

ducers' struggle to stay in business in spite of the challenges of television) rather incidentally changed the ecology for books, for which, automatically, there was a literacy test to limit their audience. A decade later, and the to-do about *Lolita* would hardly have been noticeable. Nabokov was amused by it, only mildly distressed, and always wonderfully balanced.

I remember going up to Ithaca in 1958 to interview him for *Newsweek*,

the terms of my assignment being to determine whether either town or gown now thought of him—to use my editor's words—as “a dirty old man who played with himself in the shower.” What Nabokov told me, and what he wrote shortly thereafter to Walter Minton, the president of Putnam's, the book's publisher, was that “the university's attitude toward the *Lolita* matter has been above reproach.” On the other hand, during the Halloween

trick-or-treating the week before our interview, Nabokov said that a young girl had appeared at his doorstep dressed in tennis whites and wearing a sign around her neck that proclaimed her identity as “Lolita.” He shook his head and explained, “And I don't think they knew I was the author of the book. Frankly, I was shocked.”

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REVISIONS



DOWN THE UP STAIRCASE

H.L. Mencken said that there is really only one economic law worth worrying about, that what goes up must come down, and *vice versa*. This, in essence, is the thesis of Bill Emmott's *The Sun Also Sets: The Limits to Japan's Economic Power* (New York: Times Books/Random House; 292 pp., \$19.95), a timely book written in a style that owes nothing to Hemingway and still less, if that were possible, to Ecclesiastes.

Mr. Emmott—who spent three years as Tokyo bureau chief for *The Economist* and is presently working in London as the business affairs editor of that publication—in his penultimate chapter does, however, recapitulate his argument with an admirable brevity that bears quoting. Against all who predict that Japan is the coming world power, garishly illuminated by a rising sun that is destined at the same time to throw both the United States and the Western European countries into shadow, Emmott argues that:

“[T]he metaphor of the ever-rising sun, does not really work. Suns do not just rise. They also set. That is the new era in Japan, the era of the setting sun. It was already under way in the mid-1980s, even as Japan's exports of capital were prompting speculation and concern about the emergence of Japanese power. The factors that characterized Japan's rise have changed, under the influence of the rise itself: that is, of affluence, international exposure, the

capital surplus, and the now-strong yen. Japan is becoming a nation of consumers, of pleasure-seekers, of importers, of investors and of speculators. Abundant money and free financial markets risk turning this new nation of speculators into one of boom and bust. More certainly, time and the maturing of the baby-boom generation will make Japan a nation of pensioners.

“What this means economically is that Japan's trade and current-account surpluses will disappear, not forever necessarily, but for a significant period. With them will go Japan's role as an exporter of capital. . . . Moreover, if the capital surplus does continue only for these few years, then Japan's candidacy as a top power would have to be consigned to the dustbin of history, along with that of the oil producers of OPEC, whose 1970 surpluses lasted for less than a decade.”

There is a sense in which this talk of which nation is to be—or is to be regarded as—the Number One Power belongs not just to the realm of the speculative but even to that of the unreal, and Bill Emmott is plainly aware of it. Ultimately, of course, we are dealing with questions of relation and relativity, so that, “Only if America fails to lead will Japan have to initiate; only if Japan becomes more powerful than America will Japan really begin to set its own international agenda. The story of Japan's sunrise and its eventual sunset is really a tale of two countries, of Japan and of America.”

Like the serendipitous forces that have converged to produce the so-called economic miracle of Japan, those others that have combined to create America's contemporary economic *malaise* need not, as Emmott reminds us, prove to be either lasting or determinant ones. Decades of inflationary democracy, compounded by the well-meaning but frequently ill-advised economic policies of the Reagan administration, have resulted in an American economy whose undeniable strengths are underlain by systemic weaknesses; according to Emmott, “This remedying of macroeconomics errors is the basic task facing the United States.” So far, so good; beyond this point, it should come as no surprise that, for the editor of a magazine founded originally to uphold the principles of Free Trade, “The greatest worry after the Reagan era is that the United States could turn protectionist”—that, “In particular, America [could close] its borders to trade, investment, and immigration.”

Given the source of this heartfelt opinion, it is probably futile to argue with its wisdom, beyond observing that a) the United States is unlikely to “close” its borders against *anything*, including cocaine from Columbia, and b) there is always the possibility that the sort of (relatively minor) economic inefficiencies that Bill Emmott believes protectionist policies always cause might be more than compensated for by domestic felicities lying well beyond the purview of the dismal science. (CW)

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Editing the South

I have a more or less professional interest in Southern regional magazines. Some I've written for, others I've written about, one or two I've cribbed from—one way or another a few subscriptions and the odd newsstand purchase wind up as deductions on my income tax. Whatever else these magazines may be, they're all part of the image machine that exploits and celebrates and burnishes Southern difference and self-consciousness. Month after month, year in and year out, even humdrum trade magazines like *The Southern Sociologist* and *The Southern Funeral Director* say by their very titles that the South exists, that there's something different (and usually at least by implication better) about it. One reason I follow these magazines is to keep track of what that something is supposed to be.

