

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE



Le mot juste

Non-French novelists embrace
the language of Balzac

Italy assesses damage to its art | The stars of 'Strictly Come Dancing'

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Le mot juste

Non-French writers embrace the language of Balzac



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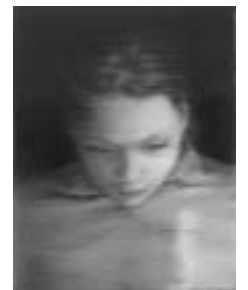
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Emma Roberts, niece of Julia and daughter of Eric, has Hollywood hopes.
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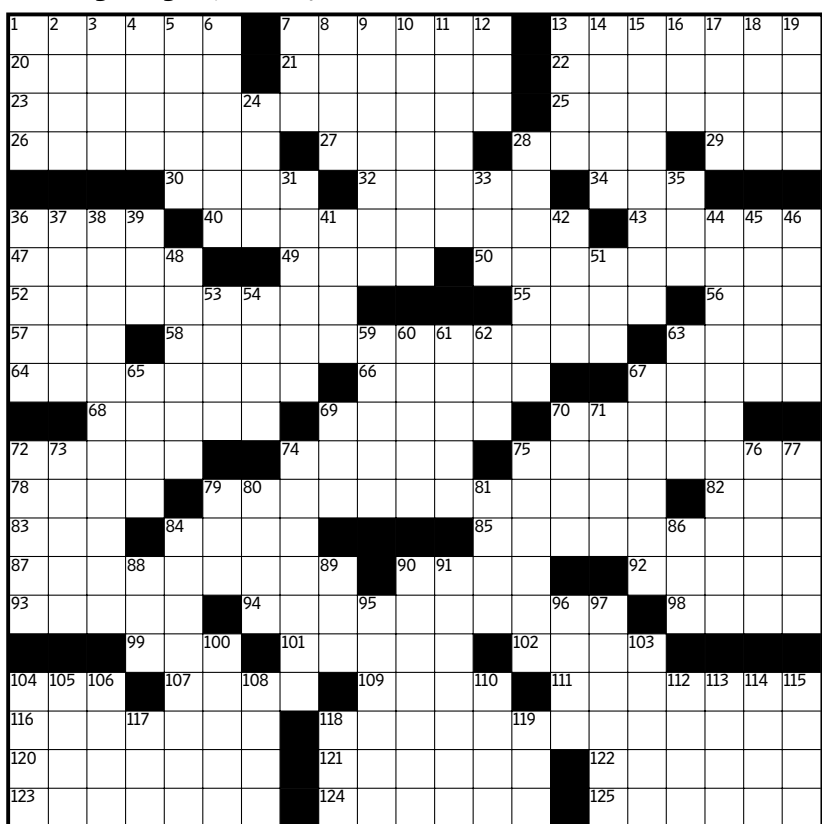
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THE JOURNAL CROSSWORD / Edited by Mike Shenk

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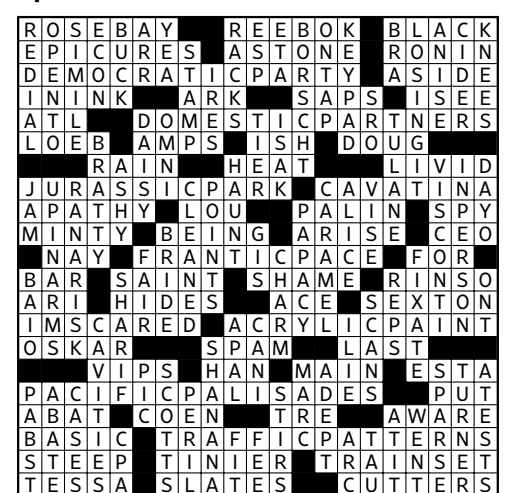
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April 3rd Solution



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❖ Fashion

Designers rebel against discounting

EILEEN FISHER IS a mild-mannered woman. But the famously silver-haired designer is pondering a radical shift in the way her clothes reach consumers.

In department stores these days, Eileen Fisher clothes “get marked down before they even have a chance to sell,” she told me recently. Perhaps it no longer makes sense to give Saks, Bloomingdales and other department stores so much control over the brand, she posited. She has

On Style

CHRISTINA BINKLEY

asked her staff to consider a new model: renting department-store space in order to control prices and inventory.

Ms. Fisher’s comments illustrate the rift that has formed between department stores and many brands after decades of close cooperation. The rift means shoppers will see fewer of those deep, early luxury-brand discounts that they have enjoyed for the past year.

The relationship between the stores and the brands cracked last fall, when Saks Fifth Avenue and its rivals slashed prices around the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday. Consumers benefited immediately. I bought a \$1,200 Piazza Sempione dress, still in season, for less than \$300 at Saks in Los Angeles.

In a matter of weeks, high-end retail’s carefully tended pricing structure began to collapse. Shoppers demanded discounts at brands’ own stores. At elite brands like Loro Piana, a flea-market mentality took hold. In Europe, even French stores, which are bound by strict pricing laws, are holding “floating sales” that include deep discounts. In the U.S., spring sales are arriving early, rather than coming at the end of the season.

Bargain pricing, of course, appeals to many cash-strapped shoppers, who couldn’t otherwise afford luxury goods. But the onslaught of sales actually dismays other customers—particularly loyal luxury devotees, who feel duped for having paid full price. Shortly after Nancy Novogrod paid full price at a department store for a pair of spring Jil Sander slacks, the editor of *Travel + Leisure Magazine* got an email saying the store’s spring sale was under way. “Spring sale?” Ms. Novogrod said when New Yorkers were still shivering in mid-March. “That’s not buyer remorse. That’s buyer rage.”

The price swings confuse custom-



Window-shopping at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York; above right, designer Eileen Fisher; below right, discounts at Galeries Lafayette in Paris.



Eileen Fisher



Getty Images

stance.

Ms. Fisher’s most extreme idea—renting space in department stores—won’t happen anytime soon, but she and her staff plan to broach it with store accounts tentatively. The project would be complex—equivalent to opening scores of boutiques across the country.

But the in-store boutiques have some precedents. LVMH’s Louis Vuitton brand has been doing it for years. Every LV-logoed wallet and handbag at Saks or Neiman Marcus is sold by a salesperson who is employed by Vuitton, on space that is leased by the French luxury manufacturer.

ers, leading them to question the real value of their purchases. Was my Piazza dress ever really worth \$1,200?

“Even wealthy people don’t want to be ripped off,” Ms. Fisher told me. She concedes apologetically that her company’s prices—a jacket might cost \$400 and pants \$150—rose more than necessary during the economic boom. “We sort of let the prices go up because business was so good,” she says.

Airlines and hotels faced similar price competition several years ago, when Web sites began buying bulk seats and rooms and sold them at discount. Eventually, the companies made their own prices more competitive, even as they gave the new Web sites incentives to cooperate and punished the sites if they undercut prices by limiting access to inventory.

These days, many fashion brands are effecting their own pushback, demanding to be left out of department stores’ sales. “All our brands are taking great care to ensure that what happened in November will not happen again,” says Paola Milani, a spokeswoman for Gucci Group, which owns Bottega Veneta, Yves Saint Laurent, Gucci and other brands. “The idea is to maintain pricing coherence in the regions in which our products are sold regardless of channel of distribution.”

Saks, which was a leader in last

fall’s discounting, declined to comment. But this week, notices for Saks’s 25% off sale exclude more than 40 top luxury brands. Ms. Fisher says she hadn’t been aware of the sale and wishes her brand had also been excluded. Her company depends on department stores for 70% of its revenue, which was \$273 million in 2008. But she would like to

whittle that share down to 50%.

To that end, Eileen Fisher will open six new stores of its own this year in the U.S.—slightly accelerated from an average of five new stores per year—and is launching a costly new technology platform for Internet sales that will offer greater flexibility, allowing online customers to pick up items in stores, for in-

Arbitrage

The price of three white calla lilies

City	Local currency	€
Rome	€5	€5
Hong Kong	HK\$116	€11
Paris	€12	€12
Brussels	€15	€15
Frankfurt	€15	€15
New York	\$22	€17
London	£18	€20

Note: Prices, including taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.



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Pulling masterpieces from the ruins

BY KELLY CROW
AND STACY MEICHTRY

AS ITALY IS MOURNING its 294 earthquake victims, the country has begun scouring for an invaluable part of its past: its art.

Natural disasters, since the ashes of Vesuvius blanketed Pompeii in A.D. 79, have wiped out towns, and their masterpieces. Those who try to salvage and restore damaged art often pick through rubble by hand, using flashlights to scour shaky buildings, experts say.

Several artworks in L'Aquila, capital of the affected region, have already been salvaged, including a carved sarcophagus of Pope Celestine V buried under a crumpled wall in a 13th-century church, Santa Maria di Collemaggio. "Around the world, in addition to condolences for the many people who have died, there is...concern for the state of our artistic heritage," said Culture Minister Sandro Bondi.

The Ministry of Culture is assessing the art damage, and the prime minister has pledged €30 million for art relief and appealed for donations.

Unclear is the fate of thousands of works like Renaissance sculptor Andrea Della Robbia's altarpiece depiction of Christ's resurrection, which is still somewhere inside Church of San Bernardino di Siena with its crumpled bell tower. Bertrand du Vignaud, president of the European branch of the World Monuments Fund, says he fears for exposed religious icons like the Renaissance fresco by Saturnino Gatti that he spotted in a church during a visit last year.

Jerry Podany, senior antiquities conservator at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, has spent three decades visiting such earthquake epicenters as Northridge, Calif., and Kobe, Japan. He doesn't know if he will work in L'Aquila,



J. Paul Getty Trust

Right, Santa Maria Paganica in L'Aquila after the April 6 earthquake; above, Jerry Podany with a Greek amphora at the Getty.



AFP/Getty Images

though he plans to go to Italy in June to give a talk on ways to "quake-proof" art collections. He discussed some of his art-saving secrets by phone from Los Angeles.

Q: What's your art-salvaging process after an earthquake?

If there's an accident and the paramedics come, they don't do reconstructive surgery on the curb. They stabilize the patient and get them to a place with the appropriate environment to do the right job. So, I come prepared solely to stabilize the situation. Whatever has been broken or torn can wait. You just want to focus on getting all the pieces.

Q: What's in your disaster kit?

The most important things are a flashlight, a two-way radio and a camera. You want to go in and make an evaluation. Triage is also easier if you have an inventory list. You hate

going in blind, but often you do because museums filed their records in the same building as the art.

Q: What do you save first?

It's complicated and often it depends on the environment. Organic materials like papers, photographs, paintings, ivories and wood furniture tend to be extraordinarily vulnerable right after an earthquake. Take a 14th-century manuscript: If you drop it four feet to the floor, you might scuff the binding or tear a page, but you won't destroy it. Take a glass goblet and drop it that far and it's gone. But dunk that book into a bucket of water for an hour and it'll be distorted or completely destroyed. When the ceiling is gone, rain becomes our big enemy.

Q: I've got a choice between saving the "Mona Lisa" or manuscripts in a puddle. I go for the painting, right?

Conservators are supposed to go

after whatever is most at risk, but there may be very good reasons that one thing is more monetarily important or impossible to replace than another. It's all valued as cultural heritage, but you have to be flexible.

Q: After a disaster of this kind, cultural sites are often encouraged to reopen as quickly as possible, even if they're still repairing the damage. Why the rush?

After the disaster, people want solidity, and history and culture feel continuous and secure. People want to say, "I'm Italian, and this painting and that building have been here since the 13th century."

Q: What are some low-cost ways that cash-strapped cultural sites can improve their art's odds in a disaster?

After this earthquake in Mexico some years back, I was infuriated because I walked into a museum store-room and saw shelves with broken

vases. The shelves weren't tied to the building. You'd push them and they'd wobble, even though tying one to the wall would've cost \$2 for wire, brackets and screws. People want to learn all these sophisticated ways to isolate and decouple artworks from their pedestals, but I don't start there. I check the shelves first and ask, are they sturdy or worm-eaten? Are the heaviest things on the bottom shelf?

Q: In Rome's Forum of Trajan, there's a broken piece of entablature carved with Trajan's name that archaeologists left where it fell during a 9th-century earthquake. When is it better to leave damaged artwork alone?

The fact that this fragment fell during this earthquake is a marker of the event, and sometimes you don't want to lose that marker. It's a work of art, but it's also become an historical document. You have to decide which value is greater.

Lost art

The earthquake in L'Aquila is the latest natural disaster to claim important works of art. Here are some examples from the past, as compiled by the Art Loss Register.



▲ Pompeii and Herculaneum, A.D. 79

The Roman Empire cities were destroyed after Mount Vesuvius erupted, suffocating the area with ash. Frescoes, paintings, bronzes, coins and jewelry were all buried alongside the cities' inhabitants.



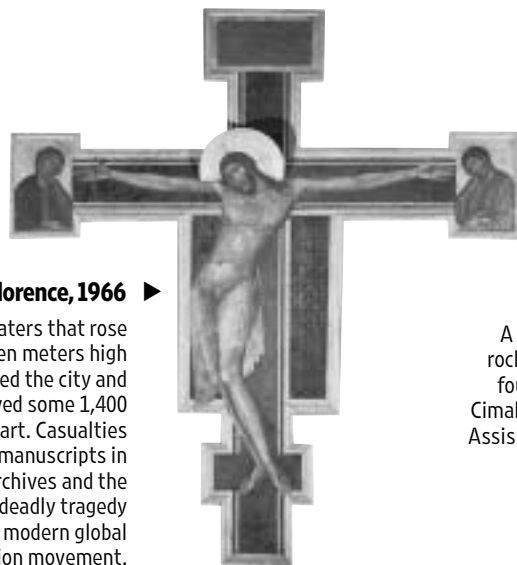
◀ Lisbon, 1755

A tsunami destroyed most of the city and killed as many as 100,000. Lisbon's Royal Ribeira Palace, which housed over 70,000 texts and paintings by Titian and Rubens, was devastated. Part of the Carmo Convent is still in ruins.



