

actually fits neatly a politics of self-indulgent fantasy in which even revolution (or, more precisely, revolutionary attitudinizing) forms but another mark of one's supposedly superior sensibility. *In the Wink of an Eye* presupposes the mind-set, so common in academia, that just *knows* that the United States is corrupt, that leftist terrorists are fundamentally on the side of right, and similar axioms of the higher political sagacity. Readers beguiled by such visions of the world may find the book amusing rather than inane. Others, who expect politics and political fiction (however comic) to have some grounding in reality, are likely to find the novel pointless and unfunny throughout.

Revolution is the ostensible subject of this novel in which copious citations from Ché Guevara are the author's idea of how to endow cardboard figures with some of the solidity decent fiction requires. In a plot filled with bizarre, hectic twists, amiable Bolivian radicals use their profits from robbing—or "liberating"—banks first to buy a small section of their country, then (profiting hugely from petroleum deposits) to annex Bolivia and, in time, South America. In a reversal of the "Good Neighbor Policy," they even bail the United States out of impending financial catastrophe. All goes splendidly until the real establishment, the power behind all thrones (even behind the Kremlin!)—the Mafia—cracks down. The noble little band then must find a new paradise, one literally and appropriately out of this world. The whole work has the zany turns of Vonnegut's comic-book novels, but it lacks even the imaginative energy infusing some of his better situations.

Real revolution is not the true subject of this exercise in armchair radical posturing. Revolutionary politics is clearly secondary to private sexual fulfillment. Two characters in particular illustrate that for Kelly Cherry radical politics is but theater of the self. One—18, "pro art and little else"—discovers her cause: "playing, in real life, Joan of Arc . . . a modern version," she will lead a general

strike against everything. At this the author smiles indulgently, inviting readers to accept the character not as a potentially dangerous airhead but as a charming waif. The girl is "[n]aturally . . . anti-inflation, anti-Thatcher, anti-Nuke, and anti-American," so her heart is in the right place. Naturally. Most admirable of all is the ultra-autonomous character who smokes cigars and sculpts in metal from her loft in the Bowery. Since radicalism is but a pose, the outcome of the revolution is unimportant; each member of the little band acquires an appropriate sexual partner, and we have the perfect "happy ending" to a consummate novel for the decade of self-fulfillment where the only true comedy lies in unintentional self-satire.

Much can be learned from the endings of these three books. McClanahan's *The Natural Man* closes on a note of continuity, a legacy from Monk McHorning which knits together past, present, and future. *Fisher's Hornpipe* dwindles

to a stop as the title character and his creator do not know where to turn from the shallowness they perceive. *In the Wink of an Eye* ends with the pseudo-revolutionaries heading into space—like the book, totally weightless in a self-made little world cut loose from earth's reality. One could hardly ask for a better symbol than this—all the more perfect for being unwitting—of the smug moral solipsism infecting many of America's "intellectuals." (Unsurprisingly, Kelly Cherry is "Permanent Writer-in-Residence" at a big-name university.) No wonder, then, "serious" fiction seems divorced from much of life or must turn to the past and a provincial setting to escape the enervating force of the abstractions and doctrinaire poses that blunt *Fisher's Hornpipe* and make *In the Wink of an Eye* a parody of itself.

There is, perhaps, a remedy for this sort of coterie fiction—skilled but imitative, hothouse, and academic. It begins with Dr. Johnson's sturdy advice: "Clear your mind of cant." □

Of Jewish Humans & Italian Humanoids

Alberto Moravia: *1934*; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

Aharon Appelfeld: *Tzili*; E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Bryce Christensen

Charles Darwin wrote no novels, though he wrote a great deal of fiction, none of it good. In *The Descent of Man* he argued not only for the scientific principle of natural selection, but for an imaginative vision defining man's place in the world as simply that of an animal. Believing that he had discovered among the simpler creatures analogs for all of

Mr. Christensen is assistant editor for the *Chronicles*.

man's most complex intellectual, emotional, religious, and moral activities, Darwin asserted that no absolute metaphysical, ontological, or spiritual gulf separated a man from a dog, an insect, or—for that matter—from inanimate matter. As one of his critics put it, his was the Medusa myth in reverse: he turned stones into men. This was, of course, not science, as the codiscoverer of natural selection, Alfred Wallace, pointed out, but merely speculative philosophizing—implausible, unsatisfying philosophizing at that, in Wallace's view. The human mind and spirit, Wallace maintained, are utterly unique and cannot be explained by any strictly naturalistic evolutionary schemata. Unfortunately, cultural forces more powerful than Wallace prevailed: Darwin's fiction triumphed as dogma,

while Wallace and his views were quietly interred in scholarly footnotes.

