

Sins of '68

Paul Berman

Power and the Idealists

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311 pages.

Reviewed by Benjamin Kerstein

In the past year, France has exploded into yet another of the periodic cycles of riot and mayhem which have marked the modern history of that country of perpetual divisions. There is irony in all this, as Paul Berman's *Power and the Idealists* is in many ways a chronicle of a generation whose own capacity for riot and mayhem, as well as for extraordinary idealism and even utopianism, in many ways set the scene, and composed the first iteration, of the upheavals that are now shaking the country, the continent, and, for the most ambitious among them, the world they hoped to unite.

The major figures that Berman undertakes to chronicle are nearly all French, or deeply influenced, as is Berman himself, by the legacy of French intellectualism and the par-

ticularly French talent for generating both political theory and political action. The failure, the disillusionment, the slowly dying dreams of that generation, seen in the context of Paris burning once again, and burning at the hands of those who are equally children of the European radicalism of Berman's onetime revolutionaries and of the Islamic apocalyptics who make up the secondary subject of Berman's chronicle, demand from us a measure of reckoning between the two; and we may take from Berman the charge of drawing unities that cross the obvious distinctions and looking fearlessly upon what we will find, be it riot, revolution, emptiness, or collapse.

Power and the Idealists is the work of an extraordinary writer. Berman is comfortable being both a voice in the wilderness and the child of an ideology. Indisputably a man of the Left, and a child of the upheavals of 1968, he has nonetheless, from his perch among the lonely social-democrats of *Dissent* magazine and in his

own books, *A Tale of Two Utopias* and *Terror and Liberalism*, shown himself unafraid, like George Orwell, to assail his own brethren for their transgressions of reason, rectitude, and simple human decency.

His new book is well in keeping with his earlier works. It is, as the author himself announces, a follow-up to *A Tale of Two Utopias*, a chronicle of the various iterations of the '68 generation's political journey from youthful rebellion and revolution of the days of rage to the quiet and uncertain calm of the post-Cold War decade. Berman extends his chronicle to include the Bosnian intervention and, ultimately, 9/11, Afghanistan, and the second war in Iraq. *Power and the Idealists* could easily be subtitled "the soixante-huitards contemplate the war on terror."

As such, *Power and the Idealists* is less a sequel than a synthesis of *A Tale of Two Utopias* and Berman's finest work, *Terror and Liberalism*. Written shortly after 9/11, and deeply influenced by the political analyses of Hannah Arendt and Albert Camus, *Terror and Liberalism* was a gloriously heretical and willfully controversial piece of political theory. It proposed a view of radical Islam which placed the latter squarely within the tradition of European totalitarianism, rejecting the fashionable progressivist conception of Islamic terror as a product of

economic and political injustice, or as a righteous vengeance upon the oppressions of Zionism, globalization, or American imperialism. While remaining squarely within the left-wing tradition of political theory, *Terror and Liberalism* nonetheless cut a furious swath through some of the Left's most cherished fields, unafraid of condemning icons like Noam Chomsky and Jose Saramago as, at best, reckless apologists and, at worst, nothing less than enablers of totalitarianism and murder. While Berman stood accused of capitulation to imperialism, descent into crypto-neo-conservatism, and an unhealthy affection for Israel, he nonetheless maintained that his book was nothing more than a call for liberals to hew to their ancient ideals; and, moreover, that if Islamic totalitarianism was to be defeated, then it was the liberals who should, indeed must, be the leaders of the resistance to it. Only they, Berman maintained, with their history of opposition to all forms of oppression and inequality, could adequately make the stand against this new permutation of their oldest enemy. To leave the resistance to the Right was to invite inevitable defeat.

