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The Epigone's Embrace: Irving Louis Horowitz on C. Wright Mills

Irving Louis Horowitz visited Yaroslava Mills in West Nyack, New York, soon after she became a widow. He greeted her as a friend and colleague of her late husband, C. Wright Mills. Before he left that spring afternoon, in 1962, he borrowed an unnoticed number of cartons containing an unknown quantity of Mills's papers.¹ In June, he finished writing an introduction to forty-one of the essays. In July, in an obituary notice in the *American Journal of Sociology*, he hailed Mills as a spiritual descendent of Voltaire and Diderot. In August, *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, edited by Irving Louis Horowitz, was ready to go.

Horowitz had waited two years for his main chance. In March 1960, he had approached the man himself with the idea of editing a volume of essays in his honor. Mills wrote to his literary agent about the idea, before (apparently) deciding against it.² He was too young, he explained to Horowitz, "and certainly haven't done enough to warrant such a volume. Nobody has in our generation, or the previous one."³ Horowitz, undeterred, wrote to Yaroslava Mills on March 22, two days after the tragedy. Nineteen days later he wrote to her again, this time boasting of his efforts to honor her husband's memory and offering his personal services for anything that she may need, "anything from flat tires to zebra hunting to transporting widows across state lines."⁴

Power, Politics, and People appeared in 1963. It was only the beginning. In the decade ahead, Horowitz took Mills's legacy firmly in hand, disseminating his ideas, rebuffing his critics, managing his public image at the time of his greatest significance and popularity. One year after *Power, Politics, and People*, he realized the original idea for a commemorative volume as *The New Sociology: Essays in Social Science and Social Theory in Honor of C. Wright Mills* (1964). That same year, he edited and published Mills's dissertation as *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America* (1964). Two years later, he had it published again, with a bigger press.

While editing volumes from Mills, Horowitz surrounded them with articles about him. He contributed to *The American Scholar*, *Studies on the Left*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, and other journals of

1 Yaroslava Mills, interviews with author, 15 March 2003, 5 June 2003, and 19 Jan. 2006. Maurice Stein interview with author, 1 June 2007.

2 C. Wright Mills, letter to Carl Brandt, 26 Oct. 1960.

3 C. Wright Mills, letter to Irving Louis Horowitz, 30 Oct. 1960.

4 Irving Louis Horowitz, letter to Yaroslava Mills, 10 April 1962.

opinion and research. In 1964, he served as chairman of the first selection committee of the “C. Wright Mills Award,” which had been inaugurated two years earlier by the Society for the Study of Social Problems. In 1969, he published a second collection of Mills’s essays, this one in Spanish, in Mexico City: *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Políticos*. Nobody did more.

“What was the ‘magic’ which C. Wright Mills possessed? How did he become the singular intellectual ‘hero’ of our age?” The opening lines of *Power, Politics, and People* called upon the utopian spirit of the early sixties to recognize “the greatest sociologist the United States has ever produced” (1). Mills had proven uncommonly courageous, conscientious, intelligent, and noble—a political leader who “eschewed the kind of romantic historicism and providential messianism that so often characterizes the truth-seeker”; a scholar who “never confused the art of intellect with the enterprise of making money or getting promoted”; and a public intellectual “tough-minded enough to face the changing world situation and generous enough to recognize that such changes as are brought about are man made” (2,7). Here had lived a man superabundant with humanity, “an understandable as well as understanding person in his own right.” Mills had been one of the “truly great,” fit to be mentioned in the company of Marx, Luther, and Socrates (5).

From the first, Horowitz played fast and loose with facts. The first line of the obituary he wrote for the *American Journal of Sociology* misstated Mills’s age at the time of his death. The preface to *The New Sociology* misstated the date of his death. In the introduction to *Power, Politics, and People*, Horowitz stated that Mills had finished his Columbia career as associate professor. In fact, Columbia College had promoted him to full professor on July 1, 1956, a month before he turned forty. This information anybody could have discovered by consulting his appointment card at Columbia or his entry in *Who’s Who in America*.

“What do you suppose is going on here?” asked Robert Merton, in a letter to sociologist William J. Goode on October 22, 1970. Merton’s curiosity was provoked by Alvin Gouldner’s *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, a tract which turned Horowitz’s error into a moral about success in the academy. “Is this merely unbelievably sloppy ‘scholarship,’” Merton asked Goode, “or do you think that ideological commitments are really producing fantasies in the guise of ‘facts?’”⁵ A little of both, surely.

5 Robert Merton, letter to William J. Goode, 22 Oct. 1970. Gouldner’s book, an influential indictment of the manners and mores of the postwar sociological establishment, made much of the ostensibly thwarted character of Mills’s academic career. “The serious critics,” Gouldner wrote, “are those marked by an ability to resist conventional success or by an ability to transcend failure as conventionally defined. C. Wright Mills never became a full professor; his ‘failure’ may remind us that the serious players are always those who have an ability to pay costs” (15).

