s “anti-heroic posture”—what he termed “the *idée fixe* of [his] generation” (Brodsky [1983] 1986, 367). His appreciation of Cavafy’s work can therefore be perceived in terms of a conscious preference for antisystemic, independent art that also conditioned his admiration for “modern poets . . . —Auden, Hardy, Frost— . . . coming out of a tradition of classic English liberalism, in which the highest value is placed not on myth, system, theology, or ideology, but on the individual, on the intrinsic value and truth of human subjectivity” (Wadsworth 2008, 468).

The endorsement of Greek authors by an overseas ideological alliance of highly acclaimed intellectuals—whose views on nationality, belonging, and art had taken shape during periods of rapid

societal transformation—transferred their peripheral reputations to the New York cultural scene, redefining them in accordance with its prevailing concerns.⁷ The fact that a journal hosting a community of intellectuals attuned to progressive ideas and eager to draw attention to the failings of the powerful was routinely preoccupied during the years of the junta with the subversion of ideas of heroism, as well as with a quest for art that would succeed in undermining nationalism, therefore conditioned the growing popularity of both Seferis and Cavafy within the United States. The benefits were mutual, of course, since the off-the-beaten-track voices of these two authors added weight to the *Review*'s aspirations to be a globally reaching beacon of Western intellectualism. The aspects of Cavafy's work most pertinent to the struggle against totalitarian ideas and the symbolic importance of Seferis's public antijunta BBC statement were, on the one hand, discursively reinforced by the cumulative cultural and political efforts of the *Review*'s left-leaning thinkers; on the other, they also served to consolidate and diversify the *Review*'s overall critical stance toward inequality and the abuse of power.

Questions of hypocrisy

Even for the most well-meaning reader, the question of hypocrisy still lurks behind every ceremonious gesture, signed petition, or statement of condemnation announced in support of freedom, whether in Greece or elsewhere around the world. This sentiment was outlined by George Steiner, then a Fellow at the New York University Schweitzer Program, who reproached Chomsky for vague dealings with the real actions envisioned for intellectuals in "The Responsibility of Intellectuals":

You *rightly* say that we are all responsible; you rightly hint that our future status may be no better than that of the acquiescent intellectual under Nazism. But what *action* do you urge or even suggest? Will Noam Chomsky announce that he will stop teaching at MIT or anywhere in this country so long as torture and napalm go on? . . . The intellectual *is* responsible. What then shall he do? I do not ask in order to make a debater's point. But in deep personal perplexity. . . . Does your essay not stop almost at the point where it ought to begin? (Steiner 1967)

Steiner's letter demonstrates the ways in which charges of hypocrisy cut both ways: editors of competing magazines had long condemned the *Review's* anti-American sentiments, aired from the comfort of academic appointments, for exhibiting dangerous leniency toward militant communism and its violent methods. Meanwhile, the *Review's* contributors, among whom Chomsky figured centrally, spoke of unrealistic, romanticized, and effectively detrimental attachments to American values, in whose name moral values, as well as a duty to keep the imperialistic tendencies of US foreign policy in check, had been sacrificed. The Greek case and the question of the provision of military aid was pertinent to this conflict: it arguably threw into relief the undemocratic undertones of the United States' anticommunist agenda, therefore fortifying Chomsky's—and by extension, the *Review's*—standpoint regarding the vested interests underpinning the American military market.

Still, Garton Ash's celebration of the *Review* as a republic of letters was perhaps overly optimistic in delineating the fruition of an intellectual utopia, especially given the cultural conservatism suggested by the limited presence of women, black authors, and young intellectuals in the journal's pages (Nobile 1974, 277). A similar impasse had haunted the Bloomsbury group, which was often reproached for elitism, lofty disengagement, and intellectual snobbery despite its liberal

ideas. Spender, a regular contributor to the *Review* and champion of Seferis and Cavafy, measured his own ideological affiliations in America against this group when he wrote that his generation had finally “proclaimed that bourgeois civilization has come to an end.” If the old Bloomsbury saw his own generation as “barbarous,” Spender argued, that was due to the fact that they were “unwilling to sacrifice their independence to the cause of the working class struggle” (Spender 1995, 392–395). Ironically, it was Spender’s view of himself as a benevolent upholder of the proletariat’s interests that led critics to point at him as an example of haphazard politics and contradictory affiliations. In 1967, he was forced to resign from the editorial board of the *Encounter*, the literary magazine he had founded in 1953, following the revelation that the publication was receiving covert funding by the CIA.

