

The canonisation of St Greta

Only two options are allowed. You can act as a teenager that has just seen the light or be disowned as a climate-bashing, earth-hating cynic.

Johan Hakelius

Time for Europe to get tough on China

Few doubt that China will be the dominant global power in the second half of the century – in response, Europe must circle the wagons and bind ever closer together.

Walter Ellis

The changing face of Europe

Migration is not a new phenomenon. A new history of the continent since 1945 shows how violent upheavals have driven the flow of people and reshaped Europe.

Peter Gatrell

The Iron Lady turned to rust

The third and concluding volume of a landmark biography of Margaret Thatcher by Charles Moore is an utterly absorbing account of the leader who helped defeat communism

James Barr

p.15



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# THE CONSERVATIVE

A fortnightly Newspaper by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party | [theconservative.online](https://theconservative.online)



THE EPIC  
**BREXIT**  
SAGA

Iain Martin on  
the final push to  
get it resolved p.5

Photo: UK Parliament - Jessica Taylor





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## THE CONSERVATIVE

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## Austrian centre-right surges

On 29 September, the Austrian people were asked to go to the polls for an early general election, two years after the last one was held in 2017.

For the last two years, the Austrian Prime Minister, Sebastian Kurz, has governed in a coalition between his own centre-right Christian democratic Austrian People's Party (the ÖVP) and the right wing populist Freedom Party (the FPÖ).

In May this year, however, the then leader of the FPÖ, Heinz-Christian Strache, then serving as vice chancellor of Austria in the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, became embroiled in a corruption scandal exposed by a sting operation conducted in 2017. This triggered the collapse of the coalition, and of Kurz's government, leading to a vote for an early general election to resolve the crisis.

Kurz and the ÖVP won the election with a significant boost to their position in the Austrian lower house, the Nationalrat. They won 71 seats out of the available 183, and surged by 6% in the popular vote to a total of 37.5%.

Meanwhile, the government's former coalition partners, the FPÖ, haemorrhaged votes, losing ten seats and 10 percentage points in the polls. Parties who picked up seats included the Social Democrats (40), the Greens (26), and the New Austria and Liberal Forum (15).

Prime Minister Kurz now has to seek to form a coalition that can see his government reach the requisite 92 to have a majority in the Nationalrat. In theory this shouldn't be difficult – he is spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing a coalition partner for a new government.

However, he has expressed an unwillingness to return to his former coalition partners as a first choice in the negotiation process, perhaps in the conviction that they are now damaged goods.

Senior figures in the ÖVP who are close to Mr Kurz have said that a coalition with the Greens is now his first choice. The Greens increased their vote by ten percentage points, after failing to reach the 4% threshold to gain seats in the Nationalrat in 2017.

It is expected that Mr Kurz will try to win them over with pledges to invest in environmental projects designed to reduce Austria's carbon emissions.

Werner Kogler, leader of the Greens, has previously expressed concern that there is a wide disparity between the environmental priorities and social welfare policies of his party and those of Mr Kurz's previous government. But he has also said that he will actively seek discussions with Kurz to see if they can find common ground.

Already, in the local governments of Vorarlberg and the Tyrol, the ÖVP governs in coalition with the Greens. There are concerns amongst the



Photo: Shutterstock.com

Greens, however, that an alliance in national government might be politically damaging for them amongst their members, for whom Kurz's desire to curb immigration is unpopular.

An ÖVP-Green alliance would require significant compromises from both sides, one which would signal a shift in Austrian politics away from the right and towards the centre ground. Beyond environmental measures, the Greens would be likely to demand greater welfare spending and a relaxation of the ÖVP's tough stance on immigration. It would be a very different government from that run by the Prime Minister between 2017 and 2019.

Ultimately, this may not come to pass: the main opposition parties, the Social Democrats and the Freedom Party, have ruled out working with one another. This means that it could even be possible for Kurz to form a successful minority administration, dividing and ruling amongst the competing blocks of the Nationalrat. ■

## Tunisian outsider wins race

When Tunisia voted in the second round of the Presidential elections last Sunday, 13 October, they were faced with a fascinating choice between two starkly different political personalities.

It really was a fascinating contest: on the one hand, there was multimillionaire media mogul, Nabil Karoui, a secularist who fought both for boosting big business and championing the poorest in the country through measures to tackle unemployment. On the other, there was the conservative law professor, Kais Saied, an avowed enemy of corruption and cronyism, who has received the endorsement of Islamists.

Despite their differences, both Karoui and Saied are united in their status as political outsiders. Whoever won this election was billed to bring a shakeup to the political elites who have governed the country since the Arab Spring of 2011 and the creation of a democracy in 2014.

At the final count, Professor Saied won an emphatic 72.71 per cent of the votes cast by 2.7 million Tunisians. He won his landslide on a turnout of over 50 per cent of the electorate, which is seen as a positive by democrats in the country who feared that a loss of faith in the political system might easily have led to a low turnout. Speaking to his supporters after the results became known, Saied described them as a "revolution within the constitutional legitimacy".

Mr Karoui, however, has complained that he was unable to run a fair campaign due to his temporary imprisonment under charges of money laundering and tax fraud for several weeks before the first round of voting.



Photo: Thierry Meunier - Getty Images

Karoui ran upon a platform of increasing presidential powers over social and economic issues as a part of plans to liberalise the Tunisian economy. Despite losing the vote in the final round on Sunday he remains popular with some of the poorest regions of Tunisia, especially in the north-western hills close to the Algerian border.

Mr Saied also expressed a desire to do increase spending on the poorest regions of the country. He became popular during the campaign for his personal austerity and his seriousness of purpose. The perambulating professor notably spent little on his campaign, instead preferring to take to the streets and meet with people in the country's many cafés.

Saied's appeal is that he is seen by the voters as a "clean" figure, untainted by the corruption of the country's traditional political leaders. Supporting this image was his lack of association with any political parties – he ran as an independent.

He has promised to overhaul what he calls the "pyramid of power", by encouraging reforms to the political system to give local councils greater authority.

He is also known to have very conservative social views – he opposes

the decriminalisation of homosexuality and legislation that ensures equal inheritance for men and women.

Nonetheless, Saied has ridden into office with a great deal of support from young Tunisians. In his address to his supporters after his election, he thanked 'young people for turning a new page' and avowed that since "Young people led this campaign", he would hold himself 'responsible for them'.

The Tunisian President is the head of state, and not the head of government. The office comes with several important powers over diplomatic and military positions as well as the central bank, and has the capacity to give or withhold assent to laws. The President is not, however, in charge of the everyday processes of government and domestic legislation.

The fact that the socially conservative, economically liberal Muslim Democratic party are currently the largest party within the Tunisian Assembly of Representatives may just give him the opening he needs for a radical overhaul of the political and economic establishment. Or, yet again, his overwhelming election may only end up being a turning point at which Tunisian history fails to turn. ■



# PiS redraw the electoral map in Poland to claim VICTORY

### Radical welfare policies are beginning to attract traditional Polish liberal voters, potentially redrawing the electoral map

#### “A good time for Poland”

was the slogan at last Sunday's Polish general election of the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS). Clearly it had resonance with the electorate, since PiS retained power in the Polish Sejm with an overall majority, won a larger share of the vote than any party in the past 30 years and extended its support into areas formerly loyal to the opposition.

In contrast, it narrowly lost control of the Senate, the upper house of the Polish parliament, where it previously enjoyed a comfortable majority. That, along with PiS's failure to secure a two-thirds supermajority in the Sejm, which would have allowed him to draft a new constitution, will be the two disappointments marring PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski's enjoyment of what was otherwise a sweeping electoral endorsement. In any case, a supermajority, which would have required PiS to win 307 seats in the Sejm, was beyond the parameters of even the most favourable pre-election opinion polls.

The election turnout was 61.1 per cent, the highest for 30 years. The vote split 43.6 per cent to PiS (compared with 37.6 per cent at the last general election in 2015) and 27.4 per cent to Civic Coalition, an alliance of liberal parties centred on Civic Platform, a party founded by Donald Tusk, now European Council president, which ruled Poland from 2007 to 2015 (31.7 per cent in 2015).

The Left alliance ("Lewica"), after being expelled from the Sejm by the electorate in 2015, clawed back 12.5 per cent of the vote, so that socialism will again be represented, albeit modestly, in the new Sejm. The Polish Coalition, led by the Polish People's Party, the oldest political movement in the country, won 8.5 per cent and the right-wing Confederation, led by the colourful eccentric former MEP Janusz Korwin-Mikke, gained 6.8 per cent, sufficient to enter parliament.

The results announced by the Polish Electoral Commission awarded 235 seats in the Sejm to PiS, the same number it won in 2015. Since 231 seats constitute an overall majority, PiS is securely back in power. Civic Coalition won 134 seats, down from 166 in 2015. The Polish Coalition representation fell too: 30 seats, compared with 58. The new winners were the Left, returning to the Sejm

with 49 seats, and the right-wing Confederation with 11. The remaining seat went to a representative of the German minority community.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the relatively undramatic seat count in the new Sejm represents a static situation. PiS achieved several successes in the broader scheme of things. First of all, it discredited the orthodoxy among electoral commentators that a large turnout would result in its defeat. Instead, it retained its overall majority in the Sejm on a turnout more than 10 per cent higher than in 2015.

Of even more concern, though, to the Civic Coalition and other opposition parties will be the way in which the electoral map of Poland has changed during the course of 2019. That map reflects a population that is most conservative in the south-east and most liberal in the north-west. Those allegiances are not based on recent developments. So tenacious is cultural heritage in Polish society, they reflect the former borders of historically parti-

more years of PiS welfare benevolence and economic success – the growth rate was 5.1 per cent last year, the third highest in the EU – could change the entire political culture of Poland.

So, amid that catalogue of electoral successes, how did PiS lose control of the Senate? PiS declined significantly from 61 Senate seats to 48, with 51 required for a majority. The apparent explanation is the different electoral system used for the Senate, which since 2011 has been first-past-the-post in individual constituencies. The opposition, by agreement, fielded only one candidate in most Senate constituencies, so that a single individual was carrying the flag for multiple parties and thus attracting all of their votes.

That strategy worked. Civic Coalition increased its share of Senate seats from 34 to 43, the Polish Coalition won three, the Left two and four independents were elected. The arithmetic is not insuperable for PiS: one of the independents is a PiS supporter, which leaves open the possibility that, on some issues, one or two of the Polish Coalition senators might vote with PiS, to produce a draw or a majority of one.

The Senate's powers are not sufficient to block the PiS government programme. It has no role in overseeing the executive.

It may take 30 days to examine any legislation passed by the Sejm and amend or reject it; but that intervention can in turn be rejected by the Sejm. For amendments to the constitution the wording must be jointly approved by both the Sejm and the Senate, but without a two-thirds majority in the lower house PiS would not be embarking on constitutional reform anyway. The Senate does, however, have the power to veto the holding of referenda.

PiS's continuation in office and the failure of Donald Tusk's old party to regain power will be dismaying to EU integrationists. It is clear that PiS will resume its reforms of the Polish courts system and pursue a policy of national autonomy deplored by the Brussels bureaucracy. This result will confront EU bureaucrats with the limitations on curbing national sovereignty. In a wider context, it is likely to set politicians across Europe reflecting on the electoral appeal of social conservatism married to generous welfare provision promoting social mobility. ■



Photo: Carsten Koal - Getty Images

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# A short history of BREXIT

by Jack Dickens

Where did Brexit start? In the 2015 General Election, David Cameron and the Conservative party managed to win a majority in defiance of expectations. One of the key election pledges made by Cameron in the 2015 manifesto was that he would hold a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union by 2017.

In that referendum held on 23 June 2016, Britain voted to leave the EU by a majority of 52% to 48%. David Cameron, who had personally led the Remain campaign, resigned his position. He was succeeded by Theresa May who, although she had supported Remain, pledged to honour the referendum result.

May's negotiating hand was week-end when she lost her majority in the June 2017 general election, and she soon ran into difficulty over the Irish border question in 2017, an issue which had been largely drowned out by other policy questions during the referendum. Irish Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, expressed concerns about the return of a hard border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. The EU declared that any withdrawal treaty would have to ensure that it did not jeopardise the Good Friday Agreement between nationalists and unionists.

The result was the creation of the mechanism known as "the backstop", which was introduced into May's Withdrawal Agreement. This determined that, in order to prevent a hard border in Ireland, the whole of the UK would remain in the EU's Customs Union until an agreeable border solution could be found. This backstop did not specify a time limit or an exit mechanism.

When May put her deal to Parliament three times between January and March 2019, it was voted down each time by the House of Commons. After failing to pass a last vote through the Commons, May successfully sought extensions to the UK's Brexit deadline. The UK's departure date moved from 29 March to 31 October.

May resigned from office, and was succeeded as Conservative party leader and Prime Minister by Boris Johnson. Johnson declared that "the Backstop is dead" and pledged to take the UK out of the EU, with or without a deal, by the 31 October deadline.

On 3 September, however, twenty of his own MPs voted with the opposition to pass legislation designed to oblige the Prime Minister to rule out a No Deal, the so-called Benn Act.

Johnson renegotiated a new deal with the European Union. His deal, agreed by the European Council last week, has altered the controversial backstop which was present in May's Withdrawal Agreement. It has now been modified to include only Northern Ireland with both a time limit and exit mechanism.

After the government withdrew the bill from the House on Saturday, after the passage of the Letwin Amendment, it once again remains to be seen whether or not the latest Withdrawal Agreement will suffer the fate of its predecessors.

Boris Johnson says he is committed to getting Brexit done. ■

# European Council approves compromise Brexit deal

Both sides had to move to get a historic agreement, and both the EU and the UK secured victories in the latest negotiations

by Pieter Cleppe

EU leaders have been endlessly repeating that the binding part of the Brexit deal as it was negotiated by Theresa May in November 2018 was not up for negotiation. Yet in the end, that's what happened. Given the challenges of "no deal", the incomplete preparations for it on both sides, and how it could easily escalate into a blame game, this was a welcome development and a UK "win" in itself.

A revised agreement was approved by EU leaders at the latest European Council last week. But what were the individual wins for the two negotiating teams?

## UK WIN AN INDEPENDENT TRADE POLICY

The key problem with Theresa May's deal was that it wasn't guaranteed that the UK would be able to conduct an independent trade policy, as the "backstop" arrangements basically meant that the UK would be outsourcing its trade policy to Brussels until alternative arrangements to prevent a hard Irish border were agreed. The "Boris deal" changes that, as the UK will recover trade powers in any case when the transition period ends, at the end of 2022 at the latest. During the transition, the UK will keep full market access in return for aligning with all EU rules and outsourcing its trade policy to the EU. If it wants to, the UK can of course voluntarily extend the arrangements foreseen in the transition for a bit longer.

## EU WIN NORTHERN IRELAND TAKES EU REGULATIONS

In order to avoid regulatory checks between Ireland and Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland will be taking EU rules, thereby de facto remaining in the single market for goods permanently. Of course, the territory thereby also keeps full access to the EU's single market, which is a win of some sort for the UK.

## UK WIN NORTHERN IRELAND WILL REMAIN IN THE UK'S CUSTOMS ZONE

British negotiators managed to persuade the EU to agree that Northern Ireland will remain a part of the UK's customs territory permanently. This is no theoretical matter, as some have claimed, because residents of Northern Ireland will enjoy the benefits of trade deals negotiated by the UK, through a system of rebates.



Photo: Thierry Monasse - Getty Images

## EU WIN INTRA-UK CHECKS

Goods entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain or outside the EU will be subject to EU-level tariffs. There will also be regulatory checks, on top of the already existing checks of live animals between GB and NI.

## UK WIN THE INTRA-UK SEA CHECKS WILL BE LIMITED

The checks between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, in the Irish Sea, will be limited and will only hit companies, as personal goods and goods that "will not be subject to commercial processing in Northern Ireland" will be exempt.

Through the "Joint Committee", the EU will have a say in this, which is a slight UK concession, but then this is a considerable EU climbdown. French centrist MP Jean-Christophe Lagarde criticized that the deal outsources the protection of the EU's external border to the UK. EU negotiator Michel Barnier also admitted that "we cannot totally eliminate the risks", suggesting that the EU is tolerating some leaks in its - otherwise already quite leaky - external border.

The UK should appreciate the EU for its flexibility here. Perhaps any further EU concession here - to tolerate even fewer checks - could ultimately bring the DUP on board, as there would then be less reason for the party to request safeguards on Northern Irish "consent".

## UK WIN A UNILATERAL EXIT MECHANISM FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Irish Assembly will have the right to no longer align

with the EU as closely, if there is a simple majority for this in the assembly. It will only be able to do so four years after the end of the transition. If it votes to dissociate, a two years "cooling off" period follows, meaning that depending on when the transition ends, Northern Ireland can only abandon the close alignment with the EU in 2027 or 2029.

The DUP preferred a possibility to decide whether to opt into this arrangement right after Brexit, with a veto for both communities on this, claiming this aligns with the principle foreseen in the Good Friday Agreement that both communities need to be express "consent" with any big changes.

Then making sure that Northern Ireland follows the UK when it leaves the EU should be seen as a concession to unionists, while at the same time taking close alignment with the EU as a starting point should satisfy nationalists. In any case, agreeing to a unilateral exit mechanism linked to a time limit has for a long time been an absolute taboo for Ireland.

## SLIGHT EU WIN EU LAW ON VAT WILL APPLY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

After Brexit, the UK will be able to scrap the burdensome VAT system and replace it with a US-style sales tax, but that won't be possible in Northern Ireland. There, the UK will be responsible for collecting it. To soften the concession, the EU has agreed that the UK will be able to apply Ireland's reduced rates and exemptions for VAT in Northern Ireland, so the "tampon tax" can remain abolished there.

## UK WIN THE BINDING "LEVEL PLAYING FIELD" ARRANGEMENT HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A NON-BINDING ONE

Boris Johnson conceded to a "level playing field" arrangement, which comes down to a promise to not overly diverge from EU environmental and social rules, but this won't be enforceable, as it's part of the non-binding political declaration. This is unlike Theresa May's level playing field arrangement, which was part of the "backstop", even if it also lacked real teeth, given that the EU wasn't able to open arbitration proceedings against the UK if it thought the UK had disrespected its obligations.

Also scaled back, as the "backstop" was scrapped, is the role for the European Court of Justice, even if it keeps some role: when there is a question of EU law at stake in case of disputes related to the withdrawal agreement, the "arbitration panel" needs to ask it to rule, but interestingly, the arbitration panel itself will be able to decide when EU law is at stake, which somewhat dilutes the ECJ's powers.

## A BALANCED AGREEMENT AND SENSIBLE COMPROMISE

This renegotiation has resolved a lot of the legitimate concerns the UK had with Theresa May's deal. Concessions had to be made by both sides, and surely this still is an imperfect deal, but given the complex nature of Northern Irish politics, it's very hard to get it right. The EU and Ireland deserve credit for ultimately engaging, even if they had been dragging their feet for far too long. ■



# NEVER-ENDING BREXIT takes another plot twist

Britain's Prime Minister had hoped for rapid approval of the new Brexit deal agreed with EU leaders. But there are still more developments to come in this dramatic story



Photo: M. R. Williams - Getty Images



by Iain Martin

The British are famously adept at producing epic literary sagas involving a gothic setting. In the 19th century the English novelist Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein, a monstrous tale centred on an ill-advised experiment gone wrong. In the late 20th century much of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series took place at Hogwarts, a boarding school modelled on the austere architectural style made popular by the architects who designed buildings such as the Palace of Westminster.

