

ARTS

How Europe lost its confidence

ART REVIEW

PATRICK REYNOLDS

What a kerfuffle! Surrealism produced in Parisian intellectual society in the 1920s. André Breton, a poet who couldn't draw for toffee, almost single-handedly conceived the idea of Surrealism (What is it? Wait and see), only to have it taken away from him by Georges Bataille and then by the artistic monopolism of Salvador Dalí.

Were Dalí and Picasso ever on speaking terms? I doubt it, but Surrealism brought them together for a short time, as a tour of *Undercover Surrealism: Picasso, Miró, Masson and the vision of Georges Bataille* (until July 30) at the Hayward Gallery would illustrate.

The exhibition features a beautiful wall of paintings by Picasso. (Did one ever realise how small "Two Women Running on a Beach" is in fact? It seems only the size of a medieval miniature.) Then there are large paintings by Joan Miró and André Masson, the latter pretty shallow. There is also an impressive piece of work by Juan Gris, "The Smoker". One look at this stupefying painting and you'd stop puffing for ever.

But why is the show on at all? The most interesting thing about the exhibition is actually the catalogue, created by two academics, Prof Dawn Ades and her colleague Dr Simon Baker. A jolly good catalogue with an exhibition attached, you might say.

But it is good that we have been able to see it, because the show explains much of the dissolution of Western civilisation. A host of differing experiences clubbed together to destroy 10 centuries of European self-confidence. There was universal foreign travel, the importing of artefacts from Near, Middle and Far East, and of ethnic works of primitive art from the South Sea Islands, Central America and



"Beneath the Mask, Pierre Prévret", by Jacques-André Boiffard, in 1930

Ethiopia. This coincided with the advent of psychology, the invention of radio, the coming of jazz and, alas, the rise of blue-rapping, intuition and "free

thought". Add to this the impact of the colossal casualties of the First World War, which made nonsense of the Enlightenment-derived civilisation of

France, and the apocalyptic change of political regimes all over Europe, then you have a world that is simply waiting for the perversity of Surrealism, which finds solace only in the subjective security of the individual.

But wait. We have missed one fundamental contribution to French civilisation: Catholicism. And it is in the context of asecular Catholicism that the present exhibition should truly be seen. Georges Bataille himself spent a year in a seminary (while his father was blind, dying of syphilis). It did the opposite of confirming a vocation: Bataille henceforth became determined to destroy Catholicism by concentrating on anything that could be construed as the opposite of it. His efforts were backed up by the presence of two virulently anti-Catholic Spaniards, Picasso and Dalí.

Bataille's *Documents* lasted barely a year's publication, but they were of enormous influence. Their pictures – which concentrated on anarchy and obscenity, with photographs of death, torture and mutilation – were so shocking that they made André Breton's efforts seem almost lady-like. Dreams turned to nightmares. *Documents* had done its intended task before it ceased to exist – and the editor was an ex-seminarian.

Surrealism persisted, above cover and undercover, until the Spanish Civil War (true surrealism, that) and the psychological pressure of the First World War consigned it to oblivion.

Dalí came back to Catholicism later and was congratulated on his conversion by Pope Pius XII. Good for him; one had to accommodate to Generalissimo Franco a bit, after all. Picasso remained an unregenerate pagan. He had tickled his palate with the perversity and idocy of Surrealism and then

it bit him. But the show – well, give yourself about half an hour. There are good lectures and entertainments of all sorts organised to go with it.

MEDIAMATTER

Rapper loses fizz in Champagne row

With all the sporting excitement over for another year we must seek stories to keep us entertained until the football starts up again some time next week, and where better to look than in the pages of *The Economist* for something suitably racy?

Last week the *Econ* carried a piece about Champagne houses – for even the dry-as-dust world of international business has its silly season – and interviewed the new MD of Louis Roederer, Frederic Rouzaud, about the popularity of Roederer Cristal with bling-bling rap artists such as Jay-Z, Gravy and Ice T. Surely the unsolicited endorsement of these people could harm the image of the brand?

"That's a good question," replied M. Rouzaud, "but what can we do? We can't forbid people from buying it."

