Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

In the autumn of 1952 all anyone in literary circles in Paris wanted to talk about was the public feud between Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. It had been occasioned by Camus's publication the previous autumn of *The Rebel* (*L'Homme revolté*), a philosophic anti-Communist manifesto and by Sartre's savage reply in the pages of *Les Temps modernes* and his unequivocally pro-Communist manifesto, *The Communists and the Peace*. Most of the arcane literary quarrels of the Rue St. Germain have a shelf life of weeks or months but this one had legs and 50 years on is still commanding attention. Of course the protagonists were arguably the two most prominent Parisian left-wing intellectuals of the period, both destined for Nobel laureates. But on Aronson's account what explains the durability of the dispute is the debilitating impact on the Western left of the Cold War. As he notes, "[a]fter their split a dispiriting 'either/or' would prevail on the left: supporting revolutionary movements and governments meant agreeing to ride roughshod over freedom; defending freedom meant opposing the only significant project challenging capitalism. In a deep sense, we are talking about the left's defeat in the twentieth century, its splintering of hope" (5).

In fact, though, as this book makes clear, there is rather more to the context of this particular quarrel than the Cold War; equally important were the hopes and disappointments of the French "resistance generation" and the corrosive divisions provoked by the Algerian war. Both Sartre and Camus walked the stage of liberated France as representatives of the much-adored Resistance. In truth the contribution of Camus to the Resistance, while real, was modest, and that of Sartre more modest still (a fact that neither man disputed). Indeed both men had a "good occupation", one in which their literary careers, unlike those of many of their Resistance contemporaries, took off. Nonetheless, by 1945 Camus edited the most important left-wing newspaper that emerged from the Resistance, *Combat*, and Sartre the most prominent journal, *Les Temps modernes*. The two of them, friends since 1943, took as their project the creation of a newer, more progressive post-war France, free to be sure of all residues of Vichy, but shorn as well of the conservative and sclerotic features of the previous republic. The project failed – or at least it failed in any terms either man would have understood – and that failure owed something (but not everything) to the fissures on the left and the concomitant failure to create an effective, non-Communist but genuinely socialist left-wing movement.

It is an open question whether such a movement was in the cards in 1945 or whether Camus and Sartre would have had the requisite political credentials to direct it. But it is hard to deny that the simultaneous onset of the Cold War

had a dampening effect on the project. And already the issue of communism was beginning to divide the left and, albeit still to a limited degree, Sartre and Camus. The issue that could not go away on the French left in the late 1940s was the vexed question of the Soviet "camps." "Labor" camps to French Communists and their leftist allies; "concentration" camps for Camus, some small fraction of the left and all of the right. (Although Aronson cannot be expected to know this, that particular distinction had a long history. In the 1930s pacifist left-wing intellectuals opted for "labor"; overtly anti-fascist left-wing intellectuals opted for "concentration," to describe Nazi camps.) Common in all cases was the fact that whatever adjective was selected, the reality on the ground were hell-holes.

Others had raised the issue before Camus did. But *The Rebel* (and Aronson correctly argues that the translation should be *Man in Revolt*) is a systematic and philosophically rigorous attack on the camps of Stalinist Russia and, more precisely on those in the West who apologized for the system, and more precisely still, those on the non-Communist left who did so, by which he clearly meant Sartre. The message of Camus was that a left-wing intellectual must choose, and he must choose freedom and therefore must reject communist totalitarianism. Sartre's reply was equally blunt. Yes, one must choose, and he chose the side of History (i.e. the Soviet Union) and the side of the proletariat (i.e. the French Communist Party [PCF], warts and all). To do otherwise would be to side with the bourgeoisie and as he would note "in the name of liberty, equality, fraternity, I swore to the bourgeoisie a hatred which would only die with me"(128). There were more than a few ironies here. The Camus excoriated by Sartre as a running dog of the bourgeoisie was actually the son of a washerwoman from a working-class district of Algiers. The man who had discovered his identity with the French working class was (much like his partner Simone de Beauvoir) a product of the Parisian upper-middle class. Perhaps this explains why when Sartre was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964, he refused to accept it or the handsome sum that went with it; Camus, by contrast, cashed the cheque and bought a house. Sartre, for all his much-publicized affinity for the French Communist Party, never quite managed to join it, unlike Camus who, in his youth and in the Popular Front era, had.