Assisi, Italy, 1997

A series of earthquakes and aftershocks rocked the Umbrian town of Assisi, killing four and shattering frescoes by Giovanni Cimabue inside the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. Italy spent \$39 million to restore the 13th-century basilica and its frescoes.



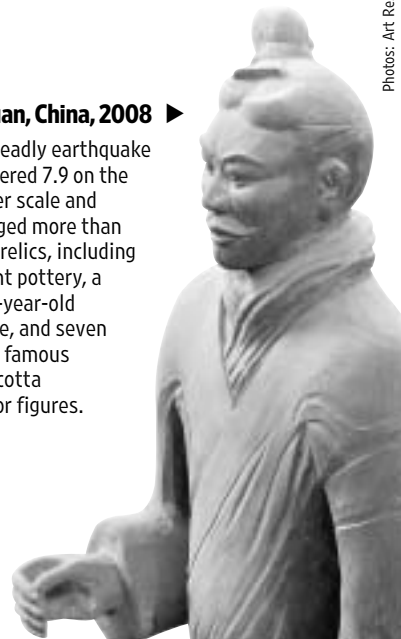
Tokyo, 1923 ▶

With a Richter magnitude of 8.3, the Great Kanto earthquake destroyed tens of thousands of pieces of ancient Japanese art. It also wiped out traditional studios that made prints like this one.



Sichuan, China, 2008 ▶

This deadly earthquake registered 7.9 on the Richter scale and damaged more than 1,500 relics, including ancient pottery, a 2,000-year-old temple, and seven of the famous terra cotta warrior figures.



Photos: Art Resource, NY (4); Getty Images; Bettmann/Corbis

❖ Dance

The 'Strictly' professionals

BY SARAH FRATER

Special to *The Wall Street Journal*

'STRICTLY COME DANCING" is a British talent show that pairs professional ballroom dancers with popular celebrities, although "monster hit" might be a more accurate description. An estimated 13 million viewers tuned into the 2008 "Strictly Come Dancing" finale, and the BBC has franchised the format to more than 30 countries world-wide.

Broadcast on BBC One since 2004, the show follows the celebrities—from actors and musicians to journalists and beefy sports stars—as they are coached from flat-footed beginners to appealing performers. The pro-celebrity pairs then compete in a weekly dance-off, with the judges' scores combined with a viewers telephone poll to eliminate the lowest-scoring couple. There is sometimes controversy: In the 2008 contest, political journalist John Sergeant, paired with professional dancer Kristina Rihanoff, consistently received low scores from judges but was surging ahead in the viewer poll; he quit the show, saying it would be silly if he won.

The show's success took many by surprise—the formality of ballroom dancing was considered out of sync with "Cool Britannia"—and its "Come Dancing" predecessor, which ran on the BBC from 1949 to 1998, had been derided as old-fashioned.

But what many had underestimated was the seemingly universal appeal of elegance and grace and decorum. "Strictly Come Dancing" has men who know how to dance and ladies who know how to behave. Everyone looks nice and dresses properly. The show is like a modern-day Fairy Godmother, who waves her wand and takes us to the ball.

Professional dance duo Anton Du Beke and Erin Boag have been with the show from the start. Each is paired for the course of a season with a different celebrity: Mr. Du Beke's best known partner was opera singer Lesley Garrett; Ms. Boag's was track star Colin Jackson, who earned the nickname "snake hips."

Mr. Du Beke, who is British, and Ms. Boag, who is from New Zealand, were successful professional ballroom dancers before they joined "Strictly," as they and its fans call the program. They've since performed in their own live show as well as making numerous TV appearances.

We talked to them as they prepared for their show, "Cheek to Cheek," which features the pair dancing together to music from a 30-piece orchestra, as well as performances by salsa dancers Chris Marques and Jaclyn Spencer, and singer Richard Shelton. It runs at the London Coliseum from April 22-26.

Q: Can you talk about the success of "Strictly Come Dancing"?

Erin Boag: It took us completely by surprise. We had no idea that it would be so big.

Anton Du Beke: Bringing ballroom dancing back onto prime time television was actually quite risky for the BBC. To be honest, the ballroom world was over the old show, "Come Dancing." It seemed like an earlier era. But we wanted to be involved [with the new show], so we could make it reflect what was hap-

pening in ballroom dancing now.

Q: So how do you explain its popularity?

Ms. Boag: The refreshed format is very clever, with celebrities going on a journey, and being transformed. You see their anguish and effort. And people just love ballroom dancing. It's so romantic.

Mr. Du Beke: Part of ballroom's appeal is that it's based on a natural way of moving. It's a walking step. And there's the proximity of the two bodies, moving in harmony. People love to see it done well, with speed and precision and not bumping into each other.

Q: And you have to look nice.

Mr. Du Beke: When I was a kid, I loved that you had to dress smartly for ballroom dancing. I've recently got a tail suit with a wonderful sheen. A sort of Sunday best suit. I wear it when I dance for the Queen.

Ms. Boag: With "Strictly" there's a big costume department who coordinate all the dresses. You obviously can't have four people all wearing red dresses.

Q: It's been said that the celebrities look suspiciously good. As if they've been specially chosen.

Mr. Du Beke: Some of the celebrities have a natural facility to dance, but some can barely walk in a straight line!

Ms. Boag: The celebrities have different abilities. The sportsmen often do well, as they have stamina and an understanding of their physicality. They also have mental strength from their sports training. A sportsman like [British sprinter and hurdler] Colin Jackson has an incredibly strong mental attitude, whereas [British comedian and novelist] Julian Clary needed a cigarette break every five minutes.

Q: How did you start dancing?

Mr. Du Beke: My sister went to classes, and one afternoon I had to pick her up. As I walked in, I saw a room full of girls and as a lad of 14 it had quite an impact. The dancing teacher said because I was the only boy I had to join it. And that was it. I haven't missed a day since.

Ms. Boag: My parents had been amateur ballroom dancers in New Zealand, and I'd gone to classes as a child. But it was only when I saw a competition in Australia when I was 15 that I knew I wanted to do it.

Mr. Du Beke: What I realized early on is that with ballroom dancing you are in charge of your own world. The star of your own show. You take it on the road. You enter competitions. You do with it what you will. In a ballet company you are one of many.

Q: How did you meet?

Ms. Boag: We were both amateurs, entering competitions, and by chance we both needed a partner. You have something called a tryout, where you meet, practice a bit, and decide to take it forward if it works out.

Q: Can you talk about finding the right partner? It's the same in ballet: If you don't find the right person to dance with your career can be limited.

Ms. Boag: You have to be compatible in terms of size and shape and coloring. You have to look good together, and your bodies must be in physical sync. But you also have to

have the same artistic goals and the same ambitions.

Mr. Du Beke: You are potentially entering into a long-term relationship. We have danced together for 12 years. It doesn't work for all ballroom couples. Some split up if someone better comes along. It can be pretty cutthroat.

Q: You've just completed a documentary for Sky One, "Ballroom High," where you teach inner-city kids to dance.

Ms. Boag: It was inspired by the story of the dance teacher Pierre Dulaine who introduced ballroom dancing to some of New York's toughest schools. It was made into the film "Take The Lead," starring Antonio Banderas. Teaching the children to dance was the easy part. What we also wanted to give them was respect, the ability to work as team, social etiquette and manners.



Ballroom dancers Anton Du Beke and Erin Boag.

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Anna Faris and Seth Rogen in 'Observe and Report'; below, Miley Cyrus in 'Hannah Montana: The Movie.'

Bad mall-cop, good mall-girl

RONNIE BARNHARDT (Seth Rogen) is the bipolar, baby-faced, boorish head of security at the Forest Ridge Mall in the bleak, creepy comedy "Observe and Report." Sexist, racist, fascistic, grandiose, delusional—and this is while he's on his meds—Ronnie metes out justice to skateboarders and other miscreants, and rides roughshod over his fellow guards



Disney Enterprises

In the early '60s, Hayley Mills played identical twins to great effect in "The Parent Trap." With some minor tinkering and updating, Disney gave the movie another go in the late '90s with Lindsay Lohan assuming Ms. Mills's mantle. Then, almost 10 years later, came the Disney Channel series "Hannah Montana," which chronicles the life and times of one Miley Stewart (Miley Cyrus). By day, she's your average Los Angeles high-school girl, and by night, she's a pop superstar. But only Miley's family and a few close friends are privy to her double life, leading to the sorts of complications most fully appreciated by Clark Kent.

Ms. Cyrus (who seems to have more appeal than talent) is a touchstone for prepubescents. Her first two CDs sold millions; her 2007 concert tour and the subsequent 3-D movie of the tour, "Hannah Montana & Miley Cyrus: The Best of Both Worlds Concert," were box-office bonanzas.

As night follows day, a feature film—"Hannah Montana: The Movie"—was inevitable. For parents of 9- and 10-year-olds, it will be inescapable. The best that can be said of it: inoffensive.

When Dad Robby Ray (Ms. Cyrus's real-life father, country-music star Billy Ray Cyrus) thinks Miley/Hannah's L.A. life is getting out of control, he tricks her into a trip back home to Crowley Corners, Tenn., to visit her grandmother (Margo Martindale) and to get her priorities straight.

There, Miley plays tricks on a smarmy reporter eager to get the scoop on Hannah Montana, sings a catchy tune that sets the Crowley Corners citizenry dancing (wow, did they pick up those tricky steps fast!), saves the town from a greedy developer who wants to build a mall, reconnects with her childhood sweetie (Lucas Till), and reconnects with herself. The Disney movie-plot software wouldn't have it any other way.

Country star Taylor Swift makes a cameo appearance. So does Tyra Banks, who gets into a tussle with Hannah over a pair of designer shoes. Those stilettos are the only sharp thing in the movie.

weaves between gross-out comedy and violent psychosexual drama, ultimately sliding into parody. But Nell (Collette Wolfe) is touching as a temporarily crippled barista and born-again virgin, and Ms. Faris is as game as they come. Mr. Rogen, who's often cast as a likable schlump, gives an edgy, brave performance, making not even the faintest plea for audience understanding or sympathy.

'Hannah Montana: The Movie'

Over the years, Disney has had remarkable success with its "one adorable girl plays two roles" template.

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Opening this week in Europe

- Cadillac Records Germany
- Defiance Germany, Sweden
- He's Just Not That Into You Belgium, Turkey
- Let the Right One In Netherlands
- Observe and Report Iceland, U.K.
- Race to Witch Mountain Portugal
- The Duchess Denmark
- The International Portugal, Spain
- The Reader Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Sweden
- The Uninvited Norway, U.K.
- War, Inc. Germany
- Zack and Miri Make a Porno Czech Republic

Source: IMDb
WSJ.com subscribers can read reviews of these films and others at WSJ.com/FilmReview

Film

JOANNE KAUFMAN

(whose combined IQs may perhaps round up to two digits). If not for a certain versatile four-letter expletive, he would be at a loss for words.

On patrol, he hungrily eyes Brandi, a pneumatic blond cosmetics clerk (Anna Faris) as though she were a Cinnabon; enjoys what seems to be the one perk of the job—a free cup of coffee at the doughnut counter; and, like the protagonist of the far more good-natured "Paul Blart: Mall Cop," dreams of the day he can become a real cop and pack a piece. Ronnie, get your gun.

Meanwhile, he takes target practice (always aiming at the head and the genitals) and goes home each night to his slatternly, alcoholic mother (Celia Weston). The earnest exchanges between mom and son are the movie's comic high points.

When a flasher starts showing up at Forest Ridge, Ronnie, a combination of Travis Bickle and Barney Fife, views the situation as Captain Queeg viewed the missing strawberries in "The Caine Mutiny": a career opportunity. Eager to prove his mettle, Ronnie (who bears a passing resemblance to the trench-coated exhibitionist) is none too pleased when a police detective (Ray Liotta) takes over the case. His way of dealing with the incursion is knuckle-headed vigilantism.

By now, the mall as a metaphor for materialistic wasteland and for society's dark underbelly has become a wearisome notion; the cliché gets another airing in "Observe and Report," which bobs and

After a string of flops, Affleck is back in 'Play'

BY MICHELLE KUNG

IN THE NEW political thriller "State of Play," Ben Affleck co-stars as a U.S. congressman attempting to regain his footing after a major career setback—a situation to which the 36-year-old actor can relate.

In the late '90s, Mr. Affleck was one of the most in-demand talents in Hollywood after starring in "Good Will Hunting" and winning an Academy Award for co-writing the screenplay with his friend Matt Damon. But after a string of flops, (including "Jersey Girl," "Surviving Christmas" and "Smokin' Aces"), Mr. Affleck lay low before returning to film with a small but critically acclaimed role in "Hollywoodland" and guiding actress Amy Ryan to an Oscar nomination in his directorial debut, 2007's "Gone Baby Gone."

With "State of Play," an adaptation of the acclaimed British miniseries, the actor returns to leading-man status as a secretive politician who must work with a journalist friend (Russell Crowe) to uncover a murder conspiracy.

Q: As an admitted politics junkie, doing the research for this film must have been a dream come true.

It was definitely something that I was excited for once I got the job, though I wasn't sure how receptive everyone on the Hill would be about talking to yet another actor. But most proved to be pretty open to it. There's this image in the public consciousness that they're just a bunch of lugubrious, free-spending bodies mindlessly moving cheek-to-jowl and wasting the public's money, but that was not the Congress that I saw.

Q: How did your visits inform your portrayal of your character, Congressman Stephen Collins?

