WEEK 46, 2019

THE EPOCH TIMES

LIFE & TRADITION

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Leonardo da Vinci

Painting occupied a central part of da Vinci's life. He considered it a 'divine science.'

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"Virgin of the Rocks," circa 1483–1494.

FINE ARTS

A Nun's 'Last Supper'

Rediscovering Sister Plautilla Nelli's great masterpiece

LORRAINE FERRIER

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The signature with the appeal "Pray for the paintress."

Conservator Rossella Lari makes a few finishing touches.

Around eight nuns are thought to have painted Nelli's "Last Supper." This is one of Nelli's most successfully painted saints.

Who better to paint biblical scenes than someone who had devoted her life to God. Sister Plautilla Nelli painted 13 life-size male figures, depicting the moment of Christ's betrayal, across a 21-foot canvas—one of the largest paintings by any early female artist worldwide.

Nelli's "Last Supper," painted around 1550, is the only "Last Supper" known to have been painted by a woman. The painting was recently unveiled in the Old Refectory of the Santa Maria Novella museum in Florence, Italy, after four years of extensive restoration. It is now part of the museum's permanent display.

Yet, you can be forgiven for never having heard of Florence's first female painter. Essentially, it wasn't until 1938 that Nelli was rediscovered and noted in an article by Giovanna Pierattini titled "Sister Plautilla Nelli, Dominican Painter." As recently as 2006, only three works were attributed to her. Now there are nearly two dozen.

Many of Nelli's works, like the "Last Supper," have been recovered and restored to their former glory, largely due to fundraising by the U.S. organization Advancing Women Artists (AWA). It was founded in 2009 by the late author and philanthropist Jane Fortune (1942–2018).

Fortune was intrigued as to why so little was known of Nelli's works considering that her paintings were popular when she was alive. Fortune vowed to make other female artists visible, and hence the AWA's aim is to "research, restore, and exhibit art by women in Tuscany's museums, churches, and storehouses."

AWA's recovery of Nelli's forgotten oeuvre led to the Uffizi's first exhibition of her work in 2017: "Plautilla Nelli: Convent Art and Devotion in the Footsteps of Savonarola," which included 15 of the 20 paintings and drawings attributed to the artist that AWA had restored over the course of a decade.

(Above) The newly restored "Last Supper," by Plautilla Nelli is now on permanent display in the Old Refectory at Santa Maria Novella museum in Florence.

Sister, Prioress, and Painter

Pulisena Margherita Nelli was born in 1524, to a draper. In 1538, at the age of 14, Pulisena took to the cloth and became Sister Plautilla in the Dominican Convent of Saint Catherine of Siena, in Florence. Her only sibling had preceded her into the convent. Nelli was a prioress at the convent on three occasions, and possibly when she painted the "Last Supper."

Nelli continued the artistic tradition of the early 16th-century School of San Marco, which aligned with the concepts and philosophy of Friar Girolamo Savonarola. In 1495, Savonarola instigated the Bonfire of the Vanities, whereby objects that encouraged people to sin were destroyed, such as cosmetics, art, and literature. At that time, Savonarola also supported art created by religious women "as a way to avoid sloth."

Dominican monasteries and convents were places that focused on fostering literature, music, painting, and miniatures, Pierattini noted in her 1938 essay. Undoubtedly, this rich cultural environment would've aided any artist. The religious artwork in Nelli's convent would have also aided spiritual contemplation and concentration.

As recently as 2006, only three works were attributed to Sister Plautilla Nelli. Now there are nearly two dozen.

Nelli painted large canvases with biblical subjects. Her "Last Supper" was a workshop piece; eight sisters are thought to have worked on the painting, all with varying levels of skill. The painting was originally hung in the refectory of the Dominican Convent of Saint Catherine of Siena, where at mealtimes the sisters were able to reflect on the religious scene, aiding their meditations.

Although the confines of the convent workshop meant that Nelli must have been limited to certain artistic experiences, she overcame these challenges. For example, as a nun she couldn't study anatomy. In addition, apart from her own hair, she may not have been able to closely study other examples of hair due to its being hidden under the habit.

The art historian and artist Giorgio Vasari noted that Nelli "had no great practice in her art," in his 1568 publication, "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects." What he meant was that women were unable to apprentice in a workshop alongside a master. Nelli would not have learned to study, draw, and copy living and natural objects as men did, Vasari wrote.

Nelli worked with what she had. She taught herself art through the first book of meditations on the rules of drawing by Alessandro Allori and M. Agnolo Bronzino, as Vasari attests to in his "Lives," and simply through copying great art. Along with the interior of the convent, which would have had remarkable devotional works, she had inherited 500 of Fra Bartolomeo's drawings. Bartolomeo also owned a collection of wooden models that the sisters at the convent may have also inherited.

Bartolomeo was a prominent devotional painter of the San Marco School, who was inspired by the pre-eminent Italian painter Fra Angelico. Bartolomeo's drawings, consisting of not only Bartolomeo's works but also those of many other accomplished artists, were a valuable resource for her to copy and hone her skills.

"She, beginning little by little to draw and to imitate in colors pictures and paintings by excellent masters, has executed some works with such diligence, that she has caused the craftsmen to marvel," Vasari wrote.

Indeed they did marvel. Nelli's art was highly regarded by noblemen who believed that her paintings held a mystical quality. Her paintings were "in the houses of gentlemen throughout Florence," Vasari wrote. "There are so many pictures that it would be tedious to attempt to speak of them all."

(Top) Sister Plautilla Nelli's "Last Supper," before undergoing 4 years of restoration.

To find out more about Plautilla Nelli's "Last Supper" visit SMN.it

The restoration of Nelli's "Last Supper" is the result of many expert hands at the Municipality of Florence, Florentine Civic Museums, the Superintendent's Office for Archeology, Fine Arts and Landscape of Florence, Pistoia and Prato, and the Dominican friars of the Monastery of Santa Maria Novella. The project is detailed in the book "Visible. Plautilla Nelli and her Last Supper, restored" by Linda Falcone.

The Journey of Dr. M. Stanley Whittingham, Chemistry Nobel Prize Winner

"I think you're successful if you're happy with what you're doing.

Stanley Whittingham

SHIWEN RONG

BINGHAMTON, N.Y.—In the corner of the hall on the second floor of the Innovative Technologies Complex campus at Binghamton University, there's an office decorated with balloons. A modest way to celebrate Dr. M. Stanley Whittingham's 2019 Chemistry Nobel Prize.

Now 78 years old, Whittingham is still excited about batteries, visiting laboratories, and giving lectures around the globe.

"So people say, 'When are you going to retire?'" Whittingham said. And he'll reply, "I like what I'm doing. I'm gonna keep doing it."

And his wife, Dr. Georgina Whittingham, who is a professor of foreign languages, says the same.

"We keep teaching," he said. "And my doctor says, 'Don't retire.'"

For more than 30 years, Whittingham has been working at Binghamton University in different positions. Currently, he's a distinguished professor of Chemistry and Materials Science and Engineering.

It's a place he loves.

"There's a lot more teamwork here," he said.

He's a busy man—even more so since being announced as a key figure in history. What won him the Nobel Prize was that he was the first to develop the lithium battery in the 1970s at Exxon.

British at Heart

He came from a small town—Lincolnshire, England—where his high-school teacher got him excited about chemistry.

"Those days, you could make chemicals, blow things up, and things that you are not allowed to do," he said with a laugh. "So I got excited about chemistry."

He then made it to Oxford and finished his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D.

At the end of his Ph.D., unlike many colleagues who went to North America and Canada, he decided to go to Stanford University.

"I wanted to go somewhere with sunshine," he said with a laugh. "I'm still British at heart."

After being there for two months, he was asked to take charge of the material labs of the Department of Defense for the next two years.

"Very successful time, I should say. During those two years, something even more important happened," Whittingham said. "I met my wife at Stanford."

"We didn't waste any time. Within I think nine months, we were married."

Next-Generation Batteries

After finishing his postdoctoral research in two years, he went to work for Exxon.

"I was hired to work on energy, but not petroleum or chemicals," he said.

With a keen interest in solar energy and fuel cells, he started researching batteries.

"We wanted to build the next-generation battery," he said. "The big interest was electronic vehicles because of the gas crisis in the U.S."

SEBASTIAN GOLLNOW/DPA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

2019 Nobel Prize Laureate in Chemistry Dr. M. Stanley Whittingham in Ulm, Germany, on Oct. 9, 2019.

So they started building batteries in test tubes. At that time, they didn't have any unique environment, advanced machines, or even theories on what they might discover.

"We knew there was something there. We didn't know how big it would be."

Whittingham never thought his invention would change the world.

"Even 15 years ago, the phone, you'd need a whole briefcase to carry it. And I think lithium batteries helped all these little devices."

In the 1980s, John Goodenough, using the foundation that Whittingham laid, made another breakthrough to even more powerful batteries.

With a physicist's eyes, Goodenough set out to test something that they thought wouldn't work, Whittingham said.

Following that, in 1985, Akira Yoshino created the first commercially viable lithium-ion battery.

After decades, these three scientists who changed the world have been recognized with the 2019 Chemistry Nobel Prize.

And it's all about perseverance.

"You're going to make mistakes. Don't worry about that," Whittingham said. "If you don't make mistakes, you won't make the big breakthrough."

After working for Exxon, Whittingham realized research and academia was something he always wanted to come back to.

Young at Heart

Whittingham took up a professorship at Binghamton University in the late 80s and continued his research on batteries.

"I really wanted to do research, because lots of academia you get 18-year-olds every year coming in. So it keeps you younger," he said jokingly.

But in the end, he said what matters is that he does what he likes.

"I think you're successful if you're happy with what you're doing," he said. Winning a prize certainly helps as well, he said with a laugh.

"It's so motivating that, even at his age, he's still young," said Anshika Goel, one of his Ph.D. students. "He comes in the lab, he comes to the office every day on time, no matter how much he's traveling."

"He just replied [to] my email at 3 a.m.; he's still working," said Yicheng Zhang, another of Whittingham's Ph.D. students.

Now 30 years later, he's still teaching, and it's his passion that keeps him young at heart.

ALL PHOTOS BY RON POBLETE

Ludan Taquiqui offers free boxing classes for homeless and at-risk youth in Las Vegas.

Ludan Taquiqui (L) has been boxing since 2003.

Mentoring Homeless and At-Risk Youth Through Boxing

ANDREW THOMAS

Nevada has the largest population of homeless youth, and the city of Las Vegas also has many at-risk kids. Ludan Taquiqui mentors these young people by offering free boxing classes, and is making a significant impact on their lives both inside and outside of the ring.

Taquiqui is 36 and lives in Las Vegas. He's been boxing since 2003, and it was Manny Pacquiao who inspired him to take up the sport; he looked up to him because he too was Filipino.

There are many homeless youth who stay in tunnels underneath the strip. But even children who do have a home can end up at-risk without proper parental guidance. The vices of the city, such as alcohol and gambling, can also destroy the family unit. Without a strong support system, many young people end up taking the wrong path.

Taquiqui trains both homeless and at-risk youth because he wanted to find a way to give back to his community. For the past two years, roughly 100 kids have come through his gym.

Moreover, he wanted to be able to provide a space for them to go where they could safely learn how to box and learn positive values.

"Boxing is pretty much synchronized with life. In life, you're going to go through what you're going to go through. You're also going to have these obstacles which are pretty much like punches going at you," Taquiqui told The Epoch Times.

Boxing and Life Skills

Boxing instills a mental toughness that young people can apply to other aspects of their lives, and creates a solution-finding mindset.

The sport also instills discipline and focus. Furthermore, it provides young people with a way to express themselves in a healthy, safe way.

Every time Taquiqui and his students train, their sessions also feature a Bible study which relates to the sport.

Boxing instills a mental toughness that young people can apply to other aspects of their lives, and creates a solution-finding mindset.

"[It's like] David and Goliath. It doesn't matter how big the problem is, if you've got God on your side you can handle that," Taquiqui explained.

While he teaches his students how to fight, he also teaches them to use their skills for good and to defend those who are bullied rather than become bullies themselves.

Taquiqui has made an impact on numerous young people's lives.

One of his students' parents were splitting up, and Taquiqui became a mentor to him. The student started getting better grades, and became a more focused and respectful kid after he started boxing.

Another student lost his father, and felt lost after his father's passing. Boxing gave him a sense of purpose, and has helped him cope with his grief.

Outside of the ring, boxing gives the students self-confidence, mental toughness, and gratitude for life. Taquiqui also tries to instill the values of gratitude, respect, integrity, and loyalty. Working with these kids is incredibly rewarding, and he enjoys watching his students train newcomers.

"To see them develop, to see the way they end up getting better and better when they fight, to see the way they talk to people, the way they uphold themselves, it's definitely rewarding," Taquiqui said.

> **The effect is mysteriously beautiful, of a great softness. What we see isn't the mix of colors that the artist has applied from his palette, but the combination of colors through numerous layers of glazes.**
>
> *Arnaud Hu, professor of art history*

"Madonna of the Yarnwinder," 1500–1510, Leonardo da Vinci and his students. Private Collection, United States Artmyn 2019.