Initially Sartre would appear to have gotten the better of the dispute. For the next twenty years most, although not all, non-Communist intellectuals appear to have sided with him. Camus scored well on the anti-Communist right but these were allies that he, a genuine leftist (Sartre notwithstanding) did not really want. But this was almost certainly the case because within a year of the outbreak of this feud Stalin died, the Cold War thawed, and the issues raised by Camus lost some of their immediacy. More important still, within two years the Algerian war broke out and gradually displaced the Cold War as the central reference point for the French left. And this would not be the finest moment for

Camus. In December of 1957 after receiving the Nobel prize for literature (seven years before his rival) he addressed a group of students at Stockholm University, one of whom was from Algeria and given to posing pointed questions about the savage repression then being applied by the French government. The notoriously hot tempered Camus lost his composure and informed his antagonist that he condemned the kind of terror currently being carried out by Algerian nationalists which might some day strike his mother, still living in Algiers. In a phrase destined for some notoriety he declared, "I believe in justice but I will defend my mother before justice" (211). Not a bad line and one that many would subscribe to, but a certain loser given the conduct and outcome of the war.

The Algerian war, however, has now passed into memory, its passing made easier by the sordid quality of the post-independence Algerian regimes. Camus' blindness no longer looms quite so large. The Cold War is also over but in light of post-Cold War triumphalism, it is not surprising that Camus gets higher ratings in certain circles (and Sartre lower ones) than ever before, especially among ex-members of the European left – one thinks immediately of François Furet and Tony Judt, anticipated by more than a decade by Bernard-Henry Lévy.

The great merit of Aronson's account is that he makes a major – and largely successful – effort to provide a balanced analysis of this debate. He notes, for example, that despite its prominence in the anti-Communist cannon, *Man in Revolt* is an imperfect book. Although the book was intended as a denunciation of totalitarianism and political murder, the Nazis, pretty good at both, drop out of sight after the early chapters. To be sure, Camus' targets were the "rational murderers", by which he meant the Communists rather than the "irrational" Nazi variety. But he is also strangely silent about the violence of Western imperialism. His analysis moves almost entirely at the level of ideas, the style is a-typically diffuse and imprecise and *Man in Revolt* may qualify, Aronson asserts, as one of Camus' worst books. He is no gentler, however, with Sartre's contemporary polemics, suggesting that the utterly turgid *Communists and the Peace* qualifies, in turn, as one of Sartre's worst outpourings. Sartre's indignation over the execution of the Rosenbergs in the United States and his discrete silence over the execution of Rudolph Slansky and his colleagues in Czechoslovakia, the author observes, made rather a mockery of Sartre's more or less contemporary assertion that the "intellectual's duty [was] to denounce injustice wherever it occurs" (170).

But Sartre's abject deference to the PCF did not last very long. By 1956 he was outspoken in his opposition to the Algerian war, at a time when French Communists were still supporting the increasingly repressive measures of the Guy Mollet government. For Camus, Sartre's protests were the rantings of a privileged and isolated Parisian intellectual who could not grasp, as he, a *pied*

noir, could, that most French settlers in Algeria were not the owners of large agricultural estates but modest members of the working class. In truth, Camus had long been a more articulate critic of French colonial rule than Sartre or most of the Parisian left. Indeed he quit the Communist Party after two years in the late 1930s in protest against its general indifference to colonial issues. But Camus could not get past the violence of the National Liberation Front (FLN). The man who had courageously denounced the savage French repression at Sétif in 1945 could not, a decade later, appreciate that FLN violence had almost always been proceeded and exceeded by that of the French. Camus had been ahead of his times in protesting the abuses of colonial rule; what ultimately escaped him was that the problem lay in the colonial system itself. Sartre, for all his periodic blindness, understood this perfectly.

Aronson's insistence that the rupture between Sartre and Camus was a tragic product of the Cold War is well argued. Yet it is entirely possible that some parting of the ways would have happened anyway. Camus was notoriously thin skinned. Sartre and his companion Simone de Beauvoir had always been slightly miffed that, despite the genuine friendship that existed between the three in the 1940s, Camus was never prepared, as so many of their acolytes were, to be part of the couple's adoring "famille" on the Rue St. Germain. It cannot have been easy for Sartre, the senior by eight years and the most prestigious *normalien* of his generation to be considered the equal of a man with the functional equivalent of an MA from a provincial university and to have received his Nobel prize seven years after his younger colleague. And, as both men were avid womanizers, it cannot have escaped Sartre that the infinitely more handsome Camus enjoyed a substantial advantage in that department.

Nonetheless this is an important book. Aronson is at ease with the philosophic nuances of both men's writing; he is also comfortable with the historical context. His writing is lucid and delightfully free of jargon. Although a great deal has been written about the post-1945 intellectual history of France, this book is high on the list of "must reads."

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Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home. France in the Global Age* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

Those who are interested in the cultural identity of twentieth-century France, and more precisely in the struggle for the legitimate cultural identity of France, cannot avoid Herman Lebovics' scholarship. After, among other works, *True*