



Books and arts

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Updated: 3-20

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British foreign secretaries: Pessimists v optimists

Tensions between two styles of foreign policy have endured for 200 years

Choose Your Weapons: The British Foreign Secretary, 200 Years of Argument, Success and Failure. By Douglas Hurd. Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 414 pages; GBP25. Buy from Amazon.co.uk

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The financial crisis and the future of regulation: Blame game

Two influential economists take a potshot at financial policymakers. Why don't their criticisms add up?

Freefall: America, Free Markets and the Sinking of the World Economy. By Joseph Stiglitz. Norton; 361 pages; \$27.95. Allen Lane; GBP25. Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

13 Bankers: The Wall Street Takeover and the Next Financial Meltdown. By Simon Johnson and James Kwak. Pantheon, 280 pages; \$26.95. Buy from Amazon.com ...

The financial crisis explained: A novel view

Wit and wisdom for the general reader

IOU: Why Everyone Owes Everyone and No One Can Pay. By John Lanchester. Simon & Schuster; 223 pages; \$25. Published in Britain by Allen Lane as "Whoops! Why Everyone Owes Everyone and No One Can Pay"; GBP20. Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

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New theatre: In the round

The pleasures of being a contrarian

LUC BONDY, a mischievous 61-year-old Swiss theatre and opera director, thrives on controversy. He provoked sections of the audience at the Metropolitan Opera in New York to boo his recent production of Puccini's "Tosca". Directorial touches such as Scarpia being pleased by prostitutes and Cavaradossi painting a bare-breasted Mary Magdalene were not universally admired. He is not apologetic: "It makes me more famous than I was," he says.

Mr Bondy was already quite famous. A precise, inventive director, he has run two of Germany's most prestigious theatre companies, the Berliner Ensemble and the Schaubuhne. His opera productions have included a memorable "Don Carlos" at the Royal Opera House. His "Tosca" moves on to La Scala in Milan and then to the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich. ...

New poetry: In full flight

A magnificent late achievement

White Egrets. By Derek Walcott. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 96 pages; \$24. Faber; GBP12.99. Buy from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

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Prophets of the financial crisis: All geek to them

A handful of outsiders come out of the crisis in credit

The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine. By Michael Lewis. Norton; 266 pages; \$27.95. Allen Lane; GBP25. Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

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The proliferation business: Unstoppable?

The illicit nuclear trade flourishes because governments let it

Peddling Peril: How the Secret Nuclear Trade Arms America's Enemies. By David Albright. Free press; 304 pages; \$27. Buy from Amazon.com

EVER since the atom was split, governments have struggled to control a force with potential for good that can also wreak awful destruction. Some argue it is impossible to stop technologies that can keep the lights on from being used to make bombs. That is a sobering thought in a world ready to re-embrace relatively carbon-free nuclear power. But David Albright, a respected chronicler of undercover nuclear shenanigans, tells a more alarming story: just how little most governments have done to halt the bomb's spread. ...

Scandinavian crime fiction: Inspector Norse

Why are Nordic detective novels so successful?

THE neat streets of Oslo are not a natural setting for crime fiction. Nor, with its cows and country smells, is the flat farming land of Sweden's southern tip. And Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, is now associated more with financial misjudgment than gruesome murder. Yet in the past decade Nordic crime writers have unleashed a wave of detective fiction that is right up there with the work of Dashiell Hammett, Patricia Highsmith, Elmore Leonard and the other crime greats. Nordic crime today is a publishing phenomenon. Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy alone has sold 27m copies, its publishers' latest figures show, in over 40 countries. The release this month in Britain and America of 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo', the film of the first Larsson book, will only boost sales.

The transfer to the screen of his sprawling epic (the author died suddenly in 2004 just as the trilogy was being edited and translated) will cement the Nordics' renown. The more unruly subplots have been eliminated, leaving the hero, a middle-aged financial journalist named Mikael Blomkvist (Michael Nyqvist), and an emotionally damaged computer hacker, Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace, pictured above), at the centre of every scene. The small screen too has had a recent visit from the Swedish police. Starting in 2008, British television viewers have been treated to expensive adaptations of the books of Henning Mankell, featuring Kenneth Branagh as Kurt Wallander. The BBC series has reawakened interest in Mr Mankell's nine Wallander books, which make up a large slice of his worldwide sales of 30m in 40 languages. ...

Henri Matisse: Ascent of a master

A new exhibition expands what we know about how Matisse worked

ON A trip to Chicago to give a lecture, John Elderfield, then chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, dropped in to see how conservation of Henri Matisse's monumental painting, "Bathers by a River", was coming along. He was hooked. The result, five years later, is an exhibition that dramatically changes established ideas about the artist's work and working methods.

A scholar, Mr Elderfield has always been attracted to questions that are hard to answer. He is from the tough former mining county of Yorkshire, which may have shaped his conviction that if an undertaking is easy, it isn't worth doing. During his more than 30 years at MoMA (he retired in 2008), there were many thorny problems to engage him. Quite a few concerned Matisse. His 1992 exhibition, "Henri Matisse: A Retrospective", was a tremendous popular and critical success. He imagined he had probably given the subject everything he could. But not at all, it turned out. His "Matisse Picasso", the first major exhibition devoted to these two giants, opened in 2003. Only a couple of years later, in Chicago, he was enmeshed again. ...

