

**ALONG THE EDGE OF
THE FOREST:
An Iron Curtain Journey**
by Anthony Bailey
Random, 1983
332 pp. \$15.95

In 1981, *New Yorker* correspondent Bailey traveled from the Baltic Coast to the Aegean Sea along the west side of, and occasionally across, the border that Winston Churchill dubbed the "iron curtain" nearly 40 years before. His aim: to meet and talk with those who live under the shadow of that nearly impenetrable divide—and with those who have attempted to cross it from the east. Interviewing West Germans, he found that their nonchalant attitude toward the barrier often clashed with his own sense of anger. In West Berlin, or "the island," as natives call it, Bailey himself felt everything "from rage through curiosity to resignation (though never disinterest)." The Berlin Wall seemed to him "in its perverse way one of the wonders of the modern world." Continuing south, he reached the physically less-forbidding Czechoslovakian border; in Austria, he passed along the boundaries of Hungary and Yugoslavia. Side trips to Prague and Budapest yielded the most interesting interviews. "[Communism] is a system that suits the second-rate," complained one Prague resident, "those who don't have aspirations or don't want to try too hard." Another Czech sounded perhaps the most despairing note: "It's like living in a year without seasons. It will go on and on and on like this. We would be deluding ourselves to think otherwise."

Arts & Letters

**THE ODES OF
JOHN KEATS**
by Helen Vendler
Harvard, 1983
330 pp. \$18.50

If John Keats had lived beyond his 26 years (1795–1821), he might well have become his century's Shakespeare. Both in his late poetry and in his famous letters, he expressed a growing interest in dramatic poetry. Tuberculosis cut off any such flowering, and Keats's reputation rests solely, but securely, upon his lyric achievements. Among these stand out six incomparably crafted odes, including the famous "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn," all written between March and September of 1819. Haunt-