The consequences have been awful. Bestial and inhuman acts gained a quasi-scientific justification, as “survival of the fittest” became the excuse for the most rapacious and predatory behavior. Ignored was the fact that our very use of the word *inhuman* and the total absence of analogs (*incanine? insimian? infeline?*) testifies to man’s distinctively moral character. Nazism, in particular, with its cant about inferior races, its eu-

say two percent; for the other ninety-eight percent we are animals.” In a different novel this might be an acceptable hyperbole expressing the genuine difficulty of mastering the powerful subliminal impulses constantly tempting us to forsake our humanity. However, in *1934* no one *wants* to be human. Lucio is convinced that if he allows his “two percent of humanity” to prevail, he must inevitably kill himself, since he is “absolutely certain that the normal condition of man should be despair” and that the logic of

dance, he himself tells us, has nothing to do with his “metaphysical” despair: “I would have felt just as despairing if Fascism were to fall,” he admits. Moreover, Lucio is not opposed to fascism because it is bestial—since he himself is trying to cultivate enough carnality to survive. He is even repeatedly willing to feign allegiance to the brown shirts in order to get his genital target closer to his bed. What apparently bothers him about fascism is that it seeks to organize animality: lone wolves are acceptable; organized packs are not.

It is order, then, and not fascism that Lucio and his creator actually abhor. Moravia even posits a linkage between conventional sexuality and fascism on the one hand and on the other perversion and antinazism. In the end, this means that the German actress (both halves) commits suicide with her lesbian lover after the Night of the Long Knives, leaving Lucio drearily balancing his human despair and his animal libido.

But who cares? If Moravia wishes, as the dustcover claims, to explore the nature of “politics and love” during a “terrible time,” why has he focused his overly contrived and implausibly artificial plot on featherless bipeds who, having no affirmative sense of their humanity, want to blot themselves out of the realm of all politics, love, and time just as soon as sex has grown cloying? The novel includes several negative references to nazi anti-Semitism, but what tenable arguments or moving sentiments can suicide-prone anthropoids marshal against Auschwitz? If the desire to live is nothing but an animal drive, why should we consider the perpetrators of the Holocaust any more culpable than Swift and Armour’s butchers in the Chicago stockyards? Conversely, if humanness means nothing but despondency, then humans everywhere should have flocked to the gas chambers and thanked the nazis for providing such a modern convenience.

Those destroyed at Auschwitz and Buchenwald did not eagerly rush to their deaths. However, because they

“1934 is very much a romantic work.”

—Harper’s

genic experimentation, and its extermination camps, seemed terribly logical to post-Darwinian men convinced that they were truly animals (albeit superior ones) and that therefore amoral and brutish behavior toward other men was not only natural but even imperative.

The horrors of fascism, of course, are a favorite theme among 20th-century novelists. Virtually all of them oppose the specific actions of Hitler, Mussolini, and their partisans, but the imaginative force of their opposition depends ultimately upon their vision of man. If they follow Darwin, as does Alberto Moravia, in seeing man as essentially an animal, then their artistic repudiation of nazism must remain weak and unconvincing, no matter what talent or ingenuity they bring to their work. Moravia, to be sure, is a writer of ability and his attempt in *1934* to discredit German and Italian fascism shows marks of craftsmanship. But a portrait of Darwin hangs in the Caprisean pensione where the action is centered, and his pervasive influence undermines the protagonist’s (and author’s) stand against the führer and Il Duce.

Early in the novel, the protagonist, a young Italian writer named Lucio, concedes his almost complete surrender to Darwinism by explaining that “we are not completely human; or rather, we are human only to a minimum degree, let’s

despair leads to self-destruction. Not really wanting to do this, he seeks to “stabilize despair” by bringing it into “an unshakable balance” with his animal appetites. In his search for such stability, he falls in lust with a German actress with a split personality. Half of this woman is sheer animal: energetic, voracious, libidinous, and nazi. The other half, the half that most attracts Lucio, is “human,” that is, utterly despairing. Hopeless and literary, she invites Lucio to join her in adultery and then, a la Kleist, double suicide.

