



based Stephen Mottram's Animata and featuring human-like marionettes as the seed carriers of the title.

Mottram himself appears as a mysterious figure who hunts the seed carriers with a net. With the action confined to a stage enclosed within black curtains, a memorable night seems in store.

If you feel like a laugh, Coulrophobia might be a better bet. "Very rude and very funny," says Will. "Disappointing nudity and some strong language," warns the festival website.

In the 75-minute show from Pickled Image, you are invited to join a pair of clowns on a "ridicu-

lous, anarchic, often hysterical and sometimes terrifying quest for freedom".

Two years on, this Culture Awards Best Newcomer seems poised to become established, with a packed programme of performances, screenings, talks and workshops.

Will says: "It's a shame that the North East gets neglected by certain art forms. Hull have had UK City of Culture and Liverpool have had a go (European Capital of Culture, 2008). But when we do things as a city or region we tend to do them very well. I have such strong and positive memories of the Gateshead Garden Festival (1990). I'd like to think we can generate memories like those with our festival."

■ Moving Parts: Newcastle Puppetry Festival is from April 6-14 with tickets on sale now. Find details at www.newcastlepuppetryfestival.co.uk or tel 0781 4046205.

NOMINATE NOW!

You can give another North East company or individual a career leg-up with a nomination for this year's Culture Awards, held in association with Middlesbrough Council.

Anything or anyone that wowed you in 2018 qualifies and categories include Performer or the Year, Artist of the Year, Newcomer of the Year and Event of the Year.

The closing date for nominations is March 22. Find all the categories and nomination forms at www.chroniclelive.co.uk/cultureawards or www.teesside-live.co.uk/cultureawards

The winners will be presented with their awards at an exciting event, complete with musical entertainment, at Middlesbrough Town Hall on May 23.

You won't want to miss it. Tickets, which are £20 each, can be bought from Dawn Owens at dawn.owens@reachplc.com or tel 0191 201 6430.



University of Sunderland



TEES VALLEY MAYOR

Travel beyond the EU and you start to see its benefits

Paul Benneworth



ALTHOUGH I do travel a lot, being an emigrated academic, most of my travel is between a few familiar locations where my trusted partners sit. It's rare for me to visit a country I've never been before, and even rarer when that country is outside 'Europe'.

This week, I've been organising a meeting in Podgorica, the capital of the tiny former Yugoslav republic Montenegro, and the visit has opened my eyes in all kinds of ways. The country's name means 'black mountains', and those dark, razor-edged peaks certainly caught my eye as the plane began its descent to the airport.

Locals' friendliness was immediately disarming. When I told my (Liverpool-supporting) airport cabbie I was from Newcastle, he immediately launched into a unexpectedly detailed and accurate analysis of NUFC. Although I disagreed with him criticising Rafa's defensive style and treatment of Mitrovic, we both readily agreed that Alan Shearer was a Premier League great.

It's a friendliness born of the country's intimacy - more people live in the Newcastle metropolitan area than in Montenegro, and our modest meeting even made the national morning news.

For a country at war two decades ago, it's surprisingly modern. As a Geordie, I love a good river bridge, and Montenegrin Prof Mladen Ulicevic designed a stunning Millennium Bridge that wouldn't look out of place spanning the Tyne.

Montenegro's still under reconstruction, and admittedly still looks shabby. Those optics weren't helped by a recent hurricane that spread a rubbish mountain across Podgorica, and there's no obvious urgency for the clear-up.

But my greatest shock came in switching on my phone. I knew Montenegro's not yet an EU member, but I didn't realise what that meant for roaming. And when I saw that a single megabyte of data - roughly one Google Maps search - cost £2, I immediately deactivated mobile internet!

I wasn't the only one in our party who felt that way, and it

gave our group the curiously old fashioned sight of academics trying to navigate around the city using only paper maps.

Seeing us arriving at the cafe for our dinner was like watching adventurers of yore reaching a remote camp, small groups peering over our maps to make sense of an impenetrable foreign landscape.

That was inconvenient, but we all did it rather than forking out a couple of quid to use our phones. And that encapsulates Brexit in a nutshell: it's going to make a load of things which are currently effortless inconveniently difficult and expensive.

It's easy not to know it was the EU that made roaming free. Nelly Kroes, competition commissioner and pure unelected Brussels bureaucrat, took on both telecom companies' vested interests and the resistance of member states (including the UK).

She mandated a series of price cuts that eventually gave us cost-free roaming. But when it finally became free, the phone companies pretended it was down to their generosity, and the Tories even had the gall to pretend it was their idea.

So much Brussels' "red tape" is about making things across Europe simple for citizens. You drive on to a ferry in North Shields knowing that you stay legal when you drive off in IJmuiden, saving time, cost and effort for anyone making the journey.

Unsurprisingly, Montenegro is clamouring to join Europe - they feel their lives have been too burdened for too long. But for us, it's all coming to an end this month, although you wouldn't hear it, listening to our politicians.

May's 'deal or no deal' will put unbearably heavy burdens on us when doing everyday things we currently find easy. So I desperately hope Parliament arises next week to vote to save us from those failed populists seeking to enrich themselves by making all our lives much more difficult.

Prof Paul Benneworth is professor of innovation and regional development at HVL University, Norway

against women – Mslexia

She said: "What's still shocking to me is the persistence of women's lack of confidence in their writing, and in their right to write - which seems barely dented by the achievements of authors like Hilary Mantel and Carol Ann Duffy."

Debbie revealed that Mantel has been a supporter of the magazine, published quarterly, since it began and in 2006, she interviewed her at what turned out to be an historic literary moment.

"She was really happy as she had just written the first page of her new book, Wolf Hall," said Debbie.

The book, the first in a trilogy

about the rise to power of Thomas Cromwell in the court of Henry VIII, was eventually published in 2009 which went on to win a Booker prize as did the second book in the series, Bring Up The Bodies. The third, The Mirror and the Light, is still in progress.

As well as igniting debate on gender and literature, the not-for-profit title has attracted over 22,000 subscribers - 2,000 of whom have been with them from the start - and submissions from 100,000 women, aged from 18 to 88.

Its many supporters, as well as Mantel, include poet laureate Carol

Ann Duffy, and the internationally acclaimed crime writer Val McDermid.

Since Mslexia's launch, Debbie points to a significant advances for women writers, including: a full house of female poet laureates; more women editing literary magazines; women crowding onto the shortlists of literary prizes; women achieving unprecedented success in self-publishing; women far outnumbering men in the exploding creative writing course sector.

Because of this Debbie looks forward positively to the future for female writers.