

about what it means to be human. With bigoted arrogance, some of these essayists implausibly posit that the muteness of science on metaphysical issues constitutes an objective proof for materialistic naturalism. Fortunately, a few of the contributors, more honest and humble in victory, concede that as an explanation of the *hows* of life, science can say nothing about the *whys*, not necessarily because there are none, but rather because such questions "transcend the limitations of [science's] epistemological field." Indeed, a philosopher of science who testified against the creationists expresses his relief that no one pressed him on how he intuitively "moral values as objective realities," since he has no idea "what that means."

The writers of Scripture knew what objective moral values meant, but through the Holy Ghost, not through science: they left lesser mortals to cultivate that narrow epistemological field. The question then is, Why are the fundamentalists, who quote these writers so frequently, now shamelessly yoking Moses and Peter to the scientific plow? Why, for instance, is Peter's insight that "a day with God is as a thousand years with man" not openly proclaimed as a *religious* revelation of the relationship between the eternal God and temporal man instead of surreptitiously advanced through distorted geological data as a scientific formula for calculating the age of the earth? A partial explanation is suggested by a perceptive contributor who notes that the fundamentalist hermeneutic principle "literal where possible" is "not derived from the Bible itself, but from some alien philosophical sources," specifically from Enlightenment Baconianism. The troubling implication of this critique is that in their literalist preservation of the words of Scripture, fundamentalists have no access to or do

not trust the Spirit who inspired those words. Fundamentalism thus apparently abandons the most important of fundamentals. Hence, the devious attempt to transform Scripture into an alternative science is actually an awkward capitulation to the scientific spirit of the age and a mute confession that those so involved lack something animating those who openly testify of their religion *as* religion, revelation from God, not discovery of man. With justice, fundamentalists apply to our time Hosea's lament, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." But if they suppose that the spiritual knowledge necessary to forestall destruction can or should be enclosed in a science textbook, then, to quote Isaiah: "The vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed." (BC) □

## Perceptibles

**Michael Novak: *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age***; Thomas Nelson; Nashville, TN.

Demands for a nuclear freeze are frequent these days, in the halls of Congress, in university classrooms, in the streets, and in churches. In particular, the American Catholic Bishops' pastoral Letter on War and Peace, with its call for a "halt" to the production and deployment of nuclear weaponry, has received wide attention. In this collection of intelligent essays, Michael Novak, himself a Catholic, examines that document in its historical, ecclesiastical, and political context. He reveals that from 1968 to 1982, the United States *did* freeze its nuclear-weapons manufacture, producing not a single new delivery system for missiles and no new strategic bombers during that 14-year period. During this same time, the Soviets built up their

nuclear forces relentlessly, surpassing the U.S. in virtually every category, especially in the European theater. The call for a freeze now, at a time when America is belatedly trying to rectify this imbalance, can only mean that the grey matter of many Westerners, including that beneath many miters, is in permafrost. □

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**Michael D. Aeschliman: *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism***; William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.

While remarkable efforts have helped bring such creatures as the sandhill crane and the American alligator back from the edge of extinction, far too little has been done to save a more important endangered species: man. Considered simply as a biological organism, *Homo sapiens* appear to be flourishing, with more than 4 billion specimens to be found on earth. But precisely because mankind is now often considered merely scientifically and not philosophically, morally, or re-

ligiously, man is ceasing to be man. Forty years ago, in *The Abolition of Man*, Christian apologist and literary critic C. S. Lewis warned that the triumph of scientism over traditional metaphysics could only give us "men without



chests," arbitrary, inhuman, and partial men. Because Lewis's book has found tens of thousands of readers, including perceptive analysts like Michael Aeschliman, there is some reason to hope that his warning was heeded. If so, we may anticipate future evidence of man's survival to take forms more meaningful than wildlife photos in *National Geographic*. □

## WASTE OF MONEY

### Psycho-Babble

**Judith Rossner: *August***; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

by Keith Bower

'A woman who writes well never writes much.'

—Max Beerbohm, *Ouida*

Chapter 10 in Judith Rossner's latest novel begins: "In her first

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months with Dr. Shinefeld that September, Dawn was cheerful. . . ." This curious handling of time isn't on a par with Rossner's confusion of the Immaculate Conception with the Virgin Birth in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, but it does show that Rossner is as perceptive as ever. The book is mostly the transcript of young Dawn Henley's psychiatric sessions with Dr. Lulu Shinefeld. And it reads, or rather sprawls, like a transcript, anacoluthons abounding, with dodges and

asides into obscure, incomprehensible mutterings.

*Looking for Mr. Goodbar* was tolerable—at best—because it had a plot, and a unique one at that. You knew Terry Dunn was going to end up murdered, even if you hadn't seen the movie first. A murdered main character usually compels some sentiment and serious consideration. The plot did wonders for what turned out to be a merely pathetic character. But *August* lacks any device that can engender concern for the protagonist, and ranting, quirky histrionics do not fill the gap.