The da Vinci exhibition at the Louvre celebrates the 500th anniversary of the Italian painter's death.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Virgin of the Rocks" circa 1483–1494 (Paris version), by Leonardo da Vinci. Wood transposed on canvas. The Louvre Museum, Paris.

C2RMF/ELSA LAMBERT

Infrared reflectography of the "Virgin of the Rocks."

ALL PHOTOS BY DAVID VIVES/THE EPOCH TIMES UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

"La Scapiliata," 1500–1510, Leonardo da Vinci. The National Gallery of Parma.

"Christ and Saint Thomas," 1467–1483, by Andrea del Verrocchio. Bronze. Church and Museum of Orsanmichele, Florence.

FINE ARTS

Leonardo da Vinci

CAPTURING DIVINE LIGHT

A new Louvre exhibition shows the importance of painting in his life

DAVID VIVES
& MICHAL BLEIBTREU NEEMAN

PARIS—The Gospel of John tells us that the apostle Thomas did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he saw and touched his wounds. Jesus actually invited Thomas to see for himself, but told him (in the New King James version), "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The great Italian sculptor Andrea del Verrochio took 16 years to capture this scene in his bronze statue "Christ and St. Thomas." Thomas is almost smiling, happy to see Christ again; one hand hesitates, searching for his savior's wounds, but stops in mid-movement. What Thomas discovers on that day is his own doubt.

In 1467, the same year he started the statue, Verrocchio welcomed a new young student in his atelier. He was 17 years old, and the drawings presented by his father were promising; the youth seemed to have a future in painting.

And thus, seeing the statue in the studio and being face-to-face with Thomas's disbelief, the student saw, believed, and understood. His name was Leonardo da Vinci.

Like any other student, Leonardo didn't touch any brushes during his first year—except to clean them. He was initiated into the methods of his teacher. Legend has it that Leonardo was charged with painting an angel on the canvas of "The Baptism of Christ." The angel was so beautiful that Verrochio, upon seeing his young student surpass him, never picked up a paintbrush again.

In Quest of Perfection

Leonardo da Vinci attracts hyperboles. According to Louis Frank, curator of the new exhibition at the Louvre Museum, the number of books on Leonardo is "truly enormous." The efforts from the curators are just as impressive.

It took more than 10 years of work for Louvre curators Louis Frank and Vincent Delieuvin to prepare the exhibition dedicated to the Italian genius. Transformed into diplomats, the curators had to seek permission from Queen Elizabeth for drawings from the Windsor Royal Collection, from Venice's Accademia Gallery for the loan of the "The Vitruvian Man"—which was nearly refused to them—and from the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, for the "Benois Madonna."

From the Industrial Age, where his sketches of flying machines left people dumbfounded, to the film "The Da Vinci Code," which explored the master's secrets (such as mirror writing), Leonardo has become a legend through the centuries. The Florentine painter's fame has conferred upon him a mysterious aura, as well as abundant literature.

Finally, the Louvre succeeded in gathering 140 of his works, including an impressive number of sketchbooks and studies. But painting seems to be most prominent here, over any other medium.

> **Like any other student, Leonardo didn't touch any brushes during his first year—except to clean them.**

Louis Frank, the curator of the Leonardo da Vinci exhibition at the Louvre, on Oct. 22, 2019.

"We look at Leonardo today as if he were lost across an extraordinary labyrinth of scientific discoveries, yet painting was at the center of his life. It was his essential preoccupation. For him, it was elevated to the level of science. He used the expression 'divine science,'" Frank explained.

"Some think that Leonardo didn't like to paint, because he painted very little. But that's false. All his life, he worked on paintings, and some of them were never finished," he said.

The Christian faith isn't explicitly referenced in Leonardo's "Codex Urbinas," his treatise on painting. But the nature of the divine had a particular significance for him, as for many of his contemporaries. It's as if painting allowed him to attain and reach higher aims than those of mortal beings. In "Codex Urbinas," Leonardo wrote, "The divinity which is the science of painting transmutes the painter's mind into a resemblance of the divine mind."

> **We look at Leonardo today as if he were lost across an extraordinary labyrinth of scientific discoveries, yet painting was at the center of his life.**
>
> *Louis Frank, curator, Louvre Museum*

The Light of Divine Beings

Guiding the Gothic architecture of 12th-century cathedrals, the theology of light posited that stained glass windows were intended to transform ordinary, physical light into divine light in a way that it could penetrate the churches and be witnessed by and instruct all believers.

During the Renaissance, the momentum of Italian painters was unstoppable—their work surpassed all that existed until then. According to Arnaud Hu, professor of art history who also attended the exhibition, though other schools of painting existed outside of Italy—such as the Flemish School—the Italians were the sole ones to see the potential of painting to express light.

"The painters picked up on the Theology of Light, which inspired the creation of stained glass windows. And the work on light by the artisans of the cathedrals continued with the Italian painters. The goal was to make divine light visible to those looking at the painting," Hu said. Several techniques, such as chiaroscuro, later popularized by Caravaggio, emerged. But always, the goal was to reveal the light of divine beings.

Leonardo thus created his famous "sfumato" (derived from the word "smoke"), an optical effect that smooths out the contours, and highlights the colors and lights of the characters being depicted.

In 2010, researchers, using a technique called X-ray fluorescence spectrometry, worked to uncover the secret of Leonardo's technique.

And they found the answer. After having finished his painting, Leonado added transparent layers—a glaze. To obtain a visual effect of transparency, artists can superimpose different layers of glazes. The accumulation of these different layers result in a diaphanous effect.

In the case of Leonardo's sfumato, researchers found multiple minute layers, measuring between 1 and 2 micrometers, superimposed on each other—layers so thin that it defies the imagination.

"The effect is mysteriously beautiful, of a great softness. What we see isn't the mix of colors that the artist has applied from his palette, but the combination of colors through numerous layers of glazes," Hu said.

This elusive light no doubt enhances the expression of the characters and the beauty of the scenes.

According to Frank, Leonardo learned how to capture the essence of life in motion, which means the contradiction between the human mind and one's deepest feelings—as in his master's statue of Christ and St. Thomas. The position of St. Thomas's body's suggests a deep impulse, a wish to join and greet Jesus, but his hand seems to hesitate. Looked at from a different perspective, it's hard to say whether Thomas is smiling or is thinking of something else, as his doubt challenges him at that moment.

"In the context of religious paintings, Leonardo wanted to understand profound meanings. What was the state of mind of the Virgin when she saw Jesus play with the lamb, which symbolizes his sacrifice and his ultimate mission? Her smile is as joyful as it is melancholy. She tries to hold him back, but she understands that the lamb is his ultimate mission," Frank explained.

When Leonardo went to France at the invitation of King Francis I—he would spend the last three years of his life there—he brought with him three paintings: the "Mona Lisa," "The Virgin and Child With Saint Anne," and "Saint John the Baptist." These were three unfinished works that he would try, for the rest of his life, to finish—and perhaps, to understand.

Escape From East Berlin

30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, former diplomat Jochen Wolter recalls his family's daring escape to West Berlin

COURTESY OF JOCHEN WOLTER

An old photo of the Wolter family.

HERBERT W. STUPP

If we assembled a panel of experts on communism and asked them to recall the symbol that best represented the evil of that philosophy, we would elicit an array of responses. Some would mention the Soviet gulags described so eloquently by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, where "patients" and inmates were tortured relentlessly, even to death. Others would point to the closing of houses of worship across Red China, the Soviet Union, and other officially atheist communist bloc nations. Still others would point to the unprecedented killings carried out by Marxist–Leninist states that still defy precise computation. At least 2 million human beings were killed by the Khmer Rouge in the small nation of Cambodia, and over 80 million were put to death or starved in China, and another 60 million in the Soviet Union.

But for sheer symbolism and the most glaring contrast between the evil of communism and the virtue of the West, it is hard to top the Berlin Wall.

From the time the Soviets first occupied their "zone" of Germany in 1945, following the end of World War II, up to the summer of 1961, Germans could move freely within the city of Berlin. My own mother and her family were summarily expelled from their modest house in the eastern Pankow neighborhood by the Soviets. Though the house had lost one room due to Allied night bombings during the war, it was still habitable, and the Soviets installed officers in our family's hearth. There was no compensation for this Soviet larceny, but at least Mom could travel freely to the West, and then on to New York and New Jersey in spring 1947.

Although the "Iron Curtain" that Winston Churchill described in 1946 conformed to the borders dividing East and West Germany, and the boundaries between free and communist nations to the south, there was unrestricted transit within the city of Berlin. Subways and bus lines served and connected all sectors of the city: the three free zones and the large communist sector in the east.

The Wall Goes Up

That all came to a screeching halt on Aug. 13, 1961, when the communist East German government, assisted by their Soviet masters, began hurriedly constructing cinderblock walls between West Berlin and the East, preventing East Germans from crossing into the west. The so-called "Democratic Republic of Germany" (DDR to Germans) was clearly embarrassed that some 3.5 million of its people had fled to the West.

Subway lines were suddenly terminated at the east-west border, with tunnels bricked up to prevent underground escapes. Before long, subway maps in the East treated West Berlin as a "blank," with no subway lines

For sheer symbolism and the most glaring contrast between the evil of communism and the virtue of the West, it is hard to top the Berlin Wall.

The sleeping pill didn't have an effect on me, so I remember all the details of that journey to freedom.

Jochen Wolter

THE EPOCH TIMES

Jochen Wolter is a former diplomat who fled East Berlin with his family at the age of 8, in the fall of 1961.

or verbiage in that empty space. Overnight, families were separated, sometimes with spouses, parents, and children stuck on opposite sides of the Wall, never to see each other again.

As the wall was being completed, communist forces added miles and miles of barbed wire, watchtowers staffed by armed soldiers with "shoot to kill" orders, mounted shrapnel guns, and "kill zones" with concrete plazas and trenches designed to thwart any attempted escape by speeding vehicles.

Looking for a Way Out

Even as the cement was drying on the infamous Wall, East Germans were actively seeking ways around, over and even under the hated barrier. More than 5,000 East Germans succeeded in escaping through and around the wall, though over 100,000 tried. Sadly, as many as 245 died trying to escape, the last being Winfried Freudenberg, who perished just months before the Wall was breached, as he fell from the hot air balloon he hoped would deliver him to freedom.

The Wall's first casualty, just days after it was completed, was Ida Siekmann, who lived on the fourth floor of a Bernauer Strasse walk-up. The Wall was directly below her window, and after tossing down bedding and other furniture, she leaped to what she hoped would be freedom, the western side of the Wall. Sadly, she died from the impact of her fall. Before long, the communists were closing all building windows near the wall, sealing them with fortified bricks.

Perhaps the most famous murder at the Berlin Wall was that of young Peter Fechter in 1962, about a year after the barrier's construction. He made a run for freedom, seeking to traverse a barbed-wire fence. Without warning, a rifle-toting East German guard fired on 18-year-old Peter, stopping him cold. Even more heartless than the shooting was the communist response: they literally allowed Peter Fechter to bleed out and die on the barbed wire, retrieving his body only hours later. Another "don't even think about it" message was sent by the East's dictators.

Berlin has many rivers, canals, and tributaries, with more bridges than Venice and Amsterdam combined. The East Germans observed some escapes by water, and quickly moved to deploy armed soldiers in gunboats to capture or shoot departing swimmers and dinghies.

With jumping, swimming, and sprinting proving fatal, East Berliners seeking freedom sought to escape under the Wall. During the Wall's infamous 28-year presence in Berlin, some 75 tunnels were begun, to give freedom-seekers another option for emigration.

Most of the excavations, however, could not be completed. Scores of those involved in digging the tunnels were arrested by East German secret police (Stasi), facing long prison terms. Though many crawled and scraped their way into West Berlin, others died in tunnel collapses, from oxygen deprivation, and shots fired by pursuing communist police. Reporter Greg Mitchell catalogs this spellbinding subterranean story in his book, "The Tunnels."

Still others, aided by pro–freedom groups in the East, managed to bluff and cajole their way through the Wall and its checkpoints. I happen to know one of these brave Berliners who made it through the Wall, as an 8-year-old in 1961, led by his parents.

My wife and I became friendly with Jochen Wolter and his American-born wife, Susan, during his posting in New York as a member of the German Diplomatic Service. From 2009 to 2014, he was the press officer for the Consulate General of Germany, after having earlier served in New York in the 90s at the German Information Center.

Wolter's last post was in Berlin with the German Federal Press Office, where he was responsible for public information about the Ministry of Energy, Research, and Sustainability, from which he retired earlier this year.

But perhaps a bit like the "Superman" character Clark Kent, Wolter only appears to be a mild-mannered civil servant. In fact, he and his family succeeded in escaping through two heavily-guarded checkpoints in the Berlin Wall, with the derring-do, pluck, and ingenuity worthy of a John le Carré or an Ian Fleming novel.

