

resto



French Kiss

SAVORING THE PARISIAN PLEASURES OF THE WEST LOOP’S NEW MARKET

By Michael Nagrant

I’M TRYING TO IMAGINE MAYOR DALEY MAKING OUT WITH A SUPERMODEL. Thankfully I’m not really spending much time thinking about his sputtering sweating visage as much as imagining what kind of daddy issues a supermodel would really need to make that happen.

Though I’m sure he dreams of dripping Italian-beef gravy on Carla Bruni’s naked body, Daley is no Nicolas Sarkozy. However, he did finally realize a bit of the French dream when he allocated eight million of his secret-slush-fund, err, I mean tax-increment-financing dollars, to open Chicago’s burgeoning French Market in the west part of the Ogilvie Transportation Center on December 3.

Finally, clout we can believe in. Well, sort of. Though the market’s six weeks old, for most of the last month, many of the stands weren’t at full operation, and some had yet to open. You’d think Daley would be hoisting a glass of Old Style in celebration, but as of last week Frietkoten’s beer taps were still empty since they haven’t received their liquor license. (They must have donated too much to aldermanic thorns in Daley’s side like Bob Fioretti, Brendan Reilly and Scott Waguespack.)

On my first few visits the whole thing felt a little half-baked, like I imagine the whole idea of this thing went down in the first place: I see Mayor Daley on some European tour getting shuttled around in a private double-decker bus by the East End equivalent of the Chevy Chase character in “European Vacation” saying “Oy, ‘ere’s Big Ben, Parliament.” Eventually the whole trip ends up in Paris at the Marché d’Aligre with pan au chocolat dripping from Daley’s craw and him saying, “We gotta get us one of dem markets back in Chicawgo.”

But, lest I sound ungrateful, I’m all for anything that dispels the myth that Chicago’s all about deep-dish-pizza-slurping, hotdog-guzzling fatties committed to Cheez Whiz, green can parmesan and over-oxygenated bloody-red deli-counter meats. This new market is a step in the right direction, and has increased the quality lunch options tenfold in the food desert that is the eastern part of the West Loop.

I do wish the whole affair was regulated with some of the discipline of the Green City Market which allows only sustainable producers. Right now there are about five too many bakeries and far too much congealed steam-table fare (here’s looking at you Bowl Square). The charcuterie and fresh meats on offer are also a bit anemic, and prices overall skew in to the movie-theater-popcorn-gouging range, but there are still plenty of great food finds. Here are my favorites:

Saigon Sisters

Speaking of gouging, charging \$7 for a banh mi when pretty much every other spot in town charges \$3 is pretty gutsy. However, the quality of the meats here from duck confit to braised Duroc pork belly isn’t exactly your average Vietnamese Spam-like pate, and you generally get what you pay for, except for the gristly rubbery overcooked short rib on the “Suntanned Cow” banh mi. My favorite is the luscious pork meatball sandwich, bursting with basil, scallion and ginger pungency, sort of what might happen if D’Amato’s and Nhu Lan bakery had a culinary love child.

Frietkoten

I’d almost consider moving to the far west suburbs just so I could take a cone of these spuds on the Metra with me every night. Though they’re not the best I’ve ever had, maybe because they’re only fried in pedestrian Canola, they’re cooked to order, well seasoned and perfect for the connoisseur who loves a touch of crunch and a lot of snowy light potato fluff inside their fries. The curry mayo dipping sauce is a good accompaniment.

Vanille Patisserie

There might be ten baked good spots in the new French Market, but only Vanille would probably survive in a real Parisian market. Vanille is easily one of the top three patisseries in Chicago, and their pistachio macarons, mille-feuille and lemon curd tarts prove it.

Pastoral Artisan

One of the best cheese mongers in the city, it’s also one of the market’s best sandwich makers. Don’t miss the B.L.T.A featuring house-made Prosciutto bacon with avocado, tomato, mayo and greens.

Flip Crepes

While digging in to the Banatella, or banana, Nutella, and rum-soaked raisin crepe here, I was utterly baffled as to how Häagen Dazs hasn’t made this one of their flagship ice cream flavors.

Chicago French Market, 131 North Clinton, (312)575-0306. 7:30am-7:30pm, Monday-Friday; 8:30am-6pm, Saturday.

words

READINGS

THU/14

→ Ha Jin

The author discusses his work as part of the “Writers on the Record with Victoria Lautman” series.
Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm. Free.

→ So You Think You Have Nerves of Steel?