In the movie, my character is described as a rising star, someone with a lot of force and courage in his demeanor. So I tried to meet up with guys that fit that particular bill, which in my case, ended up being representatives like Anthony Weiner, Adam Smith, Rahm Emanuel and Patrick Murphy, who was particularly insightful, because he was closest to my character. I sort of borrowed piecemeal from all of them to construct this character.

How has stepping behind the camera for "Gone Baby Gone" changed your approach to acting?

My directing experience has made me both a better writer and a



Contour/Getty Images

better actor. Once you know how different parts of the overall picture come together, it makes you think more comprehensively about what needs to get done. On "State of Play," [director] Kevin [Macdonald] and I are more or less peers in age, so watching his approach made me think about my own process more.

Q: This film was shot last spring before the presidential election, and your character is trying to take down a Blackwater-like company. How do you think it holds up now that we're living under an Obama administration?

I was really concerned that no one was going to care about defense contractors, and many of the political issues that drive the story, if the election went a certain way. But coincidentally, what has risen is the ascent of the Internet and the descent of newspapers. Just as the movie's coming out, we're at this moment where newspapers are being destroyed by the Internet, brick by brick—they're just being eaten away like the Borg in "Star Trek," with the Internet chewing away at newspapers.... Eventually, we're just going to be left with nothing but free-floating blogs out there in the ether.

Q: Your next film, "The Company Men," an indie drama co-starring Kevin Costner and Tommy Lee Jones that starts shooting this month, is also oddly prescient.

It's either going to be very timely or too timely. We actually planned to do it a while ago, before everything started to fall to pieces economically, but the timing didn't work out. The film is about this company that lays off 5,000 people and I'm one of the guys who gets laid off. The story is not ideal, because so many people are going through this right now, but the script [by "ER" writer/director John Wells] is fantastic. I'm also working on an adaptation of Chuck Hogan's Boston-based crime novel "Prince of Thieves" called "The Town," but I haven't cast anyone yet.



Ben Affleck in 'State of Play.'

Universal Studios

An Old Quarter's timeless lure

BY STAN SESSER

ANYONE WHO WALKS past 15 Hang Ma Street in this city's Old Quarter could be forgiven for doing a double take. Displayed in front of the shop is a half-sized motor scooter, so realistic it seems a child could hop on and ride away. Touching it, you find it's made of paper. So is a Sony TV set hanging from the ceiling. And stacks of paper money—dollars, euros and Vietnamese dong—are obvious fakes.

All these items for sale on this block, whose nickname is "Counterfeit Street," are made to be burned. Mourners at funerals and families at ceremonies for deceased ancestors set the items on fire because those who are moving on to a new life will need transport, relaxation—and a little spending money.

It's a tourist's delight, and that's the problem. The "36 Streets" of Hanoi's Old Quarter—many of them selling only one category of goods, like silver jewelry or wire screens—reflect 1,000 years of Vietnamese cultural tradition. But the Quarter is now battling a newer phenomenon: hordes of foreign visitors. They make travel agencies, coffee houses, backpacker hotels and stylish fusion restaurants a lot more profitable than stores selling counterfeit dollars.

Still, thanks to some spotty government regulations on preservation and to many shopkeepers who refuse to sell their businesses, a good part of the Old Quarter is surviving.

It's an oasis of old culture in Hanoi, a still-beautiful city of French colonial villas and lakes that nonetheless is dotted with new high-rise projects, with rice fields transformed into suburban malls. "There's nothing quite like the Old Quarter in the world," says Mason Florence, who wrote the first Lonely Planet guidebook for Hanoi a decade ago. "Some of it is exactly like it was when I first saw Hanoi in 1990. ... The trees are fantastic; they don't cut them because they're considered sacred."

Most of the stores on Counterfeit Street, actually a block of Hang Ma Street, sell the same things. ("Hang" means merchandise or shop.) Besides what's designed to go up in smoke, gold-colored branches and flowers, red lanterns and other decorative funeral items light up the entire block in a blaze of color.

A cluster of stores selling similar merchandise is hardly unusual—one successful dress shop can spawn others that profit from a spillover of customers. But the concentration here may be unique in the world.

Walk down Lan Ong, the traditional medicine street, and the smell of herbs overwhelms the exhaust fumes from the car and motorbike traffic jockeying for space with the cyclos, the ubiquitous Vietnamese bicycle taxis. On Hang Thiec, Tin Street, the pounding of hammers shaping the tin into lockboxes, funnels and watering cans sometimes makes it necessary to shout to be heard. Here you can buy a little stove made to burn that counterfeit money.

Next year Hanoi celebrates its

Hanoi



Stan Sesser/The Wall Street Journal



Alamy

1,000-year anniversary. These Old Quarter clusters trace their origins back to 1010, when the emperor Ly Thai To, founder of the Ly Dynasty, moved his capital to the site of Hanoi, according to Michael DiGregorio, a Ford Foundation program officer in Hanoi who specializes in culture and urban planning. "To build their city, they brought in craftsmen from villages all around," he says. "Each craft village had its area in Hanoi." Many of these craft villages, each specializing in a particular prod-

uct, still exist on the city's outskirts.

The origin of the term "36 Streets" is more obscure. The Old Quarter during the Middle Ages didn't even consist of streets, but was more a collection of little communities, separated from each other by gates and bamboo hedges, according to the book "Hanoi—Streets of the Old Quarter," published three years ago and written by Nguyen Vinh Phuc, Nguyen Thua Hy and Barbara Cohen. They say "36" might have



Aaron Jael Santos for The Wall Street Journal (2)

come from the number of administrative units in the area, or from the fact that in Asia the number nine "represents 'plenty,' and nine times four (the four directions) would make 36, which means simply, many."

No one knows just how many streets exist in the Old Quarter today, since its boundaries differ from map to map; there are certainly more than 60. One thing is sure: A street devoted to a particular product can almost overnight turn into the home of trendy restaurants. On one short block, I walked past a tapas bar, a Mediterranean restaurant, a patisserie and two upscale coffee houses.

The book on Old Quarter history says that once there were streets devoted to combs, bottles, charcoal, floor mats and even sandworms. Today's streets—besides Hang Ma and the tin and herbs streets—include Hang Nam (Gravestone Street), Hang Bac (Silver Street), Hang Quat (flags and banners), Hang Gai (silk and paintings) and Hang Quai (Buddhist altars and statues).

Enterprising merchants have even started at least two new streets, devoted to mobile phones and computers. One day I took my aging IBM ThinkPad laptop to Computer Street, Ly Nam De; one of the screen's hinges had snapped in half. A computer repair shop in California had told me buying a new laptop would be cheaper than fixing it. But a Ly Nam De repairman said he could do the repairs for \$40 if I could



Clockwise from left, a shop on Hanoi's Hang Ma Street sells artificial flowers used in funeral ceremonies; fried springrolls in Dong Xuan alley; a man carves gravestones at a shop on Hang Mam; the Ngoc Son Temple.

wait four days for parts to arrive.

Besides their specialty products, villagers brought with them to Hanoi their religions, with a large number of deities. Many streets have communal houses, where ancestors are worshipped, and ancient temples dot the Old Quarter. Most famous is the Bach Ma temple, where representations of Vietnamese deities compete with Buddha images. At one altar, two Vietnamese women prayed in front of a stack of neatly displayed beer cans—a prayer that the departed ancestors are having a good time, my interpreter said.

If walking the streets makes you hungry, the Old Quarter features single-item restaurants, places where you perch on low stools and for a couple of dollars have a great meal—though with no choice in what you're eating.

Dac Kim, up three flights of rickety circular stairs, offers a splendid lunch of bun cha, or grilled pork patties with noodles. There's also banh cuon, rice-flour pancakes stuffed with pork and mushrooms, and pho, the ubiquitous noodle soup. Best known is the restaurant called Cha Ca La Vong, though some locals dismiss it as aimed at tourists; it serves cha ca, where fish, dill, noodles and other condiments bubble away in a wok at your table.

The attractions of the Old Quarter go beyond the 36 Streets and the food. The Quarter begins at the north and west shores of Hoan Kiem Lake, an enchanting body of water surrounded by trees and featuring a pagoda on an islet. From calisthenics and badminton in the morning to young lovers hugging on park benches at night, Hoan Kiem makes a pleasant promenade at almost any hour. Another must, at a lakeside auditorium: brilliantly executed nightly puppet shows, with puppets walking on water.

What preserves the Old Quarter's ties with the past is in part government regulations—which impose height limits, restrict population density and require government permission to alter the most historic of the buildings. It's also the dedication of the shop owners, who live above their stores and wouldn't consider any other sort of life, though their real estate has soared in value.

"I don't require anything more," says 75-year-old Tran Cong Mien, who has lived above his art gallery for the past 30 years. "The spaces are cramped and families share the same toilet. But here I walk out on the street, I can buy whatever I need, and I can talk with friends. In a new building, you don't talk to your neighbors."

Trip planner: Hanoi's charms

Where to stay

The narrow buildings of Hanoi are a charming idiosyncrasy, dating from an era when property was taxed solely on the extent of its street frontage. The Old Quarter hotels are of this variety. Always request rooms facing the street if you want a view.

Church Hotel, on the street fronting St. Joseph's Cathedral, is a bargain at \$55 for a double. 9 Nha Tho St., ☎ 84-4-3928-8118.

Maison d'Hanoi is a sleekly modern renovation. 35 Hang Trong St., ☎ 84-4-3938-0999, from \$90.

Where to eat

My nomination for the best restaurant in Hanoi, a seafood

place specializing in crab, is at the western edge of the Old Quarter. Huong Bien Quan, 30 Tong Duy Tan St., ☎ 84-4-3828-6311. (Walking away from the Old Quarter's center, this is the farthest of the restaurants with the address of 30; you enter by walking up a flight of chipped concrete outdoor stairs.)

The wonderful one-dish Old Quarter restaurants include 146 Bao Khanh St. for banh cuon (rice pancakes stuffed with ground pork and mushrooms), 87 Hang Dieu St. for eel rice soup, 1 Hang Manh So St. for bun cha (grilled pork patties) and 24 Duong Thanh St. for cha ca (fish chunks cooked at your table with dill, noodles and other condiments.)

Le mot juste

Non-French novelists embrace the language of Balzac

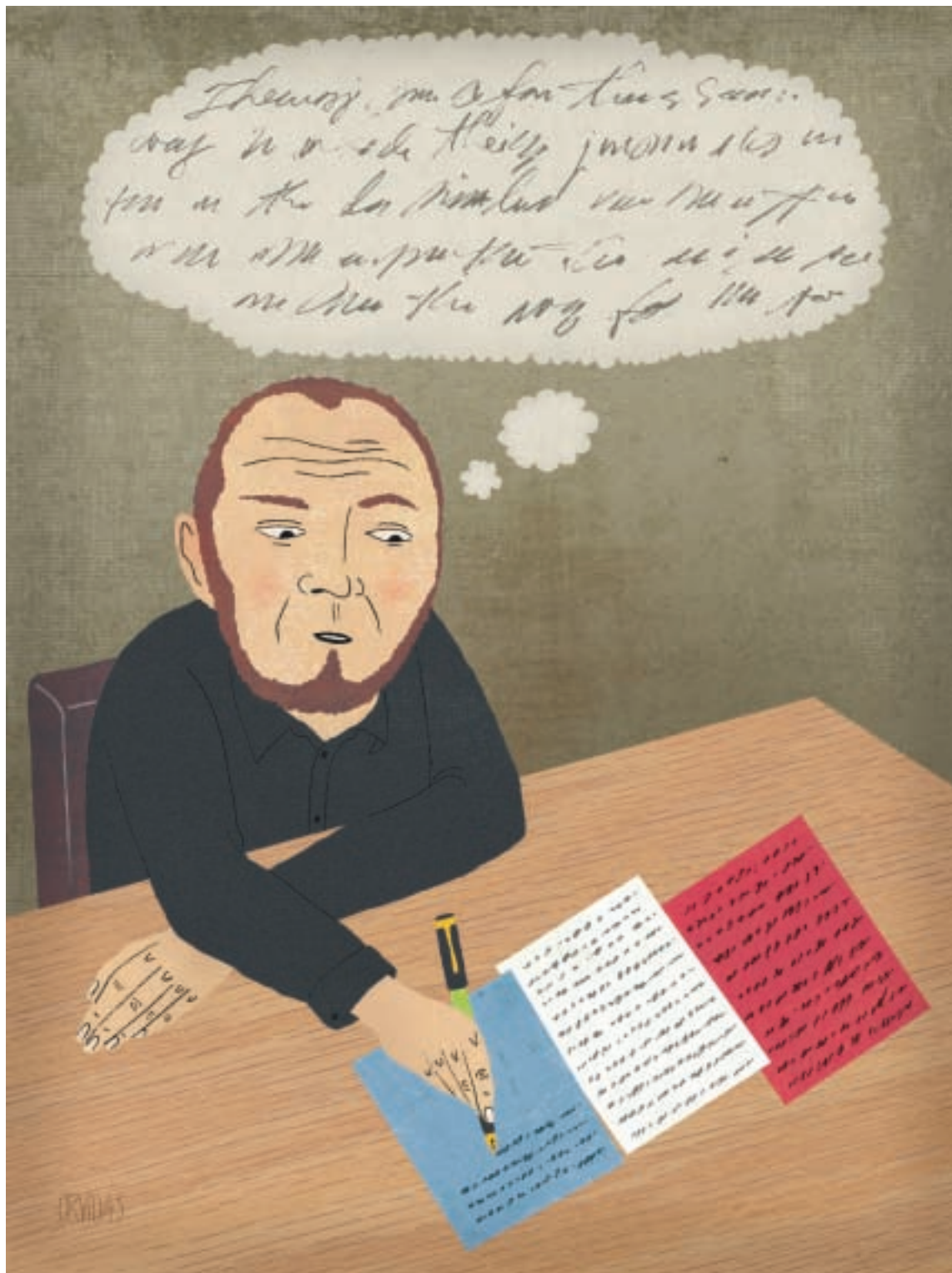
GROWING UP IN the small town of Kenadsa in the Algerian Sahara, Mohammed Moulessehoul dreamed of becoming an Arabic poet. As a Bedouin his schooling was all in Arabic and though he read books in French it was not a language he felt comfortable writing in.

