

lication immediately after it of the immensely popular fantasies by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, both of them veterans of the World Wars. Although Tolkien started writing his great trilogy as an undergraduate before World War I, and published *The Hobbit* in 1936, the *Lord of the Rings* did not appear until the mid-'50s. Selling 9 million copies, it became a cult phenomenon for the very generation that at a slightly younger age had seized so eagerly on *The Catcher in the Rye*.

C.S. Lewis' seven stories of the land of Narnia also appeared in the '50s. His and Tolkien's popularity coincided not only with the general conservatism of the '50s but with the postwar vogue of such theologians as Søren Kierkegaard, Jacques Maritain, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr.

For Carpenter, Tolkien and Lewis are not of the true Golden Age. They are a little too conscious and explicit, not subversive enough, not even as subversive as Frank Baum in *The Wizard of Oz*. They lack the doubts and inner conflicts that enriched the works of the Victorians in ways that would have been shocking if then understood. This is notably true of *Alice*, though it does sometimes frighten children, whose parents like it rather more. But how many adults took in completely the fact that the signs "EAT ME" and "DRINK ME" confronted by Alice referred to the blood and body of Christ?

Concepts of childhood come and go, along with the children themselves. Carpenter cites *The Disappearance of Childhood* by Neil Postman, a deeply pessimistic account of how American society through its schools, its mass media and the home, has irresponsibly been obliterating the distinctiveness of childhood.

Although we are in a period of revived fundamentalism, with the myths and miracles of the Bible taken quite literally again, there is no corresponding revival of romantic wonder, of nostalgia for vanished Edens in books for children. Louisa May Alcott has been replaced by the tough, sexually explicit Judy Blume. I know of no current fantasists successfully creating sustained other-worlds

like those of C.S. Lewis and Tolkien, or of the great figures of Carpenter's Golden Age, Kingsley, Grahame and MacDonald.

In the general retreat from reading, mythic fantasy for children has been triumphantly captured by cinema spectacles, animated cartoons and TV space-war serials. Some of Steven Spielberg's productions almost meet Carpenter's standards, especially *E.T.*, which contains a Christian death and resurrection myth. On the other hand, in its immediate successor, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the mystic power of the recovered Ark of the Covenant was used for nothing more spiritual than to vaporize some Nazis. Most of the violent films for children have no more spirituality than the violent adult films they watch during the prime time "family hour."

In James Thomson's *The Seasons*, once much anthologized, there are two famous lines on bringing up children: "Delightful task! to rear the tender thought, / To teach the young idea how to shoot."

The electronic media are only too delighted to teach the young how to shoot with a variety of marvelous weapons on the ground and in the air in all-out wars between "us" and "them." These wars are an unfailing source of excitement. I speak not from the remoteness of crabbed age, but from listening to the talk and watching the play, including play on the computer, of my grandson and his friends, boys somewhat younger than I was in 1918. One of the games included gratuitously on my Basic disk is called "Blood Bath."

If we look at the posters in the windows of comic book stores or lean over the shoulders of youngsters in video arcades or sample the animated cartoons on Saturday morning television, Postman's gloom in *The Disappearance of Childhood* seems justified. What was once a Golden Age is now nuclear, and Armageddon has replaced the Secret Garden. But never fear. Only the Bad Guys get pulverized in Star Wars, and even if the worst happens, there are galaxies upon galaxies where we can proudly plant our flag.

The Moslems of Despair

Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics

By Emmanuel Sivan

Yale.

218 pp. \$18.50.

Reviewed by Daniel Pipes

Professor, U.S. Naval War College; author, "In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power"

EMMANUEL SIVAN, professor of history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, sets out to explore three things: What the Sunni fundamentalists of Egypt and Syria diagnose as the ills confronting Islam, the cure they propose, and how they suggest administering it. He succeeds brilliantly in this gem of a small book.

The litany of specific fundamentalist complaints is as varied as it is long. It includes the frivolous and anti-Islamic fare of the mass media in Egypt and Syria, the non-Islamic nature of education in those countries, the absence of Islamic laws, the mingling of the sexes, the prevalent commercial ethos, their decrepit Islamic establishments, and the repression suffered at the hands of their governments.

In sum, the fundamentalists maintain, Moslems have reverted to the level of ignorance and barbarism—known in Arabic as *jahiliya*—that existed before the revelation of the Prophet Mohammed. They have deviated from their teachings to the point where they can no longer be considered true followers of the faith, and more of them are lured by Westernization all the time.

Sivan shows that fear of daily losing battles has imbued the radicals with a particular sense of urgency: Unless something is done quickly, it will be impossible to stem the rot.

