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## Macron's Travels in Trumpland



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All smiles and hugs is the current French President, Emmanuel Macron. In the White House, there seemed to be an emotional equation generated by the supposedly warm relationship between President Donald Trump and his guest. In entertainment vision, substance would only consist of wiping the dandruff off the jacket of Macron and

handshakes so firm they appear, at stages, to be the weary product of Stockholm syndrome.

A stream of inanities on Macron's travels developed into a rampaging flood on the idea of what all this back rubbing and hand holding meant. The Bromance theorists became an irritating phenomenon, a cult of confused masculinity. Macron, for one, had gone beyond the polite French formality of issuing kisses – the old *bises*. Here, he was all in for the manly shake, though in being hugged, pondered Europe 1 journalist Vincent Hervouët, he was exposed “to the risk that the other person suddenly thinks they can dust you down.” Or at the very least grope you.

Others became amateur ethnologists and psychologists, wondering whether Macron might, like some chancing charmer, find his way to influence Trump for the sake of France, and, by way of default, the world. “As no politician gives the impression of being able to influence him,” noted former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine [to Europe 1](#), “it's not at all absurd for Emmanuel Macron to try the friendship card.”

Olivier Mazerolle got inventive for radio station RTL on the role of the French president as valued, elevated intermediary. “They'll probably do as in the saloon bars of the Old West... when they realise nobody has what it takes to win, they take a drink together. And neither of them has any wish to split”.

[Stephen Bunard](#), in *Journal du Dimanche*, showed a touch of Desmond Morris in creep vision. “A pat on the back, or repeated taps on the back, the place on the back being tapped... all that is important. For example, the higher on the back the tap, the more the person is showing their dominant character.” A sense of envy here that Bunard did not get a chance to be the proverbial, if traumatised fly, on the White House wall.

While Macron timed his smiles and showed a cordial disposition, the French position seemed to be one previously assumed by the British: the Greeks of old supplying wise counsel to the Romans of now. Convince your Roman counterparts about the folly of ignoring current climate change agreements; remind them of the importance of being collective rather than unilateral in decisions; be wary of feverish nationalism and keep the Iran nuclear deal in place. “This rapport,” [claimed the BBC](#), “has pushed France ahead of Germany and the UK, to become America's primary European contact.”

Trump was evidently liking the moment. His tweets on the subject had become sugary rather than abusive, and, in glucose-filled wonder, [observed](#) those links between “two great republics”, “the timeless bonds of history, culture and destiny. We are people who

cherish our values, protect our civilization, and recognize the image of God in every human soul.”

Macron’s [speech before Congress](#) made the pitch of argument while simulating praise. He began with a ponderous Franco-American comparison on the physical interactions he had been sharing with Trump. The French philosopher Voltaire, he reminded his audience, had met Benjamin Franklin in Paris in 1778. “They embraced each other by hugging one another in their arms, and kissing each other’s cheeks. It can remind you of something.” Certainly, though not that.

He reiterated the drug-induced mission both messianic countries have undertaken. “The American and French people have had a rendezvous with freedom.” He spoke of two possible pathways to take: “We can choose isolationism, withdrawal and nationalism... But closing the door to the world will not stop the evolution of the world.” He reiterated the urgency of greening, rather than warming, the earth, there being no “Planet B” to fall back on.

Macron was enjoying himself. His domestic front is troubled, packed with discontent and strikes organised against his reform agenda. These, as [French history shows](#), often have considerable effect on the leadership of the day. Relief has been sought elsewhere, and even a Trump White House offered temporary solace.

A delightful aside to the entire Washington visit was the aftermath of the [sessile oak planting](#) in the White House grounds. The placing of the sapling in the South Lawn by both presidents was meant to signify yet another one of those special relationships covered with good intentions coloured in with camera ready display. The tree’s provenance had some symbolic potency, stemming from the Belleau Wood where some 2,000 US soldiers died in the First World War.

Within a few days, the tree had vanished. Hacks speculated about motives and ploys, enshrouded by what was termed [“a mystery”](#). The explanation duly came: the tree had been quarantined. Cheers all around. An official from Macron’s office [told Reuters](#) how timing was all, “a special favour from Trump to France to be able to plant the tree the day of the president’s visit. Since then, it has returned to quarantine and will soon be replanted in the White House gardens.”

Gallic parasites that had found their way to the tree might have insinuated themselves into the good vegetation of the White House. What a suitable statement: an arboreal gift timed for the cameras, followed by a quarantine of possibly dangerous, if microscopic immigrants.

