FRIDAY - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23-25, 2009

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE

Contemporary chefs take a walk on the wild side

Game on

A publishing fairy-tale | The guilty pleasure of shopping

Contents

3 | Books

First-time Australian novelist catches publishing world's eye

4-5 | Fashion

Betsy Bloomingdale: One woman's history of haute couture ▼

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Karl Lagerfeld and Betsy Bloomingdale, Neiman Marcus event in Los Angeles.

Spending guilt challenges luxury retailers

6-7 | Cover story Food

A walk on the wild side

Bringing traditional game to high-end cuisine

COVER, A dish on the table at Ledbury in Notting Hill
Photograph: Giles John

8 | Sports

Golf: A revival at St. Andrews

An interview with Kim Clijsters

9 | Film

The intrigue of Amelia Earhart

10 | Top Picks

Beckett's "End Game"

The essence of Adenauer

11 | Taste

Mr. Sarkozy: What would Asterix do?

12 | Time Off

Our arts and culture calendar

WEEKEND JOURNAL. EUROPE

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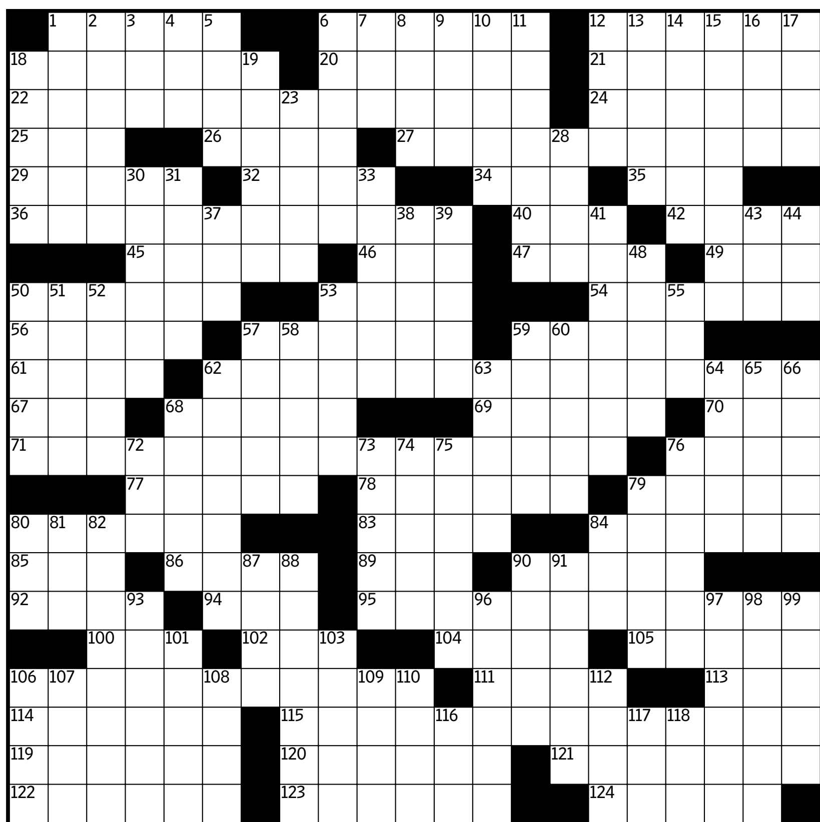

Across

1 What Wall Street laid, according to a 1929 Variety headline
6 With 56-Across, 1930 William Faulkner novel
12 Lake in the Sahara, e.g.
18 Draw out
20 "CSI: NY" star Gary
21 Rain forest prowler
22 Poet of the platoon can't take the pressure?
24 Heart of Venice
25 Box on un calendario
26 Pep Boys purchase
27 One who's chilling in the big house?
29 Michelle Robinson's married name
32 Bass parts
34 Green start
35 Pharaoh to Charlton's Moses
36 Thanksgiving guests treated like cattle?
40 Early hrs.
42 Maximum
45 Deposits in some banks
46 "Bored to Death" carrier
47 They played in RFK Stadium until 2008
49 Pother
50 Detective Pinkerton and others
53 Michael Spinks's older brother
54 Edgar and Hugo
56 See 6-Across
57 "Coraline" author Neil
59 Radio knob
61 Not duped by
62 Stockpiles of money kept under the mattress?
67 Game with Skip and Reverse cards
68 Bad thing to be taken for
69 Outcome of a sort
70 Distinct span
71 Do upkeep on dwellings made of concrete?
76 Dance of the 1960s
77 Knocks about
78 Game pursuer
79 Inclination
80 They connect to scapulae
83 Stately trees
84 Work for some stand-ins
85 Picardy pal
86 Fledgling's spot
89 Clinch
90 Thin
92 Surprised reaction
94 Fossil Butte Natl. Monument setting
95 Product that offers drivers a rosy outlook on things?
100 Combative nomad
102 U.S. biomedical research agcy.
104 Draped garment
105 Wing: Prefix
106 Duplicated real estate listing?
111 Identify
113 "Platoon" setting
114 Heather's "Melrose Place" role
115 Municipality famed for its sugary leafy vegetables?
119 In the book
120 Labour Party leader from 1935 to 1955
121 Intermediary
122 They may be significant
123 Salad preparer, perhaps
124 Key in

Down

1 Exuberant Spanish exclamation
2 Polite denial
3 Country rocker Joe
4 Big dollop
5 Wee nuisance
6 Scale
7 Baronet's title
8 "...the sickness gets ___ the liquor dies out": Kipling
9 Pediculicide's target
10 Help desk sign
11 Sammy Davis Jr. autobiography
12 Two-time Italian prime minister Aldo
13 Unfriendly way to reply
14 Do research
15 Air raid ender
16 Attend
17 School attended by Hugh Laurie
18 ___ paper (jotting spot)
19 Ornament at the base of a column
23 Helps with the dishes
28 1977 bestseller set at Memorial Hospital
30 Second-largest city of Italia
31 Beside
33 Conceptual pattern
37 QB's gains
38 Kriegsmarine vessel
39 "It tolls for thee" poet
41 Attitudes
43 Throw in
44 Decks
48 Pledge
50 Deuce follower, maybe
51 Dick Cheney's wife
52 Discovered by chance
53 Perk up
55 Pendulum path
57 Scrub brush target
58 Senate staffers
59 Verbally sparing
60 Natural milk container
62 Early screening
63 Items on a card
64 Bird with an S-shaped neck
65 Break out, as fighting
66 Wise guys
68 Future oak
72 "Forgot About ___" (Grammy-winning rap song)
73 Owned by those guys
74 "Amadeus" star
75 Sedated, say
76 Articulate
79 Take off, or takeoff spot
80 Gorgon
81 Quentin wrote "Kill Bill" for her
82 Jumble
84 Words of wisdom
87 Agreement
88 Plies
90 Piper Palin's mother
91 Basic
93 Latin jazz legend Tito
96 Summer sign
97 Richards of "Wild Things"
98 Clay, for one
99 Females, in feminist writings
101 Public Citizen founder
103 Bookstore section
106 Video game series featuring the alien Covenant
107 Cut
108 June honorees
109 Izod Center team
110 Reef residents
112 Stop on Amtrak's Lake Shore Limited
116 Kickoff aid
117 "The Lost Symbol" author Brown
118 Op. ___ (footnote abbr.)

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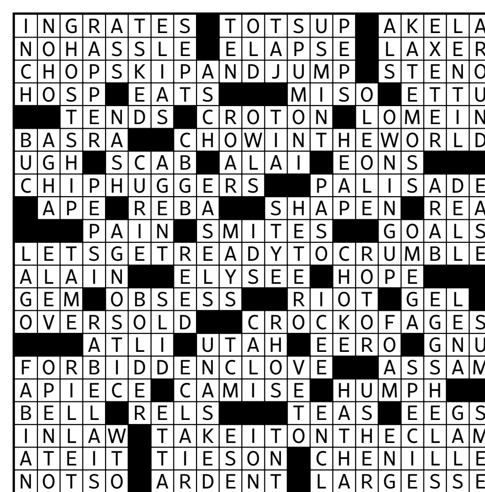

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OVERSOLD CROCKOFAGES
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BELL RELS TEAS EEGS
INLAW TAKEITONTHECLAM
ATEIT TIESON CHENILLE
NOTSO ARDENT LARGESSE

From Down Under, the next J.K. Rowling?

By Dalya Alberge

REBECCA JAMES IS an Australian kitchen saleswoman who dreamed of seeing her first novel published. The sound of a rejection slip dropping through the mailbox always woke her up from that recurring dream. She had a growing collection of rejection letters from every agent in Australia and a few in America. So, her dream was fitful when, unsolicited, she sent off her manuscript earlier this summer to a British literary agent, Conville & Walsh, or C&W.

Author Rebecca James and her family.

Steve and Julie Campbell Photographers

Now, the 39-year-old mother of four has discovered that her debut novel "Beautiful Malice," a gritty psychological thriller for teenagers upward, isn't merely to be published, but has become a publishing phenomenon that is sparking an aggressive bidding war world-wide.