Today Mr. Moulessehoul is more widely known under his nom de plume Yasmina Khadra, adopted while serving as an officer in the Algerian army to avoid military censorship.

Mr. Moulessehoul revealed his true identity in 2001 after leaving the army and going into exile in France. He is the author of 22 novels, books of essays and short stories—all of them written in French—and has been translated into more than 30 different languages. His latest novel to be published in France, “Ce Que le Jour Doit à la Nuit” (“What the Day Owes to the Night”), a sweeping love story set in Algeria during the country’s drawn-out war for independence from France, sold 230,000 copies and was voted best book of 2008 by the French literary magazine Lire.

How did an aspiring Arabic poet end up becoming one of the most widely read contemporary novelists writing in the French language? “The turning point in my life was when I read Albert Camus’ ‘The Stranger,’” says the 54-year-old Mr. Moulessehoul. “I found the genius in Camus’ writing was its simplicity. Camus has the gift of being able to make human absurdity understandable with words which are not complicated to grasp and with extraordinary fluidity. That was what first encouraged me to think I could write in French and become a novelist.”

A growing number of other non-French writers have been thinking the same way—and publishing novels in French that are proving popular both with critics and the book-buying public. Two of the last three winners of France’s most prestigious literary award, Le Prix Goncourt, were both foreigners writing novels in French for the first time. The most recent winner was Afghan writer Atiq Rahimi, whose novel “Syngue Sabour” (“Stone of Patience”) tells the story of a woman in a country resembling Afghanistan who has to care for her husband after he is left paralyzed from a bullet wound. The Goncourt jury praised “Syngue Sabour” for



“its elegant portrayal of the oppressive nature of Afghan society.”

Two years earlier the same jury awarded Le Goncourt to the American writer Jonathan Littell for his Holocaust novel “Les Bienveillantes” (“The Kindly Ones”). The 900-plus-page book was a huge success in France, selling 700,000 copies and earning comparisons to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Mr. Littell’s novel was recently published in an English translation—though not by his own hand but by Charlotte Mandell, who has won praise for her translations of Proust and Flaubert.

“The success of ‘The Kindly Ones’ in France showed there is a public out there which is not being satisfied by native-born French writers,” says the Spanish-born author Jorge Semprun, a Goncourt jury member who alternates between writing in French and Spanish. “Most of today’s young French writers are navel-gazers, interested in nothing more than writing about their own problems. It’s a kind of egotistic naturalism which is endemic of a deeper French malaise. The novels of writers like Atiq Rahimi and Jonathan Littell are far more outward-looking than most of those written by the French themselves.”

For Mr. Moulessehoul, the language isn’t even the main consideration; he’s a storyteller first and foremost. “When I write I don’t pay too much attention to the words,” he says. “I’m much more interested in transmitting emotion: I push the French language to the extreme to prove that it can express everything I want to say.”

In his topical novels Mr. Moulessehoul tackles challenging issues head-on, such as a suicide-bombing in “The Attack,” the repressive effect of the Taliban on ordinary Afghan families in “The Swallows of Kabul,” or the way war can provoke terrorist resistance in “The Sirens of Baghdad.” His books are page-turners, not the hermetic literary musings commonly associated with native-born French novelists.

“The tendency of many French writers these days is to produce elegant, thoughtful fiction on a small scale-set in France, usually Paris, often the Left Bank,” says U.S. journalist and veteran France-watcher Donald Morrison, whose Time Magazine cover story “The Death of French Culture” sparked a heated debate at the end of 2007. “The French crank this stuff out and people buy a few copies but it sure isn’t Balzac, Hugo, Zola or even Camus.”

By Tobias Grey

Special to The Wall Street Journal

ILLUSTRATION: KEN ORVIDAS



Non-French writers have long been attracted to the language of Balzac and Hugo. Throughout the last century such inventive stylists as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Milan Kundera, Julien Green and the Romanian philosopher and essayist Emil Cioran have written original works in French even though it was not their mother tongue. But whereas these earlier writers appealed (and in Mr. Kundera's case still appeal) to an educated elite, many of the more recent foreign-born French writers are looking to connect with a wider audience with more mainstream tastes.

"I'm certainly not writing for an elite," says Mr. Moulessehoul. "When I write in French it's not the same French as a native but that of a Francophone. I invent and inject a lot of my own sensibility as a Bedouin. Perhaps that's what a lot of my readers in France find interesting."

Other foreign-born emigrés whose French-language novels are remarkable for their strong story lines include Mr. Semprun, Eduardo Manet (Cuba), Andreï Makine (Russia), Tahar Ben Jelloun (Morocco), Nancy Huston (Canada), Anna Moi (Vietnam) and Dai Sijie (China). Also, a number of talented newcomers are earning plaudits for their novels, including: Eugene Green (U.S.), Mercedes Deambrosis (Spain), Rouja Lazarova (Bulgaria), Pia Petersen (Denmark), Brina Svit (Slovenia), Aki Shimazaki (Japan) and Giulio Minghini (Italy).

"By definition foreign writers working in French have a wider scope than native French writers because they come from elsewhere," says Ms. Huston, whose most recent novel "Fault Lines"—about four generations of the same family—won France's Prix Femina Award in 2006. "They see France as a country among others and live on an identity fault line that predisposes them to project themselves into other people's minds."

The Spanish-born Ms. Deambrosis, whose latest novel "Juste Pour le Plaisir" ("Just for the Pleasure") is set during World War II, finds the act of writing in French liberates her as a novelist. "Despite being totally bilingual I can't seem to write novels in Spanish at all," she says. "The only thing I can write directly in Spanish is poetry and yet I've

never been able to write poetry in French for some strange reason."

One of the most common criticisms of contemporary fiction as practiced by native-born French writers is that it is inward-looking and autobiographical in the way that poetry often tends to be. The French have even invented a term for this kind of literature: autofiction.

"The two world wars and their sequelae, plus an unfortunate fascination for literary theory have damaged, not to say destroyed the ability of most French writers to believe in the virtue of storytelling per se," says Ms. Huston. "Even those who do tell stories are surprisingly unambitious, prefer not to do research in the real world, and content themselves with a very tiny scope."

The Cuban-born novelist and playwright Eduardo Manet, whose latest novel "La Maitresse du Commandant Castro" ("Commandant Castro's Mistress") brings Fidel vividly to life during and after the Cuban revolution, deliberately chose to ignore Chateaubriand's edict that no writer "is a competent judge but of works written in his own language."

"I'm very aware that I can never write the kind of French favorite poets like Baudelaire or Rimbaud once wrote," says Mr. Manet, who settled in Paris in 1968. "But that doesn't bother me anymore. What I enjoy doing is inventing a story and interesting characters. Whenever I can, I ex-

plore the structure and syntax of the French language which I then appropriate in different ways, such as occasionally inserting Spanish words into my text."

French is widely spoken in 54 countries around the world—the first language of about 80 million people and used as the second language of 190 million people. L'Académie Française was created in 1635 to govern the language's usage and its tentacles reach far beyond the Francophone world. It was while attending the Académie-sponsored French Lycée in Kabul that future Goncourt Prix winner Mr. Rahimi first excelled in the language of Molière.

"In certain respects the French language is like a state within a state," says Eugene Green, whose first novel in French, "La Reconstruction," about an aging French university professor reminded of his past by a troubled stranger, was recently published to glowing reviews in the French press. "The fact that it was the language adopted by European elites from around 1700 to around 1950 has given it, up to a certain point, a 'universal' identity. These elements make it a language that a foreigner can master more completely than another. But in spite of this it still possesses the

kind of deep mystery all languages do, and of course it's that dimension which attracts me when I write."

Mr. Green, a 61-year-old American-born filmmaker and playwright, has been writing in French every day for the last 40 years. His deep admiration for the French language led him to transpose the phoneticism of certain English branding words that have become a regular part of the French lexicon. In Mr. Green's hands "Coca Light" becomes "Quôqualaït," while "tramway" re-emerges as "tramouais."

"The spellings I adopt for these English words are an act of resistance against an occupation, which is not achieved by soldiers and tanks, but through the 'globalized economy' and modern means of communication, such as the Internet," says Mr. Green. "I think that humanity is rich because of its diversity and that you have to actually struggle to conserve languages and human culture in the same way we seek to protect elephants and whales."

Mr. Green's hard-line is diametrically opposed to writers like Atiq Rahimi and Yasmina Khadra, who often use Arabic words when they cannot find an adequate French substitute. Nonetheless, both approaches are symptomatic of ways in which the French language is undergoing changes.

"One of the most interesting things about novels by foreign-born authors is that they use foreign words and phrases un-self-consciously," says Mr. Morrison. "The mandarins of the French Academy will hate me for saying this, but I think it's healthy that foreign words are creeping into the foreign language."

In March 2007, 44 authors, most of them from France's former colonies, signed a manifesto in Le Monde newspaper arguing that it was time for the French to stop looking down on Francophone writers not born in France. One of the biggest complaints was that many French bookshops ghetto-ize the novels of Francophone writers by placing them in sections denoting the writer's country of origin rather than on shelves alongside books of native French writers.

"I've always spoken out in favor of creating a similar situation in France to that which already exists in England with the Commonwealth writers like Ben Okri, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith and Hanif Kureishi," says native-born French

writer and journalist Pierre Assouline, whose blog La République des Livres is one of the most widely read in France. "These writers have enormously enriched English culture and the English language. Now since about two years ago I can see something similar beginning to happen in France. Proof of that were the literary prizes handed out to reward writers like Littell, Rahimi and others. It seems to me to be a very good sign and it can only help enrich the French language."

Despite his admiration for their work, Mr. Assouline is not convinced Francophone writers like Mr. Littell and Mr. Rahimi are a match for the great French writers of the past. He also doesn't hold out much hope on the domestic front: "A perception of high quality is very subjective. But personally I don't think there is very much high quality in [contemporary] French literature. It comes along three or four times a century, writers like Proust or Celine. So rather than speaking of high quality I'd describe their writing as possessing originality."

When Mr. Littell's "The Kindly Ones" was published in the U.S. and Britain to largely negative reviews last month, many critics in these countries wondered why the book had sold so many copies and been so highly praised in France. The Times of London's Philip Kemp, who described Mr. Littell's book as "bloatingly inept," called "its reverential reception across the Channel barely comprehensible."

"I'm convinced that the vast majority of people who bought the book did not finish reading it," says Ms. Huston. "Secondly it was a sort of faddish challenge—everyone wanted to prove that they, too, had managed to deal with a thousand pages of horror."

But those in France who originally championed Mr. Littell's novel are not about to abandon their adoptive son (the author was granted French citizenship not long after his book was published) at this late hour. "For me 'Les Bienveillantes' is a French novel, the fact that its writer is American is of no importance," says Mr. Assouline. "A writer's country is his language. If he writes in French then he is French—that is all that counts."



Non-French authors writing in French include Nancy Huston (above), author of 'Lignes de faille,' and (top, from left): Eugene Green, 'La Reconstruction'; Dai Sijie, 'Le Complexe de Di'; Mohammed Moulessehoul, 'Ce que le jour doit à la nuit'; Atiq Rahimi, 'Syngue Sabour'; and Andreï Makine, 'L'amour humaine.'

Photos: AFP; Belga

When readers think fiction is real

The 'No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency' author on the intense personal relationships readers form with characters

BY ALEXANDER MCCALL SMITH

A FEW WEEKS AGO, on a book tour of Australia, I found myself signing books in Sydney. As the line of readers moved, two young women presented copies of books for signature. These books were from a Scottish series I write, one featuring a heroine called Isabel Dalhousie. Isabel, who is in her early 40s, has a boyfriend considerably younger than she is—by 14 years, in fact. As I signed their books, one of the women mentioned that she thought that this relationship between Isabel and Jamie, the younger man, was not a good idea at all.

I defended Isabel's choice. "Why shouldn't they be together?"

The answer came quickly. "Because it's not going to go anywhere."

"But I thought it was going rather well," I protested.

