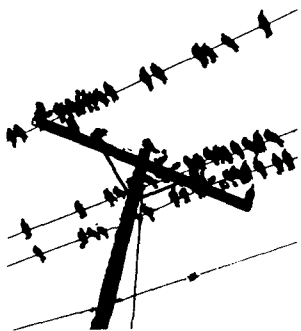


his wife discovers that he is turning into a Peeping Tom, his response is not shame but an outraged accusation: "What about my privacy?" Her answer, "I didn't mean from me!" is the flashpoint of their brief marriage. The title story is the most explicitly philosophical and seems to approach the metaphysical quality of Flannery O'Connor. In a rare fit of lucidity, the schizophrenic mother of a disabled vet "poured gasoline



over herself and burned herself to death in the hog barn." In her note, she tells her son that she is tired of waiting for the angels to come:

I thought I saw some
today, but no, just crows
on the barn roof

—a sentence which could be taken as the epitaph not only of one unhappy woman (or even of Shaw's characters) but of a great many people who cannot seem to make any sense out of a confused America. Unlike O'Connor, Janet Shaw does not see angels, even when they might be real. But it is not the artist's function to offer philosophical solutions or a guide for the perplexed. What he can do—and Shaw does it admirably—is to stay submerged long enough in contemporary experience to see such visions as only drowning men are privileged to see. In Shaw's case, a whole generation of American lives seems to have passed before her eyes. □

Great Saladin

P. H. Newby: *Saladin in His Time*; Faber and Faber; London.

There are two views of Saladin in the Christian world. In his lifetime he was regarded as the courtly and virtuous Saracen, the noble enemy of an equally noble *Coureur de Lion*. Dante treated him kindly in the *Commedia* and Kaiser Wilhelm II had his tomb in Damascus refurbished. Most of us became acquainted with this model of pious chivalry in Scott's *The Talisman*. But modern historians have not been so kind. Saladin made a show of piety and proselyted his enemies, but, they point out, he drank wine and failed to make the obligatory *hajj* to Mecca. While the crusaders claimed to admire his chivalry, Saladin rose to power by pushing aside the family of his benefactor, Nur-al-Din, and from time to time he showed himself capable of acts of violent retribution. In a brief but forceful account, P. H. Newby has given us a portrait which does include the warts but does not overlook the nobility of the entire countenance. One incident can serve to illustrate the Saracen's character and the difficulties he faced. At the capture of Jaffa (1192), his Kurdish compatriots began looting the city—contrary to orders. Saladin succeeded in inducing his Egyptian *mamluks* to attack the Kurds and compel them to restore their loot. On the other side King Richard, with only 3,000 men against 60,000 Moslems, managed to attack and retake the city the next day. Predictably, Scott turns out to be more accurate than the historians. As Aristotle observed, fiction is more philosophical than history, and a major premise of most fiction is the influence of character upon event.

The fate of empires can sometimes turn on the career of a

single man. During Saladin's lifetime, the world of Islam was as divided as it is today. The Caliph in Bagdad was becoming less of a figurehead, partially at the expense of the Turkish Sultans, and Syrians, Kurds, Egyptians, and Turks seemed unable to mount a united opposition against the Franks. Saladin was instrumental in reviving a Moslem commitment to recover the holy places—especially Jerusalem—and expel the Europeans. The Third Crusade, largely because of the personal vigor and military genius of England's Richard, did pose a serious threat to Saladin's strategy. Most of his emirs turned against him and openly refused to prosecute the war. But Richard sailed for England and a truce of three years and eight months was declared. The Kurdish Sultan died a year later,

leaving the empire he had created to his sons and brothers, whose family squabbles led to its demise. Even Jerusalem was retaken for a time but the days of Outremer were numbered. The Third Crusade had been the last real chance for a Latin empire in the East.

