

The Acropolis

Philosophy for today

Confinement - Living With Philosophy

The Irish Renaissance

Art, Music, Film and more!

No. 1 April 2020



Cover Image (Flowers & Sun): Photography by Rafael Macedo.



What is The Acropolis?

In ancient Athens the Acropolis, literally meaning the High City, was the place which supported the highest ideals of the people. The founder of New Acropolis International, Professor George Livraga, chose this name to capture the key objective of philosophy; that we as individuals build a new high city within, that we discover the heights of our own potential, so that we may externally build a new high city, a new and better world, together. The Acropolis magazine is motivated by this objective and aims to share inspiring content, combining all the major endeavours of philosophy, art, science, education and culture.

About Us

New Acropolis is an international organisation working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society.

For further details please visit: www.acropolis.ie



What's inside

4	Editorial The New Normal	Alain Impellizzeri
6	Current Affairs Confinement! Living with philosophy	Isabelle Ohmann
8	Art The magic and mystery behind Ireland's favourite painting	Tim Leahy
10	Philosophy for living Crisis	Delia Steinberg Gusman
12	History The Irish Renaissance	Aidan Murphy
14	Movie Review Bacurau (Brazil, 2019)	Conor McMahon
15	Music Pachelbel's Canon in D Major	Laura Lorincz

The New Normal

The circumstances of the coronavirus crisis have shown quite clearly how fragile our modern systems are, indeed, as fragile as life itself. And we are discovering a rare opportunity in the midst of worldwide isolation - an unparalleled sense of solidarity. Whether it is applauding frontline workers from our doorsteps, helping assist those most vulnerable to cocoon safely or just the simple act of staying home, suspending our personal desires in the interest of others' well being - the reality of our interdependence is more evident than ever.

Everything becomes a little clearer when we are confronted with adversity; our priorities can adjust quickly, our inner capacities (and deficiencies) are revealed quite readily, the fog of trivialities which clouded our minds lifts suddenly. But in place of that haze, in the cold light of reality we are also confronted with our fear - a natural fear in the face of an unprecedented health crisis. If we are in solidarity with those courageous figures on the frontline, then let us inspire ourselves to be courageous also - to act despite our fears. Fear is an ally, a natural mechanism, we simply need to reassure it; like a frightened child, and, taking our fears by the hand we continue moving forward.

Fear is also bred by uncertainty. This is the contagion of anxiety that is quietly sweeping across the globe, whispering in the shadows what comes next? If philosophy can teach us anything in the face of uncertainty it is the importance of developing the moral character and inner fortitude to adapt to any situation. Many are now speaking of a "new normal", how society will need to adjust in the months, perhaps years, to come. Though it remains uncertain, we can be sure that it will be different to yesterday and we can use this period of isolation as a transition, to prepare ourselves practically and psychologically for a different way of living.

Let us use this time to breathe new life into every corner of ourselves. To feed ourselves with more than constant media coverage, more than endless box sets, but with inspiring and beautiful things that nourish our humanity. Poetry, music, art, literary classics, philosophical writings. Let's stay connected, keep that flame of solidarity burning with every phone conversation, every video call. When we think of a loved one, let them know they are in our thoughts. Let us not withdraw into ourselves but return to ourselves, to the deepest essence of who we are, what matters most to us and what gives our lives meaning. Let us emerge from this lockdown like a butterfly breaking through a chrysalis of transformation.

And let us not fear a "new normal". Instead, ask ourselves - what is the "old normal" we are leaving behind? Was it so normal to live in a world, apparently more connected than ever and yet filled with division? Was it so normal to pollute our soil, our seas and our sky with our toxic excesses? Was it so normal for us to live in a world that required a global pandemic to bring us together? Normal is simply what we got used to, it was convenient. Let us make a better normal, together.

Alain Impellizzeri
Director New Acropolis Ireland

“Do not pretend that things will change if we always do the same. The crisis is the best blessing that can happen to people and countries, because the crisis brings progress. Creativity is born from the distress, as the day is born from the dark night. It is in crisis that invention, discovery and large strategies are born. Who ever overcomes crisis, outdoes himself without being overcome.”

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

Confinement

Living with philosophy!

Isabelle Ohmann

The period we are living in is incredible, in the strongest sense of the word. Barely a few weeks ago we looked with vague indifference at the arrival of a virus from China, with a barely veiled astonishment at the scale of the measures taken in Asia, uncertain about the advisability of millions of people being confined at home. And now here we are, confined, by the tens of millions!