But for dark drama and ludicrous plot twists, nothing can quite top the 21st century Brexit story as it has unfolded in the House of Commons since Britain voted in 2016 to leave the European Union. The tale is something akin to a cross between the feature film Groundhog Day, in which a weatherman is condemned to live the same day over and over again, and the Netflix series House of Cards that casts politics in such a bad light.

Then, on Saturday, the scriptwriters of Brexit produced their most implausible development yet in the entire series. Rather than endorsing the deal painstakingly agreed with the European Union, MPs in London voted for further delay. This ushered in the ongoing tussle over yet more extensions and a frantic row on whether or not the Commons will pass the Brexit legislation wanted by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and an understandably weary EU.

It does not mean that Brexit is off or the deal with the EU is dead. Rather, it means that it remains unresolved and there will now be occasion for days and weeks of more shouting and disagreement in Britain's parliament as a bewildered and increasingly frustrated British electorate looks on.

EU leaders - keen to get this sorted out one way or the other - sensibly regard it as a postponement.

At the British end, this process has grown ever more fraught. This year has been the parliamentary equivalent of a horror story, with endless arguments between MPs always opting to delay a moment of decision. At every stage, MPs have been able to agree on what they do not like. But they have been incapable of voting positively for a solution or a deal.

The botched attempts by the British to leave have so far led to the departure of two Tory Prime Ministers, David Cameron and Theresa May. Bitter divisions between and within Britain's political parties have spilled into rancorous public discourse. At times it has seemed as though Britain's long-established party system, built around the cen-

“  
The Brexit tale is something akin to a cross between the feature film Groundhog Day, in which a weatherman is condemned to live the same day over and over again, and the Netflix series House of Cards that casts politics in such a bad light.

tre-right Conservatives and the left-wing Labour party, and an array of smaller parties, would come apart at the seams. A string of MPs have resigned and crossed the floor, or now sit as independents.

In the country, the divisions between leave and remain have proved impossible to resolve. A vociferous Remain campaign has developed, demanding a rerun of the referendum. At the other end of the spectrum, Nigel Farage MEP, the leader of the insurgent Brexit party says loudly that any deal with the EU is surrender and doesn't count as a "real" Brexit.

In the middle of all this, trying to sort it out, is Boris Johnson. His hope at the weekend was that there would - finally - be closure on the first phase

of Brexit. MPs had gathered in London for the first sitting of the House of Commons to take place on a Saturday since the Falklands War in 1982.

What went wrong?  
On the agenda was a simple indicative vote to endorse or reject the deal that Johnson secured in Brussels at the latest meeting of the European Council last week. The Johnson deal, amending aspects of Theresa May's original and failed deal, involved a compromise on Northern Ireland and customs. The EU side was positive and going into the weekend Number 10 was optimistic that they had the numbers to pass a meaningful vote signalling approval by the Commons.

Unfortunately, nothing is so simple in the Brexit saga. By the time MPs met on Saturday morning, an extra layer of complication and confusion has been added. Oliver Letwin, a former Conservative and a veteran MP who has a reputation for over-complicating everything he gets involved in, had introduced an amendment. In essence, it sought to create a further delay. It stipulated that Johnson would have to pass the full legislation related to Brexit before the Commons would consider declaring - to the EU - that they approve of the deal.

MPs who want to stop Brexit completely spotted an opportunity and allied with Letwin. His amendment passed - 322 to 306 - effectively killing off Johnson's attempt to get headline

approval from MPs. The DUP, an Ulster Unionist party that previously propped up the Tory minority administration, has also been serially difficult.

All is far from lost though. The British government is pressing on and trying to get the legislation required through both the Commons and the House of Lords. The EU is monitoring the situation.

There are signs too that Johnson's determination to get Brexit done is building him a reputation as an unorthodox statesman with a longer-term future. Other European leaders, who found Theresa May extremely hard work socially, seem to have warmed to Johnson. At the Council they looked genuinely pleased to see him. He makes people laugh and uses charm to make progress.

It is worth remembering that Johnson was not given much of a chance of even getting close to securing a new

deal with the European Union. Yet he bartered an improved deal that is endorsed by the EU.

Other European leaders have noticed this and are planning ahead for relations after Brexit, assuming Johnson wins a subsequent British election.

Emmanuel Macron, President of France, has become an unexpected admirer of Johnson's approach to getting things done. At his press conference at the European Council, Macron said: "He (Johnson) is sometimes a colourful character, but it can be the case for all of us. He is who he is, but I believe he is a leader with genuine strategic vision, and those who did not take him seriously were wrong and will continue to be wrong."

That is an astute observation. In the weeks and months ahead, despite all the twist and turns, Johnson may yet get a happy ending - an orderly Brexit via his deal. ■







## ECR Group seeks tough measures to combat foreign political interference

Anna Fotyga, the ECR Group foreign affairs spokesperson, has warned that the European Parliament's adoption of a resolution on electoral interference should be backed up by more wide-ranging measures to combat cyber manipulation by foreign powers.

Fotyga said: "Although a majority of EU Member States have strengthened their capabilities in detecting and countering hostile propaganda, the problem is however still there and needs to be addressed at the highest levels."

She added: "The EU should develop effective measures making it much more difficult for foreign agents to operate inside the EU and force social media platforms to develop stricter rules to prevent their platforms being used for disinformation campaigns."

According to a survey conducted by the European Commission in November 2018, 59% of respondents said that they were concerned about cyber manipulation by foreign powers and criminal groups in domestic and European elections.

Various efforts have been made throughout the last year to respond to rising public anxiety over interference in the democratic process. In February, the European Council adopted several conclusions drafted by the Commission for "Securing Free and Fair Elections".

These measures included a number of non-legislative actions, such as organising regular meetings of the European election cooperation network, at which member states share expertise and good practices, as well as identify common threats; setting up a common framework in which member states can work towards identifying disinformation campaigns; the creation of a "network of multidisciplinary independent fact-checkers" to expose disinformation on digital media; increasing "digital literacy" to educate citizens about disinformation; and clamping down on cyber threats and manipulation.

Social media companies are



Photo: European Union 2019 - Source: EP

engaging in increasingly extensive voluntary checks. Fotyga warned: "In addressing this issue, we must be careful not to undermine freedom of speech or allow social media companies to become privately owned censored bodies."

Ahead of the European elections earlier this year, Facebook unveiled new mechanisms to clamp down on political interference, including a measure which required those who wish to run political and issue ads to be "authorised" before launching an ad campaign.

Fotyga singled out Russia for its use of "large-scale disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks and the use of online trolls and fake news accounts." Officials in Brussels have suspected Russian interference since 2015 at least, when an East Stratcom Task Force was created, a specialist unit set up to identify Kremlin attempts to manipulate EU citizens in democratic processes. Giles Portman, head of the task force, told the BBC in May 2019: "Attempts have been made to hack and leak, or to denigrate particular politicians, or to misrepresent certain policies. The best way (for Russia) to strengthen itself is to weaken its opponent."

Ultimately, the EU Commission may have to simply bulk up its resources. Russia and Moscow are set to spend up to 1.1bn euro on pro-Kremlin media, while the budget of East Stratcom Task Force amounts to just 3m euro by the same date. ■

## Europe must take a pragmatic approach to fighting climate change

ECR Group Co-Chair Raffaele Fitto has urged Europe to take a bold but pragmatic approach to fighting climate change.

Speaking ahead of the Climate Change Conference to be held in December in Santiago, run by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change (UNFCCC), he said: "We agree on an ambitious approach to tackle climate change and reduce emissions."

He added: "We have to avoid extreme positions. To successfully face the challenges of the green agenda we need to be realistic and find an approach that protects our economies and businesses."

The conference will follow on from the work of the UN Climate Action Summit held in New York in September 2019, as well as the Regional Climate Weeks which have been held in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific throughout the

year.

The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, is expected to challenge states and private investors to push for further measures in the areas of energy transition, climate finance, carbon pricing, and localised renewable energy initiatives.

On 4th October 2019, the EU Council set out its position for the conference. Their expressed priorities include: completing the implementation guidelines for the voluntary cooperation mechanism of the Paris Agreement; enacting the second review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for loss and damage; building on the review of the Lima work programme on gender; and advancing technical work under the Enhanced Transparency Framework.

However, the EU's statement also highlights the success of decarbonisation and the reduction of emissions in the EU between 1990-2017. The EU is



Photo: European Union 2019 - Source: EP

working towards the fulfilment of the Paris Agreement to reduce domestic Greenhouse Gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030, compared with 1990 levels.

The EU has also expressed its desire to move towards a longer term strategy of net carbon neutrality by 2050. ■

## Leading conservatives gather in Rome

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Atreju Summit took place from 19-21st September 2019 on the Tiber Island, in Rome. Atreju has become the main annual gathering of all centre-right Conservatives in Italy, and the ECR Party was well represented by a senior political delegation, playing a significant role in promoting the ECR Party's values at this major Conservative festival.

Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban from the Fidesz party, and the Italian President of the Council of Ministers, Giuseppe Conte, were joined by the Fratelli d'Italia party and its leader Georgia Meloni, and other Italian Conservatives, from Matteo Salvini's Lega party, Berlusconi's Forza Italia, as well as several other Italian Conservative Parties.

Leading the ECR Party delegation was Jan Zahradil MEP, ECR

Party President, Santiago Abascal MP, leader of Vox Party in Spain, Thierry Baudet MP Leader of the Forum for Democracy in the Netherlands, and Raffaele Fitto MEP, ECR Group Chairman and board director of the ECR Party. In addition, the ECR Party sent more than 50 international politicians, thought-leaders and academics from 12 European countries to represent the party, by participating and speaking on numerous events, fringe meetings, breakout sessions and attending social engagements.

Throughout the weekend, a range of important issues were discussed, not just on Italy but regarding the European continent as a whole. The central theme of the summit was: "Let's change Europe for the Better."

Jan Zahradil, who was a scientist before becoming a politician, gave an

insightful speech on the challenge of climate change and warning against the green illusion: "In Europe, a radical agenda is hidden behind the environmental issue. This is an attempt at a systemic change in our society, we must empower innovators and entrepreneurs through market mechanisms and encourage the natural trusteeship and stewardship of our lands to help solve climate issues."

Santiago Abascal stated the importance of a shared European heritage. "There are many cultures, but in Europe there is only one true civilization, the European one. It is the one that has conceived man as being endowed with faith and reason... When Europe believes in these things we have prospered, when they have forgotten it we have become weak. Europe is poorer when we are divided," he said. ■



## ECR Party leads large delegation to Conservative Party Conference #CPC19

The annual Conservative Party Conference (CPC) is one of the highlights of the political calendar and a great opportunity to come together as a Conservative family.

This year, over twelve thousand people attended the Conference, that took place in Manchester, between the 29th of September and 2nd of October, including a large number of MPs, MEPs, Ministers, and representatives of leading charities and businesses.

The Conference consisted of more than 500 fringe events, panel discussions, receptions and other networking activities organized by think-tanks, magazines and businesses, and keynote speeches by leading politicians. Conservatives from the UK, Europe and across the world convened to discuss ideas and policies. The gathering was an opportunity for the ECR Party and its members to engage, debate, and connect with friends and partners

in the United Kingdom and with an audience of business leaders, entrepreneurs, and key political players.

This year, the message of the Conference was simple and clear: Get Brexit Done. ECR Party guests and delegates met with the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Conservative Party Chairman James Cleverly, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sajid Javid. ■



## Debate on the Future of European Conservatism

Outside of the main auditorium speeches, one of the biggest attractions of Conservative Party Conference are the numerous fringe events that take place. They involve think tank directors, leading journalists, and Cabinet Ministers and focus on a litany of issues ranging from welfare reform to rural broadband. The ECR Party hosted a well-attended fringe event, bringing together over 200 international guests and a lineup of great conservative speakers on a lively hour-long

panel discussion. The debate focused on the rise in populism and examined the dangers it may pose to global conservatism.

Panelists included the President of the ECR Party, Jan Zahradil MEP, Daniel Hannan MEP for the South East of England, former PM of Bermuda Sir John Swan, and former UK Minister James Wharton.

The debate at the ECR Party event centred on whether the recent electoral success of populist parties will create a long-term shift in politics

or whether this burst of populism may prove to be a relatively short-lived phenomenon. The panelists then discussed core conservative principles and catalogued different approaches adopted by the Left and the Right in countering, or even adopting, populist strategies. With a particular focus on Europe, they also discussed the extent to which Brexit has created single-issue parties in the UK and whether this will become more common across Europe in the future. ■



More than 5,000 copies of the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Conservative* were distributed to Conference participants and delegates. It was popularly received.

Senior figureheads of the Conservative Party received copies, including Leader and Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who was presented with his own copy of *The Conservative* by ECR Party Executive Director, Richard Milsom.

## ECR Party builds strong links with Conservative parties from across the world

The ECR Party and its delegation to Manchester took part in a series of events organized by the International Democratic Union, the international alliance of centre-right political parties, in which ECR Party plays a leading role as its main European regional partner. The IDU brings together more than 80 Conservative parties from over 60 countries, with which the ECR Party engages and works closely

in its efforts to further promote Conservatism. The ECR Party delegates had a series of high-profile bilateral meetings with political leaders such as the former Prime Ministers of Canada and Australia, Stephen Harper and Tony Abbott, with the Conservative Party Chairman James Cleverly, and other elected officials and members of the Conservative Party, as well as with party leaders from the IDU sister parties. ■



## ECR Party members participate in world class training sessions

During the conference, ECR Party Members were fortunate enough to once again participate in a number of training sessions, lively workshops and activities offered by the Conservative Party, aimed to hone their campaigning abilities and hyper charge their skills. The training sessions were run by some of the most successful campaigners in the world,

and included sessions about political messaging, digital strategies and social media, political coaching, public speaking, and leadership training. Best practices, successful campaigns, winning tactics; these are some of the key takeaways our members and guests took away from a four-day training boot camp, designed to help improve campaigning and winning elections. ■




# TRAINING<sup>2</sup>

## ACADEMY



**13<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019 ■ GRANADA ■ SPAIN**  
[ecrparty.eu](http://ecrparty.eu) ■ [@ecrparty](https://twitter.com/ecrparty)



# MIGRATION

## SUMMIT



**CATANIA ■ SICILY ■ ITALY**  
**21<sup>st</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> November 2019**





# Capital markets are already working to mitigate climate change

Amid the gloomy portents of climate catastrophe, markets have been driving a revolution in cleaner, greener energy

by *Jack Dickens*

The recent publicity acquired by climate change protesters has raised important questions: does managing climate change and preventing environmental catastrophe necessarily have to curtail economic development for the world's poor? Must there necessarily be a tension between economic growth and ecological protection? These questions matter because it is often argued by those advancing an environmentalist agenda that climate change is the result of a crisis of capitalism, and that this can only be overcome through drastic carbon reduction and the elaborate control of all economic activity by the state.

Many environmental movements, such as the UK's Extinction Rebellion, demand radical, altruistic changes to people's lifestyles and economic ambitions. The central problem they face, however, is that it is both unreasonable and impossible to expect people to de-industrialise and return to a pre-modern economy in which life is, in the memorable phrase of Thomas Hobbes, "poor, nasty, brutish, and short".

In spite of popular catastrophising, there is also cause for climate optimism. There is every indication that

we are succeeding at lifting unprecedented numbers of the global population out of poverty without destroying our environment. According to the World Bank's data, in 1981 44 per cent of the world's population lived in absolute poverty. In 2013, that figure was reduced to just 10.7 per cent, a change in no small part due to the success of developing nations in being integrated into capital markets and global trade.

At the same time, the dire predictions of generations of climate alarmists have failed to materialise. There has been less than half a degree of global warming in the last four decades, an increase which has recently slowed down and not speeded up. The sea level, meanwhile, has also risen at the steady rate of about one foot per century.

The future is also less bleak than alarmists would have us believe. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that by the 2070s, the total effects of climate change, including on ecosystems, will be equivalent to a reduction in average incomes of 0.2 to 2 per cent. By then, however, each person on the planet is expected to be 300 to 500 per cent richer.

To point this out is not to deny the reality of the man-made nature of

climate change – it is simply to place it within a more rational context.

The practical and ethical route out of the current threat of climate disaster is to make environmentally-friendlier energy resources a competitive and desirable alternative. This has already been occurring for the last few decades. Capital markets and clean energy entrepreneurs have been playing a crucial role in encouraging cleaner energy and the reduction of humanity's dependency upon fossil fuels.

This can be seen on the macro-scale, where global levels of investment in renewables and reliance upon cleaner energy resources have been rising at the expense of coal. According to the research of BloombergNEF (BNEF), Europe has invested a total of \$698 billion in clean and renewable energy in the last decade; and there is still room for far more investments to be made in a variety of areas.

New economic opportunities afforded by cheaper clean energy have been made available across Europe. Spain has become Europe's leading market for subsidy-free solar energy. In June, Iberdrola, one of the world's largest clean energy companies, unveiled plans to create Europe's largest solar farm in Caceres by 2022. It is doing so because the levelised cost of electricity for large-scale solar power in Spain is now twelve per cent lower than the wholesale price for energy.

States and private investors are combining to stimulate energy transition, driving down costs and making renewables a real option for venture capital. None of this is happening because of extensive anti-carbon regulations by states and governments or because of the benevolent altruism of



populations – instead, this energy transition is occurring because research and development is making it increasingly attractive both to invest in and to use alternatives.

Across the world, countries and companies are embracing the potential economic dividends to be gained from partnerships geared towards research and development into new, cleaner technologies. At the G20 summit at Osaka in June of this year, Japan, the US, and the EU all pledged themselves to a new partnership exploring the use of hydrogen fuels.

In the private sector, Primatec Technologies, a joint venture by Mitsubishi and Siemens formed in 2015, has invested significantly in the discovery of a means of replacing coal with hydrogen in the production of iron. If this is successfully carried out in a trial process to be conducted in Austria in 2020, then this would potentially eliminate the carbon footprint which results from steel manufacturing (which currently accounts for about 7% of global emissions).

While there are many winners from all this, however, there are also short-term losers. The incoming European Commission's target of a reduction of

the whole EU to net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 is ambitious, and it will come with sacrifices. Countries such as Germany, the home of the EU's largest heavy industries, including petrol and diesel vehicle manufactures, will potentially face a harsh transition.

Nonetheless, it is clear that neither big state carbon protectionism nor coerced deindustrialisation provides the answer. We are living through a great transition, one in which the shape and nature of our energy consumption and economic behaviour is rapidly changing. It would be an enormous act of self-harm to derail capital markets at a time when they are making cleaner, greener energy consumption more profitable than ever.

If we can work to make climate mitigation not only abstractly desirable but also practically profitable, then it might just be possible to change lifestyles in a more sustainable direction. In other words, to steal a line from the great Scots philosopher Adam Smith, it will not be by appealing to benevolence, but to "necessity", "advantage", and "self-love" that we will succeed in confronting the challenges of climate change. ■

# Questioning the canonisation of St Greta is heresy

Only two options are allowed. You can act as a teenager that has just seen the light or be disowned as a climate-bashing, earth-hating cynic

by *Johan Hakelius*

The Swedish National Agency for Education suggested the other week that Swedish teachers should skip the Greeks and the Romans. History has grown too large to fit into the curriculum. Something has to go, so why not clean the stairs from the bottom up and get rid of antiquity?