A few examples and maybe you can draw your own conclusions. Consider, for instance, *Southern Living*, an extravagantly successful house-and-garden magazine out of Birmingham, this year celebrating its silver anniversary. I'll have more to say about *SL* next month; for now, simply note that more than three million subscribers make it not just the most successful Southern magazine, but the most successful regional magazine, period, leaving the West Coast's *Sunset* far behind and inspiring imitators that include the recent *Midwestern Living*. *Southern Living* has acquired a number of other magazines itself, among them *Travel South*, essentially an expanded and freestanding edition of *SL*'s travel section, and *Southern Accents*, sort of a Southern *Architectural Digest*. *Southern Accents* appeals to a more upscale market than its parent magazine, but the basic message—that Southerners have both a different idea of gracious living and a special knack for it—is approximately the same.

In the interests of science, I read another magazine with pretty much the same view of what the South is about. "The days of Scarlett O'Hara may be gone," says an ad in *Southern Bride* (subtitled "The Magazine of Traditional Weddings"), "but that same graciousness and majesty, that same elegance and style so steeped in tradition live on in the Southern weddings today." No Kahlil Gibran here, in other words, and the magazine's letters column provides a forum for aggrieved traditionalists like the minister who wrote to complain about a couple who wanted "She's Having My Baby" played at their wedding.

Regional chauvinism can provide a potent hook for advertising, as it does for the Birmingham engraver who gushes in *Southern Bride* that "There's Just Something About a Southern Wedding—Something Only a Southern Engraver Can Capture!" But sometimes the pitch is a little more subtle, like: "Thanks to her grandmother, her hair is red, her eyes are green and her flatware is silver."

A somewhat less old-fashioned image of the South can be found in *Southern Style*, a big glossy women's magazine from the Whittle Communications empire of Knoxville. "The Southern woman stands apart from her neighbors to the north and the west," the first issue proclaimed. "She is proud, she is dedicated, she is capable and she has the courage to live life, not merely observe it." (I have no idea what this means. Do you?)

Clearly the editors hope that "the Southern woman" stands apart at least enough to want a magazine of her own. One way she stands apart, they claim, is in what she wants to look like. According to the magazine's market director, "Editors in New York don't know [Southern women's] taste in clothes or hairstyles and they don't understand their pride in the region." Before *Southern Style* came along, many Southern women had given up on Yankee fashion magazines: "They either didn't want to look like that or it was unattainable."

Maybe so. Anyway, the attractive women pictured in *Southern Style* are

not the killer androgynes one finds in *Vogue*—although few are as unandrogynous as Dolly Parton, who graced the first issue's cover and allowed inside that "I'm always defending us. I'm quick to jump in when somebody tries to make light of the South." If you've ever picked up a magazine only to find all the cents-off coupons already clipped, *Southern Style* has found the answer: each ad for Duncan Hines cake mix in its special "Salon Edition" (distributed free to beauty parlors throughout the South) is accompanied by a dozen coupons. This sounds tacky, but *Southern Style* is actually well-edited, pleasant to look at, and surprisingly literate.

When you've had as much gentility as you can stand, though, turn for a purgative to a magazine that's one of my personal favorites: *Southern Guns & Shooter*. A recent cover shows two pistols superimposed on the Confederate battle flag and headlines an article entitled "The Threat From Up North—They're Still Trying To Take Our Guns Away." In the same issue another article reviews the "45 ACP: S--t Kicker of a Gun," and a regular feature is the "Sheriff of the Month." This is not some low-budget lunatic-fringe newsletter. At \$2.50, it is chock-full of advertising and color photographs with captions like, "Jan likes the feel of a long barrel, something she can get her fingers around and caress like a fine collector's item." Eat your heart out, Howard Metzenbaum.

Right now the question of Southern identity, what it means to be Southern and who qualifies, strikes me as up for grabs, and regional magazines offer a remarkable variety of answers, some only implicitly, others more forthrightly. The *Southern Partisan*, for instance, a fire-eating quarterly out of Columbia, still stoutly maintains the classic "Forget, Hell!" position. The *Partisan* never apologizes, seldom explains. Its views on current politics could be characterized roughly as New Right, but the issues that really excite it are old ones. Very old ones. Its sections have headings like "The Smoke Never Clears," "From Behind Enemy Lines," and "CSA Today," and its