How can philosophy help us make sense of these difficult times? Let us stop to reflect on the key lessons that this pandemic teaches us.

Anything can happen

“Tomorrow is not ours” is the first lesson of COVID-19 which reminds us that we are vulnerable to illness and death. Although, the death rate from this particular disease is considered to be relatively low, thousands of people have already lost their lives, and many more to come. This confrontation with illness and death reminds us that the Promethean idea of controlling life is not only an illusion, but a cause of suffering. Because life is unpredictable, uncertain, and uncontrollable. The impermanence of life is a subject particularly emphasized by Buddhism. Impermanence expresses both the ephemeral and precious character of life in all its forms with consequently the need for vigilance and attention to grasp the value of the present moment. In the face of impermanence, let’s follow the advice of the Egyptians, who advocated a completely flexible attitude towards life. They said, “You have to recreate the world every morning”. By changing our posture and accepting the ephemeral, impermanence is no longer a source of suffering.

That only happens to other people

“Nature knows no human borders” is the second lesson of the pandemic. We realise through this common test that humanity is one. “We are the waves of the same sea, the leaves of the same tree, the flowers of the same garden” poetically wrote the Stoic Seneca. With this, our interdependence as humans suddenly becomes evident. Our health is no longer the only one to protect, because the behavior of our fellow human beings determines our probability of contracting the virus. So we are all dependent on each other. As philosophers say, manifestation is the product of a weaving that makes all things interdependent. Ignoring or denying interdependence, the fact that we are intimately connected, produces separatism and isolation, inherent in individualism, the dangers of which for the community can easily be seen. Let us therefore accept our intrinsic solidarity and ask ourselves what our attitude can bring to others positively during this period. How can we be a source of support for others?

Accept the inevitable

Faced with the anxiety that we may feel in the present situation, let us listen to the advice of Buddhists: “What is the secret of serenity? Unconditionally cooperate with the inevitable.” Indeed, not only can we not change the things that are, since they are already there, but it is also difficult to judge the value of things at the moment. “A person who thinks should not be particularly troubled by adversity. There are many events that seem bad

at first, but which ultimately prove to be beneficial. Everyone should always put a stop to their joy and discontent, and keep their emotional reactions away.” - writes the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1138-1204). Indeed, there are also advantages to the present situation, such as the reduction of pollution in the world. And who knows if this episode will not lead us to reshuffle the cards and envisage a different paradigm for the future? So let's stop focusing on the problems and try to calm our emotional reactions by keeping a list of all the benefits that will or will not arise from this for ourselves and others.

Giving thanks

The prospect of a serious illness reminds us to be grateful for our health, and allows us to recognise our dependence on others for those who struggle to protect us, to serve us. Living with gratitude, thanking life and the heroes of everyday life, opens our hearts, which allows us to get out of anxiety and gives us unexpected inner strength and joy. Because as Plato says “by seeking the good in our fellow human being, we meet ours”.

Cultivating beauty

Cut off from the futile, we can once again contemplate the beauty of the world, the poetry of life, the wonder of nature, the strength of the living. The philosopher Simone Weil recommended an education, made up largely “with the Romanesque art, Gregorian chant, liturgical poetry and the arts in general, poetry, prose of the Greeks of the good age. There, one can drink abundantly of absolutely pure beauty in all respects.”

It is an opportunity to (re) discover classical art, which is not classic because it is old, but because it is timeless, beyond fashions and cultures, because it addresses the universal in us. In these times of confinement we are offered magnificent virtual museums

to visit, free concerts by the greatest artists and a thousand other artistic expressions. So let's take advantage of it.

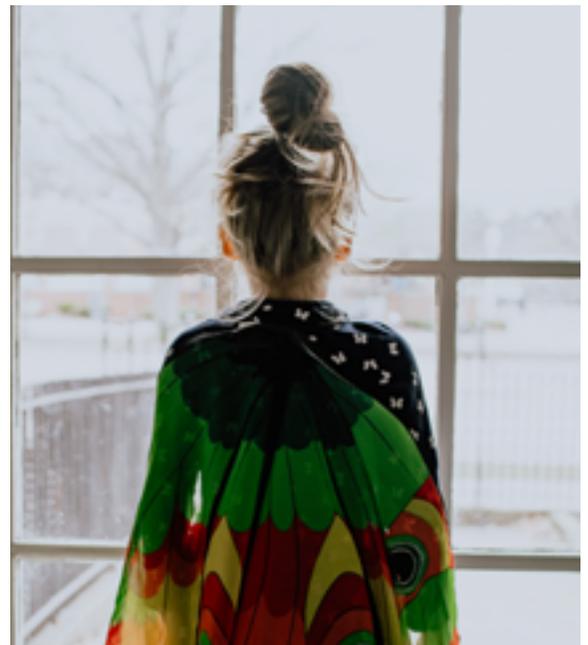
Look inside (Look within)