C&W, a leading literary agency with a stable of best-selling, prize-winning authors including the Booker-winner DBC Pierre and the poet Ruth Padel, took it to the Frankfurt Book Fair last week. C&W was struggling to keep up with offers from publishers that had received the manuscript.

Even though the C&W agents have yet to meet Ms. James, the novel is set to be translated into at least 30 languages, and they envisage a series of similar "sexy, psychological thrillers" from the author.

Bantam USA was so determined to acquire the rights, it bid up to $600,000 for two books (the second is a thriller titled "Cooper Bartholomew Is Dead").

In Germany, the rights were snapped up by Rowohlt Verlag for €252,000, seeing off six rival publishers, while there were similarly high figures in other countries such as Italy, the Netherlands and Brazil. It has gone to Faber & Faber in the U.K. and to Allen & Unwin in Australia for undisclosed five figures. The buzz about Ms. James even prompted a Romanian publisher to make a blind offer—without reading the manuscript.

"It kept me riveted in a way that no book has done for years," said Julia Heydon-Wells, publishing director for Faber.

Barely a few weeks ago, Ms. James was broke. The recession had forced the closure of the kitchen business she set up with her life and business partner, Hilary Hudson. They were desperate.

In a success story reminiscent of Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling's, Ms. James is a mother and first-time author who is going from nothing to becoming a millionaire. Royalties will be paid over four years, but while deciding how to spend her money, she has made her first purchase—two puppies.

She says she is "gobsmacked" by her success. It was only in recent years, after having the first of four children nine years ago, that she began writing. She says there was no childhood desire to become a writer, although she reads a book a week, with Charlotte Brontë's "Villette" among her favorites.

She was always "restless," she says. Having grown up in Sydney, where her parents built up a small kitchen-furniture manufacturing business, she dropped out of various degree courses, including nursing, to become a waitress for five years. She also traveled, teaching English in Indonesia and Japan for about three years. Eventually, she settled down in a rundown 1970s house in Armidale, six hours north of Sydney, building up a kitchen business.

Set in Sydney, her book, "Beautiful Malice," tells the story of an unsettling friendship between the solitary Katherine, who has lost her sister to a brutal murder, and Alice, a glamorous party girl whose character becomes as chilling as she is charming. With its gritty and tough themes, the book is expected to appeal both to teenagers and adults. One publisher likened "Beautiful Malice" to Stephenie Meyer's successful Twilight series—without the vampires but with the sex.

Kate Miciak, editorial director of Bantam Books/Delacorte Press, imprints of the Random House Publishing Group, said, "You had only to read the opening sentence—'I did not go to Alice's funeral'—to know that you had instantly fallen under the thrall of a strong narrative voice, which was going to hold you in its grip and keep you there."

Janine O'Malley, senior editor at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, wanted to acquire it but was outbid.

"'Beautiful Malice' was one of the most extraordinary manuscripts I've read in a very long while," she said. "I'm still reeling over having lost it." Ms. O'Malley said it offered young adults something totally different—a smart and literary psychological thriller.

What makes the valuation of Ms. James's literary success more astonishing is the publishing industry has been prepared to pay six-figure sums in the middle of a world recession. Only last month, U.K. author and agent societies warned that the financial crisis was being used as an excuse by publishers to cut advances, by as much as 70%, and to reduce their catalogs.

That Ms. James's 75,000-word novel was fished out from an agent's "slush pile" of unsolicited manuscripts is also relatively exceptional. Agents tend to play it safe, relying on introductions. C&W receives as many as 100 unsolicited manuscripts a week—so many that the agents barely have time to look through them.

"I know full well that we miss gems all the time as, like most agents, we don't have time to read in the office and sometimes one is simply overwhelmed by the tidal wave of submissions," said Patrick Walsh, co-founder of C&W. "But I strongly believe that...a great book will always somehow find attention."

His colleague, Jo Unwin, spotted Ms. James's talent. Having recently joined the agency to build a teenage and children's list, she took the time to look at the slush pile. After just 30 pages of "Beautiful Malice," she was gripped by what she describes as a "brilliantly plotted page-turner," noting that you wouldn't know it was a first novel.

Ms. James, who until recently was contemplating retraining or studying after having shut down her kitchen business, is still overwhelmed by the turn of events.

"It was very scary," she said, but "this is now an amazing fairy tale."

—Dalya Alberge is a writer based in London.

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One woman's history of haute couture

Betsy Bloomingdale's new exhibit of 60 outfits offers a glimpse into her high-flying world

Hector Mata for The Wall Street Journal

By Christina Binkley

IN PARIS IN the summer of 1996, Betsy Bloomingdale left the Valentino haute couture show without placing an order and strolled back to her hotel along the Avenue Montaigne. On a whim, she stepped into a boutique whose window displayed a Valentino ready-to-wear gown. "I thought, 'I like that and that. And I can buy three of those for the price of one haute couture gown,'" recalled Mrs. Bloomingdale. "That's when I started wearing ready-to-wear."

It was a small but seminal moment, as Mrs. Bloomingdale, wife of the late retailing scion Alfred Bloomingdale, joined a stream of couture clients who were beginning to embrace store-bought clothes, hastening the decline of the haute couture market. Now Mrs. Bloomingdale has donated a sizeable collection of the haute couture she had assembled over more than 30 years to the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising in Los Angeles. An exhibition of 60 of her outfits from couture houses like Givenchy, Oscar de la Renta, Chanel, Dior, Courreges, Valentino and Yves Saint Laurent will be open to the public until Dec. 13.

The exhibit offers a glimpse into the high-flying world of the 83-year-old Mrs. Bloomingdale, known for her friendships with New York City socialite Nan Kempner and former U.S. first lady Nancy Reagan as well as the parties she gives and attends.

Many of the outfits are the sorts of daywear not usually associated with today's lavish haute couture displays.

"It was real life, where today, it is not," says Kevin Jones, co-curator of the FIDM exhibit, who calls the exhibit "a total case study" in haute couture of that period.

Haute couture was born in the high fashion houses of Paris and London in the 19th century, when wealthy women sought a season's wardrobe from a designer like Charles Worth or, later, Madeleine Vionnet. Each item was made to the client's measurements. In France, laws dictated that all garments were to be sewn by hand domestically.

After World War II, French designers routinely sold designs to American department stores, which made copies for their own customers. But high-society ladies continued to head to Paris twice a year, where they would gather each day at 3 p.m. at a designer's atelier to place orders. The clothes cost many times more than ready-to-wear by the same designers (an haute couture suit today can easily cost $20,000), but they were exclusive and fit perfectly, with hidden weights or hooks to hold everything in place.

Mrs. Bloomingdale's haute couture odyssey began with a Balmain dress in 1961. "My husband started Diner's Club, and we went to Europe," she said. On visits to various fashion ateliers, Mr. Bloomingdale hit it off with the managing director of Dior. "Alfred said, 'You buy your clothes at Dior.'"

Designers eventually sent sketches to Mrs. Bloomingdale so she could shop at home. "I would spread them out on the floor, and Alfred would look at them," she recalled. The exhibit includes a number of these sketches alongside the dresses.

The 1960s through the 1980s was a period of extreme transition for haute couture, when older houses like Dior were struggling to modernize as their founders retired or died. Mrs. Bloomingdale offers a personal view of how those changes affected clients. She was close to Marc Bohan, who succeeded Yves St. Laurent as the designer of Dior in 1958. Later, when luxury conglomerate LVMH replaced Mr. Bohan with Gianfranco Ferré, she found the new designer's designs to be too heavy for comfort, and she drifted to other ateliers.

She has several items from Hubert de Givenchy, but says the designer never particularly catered to her. He was there in his atelier but "he never ever came to see you."

Buying couture also meant Mrs. Bloomingdale had the privilege of wearing clothes at the same time that they were featured in the fashion magazines, says Mr. Jones, who has included some of these photos in the exhibition.

"It didn't make much difference here" in Los Angeles, said Mrs. Bloomingdale, wearing a buttery leather jacket by Valentino over a black dress. "But it did in New York."

Mrs. Bloomingdale loves lists. Each outfit has a tag citing how to wear it (one tag suggests "light hose, not control. Valentino satin stole, earrings") and where it had been previously worn.

Mrs. Bloomingdale wore a blue Dior haute couture gown by Mr. Bohan to the first inauguration of President Ronald Reagan, for example. Mr. Jones and co-curator Christina Johnson calculated that each outfit was worn about five times over a 10-year period.

At the time of Mrs. Bloomingdale's Valentino ready-to-wear epiphany in 1996, the design world was upending haute couture. Today, the real buyers of haute couture are few and far between. For the most part, the shows are lavish marketing showcases for the press, showing elaborate designs rather than wearable clothing.

Is Mrs. Bloomingdale wistful about those times? "Not at all. Time marches on," she said firmly. "My last dress was a Gianfranco Ferré dress. He's dead now."

Left to right, Brian Sanderson, FIDM Photography(2); FIDM Museum

From left to right: Yves Saint Laurent dress; Gianfranco Ferré for Dior gown and detail of accompanying sketch, Betsy Bloomingdale at FIDM.

Retailers provide remedies to assuage shoppers' guilt

Stores rethink tactics, seeing shame over splurging as a barrier to recovery

By Christina Passariello

IN THE PAST year, the guilty pleasure of shopping has turned to plain old guilt.