It was one of those proposals, so frequent these days, that seems like a ruse, as if someone's checking whether we're still awake. As it happened we were, and the idea was scrapped last Friday. But the Agency is still on the warpath, looking for some other era to erase for its scheduling purposes.

The striking thing was that the people – parents aside – ultimately responsible for the education of our kids, didn't seem to realise that those

old Greeks are something more than just one instance in a long sequence of one damn thing after another. Antiquity is the Bletchley Park of civilisation. It provides a decryption machine to understand society and ourselves.

In that sense it all added up to yet another reminder of the degrading slavery of being a child of our age. And speaking of children...

A couple of weeks ago, Greta – as with intimates and royalty, the surname is no longer in use – was awarded the "Alternative Nobel Prize", as the founder Jakob von Uexkull likes to market his Right Livelihood Award. The virtual and almost world-wide canonization of Greta Thunberg is a remarkable phenomenon. It may even be a first on this scale, even if messianism and apocalyptic cults from time

to time have been known to grab the reins in a smaller setting.

Living, as we do, in a world with no shortage of intellectuals, you would think the Cult of Greta would be an irresistible treasure trove for dissecting our time. After all, we're not all enthralingly gloomy teenagers. Some of us are actually grown-ups, presumably with an ability not to drown in our own sentiments and fears. There's very little of that going around.

Sweden may be exceptional to a degree, in the sense that we prefer to hold one view at the time. In Sweden disagreement is viewed not only as unpleasant, but as a failure. In the case of Greta, the race for conformity seems to have driven the entire top tier of society over the edge.

A high-ranking minister in the church has proclaimed Greta "fully comparable with the prophets of the Bible". The editor of the cultural section of *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest daily and traditionally the voice of prissy middle-class



Maybe the Cult of Greta is best understood as a kind of Bacchanalia, or at least an orgy, minus the wine and sex, I'm afraid. An ecstasy that allows us to escape reflection.

middle-of-the-road averageness, literally only writes about climate change in general and Greta in particular these days. He talks about experiencing a personal "climate-revival" last summer and he recently preached to a Christian auditorium and told them "you can face the truth of the apocalypse, tell us that everything may end one day".

The home turf of Greta may be somewhat exceptional, but it's not unique. The Archbishop of Berlin, Heiner Koch, this spring compared the "school climate strikes" inspired by Greta with Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Yet, to analyse this remarkable cult is taboo. It's as if any attempt to understand what's going on is heresy. Only two options are allowed. You can act as a teenager that has just seen the light – or perhaps rather the utter darkness

– or be disowned as a climate-bashing, earth-hating cynic.

Of course, part of it is simply driven by a will to power. A lot of people, especially teenagers, intellectuals and politicians, find few things as gratifying as judging and commanding others. There will be a huge release of endorphins within the Extinction Rebellion protests across the world.

Part of it is probably a collective midlife crisis: following a sixteen-year old is rejuvenating to the chattering classes. But you can't help suspect that what really strikes fear into our age is not the outer workings of climate change, but the inner workings of post-modern man. Maybe the Cult of Greta is best understood as a kind of Bacchanalia, or at least an orgy, minus the wine and sex, I'm afraid. An ecstasy that allows us to escape reflection.

Come to think of it, the scrapping of antiquity in Swedish schools may have been a way of trying to keep that secret. ■

Photo: Shutterstock.com



# Time for Europe to GET TOUGH ON CHINA

by *Walter Ellis*

Marco Polo may not have been a conservative, but he was certainly a capitalist. The thirteenth century Italian explorer greatly increased traffic along the Silk Road, the network of trade routes between East and West first opened up in the second century. In the era that followed, paper, pasta, tea and gunpowder were among the discoveries originating in China from which Europe would profit. From the very earliest days, it was an exploitative process, and as the centuries went by and Chinese power declined, it was Europe's "belt and road" approach that determined the nature of the relationship.

By the nineteenth century, with control of the opium trade the principle means by which the West, now including the United States, kept China quiescent, the resentment felt in Beijing was approaching boiling point. First came the 1911 Uprising that overthrew the last imperial dynasty. Next, in response to Japan's murderous attempt to make China a virtual slave state, came the Kuomintang, led by the nationalist Chiang Kai-shek. In the years immediately following World War II, it was the Communists

who triumphed, inspired by the ruthless, messianic figure of Mao Zedong. Mao would not only bring fundamental change to China, but by the turn of the new millennium his heirs would usher in a new world order. The problem for Europe today is that Chinese payback for the years of humiliation is starting to eat away at the foundations of the continent's economic independence. This month, as Beijing celebrates 70 years of Communist rule, the feeling is growing that a shift is taking place that may soon become unstoppable.

No world leader could fail to be impressed by the sight of hundreds of thousands of marching feet moving in unison in front of the Great Hall of the People, interrupted only by lines of tanks and vast machines. But as the West draws its breath in the face of China's formidable military displays, it must also confront the decades-long scandal of the eleven million Uighar people held captive in the western province of Xinjiang. The Uighar, Muslims of Turkic origin, are regarded by Beijing as primitives, rather like the natives of Tibet. Across Xinjiang, there are no fewer than 27 internment camps, in which an estimated 800,000 Uighar are held prisoner.

Few doubt that China will be the dominant global power in the second half of the century, dwarfing Russia, outpacing India and even eclipsing the United States. All that Europe can do is circle the wagons and bind ever closer together, hoping to project a united front. "Belt and road" – a term dating back to the original "belt" of silk roads – is one of three interlocking strategies aimed at achieving China's primary goal, the others being military might and a dynamic domestic economy. First Asia, then Africa, now Europe had to be made dependent on Chinese money and purchasing power. It was a simple plan, direct in its objectives, that could only be accomplished by a country with 1.4 billion people and an ambition to match. You offer to build roads, railways, airports and seaports, lending money to the applicant states that in many cases, as in Sri Lanka, can never be fully repaid. Then you operate

the infrastructure of the client state as if it were Chinese, following up with factories and marketing that tie everything back to Beijing. In Europe, Italy is clearly a key target. Rome spent the money years ago that should have been used to upgrade and replace its creaking roads and bridges. Now China is stepping in, taking advantage of the country's political instability and ongoing financial crisis. Contracts totalling more than €900 billion were signed earlier this year, including one to rebuild the port of Trieste, vital not only to Italy but to the neighbouring Balkan states. The prospect of Italy as a sino-trojan horse is causing disquiet across Europe.

Elsewhere, Athens handed over control of the port of Piraeus to Cosco, the Shanghai-based shipping and logistics conglomerate owned by the Chinese state. Cosco also runs container ports in Valencia and Bilbao in Spain. In Portugal, Chinese investment in infrastructure is costed at €6 billion, and rising, while in the Czech Republic a visit by Xi in 2016 led to massive investments in media companies, an airline and one of the country's leading football clubs. President Emmanuel Macron, generally regarded as Europe's most

Beijing would have Europe believe – or at least pretend to believe – that its mercantile imperialism is essentially benign. Europe needs the investment; China needs something useful to spend its money on.

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President Emmanuel Macron, generally regarded as Europe's most

activist leader, will visit China next month for talks focused on climate change and trade. He has already made clear to President Xi that China's cavalier approach cannot continue unaltered and that, at the very least, there must be progress over European demands for a relaxation of the rules covering foreign investment.

Reflecting in Brussels on Italy's Belt and Road initiative, he said that the time of "naivety" in regard to China was over. "For many years we had an uncoordinated approach and China took advantage of our divisions. What Europe needs now is a clear, unitary view."

This summer, during a visit to India, Macron said that the rise of China was good for everybody. "It's good for China itself and its middle classes, and it's good for global growth and regional growth." But if "hegemony" – a word much employed by the Chinese

– was to be avoided, it was important that there should be rules-based development, leading to (another Chinese favourite) "balance".

Unsurprisingly, Xi has, up until now, shown himself somewhat less than moved by Europe's expressions of disquiet. Indeed, he seems entirely sanguine. "French investors are welcomed to share development opportunities in China," he wrote this year in the French conservative newspaper *Le Figaro*. Ties between France and China were like "a myriad of small streams converging into a mighty river".

Macron remains to be convinced. He wants there to be not so much a mighty river, flowing into the South China Sea, as a two-way street, in which European investors can more easily put money into Chinese businesses or open factories and offices that do not immediately fall foul of China First regulations. Beijing would have Europe believe – or at least pretend to believe – that its mercantile imperialism is essentially benign. Europe needs the investment; China needs something useful to spend its money on. It is win-win – much as the opium trade was win-win, with Chinese peasants desperate for some form of relief from the drudgery of their existence and the West only too happy to supply the means.

Three years ago, Synutra, a leading Chinese baby-milk producer and distributor, opened a massive processing plant in Carhaix, in central Brittany, that was supposed to ensure a good living for dairy farmers through the



Few doubt that China will be the dominant global power in the second half of the century – in response, Europe must circle the wagons and bind ever closer together, hoping to project a united front

region for decades to come. The issue is that though the market is undoubtedly there – China has developed a dairy habit that in past centuries would have been regarded as faintly disgusting – the price is far from guaranteed. Moreover, it is decided by Synutra. When Sodiaal, France's biggest dairy cooperative, whose products include Yoplait, Entremont and Candia, looked into the possibility of buying the Chinese plant, it was made clear that the market did not go with the factory and that the only way to sell into the Chinese market was with a Chinese partner.

On the Uighar front, it seems highly improbable that China is about to change its behaviour. As far as Xi, the Communist Party Politburo and the National People's Congress are concerned, any interference in the affairs of the People's Republic is an affront to Chinese dignity that cannot be tolerated.

The People's Liberation Army is by far the largest in the world. China's Navy and its Air Force are growing in leaps and bounds. Europe, by contrast, looks powerless. The absence of even an EU rapid reaction force, still less a European Army, is viewed by Beijing as evidence of a lack of serious intent, giving rise to contempt. Soft power is one thing – and Europe has that in abundance. But raw power is what counts when the chips are down.

In the meantime, trade continues to dominate much of the public dialogue between Europe and China, with no shortage of talking points or controversy. Heiko Mass, the German foreign minister, probably put it best when he warned this year that the EU had to stand united when confronting the world's giants. "If some countries believe that they can do clever business with the Chinese, they should not be surprised when they wake up and find themselves dependent." ■





14<sup>th</sup> November 2019 ■ BRUSSELS ■ BELGIUM

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LEADER COLUMN

# TAKING ON CHINA

The European Union has a problem with China and it can no longer defer confronting that reality. China is an anomaly in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century globalised economy and geopolitical arena: a Communist demi-superpower, the world's second largest economy by nominal GDP (and the largest by purchasing power parity), an increasing actor in international affairs with an ever-expanding outreach, and a massive and unapologetic abuser of human rights.

That profile inevitably renders EU-Chinese relations problematic. Until recently, greed blinded the West to the wider implications of China's roaring economic growth, averaging 6 per cent for 30 years until 2015, and its emergence from Maoist isolation. The rush to target a market of 1.4 billion consumers fostered a blinkered indifference to issues that would have rung alarm bells in dealing with any other nation.

The outcome of that stampede has been substantial. The EU is now China's biggest trading partner and China is the EU's second largest trading partner after the United States. But China enjoys the advantage: last year, in trade in goods, EU exports to China amounted to €209.9bn, while Chinese imports totalled €394.8bn, so that the EU had a trade deficit with China of €184.9bn.

Beijing does not believe in a level playing field. It maintains industrial policies and non-tariff measures that discriminate against foreign companies; in its domestic economy, government intervention has resulted in a dominant position for state-owned firms and unequal access to subsidies and cheap financing. China's cavalier attitude towards intellectual property rights has long been a concern to other countries.

It is not necessary to be supportive of President Trump's aggressive trade policy towards China, with all its hostages to fortune, to acknowledge that at least he is taking a robust stance, which all other parties have signally failed to do. There is now an urgent need for the rest of the world to make it clear to China that it must conform to the same standards as other members of the global community.

There are concerns more serious than discriminatory trade policies. Last year an EU communications network was found to have been hacked in a large-scale cyber attack that gained undetected access to diplomatic cables over several years; it is widely believed the Chinese military were behind this operation.

Most serious of all is China's flagrant and large-scale abuse of human rights. The situation in Hong Kong is a global scandal. When the Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesman was asked at a press conference to respond to the EU Parliament's decision to discuss Hong Kong-related issues, he blandly replied: "We hope the EU will fulfil its commitment to China-EU relations and meet China halfway to ensure the sound and steady development of China-EU relations."

The repression of the Muslim Uighurs in the Xinjiang region of China has resulted in more than a million people being detained in re-education camps, a persecution that began in 2014 and has enlarged to the point where the construction costs of this gulag in 2017 increased by \$2.96bn. In April this year the European Parliament passed its sixth resolution of the past decade on Chinese human rights abuse. The resolution identified nine major abuses by the Beijing government – a telling indictment – followed by an anticlimactic conclusion.

The parliament called on the European Council to consider targeted sanctions against officials in Xinjiang – presumably their names are household words in Brussels – and a halt to exports of cyber surveillance and predictive profiling apparatus to China. This follows a long tradition of limp responses to Chinese provocations.

Economic sanctions with teeth are the only response Beijing will heed. The Member States' recently published report on EU coordinated risk assessment of 5G networks security highlights threats from non-EU states or state-backed actors and suppliers. In that context the West must be vigilant when it is known that Chinese firms could at any time be compelled by the Chinese government to gather intelligence, in compliance with Article 7 of China's National Intelligence Law.

We can only legitimately censure Donald Trump's scattergun policy towards China if the EU develops an equally robust but sophisticated programme for the containment of a state that has transgressed behavioural norms beyond a level that can any longer be tolerated. ■

# The CHANGING FACE of Europe

**Migration is not a new phenomenon. A new history of the continent since 1945 by a leading scholar shows how violent upheavals drove the flow of people and reshaped Europe**

by *Peter Gattrell*

Famously, Donald Tusk proclaimed in a speech in September 2015 that, "Today, everything is immigration". Nothing has happened since to lessen the force of that statement. Indeed, "everything" in Europe has always, not just today, been about migration and migrants. Note that I have dropped the first two letters: this makes a big difference. Immigration implies that people buy a one-way ticket, whereas "migration" takes account of regular return journeys and the prospect of returning to one's place of origin – in other words, decisions not to burn bridges with one's place of birth. Migration speaks of interrupted journeys and travel between different destinations. It acknowledges that migrants may simultaneously have a stake in more than one place.

The history of post-1945 Europe is a history of people on the move. Migrants including refugees have been neither marginal figures nor of fleeting significance, but have instead been integral to the history of the entire continent. In my latest book *The Unsettling of Europe* I wanted to connect the experiences of individuals who left their homes for one reason or another with the broad history of a continent that has been transformed, politically, economically, socially and culturally by migration.

Migration and migrants have come in various guises. Men, women and children alike were forced from their homes because of violence: in the aftermath of the Second World War, for example, ethnic German minorities were expelled from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; refugees fled when communist parties triumphed in East-Central Europe. Two decades later, Greek Cypriots fled from northern Cyprus to the south following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s displaced more than four million people. In the second decade of the new millennium,

political upheavals in the Middle East and in particular the civil war in Syria sparked talk of an unprecedented "European refugee crisis". In truth, as I shall argue, it is not unprecedented. Nor – since most Syrian refugees have remained in the Middle East – is it fundamentally European, even though the political ripples reach many parts of Europe. Meanwhile, other stories, such as mass internal displacement in Ukraine, figure only intermittently on the international radar.

Involuntary mass migration was also the product of European decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. Independence movements in colonies ruled by Britain, France, the Netherlands and Portugal made life

“History tells us that people smuggling is not a new phenomenon. It runs like a thread through the history of migration in and to Europe.

uncomfortable for colonial settlers and colonial officials. When independence was achieved many of them "returned" to a "mother country" in which they had hardly set foot hitherto. These migrants portrayed themselves as victims of persecution. In any event, their migration was the result of the formation of new states.

But if post-1945 migration has been about ordeal, it has also been about opportunity – the opportunity to secure a better standard of living or to gain additional qualifications by moving between countries or from the countryside to the city. Sometimes this took place through word of mouth, but migration was also the result of orchestrated measures by

governments and firms in north-west Europe to attract reserves of labour. So-called "guest workers" who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s from southern Europe were expected in due course to return to their homes and to be replaced by fresh contingents, but in many instances they decided to put down roots. As the Swiss author Max Frisch put it, "we asked for hands, but we got people instead".

Migration has affected all parts of Europe. For close on half a century, Europe was divided by an Iron Curtain, but migration was as much a feature of the Soviet bloc as it was in Western Europe. Across the continent, under different political and economic systems, migration has enabled greater prosperity. However, migration has not only served a utilitarian purpose: it has supported social and cultural transformation. To be sure, migrants were often made the scapegoats for social problems in host countries in Europe, just as the blame for today's over-stretched public services is often laid at the door of recent migrants rather than on governments for having failed to invest. But this makes it all the more imperative to understand the motives of migrants, to appreciate how they created a life for themselves, and to recognise how they made Europe richer and more diverse.

But isn't the situation today completely different from what it was in post-war Europe? My answer is that it is important not to minimise the differences, but equally important not to overlook some of the similarities. First, the numbers involved might seem to be "unprecedented". This is misleading, however. UNHCR estimates that 71 million people are displaced worldwide as of 2018, but more than twice as many people were wrenched from their homes during and after the Second World War, 60 million of them in Europe alone. And in proportion to the world population in 1945, the post-war crisis dwarfed what is happening today.



Photo: Shutterstock.com

Who are the people who are on the move today, and aren't they very different from those who migrated in the post-war era? It is true that the displaced population in Europe in the late 1940s were predominantly Europeans, including ten million ethnic German expellees. But to suggest

that they had a close affiliation with the host society fails to take account of the hostility they faced from many "native" Germans who portrayed them as "foreign elements". The same happened elsewhere on the continent, such as to ethnic Turks who moved from Bulgaria to Turkey.

It is true that the Cold War framed debates around migration for four decades from the late 1940s onwards. Those who fled from communism could be portrayed as heroic "escapees", including authors, musicians and ballet dancers. But not everything was as straightforward as it might appear in hindsight: during the 1950s Western governments regularly sought to separate those who could demonstrate that they were victims of political persecution from those who (as it was said at the time) "merely disliked" state socialism in Eastern Europe.

Some commentators insist that we are living in an entirely new era by virtue of globalisation and the prospect of mass migration likely to be unleashed not by war but by "over-population" in the Global South. But observers who have taken the trouble to engage with migrants who attempt the journey from impoverished parts of sub-Saharan Africa confirm that many of them wish to maximise opportunities from short-term migration (including sending remittances back home) before going back. This is not to ignore the fact that some will put down "roots" in Europe, just as Italian, Turkish and Yugoslav guest workers did in the 1960s and 1970s.

Where does this leave refugees, as the most vulnerable group of people on the move? From a European standpoint, the situation faced by refugees could hardly be worse. Broadly speaking, European politicians favour deterrence and restriction. In 2018-19 the central Mediterranean replaced the eastern Mediterranean as the chief hotspot. Governments now prefer to process claims for asylum offshore, in countries such as Libya, where the rights of migrants are regularly abused. Many claims are refused, on the grounds that most claimants are "economic migrants" rather than individuals with a genuine claim to refugee status on grounds of persecution. But, as indicated, insisting on this distinction is not new.

