



Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College, 1942-1944

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Sixty years ago, at the height of World War II, an extraordinary series of gatherings took place at Mount Holyoke College in western Massachusetts. During the summers of 1942–1944, leading European figures in the arts and sciences met at the college with their American counterparts for urgent conversations about the future of human civilization in a precarious world.

Two Sorbonne professors, the distinguished medievalist Gustave Cohen and the existentialist philosopher Jean Wahl, organized these "Pontigny" sessions, named after an abbey in Burgundy where similar symposia had been held in the decades before the war. Among the participants?many of whom were Jewish or had Jewish backgrounds?were the philosophers Hannah Arendt and Rachel Bespaloff, the poets Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the linguist Roman Jakobson, and the painters Marc Chagall and Robert Motherwell.

In this collection of original essays, Stanley Cavell and Jacques Derrida lead an international group of scholars?including Jed Perl, Mary Ann Caws, Jeffrey Mehlman, and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl?in assessing the lasting impact and contemporary significance of Pontigny-en- Amérique. Rachel Bespaloff, a tragic figure who wrote a major work on the Iliad, is restored to her rightful place beside Arendt and Simone Weil. Anyone interested in the "intellectual resistance" of Francophone intellectuals and artists, and the inspiring support from such American figures as Stevens and Moore, will want to read this pioneering work of scholarship and historical re-creation.



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