

post-Gang-of-Four period, a tragic vision of China's recent past becomes so strong that the somewhat hopeful ending of the book is not wholly convincing. Always in the background is Liang's father, an intellectual who eventually loses his wife, his health, and the greater part of his seemingly indestructible faith in Mao and the Party. He, more than any other figure in the book, represents the human cost of the omnipresent political campaigns that have had such devastating effect on the country and its citizens.

There is little in *Son of the Revolution* that has not been revealed or alluded to in other works about contemporary China, whether published in China or abroad: the state of virtual anarchy that existed for years, the erosion and near-paralysis of normal, civilized human relations, the true state of the rural economy, class antagonisms, and a growing skepticism that has its most profound effects on youth. But in this book the victims are given names and faces, and there is a unifying element that humanizes the drama: the author's family and the people he came to know so well during his adventures. *Son of the Revolution* is a very personal account of Mao's China, and a sobering one. WV

### 1934

#### by Alberto Moravia

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux; 297 pp.; \$14.50)

*Edward J. Curtin, Jr.*

This is a pretentiously muddled novel, similar in many ways to John Fowles's *The Magus*. It is the pathetic and farcical story of Lucio, an aspiring and despairing young Italian writer, who, in that portentous year when Hitler is consolidating his power, comes to the enchanting isle of Capri to learn whether it is "possible to live in despair and not wish for death." Perturbed though he is by the Fascist ascendancy, it is not the cause of his despair, which is, "so to speak, metaphysical." The novel, indeed, evokes a bizarre world that is implicitly godless, totally lacking in transcendence or its possibility. Lucio is one of the living-dead, as are all the characters in this book. Vaguely wishing to come to life, he is doomed to fail; his absurd efforts are pervaded by a dispirited, premature sense of exhaustion. The action, if it may be called action, approximates a disturbed dream: "I had only dreamed; I had dreamed I was dreaming and then waking, and then dreaming again."

On the boat to Capri, Lucio contemplates Dürer's engraving "Melancholia" and considers the possibility of living with despair. Seated opposite him, a young German woman, Beate, returns his despairing yet lustful stare, seeming to say, "No, have no illusions; it's not possible, absolutely not." He feels he has found his twin, an equal in despondency. They exchange no words; she is accompanied by her husband, fat and much older. Of course the husband poses a problem, but Lucio's lust is obsessive and determined. "For you I'd do anything," he tells her. He exchanges the Fascist salute with Beate's husband, betraying his convictions for a mimed kiss. His love is a lust to betray and lose himself, a merging of love and death.

Being a writer, however, an expert on Kleist, Lucio has come to Capri to write a novel. He intends to have his protagonist kill himself for political reasons, hoping that "the self-destructive violence of despair would be released on the page instead of in life." And so writing—"nothing but a game"—would be his salvation. Of course he writes nothing: he is too obsessed with his passion for his mute angel of death.

Still, determined to act, to jerk himself out of his slough of despond, Lucio gives himself, in typical Moravian fashion, to sex. Death, love, and literature are ambiguously addled as he pursues his sexual obsession. He is not disappointed. Beate in her own despair offers him a bargain: In return for a night of sexual love he must agree to double suicide, Kleist-style. This runs counter to his original wish to stabilize despair—"transform it, that is, into a normal condition of life and thus never arrive at the logical and equally inevitable conclusion of suicide." Lucio, however, belying his name, is powerfully attracted to death. "Thus, the same vital instinct that should have made me reject double suicide, that same instinct drove me, instead, through desire, to accept it."

And so a bewitching game of mystification unfolds in which the political and the sexual are commingled. "My husband horrifies me," Beate tells Lucio, "his hands are stained with blood." Executioner and victim, master and slave, husband and wife are bound by a tie of cryptic, reciprocal corruption. Lucio is fascinated. Beate proves to be an actress: a twin sister appears: the mystification grows thicker. Still, it would be unfair to reveal the plot. Suffice it to say that Moravia's typical themes are here: the link between irrational passion and violent death, the effort to explain political fanaticism in sexual terms (with the disturbing suggestion that homosexuality is one of its

causes), characters who are despairingly indifferent and hopelessly detached, the unfulfilled desire to pass from living death to the feeling of life.

Admirable in intent, *1934* develops into a morass of confusion. By book's end, one is given to suppose, Lucio has seen some sort of light. Himself? The truth of fascism? The devil? Whatever it is, it escapes me. Perhaps it escapes Moravia as well. "After a very long moment, I thought: It's all bad literature....How literary it all is!—but without irony, almost as if certifying a real fact: I stretched out my arms....But my arms clasped the void."

Though Lucio never writes his novel, Moravia has. One assumes it has helped him to endure, to stabilize his lucid despair.