But *Terror and Liberalism* was more than a simple call to arms. It was also an extension of Hannah Arendt's theories of totalitarianism. The great revolution of Arendt's work was to

perceive a broader nature to totalitarianism than the specific nature that a Nazi, Fascist, or Communist regime might immediately display. Totalitarianism, she proposed, was a form of political utopianism gone mad, a delusion of total control, universalism taken to its utmost extreme, and thus a phenomenon which crossed political parties, ideologies, and geographical coincidence. Berman's intention in *Terror and Liberalism* was to extend the boundaries of Arendt's thesis, to expand upon her unified theory of totalitarianism to include new permutations, permutations which reached beyond the border of Europe into the Arab and Muslim worlds, and thus begat a different but nonetheless eerily related form of the same phenomenon.

Terror and Liberalism is therefore a study in theory. *Power and the Idealists* is a study in practicalities, an analysis of why the generation of which Berman has appointed himself the chronicler—his own generation—now faces the challenge of totalitarianism, initially in the Bosnian conflict, and finally in the form of Islamic terror and Arab fascism. *Power and the Idealists* is thus perfectly titled. It is a tale of the meeting between the intangible ideals of a generation that lived most fully in its ideals, and the harsh practicalities of political power.

It is also a tale of disillusionment, and perhaps of tragedy. As Berman relates it, it is an Icarus myth, the tragedy of a generation that sought, perhaps, to fly too high ever to realize its aspirations.

Berman relates his tale through a series of characters, a dramatis personae worthy of the finest *bildungsroman*, and he introduces them—as befits a generation that cherished provocation—with a scandal. The affair, which first broke in January 2001, involved two of the most famous and successful scions of the spirit of 1968: Joschka Fischer, then the Green Party foreign minister of Germany; and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the infamous “Danny the Red” of the Paris student revolt. The scandal, which began with the publication of a series of pictures showing the now eminently respectable Fischer in his revolutionary days assisting in the beating of a policeman, grew to encompass charges of fraternizing with terrorists, collaboration with the likes of the Baader-Meinhof gang and the PLO at its most tenaciously genocidal, and, finally, accusations of child molestation against Cohn-Bendit. As Berman relates, the scandal eventually took the form of a cultural phenomenon, named by the European press “the trial of the generation of 1968.” As Berman tells it, this was nothing

less than an effort to discredit the achievements of the entire revolution of 1968, an effort crystallized most explicitly in the writings of French literary provocateur Michel Houellebecq, whose novels present the '68 generation as a legion of sadistic hedonists whose eventual legacy, as related in the scintillating final pages of Houellebecq's masterpiece, *The Elementary Particles*, consists of nothing more or less than the destruction of the entire human race.

Berman connects the scandal to the simultaneous European debate over the intervention in Bosnia. And here he gives us his distillation of the ethos of '68 at its best. He describes it, early on in his book, as follows:

It was a fear, in sum, that in World War II, fascism, and more specifically Nazism, had not been defeated after all—a fear that Nazism, by mutating, had continued to thrive into the nineteen-fifties and sixties and onward, always in new disguises.... A Nazism of racial superstitions committing the same massacres as in the past, a Nazism declaiming a language of democracy and freedom...

What was New Leftism, then? It was—it pictured itself as—Nazism's opposite and nemesis: the enemy of the real Nazism, the Nazism that had survived Nazism, the Nazism that was built into the foundations of Western life.

The Bosnian intervention, of which Fischer was among the most

fervent supporters, was in Berman's telling the product of precisely this ethos: The desire to confront and resist Nazism in whatever guise it might take. Whatever their excesses, the scions of '68 had brought this necessity to the forefront of world politics, and the result had been the slow but ultimately successful defeat of the crypto-Nazism, complete with genocide and concentration camps, of Slobodan Milosevic. This victory for human rights and human decency was, as Berman relates it, a victory which would only have been possible through the moral lexicon of 1968, which judged according to a simple maxim, born of the Manichean question posed by the Vichy regime, as Berman puts it: "Would you have been a *resistant*? Or a *collabo*?" Resister or collaborator. The '68ers' greatest accomplishment was to insist on not being a collaborator, on the necessity of being a resister.