The errors, slight in themselves, marred the introductory character of Horowitz's enterprise. The mistakes in the annotations for *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos* must have thrown innumerable Mexican intellectuals off the trail. Other blocks of "non-facts" (as Merton called them) betrayed a definite ideological character. "With the exception of his election to Phi Beta Kappa, he did not participate in any of the usual extra-curricular college activities," Horowitz declared in the introduction to *Power, Politics, and People*, in spite of the fact that Mills had served, reluctantly but definitely, as president of his college's sociological society (8).

As chairman of the award committee for the Society for the Study of Social Problems, Horowitz reported the circumstances of Mills's election to Phi Beta Kappa. "The anomaly of the C. Wright Mills Award is that Mills himself never received such an award during his lifetime. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, but chose not to accept on the grounds that the Phi Beta Kappa principles foster elitist orientations in education. Twenty years later he finally chose to accept this award" ("Report" 233). That Mills had accepted his Phi Beta Kappa election in college was recorded on his college transcript and on every copy of his curriculum vita, as surely as it was recorded by Horowitz's introduction to *Power, Politics, and People*. How or why he came up with the idea that Mills had accepted the award "twenty years later" was impossible to say.

Impossible, literally, because Horowitz did not offer much evidence for his various contentions, and because most of the evidence to which he did point was laid away in letters and manuscripts privately held, unavailable to scholars and thus impossible to falsify in accordance with the ethical imperative of independent inquiry. The publication of *Power, Politics, and People*, *The New Sociology*, *Sociology and Pragmatism*, and *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos* afforded him a first-run monopoly on Mills. He made ample use of all the rights and privileges assumed by the editorial function, composing prefaces, introductions, and bibliographies, each of them renewing his own invitation to interpret and comment. "The Unfinished Writings of C. Wright Mills," a 1963 article, drew from an unpublished journal of Mills's trip to the Soviet Union. The introduction to *The New Sociology* quoted extensively from unpublished manuscripts Mills had written toward a multivolume work on comparative sociology. Of the twenty-nine essays in the Mexico City collection, half had not been included in *Power, Politics, and People*. Most had never been published during Mills's life. Many are still not available in English.

Horowitz vouchsafed his authority by circulating the impression that his work sprung directly out of the special access it had been his privilege to enjoy with the deceased. Here his advantage would have appeared to challengers to be insuperable. He dedicated *Power, Politics, and People* "to Yara," the informal rendering of the name of Mills's widow. The subtitle,

“The Collected Essays,” gave readers no reason to suspect that not all of Mills’s essays were actually collected therein. The preface referred, vaguely, to “my own small role in Wright’s achievement.”

The New Sociology he ascribed to a gift of grace: “I never saw Mills in a more amenable and relaxed state than that autumn day,” Horowitz wrote in the preface. “He was genuinely enthusiastic about the possibilities of such a volume although he continued to harbor misgivings” (xiii). Here again, the jargon of authenticity, so noticeable in the public speech of the early sixties, bespoke the promotion of a guru. In the preface to *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos* he said, “I assure the reader that this represents an authentic work of Mills.” The introduction to *Power, Politics, and People* promised to reveal “the ‘secret’ of Mills’ extraordinary ability to communicate with professional and popular audiences alike” (4). Until now, his dissertation had been “shrouded in mystery.” Horowitz issued his own personal certificate of authenticity in the preface: “Thus, aside from the rather standard editorial services any good book deserves, the reader can rest assured that this is an authentic and accurately transcribed book of Mills.”

Had Mills really wanted his dissertation to be published? “Wright Mills wanted *Sociology and Pragmatism* to be published. In spare moments, he would go over the manuscript for purposes of style and formulation. As a matter of fact, he had submitted the dissertation to various commercial publishers, but no arrangements were arrived at which could prove mutually satisfactory” (“Preface” *SP*). Had Mills really wanted his dissertation to be published in this format? Henry David Aiken, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, pointed out that Horowitz himself confessed in the preface to having changed the title of the dissertation to *Sociology and Pragmatism: A Study in American Higher Learning*. Actually, Aiken pointed out, Horowitz had titled the dissertation *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America*. Horowitz, in his reply, said that he had cleaned up the grammar and had inserted chapter headings. He had searched *with* Mills for the current title. Which title, he did not say.

If Irving Horowitz had known C. Wright Mills intimately enough to speak for him as well as about him, then why did he commit so many basic biographical errors? In discussing the matter of the honorary volume with Carl Brandt, his agent, in October 1960, Mills seemed to suggest that he had never met, or at least did not remember meeting, his would-be editor. “Horowitz seems like a nice academic type” was the most he mustered in the way of description.⁶ It is probable that additional letters, if made public, will fill out the picture of relations between Horowitz and Mills. Nonetheless, Mills lived only fourteen months after writing to Brandt, mostly in Britain, France, Poland, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union, and

6 C. Wright Mills, letter to Carl Brandt, 26 Oct. 1960.

nowhere in his surviving letters did he nominate an heir, or provide for such broad editorial discretion as Horowitz exercised after his death. Could he have supposed that scholars and writers soon would mistake Horowitz as the executor of his literary estate?⁷

Could he have foretold his posthumous role as benefactor? Horowitz, like him, had come to sociology after studying philosophy, and, like him, displayed a young talent for noun-heavy sentences overpopulated by polysyllables and mixed metaphors, though Horowitz had a weakness for tautology all his own. In one essay, "Mind, Methodology, and Macrosociology," he explained that "Intellectually, I aim to integrate in my work what is implied precisely by that word itself, namely, intellectuality" (52). This gem he used in the introduction to *Power, Politics, and People*, as well as in other publications, to explain Mills's cultural significance: "He attempted to fuse a liberal imagination with a sociological leavening, and through such a fusion to revive the sinews of democratic politics in America" (14).