Whoops! You wouldn't have picked Jay-Z for an avid *Econ* reader (but what can they do? You can't stop people buying a magazine), but he reacted angrily to the Frenchman's words, which seemed to him to smack not only of ingratitude for all the free publicity, but of racism. (Not so sure about that one, Spobbery, for sure, but if Jay-Z is implying that all black people become tastelessly ostentatious, beyond belief upon the attainment of wealth and celebrity, who's the racist?)

Anyway, the upshot is that Jay-Z has now rewritten some of his lyrics to deprive Cristal of its plug and pulled the stuff from his chair of nightclubs, and he and all his pals in the loaded, black American musical community are boycotting it in favour of Krug and Dom Perignon; so presumably all their fans will do likewise. In all its proud history of thorough and sometimes investigative work in the field of global business, *The Economist* can surely never before so much damage in one article to a single brand.

All of which, of course, begs the question: why did the rapper cotton on to Cristal in the first place? It's jolly nice, certainly, but that in itself is an insufficient explanation. Chivas Regal scotch, which Americans seem to regard as the height of sophistication though

some of us over here think it's syrupy muck, has been aggressively pushed to the American market for decades, and duly scooped its reward. But did Louis Roederer hit the streets of Brooklyn and Harlem with a multi-million dollar campaign designed to convert the brothers to his brand? It did not. Does the New York hip-hop radio station Hot 97 owe one of its awards to a Roederer publicity stunt? Unlikely.

Every luxury brand would like to be seen as the ultimate badge of wealth and taste, the choice of Olympian and somehow Cristal managed to score with the well-to-do rapper, just as Burberry did with our own chavs and footie-thugs. There's no rhyme or reason to it. It's a little more understandable that a grand old man of hip-hop like Ice T should drive a Bentley, for that is a uniquely polished and stately symbol of wealth and taste that kicks all its brassier American rivals into the central reservation (and the chaps at Bentley, I note, have not complained). But there are quite a few first-class Champagnes around, and why the one in the clear glass bottle should have been the favourite of one particular group of musicians, until a snooty Frenchman forgot that some of them might be able to read, remains a mystery.

So will Moët (who make Dom Perignon) and Krug now issue statements saying how proud they are to be associated with hip-hop? And will Cristal put on more sales than it loses, adding people who can sing to its client base now that the peculiar and stately rhyme have slumped its wares? I'll have to check in next week's *Economist*.

Nick Thomas



Left: Rapper Ice T

No more of these dodgy, under-age heroes



FILM REVIEW
Freddie Sayers

I think something quite strange is going on. This week, a film called *Little Manhattan* has been hitting cinemas across the country. It tells the story of the New York romance, through highs and lows, of a 10-year-old boy with an 11-year-old girl. When David Cameron recently announced his concern about the sexualisation of minors, I thought it was quite an odd thing to say. Children have always pretended to be adults, right? But then you hear about the padded bras being sold by Marks and Spencer, and the proud 11-year-old single mother in

Scotland, and you begin to wonder whether he perhaps has a point.

Little Manhattan is, first and foremost, a diabolically bad film. So inane, so clichéd and so desperately boring I can confidently say I have never seen anything like it. Its whole sphere of reference – the travails of falling in love, the jolly inevitability of divorce, the attempt to make it all okay by speaking your mind – is America at its most depressing.

The film tells the story of 10-year-old Gabe (Josh Hutcherson) who lives with his parents (in the process of divorcing, but still living together) in a flat on New York's Upper West Side. He is a normal, happy 10-year-old, plays football with his Dad in the park, basketball with his friends at school, and, like all his friends, steers well clear of the girls in his class.

That is, until he takes up karate lessons and accidentally gets paired with 11-year-old Rosemary (Charlie Ray). After class, she tries on a dress for him and suddenly, violently, he falls in

love. The decision to choose karate practice as a forum for their courtship is already way off. Instead of daisy chains and holding hands, these pre-adolescents roll around in each other's apartments when the parents aren't there, sweating and grunting. At one point, Rosemary pins Gabe down on the floor, straddling him, and brushes her long hair over of her face, ready for a kiss. This is soft kiddie porn! I was outraged.