To do justice to the story of the Wolter family's 1961 escape from East Berlin, an interview with Wolter seemed to be the best option.

HERBERT W. STUPP: What was your childhood in East Berlin and East Germany like?
JOCHEN WOLTER: I was born in 1953, and was 8 years old when the Wall was built, and later that year, my family began planning to escape. As a preschool kid, daily life was probably not much different than in other parts of Germany. We owned a nice summer cottage at a lake on the outskirts of East Berlin where we spent summers and weekends.

Childhood life changed when school started. The obligatory oath of allegiance every Monday morning on the schoolyard was a first and clear sign of state-controlled influence of young boys and girls at a very early stage of life. The official request and strong peer pressure to join the communist youth organization, "Junge Pioniere" (Young Pioneers), was another method of ideological influence. Therefore, my parents didn't allow me to join, which I held against them. For us it seemed fun to be with others the same age.

MR. STUPP: What sort of work did your parents do in those days? Were they disadvantaged by not being members of the East German Communist Party?
MR. WOLTER: My father was a chief doctor in a state hospital. My mother, a trained nurse, managed the family of six, including my two older sisters and my twin brother. Although my father was often asked to join the Communist Party, he never did because until the Wall was built, there was always the opportunity to leave the DDR. After the Wall was built, the pressure became almost unbearable.

My father was able to keep his position only because they needed him there. But from then on, he had to be very careful about what he did and said. There were ears everywhere just waiting for a critical word or comment to provide a reason to fire him. He was aware that his situation as an untouchable doctor wouldn't last forever.

MR. STUPP: What sort of freedom were your parents hoping for in the West? How much were they bothered by the lack of freedom of worship, no freedom of speech, no free elections, no work or career decisions without communist government involvement, and the lack of consumer goods that were taken for granted a few miles away?
MR. WOLTER: In addition to all the sorts of freedom you've mentioned, most important was the topic of education for them. With four kids in school, the prospects to go to university later and have a high-profile education were almost zero. The communist ideology wanted radical change in society.

The strategy was to take privileges, including higher education, for offspring of educated people and give the working class special treatment by opening colleges and universities for them. That created a class of obedient citizens, thankful for the unexpected opportunities and reluctant to criticize or oppose the regime.

Before the Wall was built, the variety of freedom and choice was a little more difficult to achieve, but still possible. My older sisters even went to schools in West Berlin. The Wall changed everything. Because my parents didn't want to give up any freedom, they decided to leave the DDR, whatever it would take.

MR. STUPP: Do you recall overhearing or otherwise learning about your parents' plans to escape East Berlin, after the infamous Wall was built by the communists?
MR. WOLTER: No, they never talked about it in front of us kids. Although we noticed a dramatic change of their mood from August 13, 1961, on, when the border to West Berlin and West Germany was hermetically closed.

My parents arranged a family vacation in Thuringia in September 1961 on short notice, which we later found out was meant to check out the "Grüne Grenze" (the "green" heavily wooded border with and to West Germany) looking for an unguarded hole in the fence to get through. But border control with armed guards and trained dogs was already so tight that the risk was too high. This was not an option.

MR. STUPP: Children are notorious chatterboxes. Was it difficult for your parents to keep you and your siblings from "spilling the beans" about their secret escape plans?
MR. WOLTER: It probably was, but they did a good job. My brother and I never heard or noticed anything until the very last day. My sisters may have known more, but they for sure had been instructed to keep their mouths shut. People in East Germany in general were used to being careful and silent in public because one never knew who was listening.

MR. STUPP: Tell me about the organization and the brave East Berliners who helped your family to escape. What did they do to prepare you to get through the Berlin Wall in two cars?
MR. WOLTER: A longtime childhood friend of my father's, a Protestant pastor in West Germany, contacted a Swiss student group which had developed strategies and concrete plans for escapes from the DDR. Members of the group came as day visitors to East Berlin and contacted my parents.

The plan they presented was based on our traveling to West Berlin as "returning day visitors" from East Berlin with fake Swiss passports and included a separation of the family in three groups using different checkpoints. My mother agreed, but only under the condition that she would not be separated from her 8-year-old twin sons, my brother and me, which was originally planned differently.
The change of the *Continued on* ***Page 8***

GERARD MALIE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

West Berliners crowd in front of the Berlin Wall early Nov. 11, 1989, as they watch East German border guards demolishing a section of the wall in order to open a new crossing point between East and West Berlin, near the Potsdamer Square. Two days before, Gunter Schabowski, the East Berlin Communist Party boss, declared that starting from midnight, East Germans would be free to leave the country without permission, at any point along the border, including the crossing-points through the Wall in Berlin.

MIKE SARGENT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

President Ronald Reagan addresses the people of West Berlin at the base of the Brandenburg Gate on June 12, 1987. The President's words could also be heard on the eastern side of the wall. "Tear down this wall!" he said to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. His address that day is considered by many to have affirmed the beginning of the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism.

Before long, East Berliners were hugging their long-estranged neighbors in the West, as others climbed on top of the wall to celebrate.

EXPRESS NEWSPAPERS/GETTY IMAGES

Heinz Meixner, with his fiancee and her mother, Frau Thurau, show how they arranged themselves in his Austin-Healey Sprite to drive through a checkpoint at the Berlin Wall, Germany, circa 1965.

Soldiers of the East German National People's Army (NVA) erecting barbed wire fences to close off a street in preparation for the construction of the Berlin Wall on Aug. 14, 1961. The first concrete emplacements were erected on Aug. 17.

KEYSTONE/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

(Below) Soldiers building the Berlin Wall as instructed by the East German authorities, in order to strengthen the existing barriers dividing East and West Berlin, in 1961.

(Bottom R) A young woman is seen through semi-transparent portraits of people who were killed trying to cross from east to west across the Berlin Wall, at the Bernauer Strasse memorial on Aug. 13, 2011. The wall was equipped with watchtowers, armed guards, and trip-wire triggered machine guns.

SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES

Escape From East Berlin

30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, former diplomat Jochen Wolter recalls his family's daring escape to West Berlin

Continued from ***Page 7***

plan was possible.

To minimize the risk of disclosure, none of our East Berlin friends knew anything, with one exception: very trustworthy friends took our family dog, Mira, a dachshund, later to a parking lot on the transit highway between West Berlin and West Germany and gave Mira to West Berlin friends who took a not-so-accidental break at this place at the same time.

MR. STUPP: The day your family escaped is a drama worthy of a spy thriller movie. Tell us about "escape day," with your father driving one car, and your mother driving another.

MR. WOLTER: Escape day was November 11, 1961, a rainy Saturday. My parents let my brother and me watch a TV movie late in the evening, which was very unusual for us. As an explanation, we were told that the whole family would later visit an uncle in West Berlin who had an enormous model railway at his house.

The next thing was to change clothes. My mother chose different outfits to put on, which had only labels from companies in Western countries. That was a precautionary step in case of a strip search at the checkpoint: a Swiss day-visitor would surely not wear clothes with an East German label.

At night, the six of us drove in the family car, a Wartburg, toward downtown and parked somewhere near the opera house. In pitch darkness, we met our Swiss helpers, and the group was separated. My mother and we twins got in a car with Swiss car plates and a stranger at the wheel. The next task was sleeping pills to make us boys sleepy and a Swiss-sounding first name for each of us in case somebody at the border checkpoint would ask us directly. At that point it became clear to us that something very strange was going on.

The sleeping pill didn't have an effect on me, so I remember all the details of that journey to freedom: the long car line at the checkpoint, the unexcited conversation in the front of our car between my mother and the driver as if they were long-time partners. The border guard was a heavy woman with a strong Saxon dialect. She acted extremely unfriendly, maybe wanting to prove that she could be as tough as a man on the job. She concentrated on the adults and luckily didn't pay much attention to us in the back seats.

MR. STUPP: Seeing your mother and father reuniting in West Berlin, along with your siblings, must have been a very emotional moment. Can you describe it?

MR. WOLTER: The meeting point was a central late-night café in West Berlin where we arrived first. It was already after midnight. I remember that my brother and I, now pretty tired, kept asking my mother when the others would come. I have admired her all my life for her self-control and coolness in that moment. She answered us several times very patiently, reassuring us that our father and sisters would show up any minute.

When they finally came, there were tears, hugs, and gratitude. But the night was not over yet. We then rang the doorbells at homes of friends who had no idea that we would come. But people in West Berlin those days were somehow prepared for sudden visits from people on the other side of the Wall, which could never be announced in advance. We found open doors, warm beds, and loving care that night. The first purchase the next day, a Sunday, was six toothbrushes surprisingly found at a kiosk!

MR. STUPP: Did the West Berlin government or other organizations help you to resettle in the west?

MR. WOLTER: Since we literally left everything behind in East Berlin, there was a need for a new life with all its ingredients. We all got a basic set of clothing and probably some money at the official welcome camp where every refugee had to register. We didn't need much more because we got a lot of help from family and friends.

MR. STUPP: Looking back on the entire adventure, which included a real risk of harm and likely prison had your parents been caught, did your mother and father ever second-guess themselves?

MR. WOLTER: They probably had. If so, they kept it to themselves. The dimension of the risk they took became apparent only after it was all over. My parents confessed later that they wouldn't have taken the risk if they hadn't had children. For our future, they were willing and ready to take the risk.

MR. STUPP: How happy were they to be living in freedom?

MR. WOLTER: They never regretted their decision. The freedom to live your life the way you want it, to articulate your opinion free of the fear of oppression and being a part of a real democracy was most important for them. There was no room for compromises.

MR. STUPP: Do you think the family's experiences under communism influenced how your parents and your siblings have voted since 1961 escapes?

MR. WOLTER: I'm pretty sure it influenced my parents. It did influence me. I can't speak for my siblings. But with our experience, we all definitely became sensitive to comments that trivialize communist terror and oppression when and where they occur. A forgiving look back with a statement like "not everything was bad" plays down the crimes and forgets the victims of the brutal and inhumane communist regime.

> **A forgiving look back with a statement like 'not everything was bad' plays down the crimes and forgets the victims of the brutal and inhumane communist regime..**
>
> *Jochen Wolter*

MR. STUPP: Do you have any thoughts on how we can help students and young people to simply accept or at least be open to the truth about life under communism and other dictatorships?

MR. WOLTER: Archives and personal testimonials documenting the conditions of life under dictatorships and documenting the crimes of undemocratic authorities should never be closed or silenced. It's important to present these records to young generations in an objective, dispassionate, and unbiased way.

I think Germany has done a good job teaching the public, including young people, about the crimes of the Nazi regime and the fate of its victims. It is vital to keep those memories alive, and an accurate history should open eyes and ears and make people alert for the dangers of repetition of cruel and inhumane regimes.

MR. STUPP: As a newly-retired diplomat who had real-life experience with communism, what concerns you most as you look out at the world in 2019?

MR. WOLTER: Communists determine and tell people how to behave and what to think and say. They claim the right to determine what's good and what's bad, what's right or wrong. Whoever doesn't follow these strict definitions can suffer fatal consequences.

I see tendencies of a growing intolerance toward different opinions when they are publicly expressed, and sometimes in private conversations, too. Political topics like migration, climate change, or racism are examples. Unacceptable and dangerous fanaticism is a development we see at educational institutions in the U.S. and more and more in Europe, too.

Radical student groups protest violently against a scheduled [commencement] speaker who might have a controversial opinion on a subject. The intolerance of protesters is bad, but even worse is when universities give in and disinvite criticized speakers. The dominant rule over public speech can be a first step to damage democracy and establish a dictatorship. Educational institutions should be places of discourse and dialogue, places to learn and practice critical thinking, and not places that back down in the face of controversy.

(The interview was edited for brevity and clarity.)

KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

Two mothers can only wave to their children and grandchildren in the Soviet sector of Berlin from across the Berlin Wall in this file photo.

Mounting Protests

During the 1980s, as President Ronald Reagan was funding new weapons systems, increasing defense spending, and partnering with Chancellor Helmut Kohl to deploy medium-range missiles in West Germany, many Soviet leaders realized they couldn't keep pace with the challenges posed by the U.S. and its allies. The Soviet Union, due to deaths in office, experienced four General Secretaries of the Communist Party in short order, from 1982 to 1985. They finally selected Mikhail Gorbachev as their fourth leader, and before long, his policies essentially acknowledged the Soviets' inability to meet the Reagan challenge.

Domestically, Secretary Gorbachev ushered in policies of "glasnost" (openness) and "perestroika" (restructuring), which included limited private business development and other freedoms, from 1985 through 1988. But as these changes were taking hold across the Soviet bloc, the East German communists were among the last hard-liners.

Protests mounted in Poland, Hungary, and other communist-bloc nations, eventually leading to unrest in East Germany. Though suppressed for over 40 years, church pastors were among the key organizers of demonstrations demanding freedoms and an end to the communist dictatorship.