Of course, many point out that these times of confinement bring us back to basics. Philosophers teach us that in loneliness the mind gains strength and learns to rest on itself. Inner life is essential to happiness Buddha said, “Peace comes from within, do not seek it from outside.”

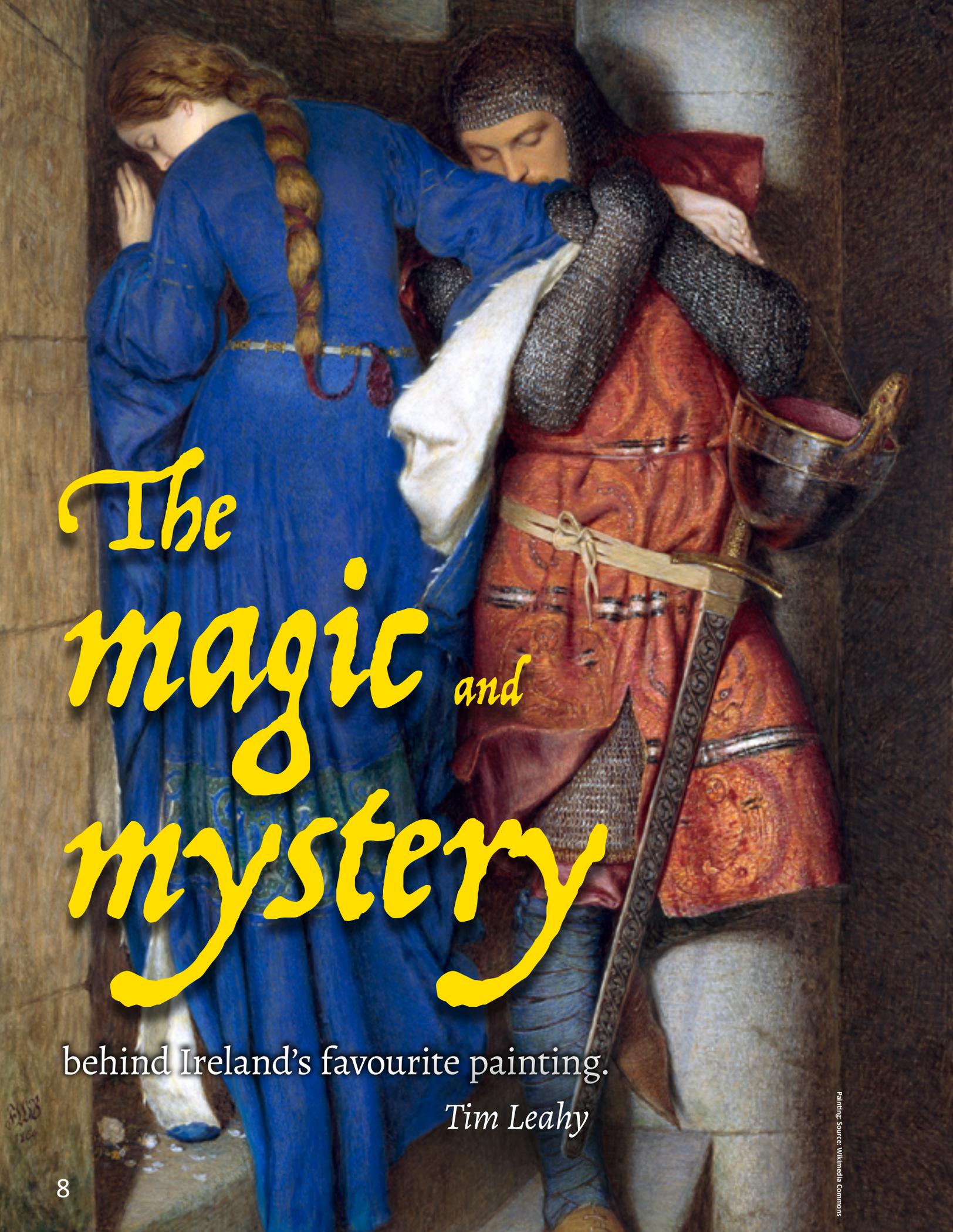
Cultivating the inner life is above all taking the time, the time to read, to reflect, to ask questions about oneself, one's reactions, one's behavior; questions about one's life, the essential things, those that we miss and those that we do not miss; questions about the events, how we got there, the real causes.