The institutionalized hypocrisy with which Spender’s name has been indelibly marked (Hamilton 1994) recalls Epstein’s (1967) discrediting of even the most liberal, prodemocratic views, when they were voiced under the patronizing aegis of the CIA. The Greek junta was caught in the crossfire of these disputes of intellectual legitimacy, tethered as they were to the tensions of the American cultural field and the urgency of the historical moment. In 1976, two years after the fall of the junta, Henry Steele Commager composed a review of the US Government’s *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* for the *Review*, in which he argued that the overseas criminal activities of intelligence services routinely posed a threat to the US Constitution; the fact that “the issue of legality never arose” was “another example of the banality of evil” (Steele Commager 1976). Going on to list the ways in which the people were kept in the dark with respect to intelligence activities, he equated the process with a complete disregard for democratic principles. He also counted America’s “ill-considered interventions in the internal affairs of Greece” as one of the core reasons for “the alienation of much of world

opinion” toward the US (Steele Commager 1976).

However, Steele Commager also noted that despite these failures, the *Review*, among a few other journals, consistently sought “to focus public interest on issues of principle” (1976). Indeed, with the publication of anonymous letters, the celebration of authors stifled by the Greek junta, and the immersion of Greek politics and literature in an arena committed to exposing exploitative global politics, the journal was a major channel for political and literary discussions moving in the direction of resistance. The think piece was at the heart of this endeavor; it offered the journal’s contributors a nonformulaic, nonprescriptive medium from which to contemplate timely and relevant events, thus establishing the outward-looking ethos that Garton Ash extolled for its exemplary dissemination of Enlightenment-inspired ideas and values.

Despite the varied levels of moderation applied by the *Review*’s writers—who were not all necessarily aligned with Chomsky in their resolve to castigate American intervention, doing so only insofar as Greek responsibility and internal corruption were also acknowledged—the journal was instrumental in forging the link between the Greek *coup d’état* and debates on the detrimental effects of opportunistic Western agendas. In this respect, even if the *Review*’s written archive and its elite cohort were bound by their own limitations, they still succeeded in decisively framing the crisis in Greece within its global humanitarian relevance. By extending from the specific to the universal, and from the local to the transnational, the *Review* consistently provided an outspoken cultural forum that enabled a collective of thinkers if not to change drastically the course of history, at least to challenge what may have otherwise been taken for granted.

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NOTES

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¹ The title of this essay is an allusion to the wording employed by Timothy Garton Ash in his essay “From the Lighthouse: The World and the *NYR* After Fifty Years” (2013).

² The think piece should be distinguished from so-called new journalism, a blend of fact and fiction prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, which has been criticized by writers in the *Review* for abuse of poetic license to the point of inaccuracy and confusion. The style of new journalism was commonplace in American magazines (notably, *The New Yorker*) and included writers such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Dwight McDonald, Hunter S. Thompson, and Norman Mailer. The term was attributed its current meaning after the publication of a volume of collected writings edited by Tom Wolfe (1973). The most polemical reaction to the genre was expressed by Dwight McDonald, published in two consecutive issues of the *Review* (1965 and 1966), in which the critic labeled new journalism’s imaginative rewriting of factual information “parajournalism.”

³ All essays published in *The New York Review of Books* are sourced from the digital archive through subscription and therefore do not feature page numbers (scroll-down format). The journal will be abbreviated as *NYRB* in citations and as *Review* in the main text. Accessed 2 May 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/>.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the sociopolitical context of Seferis's BBC proclamation, see Roderick Beaton's (2003) biography of the poet.

⁵ The idea that the author is responsible for debunking myths of racial supremacy, as well as for exposing the dark side of a supposedly virtuous concept of identification with one's country, can also be traced back to E.M. Forster's view of Cavafy's poetic value in terms of his disinterest in the celebration of great causes and great men, whom Forster held accountable for the violent and destructive forces of war. Forster believed that "hero worship is a dangerous vice" (Forster [1938] 1972, 69) and celebrated Cavafy's alternative outlook, emphasizing the poet's reaction against stereotypical greatness—"the tyranny of classicism" (Forster [1919] 1983, 16)—and praising his interest in "little men" (Forster [1951] 1983, 41).

⁶ Joseph Brodsky's views on the condition of exile as an empowering position from which to effect change was published by the *NYRB* (1988). For further comparisons drawn between the exilic condition and the existential predicament of the intellectual, see Said 1993.

⁷ Another Greek author who gained visibility during the junta was Vassilis Vassilikos, whose letter to his editor from prison (written under the pretext of a financial agreement) was translated by the American poet James Merrill for the *Review* (1970). Merrill also published an essay on Cavafy (1975), as well as number of poems *à la manière de* (for example "After Cavafy," published by the *Review* in 1994). Minas Savvas, one of the first to write a letter to the *Review* on the responsibility of the international intellectual community to speak out against the junta, also translated the left-wing poet Yannis Ritsos's poetry for the *Review* (1973).

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