It is sometimes said that the vulnerability of today's migrants including refugees is compounded by the actions of people-smugglers. People-smugglers have a lousy reputation. They are denounced for trading in human lives, seeking to profit from the desperation of people seeking to

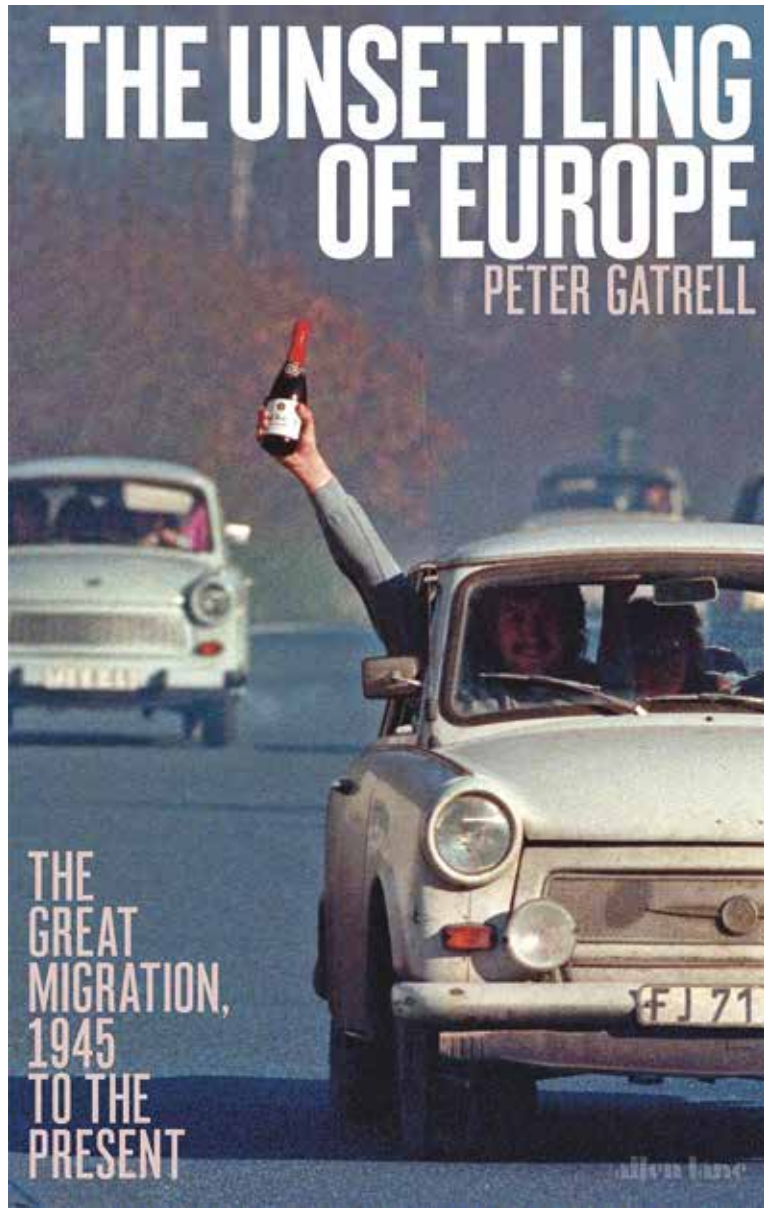
smugglers to help them get to Hungary via Italy and then to Germany via Slovakia and the Czech Republic. No-one berated those who offered their services to the beleaguered victims of civil war.

There is also a less well known side to the history of people smuggling in Europe. From the 1950s onwards, migrants from Spain and Portugal wanted to escape not only from poverty but also the iron grip of authoritarianism under General Franco and Antonio Salazar. These migrants – trade unionists, students, journalists and others – relied upon well-disposed helpers to cross the Pyrenees in the 1960s. Sometimes they were unceremoniously dumped over the border, but they were often welcomed by European employers who needed workers and by liberal-minded governments who made political capital from their presence, not unlike some modern-day politicians who are willing to recognise the potential contribution of refugees from Syria and elsewhere.

There is much more to be found in my book *The Unsettling of Europe*, including the portrayal of migration in fiction and in film, and discussions of where to locate migration in cultural institutions such as museums. My aim in writing it has been to provide readers with a new history of post-war Europe, East as well as West, that examines migration as the consequence of violent upheavals near and far, but that also takes due account of the perspectives of people on the move and their "unsettling" presence in European society. It examines obscure and hidden personal stories alongside more familiar ones. If it springs a few surprises on readers who think they know the history of migration, I shall be very pleased. ■

History tells us that people smuggling is not a new phenomenon. It runs like a thread through the history of migration in and to Europe. During the Cold War, a people smuggler could portray himself as a latter-day Scarlet Pimpernel, although many of them extracted payment for services rendered and occasionally they betrayed the people they offered to help. During the wars in former Yugoslavia, according to the International Organisation for Migration, refugees paid

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# How impeachment travails may help TRUMP IN 2020

US Republicans are confident that the Democrat frontrunner being knocked out sets up an easier re-election run, but there are potential plot twists ahead

by **Gerald Malone**

Donald Trump's impeachment is America's very own, never-ending Brexit. The story bubbles, boils, stumbles, pauses, the single relentless feature being permanent domination of the media.

The idea of removing Trump started as a murmuring spring pretty much immediately after his inauguration. Now it is a mighty torrent, overcoming the last dam blocking its way – House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi. She knows impeachment will prove toxic for Democrats at the polls. Yet, on 25th September her own caucus ignored her advice, pressuring her into triggering the process.

Impeachment has yet to reach a vote on the House floor, to refer the matter to the Judiciary Committee. Why? Because at this stage no Republican will support it and precedent holds that a degree of cross-aisle support is gathered before referral. But, hothead Democrats, whipping themselves into a late-night show lather, will probably ignore precedent and refer regardless.

The only two previous presidential impeachments – Andrew Johnson in 1867 and Bill Clinton in 1998 – had a degree of bipartisan support for the process in the House. The Judiciary Committee was not boycotted by the opposite political faction. It will be this time. When impeachment reached the Senate, which conducts the trial, it failed at the hurdle of a two thirds majority. Johnson survived by only one vote, Clinton by 10.

Two other presidents faced impeachment proceedings, where we stand now with Donald Trump: James Buchanan in 1868 and Richard Nixon in 1973 (abandoned when he resigned). Both commanded a degree of cross aisle consensus at the House investigation stage.

The House Judiciary Committee comprises twenty-four Democrats and seventeen Republicans. A reference to the committee straight down party lines would likely cause the Republicans on the Judiciary Committee to shun the process, turning impeachment into a partisan polit-

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Why trigger a strategy that is bound to fail? In Washington last week the buzz was that Democrats on the left are doing it to derail Joe Biden's candidacy.

ical show trial, which the Founding Fathers explicitly strove to prevent.

Has President Trump committed an impeachable offence – even if all of the whirling, contradictory accusations about the Ukraine intervention are proved? Representative Maxine Waters, Chairman of the House Financial Services Committee has defined

an impeachable offence as “Whatever Congress says it is. There is no law.”

Wrong. When the Constitutional Convention of 1787 debated impeachment, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton framed the definitions of grounds of impeachment that still apply; “treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanours”. Rep. Waters would respond that Congress can simply conclude that the almost incomprehensible flood of texts, tweets and telephone calls referencing Ukraine, upon which she and her allies rely, amount to “treason”. That is a political judgement, not a legal test.

The words “other high crimes and misdemeanours” were chosen after long deliberation by the framers over an alternative, “maladministration,” precisely to place them in the category of criminal-like acts of a serious nature.

Put it this way, if Aaron Burr was not impeached for killing Alexander Hamilton, it's a bit of a stretch to argue that Donald Trump should be impeached for dissing Joe Biden, the former Vice President and contender for the Democrat nomination.

The first is a potential crime. The second may be dirty politics, but it's hardly a criminal offence. Dressing the accusation up in words implying that the national interest has been besmirched is simply applying lipstick to the pig.

If Speaker Pelosi eventually calls a floor vote which the Democrats will win – the obsessed wing of her party will likely bring her to that – the impeachment process is ultimately doomed to failure anyway. The Senate, Republican controlled, will not deliver the necessary two thirds majority to convict. Game off.

Why trigger a strategy that is bound to fail? In Washington last week the buzz was that Democrats on the left are doing it to derail Joe Biden's candidacy. Professional Trump campaigners were cautiously rubbing their hands at the prospect, because it could leave Trump facing Senator Warren in November next year.

The Trump team would rather not have an ongoing impeachment process at all. Who knows what might crawl out of the woodwork? Or their candidate, never an exemplar of self-restraint, may tweet in the heat of the moment. But, the main cause for celebration in Connecticut Avenue's Russian restaurant, Mari Vanna, where a coterie of young White House staffers could not believe their luck, was that Democrats seem intent on undermining the credibility of the candidate who is the biggest threat to Trump in 2020, Joe Biden.

Polls prove they have a point and that the former Vice President is suffering



Photo: Drew Angerer - Getty Images

collateral damage. Senator Warren has edged into a national Quinipiac poll lead of 22% against Jo Biden's 20%. The Ukraine debacle centres on possible patronage for Biden's son and leaves a bad smell in voters' noses.

Sadly, Bernie Sanders' heart attack is likely to scupper his campaign, in spite of recent strong fundraising and his protests that he is fighting fit. So, the political impact of keeping Joe Biden's name in the Ukraine frame by heading down the impeachment cul de sac will be to present Dodgy Donald with the easiest candidate to beat, Senator Elizabeth Warren. Brilliant.

However, there are other possibilities. Enter stage centre another contender for the Democratic nomination. Welcome, Andrew Yang, the entrepreneur hopeful from Schenectady, New York, who squeaked into the latest televised candidates' debate. He scored 3% in a Quinipiac poll. His funding is surging – a good litmus test of momentum. On October 2nd his campaign announced he had raised \$10m in the third fund-raising quarter.

In New York earlier this month I found myself on Andrew Yang's home territory, a celebration of the founding of the Republic of China in 1912. It was hosted by the Republican Party of China – careful, not the People's Republic of China. This was Manhattan's Chiang Kai Shek adoration society in full cry.

To my astonishment, the whole of Chinatown was decorated with Taiwan

and American flags. The ambiguity of the “Two China's” policy stand-off had spilled onto the streets of Manhattan. I was in the basement of the Mott Street Chinese Community Center, and events were presided over by a “Mayor”, elected by a cohort of the sixty-six families who shaped Chinatown as a community in the late 1890's.

We started with the American national anthem, which I knew, followed by the anthem – this has to be word perfect – the national anthem of the Republic of China on Taiwan, which I did not. Everyone on Mott Street was a paid-up member of the “Yang Gang”.

Cue Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat, New York, the left-winger who clearly had no idea where she was, or to whom she was talking. She banged on about reversing evil Trump's sanctions against Chinese people, upending immigration controls and looking forward to impeachment, blissfully unaware that she had stumbled into the wrong China.

She arrived disruptively late, then dodged out discourteously early. It was all show, “Me, Me Me”; an apt metaphor for an impeachment process which will fail, and deliver Donald Trump an easier run in 2020 than his nervous support team could have expected. Even so, are those in Team Trump nervous? You bet. They are only ever a dangerous tweet away from oblivion. ■



# SMEs are Europe's backbone – Brussels must help them flourish

Whatever the outcome of the tortuous Brexit negotiations, there is one subject on which all Europeans – whether they are citizens of the European Union or not – can agree on. I am referring of course to all the start-ups, small and medium sized businesses across the continent. It is these 23 million small businesses that everyone agrees must be helped to develop and thrive if the region is to prosper.

What's interesting is that almost without exception when industrialists or politicians talk about these sectors, they refer to them as the “backbone” of their country. In the UK, it is the 5.6m SMEs which are the backbone. German business leaders call their 3.5m SMEs, including their *Mittelstand* companies, the *Rückgrat*, the French have the more lyrical description – *le colonne vertigral* – and the Italians call them the *spina dorsale*. And the Polish? Well, they are the *kreggostupit*.

Never have these backbones been needed more. With growth slowing around the world, and in particular across the eurozone, Europe's entrepreneurs and small and intermediate-sized business leaders are needed more than ever to provide the jobs and growth of the future.

As well as being the backbone to their economies, small companies – often family owned – provide the glue of so many local communities. Not only do they hold together the fabric of small villages and towns, these

small companies are more robust in times of crisis and they inevitably invest for the long-term.

The facts speak for themselves. Since the 2008 financial crash, for example, 80% of all new jobs in the UK have been created by SMEs. In France, 335,000 jobs have come from mid-sized companies over the period, more than a third of them in manufacturing.

Yet there is a problem at the top of Europe's political and policy-making hierarchy. Even though politicians – whether they be in the major capitals or in Brussels – say they know how critical SMEs are to their countries, in truth many of them ignore their cries for help. With productivity low across the continent, this attitude must change if Europe's small businesses are to compete with the world's bigger trading blocs like China and India.

The ambition sounds easy enough to announce – get rid of red tape, cut taxes, hand out a few tax breaks and let small businesses free etc. But it's not that easy to achieve, as I discovered listening to a fascinating debate between French, German and British small business leaders organised by the Club of Three and Cercle d'outre-Manche in London recently.

As Dr Bernd Atenstaedt, the chairman and CEO of German Industry

UK, pointed out at the meeting, Germany's economics minister, Peter Altmaier, was forced into announcing a string of new measures for the country's *Mittelstand* after being stung by fierce criticism that he was only interested in helping big business.

But the criticism worked. In August, Altmaier came up with a new strategy to help Germany's entrepreneurs and medium sized companies

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Even though politicians – whether they be in the major capitals or in Brussels – say they know how critical SMEs are to their countries, in truth many of them ignore their cries for help. With productivity low across the continent, this attitude must change if Europe's small businesses are to compete with the world's bigger trading blocs like China and India.

become more competitive by offering tax breaks, reducing bureaucracy and launching a new campaign to help finance start-ups.

Finding a solution to Germany's skills shortage is another big problem for the country, says Dr Atenstaedt, particularly for its smaller companies as most young workers would prefer to work for giants such as BMW or Siemens. Encouraging refugees to

become apprentices is just one of the ways the government is trying to help overcome the skills shortage.

By contrast, the big problem in France is less state interference and more freedom for private business. According to Frédéric Coirier, co-president of Meti – Mouvement des Entreprises de Taille Intermédiaire – and chairman of Poujoulat, the most important reform needed to boost small businesses in France is for taxes on assets to be cut drastically or abolished. Since the 1980s, when the wealth taxes were introduced by President François Mitterrand, the number of intermediate companies has collapsed from 5,000 to 4,000. (Germany has around 12,000 of these mid-sized companies, the UK has 8,000 or so and Italy roughly the same.)

As three quarters of these intermediate companies are family-owned,

the tax on the transfer of company shares was devastating. Coirier says that President Macron's recent decision to abolish most of the top wealth taxes on financial assets is starting to show positive signs, as are the more flexible labour laws which are being introduced. There's more to be done: France is still the highest taxed of all EU countries. Coirier says small businesses want to see other



by **Maggie Pagano**

taxes on capital assets – also known as a production tax – reduced if not abolished.

He also had a warning for his European neighbours seeking help from their governments to boost enterprise: “In France we want less of the state involved in our SME sector. Be careful that you don't become like us and end up with more state interference.”

Each country has its own wish-list for what can be done to boost small business growth. In the UK, Martin McTague, policy chairman of the Federation of Small and Medium-sized Businesses, reckons that improving apprenticeships for small businesses is vital and is talking to the new education minister about how vocational training can be improved for small businesses. In France, Coirier will keep lobbying Macron for more tax cuts while Atenstaedt hopes Altmaier will go through with his promises to Germany's entrepreneurial spirit.

And the best takeaway from the Club of Three? That, despite or in spite of Brexit, the business leaders of Europe's three biggest economies will continue working with each other to improve conditions for SMEs. Their next step should be to start lobbying the new Commission and MEPs in Brussels to make sure policy-makers don't pile on more rules and red-tape. That would really stiffen the backbone of the European economy. ■

# The ECB's policies are creating more friction within the Eurozone

Mario Draghi's last months as President of the European Central Bank have been tumultuous. He managed to push through more bond purchases or “quantitative easing” on 12 September, despite the fact that Central Bank governors representing a majority of eurozone economic output opposed it, also because it was “open-ended”, without a time-limit. Not only was there open opposition by German and Dutch Central Bankers, but also France's Central Bank chief resisted.

Governments waded in. Belgium's Finance Minister warned that the ECB's policies hit savers and increase inequality. Ahead of the decision, the Dutch government had stated that the policy suppresses interest rates, with their Christian Democratic coalition partner even accusing the ECB of endangering Dutch pensions, which have had to be cut due to ongoing low rates, further raising the question of whether the ECB is respecting its mandate.

Draghi and his acolytes have been rejecting all these accusations, arguing that interest rates are low due to ageing populations. Meanwhile,

research by Claudio Borio, the top economist of the Bank for International Settlements, the “Central Bank of Central Banks,” has demonstrated that “the decline in real interest rates over the last 30 years is not explained well by non-monetary factors but monetary policy seems to play a more significant role”.

The ECB has been using various methods to keep interest rates low. This includes its general interest rate setting policies, whereby it sets negative rates, as well as “Quantitative Easing”, which amounts to creating new money, which is then used to buy bonds, including government bonds issued by Eurozone governments.

Beyond negative rates and QE, it has also been lowering collateral requirements for banks in Eurozone countries to receive financing from the ECB.

When interest rates decrease as a result of this kind of manipulation, even if this is also partially the result of natural, “non-monetary”, factors, the beneficiaries are excessively indebted governments that have a hard

time refinancing their debt. At least in Zimbabwe things are more honest, with the Central Bank paying out subsidies directly with printed money.

There is no such thing as a free lunch, however, so someone has to bear the cost. David Folkert-Landau, the chief economist of Deutsche Bank, estimates that negative interest rates amount to an annual tax on Euro-

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It's not only an issue that savers are hit and that asset prices are distorted, given that people buy hard assets to avoid debasement of their savings.

zone savings equal to EUR 160 billion. That is not very democratic, given that national parliaments have no say over what is essentially an “inflation tax”. Historically, central banks have been used to provide finance when taxpayers refuse to pay, most notably in the case of war, which is why the Bank of England was set up in 1694, at the height of the Nine Years' War with

France. Nowadays central banks facilitate runaway welfare spending.

Of course, central banks in the US, Japan and the UK engage in similar practices. However, Greece, a country with a debt burden that would be unsustainable without external Eurozone and ECB support, has paid less to borrow over a ten year period than the United States, whose currency underpins the world economy. Greece now also enjoys negative rates, meaning investors pay the Greek government for the privilege of lending to it. This makes it clear how far the ECB has gone.

The official line of the ECB is that we need all this to “achieve” a 2 percent inflation target. Originally, this was interpreted as a maximum limit, but somehow the ECB gets away with reinterpreting this as a goal to achieve. As if anyone aims for their investments to lose 2 percent per year.

It's not only an issue that savers are hit and that asset prices are distorted, given that people buy hard assets to avoid debasement of their savings.



by **Pieter Cleppe**

Some countries are also hit worse than others: Belgium has a lot of savings, the Netherlands a lot of pension funds that are banned from taking big risks, while a relatively low percentage of Germans own real estate. Just like fiscal transfers, these monetary transfers ultimately also threaten the Eurozone as they create more disunity: those having to pay aren't happy and those having to accept conditions linked to the payments aren't either.