Let's take the time to meditate, write, listen to music, to relate to ourselves, to the person we really are and/or want to be, far from social representations. So, as Sylvain Tesson said, this coronavirus

“If it spares the integrity of our organism, it will reveal the solidity of our soul.”



Girl looking through window. Photography by Kelly Sikkema.



The magic and mystery

behind Ireland's favourite painting.

Tim Leahy

In 2012, RTE television ran a documentary series with a public vote to decide Ireland's favourite painting. The shortlist of ten paintings included such famous works as The Taking of Christ by Caravaggio, and Lady Writing a Letter by Johannes Vermeer. The surprise winner, though, was a watercolour painting by a little known Irish artist, Frederic William Burton (1816 - 1900). The painting is called Hellelil and Hildebrand, the Meeting on the Turret Stairs. Why did Burton's painting win the hearts of the Irish public ahead of great artists like Caravaggio and Vermeer?

Burton's inspiration for the painting came from a medieval Danish ballad (a sung poem), which tells the story of a forbidden love between an aristocratic woman named Hellelil, and her bodyguard, a knight named Hildebrand. Her disapproving father discovered the relationship and ordered Hellelil's seven brothers to kill Hildebrand.

"his painting evokes higher values, such as love, courage, loyalty, chivalry, and honour."

The scene on the stairs depicts the couple's final moments together, before he goes out to engage in battle, leading to his inevitable death. Hellelil, broken-hearted, dies soon after.

Let's take a look at the painting.

The scene could be interpreted in any number of ways. The figures of Hellelil and Hildebrand are facing away from each other, lending an air of mystery to the image. Their faces are only partially visible, leading one's eye to the focal point of the scene: Hildebrand tenderly holding and kissing the arm of his beloved. Like Caravaggio's The Taking Of Christ, Burton could have depicted the chaos and violence of the battle scene, or chosen a more lurid image of the relationship between Hellelil and Hildebrand.

Instead, his painting evokes higher values, such as love, courage, loyalty, chivalry, and honour. The painting also suggests a stoic acceptance of the consequences of their love, including family disapproval and their ultimate deaths.

Burton was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement: a group of artists renowned for representing the scenes they painted in a true-to-life way, with a high degree of technical accuracy. They also liked to hide symbolic meanings in the detail of a painting. An example in Burton's painting is the broken flower and scattered petals, dropped at Hellelil's feet. This symbolises the brevity of the relationship, its delicate nature and also, perhaps, its destructive ending.

The scene depicted in The Meeting on the Turret Stairs is charged with emotion, and can elicit a strong emotional response in some viewers. So much so, in fact, that several people have proposed in front of the painting! On occasion, National Gallery staff have witnessed visitors shed a tear while viewing the painting.

If you want to see The Meeting on the Turret Stairs "in the flesh", you can do so at the National Gallery of Ireland on Merrion Square, when it reopens. Note, that because old watercolour paintings are very sensitive to light, the painting is only on display for two hours each week, and all day on Saint Valentine's Day.

Further details can be found on the [gallery website](#):

A person wearing a bright yellow raincoat is seen from the back, looking out over a scenic valley. A river winds through the center of the valley, surrounded by lush green trees and hills. The word "CRISIS" is overlaid in large, semi-transparent blue letters across the middle of the image.

CRISIS

Delia Steinburg Gusman

The old idea that the classical Greeks had of “crisis” is more relevant than ever today. Whether or not we want to accept it, we are evidently in crisis, which means that we are at a time of change, at a turning point where the angle of history is facing in two directions.

In times of crisis, in other words, in times of change, all things tend to appear unstable; insecurity and doubt are the order of the day and no one wants to risk great undertakings because of the uncertainty of what may happen tomorrow.

It is in these moments of crisis that human beings are most likely to become confrontational, with no room for negotiation.

There is bitter opposition between those who are one side of change or the other: those who look back at what is being left behind and those who dream of what is to come in the future. Each one has good and more than

adequate arguments to defend their position; and each one defends it with the methods that are typical of times of crisis: violence and a lack of understanding for the other.