Guilt has always been part of the shopping experience. But retail executives say it has become such an overriding emotion among shoppers since the economic crisis set in last year that it is delaying the recovery of the luxury-goods industry. Shoppers are suffering from "luxury shame," consulting group Bain & Co. said in a research report this week.

Right now, guilt is the single biggest problem in the way of getting people to shop again, said one executive of a European luxury powerhouse—although he declined to be identified for fear of sounding too negative about his outlook.

"Guilt has really increased in the last year," says Martin Lindstrom, a brand strategist and author of "Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy." "It can hamper any other good feelings" about shopping, he says.

Now some luxury brands are emphasizing marketing tactics that they hope will push away the guilt and reboot consumers' desire to spend. That can mean touting a special justification for splurging—profits are channeled to a charity, for instance—or offering novel shopping experiences that can make people forget their guilt.

"It used to be about keeping up with the Joneses, and now it's about outsaving the Joneses," says Alexis Maybank, the co-founder of Gilt Groupe, which organizes online, by-invitation-only 36-hour sales of high-end merchandise from labels such as Burberry and Matthew Williamson. "We need to encourage people to get excited about fashion." (The double entendre in her company's name dates from an era—2007—when the guilt that went with shopping was far less disruptive.)

Browsing and buying release a variety of emotions. Selecting clothes and trying them on produces a high. When shopping feels good, that's the dopamine in your brain, the same euphoria that eating chocolate can generate.

But guilt sets in quickly. "It's not very strong at the beginning but increases when you swipe your credit card through the credit-card reader," says Mr. Lindstrom, who conducted three years of studies in neuromarketing—hooking 2,000 people up to sensors to monitor the brain's response to ads and brands. Guilt flashes up in the prefrontal cortex—the same reaction generated in a smoker who has finished a cigarette.

Guilt is what Carolyn Hsu, founder of The Daily Obsession, a shopping blog, felt after her purchase of a Tod's bag at the beginning of the year. It was one-of-a-kind, she was told at the private luxury sale she attended. She decided to pay more than $1,000 for the large aubergine-colored bag, driven by the fear she would never find the bag again. "I try not to have those moments anymore," says the 24-year-old, who also works in marketing. "I still have, but it hides in the back of my closet."

Guilt is running so high these days that many people simply aren't going into stores in order to avoid the temptation to buy, retail executives say. Shoppers are steering clear of the usual shopping zones, says Andrea Ciccoli, the administrator for Italian fashion group Ittierre SpA, the owner of Gianfranco Ferré and the licensee of labels such as Just Cavalli and John Galliano.

In response, some brands are trying to catch consumers off-guard with new outlets for selling. Ittierre is considering having some brands open pop-up stores—boutiques that exist for a few weeks or months—in unexpected parts of European and U.S. cities that aren't traditional luxury-shopping districts. The idea is that pop-ups may not activate the psychological barriers that prevent shoppers from entering traditional stores.

Of course, many brands have used pop-ups in recent years to create buzz and test ideas. But the idea has new currency as a way to short-circuit guilt. "People are so disciplined, their super-ego tells them not to buy, and then they don't buy," Mr. Ciccoli says.

Encouraging Internet shopping, as many brands have been doing, can also help break old shopping habits. "Luxury shame"—epitomized by the showy act of walking out of a fancy store with a big shopping bag—is one of the main reasons for the estimated 20% jump in online luxury sales this year, Bain & Co. says.

Online shopping involves different consumer behavior, says Gilt's Ms. Maybank. Instead of planning a chunk of time around going to the store, "you take five minutes out at a specific moment of the day to get the things you need," she says.

Another tactic for taking some of the guilt out of shopping—offering a charitable-giving component—is gaining traction as well, especially ahead of the holiday-shopping season, when people tend to feel the most pressure to donate. Shoe brand Cole Haan recently sponsored a typical promotion: Get a 15% discount on a new pair of shoes when you donate an old pair to a designated charity. Such incentives could help with "the argument shoppers have with themselves," says Sue Phillips, the London-based chief executive of consumer-research firm Synovate Censydiam.

One of the hottest new stores in Paris this year, Merci, fuses fashion with philanthropy. The store's light, loft-like space is as trendy as that of other concept stores, selling apparel from brands such as Stella McCartney, special versions of Annick Goutal perfume, flowers and used books. The difference is that all of the profits, after operating costs are paid, go to children's charities. Last month, Merci—which was founded by Marie-France Cohen as a way of giving back after she sold luxury children's-clothing label Bonpoint—opened a one-month shop in New York with help from the Gap.

The charitable argument may give consumers another reason to visit the store, Ms. Cohen says, although she says "a consumer who is tempted by an item goes back to being just a consumer."

Other companies are putting more emphasis on the "guilt-free shopping" that is said to come with buying environmentally safe products. Stores are even offering to ameliorate the global problems of waste and — interestingly — overconsumption. Last year, upscale Swedish clothing brand Filippa K opened a secondhand store in Stockholm that sells used clothes of its own brand for at least 50% off.

Anders Wiberg, who oversees the boutique and is the brand's supply-chain director, says the boutique has boosted sales of the current collections. "The customer looks at us as taking more action," he says.

A car decorates Paris's Merci boutique.

Amelie Nello/ Morning By Foley

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From game to flame

Young chefs are offering a new take on the bounty of the wild

By Bruce Palling

THE SCENE: THE Berkshire Downs, southern England, just after dawn. A camouflaged man, silencer on his rifle, crawls crablike toward the fence line. He pokes his head through some tufts of grass, takes aim and fires. But, rather than shooting a fleeing secret agent, the target is a large fallow deer only 140 meters away. Blood instantly bubbles out behind the front legs, leaving a discernible trail as the deer briefly sprints before slowly circling and then collapsing in a nearby field. Minutes later, the carcass is eviscerated, with its liver and kidneys deftly removed and the still steaming innards dumped for the circling birds of prey.

The enthusiastic participant in this bloody ritual is Brett Graham, one of the rising chefs on London's restaurant scene, with a Michelin star and another expected soon. He likes nothing more than leaving his cramped kitchen at the Ledbury restaurant in London's fashionable Notting Hill neighborhood to roam this magical landscape just a little more than an hour west of the metropolis.

"I immediately fell in love when a friend took me," Mr. Graham said. "It is the whole process—shooting something, bringing it back to the restaurant, preparing it and then serving it on a plate. Last week, we served more than a hundred separate pieces of game—10 hares, 60 partridges, 25 grouse, 12 saddles of muntjac (barking deer) and eight pheasants." He also co-owns the Harwood Arms pub in London's Fulham, which has a preponderance of game dishes on the menu.

The 30-year-old Australian-born Mr. Graham is at the forefront of contemporary chefs who are helping expand the sale of traditional game to a sophisticated culinary audience that embraces it for a range of reasons.

In part, it is the attractiveness of the flavors that only wild game possesses. Also, wild game birds and all deer species have significantly lower fat content than farm-reared animals. Vast amounts of woodland are undisturbed and not turned into pasture or otherwise farmed because they remain as game reserves.

"Modern palates no longer want something as powerfully tasting as traditional well [aged] game," Mr. Graham said. "If you have a lady upstairs having lunch, and you serve her a dried-out pheasant or hare that has been hung too long, she's not going to enjoy it and will never order it again. You can still spread all the liver or guts of a woodcock on toast, but do it on the side. The most important thing is to consider your customer and appreciate how they would like to eat it."

> *"In France, there is a growing aversion to subjecting game to heavy marinades to cloak the taste. Instead, chefs are treating deer or hare with more respect and allowing the delicate flavours to emerge on the plate."*
>
> Gilles Pudlowski, publisher of 'Le Pudlo France'

He is currently devising a special game-tasting menu that will include courses such as his game consommé, which consists of a medley of grouse, pheasant, partridge plus a touch of hare to give it a bit of an edge. "It is part of my philosophy of not wasting anything," he said. "Because we had been preparing poached partridge we had a lot of bones so we added them [to the consommé stock] too."

His version of roast grouse is a far cry from the traditional one with all the trimmings, served by such renowned game restaurants as Rules in Covent Garden. Arguably London's oldest restaurant, time stands still here at some imaginary high watermark of the Victorian era. Antlers and 19th-century prints surround the mostly elderly customers. (The menu still helpfully advises patrons that lemonade is available, free of charge, for their drivers if they are waiting outside.) Still, business is brisk and there are no complaints about either the style or the quality of the raw ingredients. After all, Rules actually owns a vast shooting estate in County Durham in northern England, from where a great deal of their produce originates.

The recently held London Restaurant Festival included a sell-out game event in Leadenhall Market. A handful of London's top chefs, including Rowley Leigh of Café Anglais, Henry Harris of Racine and Richard Corrigan of his eponymous establishment, cooked partridge, deer and wild boar for several hundred people in this exquisite covered market just around the corner from the Bank of England. Mr. Leigh r cently installed two large French rotisseries in h restaurant and makes a point of offering a wid range of game birds spit roasted. He thinks near 50% in the growth of game bird consumption due to chefs offering to debone them. "People li the idea of a whole grouse or partridge but th don't really know how to tackle the bones. Yo only have to see the carcasses when they com back."