The cure, he explains, is believed to reside in militant political action. The state has allowed anti-Islamic measures to draw Moslems away from their religion, extremists reason, and it could also bring them back. Thus they call for rebellion to replace the state's pernicious influence with a wholesome one. Although that may strike outsiders as hardly shocking, taking up arms against the ruler directly violates longstanding Sunni tradition. Mohammed is supposed to have said, better a lifetime of tyranny than a moment of anarchy. Convincing Sunni Moslems to oust their rulers, therefore, required the development of a whole new line of thought.

That was precisely the achievement of Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), the Egyptian writer noted for borrowing many of his ideas from the medieval thinker Ibn Taymiya (1268-1328). Ibn Taymiya argued that "he who forsakes the Law of Islam should be fought," regardless of whether he considers himself an obedient Moslem. Qutb applied this principle to modern leaders who abandon the Law in pursuit of Western ways, and concluded they had to be overthrown. The impact of his thought was attested by Sadat's assassins. They justified murdering the President while he sat watching a parade with the assertion that "the apostate must be killed even if he is in no position to fight."

As Sadat's death made clear, however, eliminating the man at the top will not by itself bring about a properly Islamic society; beyond punishing transgressors, the radicals need to actually seize the government. To accomplish this in the face of powerful and repressive states, they have organized counter-societies—self-contained and isolated groups living in strict accordance with Islamic precepts. (One Egyptian group went so far as to live in desert caves.) These radicals form a vanguard of True Believers who challenge the state first through violence and over the long term through education.

Radical fundamentalist thought generally follows predictable paths, yet Sivan notes several unexpected developments. Despite an intense loathing for Israel, for example, the radicals are in

no rush to conquer Jerusalem. They see no point in fighting in today's armies ("How can a ruler governing his people with a whip triumph on the battlefield?"), insisting on a new order in their own camp before dealing with an external enemy.

Rather surprising, too, is the virulence felt toward President Hafez al-Assad and the other Alawi rulers of Syria. Harking back to Ibn Taymiya's condemnation of them as "worse than Jews or Christians, worse even than pagans," and his railing against their "history of treason to Islam," the Sunni radicals reserve their harshest criticism for Syria, terming it the "Alawi terror state" and portraying Assad as a "defector from Islam clad in Moslem garb."

In addition to delineating the extremists' thinking—and offering some striking quotations from their writings—Sivan looks at two other Egyptian and Syrian groups in relation to the radicals: conservative Moslems and Leftists. The former share many of the radicals' beliefs but continue to live in normal society, and consequently find themselves being pressured from both sides. The state uses them to battle the radicals on their own terms; the radicals act as their bad conscience, pointing out the compromises and inconsistencies they tolerate to stay in the mainstream. Sivan believes them vulnerable to the second message: "There is reason to expect that many conservatives will be drawn one day to despair, possibly to radicalism."

Meanwhile, the recent powerful appeal of fundamentalism has prompted the intellectual Left of Egypt and Syria to engage in orgies of self-analysis. A significant number of Leftists have concluded that they made a terrible mistake in ignoring Islam during the years they were riding high. As one of them who turned a Khomeinist put it, the Left "must either try to take hold of Islam and save it from the reactionaries who exploit it... or be relegated to the marginal role of observers of the historical storms due to be unleashed." The author agrees, remarking that Islam is "so intimately interwoven into Arab life that to escape from it one can only take refuge in a fringe sectarian existence."

Sivan writes clearly, dispassionately and with enviable command of his subject. His book makes a large and almost entirely new body of information available.

Primo Levi in Poland

If Not Now, When?

By Primo Levi

Translated by William Weaver
Summit.

349 pp. \$15.95.

Reviewed by Henryk Grynberg

Polish novelist and poet
living in the U.S. since 1967

IN A PAPER for a conference on "The Survival and Transformation of Jewish Cultural and Religious Values in Literature After World War Two," Primo Levi suggested that *If Not Now, When?* was meant to answer a question: Did the Jews of Eastern Europe "allow themselves to be led to the slaughter without resistance?" He added that he wanted to honor those, "whether few or many, who in their desperation found the force to oppose the Nazis."

Levi is an assimilated Italian Jew. His Ashkenazi brethren were "not known to him firsthand," as Irving Howe puts it in the Introduction. Levi did not encounter them until he was himself deported to Auschwitz. Indeed, he tells us in an Author's Note that before taking up his pen to recount the fictional ordeal of some 30 Jewish men and women who fought through the forests of Russia and Poland to the Promised Land of Israel, he had to study many books to become acquainted with their social and psychological background.

Levi's intentions were noble but, alas, he based his novel on several misconceptions. One of these concerns the limits of possible resistance in such places as Warsaw. In 1942 a little boy quoted in Janusz Korczak's *Ghetto Diary* wrote, "My father was a fighter for a piece of