

And those who do speak up—Jew and non-Jew alike—find themselves the victim of character assassination campaigns and worse. (On this subject, former Representative Paul Findley's soon-to-be-published volume about the tactics and power of the Jewish lobby makes for intimidating reading.) In this particular case, not one single American Jewish organization protested the murder of the Palestinians or publicly stood behind the courageous Israeli press as it battled the Israeli Government. Nor has any American Jewish organization insisted that the murderers be brought to trial.

Israel has badly lost its way and is dangerously close to grafting a kind of democratic fascism onto a Middle Eastern apartheid. The recent election has made all too evident both the escalating ideological polarization and political impotence of Israel today.

American Jewry has lost its voice and is dangerously close to losing its independence from Jerusalem along with its concern for the universal, humanistic values of the Jewish heritage. And the American Government appears to have acquiesced in Israel's tragic distortion of Camp David—now a lifeless, one-sided perpetuation of conflict rather than the hoped-for pursuit of a fair and honorable peace that would promote "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" as well as Israeli security.

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EXCURSUS 4

Richard O'Mara on VILLA BARZINI

Luigi Barzini's last piece published in English before his death this past March was a brief confessional story about his house on the Via Cassia, just outside Rome. He wrote of how he had bought the land cheap back in 1949 during one of those recurring cold war crises (the Berlin blockade in this case) when everybody was trying to unload unportable possessions and preparing to flee to who knows where. He built a country house and sat back to enjoy the pleasures of a rural existence. He grew grapes and olives for their wine and oil, raised chickens for their eggs. Today the Villa Barzini is engulfed by suburbia, though the extensive grounds—overgrown but hardly out of control—insulate the place from much of the noise, smoke, and clamor that have crept up out of the valley of the Tiber.

Barzini seemed to share the desire of many intellectuals, artists, and others with active interior lives for a private place to do creative work—a place to read and write or sit and mull. The English writer Howard Spring wrote of such a place in his book *My Son, My Son*. It was the writer's lair: a wall on which to line up his published books, a space with a warm stove, a well-placed lamp to woo the muse of future work. The library in the house on the Via Cassia was this kind of place.

Five years ago I visited Barzini in that library. I was on a

fellowship granted me by the European Economic Community. The sidars of the EEC in Brussels had promised to get me in to see just about anybody; short of prime ministers, in any of the member-states. Being a journalist, I wanted to meet journalists. In France I chose Jean François Revel; in Italy, Barzini. I had been impressed by *The Italians*. As a portrait of a people, I thought it came closer to completeness than any other exercise of that sort. Most books of the genre tell us that Germans are efficient, Latins insouciant, and so on, simply redrawing the configuration of basic national stereotypes. *The Italians*, by contrast, offered the sophisticated judgment of a man who was both Insider and Outsider, one who could perceive what was right and what was wrong with his people with a clarity few others enjoyed. The remove of Barzini's U.S. experience (Columbia School of Journalism, *New York World*) gave him the vision to assess his brilliant and tempestuous race. But that remove must have had a very specific effect, for when he tried to exploit his peculiar history in other books, as for example in *The Europeans*, his last, he never succeeded to the same degree.

I arrived at Villa Barzini on a hot afternoon. I had the taxi driver turn off the congested Via Cassia onto a dirt road and follow it down to a turn into a clearing in front of the house. An old man wearing a vest let me into a side entrance. We crossed a polished wood floor, and the servant opened the door to the library. It was a cool, shadowy place, with books lining three walls and a view of the grounds through glass doors from the fourth. There was a large desk, only slightly cluttered. Barzini sat on a chair by a dead fireplace. It was a deep chair and he sat forward on the edge of the cushion as though to avoid being absorbed in its pillowed comfort. He had a book open on his lap. He spoke my name, then told me that I had an illustrious ancestor, the Irish physician who had attended Napoleon in his final exile. It had the effect of making me recall that Napoleon was one of the great Italians, only reluctantly French.