One small complaint might be made about Newby's little book. Its strongest virtue is the Western scholar's willingness to look at things from the perspective of Islam. But this virtue might also be taken as a sign of despair, as if the author could only find his heroes in an alien world. There is, after all, more than one way of going native. The crusaders, like Dante and Scott, were generous enough to admire the virtues of their enemy. They were not, however, converted by them. □

IN FOCUS

A Tale of Modern Times

William Dear: *The Dungeon Master: The Disappearance of James Dallas Egbert III*; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

Dallas Egbert was a genius. At the age of 13 he entered Michigan State University to study computer science. MSU assured the Egberts that the university would take special care of the brilliant but remarkably immature student. Two years later he disappeared. William Dear, the Texas PI hired to find him, lost no time in discovering how well MSU had protected their young charge. Little Dallas had spent his college years cooking up angel dust in his dorm room and taking an active part in the homosexual community of East Lansing. His most strenuous intellectual pas-

time was playing Dungeons & Dragons—not just in his head, but in the eight-mile maze of steam tunnels under the MSU campus.

Dear's investigations were sometimes bizarre. In order to get inside the boy's head, he spent time learning to play Dungeons & Dragons. He even lay down in front of an oncoming train (another one of Dallas's amusements). Unfortunately, the engine had a cowcatcher attached, and the PI had to run for his life. More productively, Dear authorized a homosexual investigator to start pressuring the local gay community just to see what would pop (Philip Marlowe would have been proud). Eventually Dear retrieved the boy from an oil-field town in

Louisiana. His story, when he finally gave it to the detective, was as strange as anything Dear had imagined. Driven to despair by the obvious pressures of his fantastic life—pressures which were increased by a domineering and demanding mother—he took refuge in the steam tunnels and swallowed what he hoped was a lethal dose of quaaludes. When he woke up to discover yet another personal failure, he went for help to an older homosexual, who first befriended him and then exploited him with a series of “friends.” Eventually the gays got scared, probably as a result of Dear’s pressuring, and sent the boy to Louisiana, perhaps intending to have him killed in a more convenient location. As Dear closed in, they changed their mind and told the boy to telephone the detective. Dallas’s recovery is not the usual happy ending of fairy tales. His relations with his family improved for a while but not enough to stave off chronic depression. One year and a day after his disappearance, he blew his brains out with a .25 automatic.

William Dear is no writer—his style alone acquits him of that charge—but he has put together a compelling narrative of modern times. The casual and indirect manner of his storytelling gives the reader an occasional frightening glimpse into the unreal world of the college campus. Students would not come forward with information. The faculty refused to talk. The Gay Rights organization was only interested in protecting its rear. Nobody, it seemed, cared one way or another about the 16-year-old boy who had lost himself in the fantasy world of sci fi, Tolkien clubs, and game fantasies. The kids who knew him best were too wrapped up in their private worlds of games, drugs, and illusions.

What was the role of MSU in all this? If Dear is right, they deliber-

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ately misled Dallas's parents about the life the boy was leading. So far from providing supervision, the university authorities had no way of knowing from one day to the next if the kid was even in East Lansing (often he wasn't). They took five days to notify the parents of his disappearance, and Dear was in East Lansing for a week before they allowed him to explore the tunnels. Meantime, "somebody" complained to the Michigan State Police that Dear was not properly licensed in the state—anything, it seems, rather than help uncover a potentially damaging scandal.

It is difficult to say what Dallas Egbert might have made of his 180 + IQ if he had been allowed to lead a more normal life, or if he had been sent to a responsible liberal arts college instead of to the nightmare campus of what Russell Kirk has taught us to call Behemoth U. □

Ugly Little Facts

Anthony T. Bouscaren: *Soviet Offense: U.S. Defense*; The Foundations Press; Notre Dame, IN.

Adam M. Garfinkle: *The Politics of the Nuclear Freeze*; Foreign Policy Research Institute; Philadelphia.