But the '68 generation, and Berman does not shrink from admitting this, has its own history of collaboration. Collaboration with state violence and oppression in Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, and elsewhere. Collaboration with foreign and domestic terrorism, with Baader-Meinhof and the PLO. Even the creed itself, the insistence on opposition to Nazism and crypto-Nazism, had its own illusions and delusions—most

perniciously, as Berman relates, when Israel, and its invocation of the Jewish Question, entered the picture:

The 1967 war, in which the Israelis seized a lot of land, seemed to confirm Israel's imperialist nature.... And, under those circumstances, the New Left came up with one more interpretation of the Middle Eastern conflict, in which the New Left's vision of a lingering Nazism of modern life was suddenly reconfigured, with Israel in a leading role. Israel became the crypto-Nazi site par excellence.... What better disguise could Nazism assume than a Jewish state?

What are we to make of the bizarre association of the Jewish state—a liberal democracy and a homeland for the oppressed—with Nazism in the minds of those who saw themselves as anti-Nazis *par excellence*? Berman deals with the question head on, in the classic *buldingsroman* fashion, as a piece of his chronicle of young men in the process of becoming. Fischer, as Berman relates, may well have sat in silence in Cairo as Yasser Arafat called for Israel's annihilation, but he also looked with horror at the Entebbe incident, and the separation of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners at the hands of the Palestinian terrorists and their German leftist collaborators. Fischer, Berman tells us, reached a realization, and since then has been outspoken in his condemnation of anti-Semitism and of hatred

of Israel—a path, we are told, that others of his generation, even active collaborators in anti-Jewish violence, have followed ever since.

The Bosnian crisis gave way, of course, to a more cataclysmic disaster. 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror presented Berman's '68ers with a new set of dilemmas, and a new challenge to their anti-Nazism. The tale of their reaction makes up the lion's share of Berman's book.

Through the Bosnian crisis into the war on terror, Berman finds the most active, and in some ways the most sympathetic of his '68ers in the person of Bernard Kouchner—radical, sometime sympathizer with Castroism, acquaintance of Che Guevara, medical doctor, founder of Doctors Without Borders, and globe-trotting humanitarian who eventually found himself a place in François Mitterrand's government and a leadership role in the reconstruction of Kosovo following the intervention of the Western powers.

Kouchner appears to have gone farther than Berman's other icons, in both action and theory. Kouchner asserts an obligation beyond simple anti-Nazism. His is a view both more universal and, in some ways, more radical. It favors resistance not merely to oppression but to human suffering in general. For Kouchner, the use of

organized and even official political power to relieve the wretched of the earth is a charge beyond politics and yet completely of politics. It is a Hippocratic sort of obligation, one in which the questions of ideology or even morality are largely irrelevant. According to Kouchner, whatever one's opinion of the conflict between communism and anti-communism in Indochina, Jimmy Carter's dispatch of the Sixth Fleet to relieve the suffering of the boat people is beyond condemnation.

Berman joins Kouchner with Andre Glucksmann, among the first of the French New Philosophers who stepped beyond the prejudices of Right and Left to propose a "humanism of bad news," an Arendtian collapse of ideological boundaries to recognize the universality of suffering and the necessity of being a *resistant* to it. Oppression and suffering, whether inflicted by Right or Left, are of equal terror in the eyes of Glucksmann, and Kouchner's borderless wanderings in the name of human decency seem to him the epitome of the '68 spirit: The refusal to submit, to collaborate, with the inhuman. Berman, it seems, agrees. This, he argues, is the spirit of '68 as it is meant to be, without corruption, compromise, or collaboration.

It is here that the closing of the circle, the cycle of purification, turns

to tragedy, as it must, with the War on Terror. The 9/11 attacks, the invasion of Afghanistan, and especially the war in Iraq, drove a slow but inevitable wedge between Europe and America, between supporters and dissenters, and, ultimately, between the '68ers themselves. Their reactions represent the most telling, and most painful, epoch of Berman's chronicle, an epoch whose denouement remains unfinished and unknown.

But before Berman's characters are forced to resolve the tension between the desire to resist and the desire to collaborate, between the ecstasy of ideals and the temptations of power, he takes us elsewhere: Into the Islamic world itself, and into the thoughts of a pair of *resistants* named Azar Nafisi and Kenan Makiya.

Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, is the model of the disillusioned true believer. An ex-communist and biographer of Mike Gold, an American communist novelist of the 1930s, who returned to Iran to take part in the revolution that overthrew the Shah, Nafisi tells a tale of slow and creeping horror. It is an old tale, as old as the French Revolution itself, the tale of ecstatic rebellion and overthrow slowly descending into fanaticism, paranoia, and, ultimately, Terror. From the revolutionary fervor of her youth, Nafisi is reduced to

teaching English literature to classrooms full of jihadist foot soldiers, one of whom proclaims *The Great Gatsby* to be representative of the rape of Islamic culture.

Makiya is a more unusual case, a man who has lived both inside and outside. An Iraqi expatriate living in Britain and an architecture critic, Makiya walked the line from working for Saddam Hussein's regime and on behalf of the PDFLP, one of the numerous factions of the PLO, to staring the Baathist dictatorship in the face and painting its portrait in a book called *The Republic of Fear*. Makiya helped to expose the horror at the heart of the Baathist regime, and thus to write its epitaph, and in the process earned widespread condemnation from the likes of Edward Said, his ex-colleague from the PDFLP, whose castigation of Makiya seemed well in keeping with his inability to reconcile his ferocious cosmopolitanism with his equally passionate sympathy for Arab crypto-fascism.

It is in Nafisi and Makiya that Berman seems to find his kindred spirits. Both children of the spirit of '68, Nafisi and Makiya have been at the heart of real revolutions, not what Martin Amis called "the revolution as play" which was the work of Fischer, Cohn-Bendit, & Co.; and both have endured the long and difficult descent

into disillusionment and despairing clarity.

Both of these ex-'68ers join Berman in ultimately turning to Hannah Arendt. They too see the kinship between the Islamic form of totalitarianism and its earlier, European manifestations: The same culture of illusion, the ubiquity of oppression, the permeation of the very inner selves of the subjects by the ideology of the regime, and, most of all, the urge towards death and thus towards destruction, which cannot strike us as anything but chillingly absolute in this era of the suicide bomber. Equally, they join Berman in tracing the historical sources: The influence of the Vichy regime on the Baath Party, which merely rendered the essentials of Fascism into Arab translation; the mythos of a glorious past, of the Wagnerian Teutons or the fourteenth-century caliphate. These regimes, their methods, their makeup, their horrors, are all of a piece. What we are faced with in radical Islam, claim Berman and his fellows, is nothing new. It is as old as the twentieth century, and as dangerous to the liberal state, and to human freedom itself, as its previous iterations.

The question of this kinship of totalitarianisms leads us to the War on Terror and, ultimately, to the passions that surrounded, and

continue to surround, the debate over the war in Iraq. What we find is division, uncertainty, and fear. The nature of Saddam's regime is not challenged, nor is the nature of Islamic radicalism in Iran, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. There is no naïveté of the fellow-traveling variety at work among the '68ers, but the debate among Berman's various principals, among Fischer, Cohn-Bendit, and Kouchner, with various interjections by the likes of Andre Glucksmann and the Polish '68er and longtime dissident Adam Michnik, does point to a torpor, a resignation, and an atrophy of ideas in the face of power, a willingness to condemn matched with a refusal of action, and a desire on the part of at least some of these icons not to abandon their essential creed, but to circumvent it, to find some method of being neither *resistant* nor *collabo*. In other words, it points to tragedy.

Fischer, for his part, has his dramatic moment telling Donald Rumsfeld that he is "not convinced" by the evidence of weapons of mass destruction. Cohn-Bendit proposes a slow international isolation and opposition to the Saddam regime, in the hopes of an internal overthrow. Neither of them spend much time musing over the nature of Saddam's regime, or its attendant human cost. Their concern is with America and, specifically, the Bush administration.