Thus humanness is reduced to a death wish, a compulsion found among lemmings, while all vitality is ascribed to animality—and to fascism. Lucio is naturally opposed to fascism, but its ascen-



knew (as many no-nuke partisans now do not) that temporal existence is not the supreme human good and that therefore death is not the worst evil, many accepted their cruel fate with dignified resignation. But none expressed gratitude to those who labeled, treated, and slaughtered them as animals. They wanted to live, and for distinctively human reasons. Hints as to the character of this affirmative humanness are simply but engagingly suggested in *Tzili* by Aharon Appelfeld, an Israeli who escaped as a boy from a nazi concentration camp in Ukraine. *Tzili* is the story of a rather unintelligent, unattractive Jewish girl who survives the war years in eastern Europe by denying her Jewish identity explicitly and by denying her humanity implicitly, adopting a near-bovine existence as she wanders the countryside, working winters for poor and disreputable peasants. But through reflection upon life with her murdered family and even more through experiences with Jews who either escape or survive the camps, Tzili slowly grows into a consciousness of the positive meaning of her human identity. As she hears other Jews repeatedly aver, "Man is not an insect," "Woman is not an insect," Tzili likewise learns in a climactic moment of self-discovery: "I am not an animal. I am a woman." This is hardly a subtle insight, but in the age of Darwin it bears artistic restatement.

Of course Jews, like everyone else, are subject to animal cravings, irrational fears, crazed longings, and, too, despair. Indeed, despair hovers in Appelfeld's novella like a suffocating cloud, threatening to extinguish the very flame of life. But unlike Moravia's languid nihilists who identify despair as the acme of their humanness—a peak from which to throw themselves—Appelfeld's characters perceive that despair and self-destruction derive from the loss of our unique human identity, not its cultivation: "We lost our human image," laments a Jewish father remembering how he had abandoned his wife and children and how he had fought over cigarette stubs in the camps—then he drowns himself.

Fortunately, most Jews managed to retain at least a tenuous grip upon their human image and their will to live. Thus, though only flickering in their manifestations, love, compassion, imagination, and conscience persist in *Tzili*. Heedless of the icy currents, several men try to save the suicide. Haggard refugees share food with Tzili and voice concern for the unborn child she is carrying. And

when that fetus dies within Tzili, a prostitute rallies a ragtag band into singing "torchbearers" as they bear her on a stretcher to a relief center. It was surely this stubborn humanness which inspired nascent hope in the thousands who, like Tzili, left Europe after the war for a land where long ago their forefathers heard the voice of Yahweh declaring that among creatures made of dust, man alone bears the image and likeness of God. □

Economics Made Radical—and Static

Mancur Olson: *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*; Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

Marshall I. Goldman: *U.S.S.R. In Crisis: The Failure of an Economic System*; W. W. Norton; New York.

by William R. Hawkins

Mancur Olson has written a fair-sized book and spun off several journal articles (many of which have been collected in a companion volume, *The Political Economy of Growth*, edited by Dennis Mueller) in support of a position most people would find intuitively obvious. Olson argues that the reason economies slow down over time is because special-interest groups accumulate in stable societies until their combined weight drags the economy under. Each special-interest group distorts the economy as it diverts resources to its own enrichment and away from the common good. The "common good" is defined as high economic growth which is produced by the efficient use of all resources through the natural workings of the free market.

Individuals can gain in two ways. They can gain a larger slice of economic pie if the pie expands, or they can get a larger slice if they add part of someone else's

slice to their own. At any point in time, this second process may provide the larger gain. A glance at the issues which dominate economic policy reveals that distributional issues outweigh growth issues. Politicians maximize their own gain by providing identifiable benefits to special interests while hiding dispersed costs from the general public. By the same logic, general benefits are not as useful to the politicians because the average voter cannot as readily link them to their local representative.

Olson uses the term "distributional coalition" to describe any collective lobby, whether cartel, union, or guild. However, his most persuasive examples come from the behavior of labor unions, which he discusses from the standpoint of macroeconomics, using ideas from labor economists like Albert Rees. Business firms may try to arrange price-fixing coalitions, but they lack the ability to maintain the sort of binding organizations that labor unions form. The lure of "monopoly" profits will always attract new entrepreneurs into a market to erode the cartel's position. It is this process, credited to Joseph Schumpeter, which Olson claims is the real meaning of competition. Olson, however, leaves a major distributional coalition out of his formal analysis: the welfare underclass that explicitly trades its votes for income redistribution programs from the public sector. The diversion of capital from investment to entitlements financed by deficits

Professor Hawkins is with the department of economics at Radford University.