One who was unsettled by all this was Erich Honecker, the long-time General Secretary of the East German Communist Party. More in tune with the ruthless totalitarians running Cuba and North Korea, Honecker pleaded with Mikhail Gorbachev to dispatch Soviet troops to East Germany in order to put down the protests. After all, the Russians sent tanks and troops to Czechoslovakia to depose reformers in 1968, as they had in Hungary in 1956. This time, Gorbachev refused, and the dictatorships in Poland and Hungary fell in 1989, leading to free elections.

The Berlin Wall, justified by dictator Honecker as "our anti-fascist protection rampart," suddenly seemed pregnable itself. Cheered on by late 1980s concerts from David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen, and David Hasselhoff near the Wall, the demonstrations grew in size and frequency.

East Meets West

Finally, on November 9, 1989, East Berlin party boss Guenter Schabowski appeared at a news conference with a mission of interpreting the government's new policies on emigration. He began reading that the communist state would "allow citizens to exit East Germany and East Berlin." When asked when this order would become official policy, Schabowski ad-libbed, in error, and said that "As far as I know, it takes effect immediately, without delay."

Though broadcast primarily by the free West German television stations, these programs were routinely (though illegally) accessed by East Germans. Within hours and sometimes minutes, thousands of East Berliners massed at the Wall and the key checkpoints leading to the West. The newly empowered Easterners shouted, "Schabowski said so." The normally deadpan border guards, overwhelmed by the throngs yet still under "shoot to kill" orders, capitulated and allowed the crowds to move forward and through to the West. Some joined in the merriment.

Before long, East Berliners were hugging their long-estranged neighbors in the West, as others climbed on top of the wall to celebrate. As NBC's Tom Brokaw (by chance in Berlin on assignment) reported from the just-breached Wall, my mother in Queens cried tears of joy for the Berliners she left behind 42 years earlier.

Though not among the protesters on that Nov. 9, one young East German Ph.D. in quantum chemistry, Angela Merkel, joined the pro-democracy movement by December, and went on to greater things in politics.

Events continued to move quickly, with the Brandenburg Gate re-opened on Dec. 22, truly democratic elections occurring throughout East Germany on March 18, 1990, the demolition of the Wall beginning in June, and the formal merger of the former East with the democratic West happening on Oct. 3, 1990. This "Day of German Unity" has been a national holiday ever since.

When in Berlin, one can visit an array of museums and memorials that catalog the horrors of the Nazis' 12-year reign of terror. And to understand the cruelty of the Wall and the barbarism during the 45-year run of East German communism, there are also interesting, poignant options.

There is the DDR Museum and also the Checkpoint Charlie Museum, right near that chokepoint between east and west. Off the beaten path near Berlin's eastern city limits is the Gedenkstaette Berlin-Hohenschoenhausen, an actual Stasi prison and interrogation center, preserved for visitors. The East Germans took possession of this facility in 1951 from the occupying Soviets, and it held political prisoners until 1990.

Committed anti-totalitarian though I have been my entire life, the Stasi prison and memorial was even more chilling than I had imagined. Tours are offered, with the most popular docents being former prisoners at Hohenschoenhausen. Occasionally, even in 2019, a former Stasi prison guard will challenge a tour guide with a variation of "those people deserved to be here."

In an otherwise vibrant and beautiful city, the immediate neighborhood surrounding the Stasi prison offers classic examples of drab, Soviet-style, substandard apartments. There, you can imagine life from 1961 until late 1989 in East Berlin, where if you stepped out of line, you faced prison and torture, and if you were an ordinary, compliant citizen, you lived to work where assigned, accepted minimal consumer choices, and dared not dream of free expression, real elections, or the right to worship. And the coup de grace: that Wall compelled you to surrender all hope of another life.

Though not explicitly about the Wall, there are at least two films that give us a picture of life under communism in East Berlin. A comedy about the transition from dictatorship to freedom is "Good Bye Lenin!" which won the 2003 European Film Award for "Best Film." In 2006, a gripping movie that centers on Stasi surveillance of East Berlin residents was "The Lives of Others." It won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film that year, and launched the career of Sebastian Koch, now a star in the "Homeland" series.

So aside from actually visiting Berlin, how best to commemorate this 30th anniversary of the destruction of an edifice that actually prevented the free movement of peoples, trapping millions in an all-controlling system of evil?

Watching a movie or documentary, reading a book, and listening to actual former East Germans are all valid, interesting, and potentially emotional ways to gauge just how "total" this now-defunct form of German and Soviet totalitarianism was. But as socialism becomes more acceptable in polite society chatter, it is worth hearkening back to Jochen Wolter's advice that we remain vigilant against any rise in despotic ideas and systems.

Certainly, people like Wolter, my mother, and many millions of witnesses know ... and remember.

Herbert W. Stupp served in the presidential administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush; Stupp was also a commissioner in the cabinet of New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani. His mother was a refugee from East Berlin.

WISDOM FOR MODERN TIMES

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

What 'Joker' Can Teach Us About Free Will

If the world is cruel, then do we follow it into cruelty? And if it is harsh, then do we add to its harshness?

Joaquin Phoenix, who plays the role of Arthur Fleck and his alter ego, the Joker, in "Joker," arrives at its premiere in Hollywood, Calif., on Sept. 28, 2019.

JOSHUA PHILIPP

There's something familiar about the deeper theme in "Joker." It follows a character who is a victim of his own kindness, who is cast out and rejected by the world as it is, and in his isolation becomes a parody of society's downfall.

He is eaten away by his expectations that the people around him should be kind and courteous. So he gives up, and in his disappointment follows the restlessness brooding beneath society's façade, where he fuels the growing flames.

A Cruel World

After Civil War Gen. William Sherman burned homes of civilians in the South, he famously declared: "War is cruelty. There's no use trying to reform it. The crueler it is, the sooner it will be over."

Sherman lamented the cruelty of war. He stated, "You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will." But he also saw himself as just a player in the drama, carried by the state of the world as it was.

The world is sometimes cruel, and the world is sometimes kind. The question is whether we can change the state of the world, or whether we need to find peace despite its cruelties.

People who look to change the state of their lives usually look to eliminate their sources of hardship—such as moving on to a new job or making a change to their daily routine.

But people who are at odds with the nature of reality itself are faced with a much larger trial. Escaping hardship on this scale requires the destruction of evil as they interpret it. The cruelty they fight against isn't the cruelty of a single person or condition, but instead reality as it is.

This ties to one of history's greatest, yet most overlooked, lessons: It's often those who seek to eliminate cruelty from the world who themselves become the forces of cruelty, and those who would do away with evil in the world often become the forces of evil.

Thomas Molnar wrote in "Utopia: The Perennial Heresy," that the "one intolerable fact to the utopian is the scandal that evil exists in an otherwise perfect or potentially perfect world."

The problem, as Molnar explains, is that "utopian thinking is itself evil ... and it leads people to commit evil."

It's the plight of the Utopian, the fate of the rebel whose fight is against the nature of reality itself. It's what Friedrich Nietzsche warned of when he observed the coming age of nihilism: "Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster."

In his rebellion against cruelty as he sees it, a monster is what the Joker becomes—a comedic parody of cruelty itself.

The Death Trance

In "Joker," we watch as a man kills and simulates his suicide. Through this, he's shown as being liberated from his former cares. He discards his old identity, and in his new persona dances down the stairs of his own decline.

He enters the death trance spoken of in ancient literature—the fearful state of a man who has chosen to die.

In "Pharsalia," Lucan recounts a group of Roman soldiers during Caesar's civil wars, who find themselves cornered and outnumbered during a battle at sea. The leader turns to his men, and asks them to "choose death; desire what fate decrees."

From there, they fight without fear, and without care for worldly consequences. Lucan writes, "The band devoted stood, proud of their promised end, and life forsworn, and careless of the battle: no debate could shake their high resolve."

DMITRIJS BINDEMANIS/SHUTTERSTOCK

It's only when we are given choices, when we have the options to do good or evil, that we can demonstrate our choice to do good.

Lucan tells the story of another battle where a soldier named Scaeva enters a similar trance, throwing himself over a wall into a sea of enemies where he fought and held off their advance. He was so badly injured as he continued fighting that Lucan wrote, "His vital parts were safeguarded by spears that bristled in his body. Fortune saw thus waged a novel combat, for there warred against one man an army."

In the Japanese samurai text, the "Hagakure," Yamamoto Tsunetomo explains a similar state: "The way of the warrior is to be found in dying. If one is faced with two options of life or death, simply settle for death."

The principle is the same: Soldiers who decide to die don't retreat, they ignore mortal wounds, and in their doomed resolve feel liberated from consequences.

There's a destructive freedom in embracing death. For soldiers, crossing that line is what makes heroes. But for times outside of war, there are few states more dangerous for a person to enter.

People risk entering a type of metaphysical suicide, where rebellion turns not against ordinary conditions, but toward the basic foundations of life and existence. Albert Camus observed in his book, "The Rebel," that we're now living in an age influenced by this type of suicide—where movements of revolt seek to overturn reality as it is.

Camus explained that this "absolute nihilism, which accepts suicide as legitimate, leads, even more easily, to logical murder." At the root of this, he said, is an indifference to life, established by a logic that sees everything as equal—or rather, a belief that all things could be equal, were it not for certain worldly forces.

Such a person, Camus writes, "believes that he is destroying everything or taking everything with him; but from this act of self-destruction itself a value arises, which, perhaps, might have "made it worthwhile to live. Absolute negation is therefore not consummated by suicide. It can only be consummated by absolute destruction, of oneself and of others."

He adds, "Here suicide and murder are two aspects of a single system, the system of a misguided intelligence, that prefers, to the suffering imposed by a limited situation, the dark victory in which heaven and earth are annihilated."

A similar state was noted by Marcus Aurelius, who encouraged people to manage their expectations according to what life will naturally bring, and find contentment amidst it. Don't expect people to be kind in unkind places, but also don't let yourself be bothered by them.

He explained in his "Meditations" what happens when a person instead becomes at odds with the natural state of things: "The soul of a man harms itself, first and foremost, when it becomes (as far as it can) a separate growth, a sort of tumor on the universe; because to resent anything that happens is to separate oneself in revolt from nature, which holds in collective embrace the particular natures of all other things."

Tests of Character

Jordan Peterson made a great observation in a presentation that good men are the ones most capable of great evil. A peaceful man is someone most capable of inflicting harm, because without that ability, he's not peaceful, he's just harmless. It's only when we are given choices, when we have the options to do good or evil, that we can demonstrate our choice to do good.

Only when our souls are tested can we show our mettle.

The world is filled with trials, all of which could crush us if we allowed them.

If the world is cruel, then do we follow it into cruelty? And if it is harsh, then do we add to its harshness? Knowledge of good and evil was that first curse on mankind, yet in our recognition of all the wrongs in life, our gift is the free will to choose for ourselves between good and evil.

The Joker chooses the path of evil, and we witness the sad descent of a man into his own destruction. He expected life to be something it wasn't, and in his banishment from society, he rebelled against the order of the world as it existed.

If "Joker" leaves us with any valuable lesson, it's that we should learn to laugh at the chaos of the world. He achieved this, but in its shadow form. His downfall was that he laughed out of spite; while we should learn to laugh despite it.

It's here we find the old humor that Dante observed as he climbed the mountains of heaven. When looking down on the evils of the world he observed that people strive for power without realizing that the divine is in control; that in the wheel of karma or sin, those who harm others harm themselves. The victim is the victor in the eyes of God. That's the heart of the divine comedy—and may we all learn to laugh at its humor.

Joshua Philipp is a senior investigative reporter and host of "Crossroads."

BOOK REVIEW

Dancing Through the Darkness of Mao's China

Tia Zhang's journey of pain and triumph is brilliantly told in 'Dancing Through the Shadow'

RYAN MOFFATT

Sometimes the impact of mass tragedy gets lost in the statistics. When death tolls are in the tens of millions, large-scale suffering becomes remote and untouchable. The human capacity for empathy has reached its limit.

On the other hand, personal accounts of those who lived through atrocities do more to shed light on them than any sterile statistic could. One such story is told by Agnes Bristow in "Dancing Through the Shadow: A True Story of Survival and Courage Under Mao's Brutal Regime," a first-person account of life in Mao Zedong's China.

The book tells the true story of Tia Zhang, a ballet dancer who came of age during the time when Mao's grip was slowly strangling the country. The simple yearnings and trappings of childhood, adolescence, and motherhood are beautifully woven together against a backdrop of totalitarian brutality. It's a remarkable novel that humanizes the plight of a nation coming to terms with its new reality as a socialist state.

The communists took power in China in 1949, ending a decades-long civil war that had left the country weary and looking for change. At first, there was hope that the new government would improve life for the average citizen.

Instead, China under Mao's leadership began a descent into violent revolution that would result in one of the century's greatest humanitarian disasters. The statistics are staggering. Conservative estimates put the death toll at 65 million. The Great Leap Forward, Mao's attempt to collectivize agriculture, resulted in the worst famine in history. Forty-five million people were beaten, starved, or worked to death.

This was the world in which Tia Zhang had to make her way.