The Eurozone is no stranger to monetary actions with attached political conditions. The ECB has sent various letters to governments with instructions in the past, suggesting monetary support may end unless they agree. With the arrival of Draghi's successor, Christine Lagarde, who is first and foremost a politician, an even more politicised ECB can be expected.

But politicising the central bank will not change the fact that there is insufficient political unity underpinning the Eurozone. The clearer the effects of the ECB's policies become, the more evident this will be. ■





# Edmund Burke

## FOUNDER AND CONSCIENCE OF CONSERVATISM

In the first of a series of essays on conservative philosophers, Gerald Warner explains how the horrors of the French Revolution inspired a great thinker to give birth to a movement

by **Gerald Warner**

Modern European conservative thought begins with the British political philosopher Edmund Burke. Burke was the father of all later Counter-Enlightenment ideas on the continent, most notably Joseph de Maistre. He was not English but Irish, born and reared in a culture less insular and more in harmony with European ideas than the typical English Whig.

For Burke professed himself a life-long Whig, espousing the principles of the English Revolution of 1688 which had overthrown James II and drastically reduced the power of the monarchy in favour of the great nobles. Later in life, he was constrained to describe himself as an “Old Whig”, to distance him from the increasingly radical Whig faction led by Charles James Fox. Despite being a Member of Parliament for almost twenty-nine years Burke only twice, briefly, held minor office; yet his reputation and influence were prodigious.

Burke's background was far from classically Whig. Although his father, an attorney, was a Protestant, his mother was Catholic. She belonged to a reduced landed gentry family of Jacobites whose head, Sir Richard Nagle, had served as Attorney General and Speaker of the Irish House of Commons in James II's “Patriot Parliament” of 1689. Born in 1730, Burke received his first education in an illegal “hedge school” for Catholic children in his maternal family's country in County Cork: under the Penal Laws, Catholic schools and teachers were forbidden to function.

Burke's education was eclectic: a Quaker school followed by Trinity College, Dublin and the Middle Temple in London where, much against his inclinations, he read for the Bar. He soon discovered his true metier as a writer and began to publish philosophical studies; his second, successful publication was an essay on aesthetics.

Burke is sometimes represented as a liberal blown off course, in reaction to the French Revolution, but while that catastrophe had a powerful effect on him, as on all his contemporaries, it was its violation of his core beliefs that alerted him, earlier than others, to the destructive character of a movement that Charles James Fox and the New Whigs greeted enthusiastically.

The most important element of Burke's philosophy was his belief in the Natural Law. This key principle of Western civilisation linked him intellectually to St Thomas Aquinas

and the Scholastics and, ultimately, to Aristotle. Yet for a long time Burke was erroneously thought to have rejected the Natural Law as traditionally interpreted.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Hobbes had redefined the Natural Law beyond recognition and John Locke had subverted it more subtly, both laying the groundwork for a radical notion of “natural rights”. It was this perversion of Natural Law that would be invoked by the French revolutionaries in their “Declaration of the Rights of Man”.

That was the travestied version of Natural Law that Burke rejected. Instead, he adhered to the traditional

His friend Adam Smith, the ground-breaking economist, observed: “Burke is the only man I ever knew who thinks on economic subjects exactly as I do, without any previous communications having passed between us.” Burke remarked that commerce “flourishes most when it is left to itself”, but his belief in free trade was moral rather than utilitarian, seeing it as a necessary extension of the free right to enjoyment of property, again on Natural Law principles.

The same applied to his criticisms of the government's taxation of the American colonies and his relentless denunciation of the East India Company and Warren Hastings for

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His friend Adam Smith, the ground-breaking economist, observed: “Burke is the only man I ever knew who thinks on economic subjects exactly as I do, without any previous communications having passed between us.” Burke remarked that commerce “flourishes most when it is left to itself”, but his belief in free trade was moral rather than utilitarian, seeing it as a necessary extension of the free right to enjoyment of property.

doctrine which held that Natural Law was “an emanation of God's reason and will, revealed to all mankind”. The basic moral laws were obvious and men were capable through “right reason” of discerning right from wrong. Natural Law was universally applicable for all time and any state law that contradicted it was invalid.

This ancient concept of divinely instituted equity represents a core conservative instinct, depriving totalitarian ideologies of legitimacy; today its principles are being violently assailed by the identity politics of cultural Marxism. It provided much of the inspiration for the three great crusades of Burke's career before his final battle against the French Revolution: his campaigns for reform of the abuses of imperialism in Ireland, America and India.

On Ireland, Burke was motivated not just by his loathing for injustice and oppression, but by his belief in free trade. Eventually he and his allies prevailed and Lord North's administration lifted the restrictions on trade with Ireland, relieving its hobbled economy. In Britain, Burke succeeded briefly in abolishing the Board of Trade, but it was subsequently restored.

corruption in India. If the British government had heeded Burke's *Speech on American Taxation and Speech on Conciliation with the American Colonies*, the American Revolution would probably have been averted.

It was the French Revolution, though, that supplied Burke with his finest hour. His greatest work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, is the foundation document of European conservatism. Burke started work on it as early as January, 1790 and it was published on 1 November. The author first denounced the Revolution on 9 February, 1790 in his speech on the Army Estimates.

That shows extraordinary precision. By that time, although there had been extreme violence at the storming of the Bastille in July, 1789, the royal family had been removed by force from Versailles and taken to Paris, and the Church despoiled, revolutionary disorder had abated and much of European public opinion regarded the Revolution with fatuous benevolence.

Burke was not deceived: he perceived that all that remained in Europe of Christendom was being destroyed: tradition, order, legitimate authority, religion and true freedom.



Photo: Getty Images

In his brilliant counterattack he deployed not only vast historical, fiscal and political knowledge but also his magnificent command of prose.

The most celebrated passage in *Reflections* is his encomium on Queen Marie Antoinette: “It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles, and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision ... I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.”

Burke wept while he penned that passage, as did the Queen when she read it. This was romanticism before Walter Scott. The lifelong Whig had succumbed to his Tory-Jacobite antecedents. Burke, however, did not rely primarily on rhetoric to make the case against a revolution that had shattered European civilisation. In this book he massed all the principles that had guided his thinking to discredit the advancing anarchy. ■

What were the key principles of Burke's philosophy? Russell Kirk, in *The Conservative Mind*, suggested that Burkean conservatism could be refined down to six core principles: “(1) Belief that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience, forging an eternal chain of right and duty which links great and obscure, living and dead... (2) Affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life... (3) Conviction that civilised society requires orders and classes... (4) Persuasion that property and freedom are inseparably connected, and that economic levelling is not economic progress... (5) Faith in prescription and distrust of “sophisters and calculators”... (6) Recognition that change and reform are not identical, and that innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress...”

There, in a nutshell, is the conservative idea. Although the term would not come into currency until Châteaubriand popularized it in 1818, the necessity to conserve became imperative in the face of the French Revolution against which Edmund Burke first sounded the trumpet. The call would be taken up by others inspired by Burke, the foremost among them being Joseph de Maistre. ■

# The Iron Lady

## TURNT TO RUST

The third and concluding volume of a landmark biography of Margaret Thatcher by Charles Moore is an utterly absorbing account of the leader who helped defeat communism

by **James Barr**

I met Margaret Thatcher only once, at a small party in 1998, where she kicked off her shoes so that she could address the gathering from atop an unopened box of Famous Grouse.

I was then an MP's bag carrier and afterwards my boss introduced me. “James is a good shot,” he said, to break the ice. “Paper targets”, I explained. “Oh”, she said, fixing me with that famous, penetrating look. “I could think of a few people you could shoot.”

Who did she mean? The obvious candidates were Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson. But Charles Moore quotes Richard Wilson, a senior civil servant, saying that although she often sniped at her former chancellors after her fall, “her main focus was on the younger men who owed everything to her and had deserted her.”

Lord Wilson, as he now is, was one of over three hundred people whom Moore, the former editor of the Spectator and the Daily Telegraph, interviewed while working on his authorized biography. This final instalment covers the era from Thatcher's third general election victory in 1987 to her death in 2013.

Spycatcher (where Moore makes it clear that she was lucky to escape unscathed), AIDS, Death on the Rock and Britain's salmonella panic are all in here. Moore's access to Thatcher's papers and the unpublished diaries of some of her contemporaries means the book contains plenty of new, and often entertainingly Yes Minister-ish, stuff.

The story starts in the immediate aftermath of the 1987 victory when, despite her outward triumph, the Iron Lady was actually showing the signs of metal fatigue. At odds with many of her cabinet colleagues, but no longer strong enough to sack them, she relied increasingly on her advisers. Chief and most controversial among them was Charles Powell, a man she had accurately predicted would be “controlling us all within six months” when she appointed him three years earlier. To recharge, almost literally, she would visit “a Hindu practitioner of Ayurvedic arts” in the suburbs, who used to poach her with herbs in a lightly electrified bath. It is an approach that it is hard to imagine any of her successors daring to emulate. But then, as the official historian of GCHQ – Britain's listening centre – is quoted saying in the book, as a scientist by training, “She would have known a watt from an amp.”

After the 1987 election, the government almost immediately found itself

in trouble, as Conservative MPs realised that the new Community Charge – the Poll Tax – would lead to neighbours paying vastly different sums in local tax, and the NHS faced its annual winter crisis. A trip up north, designed to highlight Thatcher's concern about the plight of inner cities, had already produced the famous photograph of her standing, like some post-industrial Ozymandias, alone among the weeds at a derelict ironworks on Teesside.

The fact the tax burden on the average worker had eased by less than half a per cent since 1979, and the burden on the low paid had actually increased, put the onus on the Chancellor, Nigel Lawson. His 1988 budget, which cut the basic rate of income tax, and corporation tax, to 25 per cent, and the higher rate by a third to 40 per cent has framed taxation ever since. The joy within the press it caused made Lawson, whom Thatcher had once encouraged to get his hair cut, politically iron-clad.

The panache – some might say hubris – of the budget concealed another tension which predated the election victory. In a bid to tame inflation both Lawson and his predecessor, Howe, favoured joining the Exchange Rate Mechanism, which would tie

sterling to the German Deutschmark. Thatcher did not like this, partly because she correctly recognised that it would “cede” a “major role in British economic policy” to Germany, partly because Lawson's preliminary move – shadowing the Deutschmark – was already costing the taxpayer millions of pounds.

The problem refused to go away. So far as the European Commission's president, Jacques Delors, was concerned, the ERM was not an end in itself. His true aim was the creation of a central bank and single currency. Moreover, he exploited the European Community's financial crisis at this time to argue for an increase in the EC's “own resources” (the money the Community accrued through its cut of VAT and other duties). At bottom, says Moore, in one of many judicious verdicts in this book, Thatcher “was jealous of the power he [Delors] was accumulating.”

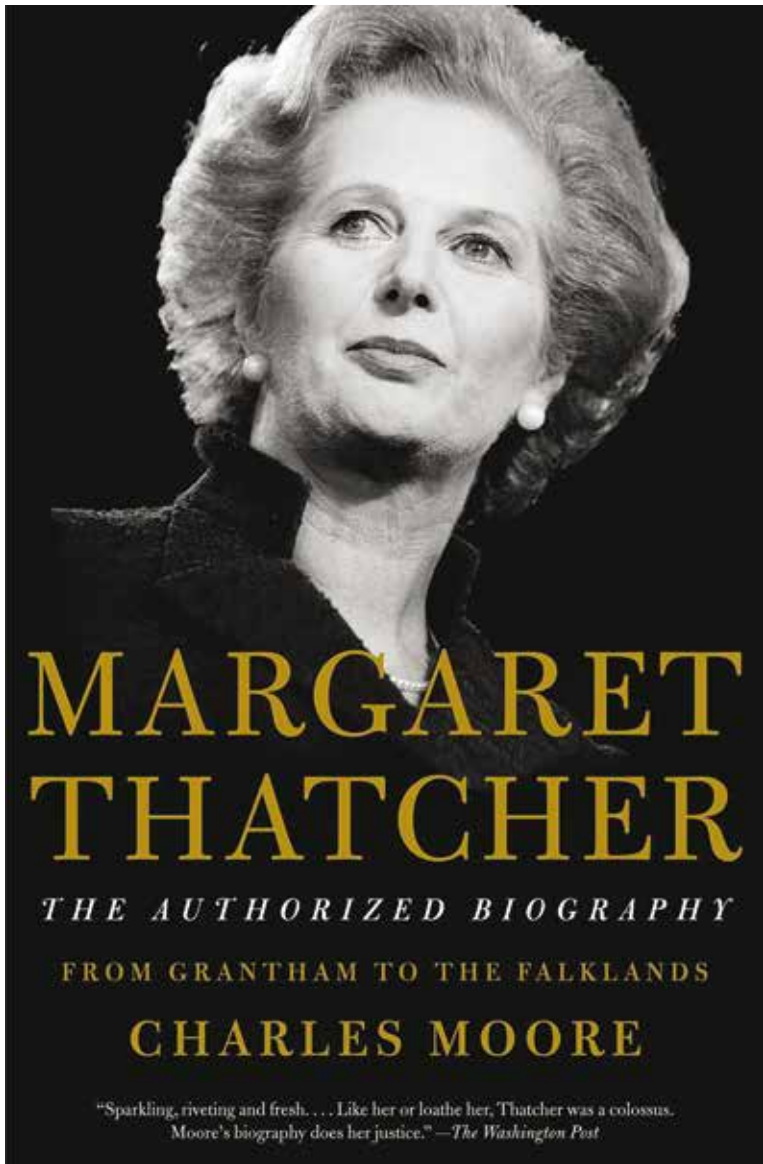
An invitation to the College of Europe in Bruges in the autumn of 1988 offered Thatcher the opportunity to offer an alternative vision for Europe. Moore's sight of the various versions of the Bruges Speech enables him to show how John Kerr at the Foreign Office tried to water down the draft. Kerr sportingly admits that

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The story starts in the immediate aftermath of the 1987 victory when, despite her outward triumph, the Iron Lady was showing the signs of metal fatigue.



Margaret Thatcher leaves Downing Street for the last time, in November 1990.

Photo: Peter Macalind - Getty Images



Thatcher's message, of freedom to the eastern European states, went over his head. “It was”, he admits, “a great moment in British foreign policy – and we all missed it.”

Delors' proposal of a three stage economic and monetary union, made in the spring of 1989, brought the question of British membership of the ERM to the boil. Howe and Lawson now argued that joining was essential if the UK was to succeed in “kicking Stages II and III [of EMU] into the long grass”. “Nonsense” wrote Thatcher in the margin, which proved to be spot-on.

As 1989, one of the most significant years in recent history, began, Thatcher's influence was ebbing, however. The Vale of Glamorgan by-election that spring produced the biggest swing to Labour in half a century.

Her unpopularity with other European leaders reduced her influence in Washington in turn. “I called Margaret today”, George Bush reported to Helmut Kohl, “just to listen to her, which I did for an hour.” The British had been counting on playing on Franco-German divisions to sabotage the single currency but the fall of the Berlin Wall that autumn brought the two old enemies together. What Douglas Hurd described in his diary as her “demonic” hostility to Germany further isolated her when the question of reunification arose.

Chris Patten told Moore that it might have been better to have let Thatcher fight and lose an election in 1992. But this was not how people thought at the time. “I'll vote for anyone as long as it's not her”, said one panicking MP, whose majority, in 1992, was shaved to 53 votes.

When finally she was challenged by Michael Heseltine, Thatcher was too grand to save herself. Too successful to go and “cadge” votes in the Commons tea-room, as Powell put it, she left Downing Street on 28 November 1990 to face an empty kitchen in her house in Dulwich. She was aghast when told that she would need to consult the Yellow Pages to get hold of a plumber. No wonder, because Moore reckons, entirely credibly, that she had not dialled a telephone number since 1979.

This is an utterly absorbing account of recent, and still highly relevant, politics, and one, moreover, that provides enough telling details to explode a central myth.

“In her sense of herself, Margaret Thatcher loved to claim absolute consistency,” Moore writes. “Part of the fascination of her character lies in the fact that this claim was sometimes false.” ■





# Whatever happened to SCANDINAVIAN ART?

Scandinavian artists like Christen Købke, Hilma af Klint and Vilhelm Hammershøi are finally getting the popular recognition they deserve

by **Alex Colville**

Scandinavia is internationally renowned for its literary heritage. Ibsen and Strindberg are well-known to the popular imagination, as are Kierkegaard and Knausgaard, the Nordic myths and sagas, *The Killing* and the scandal-rocked Swedish Academy. But why is it that in visual art, Scandinavia has only one global contender – Edvard Munch?

Even then, Munch is only really known for one painting. Walking with friends above the cityscape of Oslo, Munch suddenly saw the sky turn blood red as the sun went down, and he was overcome with an awful anxiety. “Nature was screaming in my blood,”

he later recorded in his diary. But Munch was far from alone in his awe of Scandinavia’s sublime vistas. Fellow Norwegian artist Harald Sohlberg is a footnote in international terms, despite being only six years younger than Munch.

His masterpieces like *Winter Night in the Mountains* demonstrate Scandinavia is not short either of talented painters or eye-catching subject matter.

The nineteenth century saw an explosion of independent schools of art across the Nordic states, including Denmark’s Golden



Age of painting. Following the devastation of the country’s fortunes during the Napoleonic Wars, it was inspired by a melding of neo-classicism and a desire to find an authentically Danish art tradition. The paintings produced are highly detailed, imbued with a sense of calm and stillness, subjects bathed in a dusky half-light. Big names included Professor Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, who like Joshua Reynolds in London or Jacques-Louis David in Rome, encouraged students to paint scenes from the countryside, extracting universal beauty from “the great book of nature”.

One of his pupils, Christen Købke, is often considered the best painter of the Golden Age. The son of a baker, hardly able to spell, Købke managed to create extraordinarily vivid portraits. In his portrait of Inger Margrethe Høyen, the mother of one of his colleagues and a self-made woman who grew from the daughter of a gardener to supervising a distillery, we are confronted by a woman of wisdom, cynicism and sturdiness.

Sweden’s Hilma af Klint has exploded onto the world stage in recent years. A keen spiritualist, af Klint’s paintings from the 1900s to the 1940s were intent on showing the complex and chilling world beyond

reality. She created abstract geometric shapes so radical she hid them for fear of ridicule, instructing in her will they be hidden for 20 years, displayed only when the world was ready for it. Her work has now appeared in 28 exhibitions across the West, with the Guggenheim Museum in New York mounting her first major US solo exhibition earlier this year. She is in high demand as a fore-runner of better-known abstractionists like Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich. The 2013 retrospective of her work at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet was the most popular exhibition the museum has ever had.

Af Klint may be making the biggest comeback, but she’s not the only one to re-emerge. The Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi’s *Interior with Easel*, 1912, was bought for over \$5 million in October last year by Los Angeles’s J. Paul Getty Museum.

Hammershøi was internationally renowned in his lifetime, featuring in exhibitions in Rome, Venice and Paris. Emil Nolde and Rainer Maria Rilke were amongst his admirers. But he fell into obscurity after his death in 1916. Since being exhibited at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg in 2003

and London’s Royal Academy in 2008, Hammershøi has received greater interest, his work featuring in shows in Paris, Tokyo and New York.

Hammershøi’s work is filled with unease. His cityscapes are grey ghost-ships, utterly devoid of people, while women with their back turned to the viewer gaze from a living room down yawning shadowy corridors. Domestic settings are turned into a vast, alien wilderness.