As well as this, the whole thing is narrated by Gabe, Holden Caulfield-style, with a *petit vieux* precociousness that is very fashionable, very unrealistic and quite inappropriate. Instead of we, the adult audience, looking down at this 10-year-old's innocent and sweetly preposterous drama (which would have been fine), it is a grown-up 10-year-old, sharing nudge-nudge-wink-wink jokes about dating and women with us, the fawning audience. "Cricket, it's easier to organise an Israeli-Palestinian peace conference than get a date with this girl." Ha ha.

But the really revealing element of this film is the relationship of this child with his parents. Already they are the cute dysfunctional family in the process of divorcing, the mother dating other men and the father putting named stickers on all his food in the fridge. But instead of treating Gabe as a child, they take him, and his "romance", seriously. When he introduces Rosemary as his karate practice partner, his father stares with an almost salacious fascination and says "we might" with a horrifying tone of approval.

And that's just it. Children have always pretended to be, and dreamed about being grown-ups; but grown-ups have never taken them so seriously. It would probably be considered an infringement of Gabe's rights, or interference with his sexual development, to be anything other than respectful of this childhood infatuation. I say take nothing to a child under 14 says too seriously. I say no more of these dodgy under-age cinema heroes. I say pat them on the head, and send them to bed.

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Satire and sentiment

THEATRE REVIEW
ROBERT TANTICH

Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's 30-year-old musical *Evita*, revived at the Adelphi Theatre, traces the rise of Eva Peron from small-time prostitute to big-time *poule de luxe*. She becomes the mistress, and then finally the wife, of Argentina's dictator, from which vantage point she seduces the whole nation. Mixing sex and fascism, whoring and charity work, the Argentine star Elena Roger can sing, act and dance. She's shrill, she's brassy and she's so tiny that Philip Quast's Peron towers over her absurdly. Matt Rawle (surely,

too nice) plays the disenchanted observer whose barbed running commentary gives the show its cynical edge.

Avenue Q, a Broadway musical starring glove puppets, arrives at the Noel Coward Theatre laden with awards. Funny, smart, puerile and lewd, this musical is definitely not for children. It will probably have a cult following. Two acerbic songs early on – "Everybody's A Bit Racist Today" and "The Internet is for Porn" – promise much, but the writers prefer sentimental mush and the "aah" factor is very strong. It would be unbearable if there weren't any puppets. Simon Lipkin, Julie Atherton and Jon Robyns show considerable skill in a variety of roles as actors and manipulators. The Muppet-like puppets are appealing. The jaunty music is by Robert Lopez. The witty lyrics are by Jeff Marx.

The Barbican's year-long international season continues to play an important part in London's theatrical life. The high spot of Declan Donnellan's production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with Russian actors is the late-night drunken caterwauling. Dmitry Sheerbin's Malvolio actually bursts into tears when he reads the forged letter and finds that he is loved for the first time in his life. This Malvolio never does anything to justify being thrown into a dark prison. It is amazing in this day and age that some people should still find his cruel humiliation funny. The closing scene, with the reunion of the twins, and the extended

dance which follows, is a delight. The production from Uzbekistan comes Abdullah Kadyri's *White Black Stork*, a story of a child set at the beginning of the 20th century. A Muslim father thinks the best way to cure his 16-year-old son's homosexuality is to force him to marry a girl who is in love with a straight lad. Michael Keegan-Dolan, artistic director of Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre, had a big success with his Irish version of *Giselle* last year. His new piece, *The Flowerbed*, is a crude satire on warring neighbours in suburbia battling over a lawn. Hoeseppie, garden shears and fork are put to murderous use in a bloody finale which even a Jacobean audience might find excessive. The multinational cast give cartoon performances of screaming vulgarity. Vladislav Benito Solys is hilariously revolting as a stubble-chinned, hairy-chested, beer-swilling, chain-smoker. But the sentimental love passages in the middle of all the grotesque mayhem ring false.

The Yohangza Theatre Company from South Korea act a naive, simplified non-poetic adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The roles of Oberon and Titania are reversed, and Oberon falls in love with an old hag who is disguised as a pig. The production mixes dance, mime and puppetry, with lore and percussion. The appeal for a Western audience is the stylised body language and the knee-churn of the actors.

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