Horowitz enjoyed a rapid rise in academic sociology. In March 1960, when he approached Mills, he was chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. The next year he took office as president of the New York State Sociological Association. In June 1962, when he finished writing the introduction to *Power, Politics, and People*, he wrote from Washington University, in St. Louis. He signed up with Carl Brandt, Mills's agent. He cultivated relations with Oxford University Press, Mills's publisher. Horowitz, too, served as sociology advisor for Oxford, which published *Power, Politics, and People*, *The New Sociology*, and (the second installment of) *Sociology and Pragmatism*. In virtually everything else he published in the sixties he went out of his way to mention his connection to Mills. His introduction to *The Anarchists* (1964) claimed that "as long ago as 1950, C. Wright Mills was interested in preparing a reader on 'Anarchists, Criminals, and Deviants'" (11-12). His book, *Professing Sociology* (1968), relayed opinions that Mills ostensibly held about his major work of social theory, *Character and Social Structure* (1953).

"Irving Louis Horowitz first came to the attention of sociologists as the putative heir of C. Wright Mills," Lewis Coser wrote in a review of Horowitz's *Foundations of Political Sociology* (1972). "On the evidence of this book one is forced to conclude that the inheritance was wholly presumptive." Coser, a longtime friend of Mills, ridiculed Horowitz as a writer of "nonsense" and "anti-meaning," an obfuscator who "isn't

7 That Horowitz was the literary executor of the Mills estate was reported, for instance, in Cauter, *Year of the Barricades*, 384; and in Hayden, *Radical Nomad*, 179. The responsibility always rested with longtime friend Bill Miller. "I suppose you know about Mills," Miller wrote to Daniel Aaron, on March 24, 1962, "I am executor of his estate, which will keep me busy on my return. But I must do it." Yaroslava Mills stated in a letter to Mills's parents dated August 6, 1962: "Bill has been named executor."

just sloppy, he is perversely sloppy” (26, 27). Coser was not alone. Hans Gerth, another longtime friend, denounced him to Yaroslava Mills as “an ignorant young man who unscrupulously pokes with long poles in dark clouds without much luck.” Gerth complained that Horowitz was publishing “without regard to truthfulness or accuracy” and telling “little white lies.”⁸ E.P. Thompson argued that Mills would have objected to the editing and organizing of *Power, Politics, and People*, which was repetitive, ahistorical, and chronologically confused. “Jumbled together in this way,” Thompson added, “these essays convey at times the wholly misleading impression of a man of snap judgments and of rhetorical exhortation” (6). Mills’s enemies saw in Horowitz’s work unwitting evidence for their own side. Edward Shils thought the introduction to *Power, Politics, and People* was “interesting only for its illustration of the widespread *Schwarmerei* for Mills’s fictitious ‘heroism’” (20). Irving Howe said, “The sad truth is that he deserved the admirers he won: perhaps he even deserved to have Mr. Horowitz edit his book of essays” (252).

Relations between Horowitz and Yaroslava Mills degenerated over the decade. During the spring and summer of 1962, when he won her cooperation, an extraordinary number of responsibilities had befallen her as a result of her husband’s sudden death. Her correspondence shows that she had to negotiate his debts, secure his pension, settle the custody of his youngest daughter, resolve a lawsuit against him, select and design his tombstone, console his parents and friends, find a job, and search for childcare, all of this, moreover, while fighting off loneliness and grief. At first, she gave Horowitz high marks for his editorial energy. But “The Style and Substance of C. Wright Mills,” the introduction he wrote for *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos*, marked the occasion for a permanent break. Citing a raft of errors and fatuous commentary, she granted permission for the volume on the condition that the introduction not appear with it. She was so upset upon discovering that her veto had been ignored that she refused to grant him permission to publish the essays in an English-language version that Oxford wanted. When Horowitz learned that she was considering publishing the essays with another editor, he threatened to seek a court injunction to stop her. He also threatened to release the English-language version of *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos* in advance of her plans, thereby flooding the market. Whatever else happened, he added, he would not yield.⁹ Nor would he share his booty, refusing to allow rival biographer Richard Gillam to read the papers, suggesting instead that Gillam purchase a copy of the Spanish-language translations.¹⁰