From Prosperity to Destitution

Tia's father was a high-ranking official with the Kuomintang, the governing party at the time, and provided a lavish life for his family, complete with a residence in the heart of Beijing. It was a harmonious existence far removed from the dangers that lurked just around the corner. The oldest of her siblings, Tia was coddled and disciplined in strict Chinese traditions, groomed by her mother to be a lady and destined for a life of privilege and obedience.

That fate was irretrievably altered when the communists arrived in Beijing and the Kuomintang suddenly and unexpectedly ceded power. Hopes that the communists would offer a reprieve from the strife of war and that the promised utopia would be ushered in were quickly dashed when it became apparent that anyone once loyal to the Kuomintang was destined to suffer for it.

In a desperate bid for freedom, 10-year-old Tia and her family attempted to move to the safe haven of Taiwan. But a harrowing near-death journey shattered that prospect, and the family was forced to relocate to Qingdao and eventually back to Beijing, where their life of privilege unraveled into one of destitution.

It became increasingly apparent that there was no escape from the Communist Party's grasp, especially for a family like Tia's that once held a privileged position in the ranks of the Kuomintang.

Hope Through Dance

Life carried on, however, and even when Mao's Great Leap Forward caused millions across the country to starve, Tia's family found a way to survive. The daily struggle to meet the basic necessities of life affected the entire nation, and Tia's family was no exception.

Through hard work and talent, Tia secured a coveted spot in Beijing's Ballet Academy, staffed with professional dance teachers from Soviet Russia. The school operated more like a military academy than a dance studio, but Tia nonetheless received a first-class dance education.

Dance was used as a tool for communist propaganda, and because the school was favored by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, Tia had the opportunity to perform for Mao and his dignitaries. The stark contrast between lavish Communist Party banquets and the starving population left a lasting impression on Tia, foreshadowing her disillusion with the Party and communism.

By the time Tia became an assistant instructor at the academy, Mao had unleashed his Red Guards. Like a plague, this frenzied group of students and children of Party officials brought mayhem to the country in a wave of revolution and violence. The Red Guards were brainwashed from childhood to be Mao's devoted servants. They were the perfect vehicle for his Cultural Revolution as they marched the streets, berating and beating anyone without fear of repercussion.

At one point, the ballet academy was overrun by its Red Guard students, who brutally beat the senior teachers and berated the assistants, punishing them severely for their education methods by forcing them to clean latrines and perform the most degrading duties.

Tia suffered her fate in silence, complying with the demands of her brainwashed students. Like many others, she was forced to bury her empathy and face the world with as much indifference as she could muster.

During all the turmoil, she found love but had to face the disapproval of her family and traditionalist mother who wanted her to have an arranged marriage.

HANDOUT/THE EPOCH TIMES

Tia's journey is one of pain, triumph, and a true testament to the human spirit.

Tia Zhang, a ballet dancer who came of age in China when the country was under Mao's communist leadership.

'Dancing Through the Shadow: A True Story of Survival and Courage Under Mao's Brutal Regime'

Agnes Bristow
Editions du Marais
Paperback, 517 pages
(also available on Kindle)

This would have been difficult enough without Mao's policies and the ever-present threat of being sent to a labor camp or worse. Love was a risky proposition in Mao's China, and both Tia and her husband would spend hard time in China's labor camp system.

The novel follows Tia through each stage of her life as she navigates marriage, motherhood, and an escape from communist rule. All the while, Mao hangs like a shadow in the background, dictating the terms and conditions through which Tia must find her way.

Lessons From the Shadows

Tia's journey is one of pain, triumph, and a true testament to the human spirit. At once tender, traumatic, and terrifying, the story is gripping enough to warrant the level of detail Bristow uses as she expertly combines Tia's experience with enough political analysis to shed light on life under Mao and how his policies resulted in such a high death toll. It is difficult to fathom the desperation of a populace forced to react in fear to nearly every happenstance.

This book is a worthy read for those who entertain any romantic notions about communism or Marxism. With extreme ideologies on the rise in the West, Tia's story serves as a reminder of the human cost beyond the statistics. Many Chinese of that generation will be able to identify with her plight.

The book is ultimately about love, loss, courage, and the intricacies of life amplified by the desperation of circumstance. Tia's story is a truly beautiful vehicle for exploring the human cost of political ideologies taken to the extreme, where the human spirit is put to the test.

For more information, see DancingThroughtheShadow.com

How Chess Changed the Life of a 9-Year-Old Refugee

SHIWEN RONG

NEW YORK–In a nearly new apartment in Midtown Manhattan, in the corner of a fully decorated room, there is an old-fashioned chessboard.

In March, Tanitoluwa "Tani" Adewumi was known as the homeless chess boy, but his life changed after winning his first New York State Scholastic Championships tournament for his age group.

Tani's father, Kayode J. Adewumi, had owned a printing press in Nigeria with 13 employees and had a good life. However, he feared for his family's safety when Christians were attacked by the terrorist group Boko Haram.

In 2017, Tani and his family escaped from Nigeria and fled to the United States to search for a new life.

From a business owner to a refugee, starting a new life in a foreign country wasn't easy for his family of four.

While living in a homeless shelter, Tani's brother decided to teach Tani chess with a self-made chessboard.

TAL ATZMON/NTD

Tanitoluwa Adewumi playing chess with his brother in their new house on Sept. 21.

"We have this chessboard, but not really a chessboard, its another type of game called Latter," Tani said. "So he made Play-Dough pieces that he learned. We put it there and started playing."

That was the moment when Tani discovered his love for chess. He then joined his school chess club, where he began to take the game seriously.

Championships

One day, Tani told his mom, Oluwatoyin K. Adewumi, that he would take home a trophy. But it wasn't his time yet.

In 2018, after two months of training, he had his first competition. But the process of winning wasn't without failures.

"Physically I lost, but technically it's just learning, because its a process of learning," said Tani.

A year later, Tani won first place in the K through 3rd-grade section at the New York State Scholastic Championships tournament and took home several trophies.

Tani's next goal is to become a grandmaster at age 11 or 12, the youngest in the world.

Since his big win, Tani has received nationwide attention and has changed the life of his whole family. They received an apartment, which has been filled, piece by piece, by kind-hearted strangers, with love.

"Honestly, what America did, I never have seen it," said Kayode. "Because they show love to us, to the immigrants, it's wonderful. I really thank God."

"I'm just going to thank God, that's what I'm going to do," said Tani.

For everything he and his family have received, they want to give back.

Kayode started a foundation in Tani's name, to share with those who are in need just like they once were.

WEEK 46, 2019

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

The Flag Goes By

by Henry Holcomb Bennett

Hats off!
Along the street there comes
A blare of bugles, a ruffle of drums,
A flash of color beneath the sky:
Hats off!
The flag is passing by!

Blue and crimson and white it shines,
Over the steel-tipped, ordered lines,
Hats off!
The colors before us fly;
But more than the flag is passing by.

Sea fights and land fights, grim and great,
Fought to make and save the State:
Weary marches and sinking ships;
Cheers of victory on dying lips;

Days of plenty and years of peace;
March of a strong land's swift increase;
Equal justice, right, and law,
Stately honor and reverend awe;

Sign of a nation, great and strong
To ward her people from foreign wrong:
Pride and glory and honor—all
Live in the colors to stand or fall.

Hats off!
Along the street there comes
A blare of bugles, a ruffle of drums;
And loyal hearts are beating high:
Hats off!
The flag is passing by!

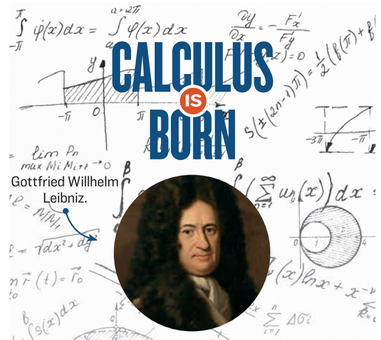
MARIAN WEYO/SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT DO YOU CALL A YOUNG ARMY?

LUIS LOURO/SHUTTERSTOCK

THATSMYMOP/SHUTTERSTOCK

This Week in History



PUBLIC DOMAIN

On Nov. 11, 1675, German mathematician Gottfried Willhelm Leibniz demonstrated the first formula of integral calculus: y=f(x). Several of the notations he used are still used today. Liebniz, along with Sir Isaac Newton, is credited with the discovery of calculus.

In addition to great contributions to mathematics, Liebniz influenced philosophy, physics, biology, politics, law, history, and more. He was a key figure of the Enlightenment.

ANDREW ANGELOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Aidan Danza, age 13

ALL PHOTOS BY MACAUYLAY LIBRARY

TELLING BIRDS APART: SOMETIMES IT'S TRICKY

The ever-present question in a birding expedition is, "What kind of bird is that?" Most people are able to tell apart a swan from a peacock, but most are much trickier than that. There are some birds that look very similar, but are not the same! There is always a difference, the key is just to notice it.

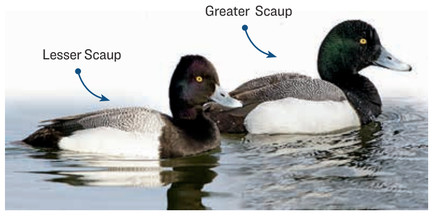
GREATER AND LESSER SCAUP

These two ducks are among the trickiest to tell apart. The key to tell them apart is in their head shape.

The lesser's head is thinner when viewed from the front. When viewed from the side, the head comes to a small peak in the back. This is not a crest, like the northern cardinal has; this is simply the shape of their head. In contrast, the greater scaup's head is completely circular.

In terms of color, the birds are identical except for the head. Male greaters have an iridescent green head, while lessers normally have purple. However, the lesser's head can also appear green, like the greater, so this is not foolproof.

Greaters and lessers often mix in flocks, and when they do, lessers are noticeably smaller than the greater, hence the name.



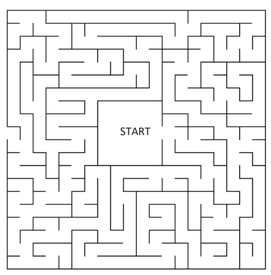
COOPER'S AND SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

This one is a bit simpler, but the solution also lies in the head.

Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks both have slate-gray crowns atop their heads, but the Cooper's hawk's crown only is on the top of the head; with the rest of the head light gray. On the other hand, sharp-shinned hawks' crowns extend all the way down to the back, and looks almost like a boy's hair. Sharp-shinned hawk's cheeks are more of a light rusty color, whereas the Coopers' are light gray.

There is yet another difference: Coopers' hawks have squarer heads, while sharp-shinned hawks have smaller, rounded ones. Juveniles are much trickier; follow the same rules of head shape, but the coloring of both birds is the same. Sharp-shinned hawks have much thicker streaks on the belly than Cooper's. Young Cooper's hawks also have yellow eyes, while juvenile sharp-shinned hawks have a darker orange.

AMAZING ESCAPES!



USE THE FOUR NUMBERS IN THE CORNERS, AND THE OPERANDS (+, - AND ×) to build an equation to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one "unique" solution but, there may also be "equivalent" solutions.
For example: 6 + (7 × 3) +1 = 28 and 1+ (7 × 3) + 6 = 28