With Chris Bower, Jill Summers, Harold Ray, Amanda Marbais.
Quimby’s, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

FRI/15

→ Cindy St. John, Julie Strand

The Dancing Girl Press poets read from their work.
Quimby’s, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

SAT/16

Caprice Crane

The author discusses “A Family Affair.”
The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

→ Greg Kot

The Chicago Tribune music critic discusses his book, “Ripped: How the Wired Generation Revolutionized Music.”
Revolution Books, 1103 N. Ashland. 2pm. Free.

SUN/17

→ Orange Alert Reading Series

Featuring Max Glaessner, Brian Murphy, Marla Seidell and Kevin Whiteley.
The Whistler, 2421 N. Milwaukee, (773)227-3530. 6pm. Free.

TUE/19

→ Alexander Aciman, Emmett Rensin

The author discuss “Twitterature.”
57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th, (773)684-1300. 6pm. Free.

WED/20

Kathleen Rooney

The author discusses “For You, For You I Am Trilling These Songs.”
Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.

Local Author Night

Featuring Troy Taylor, Bryan Alaspa, Ursula Bielski.
The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

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NEWCITY



The Players 2010

Pictured above: Comedy actor
Tara DeFrancisco, No. 36

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Literary Strangers

FICTION REVIEW

By Tom Lynch

REMARKABLY, THIS HAS NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE.

Taking inspiration from the Houghton Mifflin “Best” series, Dalkey Archive Press launches a new, unbelievably ambitious series of its own, “Best European Fiction,” and its inaugural edition for 2010 is edited by Chicago’s own Aleksandar Hemon. Attempting to solve the well-known literary problem of Americans not reading—nor being exposed to—literature from other countries, this anthology includes thirty-five short stories and novel excerpts from thirty different European countries, aiming to destroy the invisible shield that prevents such material from being translated into English and released in this country.

Dalkey Archive Press has been fighting the good fight for years in trying to get European authors delivered to American readers, so it comes as no surprise that this anthology is bulky, geographically expansive and features a selection of authors who, to put it bluntly, no one has ever heard of. Alasdair Gray, from Scotland, and Julian Rios, from Spain, have probably the largest audience among Americans—but even among bookworms, their audience is still tragically small. In that way, “Best European Fiction” is not only an introduction to the work of other countries, it’s also a view through the eyes of literary strangers, which makes it all the more compelling. To say the collection “transcends boundaries” would be insufferably predictable and downright cheesy, but perhaps there isn’t a better, or more important, way to praise it.

Anthologies such as this are most often edited by famous authors—in this case Hemon—and feature more than one introductory piece. In his, Hemon discusses the obvious importance of American audiences maintaining an open door to European literature, unveiling in his first sentence the embarrassing but not shocking statistic that only three-to-five percent of the works of literature published in the U.S. are translations. America’s isolation from the rest of the world in literature, its “disengagement” with the work of other countries, is not only ignorant, but dangerous. The phenomenon of American detachment seems to spread all around the arts—in foreign film, music, theater and more, we only scratch the surface. “White Teeth” author Zadie Smith provides a preface praising the collection that follows.

Like any anthology of this kind, there are hits and misses; there hasn’t been a perfect “Best” edition published yet. But Dalkey and Hemon succeed in providing more accomplished stories herein than not. With no apparent arcing theme, the stories are sorted alphabetically by country, a mechanical method that serves no obvious purpose and that one would hope would be abandoned in future editions. Hemon’s written some beautiful, deeply emotional novels, but he’s certainly not a humorless man, and his inclusion of Julian Gough’s “The Orphan and the Mob” is inspired. Gough, from Ireland, balances his humor and slapstick-like absurdity with a curious heart. Albania’s Ornela Vorpsi begins the collection with an excerpt from her novel, “The Country Where No One Ever Dies,” and her ability to evoke sadness in pride makes the reader want to get a copy of the novel, fast.

Because I’m an incurable sucker for nostalgia and bittersweetness, my favorite story in the collection is by the Netherlands’ Stephan Alter, titled “Resistance,” about a chess instructor and the meetings between he and his students. The story begins with his death, and what follows is a recollection, a retread of a lovely past. “Resistance” is a memory. Take that to mean whatever you want.

Another highlight is “The Sky Over Thingvellir,” penned by Iceland’s Steinar Bragi, about the failing relationship between two young lovers. (Leave it to Iceland to inject the anthology with some emo. One can almost hear Sigur Ros’ inevitable soundtrack.) Bragi achieves a stark reality with his two bitter characters, one that’s as off-putting as it is familiar. A fine work.

There are duds here as well. Christine Montalbetti’s “Hotel Komaba Eminence (with Haruki Murakami)” rings false, a sort-of love letter to the famous author, with clunky, grown-inducing lines like “We’re all disc jockeys for our own internal radio stations.” Come to think of it, that sounds like something Murakami would write. (I’ve always found the writer pedestrian.)