8 Hans Gerth, letters to Yaroslava Mills, 20 April 1962 and Summer 1962.

9 Horowitz, letter to Sheldon Meyer, 5 Nov. 1970.

10 Horowitz, letter to Richard Gillam, 1 May 1969.

By all indications Horowitz came to believe that the papers he had removed from West Nyack belonged to him. In a letter dated May 19, 1964, he acknowledged Yaroslava Mills's desire to have them returned to her possession, and promised that he would do so.¹¹ And yet five years later, in the middle of the dispute over *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos*, she wondered, "How does ILH happen to have this material?" and demanded, in a note addressed to Brandt, "Will he please return *all* CWM material."¹² Elsewhere, a less complicated impression took shape. Internal memoranda at Oxford described Horowitz as "a close associate" of Mills, and as "one of his most brilliant students."¹³ *Time* magazine ran a feature on the "The New Sociology" in 1970 and chose Horowitz as its exemplary figure in the behavioral sciences. The profile observed that his career "owes much to the late C. Wright Mills." One passage betrayed the character of the obligation: "Horowitz has become executor of Mills's literary estate and the most ferocious advocate of Mills's central thesis: that human society is characterized not by stasis but by radical change" (38). First a non-fact, followed by a non-idea, and forward went the transformation of a man into a marketable abstraction. In 1972, Horowitz slipped into *Foundations of Political Sociology* the following citation: Horowitz, I.L., ed. (1963) *Power, Politics, and People*, New York, Oxford University Press.¹⁴ Mills's name now failed to appear on his own volume of essays.

"The New Sociology" was an ideologically flexible, philosophically pragmatic, politically liberal form of inquiry that was fashionable for a while in the sixties and seventies. Aspiring to greater intra-vocational cooperation between the social scientists and the social workers of the welfare state, it stressed the practical uses of knowledge put to the improvement of public policy. "This volume celebrates the maturation of classical sociological theory into a crystallized *scientific* position—stripped of inherited ideological and metaphysical pretenses," Horowitz wrote in the introduction to *The New Sociology* (xv). He showcased what the new sociology could do in the magazine *Trans-action* (founded in 1963 at Washington University), which ran advertisements for his Mills books, and in edited volumes such as *The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot* (1967). In *The War Game* (1963), he criticized the defense intellectuals not for their debased political morality, but for the "logical paradoxes" dogging their war games model. He made "a plea for sharper logical and linguistic distinctions," for "better science—science for survival" (17, 166, 10).

11 Horowitz, letter to Yaroslava Mills, 19 May 1964.

12 Yaroslava Mills, letter to Carl Brandt, undated, from the autumn 1969. It is not clear that this letter was mailed.

13 Sheldon Meyer, memorandum to Trade Planning Conference, 9 October 1962. Sheldon Meyer, memorandum to the Editorial Board, 30 July 1962.

14 The elision of the citation was first reported in a review by Coser in 1973 (26).

In order to make Mills serve these professional aims, Horowitz represented him as a “true reformer,” bleached him of aestheticism, and purged him of utopian yearnings (*SP* 29). Oxford’s in-house description of *Power, Politics, and People* noted with approval that the selections excluded the sort of polemical material that had appeared in Mills’s pamphlets, *The Causes of World War Three* (1958) and *Listen, Yankee* (1960). Mills, according to Horowitz, offered a serviceable sociological equivalent to Walter Lippmann’s “public philosophy.” In the introduction to *Power, Politics, and People*, he assured his fellow sociologists that “Mills did not make an appeal to partisan passions” (13). On this point he insisted. “What is indisputably clear,” he wrote in the *American Journal of Sociology*, “is that Mills never ceased being a sociologist” (107). What about the extraordinary number and variety of disputes that littered his academic career? All of them were explicable in terms of his virtues. “What antagonized many was his singular capacity to transcend the parochialism, the pseudosecularization, and vicious circularity characteristic of the ‘peer groups’ in American social science” (4). In attacking methodological orthodoxy Mills had identified and filled “a desperate need of the profession,” Horowitz explained in *The New Sociology*. “But officialdom was not quite prepared to receive a dark prophet who was willing to take risks by working in areas abandoned by the leading professionals” (17, 18).

In a forty-six page pamphlet, *C. Wright Mills’s White Collar* (1967), Horowitz demonstrated how Mills’s social thought could be rationalized and made to serve the commercial aspirations of the educational bureaucracy. After summarizing the book in a neutral tone, he gave a desultory “Critical Appraisal,” ticked off nine “Suggested Study Topics,” and concluded with a section of “Biographical Information” that dragged in errors from his other writings. Published by the R.D.M. Corporation in its “Study Master” series, the pamphlet was marketed to the one group of students least likely to learn anything from it, namely, those who could not be bothered to read *White Collar* for themselves. In 1969, Horowitz tried to put to rest the question of Mills’s suitability for the academic life: “I venture to say that when the shouting dies down, as it now largely has abated, Mills will be remembered as a man who uniquely stressed moral purpose in sociology. It was a moral purpose which somehow managed not to intrude on scientific canons but, rather, underscored the scientific enterprise. It did this by showing how sociology as science is a struggle no less than a tradition” (“Mind” 56). Divested, in all these ways, of any *particular* moral or political commitments, Mills was escorted to his reserved office in the bustling society of academic men.