Dr Felix Krämer, the Artistic Director and General Manager of the Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf who curated the exhibitions in Hamburg and London, tells me that Hammershøi is a modern painter with a highly distinctive style: “No other contemporary of his is equally reduced in palette and subject matter”. Inspired by the realism of the Eckersberg and Købke, coupled with still-life interiors of the Dutch Golden Age, Hammershøi has been termed by some experts as “the modern Vermeer” for his crisp, austere depiction of domestic spaces. There is also a hint of Whistler in his sombre colour palette. Dr Krämer says it is this aesthetic purity and minimalism that excites modern tastes, along with his blending of old and new styles. While in Paris he painted a Louvre Grecian marble relief in the

pointillist style, Seurat’s controversial new technique – “He is conservative, yet radical at the same time.”

Why is it that these artists, some popular in their own time, some even pre-empting future trends in modern art, are still relatively unknown? Although experiencing a renaissance, Hilma af Klint is probably complicit in her obscurity through her self-censorship, thus explaining her failure to see a major exhibition until the late 1980s.

Perhaps the darkness of Scandinavia fires the literary imagination better than the visual one. Our conception of 19<sup>th</sup> century painting is filled with the clean light and bright colours of Monet, Delacroix, Gauguin or Matisse. The light nearer the arctic circle tends to result in dark and cool colours. Eckersberg once said that his painting style arose from seeing a summery cityscape through a black bottle. Even when he painted bright Italian landscapes, they are seen through a dusky lens, a tradition which many students of the Danish Academy inherited. Hammershøi’s work is filled with varying shades of grey (known as *grisaille*), creating paintings so neutral in coloration that contemporaries described them as “coloured black-and-white photographs”.

But, as the striking colours of Af Klint’s work demonstrate, such an interpretation is wrong. Købke’s work is no less colourful than



contemporaries like David or Delacroix. Besides, as Hammershøi proved, those who worked with cold colours were just as capable of achieving international success in their day.

So what was it about Munch that made him stand out? He was cosmopolitan, willing to travel and take inspiration from other artists across Europe. The work of Gauguin, van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec all lit a fire in his mind, and he was fascinated by the way they used colours to convey emotion. Munch also managed to publicly attach his name to Ibsen, already known as one of the great figures of Scandinavia, painting stage sets for productions of *Peer Gynt* and

*Ghosts* while living in Paris.

By contrast, Sohlberg and Købke worked in isolation. Købke, like most Danish artists of the Golden Age, received little opportunity to travel abroad. He spent most of his life painting Copenhagen, where he lived. In fact, he rarely left the city. Sohlberg preferred to paint country scenes in the remote landscapes of central Norway.

Hammershøi may have fallen through the cracks because he was so unique as to be impossible to categorise. When he travelled to Paris in 1890, he was influenced by new styles of painting but dismissed the modern artwork there as “a lot of trash”. He used classical art as his subject, as Eckersberg would have done, with cities devoid of people in contrast to the relishing of city-life that came to define the neo-impressionists. This traditional element to his work, along with his work’s stillness and sterility, may have made him seem of the old guard in an era dominated by the vibrancy and dynamism of Kandinsky, Matisse and Picasso.

Contemporary Scandinavian art no longer keeps its creatives to itself. The minimalism of Scandinavian interior design is the toast of upmarket decorators. Contemporary Scandinavian art no longer keeps its creatives to itself. The minimalism of Scandinavian interior design is the toast of upmarket decorators. Australia can thank Danish architect Jørn Utzon for the distinctive sails of the Sydney Opera House, which arose from Utzon trying to situate the building in its nautical surroundings: “It sits on a point sticking out into a harbour, a very beautiful harbour, a fjord with a lot of inlets.”

Most recently, Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* at Tate Modern’s turbine hall attracted 2 million visitors in 2003. It harnesses the sublime – a bright, burning sun, bathing the hall in warm light reflected through a fine veil of mist. Eliasson has said that his work is often inspired by the landscape of Iceland, rooted as it is in his personal feelings and memories. Scandinavian awe for “the great book of nature” continues to create remarkable pieces of work. ■



# Scaramouche

by Rafael Sabatini

Lost Classic is the Reaction series in which we highlight great artists that are under-appreciated or forgotten

by **Gerald Warner**

“He was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.”

Those words supply the epitaph on the grave of novelist Rafael Sabatini at Adelboden in Switzerland and they are the opening sentence of his most accomplished novel, *Scaramouche*. A couple of generations ago that introductory line was as familiar to the reading public as “It is a truth universally acknowledged...”. Although his works are all still in print, largely thanks to Stratus Books which has republished the entire canon, which fits into a total of thirty-seven volumes, they are the preserve of a minority of enthusiasts.

The essential epithet invariably applied to Rafael Sabatini is “swashbuckling”. Like so much of the European romantic literary tradition it is a term that traces its remote origins to Sir Walter Scott. On the Continent, Alexandre Dumas *père* was the doyen of this genre, dating from the publication of *The Three Musketeers* in 1844. Such was his staggering output that the entire cycle of Musketeer sequels, the Valois novels and *The Count of Monte Cristo* were all published in the single decade of the 1840s. Dumas’ closest rival, Paul Féval, asserted his position as a writer of swashbucklers with his bestselling novel *Le Bossu*, in 1857, but preferred to produce crime fiction.

In the 1880s, Scotland, which had arguably invented the genre of the historical novel, contributed to the canon with Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *The Master of Ballantrae*. In England, the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the golden age of swashbuckling authors. They included Anthony Hope’s *The Prisoner of Zenda* and Stanley J Weyman’s *A Gentleman of France*. These were followed at the turn of the century by A. E. W. Mason’s *Clementina* and works by Baroness Orczy, who launched the Scarlet Pimpernel on his hazardous adventures in 1905 and continued to chronicle Sir Percy Blakeney through twelve novels and two collections of short stories until 1940.

As the new century began, so, very tentatively, did the career of the man who was to take historical fiction to a new peak of popularity and literary achievement. Rafael Sabatini was, on the face of it, the unlikely candidate for this role. English was his sixth language, though his mature prose style was superior to many of his English-born literary contemporaries.

Sabatini was born on 29 April 1875 in Italy, at Jesi near Ancona. His parents were both opera singers who became music teachers, his father being Italian and his mother English. His father Vincenzo trained the famous tenor John, Count McCormack, in Milan in 1905. Rafael, after a cosmopolitan education in Portugal and Switzerland which made him multi-lingual, ended up in Liverpool where his mother had

relations, eventually scraping a living as a journalist. His early stories were published in magazines and newspapers. In 1902 his first novel, *The Lovers of Yvonne*, was published to an indifferent reception.

Not to be deterred, the aspiring author struggled on. In 1906 he published two historical novels, both very different in character. One was *The Trampling of the Lilies*, Sabatini’s first ambitious attempt to mine the French Revolution for material. Compared to a later novel in the same setting, *Scaramouche*, it is stylistically awkward, veering perilously close to the “Nay, sir, that love can never be!” school of Victorian melodramatic dialogue. In contrast, the other novel he published that same year, *Bardelys the Magnificent*, moves with pace and aplomb, somewhat in the style of his later Captain Blood short stories. The evident reason for this disparity is that Sabatini had been reworking *The Trampling of the Lilies* from his earlier material, the short story *Made-moiselle de Castelroc*, which had appeared in Pearson’s Magazine in January 1904 and so was probably written in 1903.

Sabatini diligently produced one novel every year, except once, until the outbreak of the First World War, making a very modest living while the breakthrough he dreamed of continued to elude him. In 1915, he published the first novel that would later be ranked as part of his classic canon – *The Sea Hawk* – but without notable public success at the time. Then his writing career was disrupted by the War, when his linguistic skills caused British intelligence to recruit him as a translator.

During the remainder of the war years he produced only one novel, *The Snare*, in 1917 and then wrote no further full-length work until 1921. That fallow period did not betoken any decline in his writing skills or dedication to his profession. On the contrary, Sabatini was engaged in supreme creative efforts and in 1921, aged 46, he published the masterpiece that would change his life and elevate him

to a higher literary plane: the novel *Scaramouche*.

It is believed that part of the plot for *Scaramouche* came to Sabatini while he was translating a history of the Comédie-Française. He himself described its earliest genesis in a contribution to *The Strand Magazine*. After explaining that the inspiration for his novels did not follow a set pattern: “Sometimes I begin by conceiving a situation, sometimes a single character, and sometimes I am attracted by a

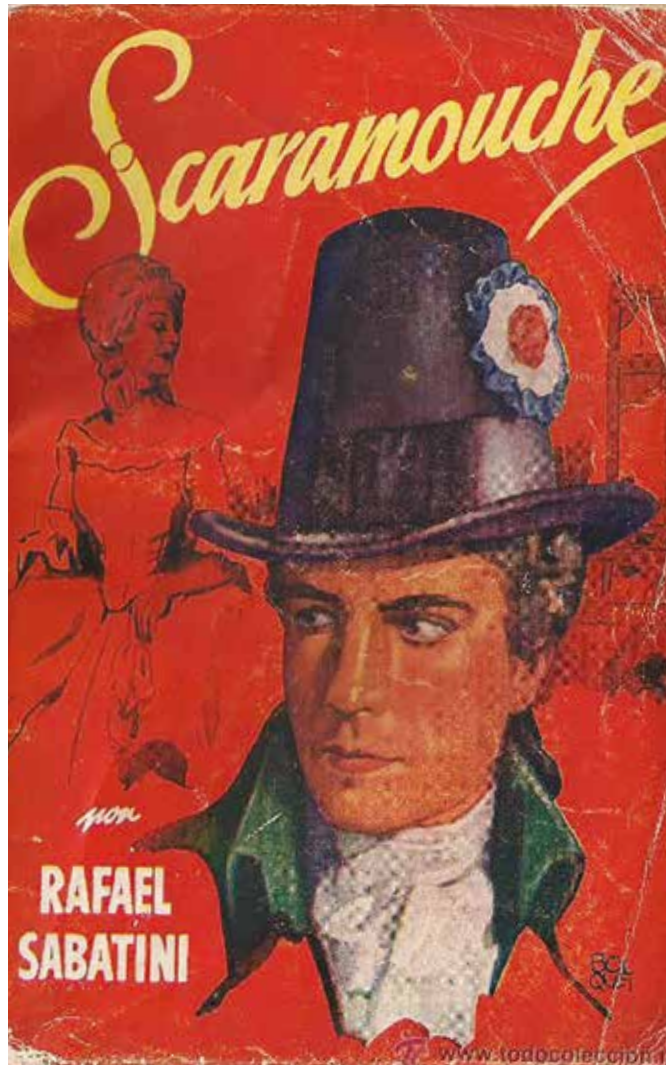
in pre-Revolutionary France. He witnesses his closest friend being killed in an unequal duel by the reactionary Marquis de La Tour d’Azyr, an incident that changes the whole tenor of his life, embracing the disparate worlds of a company of strolling players (as in Féval’s *Le Bossu*), the fencing *salle* and eventually the political turmoil of the Estates General and National Assembly.

Sabatini followed up the huge success of *Scaramouche* the following year with an equally popular novel, *Captain Blood: His Odyssey*. Its success prompted him to write two books of short stories based on the same character: *The Chronicles of Captain Blood*, in 1931, and *The Fortunes of Captain Blood*, in 1936. Both collections were strikingly atmospheric and demonstrated Sabatini’s skill as a writer of short stories, a talent not always exhibited by novelists.

In 1931, Sabatini attempted to exploit his success of a decade earlier by writing a sequel: *Scaramouche the Kingmaker*. Although it illustrated his exceptional dedication to historical research and ability to ferret out plots from real-life conspiracies, in this book Sabatini fell victim to the very literary skill with which he had crafted his greatest novel. The problem was that *Scaramouche* was too perfectly complete for the reader to live comfortably with a sequel grafted onto it.

Rafael Sabatini continued to write until his death, though less prolifically. One of his best novels was written in 1940: *The Marquis of Carabas*. In this book he returned to the themes of fencing and the French Revolution. Although the genre of historical fiction is not simply one long duel, swordsmanship is a significant element in the Sabatini canon and the author knew the lore of the sword, a knowledge he displayed most forensically in *The Marquis of Carabas*.

The same could not be said of many other swashbuckling authors. Paul Féval was ignorant of fencing: the supposed *botte secrète* of the Duc de Nevers in *Le Bossu* could never have been executed in a real swordfight.



“The essential epithet invariably applied to Rafael Sabatini is “swashbuckling”. Like so much of the European romantic literary tradition it is a term that traces its remote origins to Sir Walter Scott.

LOST CLASSIC

So, does Rafael Sabatini deserve to be recognised as a classic writer? The irony is that, if he had been a one-book author and had produced only *Scaramouche*, it would almost certainly have been accepted as a literary novel. Accompanied as it is by thirty other novels and nine collections of shorter tales, all of widely varying quality, his work is too easily written off by critics as mere adventure fiction.

In compensation, Sabatini attained fame and fortune. His life, however, was clouded by tragedy. In defiance of the cliché that lightning does not strike in the same place twice, he witnessed the violent deaths of his son in a road accident and his stepson in an air crash, while flying over his parents’ home to celebrate having earned his wings in the RAF during the Second World War. The writer’s consolations were fishing and skiing in Switzerland, where he died in 1950.

In reaction to the industrial scale of slaughter in the Second World War and the menace of the atomic bomb, the immediate post-war period witnessed a large-scale re-popularization of swashbuckling adventures in cinema and comics, with the happy consequence that many of his books were also republished. In 1950 *The Fortunes of Captain Blood* came to the screen, followed by a parodic version of *Scaramouche* in 1952, redeemed only by the duel in the finale – the longest swordfight in cinema history, between Stewart Granger and Mel Ferrer.

One final observation should be made regarding the writers of swashbuckling fiction: they were mostly untrue to their fictional totems. Dumas took a rather ineffectual, even comical, part in the 1830 revolution that finally brought down the Bourbon monarchy his created protagonists had revered and served, ushering in a bourgeois king who carried not a sword but an umbrella.

The English authors had a Whiggish mentality, most obviously Stanley J. Weyman whose Protestant self-righteousness could become tedious. He was the writer Sabatini most admired. Sabatini embraced the values of his English mother’s homeland, demonizing James II and perpetuating the Black Legend of Spanish beastliness in many of his novels. The epigraph preceding *Scaramouche*, a quotation from Jules Michelet, the anticlerical republican historian, offers an apologist’s view of the French Revolution.

The problem with creating sword-wielding heroes who are on the side of “progressive” forces that will eventually produce republics and mass democracy is that those paladins are destroying their natural habitat. Even Rafael Sabatini did not grasp that irony; in compensation, he left a large body of well-researched and graphically atmospheric fiction populated with credible, heroic and witty characters that has brought pleasure to millions of readers and deserves to be re-read today. ■





# JOKER

## A SMART, DARK LOOK AT AMERICAN URBAN LIFE

Joaquin Phoenix gives a knockout lead performance as Batman's greatest nemesis, the Joker

by **Alexander Larman**

It is rare that a mainstream film is released with the intensity of hype employed to promote *Joker*. There is the award-winning acclaim that it has already enjoyed (at the prestigious Golden Lion at Venice) and wild stories about how police have had to be drafted into screenings on its first weekend of release, and claims that nobody wearing clown makeup will be allowed admission. That sounds to me like the invention of a studio publicity department in the same way that Hitchcock reputedly refused latecomers entry to *Psycho*. It has been marketed, aggressively, as an event film, a comic-book picture that stands comparison to the work of Scorsese rather than whichever hack(s) directed *Avengers: Endgame*. None of which quite answers the question: is it any good?

The answer is very much “yes”, albeit not, perhaps, in the way that you might imagine. For all of the scuttlebutt and rumours swirling around, this is still a piece of mainstream entertainment from a major Hollywood studio, directed by the man

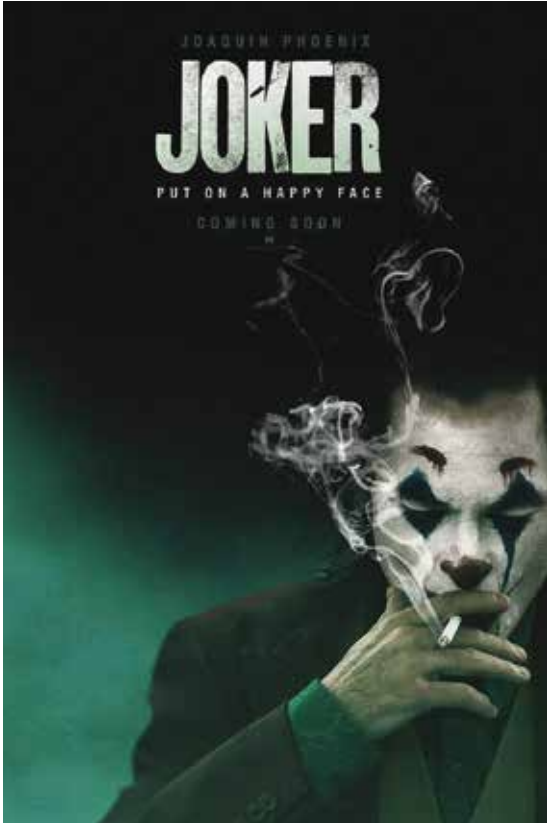
behind *The Hangover* and with two A-list lead actors in Joaquin Phoenix and Robert de Niro. Anyone going to it expecting a quasi-religious experience that redefines cinema will inevitably be disappointed. Those hoping for a smart, dark look at American urban life, leavened with a generous helping of social satire and with a knockout lead performance, will be altogether happier. Although I'm still not entirely sure about the inclusion of Gary Glitter's *Rock and Roll Part 2* in a key scene, a moment at which the filmmakers overlay their hand and attempt to troll the audience. As if they needed to.

The film, for the uninitiated, deals with the “origin story” of Batman's greatest nemesis, the Joker – although it must be noted that the scenes that try to tie the narrative into a wider comic-book storyline are some of the film's weakest. (I worked out that this was the fourth time in recent cinema that I had seen Bruce Wayne's parents being murdered; twice was probably more than enough.) As portrayed by Phoenix, Arthur Fleck is an aspiring

stand-up comedian in the early Eighties who ekes out a pitiful living dressing up as a clown, enduring violent physical abuse in the course of his work and suffering from a variety of mental health issues. He lives with his mother in the kind of cursed and tiny apartment that unhappy people in the movies always have to inhabit, and his only real pleasure comes from watching oleaginous talk-show host Murray Franklin (De Niro), whose show he has fantasies of appearing on. His life meanders on in an unhappy way, until a co-worker's misplaced kindness and a late-night subway encounter with a trio of drunken Wall Street bankers combine to memorably visceral effect. Cue the emergence of “Joker”.

A great deal of the advance word on the film suggested that it was a deliberate homage to *Taxi Driver* and *The King of Comedy*, and the influence of both is clear, especially in the casting of De Niro in a pivotal role. Its director and co-writer Todd Phillips, obviously trying to distinguish himself with a far more serious picture than his previous work, manages to keep the feel authentically grimy and gritty, especially in the first act. There are long stretches when one feels as if one is watching some lost classic from the era in which it is set, and the casting of the fine character actor Bill Camp in a small role as a moustachioed detective only contributes to the seamy atmosphere of it all. The political dimension is also clearly present. Fleck finds himself, by

accident, at the epicentre of a movement that sets the angry poor in their rat-infested city against the uncaring rich, and riots ensue. It is hard not to think of the *gilets jaunes*, or, of course, a certain red-baseball capped provocateur-in-chief. This is America, and it is definitely not great.