### GROWING YOUNG

#### by Ashley Montagu

(McGraw-Hill Book Co.; xii + 306 pp.; \$6.95 [paper])

### THE HUMAN CYCLE

#### by Collin M. Turnbull

(Simon & Schuster; 283 pp.; \$14.95)

*Albert L. Huebner*

Neoteny is hardly a household word: relatively few people outside the biological and behavioral sciences know it, and even within those disciplines the concept that it represents is often not clearly understood. That obscurity is slowly disappearing, however, and Ashley Montagu's thought-provoking essay on the subject is likely to hasten the process.

Neoteny refers to the retention into adult life of those human traits associated with childhood, with the fetus, and even with the juvenile and fetal traits of our primitive ancestors. There is striking evidence, for example, that many physical characteristics of the young chimpanzee's skull are closer to those of the human child *and* the human adult than to the adult chimp.

In a more modern form, neoteny refers to the slowing down of the rate of human development and the prolonging of the phases of development. In other species early specialization is the path to extinction. But human beings live through a lengthy period of plasticity, flexibility, and educability that confers the characteristics needed for a successful response to changes in their environment. Outstanding scientists, including Julian Huxley, Konrad Lorenz, and Stephen Jay Gould, have viewed neoteny as supremely important to past human evolution.

Montagu goes further, arguing that "as a consequence of the unique evolutionary history of our species," we are "designed to continue, throughout our lives, to grow and develop in the traits so conspicuously exhibited by the child." Both the deepening and broadening of our humanity is linked to this course. And what are these "conspicuous" neotenous traits? He works out an imposing list that includes the need to be loved and to love others; the qualities of curiosity, imagination, creativity, open-mindedness, and playfulness; and the need to learn.

Montagu laments the many contemporary pressures and institutions that subvert healthy development. Suppression of the "spirit of the child" is frequently misconceived as the path to maturity; ironically, complete loss of that spirit is often used to define old age, a condition viewed with dread. The schools, which ought to welcome traits such as curiosity, imagination, and openmindedness, sometimes seem dedicated to crippling them.

Above all, Montagu deplores that "innumerable" children have been deprived of the love they need. The love received by the child releases the power to love others. Without it, all the neotenous traits wither;

both the child and humanity are diminished. In a passage that sums up decades of his advocacy of the importance of being loved and of loving, Montagu writes: "When at last our so-called 'civilized' societies come to understand these simple truths, we may look forward to a very different world, not one of perpetual conflict, brutality, alienation, and misunderstanding, but one of compassionate intelligence and peace... 'and a little child shall lead them.' "

Montagu delineates the evidence for neotenic physical traits with exemplary clarity and rigor. Behavioral traits, inherently more difficult to identify, are another matter. Here, he presents little solid evidence. The arguments he makes in favor of most of the traits on his list are reasonable enough, but that is hardly the scientific demonstration he claims. And a few of his arguments seem strained to the breaking point.

While these defects are significant, they should not be overestimated. *Growing Young* breaks fresh ground on a matter of enormous importance. Montagu's stimulating, humane, and erudite book is certain to spur further investigation and analysis.

Montagu observes that the spirit of the child is seen in action among many so-

called primitive peoples, frequently "with unconcealed admiration." Few have found more to admire in these nonliterate cultures than anthropologist Colin Turnbull.

In *The Human Cycle*, Turnbull examines the stages of life from birth to death and the ways in which societies as different as our own, the Mbuti of Zaire, and the Hindus of Banaras handle them. The comparisons are most striking when Turnbull measures the life patterns of his own society against those of the Mbuti, whom he cherishes. In a series of richly drawn, descriptive passages, he portrays these forest people as peaceful, loving, wise, deeply spiritual, cooperative, and completely in harmony with nature. He finds that Western society falls short on each count.

Underlying these shortcomings is a sharply different view of social responsibility. According to Turnbull, "In adult life, perhaps partly as a result of our way of dealing with adolescence, social order for us rests on a law that is external to the individual; we are coerced into social behavior." In contrast, among the Mbuti "and in other similar societies, the same degree of social order is achieved without law, without even the threat of physical coercion, because each individual is impelled

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to social behavior from within, having learned to feel that way and to *want* to feel that way."

The comparison is open to many criticisms. Turnbull's depiction of the Mbuti as a virtually perfect society is likely to renew charges that he, and others who share his perception, are expressing personal bias rather than reporting anthropological fact. The bleak autobiographical episodes from his youth that he draws upon may strengthen the feeling that Turnbull's analysis is far from rigorous. And by no means does everyone in Western society have to be coerced into responsible social behavior.

These criticisms, well grounded or not, do not invalidate the main thrust of *The Human Cycle*. An overwhelming body of evidence indicates, for example, that many nonliterate cultures are far less violent than industrial societies, that they maintain a relationship to the environment that we have lost, and that they integrate the elderly into society more fully and more humanely than we do. People in industrial society are increasingly concerned about violence, about abuse of the environment, and about mis-

treatment of the rapidly growing number of elderly. More and more of them are searching for solutions to these problems. Turnbull sees nonliterate cultures as potential models that can help with the search.