The trend toward making game more acces sible can also be found in France. Renowned e tablishments such as Gérard Besson, close to Les Halles in Paris, remain unaffected by such sentiments but others such as Chez l'Ami Jean just south of the Quai d'Orsay, attempt to pur sue a more modernist approach, with dishes like rare fillet of hare with pepper and vanilla or a carré of venison with fig butter.

Gilles Pudlowski, publisher of "Le Pudlo France," the rival to the Michelin Guide, believes tastes have changed radically in the pas two or three years: "In France, there is a grow ing aversion to subjecting game to heavy mar nades to cloak the taste. Instead, chefs are treating deer or hare with more respect and a lowing the delicate flavors to emerge on the plate."

In Britain, game has become big business. Alan Hayward, the proprietor of Vicars Game Berkshire, supplies among others, the Ledbury Fat Duck and Fortnum & Mason's, grocers to Queen Elizabeth II. "When I started as a game dealer in 1973, 95% of all British game was ex ported," Mr. Hayward said. "Now less than ha goes to Europe."

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation reported that the value of game

PHOTOGRAPHS: GILES JOHN

shot in the U.K. was £61 million in 2006. Since then, the value has grown to an estimated £100 million, according to Simon Hamlyn, research officer for the BASC. "When I was growing up in the 1960s, deer were considered to be vermin," Mr. Hayward said with a laugh. "We now sell 5,000 deer annually but one of the big boys in the north sells 20,000."

Mr. Hayward also says that game sales got a considerable boost when the queen chose a dish of venison to be served at her 80th-birthday celebrations in 2006. "It was 'Loin of roe venison with rosti, celeriac, cabbage, carrot and game gravy.' That really kicked it off and a number of English restaurants started getting in on the act."

Mike Robinson, a TV celebrity chef, is another reason for the upsurge in game consumption in the U.K. He has made several series on wild food and game. Mr. Robinson also holds the shooting rights over thousands of hectares of the unspoiled landscape in the triangle of Reading, Hungerford and Oxford. "Game is the centerpiece of my existence—I grew up in the countryside here and this little region of rural paradise has never really been built on or ruined," he said. "The key is understanding and loving this environment—it is a combination of nature and nurture, if you like."

Mr. Robinson also runs Britain's first game and wild-food cookery school along with the nearby Pot Kiln, a beautiful isolated pub, near Yattendon, which specializes in game. "Basically, there are only three options for eating—processed supermarket food, organic free-range produce plus wild food and game." He says wild game has to be as carefully handled as first class farmed meat. "None of us will accept poorly shot animals and the way we immediately clean them after they are shot has raised standards considerably in recent years."

The actual deer population in the U.K. is estimated to be around 1.5 million and growing, despite 350,000 being culled annually.

There is every indication that game sales in Britain will continue to rise, but interestingly, game isn't expanding in popularity in countries such as Italy. This is mainly because the majority of game shot there is Cinghiale or wild boar, which is more difficult to promote as a fat-free and healthy product.

Nancy Harmon Jenkins, the American food writer who has lived in Italy for nearly 40 years, is pessimistic about the future of game in Italy. "Wild boar has always been hunted by gangs of middle aged and elderly people, but young people have no interest in it, they think it is fusty and old fashioned."

In Tuscany, she says, it is increasingly rare to even see wild hare on the menus or unplucked game birds in butcher's shops. "It is not something that Italians like very much."

Still, there are numerous enthusiasts who do what they can to promote game sales. Earlier this month, famous Italian chef Peppe Zullo presided over a two-day festival devoted to the cinghiale in his hometown of Orsara di Puglia in the southeastern part of Italy.

"This is the 14th annual festival we have held, so I think we will manage to keep the tradition going for a little bit longer," he said.

—Bruce Palling is a writer based in London.

Clockwise from top left: Chef Mike Robinson of the Pot Kiln restaurant prepares to track deer just after dawn on the Berkshire Downs, west of London; Chef Brett Graham torches Douglas fir to infuse venison with its flavor; Mr. Graham's game consommé, which has just become part of his menu at the Ledbury; Roe deer surrounded by Douglas fir in a copper pan.

GAME IN EUROPE

Edinburgh
The Kitchin
Some of Tom Kitchin's most renowned game dishes are braised roe deer with root vegetables and blue hare à la Royale. ☎ 44-1315551755 www.thekitchin.com

London
The Ledbury
Brett Graham signature game dish is muntjac baked in Douglas fir with a cream of white carrots. ☎ 44-207792 9090; theledbury.com

Rules
London's oldest restaurant serves every conceivable game dish in a traditional environment. ☎ 44-2078365314; www.rules.co.uk

Monte Carlo
Le Louis Quinze
This gastronomic temple always has numerous game specialities cooked by Franck Cerutti, such as wood pigeon cooked and simmered salmis. ☎ 377-92162976 www.alain-ducasse.com

Munich
Halili
They don't come much more traditional than this 19th-century Bavarian game restaurant. Specialities include partridge with cabbage and roasted goose liver. ☎ 49-89285909; www.restaurant-halali.de

Navarra, Spain
Tubal
This is a popular place to eat after attending the running of the bulls in nearby Pamplona. Tubal offers partridge salad with Jabugo ham and numerous pigeon dishes. ☎ 34-948700852; www.restaurantetubal.com

Orsara di Puglia, Italy
Peppe Zullo
One of the prime advocates of field-to-table cuisine, Peppe Zullo specializes in game and holds an annual Wild Boar Festival. ☎ 39-0881964763; www.peppezullo.it

Paris
Gerard Besson
A defiantly traditional chef who celebrates all conceivable game in his autumn menus. He has also created a game pie with partridge, wild duck, wood pigeon and venison. ☎ 33-142331474; www.gerardbresson.com

Stockholm
Restaurante Riche
Riche has a week dedicated to reindeer at the end of October with dishes such as smoked reindeer heart, and pickled chanterelles with wild lingonberries. ☎ 46-8545 03560; (www.riche.se)

In Hamilton Hall, the soul of St. Andrews

FOR ONE OF golf's most famous buildings, Hamilton Hall in St. Andrews, Scotland, is looking pretty shabby these days. Its red sandstone façade is still impressive, especially when lit by the late-day sun. The building looms over the 18th green of the celebrated Old Course and, more pointedly, over the clubhouse of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club across the street. (Thomas Hamilton, who had Jewish roots, commissioned

Golf Journal
JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

the grand structure in the 1890s, as a hotel, after being rejected for membership by the R&A.) But peek around back and you'll find broken windows, boarded-up doors and blight. Inside, rubble mounts past the wainscots of rooms with ornate ceilings, dangling wires and invaluable views of the world's most famous links.

In 2004, with great expectations, American developer David Wasserman purchased Hamilton Hall for £20 million from the University of St. Andrews, which had been using it for student housing since 1949. His St. Andrews Grand was to have been a super-deluxe timeshare; Phil Mickelson, among others, committed millions of dollars for a share in one of the 23 proposed apartments. But not enough buyers came forward, and then the recession hit. This spring the troubled Bank of Scotland, which had loaned Mr. Wasserman millions of pounds, repossessed the building and put it up for auction. The bidding closed Aug. 14; the winner has yet to be disclosed.

One bid, of £10.1 million, came from a group of Glasgow investors with ties to an Englishman named Richard Wax, a golf-industry consultant who now lives in Paris. Mr. Wax started trying to pry Hamilton Hall away from the University of St. Andrews in the mid-1990s, with a vision that calls for creating a "golf-industry nerve center" and a "clubhouse for the world."

"It is an incredibly powerful building," Mr. Wax said in a telephone interview. "It's the most recognizable building in St. Andrews, the home of golf. So in our view it should be used somehow to send a signal to the world about the spirit and accessibility of the game, not as trophy apartments for the super-rich who probably won't spend more than a week or two a year in St. Andrews at best."

The Royal & Ancient clubhouse next door, he pointed out, is hung with signs that say "Members Only," and those members can only be male. This despite the notably egalitarian tradition of golf in Scotland. "Is this the message that golf and St. Andrews want the world to see?" Mr. Wax said.

The specifics of how Mr. Wax and his group would deploy the six-story, 4,180-square-meter building while achieving a positive return on investment is unclear, especially since estimates for the additional costs of refurbishment range to £25 million and higher. The nearby British Golf Museum precludes using the space for permanent historical exhibits, but Mr. Wax mentioned staging golf lectures, public appearances and films as one possibility. He also said it could function as a headquarters for golf organizations, a virtual base for online retailers or a few floors could be a hotel.

Understandably, most townspeople would prefer a use for Hamilton Hall that generates more street life and buzz than elite apartments would, especially during the dreary winter months, but anything would be better than the status quo. "What we don't want," said Ted Brocklebank, the member of Scottish Parliament whose district encompasses St. Andrews, "is what we've seen the last five years, which is an American real-estate speculator sitting on the building because he lacks the sums required to make his dreams come true."