The casting of Phoenix, one of the edgiest and most risk-taking actors working today, represents a considerable coup for the filmmakers. Phoenix is usually found in altogether more esoteric fare, and this is his most high-profile role since 2005's *Walk The Line*, although this could hardly

be more different. There, he played Johnny Cash with gusto and brooding, but ultimately stopped short of investigating Cash's truly dark side. Here, he is like someone unleashed. If he doesn't erase memories of Heath Ledger's Joker in Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, that is solely because they are such different interpretations. Ledger's terrifying, inexplicable figure seems to have emerged fully formed from hell; Phoenix's Fleck has been created by a mixture of everything from inadequate mental health funding to deep-rooted parental issues. Initially, one pities him, before the violence shifts from being borderline justifiable to unpleasant.

Phillips' film is technically excellent, thanks to Lawrence Sher's appropriately gritty cinematography and, especially, Hildur Guðnadóttir's growling, cello-heavy score, which grows in intensity and foreboding as the action progresses. I'm not sure that it is anything like as dangerous or threatening as some of the early publicity has indicated, although no doubt there will be a few fools causing trouble while wearing clown masks at screenings. Instead, it is a splendidly effective look inside the mind of an extremely troubled man, played to perfection by a fine

actor. We can only imagine what Donald Trump will make of it all, but no doubt he will offer his thoughts on social media in due course. And thus the whirligig of life imitating art imitating life will, once again, turn full circle. Frankly, if you weren't laughing, you'd cry. ■

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds - Ghosteen

# Nick Cave

## LET'S LOVE IN AT LAST

Nick Cave's latest album is a triumph of the spirit

by **Edward Thicknesse**

There's a simple message at the heart of *Ghosteen*, the new album by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. We hear it over and again through each of the ten songs, but it is only in the record's penultimate line that it finds its clearest expression: “Everybody is always losing somebody”.

It's not a radical thought, but one that is entirely appropriate to an album that deals almost exclusively in the familiar. Told in the first person, at its heart the record is the drama of a family lost in the vastness of a universe. In July 2015 Cave's teenage son Arthur fell to his death from the cliffs near their Brighton home. *Skeleton Tree*, the band's previous record, and the accompanying film, *One More Time with Feeling*, were Cave's response, a harrowing account of a man staring into the darkness of grief. As its portmanteau title suggests, *Ghosteen* is a continuation of

that story: the darkness abides, but at last the light might start to get in.

If *Skeleton Tree* was the sound of the sky falling in, *Ghosteen* is its opposite. The songs on this album are shot through with a profound sense of wonder: Cave now feels the presence of something, or someone, else. In the *Red Hand Files*, an ongoing collection of letters addressed to fans, he has written explicitly about this: “I feel the presence of my son, all around, but he may not be there. I hear him talk to me, parent me, guide me, though he may not be there.”

Sonically, too, things have changed. Where *Skeleton Tree* was drenched in menacing synth and repetitive, oppressive percussion, the latest record is closer in texture to ambient music: long-time collaborator Warren Ellis has created a suite of songs touched with sublime, immense, sparse soundscapes against which

Cave pits his signature baritone. The result is something of at times astonishing beauty, as on standouts such as *Bright Horses* and *Sun Forest*.

Cave has applied the same process of paring-back to his lyrics. The long, narrative-led songs that made his name are no more, at least for the moment. Instead, we are faced with a coalescing, revolving group of phrases and motifs which recur throughout the album, forming a semantic framework that binds the songs together. It's as if Cave is extemporising, revising and refining in an almost oral-tradition manner.

Certain among these phrases stand out: “the past with its undertow”, “children climbing to the sun”, and perhaps most affectingly, “I am here and you are where you are”. It's almost as if Cave is using these phrases as a form of echolocation, mapping his grief in an attempt to fix his position in this newly empty world.

Images of the familiar sit side-by-side with a stream of deeply resonant cultural archetypes. We see snapshots of family life – a woman “in the back room washing his clothes” and “sitting at the kitchen table, listening to the radio” – juxtaposed with Elvis, the Three Bears, the Buddha, and, most frequently, “Jesus lying in his mother's arms”.

The Pieta, the image of the crucified Christ in his mother's arms, has a symbolic valency that is near universal. Indeed, it far outdates its Christian connotation – the so-called Sarpedon krater, which depicts the death of the

eponymous son of Priam of Troy, dates from 515 BC. By juxtaposing the semantic shorthand of this image with deeply personal snapshots of family life, we cannot help but elide the two: the private pain of Cave and his wife is transmuted into something common to all.

Rendered in these terms, we too can begin to understand Cave's pain. The Pieta speaks to the essential truth of humanity: we all must die, and thus, at some point or another, we all must grieve for something that we have lost.



The past will not let us go. There is, as his film *One More Time with Feeling* made clear, no moving on from such loss. But that is not to say that there is not beauty, and wonder, and joy. *Ghosteen* is the sound of a man coming to terms with this truth. Everybody is always losing somebody, but that's exactly where we can begin to find the strength to lift our eyes again. ■



# CORFU'S SECRET TREASURE

by **Anne-Elisabeth Moutet**

Greece's only museum dedicated to the art of Asia is one of Europe's greatest and least well-known cultural artefacts



The wonderful Corfu Museum of Asian Art is world-renowned yet rarely visited. (They did have an exhibition of their best Japanese pieces in Tokyo ten years ago, and the Japanese are still talking about it.) Housed in the grand, but somewhat dilapidated Palace of St. Michael and St. George in the old town, it was created for the exceptional collection donated to the Greek nation by Gregorios Manos, once the Greek ambassador to Austria in the late nineteenth century.

Manos had an eye for art, and a large fortune. Having retired in Paris, he spent all of it at dealers and in auction houses across Europe, in Berlin, London and Vienna. He acquired almost 10,000 works of mainly Chinese and Japanese art over a period of four decades. When he made his bequest, shortly after the end of the First World War, his only desire was that the collection should remain together as a whole. His wish was fulfilled in 1927, when the “Museum of Chinese and Japanese Art” finally came into existence, housed in what had once been, in the previous century, the residence of the British Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands. Manos joined the staff as a curator and died one year later, ruined but happy. The museum now numbers some 15,000 pieces – with more recent donations and purchases from Central Asia, Khmer, Tibet, Korea and Thailand – but it still retains Manos's personality.

The turn of the twentieth was exactly the right time to acquire Asian art, just as European interest in the Far East had begun to view its heritage not as mere decoration but as an alternative view of the world. European porcelain and cabinet-makers had imported pieces from China for several centuries; but in order to add to them, or to integrate them into their designs, they layered delicate Chinese lacquer panels onto rococo chests of drawers, encased celadon or *Famille Rose* vases in gilt bronze handles and pediments. By the time Manos was sniffing around Paris galleries, artists from Whistler to Vincent Van Gogh had started collecting Japanese art and hand-coloured prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige, and drawing on them in order to bring radical changes to their own sense of colour, shape and volume.

Part of his haul is now on show in the museum's near deserted rooms, which take up almost all of the palace itself,

save a few formal reception rooms on the ground floor. The Chinese collection has the largest number of pieces, with ceramics holding the lion's share: there is almost two millennia's worth of it, from warrior and horse figurines found in tombs to the extravagant “Jesuit” dishes. Commissioned by the best porcelain workshops for western religious designs in the 17th and 18th centuries, these are beautifully made, yet strangely void of recognisable emotion: one *en grisaille* ornamental plate representing Golgotha, with the three crosses, could be an illustration of mutual cultural incomprehension, with Jesus, the thieves and Mary all smiling in vague, ethereal contemplation.

“You leave through the elegantly provincial hallways of the Palace and down the grand staircase, scrupulously maintained and varnished, with some lugubrious portraits of various grandees in frock coats and uniforms and lots of draperies...”

Emotion, immediate and fresh, is found in sculptures and miniatures, produced variably in ceramic, stone, ivory and horn. There is a mother and her child made of two long animal tusks, forerunners of Jean Arp and Giacometti; tiny china figurines of servants with an expression of guile that would be at home in a Beaumarchais play; roof tiles and corner pieces in the shape of lions and dragons invoke their protection over the long forgotten houses they crowned. A window of seventeenth-century Tang pottery stands out in the midst of ornate decoration: monochrome vases and plates in Mondrian colours and stark shapes – yellow, red and blue – to create a modernity utterly alien to the *Beaux Arts* sensitivity of Manos's epoch. Yet he saw something, enough to buy a dozen such pieces, more than in any other Chinese art museum I've visited.



After the Chinese halls, evocative of the wealth and breadth of an ancient culture, the Japanese collection seems at first restrained. The order of visit takes you from the Chinese profusion of colours and ornamentation to the Japanese austerity of the Momoyama, Edo and Meiji eras. It takes a mental shaking-off to adapt in the first few rooms. But even before you reach the Samurai room, with swords, daggers, illustrated screens and the black-lacquered complete suit of armour that inspired Darth Vader, an intimate porcelain miniature of two girls reading a book, barely the size of your palm, catches the heart like a shot from a François Truffaut movie.

Or there's the unique alignment of Nô theatre masks, each representing a stock character: who more so than an educated Greek like Manos would find such an immediate connection to this world?

The galleries devoted to Central Asian art and textiles on the second floor are smaller, but India is beautifully served with architectural remains and statues and Buddhas in stone, wood and bronze. You leave through the elegantly provincial hallways of the Palace and down the grand staircase, scrupulously maintained and varnished, with some lugubrious portraits of various grandees in frock coats and uniforms and lots of draperies; and then come out in today's Corfu, a tourist town full of shops, clubs and restaurants.

It's a complete disconnect, suggesting only the bare bones of what was conceived, two centuries ago, as the first neo-classical ensemble on Greek land. There are two 1840s landscapes of the Palace and Esplanade, by the German Romantic artist Joseph Schranz, in one of the ground-floor rooms, that give an idea of mid nineteenth-century Corfu. In its time, Corfu has been a politically significant island fought over and ruled by the Venetians, the French, the Turks, the British, the Italians and many others. It is now a peaceful place, devoted to tourism, sailing and the odd international summit; and this great museum, half forgotten, is its secret treasure. ■

Ceramics by Jose Carvalho at the Ice House Gallery, London

# Exploring TEXTURES and SHAPES

by **Esme Mahoney**



The sky's the limit for exciting Portuguese sculptor Jose Carvalho – his latest exhibition is worth a visit

Stepping into sculptor Jose Carvalho's exhibition in the Ice House Gallery in Holland Park the immediate impression is one of gentle tranquillity. Various forms in earthy colours are arranged around the edges of the space. Upon closer inspection, the initial orderliness melts into something altogether more interesting, establishing Carvalho's work as a bold contribution to the world of pottery and ceramics.

The exhibition is named *Exploring Textures and Shapes*, and it is in the first category that Carvalho really innovates. Developing his own glazes and firing techniques, Carvalho's pieces seem to bubble and spit with life, the volcanic glazes creating intricately cratered surfaces. Engaging with the fiftieth anniversary of the moon landings, many pieces recall that rocky and romantic satellite in quality: particularly resonant and beautiful is a circular wall piece, which Carvalho broke in half and then reformed using the Kintsugi technique of reattaching broken fragments with gold. These dripping, foaming pieces encourage tactility, with the artist often juxtaposing a perfectly smoothed interior with a rougher glaze on the outside of the work.

The use of colour is also notable, with the first impression of earthy tones shifting as the works are examined more closely. Blues and sea greens feature, with some pots seeming to be lifted straight from the seabed complete with foaming waves of volcanic glaze. Horizontal banding of subtly blended colours suggests planets other than our own, with some vessels, particularly the larger works, seeming to become 3D maps of different worlds. Carvalho's use of colour is also playful, with surprising splashes of neon-yellow popping out amidst the oceanic tones, and a series in which what could be called millennial pink is blended in a variety of concentrations across several works. These are ceramics that reward closer inspection, with a richness of colour and texture being revealed over time.

There is a poignancy in the colouring of the pieces and in that delicate vein of gold that seems to evoke another theme present in Carvalho's works – that of ecological fragility. The organic quality of the pieces and the planetary character of several works quietly reflect our home planet back to us: our oceans, our forests and our moon. Beautifully formed, Carvalho's funnel vessels seem to encapsulate the sense of delicate balance most fully, with each piece crafted in two halves that then must fit perfectly together. It is a question of science and of art, and the need for care and precision seems to interact with the blackened, charred appearance of some sections so that these pieces stand almost as a subtle warning to the present.

This is a mature effort from Carvalho – his ceramics have so far been exhibited in various London venues and galleries including Hepsibah Gallery, Chelsea Physic Gardens and Otomys Contemporary gallery and he has received high profile commissions including recent work for the prestigious Heckfield Place. Carvalho's work is rich and rewarding, working with beauty and distortion to create truly unique pieces that quietly resonate with you long after they have been viewed. ■





This innovative production succeeds where previous attempts to convert Shakespeare's plays to opera have failed

Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* by Opera2Day, The Hague

# HAMLET

in the Hague makes the grade

by Gerald Malone

Hamlet isn't brooding on the battlements in Denmark. He's in the Hague; starring in a new production from Oper2Day, the Dutch "new energy from old sources" opera company. Its premiere was broadcast live on OperaVision – [www.operavision.eu](http://www.operavision.eu) – a cultural gold mine partly funded by the EU Commission (grant about to expire in 2020). It is now available on demand.

That's my commercial. Here's the threat. If funding for OperaVision is not continued beyond 2020, in some shape or form, I shall see to it personally that the ghost of post Brexit Britain returns to stalk the corridors of Brussels, demanding righteous retribution; "Alas, poor OperaVision, I watched it well".

Tout court, OperaVision is an amazing cultural resource, allowing unlimited access to a raft of productions across Europe's opera houses, and a full library of concerts and music documentaries. In the battle to make opera relevant to the many not the few (sorry for the tired trope) OperaVision is a gladiator par excellence. It combines the well-loved mainstream with the cutting edge, broadens taste, educates and draws opera watchers well beyond their comfort zone.

It is supported by 29 production companies spanning Europe (loosely defined) from Ireland in the west to Moscow in the east. It performs an important educational function, providing accessible materials to pupils and teachers alike. A library section is a cornucopia of back productions, documentaries, concerts and – well I never – a "For Fun" section. While most intellectual bien pensants the world over are having the glooms, the tribe at OperaVision dares to have fun. Heaven forfend.

On, to the battlements. *Hamlet* was a compositional bullet that even Verdi dodged: *Otello*, *Macbeth* and his triumphant finale, *Falstaff* – but no *Hamlet*. Too complex. It is Shakespeare's longest play and difficult to adapt to the operatic medium – too many subtle emotions, subplots and twists. That's true of mostly all Shakespeare plays. Others have struggled manfully. There are over 200 operas

based on Shakespeare's work, the majority – probably thankfully – mouldering in dustbins.

David Garrick had a go with *The Tempest* as early as 1756. He was accused of "castrating Shakespeare". Lord Byron, no less, accused Rossini of "crucifying" *Othello* in a letter to a fellow poet in 1818. English composer Thomas Adès brought *The Tempest* to stage in 2004 in a coproduction of The Royal Opera House, Copenhagen Opera and Opéra National du Rhin. It received great acclaim and was staged at The Met in 2012 to rave reviews and then dumped.

Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is probably the most performed Shakespeare based opera in today's repertoire, because the plot line lends itself well to operatic presentation, asses, love potions and all.

Joe "Mac" and Pat who are stuck in their dead-end jobs at Duncan's Restaurant. Pat is getting restless and hatches a plan as Mac starts to see things – the three hippies (witches). It's about supersizing – and a monument of towering piffle. But, it is opera-ish. Perhaps.

So, where in this galaxy shines *Hamlet*? Francesco Gasparini – we all remember him – had a go in 1712 with his *Ambieto* (Hamlet rendered in Italian), performed in London by the celebrated castrato, Nicolini. Takes all sorts. Funny to reflect that gender selection is nothing new. Didn't really work – the opera, that is.

Only one composer cracked the *Hamlet* curse, Ambroise Thomas in 1868, a French composer who won the Paris Conservatoire's Prix de Rome and is now best known for his operas

Some of it does. Some of it doesn't. The action is staged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, using props like digital cameras to record "the conscience of the King", during the play reprising the murder of Hamlet's father. The background is innovatively set as film noir, allowing ghosts to strut their stuff in the background and the inner workings of the characters' minds – especially Hamlet and Ophélie – to run in parallel with the onstage action.

I started out thinking, "hokum", but was quickly enthralled. The multi dimensional effect allowed the plot to be advanced quickly and understanding was enriched. It was like watching a YouTube video running at 2X speed – very du jour amongst geeks, I'm told – to pack in more content.

In this advancing era of simulcasts, global transmissions and on-the-

tempted to kill murdering Uncle Claudius who is kneeling in prayer, but stays his hand because the penitent king may make it straight to heaven. Best to do him in when he is performing some unforgivable act. This was a struggle of the mind M. de Lang portrayed vividly alongside many of his soliloquy moments. He did introspection well – a Hamlet, to his boots.

French-Dutch soprano, Lucie Chartin, sang Ophélie. The litmus test of this role in the Ambroise opera – as it is in the play – is the mad scene and Mme. Chartin was mesmerising. She flipped from sanity to madness with a glance of her eyes and sang the swooping mood changing passages effortlessly.

The performance was conducted by Hernan Schvarzman, who cracked the New European Ensemble along at a great pace. They made the most of Ambroise's score which is frankly deficient. For a tragedy there are too many ascending-chord-progression aria finales. It's uplifting rather than foreboding. Ambroise was writing for audiences who insisted on romanticism with everything. I was listening for the occasional blazing trumpet of doom – but it never came. The music is pleasant, but unexceptional. For once, I was lusting after a bit of 20<sup>th</sup> century dissonance.

All in all, this was a brave attempt to revive a former repertoire favourite to has to offer. In Tel Aviv in particular, Israel boasts one of the world's great modern cities. It has a beautiful beach, arts, night life, and unspeakably delicious food. It is perhaps the only city on Earth where you can be a Jew and gay and feel no conflict between those two elements of one's identity or a need to hide them. On buildings and beaches the rainbow flag flies proudly next to the blue and white Star of David. It hosts one of the world's biggest Pride events, with 250,000 people turning up this year.

That is far from the only apparent conflict or contrast that co-exists here though. The ancient Arab city of Jaffa sits next to the modern Jewish metropolis of Tel Aviv, with both peoples living happily side by side. Secular bars and restaurants heaving with people are on the doorstep of the Great Synagogue. In Tel Aviv,

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Mignon and François de Rimini. His *Hamlet* was performed 153 times in the era, but is hardly heard of today. The neglect was spotted by Opera2Day.

Australian composer, Brett Dean, had a moment in the Sussex countryside sun in his Glyndebourne *Hamlet* in 2017. But the sun went in and the strange effort – which drew on the words of Shakespeare's First Quarto version of the play – has not seen the light of day, let alone basked in the sun, since. "To be or not to be, ay, there's the point". Eh?

Opera2Day has based its production on the Ambroise Thomas work, itself a much condensed version of the play. Then the team picked up the pruning shears and clipped away even more vigorously. The work's runtime is 140 minutes. The play lasts four hours. Does the pruning work?

fly editing pioneered by New York's Metropolitan Opera, it makes perfect sense for opera companies to utilise technological developments to the full. This is a slick and clever production.

