

of color and fascination with the linear do not lend glamor to the hideous, but at the same time do not strip ugliness of dignity—we do not know, but it is all there. The *demi-chanteuses* and *demi-mondaines*, coarse and human, repelling and alluring, and their patrons, top-hatted and sallow, compose themselves into a panorama of an era which we have agreed to call beautiful, though we do not know why, but we know that the adjective may be correct—thanks to M. Toulouse-Lautrec. And no longer is the beauty submerged in the impressionistic fuzz that was present in Toulouse-Lautrec's early paintings. It seems clear and distinct in the inimitable brushstrokes that look like strokes of crayon. Toulouse-Lautrec's consistency of tone amidst a visual abundance of forms and hues is unique—La Goulue suddenly becomes a Shakespearean presence, Jane Avril's cancan unexpectedly unveils the future of modern graphics, the tyrannical role of lithography and poster in the world to come after she and her art have become but a memory. It's stunning to see the Aristide Bruant placard and discover how much

better it is in the original print than in even the most refined reproductions of Skira and Abrams. The stunted, sickly cripple grows into a giant, the first, per-

haps, to create a linear poetry of art and imbue it with an instinct for color which we now savor like succulent fruit. (CC) □

### The Freedom of Self-Expression

Before Manhattan "artist" Jo Roman committed what she called her "self-termination" with an overdose of Seconal, she spent her last night drinking farewell toasts with friends and family, who—knowing what she was about to do—did nothing to stop her.

Ms. Roman decided that suicide is an art form, "taking command of life's brushstrokes," as she said. We have traveled far from the time when art was supposed to raise men's hearts and minds to a sense of what is majestic and noble, dignified and divine. We came thus from Dostoevsky's depictions of human scum to Hitler's pornography to Andy Warhol's drug-art—to Jo Roman. If life is absurd, as Camus believed, the

only choices are stoicism, animalism and suicide. Camus embodied the stoic, and won the Nobel Prize, but never sorted out the vague palpitation in his logic, that is, the possibility that someone else's view of reality might be closer to the truth than his. So it is with Ms. Roman: she and her friends believed she was an artist to the end; others believe she, and they, were insane. But a distinction is necessary. It is one thing to diagnose a suicide as schizophrenic, another to allow one to proceed. Those who knew of Jo Roman's impending drug overdose, yet did nothing to stop her, are connoisseurs of Jo Roman's kind of "art." To us, they are carriers of the foremost disease of our time. (EJW) □

## Correspondence

### Letter from Italy: The Loveliness of Timelessness

by Thomas Molnar

A year ago, Mgr. Lefebvre, labeled "controversial" because the liberals in the Church did not like orthodoxy, gave a lecture in Rome at the palace of the Countess Pallavicini—with loudspeakers carrying his voice to hundreds on the street. Daughter of a merchant family from Genova (Medici by name but unrelated to the Florentines), the countess married the Marquis of Pallavicini, now dead. Stricken by paralysis some twenty years ago and now in a

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wheelchair, she has been active in "integrist" Catholic circles. When Cardinal Poletti expressed indignation that she would organize a Lefebvre "event" within earshot of the Vatican (Paul VI was still alive), the outspoken lady wrote back suggesting that Poletti mind his own business.

The palazzo is on the Quirinale (one of the Seven Hills), a hundred steps from the residence of the president of the Republic. It has vast gardens, innumerable halls, chambers and corridors, and those majestic staircases in which Italian architects always excelled. The Volpe Foundation's Seventh International Congress was held, on the

Countess's invitation, in a grand, all-marble room with a Pallavicini pope's red-and-gold woven emblem behind the podium.

The Volpe encounters, always held in April when Rome is sunny but still cool, have three outstanding features: the intellectual, the musical and the mundane. The latter, because soon after the ladies—wives, daughters, friends—take their seats, a spring fashion parade softly underlines the reasoning of scholars from the rostrum. On the second evening a choir performs. This time, "The Passion" according to St. John, by Francisco Corteccia, a 17th-century composer, for me a discovery. The topic

of this Volpe encounter was "Order and Disorder." Philosophers, lawyers, economists, politologues and artists—they seemed like a defiance of the Red Brigade in a city where practically siege conditions prevail: six bombs went off in various districts the night before the opening.

Two schools of thought emerged from the start: the *positivistic* one, defining order as following from the nature of reality, and a *metaphysical* one, assuming a transcendent pattern and proposing its values as norms for individual and community. The first position was presented by Prof. Julien Freund (Strassbourg) and the exiled Rumanian novelist, Vintila Horia (Madrid), the second by philosopher of law, Michel Villey (Sorbonne), G. Morra (Bologna) and myself.