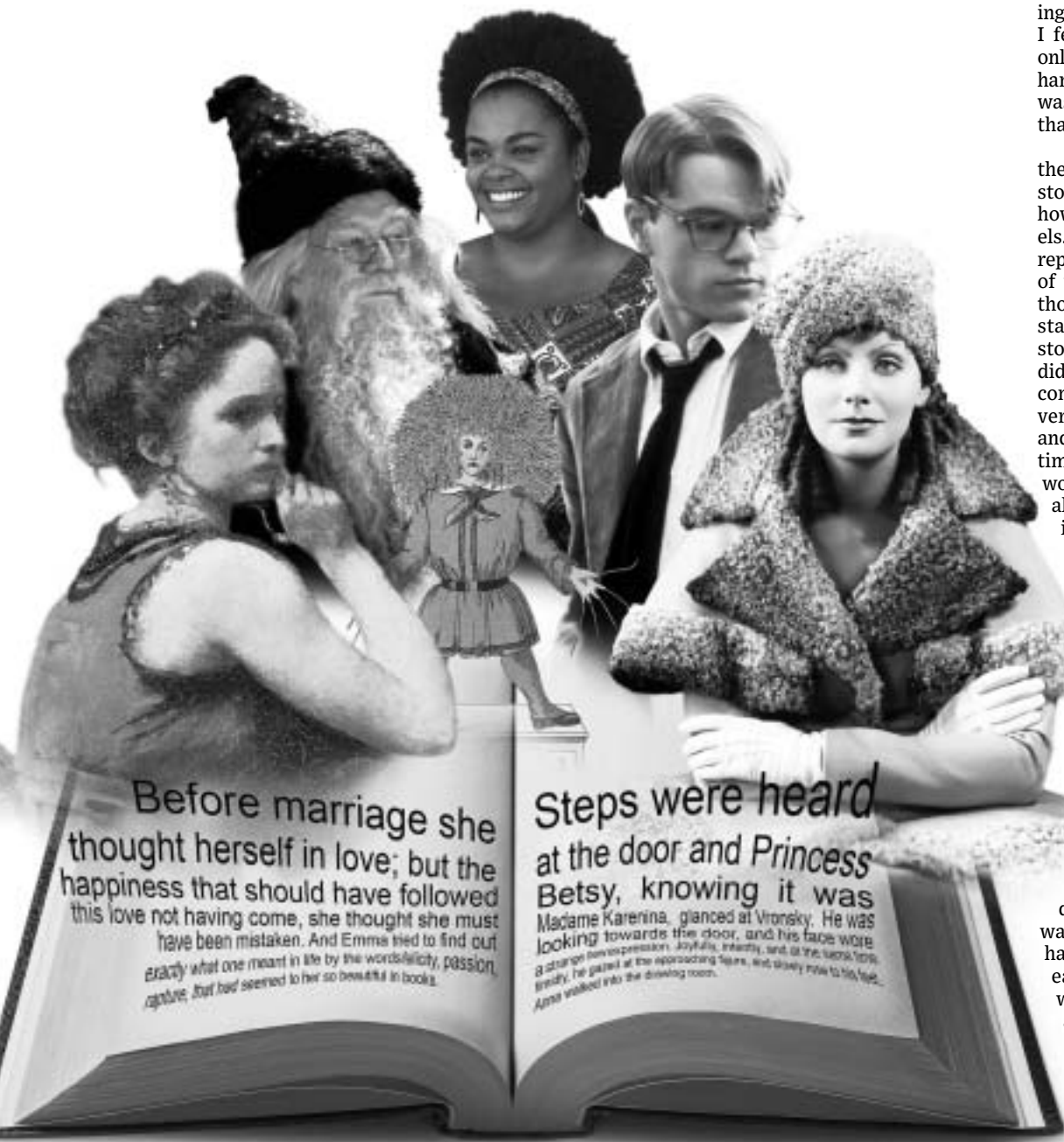
Again my reader lost no time in replying. "No, it isn't," she said emphatically.

That was me put in my place. After all, I was merely the author. As it happens, Isabel's relationship with Jamie had not been my idea in the first place, but had come about because at an earlier stage in the series I came under attack from a journalist—another woman—for not allowing Isabel to become romantically involved with Jamie. I had originally intended that their friendship be platonic, but had been told in the course of an interview with this journalist that I really had to allow something closer to develop. "Your readers will expect it," she said. "And it would be so empowering for them."

Not one to stand between my readers and their empowerment, I had decided to let Isabel develop a romantic liaison, only to be taken to task later by my Sydney critics for exactly this. This, and many other similar experiences, has made me think about the whole issue of the novelist's freedom—and responsibility. The conclusion that I am increasingly drawn to is that the world of fiction and the world of real flesh-and-blood people are not quite as separate as one might imagine. Writing is a moral act: What you write has a real effect on others, often to a rather surprising extent.

The issue of reader expectations is one with which writers of crime or mystery fiction have long been familiar. The poet W.H. Auden is among many critics who have commented on how novels in this genre follow a classic pattern: First there is peace, then this peace is shattered by the occurrence of a crime, usually a murder. This leads to a search for the wrongdoer, his apprehension and punishment, and finally a return to peace. We need to see the moral balance restored, said Auden—a view also expressed by P.D. James, one of the greatest crime writers of our times. According to James, the traditional detective novel reassures us that we live in a moral universe, one in which the detective is the agent of justice. In this respect, she suggests, the detective novel is really doing the work of the old-fashioned morality play.

Although the vast majority of mystery novels follow this well-established pattern, not all do. In some instances, we know all the way through exactly what the wrong-



Ray Bartkus

doer has done—there is no mystery element here—and the real questions are why he acted as he did and whether he is going to get away with it. If he does go unpunished, then the conventional pattern in such books is turned on its head.

Patricia Highsmith's Ripley books do just this. Tom Ripley, like many of Highsmith's characters, is a very credible sociopath, coldly capable of disposing of anybody who gets too close to his secrets. It is easy for him to kill, and the fact that he does so while living the haute-bourgeois life in an elegant French house adds to the fascination we have for him.

Of course we know that it all started with the murder of Dickie Greenleaf, and as we see his life unfold over the series of novels, we may cherish hopes that sooner or later Ripley's criminal past will catch up with him. But it does not, and after several novels I suspect that many readers are actually unwilling for that to happen. Why? Because we are fond of Ripley? That is hardly likely—Tom Ripley may be charming and urbane, but he is not really very likeable.

Perhaps we merely want his story to continue because we are enjoying it so much. If Ripley had been arrested, or disposed of by somebody he had crossed, then that would have been the end of the se-

ries, and that would have been a disappointment. As it happened, Ripley survived his creator, and is still presumably living in Belle Ombre, his house in France, awaiting some author to approach the Highsmith estate with a request to continue to record his dubious doings.

Of course a sociopath who gets away with it is unlikely to be tormented by guilt. For the nonsociopathic wrongdoer who goes unpunished by the law, authors often have an alternative form of punishment up their sleeve. Raskolnikov, the student-turned-murderer in Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment," initially gets away with his crime but then, tripped up by his conscience, eventually confesses to what he has done.

To be tortured by guilt is perhaps unpleasant enough to satisfy our desire that crimes be paid for, but in some cases the wrongdoer does not appear to suffer even that. Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" involves a particularly cruel murder—the immuring of the victim in a cellar—and 50 years later, when the perpetrator tells the story, he does not appear burdened by regret or guilt. That, of course, is how things sometimes are. The guilty and the unpopular get away with it in real life.

Why is the writer of detective fiction put under such pressure to deal

out just desserts to wrongdoers? The truth is that for many of us fiction is in some sense real, and that what happens to fictional people is, in a curious way, happening in the real world.

We all remember being told as children: It's just a story. I recall being exposed as a boy to that most frightening of children's books, "The Struwwelpeter." This collection of dark stories includes such delights as the story of the scissor-wielding figure who would bound gleefully into a room and cut off the thumb of any unfortunate child sucking his thumb at the time. Freudians would find little difficulty in seeing this as being all about castration fears, but for me it was a simple matter of what might happen to you if you engaged in thumb-sucking. I really believed in him, and was suitably frightened.

Although we eventually learn to distinguish between the world of make-believe and the real world, I suspect that many of us continue to experience fictional characters and events as being, in some way, real. This is because the imaginative act of following a story involves a suspension of disbelief, as we enter into the world it creates. When Anthony Minghella showed me a moving scene that he had just filmed for the pilot of "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency," I found myself weep-

ing copiously, right there on the set. I felt rather embarrassed—it was only a story, after all—but he put a hand on my shoulder and said that was exactly what he had done over that particular scene.

For the author, this sense that the reader has of the reality of the story has serious implications for how characters are treated in novels. It is one of the jobs of fiction to report on the sorrows and tragedies of this world. This must be done, though, from a morally acceptable standpoint. A writer who told a story of, say, rape or genocide but did so from a neutral or, worse still, complicit position would be given very short shrift indeed. Readers and critics would be on to him in no time at all; indeed a book like that would be unlikely to be published at all. Why? If it is only a story, where is the harm?

Stories have an effect in this world. They are part of our moral conversation as a society. They weigh in; they change the world because they become part of our cultural history. There never was an Anna Karenina or a Madame Bovary, even if there might have been models, but what happened to these characters has become part of the historical experience of women. When J.K. Rowling revealed in New York that Professor Dumbledore was gay, the announcement was widely welcomed. One would have thought that it would make no earthly difference to anything whether a fictional character had a particular sexual preference, but it did: People applauded and applauded. That must have been because they felt that this announcement had some significance for the real-life issue of accepting gay people fully.

It can be very inhibiting for an author if he or she knows that what happens in fiction is going to be taken so seriously. I write serial novels in newspapers and have learned the hard way that people will readily attribute the views expressed by characters to their authors. In one of my "Scotland Street" novels a character called Bruce, a rather narcissistic young man, made disparaging remarks about his hometown. Although these were not the views I hold about that particular town, I was roundly taken to task, with the local member of the Scottish Parliament suggesting that I should be forced to apologize to the offended citizens. I pointed out that these were the views of a fictional character, who was just the type to make such remarks. That did not help.

In another novel, I had Isabel Dalhousie give up breastfeeding rather too quickly for the liking of the leader of a pro-breastfeeding organization. Again I was told that I should make a public apology to those who believed in persisting with breastfeeding. That sort of thing is quite alarming, and it is such people who need to be told, politely but firmly, that it is just a story.

Mind you, I still have my doubts as to the wisdom of creating scissormen who cut off children's thumbs. Perhaps an apology is called for.

Inspired by Mr. Wright

BY NANCY KEATES

Montecito, Calif.

MY FIRST impressions? Of peace, of beauty abounding, of an old-world graciousness and elegance of line. And there was something more too: a deep-dwelling spiritual presence that seemed to emanate from the earth itself...

That's the narrator's description of Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright's famed home, in the latest novel by T.C. Boyle. The words also capture how Mr. Boyle felt when he first glimpsed his house: a sprawling "summer cottage" here, designed by Wright.

Perched like a pagoda on the hill, surrounded by trees and bushes, the 418-square-meter home is built as a cross, fireplace at the center. The front door is buried on the side, leading to an entryway with ceilings so low they barely accommodate Mr. Boyle's gangly 1.87 meter frame.

A few steps inside and suddenly the ceiling soars, light pouring in through Wright's signature windows. Pieces by Gustav Stickley and other Wright-era antiques are scattered about the large living area. The feeling is cool and still, everything so clean and perfectly placed it feels like a museum that allows few visitors.

It was his home that inspired Mr. Boyle, author of "The Road to Wellville" and "Drop City," to pen "The Women," which chronicles the architect's notoriously tumultuous personal life.

"I was constantly aware of the architect's ghost lingering in the design of this house, in which I am working," says Mr. Boyle. The book's release coincides with the completion of a meticulous renovation of the home back to its original state.

Exactly 100 years ago, Wright designed the home for George C. Stewart, a Scottish accountant. Soon after the design was completed Wright left his first wife, Kitty, and their six kids and ran off with Mamah Borthwick Cheney, the wife of a client and neighbor in Oak Park, Ill. It's the event that sets off "The Women," which chronicles Cheney's 1914 murder and a series of tumultuous relationships.

Written from the perspective of a fictional Japanese apprentice, "The Women" buries itself in the personalities of Wright's three mistresses. "You live inside a historical character to the point where they really become your fictional characters," Mr. Boyle says. "What did they think? What did they feel? You take the bare bones of what was there and add to it."

In contrast, Mr. Boyle, 60, added very little to his home in his 16-year restoration effort. Aside from changes that needed to be made (a foundation was added) and a couple of practical additions (bookshelves and a sound system), the home adheres to Wright's original plans. Mr. Boyle erased changes made by previous residents, scraping off paint and removing treatments from windows, which scholars say are notable for their unique tree patterns.

"That's the ethical thing to do—to keep a house as it is de-



Photos: Brad Swinertz for The Wall Street Journal

signed. We don't feel we need to add marble bathtubs," says Mr. Boyle.

He's less successful controlling the outside of the home, an acre where everything is in constant flux. What was the original front lawn is overgrown with trees and bushes, through which Mr. Boyle has created paths lined with stones. A group of raccoons are particularly unmanageable, though he admires the home they created from a dead tree stump.

Houses for sale in Montecito range from a four-bedroom Mediterranean listed at \$2.95 million to a nine-bedroom mansion on seven acres asking \$32.5 million.

Like Wright, who designed lighting fixtures, furniture, and even clothing to be used in his houses, Mr. Boyle likes to be in control of his art. A self-described "nutball perfectionist," he says his writing is rarely edited. He also dislikes change, constantly moving furniture back to its original position when his wife Karen tries to rearrange. "I have more staying power than she does," he says.

Painter Pablo Campos says he has seen Mr. Boyle stuff his wife's belongings into closets and drawers. "He's like a blind person who has to keep it all steady so he can navigate without bumping into anything," Mr. Campos says.

The house also reflects Mr. Boyle's desire to separate the private and public parts of his life. Visitors see three rooms: the family room in the middle with a giant roman-fired brick hearth (Mr. Boyle's 20 books on the mantle); a TV or reading room—depending on whether there's a game Mr. Boyle wants to watch—to the right, and at the far end a dining room. All the furniture was selected by Karen, who found the home shortly after falling in love with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Frank Lloyd Wright room.

Almost hidden is the stairway behind the fireplace that leads upstairs to Mr. Boyle's office and the bedrooms. He shows the private areas only with reluctance; the bedrooms are off-limits. "He is a gracious host. But he runs a tight ship," says producer Mitchell Burgess, who, with his wife, producer Robin Green (both known for HBO's "The Sopranos" series), visits often. Friends for three decades, the couple have rarely gone upstairs.

Just back from a weeklong book tour in Germany, Mr. Boyle fussed over three potted cycads in the dining room, muttering that he would have to replace them because they'd been overwatered in his absence. How often did he eat in the dining

room? Only when there were guests, he said. How often was that? "As little as I can manage," he said dryly.

