Jean-Pierre Barricelli, "Renaissance Man" in the truest sense of the word, died Tuesday July 1, 1997 of cancer at his Riverside home at age 73. He created an energetic, vocal, and always dramatic presence at the university. He strode through the halls of the University of California, tirelessly advocating and practicing an eclectic brand of humanistic education at Riverside for 34 years. His scholarly achievements were no less broad -including 17 books and over 100 articles which ranged over such topics as the Italian greats Leopardi and Dante, as well as the interrelationships between literature, music, drama, and law. He was active and instrumental in a number of professional societies, including the Association of Literary Scholars, the Pacific Ancient and Modern Literature Association (of which he was once president), the Modern Language Association, and the Comparative Literature Association. He lectured widely each year with a vigorous travel schedule in the U.S. and around the globe. Finally, Professor Barricelli was an accomplished conductor, and music critic, as well as a creative writer and painter. He was also an avid tennis player, who, it is remembered, held the game of golf in utter contempt.

Born Gian Piero Barricelli, the only son of an Italian-American physician, who died when the child was 9, Professor Barricelli was raised by his mother in Cleveland. Orfea Barricelli taught Italian at Western Reserve University and immersed her son in culture, teaching him Latin and Greek and arranging private music and painting lessons.

He took his Bachelors, Masters and Ph.D. degrees in Comparative Literature and Romance Languages all at Harvard (where he played varsity baseball and was co-captain of the team). He taught at Western Reserve, Harvard, and Brandeis Universities, and was a visiting professor at New York University, UC San Diego, and at universities in Norway. His academic honors include Fulbright awards (Paris in 1950 and Bergen, Norway in 1962), a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, and the UCR Distinguished Teaching Award in 1970.

Jean-Pierre Barricelli seemed to be able to do it all; in fact, he just about did it all. A man comfortable with a bat (he played first base for Harvard) and a baton (he conducted symphony orchestras). A man who composed poetry and classical music ... who wielded a paint brush, a tennis racket, and a sabre (he co-captained the Harvard fencing team) ... who, on stage, was a concert pianist and played Dracula. A man who served in military intelligence during World War II, who coordinated the post-war musical denazification of Bavaria (which included rebuilding German symphony orchestras), and who later created a nationally-recognized Comparative Literature Program here at UCR. A man who won six World War II campaign ribbons, four Bronze
Stars, and UCR's Distinguished Teaching Award. A man who could speak and write effortlessly about Dali and Dante, Beethoven and Babylonia, Eero Saarinen and science fiction, music and mythology, law and literature—or, more precisely, literatures-and languages (he spoke five fluently and read in countless others).

At UCR in 1976 he founded the Department of Literatures and Languages (now Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages), of which he was twice chairman. Also in 1976 he was a founder of the annual Eaton Conference in Science Fiction. He devised a popular undergraduate Humanities course at UCR in "The Quest for Values" which epitomized his unique ability to synthesize the literature, visual arts, and music of Africa, Asian and Europe. In all these endeavors Jean-Pierre strove to communicate the values inherent in the arts and humanities, to advocate academic breadth, and to encourage forward-thinking and innovative ways of thinking about cultural practices. His creation of an interdisciplinary graduate comparative literature program anticipated the development of the field we now know as cultural studies and his devotion to a wide ranging understanding of comparativism anticipated the contemporary interest in multiculturalism. His work constantly stressed how much we can learn much from the creative enterprises of all world civilizations.

His monograph-length vita contains more than a dozen books and a hundred articles about a galaxy of topics. One cannot do justice to his full scholarly richness, which can be glimpsed by just one example, which illustrates Jean-Pierre's erudition and versatility. It is called Melopoiesisu, published in 1988 by New York University Press. Through 21 fascinating essays, Barricelli explores multiple relationships of literature and music. He ranges to Wagner to Carpentier to Hugo to Verdi to Pushkin to Tchaikowsky to Mallarme to Debussy and to Liszt. And remember, this book, that topic—the relationship between literature and music—comprises only one course of the intellectual feast that he served up over the years.

Deprived himself of paternal influence, Jean Pierre Barricelli seemed to delight in mentoring both students and younger colleagues. He is remembered by many holding court in a labyrinthian, book-shelf filled office. The visitor would enter after being invited in by a booming, as yet unseen voice, and would take her or his place in the black Harvard chair reserved for such interviews. From this vantage point she or he would gaze up with some trepidation at the fencing foils hanging from the wall above Professor Barricelli's head or the large artillery cartridge on his desk. The conversations which followed were inevitably lively, loud, and certain to contain a reference to Dante.

His physical presence could be intimidating. He spoke so forcefully that eloquence and passion could be misconstrued as anger. Some who first feared him based on reputation or telephone voice later found delight in knowing him as a person. For, in truth, behind that external bigness was a man of utmost gentleness, graciousness, and generosity.
In dialogue, Jean Pierre Barricelli was exigent and encouraging, patient, and attentive, and always available, despite a host of other commitments. Strikingly, although he repeatedly insisted that he was old fashioned in his views of relations between the sexes, as department chair and as senior faculty member he fiercely defended the rights of female students, faculty, and staff to fair treatment and equal opportunity. He was, as he once told an enthralled audience of 100 in World Literature 17A, "an unabashed Liberal."

Even after his 1993 retirement, he agreed to continue teaching through the spring quarter of 1997. He had to fulfill his moral obligation to those graduate students who had specifically come to UCR to study with him. But that decision also involved sacrifice, forcing him to devote less time to personal projects he desperately wanted to complete, particularly his memoirs, of which he finished only sixty pages, covering his life only up to the age of nine.

His strong and eloquent advocacy of the arts and humanities are sorely missed by students and colleagues at UCR and elsewhere in the academic community. Jean Pierre Barricelli’s immense erudition, his ability to synthesize fields and discourses, and his genius as a teacher leave a legacy of scholarship and meaningful pedagogy which challenges all of us and from which we all continue to learn.

At the Memorial Mass held at the St. Andrew's Newman Center near UCR, Jean Pierre was remembered by former students and colleagues as a commanding, inspiring figure who cared profoundly for the university and for its mission. His last message to his students in June 1997 conveys only a small part of his ability to empower students in sincere and meaningful ways:

"I promise that in whatever way feasible nothing shall be lost and that the wheel will grind again... I can safely say that in my years at UCR I have always had students of insight and diligence, and this year's group was no exception. I honor and respect you while assuring myself of your certain future successes."

C. Cortes
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