



# A Partisan View: Five Decades in the Politics of Literature

*William Phillips*

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Since its founding in 1937, *Partisan Review* has been one of the most important and culturally influential journals in America. Under the legendary editorship of William Phillips and Philip Rahv, *Partisan Review* began as a publication of the John Reed Club, but soon broke away to establish itself as a free voice of critical dissent. As such, it counteracted the inroads of cultural Stalinism and took up the fight for aesthetic modernism at a time when the latter was fiercely contested by both the political left and the right. In *A Partisan View*, William Phillips gives a vivid account of his own part in the magazine's eventful history.

As the magazine's current editor, Edith Kurzweil, notes in her new introduction, many of the literary and political disagreements that famously marked *Partisan Review*'s history originated in the editors' initial adherence to a program of radical politics and avant-gardism. Although this proved increasingly unworkable, Phillips and Rahv, even from the outset, never allowed sectarian narrowness to determine the magazine's contents. Over the decades, *Partisan Review* published work by authors as far from radicalism as T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens or from Marxist orthodoxy as Albert Camus and George Orwell. In literature, its contributors were as stylistically and intellectually varied as Saul Bellow, Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Lowell and Isaac Bashevis Singer. In short, *Partisan Review* featured the best fiction, poetry, and essays of the 1940s and postwar decades. Beyond its literary preeminence, *Partisan Review* was famed as the most representative journal of the New York Intellectuals.

Much of the quality of *Partisan Review* came from Phillips own broad culture, cosmopolitanism, and intellectual tolerance. As Edith Kurzweil writes, "he kept trying to find a category of criticism' that might enable us all to better come to grips with the complexities of our ever-changing world." Now in paperback, *A Partisan View* will be of keen interest to intellectual historians as well as literary scholars.

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