Mr. Boyle says he fully intends to live in the house for the rest of his life, pointing out to friends the nearby cemetery where he will be buried. Up next: a book that takes place in the Channel Islands of California, which he views from a nearby beach.



Author T.C. Boyle walks his property; left, the living area of his Wright-designed home has been restored to its original state.

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The Wright stuff
See a slideshow of more photos
of T.C. Boyle's home, at
WSJ.com/RealEstate

Tiger's rivals vs. the Bear's

Augusta, Ga.

JACK NICKLAUS'S signal accomplishment as a player was winning 18 professional majors. That's the record Tiger Woods posted above his bed as a kid and plotted to break some day. (His count stood at 14 entering last week's Masters—and still does after the tournament, which was won by Ángel Cabrera of Argentina.) But in most golf fans' minds Mr. Nicklaus's career was defined at least as much by the rivals he faced and ultimately bested.

His first professional win was a playoff victory over Arnold Palmer—"The King"—at the 1962

Golf Journal

JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

U.S. Open. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, Mr. Nicklaus, Mr. Palmer and Gary Player were known as the Big Three and cumulatively won 34 majors and 159 PGA Tour events. Later Mr. Nicklaus took on and outlasted Lee Trevino (six majors, 29 Tour wins), Johnny Miller (two majors and 25 Tour wins, most of them in a white-hot spurt between 1973 and 1976) and Tom Watson (eight majors and 39 Tour wins). Mr. Nicklaus finished second in PGA Tour events more than any other player, a total of 65 times against 73 wins, but won his last major, the 1986 Masters at age 46, after all the other men had won their last majors.

In the current era, golf fans have not been so lucky. "A rivalry is when somebody who is not the best in the world beats somebody who is the best, and does it more than once. Now you have a rivalry," Tom Watson told me last Thursday after his round at the Masters. "Unfortunately Tiger doesn't have that very much, because he's the one who almost always wins. Phil [Mickelson], honestly, is his only rival, although Pádraig Harrington right now is playing awfully well and might be close."

In 2003 and 2004, when Mr. Woods dipped into a (relative) slump, the media pushed the concept of a Big Four or Fab Five. In addition to Mr. Woods, the members of this supposed team of rivals were Ernie Els, Vijay Singh, Mr. Mickelson and perhaps Retief Goosen. But when Mr. Woods revived in 2005 with two major victories and two more in 2006, the Fab Five disbanded.

Asked about his rivals in a press conference just before the Masters, Mr. Woods said he'd gone head-to-head with Mr. Els more than anybody else, factoring in international appearances. But in general he played down the notion of rivalries. "The whole idea is to handle your own business and on Sunday, see where you are. You don't look at it and say, 'I have to beat this one person to win the golf tournament,' because there are a whole lot of people that you have to beat," he said.

That seems to be the conventional wisdom concerning rivalries when you ask current players (Mr. Mickelson said something similar on the subject last week), and it's probably not far from the truth. "There's an old line from church: If you want to lead the choir, you've got to turn your back on the people," said Jackie Burke Jr., the 1956 Masters champ. Besides, he added, today's players have other things on



Left, Jack Nicklaus tees off at the 1973 Masters at age 33; above, Tiger Woods, now 33 himself, last week at Augusta.

their minds. "They're more interested in what time their jet is going to land."

But Fuzzy Zoeller's not so sure. "I never noticed how deep the rivalry was between Jack and Arnie and Gary and those mules until I started playing in the Skins Games with them in the early '80s," said the 1979 Masters champ. "Whenever I had a putt to tie Arnold or Jack, one of the others would come over and say, 'Don't miss that putt,' and they weren't kidding. Trust me, those guys were rivals, and Phil and Tiger are, too, whether they want to say it in public or not."

But still, as an odds chart on the front page of last Thursday's Augusta Chronicle makes clear, Mr. Woods's real rival these days is not

Mr. Mickelson or any other individual. Mr. Woods predictably topped the list of pretournament favorites to win the Masters, with 2:1 odds. Mr. Mickelson was listed at 10:1 odds, Mr. Harrington and Sergio Garcia at 15:1 and no one else better than 20:1.

That is, unless you count "the field." The entry for "all others" came in second, with a 5:2 chance of winning the green jacket last Sunday, only slightly poorer than the odds Mr. Woods himself enjoyed.

As rivals go, The Field has much to commend it. It shows up reliably every week, competes hard, and is constantly improving as the big money in golf attracts better athletes and inspires superior training. "The pool on Tour now is a lot

deeper than it was when Jack was coming through," said Mr. Zoeller. "Any one of the boys who tees it up has a chance to win, compared to only 20 or 30 players in Jack's day, unless somebody got lucky."

The Field as a foil for the world's best golfer is actually better than any single rival. We marvel at any magician's tricks the harder they are. From the British Open in 2006 until his knee surgery last June after the U.S. Open, Mr. Woods was 18 for 29 against The Field, a winning percentage of 62%.

But The Field is not as compelling a rival as a Big Three or, better yet, a Big Six would be. Repeated encounters down the stretch, or in major-tournament playoffs, with the same few hungry personalities

makes for far better drama.

Mr. Woods, at 33, with 14 majors and 66 Tour wins, is the same age Mr. Nicklaus was on the eve of the 1973 Masters, when he had 11 majors and 47 Tour wins. Tom Watson and Johnny Miller that week were 23 and 25 years old and had two wins between them, with no majors. That compares approximately to Anthony Kim and Camilo Villegas, two rising stars who now are 23 and 27 years old with four wins between them and no majors. And they are just the tip of the iceberg of future possible rivals, among them Nick Watney, Sean O'Hair, Dustin Johnson and the teenagers Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland, Danny Lee of New Zealand and Ryo Ishikawa of Japan, all in the field last week.

I had a chance to question several of them about their potential rivalries with Mr. Woods, and to a man they seemed far less intimidated than inspired—in short, unafraid. "Guys that are playing in Tiger's era ... maybe thought this guy was unbeatable, where the likes of Danny and Ryo and myself have seen him on TV," said Mr. McIlroy. "We can relate to him in a way, especially that first Masters. He was only 21."

Mr. Woods said he was impressed with the rising young golfers, particularly Mr. McIlroy. "It's just a matter of time," he said. Then maybe Mr. Woods will have the rivals he deserves, although as always in golf, such things are impossible to predict.

Storied steel: sales of historic arms, armor and medals

HISTORIC WAR-related items—from a threatening ninth-century Viking sword to a deadly 17th-century Scottish dagger, aristocratic 19th-century English dueling pistols and 20th-century medals for gallantry—will recall past

Collecting MARGARET STUDER

battles at auctions next week.

Bonhams in London will hold the first of its 2009 antique arms and armor sales on Wednesday. It follows three sales at Bonhams London in 2008, which sold between 83% and 97%, according to number of lots offered. Collectors are drawn to this area by the fine—and often extraordinary—craftsmanship and artistry shown through centuries of weaponry as well as the history behind the objects, says David Williams, who heads Bonhams London antique

arms and armor department.

A decorative 19th-century chiseled gilt dagger from Spain, ornamented with monsters, satyr masks, serpents and gold foliage (estimate: £10,000-£12,000) will be among the highlights in the Bonhams sale. A beautifully chiseled French 18th-century small-sword with flowers and foliage framing pastoral scenes with costumed couples, cows, sheep and dogs is expected to fetch £8,000-£10,000. A lovely German sporting crossbow from 1748 decorated with Diana, goddess of the hunt, flanked by a hound and squirrel, is estimated at £7,000-£8,000.

A star lot is a bronze mortar with handles in the shape of dolphins made by Bartolomeu Da



Rip's gallantry medal, estimate: £8,000-£10,000.

Costa in Lisbon in 1778, estimated at £18,000-£20,000. A 16th-century suit of German armor is estimated at £10,000-£15,000.

On Monday, Hermann Historica of Munich, a leading auction house for historical arms, begins its weeklong spring series of sales. The first two days will be devoted to firearms produced over five centuries. The sales will continue with offerings of edged weapons, including a 9th-to-10th-century Viking sword with an auction starting price of €15,000.

Leading medals London auction house Morton & Eden will offer groups of medals won in the wars of the 19th and 20th century in its June sale. One lot includes the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Force Cross and Or-

der of Lenin awarded to New Zealand's H.N.G. Ramsbottom-Isherwood, whose training of Russian pilots led to major victories against the German Luftwaffe in World War II (estimate for the group: £20,000-£30,000). "Collectors always like a group because it tells a story," says auction house spokesman Chris Proudlove.

Spink of London's extensive heroic medals sale on Thursday will mostly offer medals illustrating human bravery. But one of the most charismatic offerings will be the medal awarded to Rip, a dog who saved more than 100 victims buried under debris during the World War II Battle of London (estimate: £8,000-£10,000).

Also on the agenda next week is U.K. auctioneer Gavin Gardiner's sporting guns' sale on Wednesday. The sale, which covers guns from the 19th century to the late 20th century, will be held in association with Sotheby's at Sotheby's Bond Street headquarters in Mayfair.

❖ Wine

White Bordeaux, worth seeking out

NOW THAT THE SUN has finally reappeared and your thoughts are turning to white wine, you really should make the extra effort to get acquainted with one of the wine store's best values: white Bordeaux.

Heaven knows it's not easy. More stores these days are organized by varietal, and these don't fit easily into any category, since they are gen-

Tastings

DOROTHY J. GAITER
AND JOHN BRECHER

erally made with Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon in various proportions and sometimes include other grapes. Most stores have a "Bordeaux" aisle, but that tends to be in the "red" section, since 85% to 90% of Bordeaux is red. And "white Bordeaux" takes in a lot of territory, both literally and figuratively, from Entre-Deux-Mers, a large area that produces mostly drink-now wines, to well-regarded Pessac-Léognan. Not only that, but we're talking here about dry white Bordeaux, although some of the world's greatest sweet wines are made in Bordeaux, too, and from the same types of grapes. And on top of all of that, some white Bordeaux costs less than \$10 while others cost hundreds of dollars. It's enough to make us run directly to the very simple "New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc" aisle.

Is it worth the trouble? After all, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc—not to mention Sauvignon Blanc from Chile, South Africa and the U.S.—is a consistent warm-weather treat and can be inexpensive to boot. Why bother with such a complex search? To answer that question, we conducted our own experiment: We bought every dry white Bordeaux we could find from the 2006-2008 vintages that cost \$25 or less. This left out some of the classiest and best-known white Bordeaux, but what we were looking for was a consistently friendly, easy-to-buy and easy-to-drink warm-weather quaff. We had no trouble putting together enough for a broad blind tasting. While there are quite a few white Bordeaux labels out there, most of these wines are made in fairly small quantities and distribution is haphazard, so every store seems to have different ones. Few of our wines cost more than \$20 and most cost less than \$15. We tasted them in blind flights over several nights.

The result: If white Bordeaux is not a regular part of your shopping list, you really are missing something special—especially for the price. While it's impossible to say for sure what any specific white Bordeaux tastes like—some show mostly the punch of Sauvignon Blanc while others have the earthiness of Sémillon; some get significant oak and some get none at all—we found them reliably pleasant. They're generally crisp and lively, with all sorts of tropical fruit tastes—grapefruit, melon, lemon-lime. They have juicy acidity that's quite mouthwatering. But they differ from most Sauvignon Blancs in their complexity. There is something about them—their blend, their soil—that gives them a particular little grace note of subtlety and richness. This adds texture and class and makes them particularly



Erica Beckman/The Wall Street Journal

good food wines. They are easy to drink and enjoy but they have a simple elegance about them, a soulful earthiness that reminds us that they are, after all, from a very special place. And it's always interesting to us that some of them have a little touch of honey, sometimes molasses, that reminds us that they are related to the great sweet wines of Sauternes.

Our best value was a particularly good example of what we're talking

about. Château Graves de Liron 2007 cost us just \$8.99 and had a marvelous combination of liveliness and depth from good fruit, choice soil and careful winemaking. It's from Entre-Deux-Mers, it's 75% Sauvignon Blanc and 25% Sémillon and it never saw oak. Our best of tasting, Gravelle-Lacoste, is a long-time favorite. It's 60% Sémillon, 35% Sauvignon Blanc and 5% Muscadelle.

But do keep in mind that most of

these are from charming, small operations like Château La Gatte, which is in the commune of Saint-André-de-Cubzac on the right bank. We recently ran across the 2007 (\$13.95) and enjoyed it quite a bit. It was crisp, clean and very refreshing, with green grass and plenty of lemon-lime, but with an unusual weight to it. It turns out it's from a small winery—about 11 hectares—that produces just 7,500 cases (three reds, the white and a rosé). It's owned by a French-American couple (the husband, Michael Affatato, is from New York's Long Island and the wife, Hélène, is from Bordeaux, born near the château the couple now own). The white is made primarily from the unusual Sauvignon Gris grape ("very frustrating to grow, but unbeatable when it comes to complexity and depth," says Mr. Affatato). The 2007 vintage was difficult and resulted in a reduced production of only 333 cases of the white. Being the owner of a small winery anywhere is tough, which is worth keeping in mind next time you're in a store and see unfamiliar labels.

One last note: If you do enjoy inexpensive white Bordeaux, do yourself a favor and splurge on a finer one with a special meal sometime soon—maybe stone crab claws. In fact, during this tasting, Dottie made a dinner of shad and shad roe and we had it with one of our all-time favorite white wines, Blanc de Lynch-Bages. We found the 2006 for \$49.99, though it's usually maybe \$10 more, and it was excellent, with integrated, vibrant tastes and great breeding. It looked rich and indeed it was, with remarkably pure, white-velvet tastes. The underlying earthiness of the wine worked perfectly with the roe, while the overall liveliness cut through the oiliness and earthiness of the shad. Yeah, it was really good.