The term long used to characterize these cultures, "primitive," implies a backwardness that has nothing to offer members of an advanced industrial society. Again and again Turnbull challenges that view. He invites us to explore the whole world around us to "learn about the many other things we might have become under different circumstances, or could still become if we so wished." Toward the end of the book he writes: "Just as we have the right to choose one life style over another, to prefer the American way of life to that of the French or Chinese or whatever, so we have the right to choose our own ideal of what 'society' should mean and be."

Certainly the Mbuti seem to be close to Turnbull's ideal, but he does not insist that we accept his choice. Rather, he urges us to fashion our own ideal from what we have learned and then to work toward making it a reality. **WV**

### **CHRIST UNMASKED: THE MEANING OF THE LIFE OF JESUS IN GERMAN POLITICS by Marilyn Chapin Massey**

(University of North Carolina Press: xi + 182 pp.: \$23.00)

*Hans Schwarz*

In this slim volume Marilyn Chapin Massey, an associate professor at the Harvard Divinity School, endeavors to recover the political meaning of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, by David Friedrich Strauss. According to Massey, Strauss's work "is one of the most celebrated books of the nineteenth century," and "by its influence on the left-wing Hegelians and Karl Marx, the book changed the course of European and world history." She contends "that only when the Hegelian philosophy of religion is brought together with another type of interpretive guide can the political meaning of *The Life of Jesus* become evident." In order to give a political flavor to its theological and biblical content, she compares the book with a novel about a tragic young woman, Karl Gutzkow's *Wally the Skeptic*, published in 1936. Though the books have no direct literary dependence on each other, both were written in Germany at virtually the same time.

Massey devotes the first chapter to "Texts and Language," presenting a brief summary of the Strauss and Gutzkow books. In the

second chapter she escorts us through "Germany in the 1830s: Politics, Literature, and Religion," indicating the tension between the forces attempting to return Central Europe to its condition before the Napoleonic occupation and the forces leading to the 1848 revolution. She contrasts the Biedermeier culture, which was content with a very modest participation in political life, with the writers of Young Germany, who wanted to arouse Germany from its sleep. The writers of Young Germany, among whom was Gutzkow, soon got into trouble. Their works were banned in 1835, and even mention of them was considered a political crime. That this is the context in which *The Life of Jesus* must be read becomes evident when we hear that in 1830 the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III declared that theology professors who do not feel bound by the dogmas of the Protestant Church as eternal truths are extremely dangerous to the state. Indeed, *The Life of Jesus* appeared in the midst of a growing confrontation between conservative and moderate political and theological forces. Massey concludes

that Strauss's *Life of Jesus* "would introduce democratic sentiments into German cultural life in the line of the Paris Revolution. Because *The Life of Jesus* did so as a Hegelian statement, its effects were not as easy to eliminate as were those of [Gutzkow's] novel. Hegel's theory of the monarchy, as well as his theory about Christ, would be unmasked [by Strauss] as containing at its core democratic implications that posed a direct threat to the union of throne and altar, which in the Prussia of the mid-1830s was also the union of monarchy and aristocracy."

In the next three chapters—"Irony: The Holy Principle of Spirit and Freedom," "Christ and Democracy," and "Aristocracy and Genius"—Massey's thesis is that Strauss was attempting to reinterpret Hegel by his assertion that humanity, not the individual, can receive the power of the Spirit. And contrary to Hegel's original intentions, Strauss makes the Hegelian principle supportive of a democratic one. The conservative, right-wing Hegelians had drawn a direct parallel between the God-man Jesus and the monarch. Strauss claimed this was untenable, since the divine had been incarnated in humanity as a whole.

According to Massey, *The Life of Jesus* was a "potent instrument of political protest," and it was immediately associated with the works of social and political radicals. Yet it did not inspire a successful democratic revolution, since in the third edition Strauss abandoned the notion of a democratic Christ through a changed assessment of the Gospel of John. He attributed greater historical accuracy to this gospel and came to view Jesus as belonging "to the category of highly gifted individuals who in the various spheres of life are called to raise the development of Spirit in humanity to higher levels"—in short, a religious genius. This third edition was marked by a pathos that destroyed the effect of irony.

Researchers into the history of Christian thought are today more prone to see their subject in a wide sociopolitical context. The same method also bears fruit in other areas of theology, such as the exegetical and practical disciplines. Massey has shown us its value in New Testament studies, and for this she must be commended. But we hear relatively little from her about the third edition of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. Could it be that Strauss's change to conservatism in the third edition did not fit Massey's conception? Is this also why the reader is not told more about Strauss's explicit venture into politics? Though Massey may occasionally have overstated the significance of Strauss's