Unfortunately for Mr. Wax's bid, this summer's auction attracted the stated interest of several of the world's most fanatical golf billionaires—men like Donald Trump and American faucet Magnate Herb Kohler—who do have the sums required to make their dreams come true. Because bids are sealed, it's impossible to know who followed through with offers, but nine credible bids were received by the deadline, according to Jason Hogg of Jones Lang LaSalle, the agent running the auction, and the top bidder, whose name he said he could not reveal, has now signed a legally binding contract. "He has until mid-November to complete his due diligence," Mr. Hogg said.

Everyone I spoke to believes the winning bid, perhaps on the order of £14 million or £15 million, was made by Mr. Kohler. He already owns the Old Course Hotel and the Duke's golf course in St. Andrews, and was seen earlier this month inspecting the property with a group of advisers. A spokesman said the Kohler team had no information to share about the project at this time.

Mr. Wax, not surprisingly, is galled. But as Mr. Brocklebank, the Scottish MP, said there may yet be room for Mr. Wax's vision. "Hamilton Hall is a tall building," he said. "It's conceivable that some aspects of Mr. Wax's vision could be combined." If not, he said, there are other buildings nearby that might work for Mr. Wax nearly as well.

Getty Images

Simon Dyson in front of Hamilton Hall at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship on the Old Course on Oct. 5.

Fresh off U.S. Open win, tennis star Kim Clijsters slows down to speed up

By Paul Sonne

BELGIAN TENNIS STAR Kim Clijsters surprised the world, and herself, in September when she beat Serena Williams to win the U.S. Open just months after coming out of a two-year retirement. After deciding to leave the professional tour in 2007, Ms. Clijsters, 26, got married and gave birth to a baby girl. She decided to re-join the pro tour earlier this year. A former world number one, she has dialed down the pace of her work life to make room for family, opting to play just 16 tournaments next year, including all four grand slams. She spoke with The Wall Street Journal this week after finishing a game in Luxembourg.

Q: You're the first mother to win a major grand slam since 1980. How does it feel?

I never really thought about it until I won, and then people started asking me about it and how it feels. To me, it seems really normal to try to combine motherhood and being a wife with being a professional athlete. My first priority will be my family because I can only function well and be a good athlete if I know that my family is well.

Q: Why did you leave professional tennis in 2007?

I had the feeling that I was not happy playing. I knew I wasn't doing everything I could to be the best player, but I couldn't force myself. I met Brian, now my husband, and I just wanted to have that normal life that I never really had. I remember playing those last few tournaments, and my reaction after a loss or a win was the same. I even remember crying after some matches I won, and I thought, "This is just not right."

Now, I am in a situation with the new scheduling where I can spend seven or eight weeks at home. At the end of my first career, I didn't enjoy being in a hotel room or being on airplanes, but now I'm back to where I was when I was 14 years old. I really look forward to being in a hotel, because I don't have to clean and I don't have to constantly be cooking.

Q: Your coach vowed to shave his head if you won the U.S. Open?

Yes. I had totally forgotten about it until he brought it up, and then I did it in our hotel room the day after I won. He has really thick hair so I had to start cutting it with scissors, because I couldn't get through.

Q: What do you think of the grueling pace of the tennis circuit?

It's not my goal to be number one or to pick up another check at various tournaments. I think that's something I've learned: If you train hard and put in those weeks when you can practice and slow down a bit, it really recharges your battery for when you have to be out there.

That's why [the Williams sisters] have been so successful for so many years. People might have some negative comments about how they weren't always focused on tennis, but I don't think they would have been out there for so many years at such a high level if they didn't do other things.

Q: How has your game changed since you came back?

The feeling that I have is that I am more mature. I'm able to read the game a lot better than in the past. I don't think my technique has changed a lot. There are obviously a few parts of my game I would like to see improved. My game is on the baseline, but I could make the points a lot shorter by once in a while coming in to the net.

ImageForum

Kim Clijsters celebrates winning the U.S. Open in September.

Amelia Earhart biopic doesn't soar

AMELIA EARHART IS still missing.

In her place, "Amelia" presents a proto-feminist with a frozen smile spouting the free-as-a-bird slogans of a bird-brained script. The film struggles to stay aloft, and may soon vanish, like its namesake, without a trace. But below and beyond the mystery of Earhart's fate, "Amelia" leaves you wondering how its abundantly gifted director, Mira Nair, and its Oscar-winning star, Hilary Swank, could have been complicit in such clumsiness. It's the age-old question of why bad movies happen to good people.

Film
JOE MORGENSTERN

In this case the answer starts with the subject matter, which has the musty odor of old news. By now everyone has heard of the dashing aviatrix of the 1930s, and everyone knows, if only vaguely, how her story ends. (She and her navigator disappeared over the Pacific during an attempted round-the-world flight; no trace of them has ever been found.)

Still, her story remains an intriguing one. What caused the tragedy? Who was the real woman behind the smile, the rakish goggles and the publicity campaigns that marketed her to an adoring public?

The movie offers no new or interesting theories on the first count; it shows her Lockheed Electra simply running out of fuel because of navigational problems and a communications failure. And the screenplay takes a reverential view of her celebrity, barely allowing for the possibility that she, like her scholarly contemporary Margaret Mead, was eager to be celebrated. (The writers of record are Ron Bass, who has come to be known for formulaic screenplays cranked out by him and his associates in a kind of atelier, and Anna Hamilton Phelan.)

This Amelia wants only to fly. "I want to be free, George, a vagabond of the air," she tells the publisher George Putnam, who becomes her business partner and later her loving though domineering husband. He's played by Richard Gere, who gets no more sustenance from the script than Hilary Swank does.

George is the smirk to Amelia's smile, the victimizer to her victim, the ambitious entrepreneur pushing her toward profitable, if sometimes fraudulent, adventures in the name of American capitalism.

During one of those adventures, a solo flight across the North Atlantic, she gushes, voice-over, "It was a night of stars, of tropic loveliness"; the vagabond script can't even keep its climate zones straight. Amelia's final flight provides the only source of drama—of quasi-drama, since the outcome is never in doubt—but it's chopped up into short episodes and intercut, intrusively, with the episodic evolution of her public and personal life.

With material like this, what's a director to do? And not just any director, but the woman recently responsible for a wonderful film called "The Namesake," and, before it, the richly textured canvas of "Salaam Bombay!" (During the course of that final flight, Amelia and her remarkably dislikable navigator, Fred Noonan, make a refueling stop in Calcutta, which is as richly textured as a pasteboard background in a 1930s B movie.)

For all her gifts, Mira Nair hasn't attained the status of a heavy-hitting Hollywood filmmaker who can direct the writers and producers as well as the actors. The best she has been able to do is bring some humanity to certain stretches of the stolid proceedings: a few bright exchanges between Amelia and George, once he's come around to seeing her as a human being instead of a viable product; a gentle moment between Amelia and her lover's young son. (The real-life lover, Gene Vidal, is played by Ewan McGregor; Gene's son is no other than the pre-teen Gore.)

Hilary Swank, for her part, tries to inhabit a role with no living quarters. The writing is all about externals—what Amelia says rather than what she feels, what she looks like (glamorous, though she says she wears pants because she doesn't like her legs, and feminine, though there's one fleeting hint of more complex sexuality).

Even the flying is about externals. Apart from admiring her new Electra and pushing an occasional throttle, the most famous female pilot in history displays no particular affinity for the gorgeous machinery at her disposal. The whole movie is a failure to communicate.

Hilary Swank as Amelia Earhart.
Amelia, Doha Film Festival

WSJ.com

Opening this week in Europe

- **(500) Days of Summer** Germany, Spain
- **Brüno** Italy
- **District 9** Greece, Switzerland
- **Funny People** Denmark, Norway, Portugal
- **Julie & Julia** Greece, Iceland, Italy
- **Sin Nombre** France
- **The Cove** Germany, U.K.
- **The Soloist** Czech Republic, Poland
- **Zombieland** Denmark, Sweden

Source: IMDB

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Behind the scenes at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival.
Doha Film Festival

Coming attractions in Doha

By Margaret Coker

Doha, Qatar

WITH THE HELP of Manhattan's Tribeca Film Festival, stars such as Robert De Niro will tread the red carpet along the seafront of this Middle Eastern capital next weekend, on their way to movies about a ground-breaking feminist aviator, underground Iranian rock stars and frustrated Jewish men.

The subjects may not seem outré to Western filmgoers, but represent something of a cultural revolution for the region, where government censors citing cultural sensibilities cut sex scenes from the big screen, and multiplexes offer a steady diet of apolitical animated and action flicks.

The three-day event comes on the heels of a 10-day Middle East International Film Festival in neighboring Abu Dhabi. The cities, two of the world's wealthiest, have ambitious cultural plans: Doha's Museum of Islamic Art opened last fall, and Abu Dhabi plans branches of the Guggenheim and Louvre. Beyond building museums and liberal-arts campuses, the cities have turned to film as an art form local audiences can appreciate—and emulate.

The money earmarked for cinema has caught Hollywood's eye. U.S. studios hungry for financing after Wall Street's bust have been talking up the Gulf since Abu Dhabi-based Imagenation started up last year with $1 billion in capital for film and other media projects. On the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi film festival this year was a separate finance/producers' conference that drew more than 200 Hollywood and European movie executives.