This was not the only possible interpretation. In London, New York, Prague, Paris, and Warsaw, the rebellions of 1968 climaxed against the background of Mills’s biography, and carried forward contentions first aired in his writings: that advanced industrial societies could not be

presumed to rest on moral or political consensus; that the achievements of these “overdeveloped” societies rested on the threat of violence, and so taxed the most sensitive and intelligent of their young minds; that the Cold War waged in their name generated psychopathologies overripe for satire and ridicule; that the structure of consent could not easily be altered by the formal mechanics of government.

Mills foresaw, moreover, that the rebellion would originate not in the factories, but in the universities. His “Letter to the New Left” (1960) urged the uncorrupted generation to kick the “labor metaphysic,” to consider that “the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals,” may be best positioned to subvert the social order. Eight years later, after the crises of 1968 shuttered universities around the globe, dissolving tradition, order, and ceremony, setting student against student, professor against professor, the Central Intelligence Agency commissioned a classified report, “Restless Youth.” It identified Mills, Herbert Marcuse, and Frantz Fanon as the three most influential leaders of the international Left.

While Horowitz told his peers that Mills belonged in the academy and assured them that he had not appealed to partisan passions, the young intellectuals in Students for a Democratic Society read him as a “radical nomad,” and applauded him *for* his partisan passions. While Horowitz aligned him with the tradition of liberal reform, SDS intellectuals employed his distinction between “reasoning” (a sign of mental activity) and “reasonableness” (a sign of acquiescence) to remind themselves of the differences between radicalism and liberalism.¹⁵ Each side was alive to the pragmatic and democratic content of his thought, but each drew its own conclusion. Horowitz set Mills’s sociology to improving public administration. SDS intellectuals set it to direct action and mass protest. Horowitz wrote of “The Stalinization of Fidel Castro.” They made a dogma of *hombre nuevo*.

Horowitz painted them in the worst possible light. The 1968 preface to his *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason* (1961) attacked the New Left with arguments first forged by Philip Rieff, Daniel Bell, and Irving Howe, Mills’s most ardent critics. The New Left (in this view) did not herald the latent contradictions or paradoxes of postwar capitalism, but gorged itself on genuine ideological and material success. Prosperity and stability had deprived the old left of class analysis, so the new emerged bearing myths and legends about itself and its society. Rejecting parties and organizations, its social analysis quickly degenerated into conspiracy, while its political theory made a fetish of the history-making powers of personal will. According to Horowitz, the New Left’s guerrilla phase showed that charismatic gestures already took the place of tangible goals. In the savagery of their passion against “the objectivity of history,” the New Leftists found their therapy,

¹⁵ See “America and the New Era” and “Is the Great Society Just a Barbecue?” both reprinted in *The New Left*, ed. Teodori.

but not their solace. Their deviant, irrational conduct would consume them, breeding ever newer waves of revolutionaries dedicated to the purification of their personalities in public action. Seeking salvation in politics, they bespoke “totalitarian democracy.” Thus did Horowitz, the epigone as academic sociologist, accuse Tom Hayden, the epigone as political actor, of the worst possible sin: “Fascism returns in the United States not as a right-wing ideology, but almost as a quasi-leftist ideology, an ironic outcome that Sorel anticipated when in his own writings he celebrated Mussolini and Lenin as if they were really two peas in one pod” (*Radicalism* xvii).

Emerson argued that “representative men” extend two kinds of service. First, there is metaphysical and material aid, such that “the boy believes there is a teacher who can sell him wisdom.” Eventually, the need for such aid tapers away, leaving indirect aid in the form of a “pictorial or representative quality” appealing chiefly to the intellect (6). In the late seventies and early eighties Irving Louis Horowitz continued to write regularly about C. Wright Mills, but his conclusions, and his tone, turned negative and sour. By 1983, when he published the first, and what remains the only full-scale biography, he had issued four volumes of essays containing nearly five hundred items. In 1969, Horowitz had moved from Washington University to Rutgers, where had become the Hannah Arendt Professor of Sociology, as well as the head of Transaction Publishers. His needs and ambitions amply gratified, he turned viciously against his benefactor.

Perhaps the best testimony against the image he contrived for Mills in the sixties was the completeness with which he abandoned it in the eighties. On page four of *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian*, he reported a “near-unanimous negative consensus about him.” The rest of the book went toward upsetting everything he had written previously. No longer a “true reformer,” Mills was now a utopian. No longer a good academic, he was now “a prophet and fanatic.” No longer a principled, noble man of personal integrity, he was now a canny operator who made use of the strategic and tactical resources surrounding him in order to advance his vainglory, before it destroyed him.

In “A Postscript to a Sociological Utopian,” an essay presented at academic conferences and published in 1989, Horowitz deepened and extended these charges, slurring Mills as a “bigot” (440). In the sixties, Horowitz had written: “Mills was one of that special breed of men who could be as comfortable in the Harlem ghetto looking up at Morningside Heights as in looking down from the Heights of Harlem. This flexibility of human character was his shield and his buckler” (*New* 8). Now he claimed: “In C. Wright Mills I was dealing with a sadly flawed individual, a human being who had biased attitudes on many issues including minorities, Jews, women, and especially blacks” (440).