Less so, the choices made of where to cut. There were clunky jumps in plot throughout, but the strangest was the closing scene in which Hamlet, after a brief exposition of his predicament and grief following Ophélie's funeral, suddenly shoots himself. Lights out. In more senses than one. The surprised audience took a moment or two to catch on before the applause started – tentatively.

Comments on the two principals. Quirijn de Lang, the Dutch baritone, who sang Hamlet, is a true singing actor and needed all his dramatic talents to pull off some of the visuals, especially the scene in which he is



# TEL AVIV

## IS A GREAT MODERN CITY



Smart, freewheeling and dynamic – Tel Aviv might not be a centre of world religions, but it has a lot to offer

by Charlotte Henry

Despite recent showcase events like the Eurovision Song Contest and tourism-promoting advertising campaigns, when most people think of Israel their thoughts probably still turn first of all to Jerusalem, and specifically the Old City, with its iconic religious landmarks such as the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Then, perhaps, they will picture some kind of barren, arid, desert landscape. Of course, after years of violence, the tragic conflict with the Palestinians is never far from the mind either.

But to focus only on these things is to miss much of what the country has to offer. In Tel Aviv in particular, Israel boasts one of the world's great modern cities. It has a beautiful beach, arts, night life, and unspeakably delicious food. It is perhaps the only city on Earth where you can be a Jew and gay and feel no conflict between those two elements of one's identity or a need to hide them. On buildings and beaches the rainbow flag flies proudly next to the blue and white Star of David. It hosts one of the world's biggest Pride events, with 250,000 people turning up this year.

That is far from the only apparent conflict or contrast that co-exists here though. The ancient Arab city of Jaffa sits next to the modern Jewish metropolis of Tel Aviv, with both peoples living happily side by side. Secular bars and restaurants heaving with people are on the doorstep of the Great Synagogue. In Tel Aviv,

more people spend Saturday, the Jewish sabbath, on the beach than praying and many restaurants openly flout religious laws by staying open.

The Museum of Art reflects the city's diversity too. When I was there, it was displaying a thought-provoking exhibition by Palestinian artist Samah Shihadi nearby to work by the established Israeli artist David Avidan. It is not all local work either – the museum featured pieces by Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso and Wassily Kandinsky in the permanent collection.

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Tel Aviv is an unrelentingly positive city. A young city. A vibrant city. A city where as a woman who was travelling by myself I largely felt safe walking around.

Elsewhere, you can walk through the chaos of Carmel Market and minutes later be in the beautiful serenity of the Neve Tzedek area, enjoying a delicious Israeli breakfast in the shade at Café Suzana. Indeed, the food is pretty incredible across the board, with a good meal not difficult to find whether it's a relatively lowly looking falafel bar on a street corner to more tourist focussed destinations like the Old Man and the Sea in Jaffa, with its never-ending salad refill. Sitting by the sea looking up at the old city, I consider no trip to Tel Aviv complete without dinner there.

Then there are ice cream parlours that Italians might even be impressed by. My personal favourite is Otello on Dizengoff Street, which puts an outrageously good chocolate sauce on top of your selection. There's the equally delicious Anita Gelato in Neve Tzedek too, if you're in that part of town.

If you want to relax but do not fancy the beach there is Gordon Pool – a beautiful lido with Olympic sized lanes, an adult pool, and a children's pool all overlooking that harbour. It is a particularly great, although not

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necessarily cheap, day for a family or a group of friends.

Secret spots are dotted around the city too. These include Teder FM – a restaurant selling pizza by the slice and local beer hidden away behind a door that you would not even stop to look at if you did not know it was there. Go through and you enter a beautiful open square filled with bars, shops and restaurants, all animated by pulsing electronic music.

For those who want to learn about Israel's history there is the house of David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, and Rabin Square, the site where Yitzhak Rabin was

assassinated. Jerusalem is a simple bus ride away. The range on offer in what is really a small city all adds a unique kind of dynamism to what is, officially according to most other countries, Israel's capital.

Of course, that is not to say everything is perfect. The cost of living is high. While everyone in Tel Aviv seems to work in "hi-tech", those jobs can be as insecure as the fortunes of start-ups which inevitably rise and fall. Giant posters of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shaking hands with Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin were unavoidable during my visit this summer, a reminder of the country's political turmoil. You also need to remain vigilant to not be taken out by locals whizzing around on electric scooters.

There are constant reminders of the security situation too. Shopping malls and train stations have airport-like security. The Great Synagogue is surrounded by a high concrete wall and barriers to stop car ramming. Even Gordon Pool has security guards and metal fencing.

Despite this, Tel Aviv is an unrelentingly positive city. A young city. A vibrant city. A city where as a woman who was travelling by myself I largely felt safe walking around.

Tel Aviv will never be able to boast that it is at the centre of world religions. It will never be able to show-off having a wonder of the world. What it has though are all the hallmarks of a great modern city, and that makes it an increasingly essential travel destination. ■



### WHERE TO EAT



#### The Old Man by the Sea

A never-ending feast of salads, dips, and pitta bread. Add delicious fish or meat, but be sure to arrive hungry.



#### Teder FM

Secluded spot for a slice of pizza and a beer with a really fun atmosphere.



#### North Abraxus

Regarded as one of Israel's best best restaurants, North Abraxus is a staple of Tel Aviv dining. It's busy and can be hard to get a reservation, but the burned cauliflower makes it worth it.

### WHAT TO DRINK



#### Sputnik Bar

Sputnik bar is a bustling bar in the centre of the city and it has a nice outdoor area if you need to cool off.



#### Shpagat

If you want to delve into Tel Aviv's LGBT scene, this bar is regarded as good a place to start as any.

### WHERE TO STAY



#### Dan Panorama

Enormous hotel right on the beach, with a price tag to match the location.



#### Gordon Hotel

A cheaper offering also overlooking the sea, located on Gordon beach.



#### Cinema Hotel

A more boutique offering in a good, location – right near the Dizengoff centre.

### WHAT TO SEE



#### David Ben Gurion's House

The house in the Marina area of the city provides an essential insight into the founding of Israel.



#### Neve Tzedek

A lovely, peaceful area of the city on the way to Jaffa - take a stroll through the gorgeous jewellery stores.



#### Museum of Art

Near the city centre, the museum boasts a stunning collection of local and Western artists' work.





# Waiter, where is my food (or wine)?



Appalling food, rude waiters and wine gone missing – bad service is more common in the hospitality industry than you might think

by **Bruce Palling**

It was the smell that the table noticed first, which was reminiscent of a burnt tyre. This would be exciting enough in the pit lane of the Goodwood Revival, but not what you expect in a fashionable Mayfair restaurant. My wife was hosting the departure of a much-loved member of her magazine. It started on a high with old stories being told and personalities dissected with the assistance of some excellent cocktails. In fact, all went swimmingly until the food turned up. She had ordered Chicken Paillard, but what she hadn't expected was that it would be accompanied by a stench, wafting ahead of its arrival. Once it was on the table, with its latticework of burnt charcoal stripes, it was clearly not fit for purpose. Not wishing to dampen the fun around the table, she took a bite. It was nasty and inedible. The waitress nodded in sympathy and took it to be replaced.

Shortly afterwards, she very reluctantly brought the plate back – still with the bite out of the chicken. Covered in embarrassment, she told my wife the chef refused to replace it because that was how it was *supposed* to be cooked. Rather than face further awkwardness, she left it uneaten and ordered something else.

It is a puzzle how people, allegedly in the hospitality industry, can get something so egregiously wrong, but it happens more often than you would think. What makes it even more puzzling is how little official advice there is on what needs to be done when problems arise with a meal. I checked out various manuals for restaurants, including the Bible of them all, *The New Catering Repertoire*, a 1300-page work devoted to everything you need to know to run a restaurant. Nowhere in it is a single word about how to deal with a complaint – valid or otherwise – from a customer.

It would probably be difficult to categorise all the sorts of issues that can go wrong, but I was impressed with one ad hoc solution to a customer complaining to a Soho chef about a grub in her salad. He simply bent down, picked it up and then ate it.

A recent trip to Marseille provided me with a virtually textbook example of how to both ameliorate and to inflame an unhappy customer. Time was in short supply, since we had to visit the recently completed Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (MuCEM) on the site of Fort St-Jean, which dominates the

the shoulder comments about how it was coming in five minutes until the owner, a kindly middle-aged woman, apologised and said she would sort it out. Before she did, a complimentary plate of delicious hors d'oeuvres arrived, including fresh asparagus stalks, grilled red mullet and fried squid. Fifteen minutes later, the main dishes emerged, including my garden de taureau, a sticky Camargue bull daube. We rather rashly then ordered some glasses of wine, though alas, they made it onto the bill, but not the table. On departure, we pointed this out to madame, who was already furious with her staff and kept apologising and offering us wine. Overall, the service was extraordinarily incompetent, but we left with no hard feelings as we felt that every effort had been made to sort it out. The secret here was to leave us with the feeling that the management were on our side.

Ultimately, it is the sincerity of the response that matters – I still fume about being kept from our allotted table at a smart place in Manhattan, because some “personality” turned up unannounced. We were given a conciliatory glass of champagne while we sat in reception but it felt robotic and hollow.

**“**An elderly couple had wanted to celebrate their wedding anniversary at one of the most famous hideaways on Bali, so had a special bottle of Romanée-Conti 69 (retail price £10,000 plus) shipped out weeks in advance. They arrived for dinner but were puzzled not to find their treasured bottle decanted and waiting by the side of the table. It turned out it had been sent to the wrong table, where the guests thanked the sommelier profusely before drinking it.

entrance of the Old Port. There are any number of simple restaurants nearby, so we chose Chez Madie les Gallinettes, known for its classic take on Provençal Cuisine. The outdoors space looked full but we were more than happy to take the last remaining table. What more could one desire? A sunny table within paddling distance of the two and a half thousand-year-old port and a commendable €18 set lunch?

The drinks and gazpacho turned up within ten minutes, but then we entered the dreaded limbo of waiting interminably for the next course. After nearly half an hour, anxious enquiries to the scurrying waiter elicited off

All of this pales into insignificance compared to the story an hotelier told me. An elderly couple had wanted to celebrate their wedding anniversary at one of the most famous hideaways on Bali, so had a special bottle of Romanée-Conti 69 (retail price £10,000 plus) shipped out weeks in advance. They arrived for dinner but were puzzled not to find their treasured bottle decanted and waiting by the side of the table. It turned out it had been sent to the wrong table, where the guests thanked the sommelier profusely before drinking it. History does not relate which shack on Kuta Beach currently employs the sommelier. ■

# Don't buy the NATURAL WINE HYPE

by **Guy Chatfield**



The wine business is not immune to fads and crazes. There is constant chatter when a “new” grape variety comes along and we are forever hearing that X is the new Y, or something that will replace the previously popular grape whose cool quotient has now dwindled.

When I say new, that is a bit of a misnomer. The *Vitis* genus has been stalking our planet since well before the dinosaurs even popped on to the scene. Adding to that, we humans have demonstrably been fermenting grape juice to make wine for roughly six millennia, so in reality, nothing is really new. Like economic principles, hemlines and music, wine fads are cyclical and whatever is trendy now can very often be traced back to its roots in the past.

One of the hot topics in the European wine industry at the moment is “natural” wine.

This “natural” moniker has been adopted by a relatively small group of winemakers, in essence, to signify that they have added nothing to their creation. It is a movement that champions minimal chemical and technological intervention in the farming and production process. The core aim is really for producers to differentiate themselves from, as they see it, the big corporate and industrial producers. They want to create a niche of “ethical” winemakers who deliberately eschew “artificial” additives, laboratory created strains of yeast and, specifically, the use of sulphur dioxide (sulphites) for preservation. All are legal, but the question is whether excluding them from production is actually going to produce a “better” wine. Ultimately, to make the tastiest wine should be every winemaker's goal.

Just to add to the fun, the natural wine movement is a very broad church with no clear set of ground rules and no specific definition. With no definitive set of rules a lack of a clarity is often exploited and the door is opened to an “Emperor's new clothes” scenario, where consumers are led to believe that a substandard, “funky” or cloudy wine is phenomenal and that they are ignorant heels for not enjoying it.

Personally, I'm not sure what level of paranoia or distrust would make one think that the average bottle of supermarket plonk is unnatural. Even at this entry level bracket, it is still fermented grape juice and not something that can be plausibly created in a laboratory. On top of this, the use of sulphites in modern wines (which the natural wine movement opposes) is done in such a controlled and minuscule way, typically using twenty to two hundred parts per million, that it has been proven even the theoretical adverse reaction is extremely rare.

On a positive note, I am greatly in favour of producers making their wines in an environmentally sound and ethically sourced manner. There are a multitude of brilliant wines from the portfolios of established “ethically sound” vegetarian, vegan-friendly, biodynamic and organic producers out there. My advice though, on anything that specifically styles itself as “natural” is – caveat emptor, “let the buyer beware”. ■



# CULTURE DIGEST

The best of Europe's art and culture



**Lohengrin**  
*Prague Opera, until 2<sup>nd</sup> February*  
Lohengrin was conceived by Wagner during one of his frequent trips to Prague. Now it makes its return to the Bohemian capital. The production is a like-for-like remake of Wolfgang Wagner's original staging for the Bayreuther Festspiele.



**Contemporary Art Biennial**  
*Lyon, until 5<sup>th</sup> January*  
Occupying 29,000 square metres in the city centre, alongside outposts and pop-ups throughout the region, the 15th Edition of the Biennial will be the biggest yet. 50 Artists have made site-specific works for the main site in Fagor Factory, on the theme “Where Water Comes Together with Other Water”.



**Lisbon Architecture Triennale**  
*until 2<sup>nd</sup> December*  
The Triennale has become an influential platform for architecture internationally since its founding in 2007. Curated by French architect Éric Lapierre, this year's programme, entitled “The Poetics of Reason”, includes five main exhibitions in locations around the city, including “Economy of Means”, a multisensory exhibition exploring ethical and aesthetic responses to local and global challenges, at MAAT – Central Tejo.



**Rigoletto**  
*Oslo Opera House, until 10<sup>th</sup> January*  
Theatre veteran Ole Anders Tandberg directs Verdi's tragic masterpiece at the Oslo Opera House, the harbour-facing “wave wall” and home to Norwegian National Opera.



**Caravaggio and Bernini**  
*Kunst Historisches Museum, Vienna, until 19<sup>th</sup> January*  
Creating a dialogue between the sculptures and paintings that triggered the start of the Baroque, this exhibition brings works from as far afield as LA, Perth in Scotland, Chicago, St Petersburg, Paris, Rome, and Florence to supplement Vienna's own impressive collection, with works including David with the Head of Goliath and St Francis is Ecstasy by Caravaggio, and Bernini's Medusa and David.



**De Pisis**  
*Museo Del Novecento, Milan, until 1<sup>st</sup> March*  
The Italian twentieth century artist, Filippo de Pisis (1896 – 1956) receives an extensive retrospective at the Museo del Novecento, Milan. Beginning with his debut work in 1916, “De Pisis” explores the painter's universe: his influential meeting with De Chirico's metaphysical painting, his important trips across Europe, and, finally, his hospitalisation at the Villa Fiorita mental institute in the early 1950s.



**musicAeterna, Teodor Currentzis**  
*Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris and Baden-Baden Festspielhaus, until 3<sup>rd</sup> November*  
The sensational Russian orchestra and its messianic music director Teodor Currentzis have escaped their home in Perm for now, and continue a whirlwind tour around Europe, with blistering performances of Rameau, Mozart, and Hersant.



**Brueghel: Marvels of Flamenco Art**  
*Gaviria Palace, Madrid, until 12<sup>th</sup> April*  
This major exhibition exploring the work of the Dutch Brueghel dynasty between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries draws on hundreds of works by the Elders and Youngers of this influential family. The exhibition also includes representative works by Rubens, Bosch and David Teniers the Younger.



**SOMETHING from NOTHING: The Visual Realm of Magnús Pálsson**  
*Art Museum, Reyjavík, until 12<sup>th</sup> January*  
Sculptor, sound poet, set designer, writer, teacher, performer; Pálsson's creative output is wide-ranging and highly influential. This exhibition examines his visual art from the 1960s to the present day, drawing on his sculptures, bookworks, and 2D works.



**The Bassarids**  
*Komische Oper Berlin, until 10<sup>th</sup> November*  
Vladimir Jurowski and Barrie Kosky reunite to take on Hans Werner Henze's one-act music drama. The libretto, by WH Auden and Chester Allman, is based on The Bacchae by Euripides, and examines the conflict between emotion and rationality, with bloody consequences.

## crossword & sudoku

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
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17					18					19				
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		23		24				25						
26	27						28				29	30	31	32
33				34		35				36				
37			38		39				40		41			
42				43		44				45		46		
47					48				49		50			
				51					52					
53	54	55	56			57				58		59	60	
61						62				63				
64						65				66				
67						68				69				

- ACROSS**  
1. “\_\_\_ a Lady” (Tom Jones hit)  
5. Ready to swing  
10. Toffee-based candy bar  
14. Reunion attendee  
15. Dog controller  
16. Colada lead-in  
17. Measure out  
18. With skill  
20. Close observer  
21. Noah's boat  
22. George Jetson's boy, and others  
23. Place on the fluff cycle again  
25. MPEG alternative  
26. Engross  
28. For practical purposes  
33. Driver's concern  
34. Painter Jasper \_\_\_  
36. Frenzy  
37. Get better  
39. Comic Smirnoff  
41. Actor Robert De \_\_\_  
42. “A guy walks \_\_\_ bar...”  
44. “\_\_\_ can!” (campaign slogan)  
46. Fiscal VIP  
47. Backyard sight  
49. Bring to an end
51. Sent down for the count  
52. Strand  
53. Compensate for  
57. Possess, to Burns  
58. Evergreens  
61. Wagon maker  
63. Ambush  
64. Girl's name, or anagram for “dial”  
65. Based on the number eight  
66. German title  
67. Gruel, e.g.  
68. Town outside of Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
69. Miniature maelstrom
- DOWN**  
1. Likewise  
2. A nephew of Donald Duck  
3. Becomes a part of  
4. Home music system  
5. Acolyte  
6. Pathetic  
7. Here again  
8. Caribbean clock setting, maybe  
9. Swipe  
10. Box  
11. Drug unit  
12. The Motels’ “\_\_\_ the

- Lonely”  
13. Starfish arms  
19. Cheers mailman  
24. Julius Erving's nickname  
25. “I'll send \_\_\_ to the world...” (Police)  
26. Allow entry to  
27. Good, in Guadalupe  
28. Signed with a pen  
29. Amusement  
30. Greenland settler (var.)  
31. Island in the Ionian Sea  
32. Assemblage of people  
35. Made bales  
38. Can. currency  
40. Bug with wheels  
43. Distorted  
45. USA, in Portuguese  
48. Cool car  
50. Grim Reaper tool  
52. Faith that arose in Persia  
53. Hooters  
54. Blow it  
55. Generic dog name  
56. Jacket fastener  
57. “House Hunters” network  
59. Mr. Cleaver  
60. Surprisingly lively for one's age  
62. Peruvian region

		7			1		6	
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		6					9	8

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	5			3		8		
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	1							
7					2			5





# LEADING EUROPE'S CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT



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