I was less impressed by the fact of Dr. O'Meara's existence than by Barzini's going to all the trouble to search out such a fact for my benefit. I was told later by someone who knew him that he did this frequently, and I was left with the question as to whether he did it to impress new acquaintances with his erudition or whether it was a genuine attempt to cut through all the preliminaries that encumber first meetings and reach the good meat of an unrestrained, unself-conscious conversation.

Barzini, it was obvious, was a man of curiosity. Curiosity is a positive trait, but it usually does not accompany men into their later years. One simply gets tired. Yet I have known men and women who have reawakened after sixty, experienced a second mental wind, so to speak, appeared brighter, more alert, spoken with greater clarity. I do not know if Barzini was one of these, but I do know that conversation with him was both stimulating and a bit intimidating. He was always looking things up, finding and absorbing new facts from the reference books that filled his library. These facts did not decorate his conversation; they were integral to and enriched it. Since I was not up to Barzini's level, I simply let him do most of the talking. Like others whose entire life's work is a process of self-education, he tended to be a little impatient, a little self-centered.

Barzini talked about Italy and Italians; he was disappointed in both. It was not a bitter disappointment but that of a teacher who sees a favorite student succeed to a high

level but still not reach the bounds of his capabilities.

"The Italians," he said, "are an artful people, but they too often press their talents into puny enterprises. We used to make great pictures and statues. Important things. Today we make fine, small machines, pretty automobiles."

Still, he was clearly not all that displeased. If Europe was to work, its various parts joined to make a political whole, the Italians would be the glue to hold it all together. Italians, he said, are the best Europeans. They might seem a little anarchic, but they know the value of a united Europe.

In the end, he said, if the European Community is pulled apart, the pulling will be done by those who represent the older kingdoms of the Continent, the first nations formed out of the medieval order: England, France, Denmark. The Germans and Italians, who achieved their national unity much later, would always find it easier than countries with longer national histories to surrender part of their specific nationalities to make room for a pan-European ethos. Today, five years after Barzini spoke those words, the grand dream of integration is threatened by squabbles and complaints over budgetary contributions originating among the English, one of the oldest tribes of Europe.

About America, Barzini harbored a number of set ideas. These tended to be sweeping, general, and accurate. He saw us as irredeemably optimistic, and I think he found the optimism a little boring. He never believed, though I think he thought we did, that the next invention, the next technological breakthrough, would end all our troubles. His reality was darker than ours, and his pessimism was fed by the fact that his life, his future (what remained of it), and the lives and futures of his children were hostage to the Americans, to what we did in the world.

Twenty-six years earlier he had written: "The Americans are alone in the world and carry war and peace on their laps, and...nobody can advise, help or guide them." The words still apply, he said; Europe, the world, was still in the hopeful hands of the Americans. I got the impression it was something he did not dwell upon much anymore.

Like many Italian intellectuals, Barzini had a fine appreciation of historical context. He regarded the American-Soviet hegemony in the world as an unhappy historical fact about which little could be done and seemed to have scant faith in the ability of either side to choose correct policies. Barzini volunteered that while history was a religion for the leaders of half the world, the Marxist half, it was probably felt as a force more sensately by the Mediterranean peoples, if only because they had been so near history's most active stage.

After about two hours I asked Barzini to ask his servant to call a taxi. It was about five-thirty in the afternoon when the cab came into the little clearing. We walked out and around the house and Barzini sat on a ledge beside the front door. The taxi driver had difficulty turning the vehicle around in the confined space, so from the darkness of the cab I had a long time to observe the master of Villa Barzini. He waved nonchalantly. Barzini had a wide face with large features, the kind that a stage actor needs if his emotions are to be discernible even to those in the furthest seats. He had a prominent nose, deep, dark eye sockets, heavy lips, all very mobile. Now, with no one there to provoke those features into expression, his face fell into a melancholy repose. He stayed there, unmoving, as the taxi drew away.

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