Artists in 19th-century Britain: Outsider

A new biography highlights the life and work of a British artist and the women he loved

Into the Frame: The Four Loves of Ford Madox Brown. By Angela Thirlwell. Chatto & Windus; 328 pages; GBP25. Buy from Amazon.co.uk

THE Pre-Raphaelites and their 'œstunners', as Dante Gabriel Rossetti called his models, have long been the object of fascination. Perhaps that is why so little has been written about Ford Madox Brown (1821-93), a painter who, though closely associated with them, never joined their fraternity. With his upbringing and early training in France and Belgium, Brown was always the outsider. Angela Thirlwell's 'œInto the Frame', a carefully researched and sympathetic biography of Brown and the four women he loved, helps fill that gap, while making a valuable contribution to the growing literature about women who have figured in the lives of prominent men. ...

American power: Empire state

Encircling the globe

Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power.
By Bruce Cumings. Yale University Press; 641 pages; \$38 and GBP30.
Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

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New fiction: Ian McEwan: Mr Sunshine

How not to write "state-of-the-nation" fiction

Solar. By Ian McEwan. Nan A. Talese; 304 pages; \$26.95. Jonathan Cape; GBP18.99. Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

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Mothers in China: Sobs on the night breeze

The centre of global gendercide

Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love.
By Xinran. Chatto & Windus; 224 pages; GBP16.99. Buy from
Amazon.co.uk

DURING the past 30 years of economic reform, China has made what is probably history's largest single improvement to human welfare, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty. Yet millions have also been crushed by the vast engine of Chinese growth—and it is among these that Xinran Xue (who uses only her first name) finds her stories. In previous works of oral history, she has rescued from the chaos that is modern Chinese record-keeping personal narratives of her grandparents' generation (‘China Witness’, 2008) and of women caught in China's endless political turmoil (‘The Good Women of China’, 2002). In her latest book, ‘Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother’, she turns to the relationship between women and their daughters in tales of loss and often unthinkable heartache. ...

White Africans on the screen: A tribe in trouble

The short sad life of whites in Africa

Correction to this article

TWO compelling documentaries illuminate the dilemmas facing Africa's dwindling white tribes. One is set in Zimbabwe, the other in Kenya. The Zimbabwean film, "Mugabe and the White African", is the more straightforward and should be shown as widely as possible to help end one of Africa's great tragedies: the ruin of one of the continent's most successful countries and the moral bankruptcy of the governments of the nearby states (bar plucky Botswana) for failing to isolate and oust a vile dictator. ...

British politics: Ties that bind

Andrew Rawnsley's political vivisection

The End of the Party: the Rise and Fall of New Labour. By Andrew Rawnsley. Viking; 802 pages; GBP25. Buy from Amazon.co.uk

LABOUR under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown has ruled Britain for longer than any non-Conservative government in the past 100 years. With an election due in the next three months, there is a real chance that the last days of Pompeii are upon us. How will history judge New Labour as an idealistic attempt to improve lives through a blend of free-market economics and social justice, or a cynical sucking of power from longstanding and broadly functioning institutions to a small group of media-hungry, manipulative politicians? ...

A journalist in the Middle East: Golden notebook

Trying to tell it how it is

Dining with al-Qaeda: Three Decades Exploring the Many Worlds of the Middle East. By Hugh Pope. Thomas Dunne; 352 pages; \$26.99 and GBP18.99. Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

PALESTINE is yesterday's news, sighed a bored editor as he rejected Hugh Pope's offering. It was a familiar reaction. Mr Pope, a principled and thoughtful reporter, tramped the Middle East for 30 years in a forlorn bid to decipher its subtleties to a Western readership encased in its own prejudices: moderates versus radicals; an Arab-Israeli peace process that would work were it not sabotaged by Palestinian violence; Islamic Iran as the mortal enemy of Western civilisation. After his long time on the road, Mr Pope's sad conclusion is that all the words he wrote, and all the risks he took, had made no perceptible difference to the crude way a largely insensitive and meddling West views a dysfunctional region. ...

The bloody age of Vyacheslav Molotov: Bullying bibliophile

Stalin's violent henchman and his library may have inspired a modern classic

Molotov's Magic Lantern: A Journey in Russian History. By Rachel Polonsky. Faber and Faber; 388 pages; GBP20. Buy from Amazon.co.uk

EXPATRIATE spouses living pampered lives in Moscow often think it would be nice to write a book about their time there. The material is irresistible: vastness, extremes, depths and delights. But the trite, coy and overly personal jottings that result often prove quite resistible. Rachel Polonsky moved to Moscow with her lawyer husband and stayed for a decade. Her perceptive and erudite book is the exception and sets a standard to freeze the ink in others' pens. ...

John Browne's memoirs: Oil painting

Business and the bedroom

Beyond Business. By John Browne. Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 310 pages; GBP20. Buy from Amazon.co.uk

DURING his 12 years as boss of BP, John Browne was the master of many complicated briefs. He launched three big takeovers, sparking a wave of consolidation that reshaped the industry; to the horror of his peers, he admitted that oil firms had a part to play in the fight against global warming; he invested in Russia's lucrative but lawless oil business with much greater success than other Western oil firms and he made pots of money for BP's shareholders, year after year. ...

University education in America: Professionalising the professor

The difficulties of an American doctoral student

The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University. By Louis Menand. Norton; 174 pages; \$24.95 and GBP17.99. Buy from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk

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