The Doha Tribeca Film Festival has made some bold choices as part of its 30-film lineup. Joel and Ethan Coen's story of a struggling suburban Jewish father, "A Serious Man," will make its Middle Eastern premiere. Kicking off the festival is Mira Nair's "Amelia." From countries closer to home, there will be "Son of Babylon" by Iraqi filmmaker Mohammad Al Daradji.

Within the region, however, some people wonder if the Gulf sheikhs are ready to grant the freedom of expression needed to nurture home-grown film talent. "You can have all the money and resources at your disposal, but that doesn't create art. Art needs a certain mentality that many in the region right now are lacking," says Abbas Kiarostami, the award-winning Iranian filmmaker who was the president of the jury at the three-year-old Abu Dhabi festival.

But Eissa Rashed, who directs special projects at festival sponsor Abu Dhabi Arts and Cultural Foundation, points out that attendees watched lesser known documentaries and narrative films from Russia, Albania, Iran and Brazil. Organizers bypassed censorship laws and showed all films uncut.

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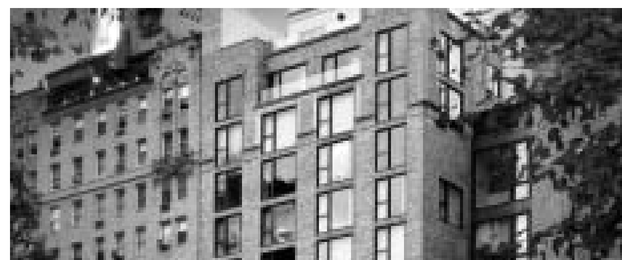

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Dreams and nightmares on the London stage

Dominic West as Segismundo in 'Life is a Dream' at the Donmar Warehouse.

LONDON: The 1635 play, "Life is a Dream" by Pedro Calderón de la Barca turns on a philosophical conundrum—how can you ever really know you're not dreaming? Or that you might one day wake up and discover everything that appeared to have happened prior to your waking was only a dream? Calderón's Segismundo is the only son of the king of Poland, but has been kept prisoner his entire life because his father has been frightened by an augury that his son will overthrow him. The king, experimenting, gives him a taste of freedom, and, when the prince abuses it, drugs his son and convinces him he only dreamed he was free.

Given a second chance, though, the prince redeems himself—after a fashion—and shows he understands politics to boot. He surprises us by making a dynastically apt marriage, rather than the love-match the audience imagines for him, and by interpreting his own liberation as treason on the part of those who have freed him. Though Dominic West doesn't look like someone whose muscles have atrophied from years of being shackled to a prison wall, his *volte-face* is almost convincing in director Jonathan Munby's pared-down Donmar production of this Spanish Golden Age drama, and he has truly splendid support from Kate Fleetwood, Lloyd Hutchinson and Malcolm Storry.

In Samuel Beckett's 1957 "Endgame," at the Duchess Theatre, life is a kind of dream—a nightmare—or possibly a hallucination, and, like the names of the characters, a four-letter word. This Complicité production was plagued by casting problems, so Simon McBurney doesn't only direct it, but also acts the part of Clov, the servant who can't (or won't) leave his master, Hamm, who in turn can't (or won't) die. Mark Rylance plays Hamm, and it is hard to fault the performances. Mr. McBurney doesn't clown; he never allows a smile to escape, and disguises the muscles inside his filthy undershirt. His superlative performance is matched by all the others in this thought-inspiring (rather than heart-stirring) production of Beckett's sigh against the dying of the light.

In his cellar with its high-up dirty windows, looking strikingly like James Joyce with his embroidered skull-cap and dark glasses, Mr. Rylance Hamms it up, being campy and raggedly dandyish; but it feels like a completely legitimate reading of the nihilistic central role. Meeting despair with an ironic view of one's own incapacities makes some sense—as we see when he realizes it's impossible to strangle yourself, the blind, half-paralyzed Hamm is impotent in his struggle against life. As Nell and Nagg, the putative parents who live in the dustbins, Miriam Margolyes and Tom Hickey, wring humor from the fetid bleakness of their discarded lives. Mr. Hickey remarks at least "our hearing hasn't failed." "Our WHAT?" asks the shockingly funny Ms. Margolyes. In the end that's Beckett's answer: The tragedy of life is that it's so very comic. *—Paul Levy*

Life is a Dream until Nov. 28
www.donmarwarehouse.com
Endgame until Dec. 5
www.duchesstheatre.co.uk

'Turner and the Masters,' a study of a competitive streak, at Tate Britain

LONDON: Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) remains Britain's best beloved painter, yet the "Turner and the Masters" exhibition at Tate Britain has as many B-production, middling-to-poor paintings by Turner as it does masterpieces. The reason? This show has a thesis, designed to explore Turner's attitudes and his practice as an artist, and it displays his work alongside those of 30 artists—old masters and contemporaries—that he was striving to emulate or excel.

Turner was hugely competitive. He was portly, short of stature, the son of a barber of small means and rivalrous. When John Constable's "The Opening of Waterloo Bridge" was hung adjacent to Turner's "Helvoetsluys" at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1832, Turner took advantage of the varnishing day (in which it was possible to make final changes) to add a small splash of red near the bottom of the picture plane, an attention-grabbing buoy amid the turbulent sea. A simple gesture; but it made Constable's work look fussy. Constable wrote of it that Turner "has been here and fired a gun." The pictures are reunited at Tate Britain, and you can see exactly what Constable meant.

In addition, Turner takes on (and sometimes loses to) Rubens, Watteau, Poussin, Claude, Veronese and Titian. But these are mostly works done before Turner comes into his magnificent, highly composed, but freely painted, own later style. Don't go to this show expecting to admire all the Turners—the greater picture is often the one Turner was struggling to surpass—but there are plenty of artistic treats. *—Paul Levy*

Until Jan. 31
www.tate.org.uk

'Dutch Boats in a Gale' (1801) by JMW Turner.

History of the mid-20th century, as seen through Max Scheler's viewfinder

HAMBURG: A new exhibition at Hamburg's Deichtorhallen places German photography as a successor to the great history painting of the 19th century.

In the 1950s and '60s, German photojournalist Max Scheler (1928-2003) was one of the leading lights at Stern, Germany's weekly news magazine, justly celebrated for its photojournalism.

Like the history painters before him, he worked in the service of a larger story (German Cold-War politics, China's Cultural Revolution, the making of a Beatles' movie) but the 140 works on display in Hamburg—most of them newly printed from archival negatives—have individual lives.

The show is in part a history of both Germanys during the first few decades after the war, and Scheler leaves his mark on West Germany's first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer—the Konrad A. of the title. His 1965 photograph of an 89-year-old Adenauer, caught in an unflattering moment during his last campaign tour, turns West Germany's patriarch into a King Lear figure, raging at the wide world just beyond the frame.

He also manages to capture the essence of the Adenauer era—whose chief characteristic was its harsh break with the past—with surprising feeling.

In 1958, he alludes to the beginning of mass tourism in West Germany by showing a man in Trachten, or traditional German costume, leaping up to kiss a woman leaning out of a train window. The woman and her train, it seems, are leaving the man and his era behind.

As the show's title suggests, Scheler is celebrated for his photographs of the Kennedys, but it is his take on the Kennedys' archrival, Richard Nixon, that haunts our thoughts after we leave.

A 1956 photo of then Vice President Nixon at an American Legion meeting—body contorted, wearing a Legion cap like a crown—seems to show a man visibly crossing over to the dark side. *—J. S. Marcus*

Until Nov. 15 in Hamburg,
then Munich and Berlin.
www.deichtorhallen.de

Porcelain vase with portrait of Mao; estimate: £10,000-£15,000.

Asian art set for London

GALLERIES, AUCTION HOUSES and museums join forces next week in a display of London's rich trove of Asian art.

Asian Art in London (Oct. 29-Nov. 7) will include special shows at some 40 galleries, dealing in the ancient and the contemporary, with works from China, Japan, Korea, India and the Himalayas. Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams will hold major auctions of Chinese and Japanese ceramics, jade, bronzes, devotional figures, paintings and textiles. Lectures and special events will take place at museums and other institutions.

Collecting
MARGARET STUDER

Since it was founded 12 years ago, Asian Art in London has become the biggest event of its kind in the world, says project director Virginia Sykes-Wright. She notes that London is attracting an increasing number of Asian buyers from growing collector regions such as mainland China, Korea and Vietnam.

Two participating galleries signify the wide diversity of Asian art on offer. Giuseppe Eskenazi will show seven rare Chinese paintings from the 12th-15th centuries, including a delicate work depicting a melon and grass, priced in the region of $500,000. Rossi & Rossi will exhibit striking portraits by Tibetan contemporary artist Tsewang Tashi, with prices ranging from $5,000-$15,000.

Among the top lots at Christie's Chinese ceramics sale on Nov. 3 will be an imperial bowl from 1723-35, decorated with peaches (estimate: £300,000-£500,000). At Sotheby's on Nov. 4, a 17th-century Chinese recumbent gray jade buffalo is expected to fetch a similar price.

On Nov. 5, Bloomsbury Auctions will devote its entire sale to Mao's revolution with Little Red Books, political posters, porcelain figures, plaques and badges. A porcelain vase dated 1968 with sun rays emanating from Mao's person is estimated at £10,000-£15,000.