Nothing upset me more than the horror-overkill of Michal Witkowski’s “Didi,” a never-ending devastation tale filled to the brim with shit, stench and horrific sex. Enough already.

But, in the end, like most of the anthologies like these, the curators have enough good taste to choose more solid stories than not, making this flagship edition of the new series a worthy launching pad. If Dalkey can keep it up, this could easily become the most important annual literary anthology in America. Which is ironic.

“Best European Fiction 2010”
Edited by Aleksandar Hemon
Dalkey Archive Press, 416 pages, \$15.95

OPEN FOR BUSINESS
SARCA



IT’S BEEN JUST SIX WEEKS since the opening of Sarca, but the store has already made its mark on the Chicago fashion scene—and its closets. Opened in early December by Alexis Cozzini, the high-end women’s clothing shop is a treasure trove of edgy finds. “I had known just in the back of my mind over the years brands that I wanted to have in my store when I opened it,” Cozzini says. She’s certainly had a lot of time to ruminate—she broke into the fashion biz at the tender age of 15.

“I worked in Lincoln Park at Celeste Turner,” she says. “It’s not there anymore, but it was like the hottest boutique at the time. I worked there after school in high school... and I loved it.”

Following up with positions in New York at heavy hitters such as Calvin Klein and Intermix, Cozzini’s passion for fashion continued to grow. Returning to her hometown roots after college, she made her move in the wake of a struggling economy.

“It was just kind of perfect timing,” she says. “You can always think of an excuse not to start. The down economy was kind of an opportunity, because you can find some great rent sales, [and] you have the opportunity to negotiate on your buys,” she says.

Drawing inspiration from international magazines (with which Cozzini is also familiar, having interned at Fitness in New York), travel and fashion shows around the world, she began to collect an eclectic mix of exclusive finds.

“I try to buy more for variety of designers than I do for variety of particular lines,” she says. Favoring lines like the tongue-in-cheek German Markus Lupfer, Tania Spinelli and British-born Jane Carr to name a few, Sarca is full of both sass and bide, (coincidentally another fave brand).

“You can come in here and find anything [you] need to fill that wardrobe gap,” she says. And then, there’s also the classic staple. “Literally, everything!”

Like her favorite Jane Carr wool silk-blend scarves. Or a pair of killer sexy boot heels. Integrating animal-esque décor with its fur-heavy stock, Sarca is also your one-stop shop for all things fuzzy. “The designers knew I had a lot of fur coming in for winter, so they played on the different elements of those. I like to call it urban rustic chic.”

Or call it unique. Ordering just one or two sizes of all of her items, Cozzini suggests scooping up finds while you can. “It’s nice too because if you’re here, you don’t see a ton of people wearing the same thing walking down the street,” she says. “It keeps the inventory fresh.” (Nicole Brieze)

Sarca, 710 North Wabash, (312)255-0900, shopsarca.com

THU/14

Tula’s Second Annual Warehouse Sale

Tula’s on-site warehouse sale will display color-coded racks displaying price categories of \$49, \$79, \$99, \$149, and \$199, making it easy to spend what you want. Get deals on wardrobe essentials from lines like Add Down, Hache, Inhabit, Nicole Farhi, and Three Dots, as well as accessories from Alexis Bittar, Philippa Roberts, Gustto and more. (773)549-2876. www.tulaboutique.com. Tula Ltd., 3738 N. Southport, 11-7. Also, FRI/15, 11-7, SAT/16, 11-6 and SUN/17, 12-5.

FRI/15

Urban Zen, Prodigal Sons Trunk Show

A group show featuring designers and artists from Chicago and New York City. Featured designers include Black Sheep

and Prodigal Sons (“Theft of Light” collection), URBAN ZEN, metalsmith Gillion Carrara, Jacki Holland and Catherine Jacobi. With a cocktail reception and hor d’oeuvres by Lula Cafe. Robin Richman. 2108 N. Damen, 5-8pm.

ONGOING

John Fluevog Sale

Up to sixty percent off on merchandise. John Fluevog Shoes, 1539-41 N. Milwaukee, (773)772-1983.

Recessionista Bride “Meet the Experts” Wedding Seminar

Meet the bridal experts to save some cash while enjoying wine and appetizers. CS Brides Editor Elise Hofer, whiteCHICAGO and others will be on hand to answer the questions that will drive the discussion. There are no presentations; the panel will supply budget saving tips. RSVP to rebecca@bettiebombpr.com. 6-8pm.