

WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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Great Scot

PALERMO, Sicily, 1230. The abbot stands motionless in the monastery church as the monks wait for their visitor. He's from Scotland, and they regard him as something of a barbarian. Finally he stumbles in wearing a metal skull cap. When he takes it off for the consecration, a brick falls from above and strikes him on the head. He lies on the floor in a pool of blood.

Elizabeth Mac Donald knows how to grip the reader. *A Matter of Interpretation* is the story of Michael Scot, a wandering monk with a sceptical bent who began a translation of the works of Aristotle with the blessing of Emperor Frederick II. You know what's going to happen next. Ideas start to emerge that the jittery establishment would prefer suppressed. Scot is ordered to halt the work.

Mac Donald, who teaches English at the University of Pisa, told us: "I've always loved quest narratives and the attempts they embody to transcend the limits of our human condition. I saw this in the tragic trajectory of the life of Frederick II. He lived at a time and in a place that has strong parallels with



our globalised lives now: thirteenth-century Sicily represented an uneasy coming-together of peoples, religions and cultures. When I came across Michael Scot, I knew I had my protagonist." One of her characters, Stéphan de Provins, she says, was inspired by Benedict XVI.

A Matter of Interpretation was published by Fairlight Books in September at £12.99; the paperback is due out in February.

A DISTINGUISHED professor emeritus of English was the first to write. It was a single

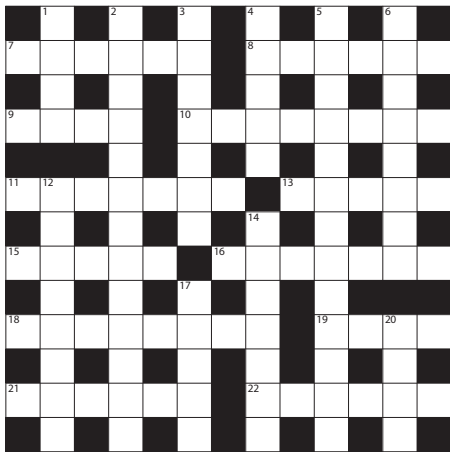
word email. "Whom?" he boomed. "Whom?" At least, I imagined he was booming. He was unhappy with our cover headline last week: "Who can we trust?", below Martí Sáiz's picture of four party leaders, each bearing a label saying, "Trust me!"

Come on, I wheedled, "Whom can we trust?" would have been as archaic as a fiddleback chasuble. But the Prof is right, of course. "Who" is one of the few words in English that differs in the accusative (objective) case, when it becomes "whom". This causes no end of bother. Start being a clever-clogs who thinks they know how to use "whom" properly and you might trip up, as Graham Greene – a one-time sub-editor, for heaven's sake – did in *The Quiet American*: "There was a big man whom I think was an hôtelier from Phnom Penh and a French girl I'd never seen before ..."

Hemingway took the title of his Spanish civil war novel from John Donne's meditation, "No man is an Island ... any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee." But never mind Donne. I bow to the master lyricist Bo Diddley, composer of "Who Do You Love?" Try singing "Whom Do You Love?" in the shower, Professor.

PUZZLES

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 687 Axe



Across

- 7 Elisha's servant's in range, hazily identifiable (6)
8 Athens' first church temperance movement smothered independent Roman province (6)
9 Tree line stood out, being consecrated (4)
10 Totally limited, Roman emperor's automatic reaction, in the main (8)
11 Chronicles valley after a breach is blasted (7)
13 Nick, being ancient, survived to make a comeback (5)
15 One of the spies' tips to galvanise agents during dastardly initiations (5)
16 Tricky slippery part of the garden slope in Genesis, according to the K.J.V? (7)

- 18 Each lad a criminal, is going to the ancestral home ... (8)
19 ... Obed's boy, one southern lass embraced ... (4)
21 ... Arphaxas' son, he's killed before the end of autumn (6)
22 One of the Hecatonchires is in bed with American (6)

Down

- 1 Something that smells with directions given to unearth Babylonian deity (4)
2 Jesus healed her two girls and little boy on drugs (4,9)
3 Musician priest is ill – Gaia's upset (7)
4 Abraham's chum's the lead in Rodgers' musical that's going around (5)

- 5 Is Dionysius a heritage poet? (3,10)
6 Container carrying criminal almost left out Labour leader from place in Asia Minor (8)
12 Perhaps a converted preacher, Paul's helper in Colossae (8)
14 Atonement from port pirates adopted having final character banned (7)
17 At around 45 degrees on the compass, distant group of islands, one of which is 9 Acr? (5)
20 Unknown number support a Manchester United idol (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 14 December, The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk, with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on Jesus, Christian Art and Catholicism – from the OUP's Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random on Friday 27 December. The answers to this week's puzzles and the crossword winner's name will appear in the 11 January 2020 issue.

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SUDOKU | Moderate

	6				9	2	3	
								9
	5		1					
		3		4	5		9	
		5				1		
	9		3	8		4		
					3		7	
2								
	4	1	7				6	

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

2	7	4	8	1	5	6	3	9
9	6	8	2	3	7	4	5	1
3	1	5	9	4	6	7	8	2
4	2	3	6	7	8	9	1	5
5	9	7	1	2	4	8	6	3
1	8	6	3	5	9	2	4	7
8	5	1	4	9	2	3	7	6
6	3	2	7	8	1	5	9	4
7	4	9	5	6	3	1	2	8

Solution to the 23 November crossword No. 684

Across: 3 Benjaminites; 7 Stable; 8 Ashbel; 9 Shem; 11 Arnon; 13 Elika; 14 Baal; 16 Cephas; 17 Hygeia; 19 Hebrew Bible.

Down: 1 Anub; 2 Bithynia; 3 Beth-Shemesh; 4 Amen; 5 Isaiah; 6 Eternal Life; 10 Elisheba; 12 Parsee; 15 Ahab; 18 Geba.

Winner: Jack Martyn Verblow, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.