France's Greatest Military Hero Turns 50

By Daniel Freedman

France's most famous freedom fighter turns 50 next week. The elite of its air force will perform acrobatics, its politicians will gush their praise, and central Paris will host a giant festival. The hero in question is Asterix the Gaul, the diminutive warrior who first appeared in the French comic magazine Pilote on Oct. 29, 1959.

France has reason to be proud of Asterix. He is arguably their greatest military hero ever. Whereas Napoleon was eventually defeated, Asterix fights on to this day. And in an era when American exports from Disney to Coca-Cola dominate the world, hundreds of millions of people have read Asterix comics (325 million to be precise), in languages ranging from Mandarin to Arabic to Latin. While the days of Joan of Arc and Charles Martel are long gone and France's real military gumption is questioned and sometimes derided—most recently in Afghanistan—Asterix's heroic championing of the underdog inspire the brave-of-heart around the world.

Asterix, the quick-witted Gallic freedom fighter, could also be an inspiration to Americans.

When the creator of Asterix, Rene Goscinny, died in 1977, France mourned. One obituary described his death "as if the Eiffel Tower had fallen down." His illustrator, Albert Uderzo, took over and since then has added nine Asterix comic books to the 24 Goscinny had completed. To Asterix purists, there is a noticeable difference in quality between the two sets. It hasn't gone unnoticed either that the number Goscinny produced parallels the number of books in another literary classic: The Odyssey.

The comics, set in 50 B.C., tell the story of a little village that is the only place in all of Gaul unconquered by Roman legions. The village's defenders are aided by a magic potion, mixed by their druid, that gives them superhuman strength and helps keep the Romans at bay. Asterix, the most quick-witted of the inhabitants, is sent by the village on missions across the world. On his adventures he prefers to rely on his wits, only resorting to fists when necessary. His over-sized sidekick, Obelix, on the other hand, seizes any opportunity to beat-up Romans.

Asterix's popularity is no mystery. Many find the story of a little village defending its freedom against a tyrannical oppressor appealing. The most obvious analogy is perhaps the comparison between Asterix's daring and the French Resistance against the Nazis in World War II. Goscinny's Romans can also be read as the Soviet Union, or any modern-day oppressor. For some, predictably, Asterix represents the little man standing against globalization. But what unites all readers in their admiration is the humor on every page.

Not unlike movies like "Shrek," Goscinny's double-entendres, caricatures, and distinctive voices are enjoyed by both children and adults. Lessons are learned and history is told, with novel twists. The flat-shaped nose of the Sphinx in Egypt, for example, is explained by Obelix having accidentally knocked it off during a climb. Famous pieces of art, historical figures, and geographical places are all covered with similarly humorous bents.

National stereotypes are mocked too. The British are shown as being overly-polite drinkers of hot water with a drop of milk, and driving their chariots on the left side of the road. The Germans are militaristic and humorless. The Belgians love Brussels sprouts. Readers can even have a laugh at the French: People from Marseille are hot-blooded, those from Normandy overuse cream on food, and Paris is full of traffic jams.

Cutting humor laces the comic right down to the names of the characters. (And here the English translators, Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge, deserve credit). There is the village druid, Getafix; the old man, Geriatrix; and the fishmonger, Unhygenix. Asterix's name itself is a pun. An asterisk (*) refers to a footnote or exception—Asterix personifies the exception to Roman rule.

Editions Albert Rene/Goscinny-Uderzo

Most Europeans need no introduction to Asterix. Even in Britain (where I spent my childhood), with its usual disdain for most things French, Asterix was a hit, perhaps because he stood as a testament to what many British wanted France to be. I remember some confused classmates when a history teacher first told us that Romans ruled all of Europe.

The one place where Asterix has never taken hold, despite appearances on the cover of Time Magazine and in the television series South Park, is in the U.S. Explanations given range from the uncharitable (the jokes are too sophisticated) to the understandable (the American market is already saturated) to the most plausible (Asterix is culturally European; America never had a Roman invasion).

It's not too late, however, for Americans to reconsider Asterix and join the celebrations. Saluting a great freedom fighter is very American. It could also do wonders for relations with France. "What would Asterix do?" has the potential to be a winning argument in convincing a skeptical French leader to help defend freedom against a tyrannical force. One can easily imagine Asterix and Obelix liberating North Korea's concentration camps, knocking the heads of Iranian Revolutionary Guards together, and freeing Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. They certainly wouldn't hesitate to meet the Dalai Lama.

And there is even reason to suspect that, in creating his libertarian-inclined character, Goscinny took inspiration not only from France's heroes, but also from the U.S. For where does Asterix hail from? A fictional village, in what used to be called Armorica. Close enough.

Mr. Freedman is director of policy analysis and communications at the Soufan Group, a strategic consultancy.

The Sublime in the Ordinary

By Lance Esplund

New York

Johannes Vermeer's extraordinary powers of invention and mastery of light are that much more apparent when his paintings are seen among those of lesser Dutch masters, as are six Vermeer pictures now in a small, contextual exhibition of 25 works at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The show's centerpiece—its raison d'être—is Vermeer's "The Milkmaid" -(c. 1657-58), which is on loan from Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and has not been exhibited in the U.S. since it traveled here for the 1939 World's Fair. Organized by Walter Liedtke, curator in the Met's Department of European Paintings, the exhibit also includes the five Vermeers in the Met's permanent collection, as well as supporting works by other Dutch Golden Age artists.

Vermeer's 'The Milkmaid' displays his transfigurative gifts.

One of the greatest pictorial virtues of Vermeer (1632-1675) is that he can imbue ordinary objects with sublime qualities. What makes this feat so astounding is that he never loses his grasp on his subjects' origins. He paints things—bread, cloth, table and wall; flesh, light, space and air—without pretense. Yet, somewhere along the way, the forms become elevated—transfigured. While lesser painters attempt to give weight to objects and volume to form, to create light and space on the canvas, Vermeer explores extremes—balancing the humble with the mysterious. He raises us to ecstatic heights as he roots us firmly in the soil.

Any grouping of Vermeers will make clear the artist's subtle control, his imaginative exploration of structure and metaphor, his range of touch. Vermeer can seem to have sculpted his forms out of light—and to have given light a full spectrum of qualities and temperatures. He colors light a wintery, velvety gray-blue in "Woman Holding a Balance" (c. 1664), at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. In the Met's "Woman With a Lute" (c. 1662-63)—in which her blurred head materializes like an apparition, vibrates like a plucked string—the soft-focus light is burnished sunset-bronze, as if warmed by touch, age and patina. Elsewhere, Vermeer's light can be autumnal and arid or murky and veiled. In the Met's "Study of a Young Woman" (c. 1665-67) it is glowing, protective and pearlescent. And light can change within a single painting. In "The Milkmaid," Vermeer's light is cool, silvery, tingling and crystalline, like that of the day winter transitions into spring. It has the charge of anticipation, the jolt of an Annunciation.

Painted for Vermeer's -patron Pieter van Ruijven, "The Milkmaid" is not, by my estimation, the greatest work among the 36 canvases attributed to the artist. But it is still one of his masterpieces. At 18 inches high and roughly 16 inches wide, the picture is the size of a small mirror or window and, as such, rewards -one-to-one engagement. At the Met it has been hung too high; its location—chosen, I presume, to accommodate crowds and distance—is that of an -altar painting, which encourages (not unwarranted) -supplication.

The work depicts a woman pouring milk from a pitcher into a small bowl. She stands alone at a crowded table by a window in a small room and may be a kitchen maid making bread porridge (though not all of the necessary ingredients are visible). As with all of Vermeer's pictures, however, its subject is not an endgame but a theme to be developed.

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Mr. Liedtke, in the catalog and exhibition, makes an iron-clad argument for the picture's erotic content. The milkmaid was a common 17th-century subject suggesting sexual availability. In genre scenes such as these, "maids and mistresses alike are distracted from their daily tasks by dreams or offers of love." The milkmaid, Mr. Liedtke tells us, "would have brought to mind the slang word melken (to milk), meaning to attract or lure." He says that "a woman in the act of milking a cow . . . is compared to grabbing a man's . . . attention." Furthermore, the painting's supporting symbols include a wall tile depicting Cupid, as well as a foot warmer, which "heat feet and, under a long skirt . . . more private parts." In "The Milkmaid," erotic undercurrents are present in the tentative dribble of milk released from the pitcher; the mysterious darkness of the pitcher's cavity; the scintillating light dancing across surfaces; the tactility of glass, starched linen, wool, earthenware and crusty bread; the electric-blue quiver and sway of the woman's apron; and the bright, milky white void of the plaster wall—a plane that in areas presses forms forward and in others opens into vastness. Yet the eroticism is never overstated, even in the suggestive nudge of a hanging bread basket by a square copper pail; or in the gentle lift of the milkmaid's apron by the table's edge.