Berman grants them their points, and adds a few criticisms of his own. Indeed, Berman's disdain for Bush is palpable, at times overwrought, almost as if the ferocity of his criticisms were a defense against the inevitable charges of neo-conservatism sure to be directed his way. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that tactical concern, a respect for international law, and moral considerations played no small part in the refusal of Fischer and Cohn-Bendit to endorse the invasion of Iraq. This does not, however, erase the fact that Fischer and Cohn-Bendit, for their part, when faced with the Manichean equation of their own making, decided, more or less, to remain neutral.

Kouchner is another case entirely. Replete with his own disdain for the Bush administration—matched in equal measure, however, by his contempt for the Chirac government and the anti-war movement—Kouchner nonetheless holds fast to his Hippocratic creed. He does not turn away from the daily atrocities that formed the nature of life under Saddam Hussein. He openly affirms the indisputables—that the majority of Iraq's population wanted Saddam Hussein gone, that the presence of radical Islam in Iraq was growing to fearful proportions, and that Saddam himself was every bit the evil that George Bush, in his unpleasing Texas

way, made him out to be. Kouchner's opposition to the invasion is purely tactical, and it is a bitter critique indeed; but Kouchner does demand, at least from himself, that one take a stand.

He is joined in this by Glucksmann, whom Berman describes in an inadvertently hilarious moment as "poring through Bush's speeches, looking for the passages that might be fairly reasonable," and by Michnik as well, the dissident from the Soviet bloc, whom Berman describes as lacking in patience for arguments against overthrowing totalitarianisms. Nor, it is implied, does a survivor of the Soviet occupation have the degree of resentment of American power so common to the French and their intellectual class.

In the end, of course, the invasion happened. Iraq's future remains uncertain, but the toll it has taken on the generation of '68 is, according to Berman, enormous. It is doubtful that there will be a sequel to *Power and the Idealists*. In the book's final pages, Berman lowers the curtain on his pageant of rebellion and disillusionment. As he places its genesis in 1968, Berman draws its conclusion in 2003, with the truck-bombing of the UN mission in Baghdad, where, as he describes it, the best of the ethos of '68, the Hippocratic resistance to human suffering, went up in flames:

The story of the generation of 1968 ended there, surely. In Baghdad in August 2003. Nobody else was likely ever again to speak about "our generation" and its mission.... Cohn-Bendit's imaginary '68ers' International... did come into existence, for a while, in the 1990s, and Kouchner and some of the people in his group in Pristina were the International's action team. The team was gone, now.... And the younger generation was going to have to find its own way of thinking.

The trial of the generation of '68 is not yet over; in many ways it has not even begun, and notwithstanding the occasional eruptions of resentment and approbation, the dominance of the '68 generation, at least over the cultural sphere of the West, and in many ways over its political lexicon as well, remains firmly in place. The best and the worst of the legacy of 1968 is something all of us are forced to live with, and to reckon with, on a constant basis. Nearly every aspect of socio-political life in the West has felt the impact of 1968, and has been formed either as an embrace of it or a reaction to it. To take our ground upon the subject, therefore, is not merely necessary, but inevitable.

This is especially pertinent when judging *Power and the Idealists*. For Berman has written not merely a requiem, but also a writ for the defense. Joschka Fischer, he contends,

should be forgiven his youthful indiscretions, Daniel Cohn-Bendit is the victim of vicious and baseless slanders, and Kouchner has long since rid himself of his romance with the likes of Fidel and Che. These men, he contends, have figured out where they went wrong, and as their mistakes are those of an entire generation, the indictments against them must be regarded as little more than insensate reaction.

Indeed, Berman, even as he itemizes his criticisms, gives little weight to any attempts at generalization. He concludes that the trial of 1968 and the cultural phenomena that surrounded it are little more than the longing of inferior minds for the oppressive sureties of the 1950s. Michel Houellebecq, symbolizing, as he does, the literary voice of the prosecutors, comes in for particular approbation. I do not intend to write a defense of Houellebecq here, although I must note that it is absurd to say that a writer as completely despairing of humanity as Houellebecq longs for anything. But there is a point worth making here. The phenomenon which Berman critiques, and to which Houellebecq gives exemplary expression, is not a movement towards reaction. It is, rather, in every way, the voice of the same Hippocratic impulse which Berman praises in his '68ers. It is

the voice of the *casualties* of a generation's revolution: The children of divorce or illegitimacy, the exploited runaways, the women who have undergone multiple abortions and broken relationships, the offspring of drug-addled parents, the tapestry of victims carelessly left by the wayside by the ideological hedonism of a generation.