Those who look to the past with nostalgia are disparagingly called “reactionaries”. They are harshly criticised for not fully embracing the adventure of the future. But they do not feel reactionary; they are simply trying not to waste all the experience that has been gained and to make use of it. They are trying to store up memories and knowledge from the past like someone who accumulates wealth so as to be able to live better in the future.

Those who look only towards the future - which, incidentally, they do not yet know - are disparagingly called “revolutionaries”. For them, none of humanity’s past experiences are useful anymore and there is only constant change, a total break with everything old and a worship of what is assumed to be

A person wearing a bright yellow raincoat is seen from the back, looking out over a scenic landscape. In the foreground, there is a rocky, moss-covered ground with some small plants. In the middle ground, a river flows through a valley. In the background, a large, faint rainbow is visible in the sky. The overall scene is misty and atmospheric.

“use the old and powerful columns of the past as a basis on which to build the beautiful capitals of the present.”

Photography by Justin Luebke

better because it is new. But they do not feel like revolutionaries in the destructive sense of the word; they have just found that none of the solutions proposed so far has brought humanity the happiness it aspires to; so they think the solution must lie in something different from what has been known until now and that all the old formulas must be set aside as unworkable.

At times of crisis, however, at the turning points of history, it is difficult to see things clearly. Those on either side of the argument become obsessed with their own particular views and can contribute nothing to a harmonious solution. In moments of crisis, we propose taking the geometric figure of the angle as a model, with its two legs facing in different directions, but joined at the top to give a higher meaning and purpose. There are, of course, some worn out and outdated elements from the past

which have been proven by failure to be invalid and unusable; but in the past there is also an accumulation of rich experience that could help us to replicate successes and avoid failures.

In the soil of the future, the glories to come are no doubt already growing and developing, and we cannot ignore them, because we are all walking towards them; but this is not the same as accepting without question that everything in the future will be better just because it is different.

Although it is true that we are in crisis, this will not last forever. Change is renewal: it means to use the old and powerful columns of the past as a basis on which to build the beautiful capitals of the present. This is the only way we will construct the edifice of history.

* An extract from the book *The Everyday Hero* published in 2018



THE IRISH RENAISSANCE

Aidan Murphy

In times of crisis it is often easy to become stuck, frozen by the uncertainty of what the future holds. We can become trapped in our typically linear view of time and history, and forget to seek the wisdom of our collective experience. History can show us, if we examine it closely, without prejudice, that the experiences we are having are not unique. Societal highs and lows, peaks and valleys of culture and human existence, even the fundamental questions we ask ourselves about life; how to be happy, where do we come from, what gives life meaning; these, too, have historical reference points.

As we have now entered into Spring, we can reflect on the natural cycles of life. Nature is bursting forth with all her splendour and abundance, to recolour the canvas of the earth in paints of Hope and Youth and Rejuvenation. It is a stark contrast to the social reality we are living; isolation, anxiety, illness, and death. But the cycles of Spring can help us to remain vibrant and engaged, even in the face of this, or any, crisis. Ancient tradition tells us that everything operates in a complex series of cycles, even time. With this knowledge we can conceive a future that is not just based on linear

progression, but on a cyclical progression; not merely a tomorrow of unknowns, but an inevitability which we can relate to previous reference points. In short, we must understand our past if we are to accept our present and consciously build the future we seek.

Some consider this period in which we are living as an Historical Middle Age. This may be difficult for us to accept but in witnessing such rampant ignorance and violence, excess materialism and superstition, and with a destructive disregard for nature, there are certain undeniable correlations with the concept of “Middle Age”. To understand this parallel clearly we must remove certain prejudices that we have about the times in which we live, and indeed, previous historical periods.

A Middle Age is simply a transitional period, a “middle” between two eras of civilization, a valley between two great peaks of human development. Nothing in life can be sustained indefinitely and so a natural decline is inevitable. In the same way, no hard times are perpetuated without end, and so, an incline is also natural and inevitable in this cyclical pattern of life. We have come to refer to these periods of incline, or rebirth of cultural values, as Renaissance. A collective Spring of human potential, blossoming in all the cultural gardens of art, science, politics and philosophy. In the last Middle Age, as the great Roman Empire slipped into decay and decadence, adrift from its once noble ideals and drowning in a sea of excess and materialism, one of the first great casualties was, as is often the case, knowledge. Books were being denied or even burned on a catastrophic scale. Ancient teachings of incomparable insight were being lost and replaced with fanaticism and dogma. Europe was quickly losing the faculty of literacy and ignorance was blazing across the continent as fast as the very flames that carried all those texts away in ash.