I would wager, however, that while eroticism is the painting's allure, Vermeer had bigger aspirations. The floor and lower wall on the right side of the canvas evoke a desert, in which Cupid and another figure wander aimlessly. Vermeer's milkmaid and table are rooted to the floor and step upward like a ziggurat. Their stature is noble, monumental. Her face feels carved out of wood. And yet, as if weightless, she rises; and she opens, infinitely opens—especially at her sturdy midsection, where her abdomen, rather than convex, is concave. Her upper body turns inward, receding into the wall, as her apron begins to -rotate outward and toward the viewer. A jumble of conflicting urges, she corkscrews, turning this way and that. And her white linen cap lifts slightly and spreads, exposing her face, her ear, to the light, just in line with a small break in the window—which suggests that she is ready, like the Virgin, to—receive.

The picture's theme is that of beginnings and expectations. The maid is a flagship—her linen cap and apron billow, as if she is setting sail. Whether she is carried by the winds of eroticism or by those of the spirit; whether she is poised to receive God or a male suitor—whether she is even making bread porridge—is immaterial. Vermeer gives her, and us, wide-enough berth to travel wherever the painting takes us.

Mr. Esplund writes about art for the Journal.

time off

Amsterdam

art

"A Master Revealed: Meijer de Haan" is a retrospective exhibition devoted to portraits and genre paintings of the Dutch Jewish painter (1852-95) who collaborated with Paul Gauguin.
Jewish Historical Museum
Until Jan. 24
☎ 31-20-5310-310
www.jhm.nl

art

"Drawings by Jacob Cats" shows four landscape watercolor drawings by the Dutch artist (1741-99), alongside a number of panoramic landscapes by 17th-century Dutch artists.
Rijksmuseum
Until Nov. 30
☎ 31-20-6747-000
www.rijksmuseum.nl

Antwerp

art

"Infantization: The New Power of Chinese Contemporary Art" displays a selection of photography, paintings, animation, video, installations, cartoons, graffiti and digital projections by young artists, known as China's Gelatin Generation.
FotoMuseum Provincie Antwerpen
Until Jan. 10
☎ 32-3 2429-300
www.fotomuseum.be

Bonn

art

"Markus Lüpertz: Highways and Byways" is a retrospective of 150 paintings and sculptures by the German contemporary artist, created between 1963 and 2009.
Kunst -und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Until Jan. 17
☎ 49-228-9171-0
www.kah-bonn.de

Brussels

art

"Dogs of War," an exhibition about animals in World War I, tells the story of men and animal in the trenches and occupied territories.
Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History
Until April 11
☎ 32-2-7377-833
www.klm-mra.be

Cambridge

art

"Lumière: Lithographs by Odilon Redon" displays lithographs by French Symbolist artist Redon (1840-1916), including two series based on Flaubert's novel "The Temptation of Saint Anthony."
Fitzwilliam Museum
Until Jan. 10
☎ 44-1223-3329-00
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Cologne

art

"The Heart of Enlightenment: Buddhist Art from China (550-600)" displays Buddhist stone sculptures and ink-rubbings of monumental texts chiseled into mountains of Shandong province during the Northern Qi dynasty.
Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst
Until Jan. 10
☎ 49-221-2212-8608
www.museenkoeln.de

Frankfurt

photography

"Barbara Klemm Strassen Bilder" showcases about 60 photographs of streets around the world by the German photographer.
MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst
Until Nov. 22
☎ 49-69-2123-0447
www.mmk-frankfurt.de

Geneva

art

"Rembrandt, Rubens, Ruisdael and Beyond" examines the evolution and changing subjects of Dutch and Flemish printmaking in the 17th century.
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire
Until Jan. 3
☎ 41-22-4182-600
www.ville-ge.ch/mah/

The Hague

dance

"Holland Dance Festival 2009" stages more than 60 dance performances, 100 workshops, and a dance parade with over 1,200 amateur dancers.
Holland Dance Festival
Oct. 28-Nov. 15
☎ 31-70-3561-176
www.hollanddancefestival.com

Hamburg

art

"Obscure: Celebrating Klaus Hegewisch's 90th birthday" exhibits more than 120 works from a private collection, including art by Albrecht Dürer, Jacques Callot, Francisco de Goya, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Odilon Redon and James Ensor.
Hamburger Kunsthalle
Until Jan. 10
☎ 49-40-4281-3120-0
www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de

London

dance

"Mark Morris Dance Group": As part of the Dance Umbrella festival, American choreographer Mark Morris and his troupe return to Sadler's Wells with two programs.
Sadler's Wells Theatre
Oct. 27-31
☎ 44-20-7863-8198
www.sadlerswells.com

Madrid

film

"LesGaiCineMad" features more than 80 films centered on themes of homosexuality, showing at cinemas all around Madrid.
Oct. 29-Nov. 9
☎ 34-91-5930-540
www.lesgaicinemad.com

art

"Dance of Colors: Nijinsky's Eye and Abstraction" showcases paintings, drawings and gouaches by Russian choreographer Vaslaw Nijinsky (1889-1950), marking the centenary of the Ballets Russes' debut in Paris.
Fundación Mapfre
Until Dec. 20
☎ 34-91-5814-176
www.exposicionesmapfrearte.com/danza/

Munich

art

"Erwin Wurm" displays modern sculptures by the Austrian artist, featuring cars, clothes, potatoes and cucumbers.
Lenbachhaus Kunstbau
Until Jan. 31
☎ 49-89-2333-2000
www.lenbachhaus.de

Paris

ethnography

"From Byzantium to Istanbul" exhibits 300 objects from Turkish, French and international public collections, in an analysis of Istanbul's history.
Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais
Until Jan. 25
☎ 33-1-4013-4800
www.rmn.fr

comic strips

"Astérix at the Cluny Museum" presents 30 original plates used to produce the famous Astérix comic books by Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny, marking the strip's 50th birthday.
Musée National du Moyen Age-Musée de Cluny
Oct. 28-Jan. 3
☎ 33-1-5373-7800
www.musee-moyenage.fr

art

"Art Nouveau Revival 1900. 1933. 1966. 1974" explores Art Nouveau's decline in popularity and its art scene comeback in the '30s and '60s.
Musee d'Orsay
Until Feb. 4
☎ 33-1-4049-4814
www.musee-orsay.fr

Strasbourg

art

"Hans Haug, Man of Museums: Passion at Work" honors curator Hans Haug, who became director of the collective ensemble of Strasburg's museums in 1946.
Heitz Gallery at the Rohan Palace
Until Feb. 28
Tel: 33-3-8852-5000
www.musees-strasbourg.org

Vienna

ceramics

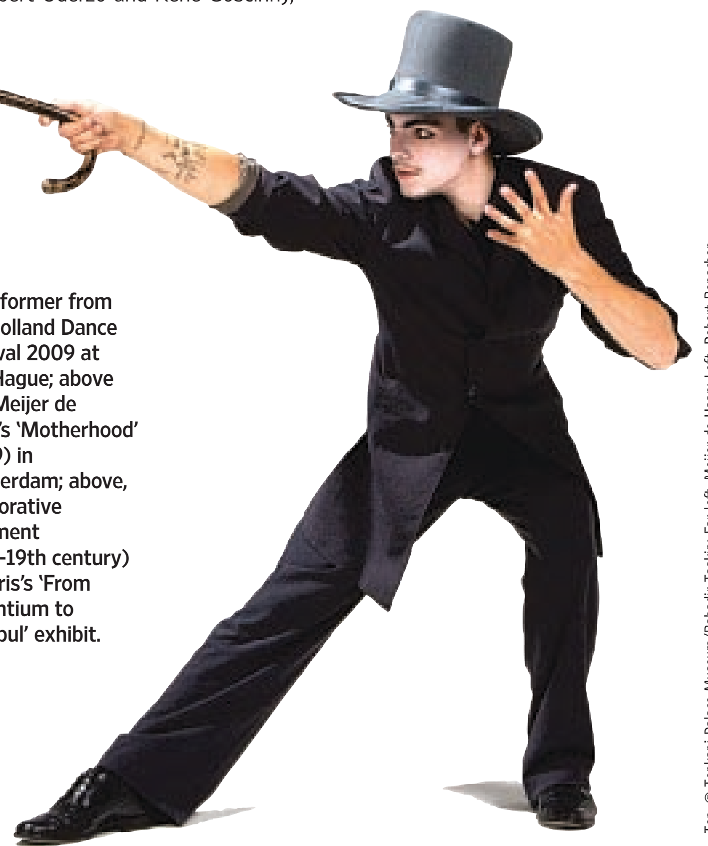
"Chawan" displays hand-made tea bowls known as chawans from the eighth to the 21st century made in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.
MAK- Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst
Until March 28
☎ 43-1-7113-60
www.mak.at

Zurich

photography

"The Herzog Collection: Switzerland in Photography 1840-1960" presents photographs depicting the evolution of the Swiss state from 1840 to 1960.
Landesmuseum Zurich
Until Feb. 28
☎ 41-44 2186-511
www.musee-suisse.com

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.



A performer from the Holland Dance Festival 2009 at The Hague; above left, Meijer de Haan's 'Motherhood' (1889) in Amsterdam; above, a decorative ornament (18th-19th century) at Paris's 'From Byzantium to Istanbul' exhibit.

Top, © Topkapi Palace Museum/Bahadir Taskin; Far left, Meijer de Haan; Left, Robert Benschop