It was perhaps not a surprise that the second argumentation slowly prevailed, a sign that the Italians, French and Germans present have not been seduced by the climate of what one may generally call "scientism." In fact, it was a young biologist whose critique of Horia's exaggerated cultural optimism, based on the nondeterministic physics of Heisenberg, Bohr and Gonthier, stunned the audience most. Professor Guardi pointed out that scientists entertain no vast designs transferable to philosophical speculation, but are interested in localized problems. He demolished the view that the "two cultures" may learn from each other and are destined to proceed in unison. For indeed, a capricious change of orbits by Heisenberg's protons has nothing to do with the proof of God's existence and man's freedom.

Prof. Claude Polin (Sorbonne), author of a recent *Esprit totalitaire*, directed a similarly decisive critique at Freund's too-sharp distinction between an "imperious" order (the way things are) and the "imperative" order, derived from an unknowable God. If no bridge exists between the two, then the lower order, so Polin argued, becomes pedestrian and arbitrary. It was perhaps Giovanni Volpe's wisdom that the con-

ference which opened with Freund's lecture, could end with mine on the subject of order and creation, concluding the switch from the first to the second worldview.

In the general debate, the philosopher Augusto del Noce gave his interpretation of the crisis in neognostic terms, a lady from the audience had the idea of defending Esperanto. The rights of the national languages—even over Latin—were reasserted by art historian Carlo Belli; I remarked that the Budapest uprising would have been unimaginable in a "supranational" idiom, and Prof. Pierre Boutang cited de Gaulle's contempt for an apartheid "volapuk."

The Countess Pallavicini attended most of the debates, wheeled in by a liveried butler. Various personalities from the political, journalistic and artistic world came and went, old acquaintances surfaced, books were inscribed by authors, gossip exchanged, and restaurant addresses passed on as if in confidence. In general, the Urbs intruded at all stages: Rome, the lovely and never-old courtesan, is not disfigured even by the warts of terrorism and tourism on her face. In the midst of exploding bombs, fights between students and police, legions of pilgrims for Holy Week—the city remained lovely and open, the shop windows elegant (and even more so in Bologna and Venice), the restaurants full, the Spanish Steps sunk in flowers.

A new feature: the Pope is everywhere, more popular than John XXIII. His photographs are in all the shops, crowds surround him wherever he goes, in the towns he visits they cry "Please come back again!" Leftist papers have stopped attacking him for fear of turning him into a "rightist" pope whom the voters would then follow to the "other camp." In Venice, a few days later, I heard under my hotel window a drunk on one of the small bridges over the canal declaim for hours: "Papa polacco, papa comunista." So there you have it. Anyway, I am not sure that the pontiff's sudden stardom is a good thing.

Is any personality cult a good thing?

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Bologna, with its arcaded sidewalks, has a communist municipality, red voters in the suburbs, bourgeois opulence and active church life in the center. Marxist parties are gaining increasing power in many important cities of Italy, France, and now Spain too. But it must be said that Bologna is kept perfectly clean, even though the much-advertised "free public transportation" (a dream from Marx to Khrushchev) is a false myth. Padua, too, is a bourgeois city—with a lot of communist voters and the renowned university where the Aristotelians used to enter battle against the partisans of Averroës. Now eleven thousand out of twelve thousand students are psychology majors, and political science professor Antonio Negri has just been arrested for masterminding the kidnap and assassination of Aldo Moro. *Otherwise*, the university is quiet, and the old waiter of Il Pedrocchio, a 19th-century café with marble-top tables, red plush banquettes and a bourgeois public sipping tea and eating pastry, says resignedly: "No disorders—today..."

I lectured in Pordenonne, Trieste, Venice. Left-wing pedagogues smiled painfully when, in the course of the questions/answers, I mentioned that I am hardly a democrat. In contrast, Trieste, bordering on Yugoslavia, is right wing: Tito is so near that the main topic of conversation is the hope for his survival for another and another year. Here too, the 19th-century bourgeois character is evident: the starch-collared hotel concierge, the coffee-pastry in the afternoon, the monumentally solid insurance company buildings, the French-speaking *politesse* of my hosts, friends and public. Trieste, the old Austro-Hungarian port city, now without a hinterland other than the communist countries, is said to be agonizing, its population of 300,000 dwindling. If so, this is not visible on the busy streets. But again, everything