Yet a solitary bastion of knowledge held fast. Nestled on the periphery of Europe; Ireland became the seed of the first renaissances that would take root and bloom in the subsequent centuries, to reclaim civilization from the brink of utter darkness. The tireless works of the Irish monks, through the various monastic communities ensured to safeguard all the knowledge that they possessed and received. Scholars flocked to Ireland to study, and to teach, and to donate texts to be transcribed and preserved by the monks who worked with diligence and humility, never asserting their preferences over what would be deemed worthy to pass on. Thanks to their efforts, countless ancient texts, the basis of modern Europe, remained intact.

This Irish Renaissance can be a reference point for us now. Confronted with times of great change we can inspire ourselves from the example of these monks, to tirelessly work to preserve what matters, to cultivate knowledge and, above all, the practice of that knowledge into a wisdom that transforms. This cycle will pass and we, now, must decide what seeds we are planting for the next cycle. We do not need to be perfect to make a better tomorrow, we need just to plant the seeds of renaissance. Today.



BACURAU

Conor McMahon

The film is set in a fictional small town of Bacarau in Northern Brazil, we are told “a few years from now.” The word “Bacarau” refers to a rare bird which is the symbol of the town. As the story unfolds the inhabitants are preyed upon by a group of foreign invaders who have paid money to shoot and kill the locals of the village for sport.

While Bacarau’s community features a strong sense of codependency, relationships among the white invaders are utilitarian. They are only co-operating because it is in their own best interests. When they have an argument amongst themselves it ends with a bullet. This is contrasted with the people of Bacarau, who are tolerant of each other’s

differences. The town is inclusive of all walks of life and when an argument breaks out it is quickly forgiven. They are able to see beyond differences and look to what unites them. They have a respect for each other and the collective. The foreign intruders seem to believe that their technological advancement gives them the right to treat rural Brazil as their own personal hunting ground. They enter it with arrogance and superiority. There’s a tendency to think that in our modern world we are more advanced than other civilisations that came before. We could be guilty of looking back on Egypt, for example, and thinking of them as a primitive race. But when we dig a little deeper it is clear that this is not the case. How advanced we are should not be judged by the weapons we



possess. How many people we can kill with a bomb. Is that real advancement? It's all too easy to only look at the outer manifestation of things and to make a judgement from there. Like the men who encroach on the town of Bacarau with a confident swagger supported by their firepower. But they are suddenly taken off guard when the townspeople fight back. Their ignorance is laid bare and they pay the price for it.

This is highlighted in a scene when one of the foreign scouts comes into the town to plant a chip that will cut off the town's cell phone signal. While there, the scout is invited to view the town's museum, to learn about its history. But the scout is not interested and this is to his detriment. If he had gone into the museum he would have learned about how the people of the town had squashed an invasion in the past, how these are not a simple people who will roll over so easily. He

would have seen the old weapons the town possessed which would eventually be used against the current invaders. The invader's lack of interest in the town becomes their undoing.

This idea is developed in a later scene when one of the gang members picks up a wooden carving of a bird, the symbol of the town, and puts it in his pocket. A sign of dominance and of how they think they have this town in their own pocket.

We have seen this dynamic play out in real wars. When a large invading country's initial arrogance is soon replaced with shock when they realise the people they attack have a history and a resilience that they didn't expect. The film is a lesson to investigate, to look below the surface, and not be so quick to think we are superior to others, because of our advances in technology.

Pachelbel's Canon in D Major

Laura Lorincz

Johann Pachelbel's name may not be known to many, but the melody of the Canon he composed in D major is familiar to almost everyone.

This great Baroque composer constructed a piece which inspired millions of other composers and writers of salon/pop music. It's a catchy melody (in the absolute best sense of the word), the chords following one after the other with such naturalness that we feel as if we always knew it.

Pachelbel was born into a family of 14 children, and his musical talents were evident from childhood. A notable organist and composer of the 17th-century German Baroque music era, he is considered to be one of the most important forerunners of Johann Sebastian Bach.

The essential phrase of the canon in D major consists of just eight chords yet it never becomes dull because we hear a wide range of instruments playing a varied melody with varied rhythms and decorations over the chord progression. Returning to the canon in D major, I recommend that you close your eyes and unleash your thoughts, immerse yourself in its endless music...

[Listen on youtube here](#)