Dawn starts seeing Dr. Lulu after a car accident, which was the result of self-destructive urges after a disastrous affair with her previous psychotherapist. She has recently had an abortion that goes by without comment other than to announce the fact. Later, Rossner has Dawn exhibit some anger over the fact that she was exploited by the boyfriend in this act of murder, but there is no moral dimension to the book, and abortion serves Rossner only as the gimbals on which she hangs the only good metaphor in her writings so far, "she threw herself onto the bed and curled up on her side like a fetus someone was trying to abort."

Dawn Henley is a Freudian bonanza. Her artistic mother committed suicide when she was six months old. Her artistically inclined, homosexual father took care of her for a while. One day he and his lover go off for a jaunt on the yacht, leaving the six-month-old to be checked on by a 10-year-old neighbor boy. A squall comes up, drowning the father. The neighbor boy does not remember until the next day that the Henley infant is alone in the beach house. Naturally, Dawn thereafter is repelled by vomit and feces (both of which covered her when she was found in a state of shock the next day).

This could be a possibility for a TV show, as evidenced by

Rossner's infuriating habit of telegraphing the solutions to her Freudian puzzle, as if she were afraid the reader won't follow the clues unassisted. But TV standards are still too high. When Dawn regurgitates in Dr. Lulu's office (literally, for a change) and then exhibits a morbid phobia of any emotional subject that will make her choke and possibly repeat the indiscretion, one is initially appreciative of her good manners, then, after being reminded two or three times, suspects there is a key to her past in this. But by the time of the flash-



back to Baby Dawn rolling around in her excretions, the element of discovery is gone. All that remains is unpleasantness, and meaninglessness, which perhaps is Rossner's point. She wouldn't be the first author to embrace this self-contradicting *raison d'être*.

Dawn also has a fear of being abandoned by loved ones, fear of desertion being a basic component of all Rossner heroines. Dawn's "parents," a lesbian aunt and her bisexual lover, raise her in a small Vermont town, which amounts to a dream scenario straight from the White House Conference on Families about children raised in "alternative families." (The traditional family in Rossner's books fares rather poorly, too.) Naturally, then, Dawn depends a lot on her psychiatrists for emotional support. The title of the novel comes from Dawn's special terror of August, the month that Manhattan psychiatrists take off for Fire Island

and points east, stranding their patients in a monstrous, five-borough day-care center.

*Looking for Mr. Goodbar* had, at its heart, some moral conflict. Terry Dunn's world was morally schizophrenic, drawn between a nauseating normality that was still identifiably "clean" and the hellish assuagements of concupiscence. But *Emmeline* and *August* are merely well-researched diatribes about the ambiguous status of women in society contrasted with their personal yearnings for dignity. And where *Emmeline* was Upton Sinclair wed to Barbara Cartland, *August* is Freud cohabiting with Erica Jong. Whatever "choices" Rossner's characters make, they are never moral ones, but simply assertions of will that are either suppressed by the dominant male or triumphal in the way a child strides off from home with a bundle on a stick. □

## Apocalypse Right Now?

**Christopher Hyde: *The Tenth Crusade*; Houghton Mifflin, Boston.**

The book of Scripture generally known to Catholics as the Apocalypse and to Protestants as Revelation has long posed difficult problems for most Christians. Filled with fantastic monsters, cryptic references, and scenes of cataclysmic destruction, suffering, and judgment, this segment of the canon provoked decades



of debate in the early Church over its validity before finally being accepted as authentic. For liberals who don't take much time now to contemplate John's awe-inspiring vision—or any other part of the Bible—Christopher Hyde has written a new Apocalypse sure to win their approval, one that will take its place in their neo-Bible right next to the sacred texts of the Four neo-Evangelists, Vidal, Doctorow, Vonnegut, and Hawkes, and of the ready-to-wear Apostle Mailer. For though Mr. Hyde the novelist (soon to be St. Hyde the Revelator) offers the usual disclaimer as to the fictitiousness of his characters and events, he is clearly offering a book of dire prophecy; hence, publisher's flack's warning that this brutal tale's "most chilling aspect is its imminent likelihood." Very little mystery surrounds the loathsome beasts in this book: they are Bible-toting paramilitary fanatics who infiltrate the government and violently terrorize all those not dead set against "the decadence of America," "the liberal-intellectual minority," and "socialism, communism, homosexuality, Judaism, free sex, pornography, abortion, and any kind of sin." John's horrid creatures challenged the spirit and imagination more deeply than these cardboard lunatics, but the intended audience will nonetheless break into rapturous hosannas over them because of the not-so-subtle linkage to the New Right, conservatism, neo-conservatism, Jerry Falwell, born-again fundamentalism, and Ronald Reagan. Illuminated manuscripts of the Antichrist with the mystic inscription RR cannot be far behind.

Two features of the ancient Apocalypse not imitated by Mr. Hyde are the New Jerusalem and the fruit of the Tree of Life. But then, his redeemed soul will probably settle for Harvard Square and royalty checks from Houghton Mifflin. (BC) □