The Dow Jones inexpensive white Bordeaux index

In a tasting of white Bordeaux from the 2006-2008 vintages that cost \$25 or less, these were our favorites. While there are many white Bordeaux wines on shelves, it's impossible to know which you might see. In general, we would buy them young. When shopping for white Bordeaux, Graves is a good appellation to look for, and so is Pessac-Léognan, which is an especially choice area of Graves; wines from those places might be more expensive than basic white Bordeaux, however.

VINEYARD	PRICE	RATING	COMMENTS
Château Gravelle-Lacoste 2007 (Graves)	\$17.95	Very Good	Best of tasting. Mouthwatering. Lime, mango, grapefruit and sunny acidity, with a nice, round weightiness to it and a tiny hint of honey. Long, fruit finish.
Château Graves de Liron 2007 (Bordeaux)	\$8.99	Very Good	Best value. Amazing for the price. Lively, with lip-smacking acidity and yet also some melon-like fleshiness. Nice fullness.
Clos Floridene 2007 (Graves)	\$24.99	Good/ Very Good	Big, earthy wine, with big fruit and obvious oak. John thought it tasted too much like an okay California Chardonnay, but Dottie liked its presence. Neither of us enjoyed the 2006 as much.
Château Lamothe de Haux 2008 (Bordeaux)	\$12.95	Good/ Very Good	Boing! Young, fresh, grassy and lively—great for summer. It's so young and aggressive at this point that Dottie said she'd decant it. John said, "Sure, dear."

Note: Wines are rated on a scale that ranges: Yech, OK, Good, Very Good, Delicious, and Delicious!
These are the prices we paid at wine stores in California and New York. Prices vary widely.



Kyle F. Webster

Wine Notes: When your tastes change

MY WIFE AND I have completely lost our taste for really good California Chardonnay (never having liked the mediocre stuff). We own a fair amount of it, including some pretty expensive stuff that is allocated by small producers. Why do changes in taste like this happen? More important, what is to be done with the wine?

—Steven Agresta, Washington

Tastes change as we get older. It's not at all unusual to go through phases with wine, falling in and out of love as time goes on. And keep in mind that it's not just your taste. The way wines are made changes as time passes, too, so that today's Chardonnays might simply be different from yesterday's.

One suggestion we'd make is to put the Chardonnay into a different context with food. In other words, if you generally think of Chardonnay as something to drink with seafood, try it with roast chicken. It might seem like a different wine.

You could also think about throwing a great party. People love Chardonnay and a chance to drink so many of the best would be a special treat for your friends.

But our top advice would be this: Don't do anything. Assuming proper storage, fine American Chardonnay ages far better than it's generally given credit for. Just lose these in the cellar for a few years. When you come back to them, you will likely find that they are very different: Paradoxically, they will seem both richer and more sinewy.

We love older Chardonnay, but it's hard to find—you'd have a treasure. We think there's a chance you'd discover that you like these older Chardonnays more than you remember.

Perhaps that's because the wines have changed or perhaps it's because you've fallen in love again—and it doesn't matter which.

—Dorothy J. Gaiter
and John Brecher

❖ Top Picks



Stories told in silk: The kimono as art, and as history

ROTTERDAM: In the late 19th century, the West developed a fascination with old Japan just as Japan was undergoing a period of rapid westernization. Nothing symbolizes the irony of this exchange quite like the fate of the kimono.

Once worn by both men and women in feudal Japan, the kimono became the height of fashion among urban middle-class Japanese women in the early 20th century as a reaction against the impact of westernization. However the word “kimono”—which means “thing to wear”—was first adopted by Westerners, who used it to refer to a variety of tube-shaped Japanese garments. By the beginning of the 20th century, the modern silk kimono had become Japan’s national costume.

In a splendid new show at Rotterdam’s Kunsthall, the co-mingling of modernity and tradition in pre-World War II Japanese society is writ large on the exquisite canvases of 120 kimonos from the time. “Silk Stories: Taisho Kimono 1900-1940” is centered on the reign of Japan’s Taisho emperor (1912-26), who presided over a period marked by prosperity—and by the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, which first flattened the city and then allowed it to be rebuilt as a modern metropolis. “Silk Stories” tells the tale of Japan’s particular zigzag toward consumerism, as reflected in kimono designs that feature everything from cranes in flight to baseball players at bat.

The most elaborate kimonos, known as *furisode*, were worn by unmarried women. One bright-red *furisode* combines floral balls, sweeping bamboo and an opened fan, with areas trimmed in gold and silver.

Luxury is only part of the story here, for even the most humble kimonos can be rich in surprises. The rise of art deco coincided with the rebuilding of Tokyo, and informal kimonos from the late 1920s and '30s often incorporate geometric patterns. One simple kimono is printed with black-and-gray stencil patterns that pay homage to Frank Lloyd Wright, who designed Tokyo’s Imperial Hotel in 1923. Spread out, the kimono, with its dense array of windows, looks like a high-rise building.

—J.S. Marcus

Until June 21
www.kunsthall.nl

Top, ‘Parting at Dawn’ (1920-1940) and ‘Abstract Pattern’ (1960-1980) silk kimonos.



Private Collection © Gerhard Richter

Gerhard Richter’s portraits focus on the impersonal

LONDON: Part of the National Portrait Gallery’s enterprising program of special exhibitions, “Gerhard Richter Portraits” is a real winner. Portraiture is a recurring concern of the artist in his photographically derived paintings, and the show demonstrates how his technique of blurring—by dragging a dry brush across the still-wet paint surface—has stayed constant, while his desire to make his images inscrutable, and unexpressive, has evolved.

Mr. Richter was born in Dresden in 1932 and his mature work is said to date from 1962, when he made the first of what he calls his “Photo Pictures.” These paintings are based on photographs culled from newspapers and magazines, and a bit later, from his family albums. Sometimes they appear to be slightly smudged black-and-white photos, but then, weirdly, the leg or face of one figure, or a bit of another’s clothing, is colored. In the 1963 “Präsident Johnson versucht Mrs. Kennedy zu trösten” (President Johnson consoles Mrs. Kennedy), the wide brushstrokes destroy any photorealistic illusion.



Above, Gerhard Richter’s ‘Betty’ (1988); top, ‘Ella’ (2007)

alist illusion.

One room in the exhibition is called “Devotional Pictures,” and features private images taken from snapshots from old family albums. Of them the artist says in the booklet that accompanies the exhibition, “Everyone has produced his own ‘devotional’ pictures: these are the likenesses of

family and friends, preserved in remembrance of them.”

Mr. Richter’s motivation for using photographs as a basis for his painting was to find a direct, objective way of representing the world with machine-made images that freed him from the conventional processes in which the artist creates themes, composition, color and even expression. Even though portraits were his dominant motif, the artist said at the beginning of this endeavor, “I don’t think the painter need either see or know the sitter. A portrait must not express anything of the sitter’s ‘soul,’ essence or character.”

In the final room of this show, Mr. Richter has introduced color, and departed so far from his impersonal stance that the subjects of the portraits are his several wives, his children and, in the case of the 1994 “Lesende” (Reader), there is even a reference to another painting, Vermeer’s (circa 1659) “Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window.”

—Paul Levy

Until May 31
www.npg.org.uk

Hidden treasures shine a new light on the Black Death

LONDON: A mini-exhibition at the Wallace Collection, “Treasures of the Black Death” is not so grim as the title indicates—though it sounds even worse when you learn that it is a display of two hoards of medieval silver and jewels hidden away by persecuted Jewish communities.

One cache was found in the Jewish quarter of Colmar, in Alsace, in 1863. But the other, making up the larger part of this show, was discovered only in 1998 in Erfurt, Germany, close to the town’s 11th-century synagogue. This is the oldest synagogue in Europe, and following this show, the Erfurt hoard will go on permanent display in its restored basement.

The hoards include the three earliest known examples of Jewish wedding rings. They were worn only for the marriage ceremony itself, and are in the form of miniature houses, thought to symbolize both the marital home and the Temple of Jerusalem. Though their tiny Gothic architectural features belie their Jewish origins, the proof is that they are engraved with the phrase *mazel tov*, Hebrew for “good luck.”

The Erfurt hoard dates to the 14th century, when the Jews were well integrated into the life of this town. As was the case in much of medieval Europe, the Jews were under the protection of local bishops and princes. But when the Black Death came, the barely suppressed ancient anti-Semitic hatreds turned to mass paranoia, as Jews were accused of poisoning the wells and causing the plague. Anticipating the pogroms (which did indeed materialize—in Erfurt as many as a thousand Jews were massacred on a single day: March 2, 1349), many Jews buried their most precious goods, then fled, hoping to retrieve them on their return.

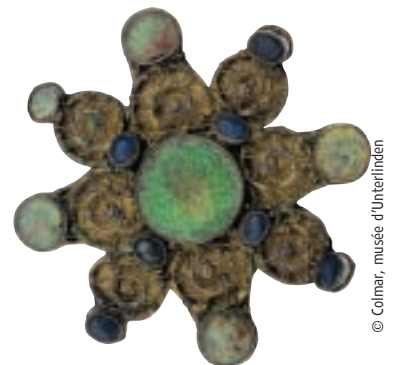
Among the items shown (from both hoards) are a great number of coins from places so widely dispersed that they testify to a thriving global economy. Among the few religious artifacts are some “double cups,” in which the lids or covers could also be used to drink from; these were used in the Jewish wedding ceremony, and were common betrothal gifts.

Their workmanship contrasts with several ingots, irregular blobs of silver, with nothing but their assay stamp to show their value.

Large magnifying glasses are helpfully offered at the entrance—you need one to see the diminutive details of these fascinating objects.

—Paul Levy

Until May 10
www.wallacecollection.org



© Colmar, musée d'Unterlinden

A brooch from the first half of the 13th century.

Green-Washing Kids Lit

If you have somehow missed the fact that April 22 is Earth Day, it's probably because you are grown up. Were you a child, there's no chance you'd be allowed to miss the chthonic nature of the day—nor the need to recycle, to use water sparingly, to protect endangered creatures and generally to be agitated about a planet in peril.

Children are so drenched with eco-propaganda that it's almost a waste of resources. Like acid rain, but more persistent and corrosive, it dribbles down on them all day long. They get it at school, where recycling now competes with tolerance as man's highest virtue. They get it in peppy "go green" messages online, on television and in magazines.

And increasingly, the eco-message is seeping into the pages of novels that don't, on their face, necessarily seem to be about environmentalism. Thus children who might like to escape into a good book are now likely to find themselves pursued into that imaginative realm by didactic adults fixated on passing along endless tellurian warnings.

Susceptible children are left in no doubt that we're all headed for a despoiled future unless they start planting pansies in their old shoes, using dryer lint as mulch, and practicing periodic vegetarianism. The more impressionable among them are coming to believe that their smallest decisions could have catastrophic effects on the globe. This, of course, is nonsense, unless their smallest decision involves tipping vats of mercury into forest streams. But children tend to believe what adults tell them—minus the nuance.

Thus we have the spectacle of a 12-year-old becoming distraught when her father orders seared tuna at a restaurant (this happened to a friend of mine), on account of over-fishing, or a 6-year-old (son of an acquaintance) panicking at the prospect of even a yogurt container going into the trash: "But I can use it as a toy!"

The patriarch of the vogue for green-themed children's books is surely Carl Hiaasen, the novelist and Miami Herald columnist who shot to eco-stardom in 2002 with "Hoot," a novel for middle-schoolers about three children who foil a corporation's attempt to build a pancake restaurant over a burrow of endangered miniature owls. "Hoot" won a Newbery Honor Award, and was followed in 2005 by "Flush," a tale recounting the adventures of a different group of youthful oddball allies that is seeking to expose a casino-boat operator who's been flushing raw sewage into harbor water.

Mr. Hiaasen's latest, "Scat," which came out in January, ever so slightly betrays the strains of extending the franchise. Here the story features a new group of three children who band together with an eccentric biology teacher and an armed eco-terrorist to stop a buffoonish Texas oilman from illegally extracting petroleum from the habitat of the endangered Florida panther.

In all Mr. Hiaasen's books for children, young readers are asked to sympathize with environmental-

ists who thwart businessmen, even when the good guys take destructive measures such as sinking boats or torching billboards. And the eco-tropes that have worked so well for Mr. Hiaasen—Good nature! Bad capitalist!—are creeping into books across the age range.

Joan Bauer's "Peeled" (Putnam, 2008) won a Newbery Honor and hordes of young adult readers with its tale of a courageous teenage journalist who outfoxes corporate interests that are trying to bamboozle a small apple-growing town. A newer novel for teenagers, Timothee de Fombelle's "Toby Alone" (Candlewick, March), is also getting buzz. In this story, we

The incessant eco-preaching in today's children's books.

meet a boy on the run from a thuggish industrialist who, you will not be surprised to learn, is both fat and rich. The tycoon's rapacious practices endanger the entire world of the book's characters, who are tiny people dwelling on the branches of a giant, weakening tree. Shades of the global warming debate, anyone?

Children a step younger who open the latest in the popular "Grk" books by Joshua Doder, "Operation Tortoise" (Delacorte, January), will learn how a boy named Tim and his dog discover a secret laboratory on a tropical island in which a billionaire mistreats tortoises in the hopes of extracting from them whatever it is that causes them to live so long. When Tim reproaches the wicked magnate, the man smiles: "You're very young. You don't know much about life. Let me tell you how the world works. The rich make the laws and the poor obey them."

