

in turn lowers the labor value of American workers. Another of the costs is less obvious: Inexpensive goods devalue the notion of craft. "The ennoblement of Cheap," writes Shell, "marks a particularly radical departure in American culture and a titanic shift in our national priorities." The author traces that departure across a trajectory of opinion in which, a century ago, the purchase of mass-produced, inexpensive goods was considered a lapse of taste. This view was largely undone by pioneering merchants such as John Wanamaker (of Philadelphia department-store fame) and Eugene Ferkauf (of Korvette's), as well as the post-World War II emergence of a particularly acquisitive consumer culture that, as John Kenneth Galbraith grumbled, nursed a battery of "wants that previously did not exist." Shell's pronouncements on economics get a bit fuzzy, but her *Silent Spring*-like moralizing about the effects of superabundant, indifferently made goods will find an eager audience among acolytes of the uncluttered, simple, debt-free life.

Diligent, useful cultural criticism, akin to Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2004) and Tom Vanderbilt's *Traffic* (2008).

Sillitoe, Alan

GADFLY IN RUSSIA

Aurum/Trafalgar (256 pp.)

\$16.95 paperback original

Jul. 1, 2009

ISBN: 978-1-906217-58-7

The Cold War-era Russian travels of the noted British novelist.

"Gadabout" is a more appropriate term than "gadfly," since Sillitoe (*New and Collected Stories*, 2005, etc.)—the Angry Young Man of *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1960) fame—seldom sinks his Socratic stinger into the flesh of Soviet society. The impulse that took him to Russia in 1967 was more of the let's-go-see-what-there-is-to-see sort, even if he was better equipped than most daytrippers—not only with his own car but also with hand-drawn maps showing, strategically, the location of gas stations and other necessities. Arriving from Finland, Sillitoe encountered signs of the times: "A young man played a Beatles tape: 'We all live in a yellow submarine...'" and two Swedish mariners were trying to kiss a couple of Russian girls." He also met his Passepartout, an official escort named George Andjapasidze, who eventually became the author's good friend. Sillitoe's path took him across western Russia and through the Iron Curtain to Yugoslavia, a winding itinerary "from the Baltic to the Adriatic." Though not looking for trouble, he certainly found it, for the young literature students he encountered were, like their Western counterparts, in a rebellious spirit. A frank conversation, a speech before a writer's group, a coincidental defection of a Soviet writer, and Sillitoe now finds himself less welcome in the country—and increasingly censored.

A sly, readable literary travelogue that stretches from the '60s to the present, chronicling eternal verities and changing moods alike.

Steinberger, Michael

AU REVOIR TO ALL THAT:

Food, Wine, and the

End of France

Bloomsbury (288 pp.)

\$25.00

Jul. 1, 2009

ISBN: 978-1-59691-353-0

A culinary expedition through France hunting for the root of the slow decline of the country's acclaimed food and wine traditions.

Slate wine columnist Steinberger introduces his subject by asking, "Did [the French] no longer care to be the world's gastronomic beacon?" In 2007, the author traveled to Paris for answers, kicking off his research by interviewing the eminent chef Guy Savoy, then briefly retracing the history of the country's cuisine, beginning in the 16th century. He elucidates how the years under François Mitterand and Jacques Chirac, rife with economic stagnation, hurt restaurants, while newly rich patrons in Britain and the United States "bankrolled gastronomic revolutions" abroad. Steinberger also conferred with other famous chefs—including Alain Ducasse—and local makers of wine and cheese, asking for their thoughts on the state of culinary affairs. He illustrates how the dawn of the "Michelin [Guide] era" affected the global restaurant world, and met with the company's current head, Frenchman Jean-Luc Naret, who confided that, contrary to some chefs' suspicions that factors like nice bathrooms boost scores, "What matters is what's on the plate." Though modern French cooking has been the subject of many books, Steinberger's meticulous research and personal hunger for objective truths bring surprising discoveries to light. A chapter about endangered cheeses, for instance, explains that increased standards of hygiene have meant fewer bacteria in milk, a change that has completely altered the production of Camembert. The author also wonders about the impact of France's growing ethnic population on traditional restaurants, a question connected to the larger issue of who or what defines modern France and, by extension, its food.

An offering of fresh and engaging insights for foodies and Francophiles alike. (*Agent: Larry Weissman/Larry Weissman Literary*)

Taeckens, Michael—Ed.

LOVE IS A FOUR-LETTER

WORD: True Stories of

Breakups, Bad Relationships,

and Broken Hearts

Plume (304 pp.)

\$16.00 paperback original

Jul. 28, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-452-29550-6

A compendium of personal essays and cartoons about heartbreak, penned by 23 contemporary American writers.

Editor Taeckens, publicity director for Algonquin Books, gathers a disparate group to share their private travails about love gone wrong. The authors range from married to single, straight to gay and transgendered, and they describe vastly different periods of their lives, from Patty Van Norman's messily scrawled childhood breakup letter ("Dear Ugly and Dear Fatso") to Jami Attenberg's cynical account of a near-reconciliation with a cheating boyfriend, composed in the second person. Many of the stories voice a shared sentiment—a desire to be loved the way the authors have always wanted. Standouts include Junot Díaz's "Homecoming, with Turtle," Gary Shteyngart's "Texas" and Maud Newton's "Conversations You Have at Twenty." Humorist Dan Kennedy, author of the acerbic 2008 memoir *Rock On*, crafts a hilarious piece about dating a divorced aerobics instructor a decade older than he, but Josh Kilmer-Purcell's account of devoting a year to matching his age (25) with casual sex partners falls flat. In "Leave Me Something When You Leave Me," Brock Clarke experiments with repetition, but the