Easy puzzle 1

Solution For Easy 1

9 × 3 + 9 − 4

Medium puzzle 1

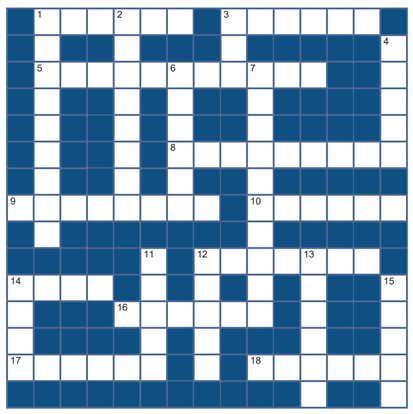
Solution for Medium 1

(3 + 1) × 8 − 12

Hard puzzle 1

Solution for Hard 1

(18 − 8) × (23 − 22) × 8



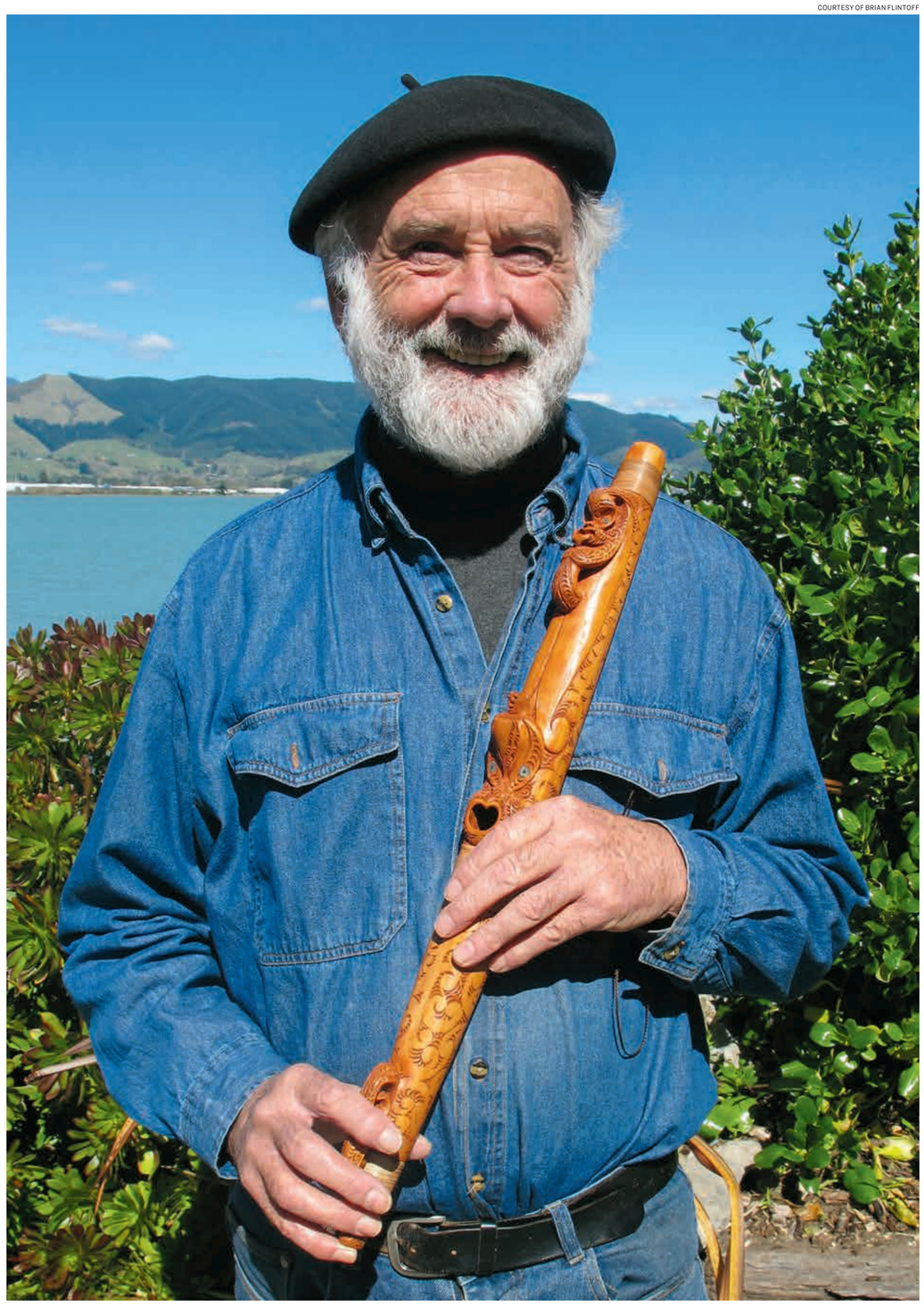
Down

1 Medals (9)
2 Monument (8)
3 Conflict (3)
4 Feeling of accomplishment (5)
6 General's pride (6)
7 Esteem (10)
11 If you want ____, prepare for war (5)
12 "...in order to form a more perfect ____ ..." (5)
13 General's commands (6)
14 Many a veteran sacrificed their ____ (4)
15 Many veterans were ____ (5)

Across

1 USAF enlistee (6)
3 Battle injuries (6)
5 Remember and celebrate (11)
8 High point of 1918 (9)
9 Altruistic (8)
10 "Play ball!" preceder (6)
12 GI attire (7)
14 Cherish deeply (4)
16 Our land (6)
17 Stick out (6)
18 Memorial Day event (6)

COURTESY OF BRIAN FLINTOFF



Master carver Brian Flintoff outside his workshop in Nelson on New Zealand’s South Island.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Reviving the Traditional Maori Music of New Zealand

Brian Flintoff, master carver of Maori musical instruments

LORRAINE FERRIER

Until some 40 years ago, traditional Maori music was thought to be all but lost. Then Brian Flintoff, along with a band of other enthusiasts, began a revival of Maori flute and instrument making and playing.

Now a world-renowned master carver, Flintoff overflows with enthusiasm for the traditional Maori musical instruments he makes. Flintoff’s instruments are in private and museum collections around the world, including the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona.

In New Zealand, in 2010, he was awarded the Queen’s Service Medal for his art.

Flintoff humbly explains by phone how, as a non-Maori, serendipity guided him to his craft and how the Maori community helped him through their songs, mythology, and storytelling. This is the story of how Maori songs were reunited with their music.

The Epoch Times: How did you get involved in carving?

Brian Flintoff: The first time I saw some bone carvings for sale, something in me said, “I’d like to try that.” The next time, I was on holiday in Nelson on New Zealand’s South Island. I picked up some bone that had washed up on the beach. I went home and with the few tools that I had, I started to play around, so it became a hobby.

I was teaching at the time, and it was something to relax me after the frustrations of working with special education children, who I loved working with, but it was a full-on day.

I had been doing bone carving for quite a while before I read something that said that this may not be appropriate for non-Maori to be doing. It was a big shock to me. It’s a pakeha way (a New Zealander of European heritage) that if you can learn something, then you just learn it.

We had a lot of Maori children in the school. When they saw what I was doing, they encouraged me to do a few pieces for them. Fortunately, a few Maori senior people liked what I was doing, and they started giving me advice too, just gently steering me and advising me in my work.

I guess because I was useful, I obviously loved what I was doing, and I wasn’t trying to make a name for myself that I’ve had wonderful support from the Maori community throughout the country.

When I wanted to extend my bone carving to beyond just making pendants, I made some of the traditional musical instruments. There weren’t many on display in museums at all, so I had to do quite a bit of guesswork at the start. I then got the confidence to approach museums to look at their full collection in storage.

Then, by chance, I met Richard Nunns, who was also a teacher. He was working and teaching himself how to play the instruments, and I was teaching myself how to make the instruments.

Continued on ***Page 16***

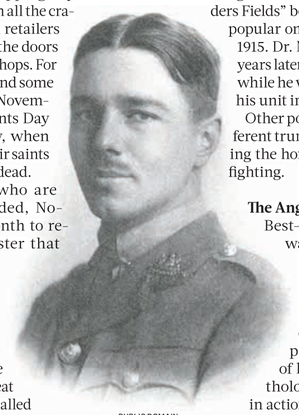
POETRY

THE PITY OF WAR: *The Remarkable Poets of World War I*

JEFF MINICK

For most of us, November is one of those in-between months, in this case a pause between October's glorious colors and the iron-dark days of winter. November brings Americans Thanksgiving, with its family gatherings, sumptuous feasts, and for some, football games, followed immediately by Black Friday, the Christmas shopping day after Thanksgiving when all the crazy sales begin and retailers long for crowds at the doors of their stores and shops. For Roman Catholics and some other Christians, November means All Saints Day and All Souls Day, when they remember their saints and pray for their dead.

And for some who are historically minded, November is the month to reflect on the disaster that was World War I.


PUBLIC DOMAIN

The War to End All Wars

The year was 1918. At the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, the Great War, as some later called it, came to an end. World War I killed 17 million soldiers, sailors, airmen, and civilians; it wounded, crippled, and maimed many others. It toppled kings and empires, sounded the death knell of European colonialism, brought communism to Russia, ushered in the rise of fascism in other countries, and left the United States the leading economic power in the world.

Life in the trenches during this war featured a hell on earth unimaginable to most of us today. The stench of sweat, excrement, and rotting flesh of corpses; the mud and the rain; the shelling, snipers, and gas attacks; the rats, lice, and lack of basic human hygiene; the mass assaults in the face of artillery and machine guns–the British, on the first day of the Battle of the Somme alone, on July 1, 1916, suffered over 57,000 casualties, including some 19,000 dead. All these horrors and more caused some hopeful observers to label this conflict "The War to End All Wars."

These same trenches also produced some of the finest war poetry in the English language.

The Idealists

Despite the slaughter and grubby life of trench warfare, some poets viewed the fighting with the sentiments associated with past military struggles. March of 1915 saw the publication of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier." Brooke died that same year from sepsis, the result of a mosquito bite, while on a military expedition in the Mediterranean.

John McCrae was a Canadian poet and physician who served as a surgeon during the war. After a friend's death, he wrote a poem urging others "to take up the torch" against the enemy. "In Flanders Fields" became immensely popular on its publication in 1915. Dr. McCrae died three years later from pneumonia, while he was still serving in his unit in France.

Other poets sounded a different trumpet call, describing the horrors of the brutal fighting.

The Anguish

Best-known of these was Wilfred Owen, whose "Dulce et Decorum Est" and "Anthem for Doomed Youth" continue to appear in textbooks of literature and anthologies. Owen died in action one week before the war ended. His mother received notification of his death on Armistice Day, while church bells across Britain were announcing the end of the slaughter.

The Survivors

The poets who survived the war continued to explore in their verse the agonies they had endured.

Though he made his living by writing such novels as "I, Claudius" and "Claudius the God," Robert Graves was first and foremost a poet. He wrote 141 war poems–he destroyed many others rather than publishing them–and he was also the author of a classic war memoir, "Goodbye to All That." Like Siegfried Sassoon, Ivor Gurney, and some of the other poets who survived the war, Graves suffered from neurasthenia, which would later be called "shell shock" or "post-traumatic stress disorder."

David Jones, a Welsh poet and convert to Roman Catholicism, took years to write "In Parenthesis," a poem of epic length describing the trials of a fictional John Ball and his fellow soldiers from their departure in England to France to the Battle of the Somme. Published in 1937, "In Parenthesis" won high praise from poets like William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Stephen Spender.

Some critics have contended that the poem offers too little protest of the war, but in "The Great War and Modern Memory," American critic Paul Fussell only partially agrees, praising "In Parenthesis" and writing that "The tradition to which the poem points holds suffering to be close to sacrifice and individual effort to end in heroism; it contains, unfortunately, no precedent for an understanding of war as a shambles and its participants as victims."

Jones spent the last years of his life, according to the Poetry Foundation, "quietly working, trying to salvage the remnants of traditional Western culture from the onslaught of the twentieth century."

In Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, a slate monument commemorates 16 British poets from The Great War. The inscription on the slate, taken from the writing of Wilfred Owen, reads: "My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity."

On target, Lieutenant Owen. On target. Requiescat in pace.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C., Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

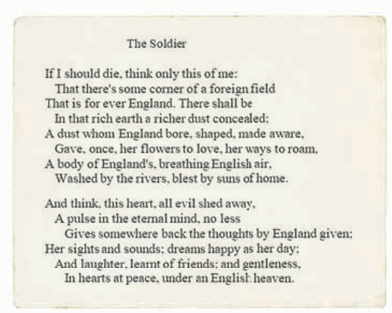
KAREN FALJYAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Some poets viewed the fighting with the sentiments associated with past military struggles.

(Top) Poet Wilfred Owen from his "Poems" published in 1920.

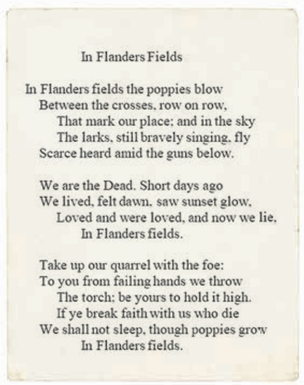
(Bottom) The wild poppy will long be associated with Flanders Fields and the poem to salute those who had fallen there.

PAPER SHEET PHOTOS BY MM_PHOTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK


The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

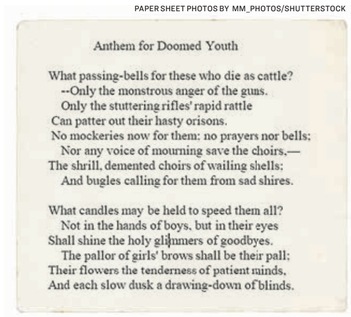
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.


In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.


Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
--Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

WILLEQUET MANUEL/SHUTTERSTOCK

As leaves fall, mid-November invites us to remember fallen soldiers, especially those of World War I.

> **The flutes were an embellishment for singing because music didn't exist as just sounds; it was the song and the words that were important.**
>
> *Brian Flintoff, master carver*

Brian Flintoff carved this piece, "Putorino with Moth," to tell the story of Raukatauri, the goddess of flute music. The flute is the shape of her cocoon, and she is seen as the central singing figure. The carving at the top is Pepe, the male moth who has been attracted by Raukatauri's sweet singing.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Reviving the Traditional Maori Music of New Zealand

Brian Flintoff, master carver of Maori musical instruments

"Nguru Kokako" by Brian Flintoff. The nguru is a short flute. This design incorporates a kokako, a bird that according to Maori legend was gifted with the ability to sing like Raukatauri, the goddess of flute music.

Continued from ***Page 13***

Once we got together, because we had complementary skills, we started to make progress. Then we were invited by the late Dr. Hirini Melbourne, who really led the revival, to a meeting of Maori writers and artists where they brought together people who had an interest in this.

Hirini was a wonderful musician, composer, linguist, and storyteller. He had all sorts of skills. The Maori language was his only language until he was in his teens, so he had a wonderful knowledge of the mythology and all things that were necessary to drive this.