Even younger readers who are drawn to the appealing pastel illustrations of Katherine Hannigan's "Emmaline and the Bunny" (HarcourtCollins, March) will find within a risibly didactic tale about a little girl who lives in a town dominated by a fleshy, bowtie-wearing mayor. The pudgy politician has ordered all trees to be cut down, and all grass paved over, to keep the place tidy. Poor Emmaline yearns for a rabbit, but the mayor has banished all wild creatures. Eventually the child finds a pet, but only after encountering a brusque old crone with a long white braid: "Humans," the woman snorts. "Cutting this, clearing that, concreting everything. They don't care a bunny's hair about anyone else."

When Emmaline protests, "I care," the young reader probably will too—which, we have to assume, is the point of the exercise.

As any parent can tell you, children are not put off by predictability in stories. They're accustomed to princesses being pretty, dragons fearsome, and, it seems, fictional businessmen corpulent and amoral. So it's probably pointless to object to the eco-endlessness on the grounds of artistic feebleness.

Yet there is something culturally impoverished about insisting that children join in adult preoccupations. Can they not have a precious decade or so to soar in imaginative literature before we drag them back down to earth?

Mrs. Gurdon reviews children's book for the Journal.

By Tom L. Freudenheim

Currently winking at one another across hectic London, two completely different exhibitions celebrate the heroics of politics and of art, reminding us again that the two estates are often inseparable.

If the title of the British Museum's "Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran" suggests a bit of overstatement, the assembled works, set in context by enlightening narrative materials and a hefty scholarly catalog, nonetheless make a persuasive case for the ability of a single strong ruler to leave aesthetic as well as political marks on his age. That's why the happy coincidence of "Van Dyck and Britain," a splendid exhibition at the Tate Britain, plays so well against the Persian blockbuster, demonstrating how a Flemish artist could transform British art in ways that lasted to modern times. Shah 'Abbas (born 1571, ruled 1587-1629) and Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) exerted their power and influence contemporaneously, if very differently.

The British Museum's curator, Sheila Canby, has managed to pry loose an amazing number of impressive loans from Iran, subtly bolstering the exhibition's thesis about the pivotal role Shah 'Abbas played in transforming and unifying the country that now looms so large on the world's political stage.

This land, Persia then and Iran now, was ruled by a man of "contradictions, his fiery temper, his imperiousness, his majesty and regal splendour . . . matched by his mildness, leniency, his ascetic way of life and his informality . . . equally at home on the dervish's mat and the royal throne," Eskander Beg Monshi, an important secretary at the shah's court, as well as his biographer, tells us. A ruler with a broad international perspective, the shah was a subject of portraits by Indian Mughal and European artists. He was tolerant of Christians when it suited his political and economic goals but also cruel at times (he had two of his five sons blinded and another killed).

Shah 'Abbas

British Museum
Through June 14

Van Dyck and Britain

Tate Britain
Through May 17

The exhibition traces the development of a more robust, expansive decorative style and broader color palette during the shah's reign. Taking in exquisite miniature paintings, elaborate book illustrations and decorations, and rich textiles, ceramics and metal work, the displays combine works that were owned by Shah 'Abbas with those that demonstrate the scope of his influence on all the arts.

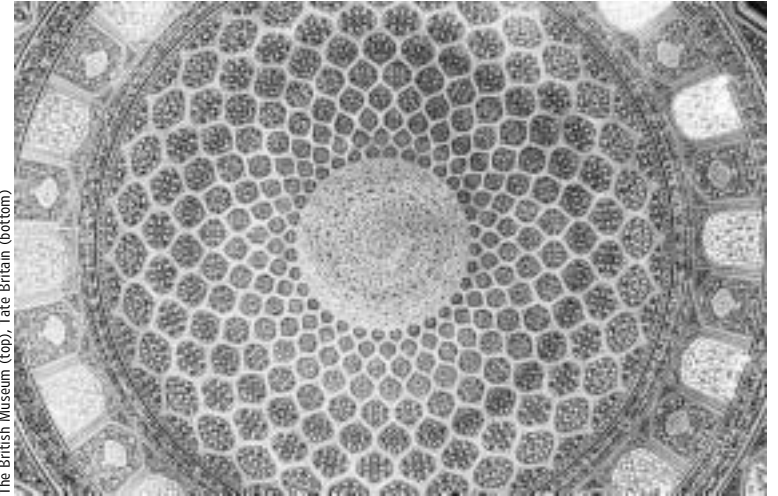
Ironically, the showiest objects are probably the 15th- and 16th-century blue-and-white Chinese porcelains, which were avidly collected by the shah and served as models for Persian ceramics, just as they did for Europeans. Many of these ceramics, now part of the National Museum of Iran's collection, were gifts of the shah to the Ardabil Shrine, which may have served as a model for later less grandiose but similar rooms in European palaces, such as Schloss Schönbrunn, the mid-18th century Rococo masterpiece near Vienna. But the most breathtaking part of this exhibition

remains the architectural display—immense, if not quite life-size, projections of the many splendid mosques and public buildings that were built and decorated during the reign of Shah 'Abbas; the ceramic tile mosaics must be considered among the glories of Islam.

Hints of British connections to something as ostensibly distant as Iran arise occasionally in this show. There are allusions to Persia in Shakespeare cited here (the shah was the playwright's contemporary), and most notably there is a pair of small portraits of Robert Sherley and his Circassian wife, Teresia; Sherley, a British

of clothing much like those in some of the portraits, and in one of the fascinating essays in the catalog Christopher Breward deconstructs the meaning of some of the fashions and stances shown in these paintings.

This is an exhibition about diving into an almost endless pool of painting, but the artist being celebrated is almost outclassed by one of the first works on display here: "The Apotheosis of James I" (1628-30). One of Peter Paul Rubens's oil sketches for the famous ceiling of the Banqueting House at Whitehall, it was recently acquired by the Tate. With



Above, interior of the dome of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, Isfahan; below, van Dyck's 'Charles I on Horseback with M. de St Antoine' (1633).

adventurer sent to Persia by Elizabeth I, ended up representing the shah on various foreign missions.

The tame images of the Sherleys at the British Museum are vastly outdone by a grander pair (1622) in the van Dyck exhibition at the Tate. Had I not earlier read about Sherley and the shah, I might have mistaken the elaborately garbed couple in the Tate show as models for a painter simply intrigued by orientalism as a way to show off painterly skills. But in the context of lush paintings by Anthony van Dyck, they fit into the splendid array of the Flemish master's portraits of the rich and famous—sometimes all that's left of the riches and fame.

It would be easy to misread the beautiful van Dyck exhibition as one more way in which our culture celebrates power and celebrity, since most of the sitters exude the kind of self-assurance that comes with position. But the Tate Britain exhibition, assembled by curator Karen Hearn, really wants us to look at portrait painting in Britain, and how it was transformed forever by a visiting painter.

Working our way from the British Robert Peake's exquisite yet stiff and self-conscious portrait (c. 1606) of a young Princess Elizabeth, to the glory of van Dyck's "Charles I on Horseback with M. de St. Antoine" (1633), we see the ways in which van Dyck used paint not just for the glory of the king but for our delectation as well. Silks and satins, hair and jewels, along with the occasional props, move effortlessly across these canvases. While one may be drawn into the anecdotes that bring the sitters to life, what draws us into the canvases has more to do with painting than biography.

The exhibition includes items



this work, van Dyck's famous teacher almost steals his pupil's thunder, even while underpinning the argument that Flemish artists changed British portraiture.

It's not difficult to see why van Dyck, who died in London at age 42, continued as a powerful influence on those portrait painters who followed him. This exhibition includes some wonderful drawings, including sublime landscapes and studies for the portraits, but its real strength is in expanding our understanding of how and why portraits continued as such a pervasive aspect of British painting. A small but representative group of paintings, from Reynolds and Gainsborough through John Singer Sargent, serve as reminders that the specter of van Dyck never quite left. In wholly different ways, both the Shah 'Abbas and van Dyck exhibitions demonstrate the power of individuals in transforming our perceptions of time and place.

Mr. Freudenheim, a former art museum director, served as the assistant secretary for museums at the Smithsonian Institution.

time off



☎ 44-20-7611-2222
www.welcomecollection.org

Madrid

art
"Julio González" represents a retrospective of 200 works by Spanish abstract and cubist artist Julio González (1876-1942).

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia
Until June 1
☎ 34-91-7741-000
www.museoreinasofia.es

Paris

art
"Zadkine on Paper" shows works on paper by the Russian sculptor Ossip Zadkine (1890-1967).

Musée Zadkine
Until July 12
☎ 33-155-4277-20
www.zadkine.paris.fr

art

"William Blake (1757-1827): The Visionary Genius of English Romanticism" presents 130 works in the first French retrospective devoted to the English Romantic poet, painter and printmaker William Blake.

Petit Palais
Until June 28
☎ 33-1-5343-4000
www.paris.fr

Rotterdam

art
"Elixir" displays nine works by Swiss video artist Pipilotti Rist (born 1962) from the period 2001-2009, including the new installation "Lobe Of The Lung."

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen
Until May 10
☎ 31-10-4419-400
www.boijmans.rotterdam.nl

Strasbourg

archaeology
"Death Rites in Alsace: From Prehistoric Times to the End of the 19th Century" shows grave furnishings, scale models of tombs, items of funeral décor and objects of devotion.

Musee Archeologique
April 25-Aug. 31
☎ 33-3-8852-5000
www.musees-strasbourg.org

Vienna

art
"The Horse as a Courtly Motif in Art" showcases varied depictions of the horse in paintings, sculptures and prints of the Princely Collections of the House of Liechtenstein.

Liechtenstein Museum
Until Oct. 18
☎ 43-319-5767-0
www.liechtensteinmuseum.at

Warsaw

design
"Golden Age—Highlights of Dutch Graphic Design from 1890 to 1990" exhibits Dutch 20th-century graphic design, including work by Jan Toorop, Piet Zwart, Paul Schuitema and Wim Crouwel.

Wilanow Poster Museum
Until May 24
☎ 48-22-8424-8
www.postermuseum.pl

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.



Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth Zürich London

Amsterdam

art
"Odilon Redon and Émile Bernard—Masterpieces from the Andries Bonger collection" shows works by French artists Odilon Redon (1840-1916) and Émile Bernard (1868-1941).

Van Gogh Museum
Until Sept. 20
☎ 31-20-5705-200
www.vangoghmuseum.nl

Barcelona

art
"Zabaleta 101—Centenary of the birth of Rafael Zabaleta" is a retrospective of work by the Spanish painter (1907-1960).

Until May 17
Caixa Forum
☎ 34-93-4768-600
www.fundacio.lacaixa.es

Basel

art
"Pablo Picasso: Prints" presents 100 prints by the Spanish artist (1881-1973), including "L'Homme à la Fraise" (1964) and etchings from the "Vollard Suite" graphic series.

Kunstmuseum Basel
Until May 24
☎ 41-61-2066-262
www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch

Berlin

art
"Erwin Blumenfeld: Dada Montages—I was nothing but a Berliner" exhibits Dada collages in 50 montages and 30 photographs by fashion photographer Erwin Blumenfeld (1897-1969).

Berlinische Galerie
Until June 1
☎ 49-30-7890-2600
www.berlinischegalerie.de

Bern

art
"In Search of the Orient: From Bellini to Klee" juxtaposes work created by Swiss artist Paul Klee (1879-1940)

during a visit to Tunisia with Arabic and Islamic art from the Middle Ages to today.

Zentrum Paul Klee
Until May 24
☎ 41-31-3590-101
www.paulkleezentrum.ch

Bonn

art
"Amedeo Modigliani" offers a retrospective of the short life of the Italian artist (1884-1920) with paintings, drawings and sculptures from 1909 to 1919.

Kunst und Ausstellungshalle
Until Aug. 30
☎ 49-228-9171-0
www.kah-bonn.de

Brussels

art
"20 years of Manga in Europe" traces the influence of Japanese comic strips, known as manga, on the European world of comics.

Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée
Until June 7

☎ 32-2-2191-980
www.stripmuseum.be

Budapest

art
"In Praise of Women" exhibits posters, paintings, drawings and photographs by Czech Art Nouveau artist Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939).

Museum of Fine Arts
Until June 7
☎ 36-1-4697-100
www.mfab.hu

Cologne

photography
"Plant Studies by Karl Blossfeldt" presents 300 influential plant studies by German photographer Karl Blossfeldt (1865-1932).

Die Photographische Sammlung
Until June 7
☎ 49-221-2265-900
www.photographie-sk-kultur.de

Copenhagen

art
"Akseli Gallen-Kallela—In the Wilderness" exhibits 100 paintings and water colors by the Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865-1931).

Kunstforeningen GL Strand
Until May 3
☎ 45-33-3602-60
www.glstrand.dk

Dublin

art
"Elizabeth Peyton: Reading and Writing" showcases paintings and works on paper by the American artist Elizabeth Peyton (born 1965).

Irish Museum of Modern Art
Until June 21
☎ 353-1-6129-900
www.imma.ie

Florence

"I Medici: The Dream Returns—Isabelle de Borchgrave at Palazzo Medici Riccardi" shows paper "outfits" inspired by the fashion of the Medici court and created by the Belgian artist Isabelle de Borchgrave (born 1946).

Palazzo Medici Riccardi
Until June 14
☎ 39-055-2760-340
www.palazzo-medici.it

Frankfurt

art
"Michelangelo: Drawings and Attributions" exhibits drawings attributed to the Italian master Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564).

Städel Museum
Until June 7
☎ 49-69-6050-980
www.staedelmuseum.de

London

art
"Madness & Modernity" is a multidisciplinary exhibition presenting the range of ways madness and art interacted in Vienna in 1900.

Wellcome Collection
Until June 28



'The Skiers, Akseli and Jorma' (1909) by Akseli Gallen-Kallela, in Copenhagen; above, 'Lungenflügel' (2009) by Pipilotti Rist, in Rotterdam; top right, 'Pequeña campesina' (1932-33) by Julio González, in Madrid.

Private collection