The animus shifted. The form stayed the same. The chapter on Mills's intellectual debts Horowitz transposed wholesale from the introduction to *Sociology and Pragmatism*. The chapter on *White Collar* he transposed from his pamphlet for the R.D.M. Corporation. The chapter on Marxism he transposed from a scattering of his early essays.¹⁶ Horowitz, moreover, still examined Mills's character and ideas exclusively through the context of the modern academic professional. In the sixties, he had used this context to make a martyr out of Mills, had claimed that only a collective misunderstanding on the part of the profession had obscured his natural qualification for the academic way. Now Horowitz said Mills had been "marginal and antiprofessional" all along ("Postscript" 446). "It is correct to note," he wrote, "that Mills could no longer really be properly defined as being within the field of sociology; certainly he was not by the end of the decade" (*Wright* 87). It was just because Horowitz still measured his subject by the norms of academic sociology that he still had a fractious character on his hands. More than two decades had passed, he noted in his introduction, and yet "my greatest difficulty was getting people who knew Mills to speak about him in a calm and reasoned manner." During interviews conducted for the biography "the sense of his presence so was imminent that old arguments were often rekindled rather than dampened at the mention of his name" (*Wright* ix).

Still Horowitz disdained to generate falsifiable propositions with publicly available evidence by way of conscientious research. Most of the letters he cited in the biography referred to his private collection, not to the Mills archives at the University of Texas. Many of his textual interpretations referred readers to the translated essays in *De Hombres Sociales y Movimientos Politicos*. "A Postscript to a Sociological Utopian," where he aired the most damaging personal allegations, offered not so much as a scrap of evidence; not even an anecdote.

Moments of incoherence marred the new portrait, just as they had marred the old. Early in the biography Horowitz transposed a formulation he had used in the introduction to *Sociology and Pragmatism*: "The thought of power did not intoxicate or absorb Mills. If anything the reverse was true: Mills was obsessed with the potential of reason to redirect the irrational rush of raw power. This is not Manichaeism, but old-fashioned rationalism" (140). In the "Postscript," he flatly contradicted himself: "Mills had abandoned the tensions of human interaction for a world of good and evil. He was possessed by a kind of Manichaeism, a poor substitute for

16 There were many examples of transposition. See, for example, the following favorite sentence: "Mills had a reverence for conflicting modes of socio-historical reality, and a healthy irreverence for all else" (Horowitz, "C. Wright Mills and the Dragons of Marxism," 648). "Mills displays a reverence for conflicting modes of socio-historical reality, and a healthy irreverence for all else" (Horowitz, "Marxism According to C. Wright Mills," 402). "Mills reviewed conflicting modes of sociohistorical reality and had a healthy irreverence for the past" (Horowitz, *C. Wright Mills*, 196).

pragmatism" (450). The last sentence of the biography was a masterpiece of self-parody: "That America was Mills's essential laboratory for testing, teasing, and thundering was an accident of birth, but one which gave special meaning and a cutting edge, albeit a blunt one, to his search for the Fourth Epoch—the utopian longing within all ideologists and, I daresay, all sociologists" (330).

And again, while some of the errors fell into no special pattern, most leaned in the same ideological direction. "Poor Mills was never able to live down his Texas background even though he had not the vaguest idea what to do with a gun or a horse," Horowitz wrote (*Wright* 244-45). Lewis Coser falsified the claim in the *American Journal of Sociology*: "Early in 1949, Mills and his wife Ruth moved into the house owned by David Riesman in Chicago, where my wife and I also lived while Riesman worked at Yale to complete *The Lonely Crowd*. On the day of Mills's arrival, we were shocked to hear gunshots suddenly coming from his apartment. Frantically rushing upstairs, we found that Mills had installed a cardboard target over the mantelpiece and was happily shooting at it" (658).

Another kind of criticism surfaced in the *International Social Science Review*, where sociologist Don Martindale accused Horowitz of "borrowing" without attribution from his own writings: "Moreover, it is difficult to avoid the impression that too often Horowitz has provided hypothetical contexts for interpreting Mills's actions and ideas which supply only probable or possible connections and which may distort the reality. In the one period that I am acquainted with firsthand, Mills's Wisconsin years, I am aware of a number of omissions and distortions in Horowitz's account" (102,104). Nobuko Gerth, the widow of Mills's longtime friend, accused Horowitz likewise in the *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*. About one turning point in the relationship between Mills and Gerth, she wrote that "Horowitz's account of this incident is a fabrication" (152).

On April 15, 1984, a letter from Mills's widow, his first wife, and his three children was published in the *New York Times Book Review*. The family reported finding "more than 50 errors of biographical fact" in *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian*. Some of the errors concerned their own backgrounds and biographies. More seriously, the family's letter disputed a key sentence in Horowitz's preface: "I have tried to contact every living person who has firsthand information on Mills" (ix). The letter falsified the claim by pointing out that Horowitz "did not contact either family members or Mills's closest friends in connection with this book." Horowitz himself had met Mills "only twice."