It is also the voice of other victims, victims of the political rather than the personal variety. Castro's prisoners, Pol Pot's massacred, the Vietnamese boat people whose plight, at least in some measure, must be laid at the feet of those who helped engineer the destruction of South Vietnam—in short, the millions of victims who did not feel the urge of revolution and were nonetheless forced to pay with their freedom, their property, and often their lives for the revolutionary passions of a few. This is a butcher's bill which demands payment, or at least acknowledgment, but is not to be found in the pages of Berman's book. Berman criticizes his '68ers for failing to live up to their ideals, but he refuses to recognize the victims of those ideals themselves.

This indifference comes to fervent expression whenever the youthful indiscretions of the '68 generation are involved. Fischer, we are assured, is now a friend of Israel, as though the victims of German-Palestinian

terror who preceded the epiphany of Entebbe did not exist. Kouchner's encounter with Fidel Castro, in which El Comandante waxes poetic on the virtues of the AK-47, passes by as an amusing anecdote, when it ought to be a chilling reminder of how many must have fallen under those marvelously revolutionary bullets. And the indictment of Cohn-Bendit is simply pushed aside as an absurd slander. Berman, to his credit, includes the passage from Cohn-Bendit's memoir—regarding his tenure as a teacher in a progressive kindergarten—which aroused the accusations:

Cohn-Bendit had written: "It happened to me several times that certain kids opened my fly and began to tickle me. I reacted differently according to circumstances, but their desire posed a problem to me. I asked them: 'Why don't you play together? Why have you chosen me, and not the others?' But if they insisted, I caressed them even so."

Berman accepts, with proper indignation on behalf of the accused, Cohn-Bendit's description of this as a "literary exaggeration." To my untrained ears, it sounds fairly damning. We are assured that Cohn-Bendit has been a longtime opponent of pedophilia. But surely this misses the point. The question is not whether Cohn-Bendit is a pedophile, but whether the culture he helped

found violated the sexual boundaries of young children. What makes Berman's reaction so frustrating is the fact that the answer appears, to me at least, to be so wretchedly obvious. But, then again, I am not a child of '68.

The question of anti-Semitism pushes us into even darker waters. The Nazification of the Jewish people in the collective consciousness of 1968 cannot be dismissed as an arbitrary aberration. Nor as a passing phase. One can scarcely walk onto a college campus today, in America or in Europe, without sooner or later being informed that the Jews have become Nazis. The resurgence of anti-Semitism, and the confluence of leftist anti-Semitism (usually in the guise of anti-Zionism) with the far more vulgar and instantly recognizable form of the contagion now found in the Muslim world—the former, by inevitable synthesis, re-legitimizing the latter—must be a part of the indictment of 1968. Berman notes the irony, but he does not press the point. If Hitler gave anti-Semitism a bad name, the '68 generation did much to separate Hitler from anti-Semitism: It created the means by which one could be simultaneously anti-Jewish and anti-Nazi, the one being the prideful conclusion of the other. In doing so, it may well have committed a millennial crime against the

humanity in whose defense it claimed to toil.

It may be that Berman's writ for the defense is motivated as much by sentimentality as by reason. These are, after all, his people. And while he does not explicitly render judgment, the sum total of his criticisms is considerable. His intention is not necessarily to analyze, but to chronicle. On this level, his accomplishment is admirable. He believes, still, in his generation and their spirit. He attempts to define and critique the spirit of '68, but also to pay tribute to it. At times Berman protests too much on behalf of his sometimes craven icons. But one has the sense that he is an author who is trying, and this has always been Berman's greatest talent, not to deceive himself too much.