The history of science, Albert Einstein once observed, is that of beautiful theories slaughtered by ugly little facts. The history of the nuclear freeze movement is that of a beautiful theory impervious to facts of every sort. The gossamer theory, of course, is that if the U.S. stops producing nuclear arms, the Soviets will do likewise, and global peace will be the eventual result. The unpleasant facts will not support this fantasy. In his short study *Soviet Offense: U.S. Defense*, Anthony Bouscaren carefully documents the unremitting Soviet quest for nuclear

and conventional superiority during a 15-year period in which the U.S. *did* freeze its nuclear arsenal and dramatically reduced its conventional forces. The sinister implications of the continuing Soviet buildup that Bouscaren traces should be evident to all but leftist ideologues and the "invincibly ignorant." Professor Bouscaren briefly discusses the combination of Western irrationalism and Soviet manipulation which has created the freeze movement, but Adam Garfinkle offers a much more comprehensive treatment of the movement in his *Politics of the Nuclear Freeze*. Intelligent and carefully nuanced, Garfinkle's analysis explodes "the illusions of certainty of freeze advocates." Of the nuclear dilemma, Garfinkle writes, "Ambiguous solutions to problems shrouded in uncertainty are much to be preferred to those that are clearcut and wrong." Lovers of beautiful theories will not care for Garfinkle's book; respecters of ugly facts will find it invaluable. □

The Sunset King

Olivier Bernier: *Louis the Beloved: The Life of Louis XV*; Doubleday; Garden City, New York.

Louis XV became King of France at the age of five. For the rest of his life he was to be courted, tickled, and used by a series of tutors, mistresses (declared and undeclared), and ministers. His long reign (1715-74) is commonly credited with bringing on the Revolution. The list of charges ordinarily leveled against the amiable monarch include: court extravagance, unsuccessful foreign policy, the indulgence of his mistresses' whims, the isolation of the court from the exigencies of the real world. Bernier makes a reasonable case for the King: his worst

problems were inherited and he did the best with what he had. By the end of his life, he could congratulate himself on the peace and prosperity which France enjoyed. No foreign army had invaded French soil (Canada was lost, but no one seemed to care about "a few acres of snow"); the pernicious power of the *Parlement de Paris* had been broken (a revived *parlement* helped bring on the crisis which led to the unfortunate events of 1789); above all, France was looked up to as the intellectual and artistic center of the world. When men like Talleyrand sighed for the lost glories of the *ancien régime*, they were paying a justified (if implicit) tribute to *Louis le bien-aimé*.

It is hard not to sympathize with Louis XV. It is equally hard

to forget that only 15 years after his death Europe witnessed the implosion of Old France and the unleashing of a revolutionary fury which was to infect the entire world. Even Bernier concedes that the King was too complacent in allowing his power to be misused by aristocratic flunkies. On rare occasions he did manage to assert himself, but his exertions had no enduring effects. Bernier's extravagant praise of Louis is something like the conservative rediscovery of the Eisenhower years. Both regimes showed a bright face to the world: peace abroad, tranquility at home; Louis was well beloved; we all liked Ike. Less noticeable but more significant in the long run were the forces of social and intellectual discontent which overflowed into rebellion. □

WASTE OF MONEY

Lucrative Lying

John Barth: *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction*; G. P. Putnam's Sons; New York.

"For the writer intent on truth," Solzhenitsyn observes, "life never was, never is (and never will be!) easy: his like have suffered every imaginable harassment—defamation, duels, a shattered family life, financial ruin or lifelong unrelieved poverty, the madhouse, jail." Things are quite different for John Barth, the prominent "post-modernist" writer who calls himself a "professional liar." Over the past two and a half decades, Barth's lying has brought him honorary degrees, invitations to symposia, a cushy creative-writing professorship at Johns Hopkins.

All meaning for Barth is simply an imaginative construct with no

absolute ontological grounding. Since the real world of fact is "devoid of ultimate meaning," the fictionist must repudiate any sense of mimesis in his art, as he creates, *ex nihilo*, "not a view of the cosmos, but a cosmos itself." At bottom, Barth concedes, his cosmos is a lie, but "my lies, at least, will be of professional caliber." For most of Barth's rewarding career this has meant creating lies that are "technically up-to-date," with all the gee-gaws, anagrams, surrealism, leftist rant, cute punctuation, and pornography demanded by the fashionable avant-garde. However, not long ago Barth allowed as how, now that the "rigidities" of "bourgeois realism" had been broken up, perhaps post-modernism could reclaim some of its conventions. That is to say, now that modernism has corroded away all of the cognitive signifi-