Horowitz's reply, published a month later, shed little direct light on the dispute. He claimed that he had met Mills in 1951, when he was a graduate student in philosophy at Columbia. Subsequently, he claimed, he had met with Mills in West Nyack three times, not two, in addition

to which he had spent time with him discussing the manuscript of *The Marxists*, Mills's last book. "Indeed, I say without fear of contradiction that no other single person was more important in assisting him on his last work. Mills himself acknowledged as much on several occasions."

As usual, what Horowitz did not say was most instructive. Challenged on a point of vested interest by those in the best position to undermine him, he did not describe himself as literary executor, as *Time* reported, nor as one of Mills's "most brilliant students," as editors at Oxford believed. What he did say, moreover, he said in such a way as to discourage the possibility of testing the discrepancy between these images and the image offered by the family. About the time and place of the "several occasions" of assisting Mills on *The Marxists*, and about the ostensible meeting in 1951, he said nothing concrete, and thus, indeed, could have no "fear of contradiction," for contradictions of fact may arise only when contrary evidence exists to test the validity of a disputed claim to truth. Horowitz said that most of the time he had spent with Mills on the book they had spent out of the family's field of vision, "for obvious professional reasons."

The acknowledgements page of *The Marxists*, the best evidence for his claims, neither supported nor refuted them. Mills acknowledged Horowitz without comment alongside eighteen other colleagues. Given that Mills was speaking for himself in the one public forum set aside for such things, Horowitz's reply to the family seems rather high-handed. But then, having kicked the terms of the dispute into the familiar vacuum of warrantless assertion, he went on the attack. He dismissed rational grounds for the protest by indicating that the family was trying to discredit him, though he did not offer any motive to suggest why they might want to do so. The family's "ludicrous" letter was "beyond comprehension," nothing more than "outrage served up as intellectual pabulum." Turning to address the widowed Yaroslava Mills, to whom he had dedicated *Power, Politics, and People*, he boasted that his relations with her late husband antedated hers. He had met him (he claimed) in 1951, "considerably before she even knew the name Mills." These matters well in hand, he rose to a grand finish: "I shall not know, any more than I did 22 years ago, adjust uncomfortable truths to fit pleasant myths." Horowitz saluted himself for having written "a work more widely heralded than any other written about a sociologist." What it heralded, he did not say.

"Horowitz's book is a balanced, judicious intellectual biography," wrote Jackson Lears in the *Journal of American History* (173). Perhaps it was the presumption of personal authority, cultivated by Horowitz over many years, which caused responsible reviewers to turn in flattering reviews. The dust jacket on the book did advertise him as "this country's preeminent authority on C. Wright Mills." Or perhaps it was the political mood of the early eighties, which afforded no kind of solicitude for the cultural heroes

of the sixties. Then, too, no rivals had appeared. Although a handful of essays on Mills had appeared in the seventies and early eighties, the best biographical writing remained unpublished, in dissertations.¹⁷ For one reason or another, questions that should have been obvious went begging for answers.

If Mills really had been “beyond the professional pale,” then how had Horowitz been able to persuade twenty-eight professional social scientists to honor him in *The New Sociology*? Why had Horowitz written there that “Mills was not the intellectual isolate he pictured himself to be”? If Mills really had purveyed pathological personal biases, then why had Horowitz, with his fund of intimate, truthful knowledge, neglected to report them in the sixties? Why indeed had he insisted upon the opposite, writing on the second page of *Power, Politics, and People* that “his victory was both public and private”? In the “Postscript,” Horowitz called Mills “a human figure, the ordinary sort one sees about the Academy” (443). But why did this belated discovery of humanity so startle Horowitz? Why had he once seen magic where he might have seen a man? Such questions were not asked, much less answered, by reviewers. Nor were they acknowledged by the author. Nowhere in debunking the mythos of Mills did Horowitz let on that it was he, more than anybody else, who had been responsible for creating it in the first place. Having once exaggerated Mills’s virtues beyond recognition, he now exaggerated his vices, feeding on both ends of the corpse.

Like Thorstein Veblen, who died in 1929, C. Wright Mills died at the dawn of a decade that seemed to vindicate his insights. In the decades that followed, however, neither the new sociologists nor the political intellectuals generated anything to compare with Joseph Dorfman’s *Thorstein Veblen and His America* (1934), no common text to set forth a reliable body of knowledge in the absence of which informed disagreement miscarries. The literature surrounding Mills since 1962 still falls into a few camps that spar for the right to derive lessons from his biography. Accreditation is the main criteria raised in their disputes. Reputation-mongering seems to be the main point. Few intellectuals may stand up to the scrutiny of the culture wars, which demand from their heroes a mix of psychic security and ideological rectitude. All gestures of independence, being inconvenient, are greeted with suspicion. Herein lies the irony. “He didn’t ask for intellectual allegiance, nor did he respect those who offered it too readily,” E.P. Thompson noted of Mills (“Remembering” 261).