Even though Hirini was a lecturer at the University of Waikato, he persuaded the university faculty that they should take the revival process out into the marae, the small Maori villages, throughout the country and do workshops. It was a labor of love mostly done on weekends.

In the workshops, we used sheep leg bones, which are about the same size as the traditionally used albatross wing bones. Because of the lightness the albatross has to have in its wing, the wing bone has a unique sound, but the sheep bone was as close as we could get.

Then we started to extend, where we could, to large bones like deer and emu bones because they were being farmed here. The most important flute to Maori was the human-bone flute, often made from an arm bone of a human; the deer bones are very close to that.

The Epoch Times: Can you please explain about the human-bone flute?

Mr. Flintoff: Well, mostly it would be to honor an ancestor, to make music from his or her bone. And sometimes, if the enemy got the flute, it would be used to mock the ancestor.

The Maori concept of life, a little like the yin-yang we know from the East, is taking the two complementary opposites and finding their balance point to create harmony. They have different words for it, but it's the same basic concept. That's why you can understand the flute could be used for those two opposite purposes.

The essential thing in Maori art is the storytelling and the mnemonics, because the arts were really their written language equivalent. The songs were written down and are some of the most accurate histories. And when they did the art, it acted as a mnemonic to remind you of little bits of story.

The Epoch Times: How does your flute making relate to the storytelling?

Mr. Flintoff: There are wonderful concepts about why we have the instruments. The music is made up of tunes and rhythms, and then we add our personal experience—that's the words. The tunes are called Rangi; Rangi is the sky father. What happens to the tunes after we've heard them? They drift off up to the sky father.

The rhythms are seen as the heartbeat: the sound of Papatuanuku, mother earth. Her first partner was the god of the sea and, of course, the rhythm of the stones rolling up and down on the beach as the waves come in—the rhythm of the waves. It was their children and grandchildren who became the ancestors of the different types of instruments.

All the flutes are known from Raukatauri, the goddess of flute music, who loved her flute so much she decided to turn herself into the humble little case moth, which is a little moth that lives in a case. That case was the shape of the little putorino flute.

The female doesn't turn into a flying moth; the male does. When she wants him, she has to sing. You may think, ah, a caterpillar singing—but if enough of them do it, apparently there is an audible sound. After they've mated, she lays her eggs in the case and then she dies. When we make the instrument, it has a male voice which is played like a trumpet and a female voice which is played like a flute.

These ideas, especially to young people, they cotton on to them. To me, it was wonderful because my study was in science and math, and so logic was important. But the Maori mythology is still so intact that you can see the logic throughout. I think that's what really helps children to understand and enjoy it, because of the logic that's inherent in the mythology.

On most of the instruments, I put a face on the blowing end, which represents the face of the instrument itself. Maori believe that everything is personified, so putting a face on the flute helps people to understand that this is a little flute person. The trees outside are tree people. It's a wonderful way to look at the world, as well as looking at what we make.

I add a similar face on the other end, but that face has two noses. This is because to play the instrument, you've got to bring it up to your lips, which then brings it up to your nose, and in the traditional Maori greeting (called a hongi), you bring your nose to the other person's nose and share your breath. Therefore, when you play, and your instrument is held up to your nose, you share your breath with the instrument's breath and the two breaths combine to make music. The face with two noses is the face of the music, showing that the two breaths can make something special.

By putting those two different faces on the end of the flute, then you're able to keep the basic concepts of what the flute is doing.

One part of the flute is left smooth, and the other part is carved. The carved bit balances the smooth bit. For the carving, I add a kowhaiwhai design (a specific pattern with a particular meaning to embellish the story) based on the painted style that the old Maori used. I carve it instead of paint it on the body of the flute to depict the music going out, making nice shapes in the silence as it drifts up to the sky father.

The Epoch Times: Please tell us about Maori music.

Mr. Flintoff: Maori music is microtonal, and so to the untrained ear it is very boring. It's like having all the notes that we have in our European scale squashed down into about five notes, so the changes between notes are very subtle. Perhaps that's why, when European music came along, the Maori people were able to harmonize without even thinking about it, because their ears were so well-trained.

Basically, the flutes were an embellishment for singing because music didn't exist as just sounds; it was the song and the words that were important.

Fortunately, the songs were not lost. A lot of the songs were sung underground, so to speak, and where Maori communities were strong enough. The songs have become a touchstone for us in reviving things. There were a few ancient wax recordings that were recorded when there were still Maori players using the instruments, which has been a great help.

Within the last 40-odd years that we've been doing the revival, we found only one old person who had been taught to play as a boy. He hadn't used the instrument for some 20 years at that stage. When he heard about what we were doing, he started playing it again, which was wonderful.

There is a bit of trouble in my mind that too many of our young musicians want to use them in the way European instruments are played, just to play their own music. I prefer when it's played as an embellishment to Maori song.

The Epoch Times: What have the instruments taught you?

Mr. Flintoff: Humility! I used to growl at Richard. He'd come out to have a look at an instrument and make it play, and then he'd take the music away with him. Because as soon as he left, I couldn't get anything out of it! But also they've taught me perseverance, to keep on trying.

There's so much that the instruments have taught me, because the stories that go with them are stories that improve the way we run our lives. The philosophy that's in our stories is a philosophy that I think the world is looking for in many places.

This article has been edited for clarity and length.

To find out more about Brian Flintoff and hear some of his musical instruments visit JadeAndBone.co.nz

In Maori music traditions, musical instruments are members of the families of the gods.

> **The rhythms are seen as the heartbeat: the sound of Papatuanuku, mother earth.**
>
> *Brian Flintoff, master carver*

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN FLINTOFF

"Nguru Whale Tuhoe" by Brian Flintoff. The nguru is a short flute with a soft sound that has a semi-enclosed bore, which is unusual in the music world.

A bone porutu by Brian Flintoff. The porutu has finger holes toward the lower end, enabling the musician to jump between two octaves.

"Pumoana Karoro," by Brian Flintoff. Shell trumpets have the common name of putatara. In the past, putatara were made from a specific shell. Brian Flintoff calls his shell trumpets pumoana when he uses other shells.

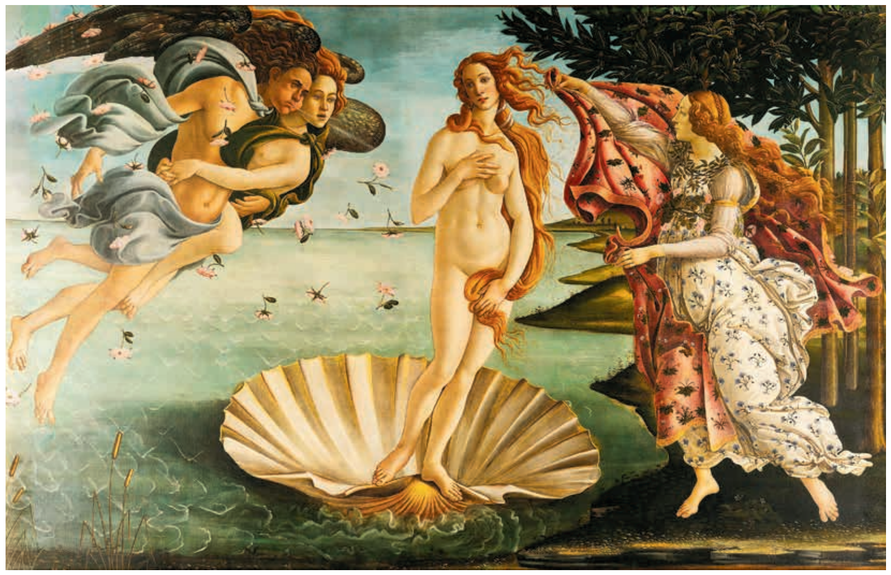
A Maori shell trumpet, called a putatara, made by Brian Flintoff. The Maori are one of only a few cultures in the world that add a mouthpiece to shell trumpets.

FINE ARTS

On Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus'

MANFRED VON PENTZ

PUBLIC DOMAIN



"The Birth of Venus," 1486, by Sandro Botticelli. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

The Gothic era, an epoch so marvelous, magical, and perplexing that to this day it has never been fully fathomed, triggered the rebirth of yet another magnificent period. That rebirth, of course, was the Renaissance, which discovered the great cultures of our forebears, Greek and Roman alike, and polished them off with Christ's maxims. And so, the first literary giants of Christianity stepped onto the stage and Humanism was born.

Amazing heroines such as Petrarch's Laura and Dante's Beatrice captivated the hearts of educated Italy and those beyond. As a result, the veneration of the weaker sex received yet another elevation of their status. The first was the highly romantic if not quasi-divine spheres the female reached by way of the troubadours. But now dukes, popes, counts, and condottieri, all with an infallible sense for beauty and elegance, had their spouses, daughters, and mistresses educated, usually by the best scholars money could buy.

Where previously the wealthy proudly exhibited their ladies' outer splendor, they now touted with equal delight that these ladies could read Aristophanes in the original and, perhaps over a glass of sublime Montepulciano, embark on a spirited critique of his doubts and certainties.

Small wonder, therefore, that Lorenzo the Magnificent, ruler of Florence in those times, decided one day to bestow immortality on an exceptionally lovely maiden. He entrusted the task to a preferred protégé, the artist Sandro Botticelli, and to imbue it with a measure of subdued passion and complex intellectual depth, as was the habit in those days, he most likely invited a close friend to get some ideas.

Now my guess is, and more it can't be, that this friend with whom he had a little chat was the venerated humanist and poet Leon Battista Alberti. It came to pass that they forged an emotionally staggering and philosophically overwhelming allegory as an underpinning for the world's most beautiful work of art.

Leon Battista, by the way, was the first Christian lyricist to write an elegy on the death of his beloved dog, a mongrel, which is, at least in my book, one of the finest credentials a true humanist can advance if asked to declare himself.

In any case, the "Birth of Venus" was born.

'The Birth of Venus'

The goddess of love stands in a large seashell that rests close to the shore. She is immensely beautiful, with shimmering blond hair and light-green eyes. Though naked, she radiates an impression of virginity and purity. She covers her loins with a strand of her long hair.

To the left hovers a winged couple, firmly embracing each other and loosely clad in a sky-blue cloth. They fly in a cloud of wild roses and both are blowing air, in this way producing a breeze that pushes the goddess ashore. There waits a young woman, ready to receive her. She holds a finely woven cloak, clearly intending to wrap the goddess into it.

Apart from its breathtaking beauty, what makes the painting so unique is its symbolism. Scholars often accept the secondary figures in the painting as minor Greek deities. But remembering that the painting was only discovered in 1815 without any historical documentation as to its name or its meaning, and more importantly acknowledging that the Italian Renaissance forged new philosophies, combining ideas from antiquity and the Middle Ages, I, on the contrary, see it as reasonable that the winged young couple, together on the left, represents the Lord God and Creator of the World.

Apart from its breathtaking beauty, what makes the painting so unique is its symbolism.

Never before has the Creator been represented in European art as a deeply intertwined man and woman, sparsely veiled on top of that. The lady on the right I see as representing mankind, anxious to receive the goddess, then to cover her and thus to honor and protect her.

Why do I make this assertion? Because, indeed, Love is the greatest and most wondrous gift ever bestowed upon humanity by its Creator.

Often misunderstood only as a sensually induced emotion, Love is much more: Namely, it is a rational attitude to life, as an all-embracing sentiment, as an eternal philosophy, and as a divine principle. Love for the good and beautiful; Love for truth and justice; Love for the sad, the poor, and the downtrodden. Love for a tree, a butterfly, a sunset, a bird, a dog; Love for children; Love between a man and a woman. Love for the divine creation in general; and Love as mankind's ultimate and highest achievement, key to a single fulfilled life and hope for a better future.

In other words, the painting is not only a grandiose example of Greek mythology but, in fact, one of the most beautiful arguments for the validity of our Christian faith ever conceived.

So there she stands, the most supreme of all goddesses, and I cannot imagine a greater compliment for our womenfolk than she.

Manfred von Pentz previously worked in advertising, graphic design, and real estate development. Now a writer and painter, he is the author of novels such as "The Crimson Goddess." His artwork can be found at manfredvonpentz.net

THEATER REVIEW

Dazzling Talent but So-So Music

DIANA BARTH

NEW YORK—Though billed as a musical, "The Wrong Man" features completely sung rather than spoken words. Does this make it an opera? No, no, no! There's not a whiff of Puccini or Verdi.

The story—of an ordinary man who encounters bad luck—is its own thing, under the banner of pop music composer Ross Golan, who wrote the book, music, and lyrics. Golan's background includes the 2016 BMI Pop Songwriter of the Year award. He has also served as writer of songs for the likes of Ariana Grande, Selena Gomez, Justin Bieber, and other high achievers.

Obviously a labor of love for Golan, this current work has been on the drawing board for more than 10 years, appearing as a concept album last summer and as an animated film at the Tribeca Film Festival.

In this production, the jewel in the crown is the masterful actor and singer Joshua Henry (nominated for a Tony and Grammy for the recent revival of "Carousel" on Broadway), who carries the show on his shoulders.