But there is another level to this book. It is, again, a study in practicalities, and it is in its practicalities, as opposed to its elegiacs, that this book has its finest moments. Berman is not concerned merely with his idealistic French and Germans. He counts among the children of '68 also the likes of Nafisi and Makiya, and, indeed, they form something like an informal fellowship, one that lies in a mutual desire to grasp the nature of a new totalitarianism, and, in doing so, to break down the traditional boundaries of East and West,

European and Colonial, Right and Left. In this sense, these three are Arendt's disciples. Berman from afar, and Nafisi and Makiya from the midst of revolution. They are all trying to draw the connections, to tease out essences, and to help us understand a threat to both East and West, a global threat, and a global totalitarianism, for a global age.

Arendt herself was accused of oversimplification, and the accusations of lack of subtlety and nuance will fly against the theories of Berman and his fellows for a long time to come. But I doubt if they will succeed in undermining them. The urge towards absolute universalism, and towards the unification of power, would seem to be a natural impulse of mankind; and the resistance against it in the name of the particular and the individual is likely to continue as well. The world is not always Manichean, but it can be. Sometimes we must make a decision that it is so, in order to rouse our energies to the necessary resistance. In this, Berman, Nafisi, and Makiya are the ones to be admired and emulated in this narrative. They are its true heroes. Where the majority of this sprawling cast have chosen neither resistance nor collaboration, these three have cautiously, slowly, but nonetheless decisively, chosen resistance.

But we must ask ourselves as well, what is the full measure of the

phenomenon being described? Perhaps the question is not if totalitarianism is confined solely to Europe, but whether the new totalitarianism is confined solely to the world of the Middle East. Here Berman does not venture, leaving his *j'accuse* incomplete, and his conclusions wanting.

We have, after all, his chronicle: The sum measure of all these lives, and the very fact of their collective disillusionments. Both Nafisi and Makiya were partisans of totalitarian revolutions. Fischer and Cohn-Bendit as well cast their lot, for a time, with the ethos of violent seizure of power. Kouchner had his romance with Castro and Glucksmann with Maoism, but Berman leaves all of these facts as mere lapses, the dirt accumulated by a generation's worth of youthful indiscretions. But this is not enough.

When it comes to his own, Berman looks for reasonable explanations, not fearsome and all-embracing theories. These are reserved for the others, the mad, the new totalitarians. Berman, in short, abandons Arendt exactly when Arendt becomes most important, exactly when the realization looms that a grand unified theory of totalitarianism may lead him not only to the Middle East but also back home, into the dirt of '68 which he has so skillfully chronicled.

It is here that *Power and the Idealists* falls short. Because Nafisi,

Makiya, Glucksmann, Kouchner, and even Berman himself, all those who have chosen resistance and action rather than silence and contemplation from afar, have, in effect, left the generation of 1968. They are no longer soixante-huitards. They have become something new and, perhaps, better. Berman's desire to acquit his generation robs him of the chance to fulfill the promise of *Terror and Liberalism*, the chance to be the herald of a new resistance. Rather than being the last chronicler of 1968, Berman could have been the first chronicler of a nascent intellectual movement, an anti-totalitarianism for the twenty-first century, opposed to both the totalitarianism of Islamic radicalism and the totalitarian instincts of the '68 generation itself. A movement opposed, most of all, to that which has left the soixante-huitards mute and indecisive at a time when speech and choice are as important as ever. A movement which, through Arendt's grasp of the essence of totalitarianism, could exemplify Camus' ideal of moral revolt.

Instead, out of pity, nostalgia, or the desire to grant indulgences to the heroes of his youth, Berman has written an epitaph, not a call to arms. It is an exemplary epitaph, but an epitaph is still an epitaph. It belongs to the past, and what *Power and the Idealists* could have been, the practical

extrapolation of the theories of *Terror and Liberalism*, makes Berman's dirge as tragic as the generation whose disillusionment it laments.

This failure, however, only proves Berman's final point. It is up to a new generation, to us, to find our own way of thinking in the face

of Islamic totalitarianism and the darker tendencies of our own predecessors, our own way of facing the choice demanded of us: *Collabo* or *resistant?*

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