17 See, for example, Joseph A. Scimecca, *The Sociological Theory of C. Wright Mills* (Kennikat P, 1977); John Eldridge, *C. Wright Mills* (Ells Horwood, 1983); Rick Tilman, *C. Wright Mills: A Native Radical and His American Intellectual Roots* (Penn State UP, 1984); Howard Press, *C. Wright Mills* (Twayne, 1978); and Peter Clecak, *Radical Paradoxes* (Harper & Row, 1973). Far and away the best long writing on Mills remains unpublished in Richard Gillam’s “C. Wright Mills, 1916-1948: An Intellectual Biography,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1972.

Horowitz is the representative figure in the vexed story of Mills's afterlife, for all those introductions, prefaces, bibliographies, postscripts, essays, reviews, and remarks, if read straight through, entomb his memory in a chaos of "non-facts" and irreconcilable attributes. There are no possibilities for dialectical progress; no stable points of departure; nothing to begin with. How did Horowitz make such a conspicuous success out of such a preposterous failure? Part of the answer lies in the late twentieth-century transformation of the academic vocation. Neither "communities of the competent," in the liberal image, nor ideological expressions of class, in the Marxist image, academic groups in America operate as rackets whose symbolic and material resources are monopolized by petty cliques and bosses. After all, the new class of professional social scientists that emerged in the late sixties and seventies professed to free themselves of the kind of debilitating political struggle practiced by their radical counterparts, while redirecting it into competencies attuned to success. Duly honored, the new class showed up in the eighties as a group of solipsistic superstar professors who taught everybody how very much could be done with so very little.

Horowitz, too, may stand for the strictly rational, unreflexive manner of valuation prominent in the social science research industry. This was the manner that Mills criticized in *The Sociological Imagination*, where he urged intellectual craftsmen to embrace "the ethics of scholarship" even if their institutions and professions had forgotten them. Scholarly ethics included "a developed carefulness and attention to detail, a habit of being clear, a skeptical perusal of alleged facts, and a tireless curiosity about their possible meanings, their bearings on other facts and notions" (127). Perhaps, finally, Horowitz exposes the limits of the quest for positive knowledge in social science. Positivism claps up the disorderly actuality of modern experience into unreal antinomies, whereas biography may never be expected to choose between rationality *or* irrationality, science *or* politics, reason *or* passion. Horowitz claimed, plausibly, that *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* was "a work more widely heralded than any other written about a sociologist." The competition was paltry.

In October 2006, the Special Collections Division, Paterno Library, Penn State University, announced its acquisition of the "Irving Louis Horowitz/Transaction Publishers Archive." The press release said that among the items deposited by Horowitz were "papers of the late sociologist C. Wright Mills." Since the description goes no further, and since the collection is not yet open to the public, it is impossible to know which of Mills's papers Horowitz deposited. Nor is it possible to know whether money was paid out in the transposition. The Mills papers constitute "a highlight" of the collection, according to William Joyce, the head of Special

Collections, who could say no more than this.¹⁸ Knowing the details of the transposition may be beside the point. An archive bearing Horowitz's name and including original Mills papers is sure to perpetuate the ostensibly intimate connection between the two men, and this maneuver has been a recognizable method of advancement ever since Henry James's *The Aspern Papers* betrayed the ingenuity of epigones in the laundering of literary reputation. James, of course, also bared the therapeutic motive that creeps behind masks of beneficence. Sure enough, it shows here, in a letter written by Horowitz in 1961 as Mills convalesced from a heart attack. "While laid up in the hospital last week (empathy pains no doubt) I came across this 'letter to the editor' in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, commenting on your book. I felt certain you would like to see it, so here it is enclosed."¹⁹

Irving Louis Horowitz has made a mess of Mills, but one thing he has not done is leave him alone. His many volumes, which are perhaps best approached as sociological equivalents to junk science, keep on coming. *The Decomposition of Sociology* (1993) blamed "left-wing fascism" for spoiling the scientific aspirations of *The New Sociology*. A profile of Mills in *Tributes* (2004) recycled material from 1962, passed along old errors, and generated a fresh round of contradictions. The 2005 edition of *The Anarchists* offered "a final statement of support for Wright, fulfilling at least in part his intellectual legacy, and allowing for an appreciation of what his thinking meant in my own development" (xii). *Daydreams and Nightmares* (1990), Horowitz's most revealing book, describes his early years as an impoverished son of Jewish immigrants, a tough boy who speculated in petty crime while clawing his way out of the Harlem ghetto. Remarking on the "more than twenty years I spent in researching a biography of the late C. Wright Mills, entitled *An American Utopian*," he said "I discovered that much of what I knew about myself figured in the writing of this book" (viii). What he discovered, of course, he did not say.

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18 According to Mr. Joyce, all donors to Penn State Libraries are required to warrant "that she/he is the sole and absolute owner in every respect of the above-referenced property and that the property is free and clear of any and all claims, liens, demands, charges, security arrangements, judgments, and encumbrances of any kind or nature."

19 Irving Louis Horowitz, letter to C. Wright Mills. Feb. 16, 1961. 4B394, CWM Papers.

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