Henry creates a tangible character as Duran, a ne'er-do-well living in Reno, who falls for a married woman, Mariana (Ciara Renée). Unfortunately, her husband, a convicted criminal known only as Man in Black (Ryan Vasquez), is incredibly jealous—so much so that he murders Mariana and another man, and pins the crimes on Duran.

Duran is arrested and spends the remainder of the show insisting that he's "the wrong man."

Golan has surrounded himself with a support team of prestigious specialists: Director Thomas Kail with his Tony award-winning stint of "Hamilton" is reunited with Alex Lacamoire, another Tony winner for "Hamilton," who here is responsible for music supervision, arrangements, and orchestrations.

Choreographer Travis Wall is recipient of a host of theatrical awards, including two Emmy wins out of eight Emmy nominations. His stark, angular choreography adds to the sometime edge-of-your-seat excitement. Betsy Adams's dark, somewhat mysterious lighting supports the doings onstage.

However, the songs are repetitive. Although, as noted, there are remarkable pedigrees here, the script isn't strong and the language of the lyrics is rather pedestrian. How many times can one say: "I'm the wrong man"?

There's a divergence of opinion regarding the quality of the production. One reviewer has concluded: "Their hardworking efforts aren't enough to make 'The Wrong Man' feel like more than a dramatically inert song cycle."

But another reviewer has written: "[the] exquisite harmony of this unusual show" and "immersive theater with great music."

And, as mentioned earlier, performer Joshua Henry makes it all worthwhile for many.

Creator Ross Golan has surrounded himself with a support team of prestigious specialists.

That's what makes the ballgame of theater. Certainly, audiences enjoy it. I attended a Wednesday matinee, and the house was packed.

Diana Barth writes for several theater publications, including "New Millennium." She may be contacted at diabarth99@gmail.com

MATTHEW MURPHY

Joshua Henry (C) and the cast of "The Wrong Man."

'The Wrong Man'

Robert W. Wilson MCC Theater Space
511 W. 52nd St.
New York

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes
(no intermission)

Closes
Nov. 24

Tickets
212-727-7722 or
MCC@MCCTheater.org

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON

Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

Martin Scorsese's Magnificent Mafia Magnum Opus

MARK JACKSON

Robert De Niro. Al Pacino. Joe Pesci. Harvey Keitel. Martin Scorsese. On the strength of those names alone, you know you have to see this movie or miss out on an instant classic that will inform American pop culture for years to come.

What about these guys being past their prime, to the point that a newfangled youth-ification technology is needed in order to stretch the time spans they can believably play? It matters not. It's a little fake, but it allows all these elder statesmen of mob-storytelling in America to have themselves a grand finale. And at three and a half hours—it's quite grand.

But is it good? Of course. Fabulous. It's Scorsese. How could it not be grand? Uplifting? Mob movies? I saw a musician Instagram meme recently about the romance of the road. Musician wannabe says, "You're in a band? Wow, I bet you get to see a lot of really cool places!" Photos of really cool places: the backseat of a van, a highway, a seedy gas station bathroom.

Directors Francis Ford Coppola and Scorsese have romanticized mob life in America, but, like a seedy gas station bathroom, mob life's not glamorous. It's killers; it's dangerous human animals. Limited-education-having, flashy, nouveau-riche predators. Just like the Russian mob. Just like mobs everywhere.

A good antidote to getting caught up in romantic notions about the Mafia is to have a look at Sicilian crime-scene photographer Letizia Battaglia's work during one of the bloodiest Cosa Nostra crime sprees in Italy. That'll sober up your romantic notions quick; all your musings: Ah! Look at what excellent cooks they are, slicing that garlic clove with a razor blade, who knew? No wonder Italian food is so excellent! Battaglia's photos will throw ice water in your face. It's an excellent chaser to follow a film like "The Irishman."

'The Irishman'

Director
Martin Scorsese

Starring
Robert De Niro,
Al Pacino,
Joe Pesci,
Harvey Keitel,
Ray Romano,
Anna Paquin,
Bobby Cannavale,
Jack Huston

Rated
R

Running Time
3 hours, 29 minutes

Release Date
Nov. 27
(Nov. 1, limited release)

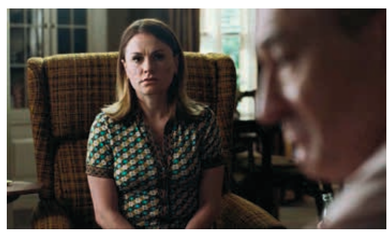
★★★★☆

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF NETFLIX UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

(Top) Robert De Niro underwent some techno-youth-ification in order to cover the entire adult life of Mafia hitman Frank Sheeran, "The Irishman." (Above) Joe Pesci as mob boss Russell Bufalino has never been better.

(Left) Al Pacino (C) is compelling as the crooked union boss Jimmy Hoffa.

(Below) Anna Paquin, as the daughter of Frank Sheeran (Robert De Niro), provides the film's moral compass.



(L–R) Al Pacino, Martin Scorsese, and Robert De Niro at an event for "The Irishman," in London on Oct. 13, 2019.

MIKE MARSLAND/GETTY IMAGES

An Italian-Speaking Irishman

Irish-American Frank Sheeran (Robert De Niro), home from fighting Nazis, is driving hulking, bloody sides of beef around in freezer trucks for a living. Not being a particularly ethical fellow, he sees a business venture and starts stealing from his delivery trucks, giving the beef to Philly-based Felix DiTullio (Bobby Cannavale).

He's soon taken note of by Philly "capo di tutti i capi" Russell Bufalino (a never better Joe Pesci), who takes a shine to Frank, in part due to Frank's ability to speak fluent Italian (having been stationed in Italy), and starts improving Frank's status.

Bufalino introduces him to mobbed-up union boss Jimmy Hoffa (a rip-roaring Al Pacino). The Mafia, in this telling, gets President John F. Kennedy elected. Which means Kennedy's in mob-debt. But JFK doesn't get Cuba reopened to mob business. And then chief counsel Bobby Kennedy harasses the mob legally. So it makes sense that some capo di tutti i capi said, of Kennedy, that phrase you hope you never hear the mob saying: "He's gotta go."

Meanwhile, Frank's become a hitman for Bufalino, while becoming bosom buddies with Hoffa, who, with his uncontrollable temper, eventually aggravates enough capi di tutti i capi that they all finally agree—Hoffa's "gotta go." So much of the movie is about Irish Frank trying to calm the Italian bosses down, regarding his anger-management-needing friend.

Then, circa 1975, Frank Sheeran and Russell Bufalino, with wives in tow, drive to Hoffa's home base of Detroit (with lots of amusing wife cigarette breaks) to attend their lawyer's (Ray Romano) daughter's wedding. Hoffa soon after disappears, forever.

Performances

Hoffa is a tailor-made Al Pacino role if there ever was one—the kind that makes you chuckle slightly, in awe and appreciation at the towering rages, so electrifying are they.

De Niro is staid, reliable, slightly uncomfortable, seeing that his character is basically a glorified gofer to very dangerous men. Frank needs to tread carefully for survival's sake. De Niro shows us that man. Late in the 3.5-hour run-time, Frank confesses to a priest in a senior home, and you can feel the festering soul-rot of the karma he carries with him and hopes to absolve himself of.

This Hollywood royalty of pretend mobsters has shone a spotlight on the American Mafia and exposed it.

This is Joe Pesci's best work to date, and it must be said of him, he actually looks handsomer at age 76. His is a Mafioso don of restraint and wisdom and even empathy. Whether the real Bufalino had those traits is debatable.

Anna Paquin, who plays Frank's daughter, is the silent conscience of the film. She says two sentences throughout, and yet powerfully holds the film's moral center through her unspoken disavowal of her father's dark profession. Feminists have made much of her lack of lines, but when it comes to acting, it's not always about, "Don't just stand there—do something!" The more powerful choice is sometimes, "Don't just do something—stand there."

Magnum Opus

Tour de force. Last hurrah. Since Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 "The Godfather," these are the men who have shown us the seamy underbelly of American organized crime. This is our American reality, so it's good that all this Hollywood royalty of pretend mobsters has shone a spotlight on it and exposed it. This is the final chapter; this will not happen again. They had to coax Pesci out of acting retirement to do it. It's a Hollywood mob swan song.

So what are the takeaways? My takeaway was, not having been particularly interested in Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories, a kind of a "Doh!" moment when it was suggested that it was a mob hit.

Another takeaway: I've always wondered if you put De Niro up against Pacino, who wins? They were pretty evenly matched in 1995's "Heat." But after "The Irishman," I say Pacino's the better actor. At least in this movie.

A takeaway scene from "The Godfather" was Clemenza comedically telling Michael Corleone that he didn't silence the pistol so as to get rid of "annoying" innocent bystanders—this line is paid tribute to in "The Irishman."

What'll stick in my mind long after "The Irishman" has faded is that when the mob says to you, "I heard you paint houses" (the title of the biography on Sheeran). It means that they know you paint houses red. Blood red. And they could use a man like you.

FILM REVIEW

An Engrossing Road Film About Second Chances

IAN KANE

ALL PHOTOS BY BLUMHOUSE PRODUCTIONS

Ex-con Russell Millings (Ethan Hawke) has to learn the ins and outs of a now, technically oriented world, in "Adopt a Highway."

'Adopt a Highway'

Director
Logan Marshall-Green

Starring
Ethan Hawke, Chris Sullivan, Elaine Hendrix

Running Time
1 hour, 18 minutes

Rated
NR

Release Date
Nov. 1

★★★½☆

"Adopt a Highway" is a haunting yet hopeful road movie that marks the directorial debut of Logan Marshall-Green. From the outset, we see that Marshall-Green and his superbly skilled crew have carefully studied the indie film ethos, as his equally nascent cinematographer Pepe Avila del Pino captures some poignant opening shots of a man being released from prison.

Newly freed, ex-con Russell Millings (Ethan Hawke) has a lot on his mind. Having been imprisoned for possession of narcotics with the intent to distribute, marijuana in this case, he finds that the world has changed immensely during his 20-year lockup. All around him are new technological advances that bewilder him—everything from the internet to cellphones and even the capability to send emails. All of these are alien to him.

Avila del Pino takes his time with shots, as if to force us to behold the irony of Russell's situation. He's now free, yet still tethered to the parole board and its system and all that comes with doing hard time. Hawke imbues his character's rather precarious situation with a muted listlessness evident in his droopy-shouldered posture and somber expressions, at least during the film's first act.

Dangerous Legislation

One of the more memorable events of the 1990s was the highly controversial "three-strikes" law. During that time, legislators signed into law the ability for courts to hand down mandatory lifetime prison sentences for those convicted of three felony-grade offenses. Unfortunately, the state of California expanded on this law by requiring that misdemeanor-grade offenses be treated as severely as felonies.

That law, plus little in the way of employment programs for those returning to society, caused many people to fall through the cracks, never to re-emerge.

Russell was one who was snagged up by this very law for a relatively low-level crime, and he had to pay the piper in a very severe way. Released from prison, he's returned the belongings he initially came to prison with, two decades prior: some clothes, an old watch, and some keys. From there, he lands a job as a dishwasher at a local restaurant and attempts his first forays into an almost unrecognizable society.

You'd think the film would lock on to the initial sense of melancholy and curbed prospects. But Marshall-Green (who also wrote the script) suddenly takes us for an unexpected detour. While visiting a dumpster near his lodgings one evening, Russel hears the faint mewling of a baby from inside of it.

He discovers a gym bag with a discarded infant in it. The only thing accompanying the unwanted babe is a piece of paper with the scribbled words: "Her name was Ella."

Russell is struck with a sense of uncertainty for a moment. When he regains his composure, his bewilderment is subtly replaced by resolve; the baby must be rescued. The ex-con understands the correlation between the forsaken baby and his own forsaken life. Society views ex-cons as disposable. Hence, he makes it his mission to care for Ella.

Russell Millings (Ethan Hawke) finds a mission in life after discovering an abandoned baby (Savannah Sucher) in "Adopt a Highway."

However, their bonding is short-lived. One day, Ella falls off his motel-room bed and is injured. Panicked, Russell takes her to the local hospital where she is quickly taken from him. Harboring a foundling without notifying the police–no matter the intentions–is considered felony kidnapping in the eyes of the authorities. As such, Russell's parole, along with his newfound freedom, is threatened.

At the end of the film, Marshall-Green again deviates from the predictable. There is a sense that there is yet hope for Russell, as if some sort of rebirth is still possible.

Hawke's performance as an ex-con trying to adapt to a sometimes indifferent society is extraordinarily understated, and he uses his considerable acting chops to convey Russell's challenges. In his triumphant directorial debut, Marshall-Green even manages to weave patches of subtle, wry humor into the script, elevating the story with occasional slivers of brightness.

"Adopt a Highway" is a film that touches on the overly severe three-strikes law and the many people who had their lives ruined by it. But it's also about second chances and moving on with one's life, despite its challenges.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles.