WEEK 15, 2020

# THE EPOCH TIMES ARTS TRANSFORMED THE EPOCH TIMES



NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



#### (Above)

A detail of the angel Gabriel's heavenly cloak in "The Annunciation" by Jan van Eyck.

#### (Left)

"The Annunciation," circa 1434–1436, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on panel, transferred onto canvas; 35.5 inches by 13.4 inches. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

#### (Bellow)

Portrait of Baudouin de Lannoy, circa 1435, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on panel; 10.5 inches by 7.7 inches. Berlin State Museums-Prussian Cultural Heritage, Berlin.

Only 23 of van Eyck's works are known to exist, and 13 of those works are on display in the exhibition.



Virtuosso Jan van Eyck Paints the **Epitome of Beauty**...4

# smear that blood on the



# What Our **Readers Say:**

It's the only sane newspaper amidst all this insanity. STANK PASTOR

It's the only paper that I know of right now that actually gives you the honest, old fashioned journalism. DRUE L., BUSINESS OWNER



TERRI B., BUSINESS OWNER

It's bringing morality

back to newspapers.

LISSA T., BUSINESS OWNER

**Everything I read in it is fair and balanced**, compared to other newspapers.



# **TRADITIONAL CULTURE** THE TIES THAT BIND: ESSONS PASSOVER

#### **JEFF MINICK**

nto this season of pandemic, quarantine, and hardship comes Passover. The Jewish celebration of Pass-

over derives from Exodus 12 of the Bible, when the last of 10 plagues visited upon the Egyptians brings about the death of firstborn sons in Egyptian households. To ensure the safety of the Israelites, God commands Moses and Aaron to tell the Hebrews to collect the blood of the lambs they have sacrificed and to

doorframes of the houses and also to eat the lambs. The sons of the Egyptians perished; the sons of Israel were spared and the people freed from their bondage.

And so was born the oldest and most important of Jewish holidays.

From that point on, the Israelites celebrated Passover, "Pesach" in Hebrew. This April, over 3,000 years later, the spiritual descendants of those freed slaves An early 15th-century manwill once again honor that uscript depicting, at the botmoment in history by tom, a Seder. The full-page gathering together, praying, reading passages val Christian iconography from the Torah, and eating foods symbolic of their liberation and their 40-year trek in the wilderness. Are there lessons for us

in Passover? Let's take a look

**Freedom Is Not Free** 

ike Amerıca, many ountries celebrate an independence day, looking to some point in their history when they threw off an oppressor. They remember liberators like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, Simón Bolívar, Mohandas Gandhi, and Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.

Of all these celebrations of freedom, Passover is by far the most ancient. The readings, the songs, and the foods eaten at Seder (a ceremonial meal during Passover), all stress the sweetness of liberty and the cost of that liberty. Those who celebrate Passover remember not only the escape from Egyptian bondage but also the time of wandering in the desert, the decades spent in search of a resting place and a homeland. Recollecting the ordeal of those long-ago ancestors reminds the Jewish people that freedom comes with responsibilities and sacrifice.

Though we Americans celebrate July 4 as our Independence Day, how many of us remember the sacrifices of those who gave us this holiday? How many of us remember men like Thomas Nelson, the wealthy Virginian who ordered his men to fire upon the British ensconced in his own mansion? How many of us remember other signers of the Declaration of Independence who lost their homes, their wealth, and sometimes their lives in their bid for freedom?

Freedom, as the Hebrews quickly discovered on leaving Egypt, means accepting the burdens of responsibility and accountability. Like Passover, Independence Day should remind all Americans that freedom comes with a high cost, often including the sacrifice of lives. The men who endured or died on battlefields like Bunker Hill and Cowpens, Antietam and Gettysburg, Normandy and Okinawa paid that cost. When we pause to savor our independence, we should give thanks to those who helped preserve that liberty.

#### **Tradition:**

**Tevye Got It Wrong** In kicking off "Fiddler on the Roof" with some comments on tradition, the lead character Tevye says of certain Jewish practices, "You may ask, how did this tradition get started? I'll tell you. I don't know. But it's a tradition."

Baloney. Contrary to what Tevye sings, devout Russian Jews knew why they covered their heads and wore a little prayer shawl. The reasons are in the Torah.

Tradition pays homage to the past. As G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to that arrogant oligarchy who merely happen to be walking

Most of us practice our traditions in small ways. With a sense of reverence, we place the ornaments collected by our great-grandmother on the Christmas tree, the prayers we say at mealtime are those of our ancestors, and we pass along the wisdom and insight of our parents and grandparents to our children in hopes they will someday do likewise in their own families.

Passover gives us a shining example—perhaps the greatest example in the history of our world—of the power of tradition. For 30 centuries, Jews of every land and age have found themselves bound one to the other because of certain beliefs and rituals, one of which is Passover.

These unbroken traditions undoubtedly helped Judaism survive.

And like Passover, our own traditions should draw us closer to those we love.

#### Mishpacha

With the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews, Passover became an intimate affair centered on the home and "mishpacha" (family). It bound together young and old in a rite of great importance, reminding them of their religious heritage, yes, but also of the many trials of

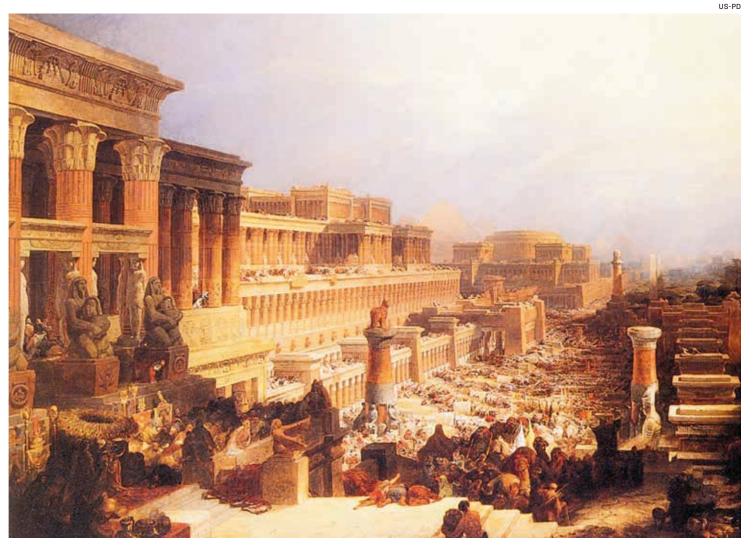


Hell on earth: The communist Khmer Rouge regime killed 1.5 million to 2 million Cambodians from 1975–1979.

# PUBLIC DOMAI

miniature adapts medieto illustrate the importance of study and discussion of Passover. Each figure has a book, presumably a Haggadah, a text about the Exodus from Egypt, that is recited at the Seder. University and State Library Darmstadt.

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 15, 2020



"Departure of the Israelites," 1829, by David Roberts. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

their ancestors. In times of trouble and trouble for many Jews is never far away, even in our present age—the family became the rock and castle in which the oppressed could find solace, strength, and encouragement.

Raising children and preparing them to become grownups, taking care of the elderly and listening to their words of wisdom garnered from experience, offering one another hope in a crisis: this is the purpose of family.

Until recently, we regarded the family as the cornerstone of society, both the nuclear family and its extensions. Philosophers and theologians, poets and artists, filmmakers and novelists all once celebrated the family in their work.

For years now, however, that idea of the family has been under attack,

deemed by some as despotic or unnecessary. Certain lawmakers have sought to replace the family with government programs, and some social scientists attack the family as patriarchal or as fetters on individual ambitions. Yet no institution has risen to take the place of a father, a mother, and children.

Passover reminds us of the importance of mispacha. Strong families mean a healthy society.

#### The Price of Liberty

Tradition, freedom, and family are not mere words. They are some of the binding ties of our civilization.

Some today seek to cut and throw away those binding ties, eroding our liberties, mocking tradition, and denigrating the family as oppressive or outdated. Take away those evils, they claim, and we can build a paradise. Those of us who oppose them, who are familiar with the ideologies espoused by these radicals, see instead the pathway to a hell on earth, a road traveled by many nations in the last centurycountries like Russia, China, Cambodia, and Cuba.

The enslaved Israelites once protected their homes by marking their doorways with the blood of a sacrificial lamb. The doorways of American freedom are also stained with the blood of sacrifice. Should we wish to honor those sacrifices and keep our freedoms, we must be always vigilant, always ready to do battle and prepared to defend our rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."



"The Signs on the Door," circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot or a follower. The Jewish Museum, New York.

Freedom, as the Hebrews quickly discovered on leaving Egypt, means accepting the burdens of responsibility and accountability.

*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.



# Virtuosso Jan van Eyck Paints the Epitome of Beauty

'Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution' at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent in Belgium

#### LORRAINE FERRIER

ifteenth-century Flemish painter Jan van Eyck's art is simply astounding. Somehow van Eyck managed to paint so true to life that when you're face-to-face with one of his paintings, once you've caught your breath, you may inadvertently mutter: "Surely, this must be real." Observe any of van Eyck's paintingsfrom his altarpieces to his portraits—and it's easy to think that you are actually in the presence of the people he painted. Van Eyck's biographer, humanist Bartolomeo Facio went so far as to say that all his portraits were so lifelike, all that was missing were the subjects' voices.

'Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution' Only 23 of van Eyck's works are known to exist, and 13 of those works are on display in the exhibition "Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution" at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (MSK) in Belgium. Among those exhibited are works from van Eyck's studio and copies of van Eyck's lost works. This in itself offers an unprecedented opportunity to see his work, but in addition, the exhibition includes Italian Renaissance artwork by his contemporaries, such as Fra Angelico, Paolo Uccello, Pisanello, Masaccio, and Benozzo Gozzoli.

A total of 140 panel paintings, miniatures, drawings, and sculptures are bought together to celebrate van Eyck's virtuosity at a time when the Northern Renaissance and Italian Renaissance flourished.

Among the many highlights in the exhibition are the eight outer panels of the Ghent Altarpiece that are hung at eve level as if they were individual paintings, rather than up high as the polyptych is usually hung.

The Perfection of the **Northern Renaissance Tradition** Along with his contemporary, painter Robert Campin (known for many years by scholars only as the Master of Flémalle), van Eyck founded the Early Netherlandish tradition of art. The Netherlands along with Italy were at the forefront of European art in the 15th and 16th centuries, according to the Prado National Museum.

"It is a fair guess to say that any work which excels in the representation of the beautiful surface of things, of flowers, jewels or fabric, will be by a Northern artist, most probably by an artist from the Netherlands; while a painting with bold outlines, clear perspective and a sure mastery of the beautiful human body, will be Italian," art historian



#### Van Eyck's attention to detail was remarkable.

Nicomedia," 1437, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on panel; 12.6 inches by 7.2 inches. Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, Belgium.

"Saint Barbara of

(Left)

(Right) The "Annunciation Diptych," circa 1433-1435, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on panel; Left: 15.3 inches by 9.1 inches, Right: 15.3 inches by 9.4 inches. Thyssen-Bornemisza Nationa Museum, Madrid.



E.H. Gombrich wrote in "The Story

of Art." While Italian artists were mainly painting in tempera, which used egg to bind pigments, van Eyck preferred to paint with oils. Oil paints took longer to dry, which meant that he could blend tones more readily, creating deep, rich colors; oils also gave him more time to paint the finest details.

Although contrary to popular myth, perpetuated by 16th-century art historian Giorgio Vasari, van Eyck did not invent oil painting. But he did perfect the medium by applying layer upon layer of translucent glazes, resulting in the exceptional blending and detailing you see on his canvases. The layering of glazes meant that he could also create solid and luminous lifelike figures.

Van Eyck must have ardently observed light. His artwork indicates that he studied optics, which in the late Middle Ages was classified as a branch of geometry. He used light in his paintings as if he had nature's hand, expertly adding touches of light to create solid, threedimensional forms and figures.

Van Eyck even used the natural light of the Vijd Chapel, where the Ghent Altarpiece originally hung, for the light source in the exterior panels of the altarpiece. Van Eyck's attention to detail was remarkable. "His eye was at one and the same time a microscope and a telescope," art historian Erwin Panofsky is quoted as saying. Van Eyck painted

everyday items and the most opulent of objects meticulously. And while his Italian contemporaries generally painted idealized portraits, van Eyck painted people as they were, and with his paintbrush, he noted every little thing. His three-quarter-view portraits showed the wrinkles, laughter lines, moles, whiskers-warts and all-as attested to by the portrait of Baudouin de Lannoy, the only portrait of van Eyck's Burgundian statesmen thought to now survive.

Notice in some of van Eyck's paintings that the proportions are not quite right: In Lannoy's portrait, his body seems disproportionate to his head; similarly in a portrait of van Eyck's wife, Margareta, her head is painted in a different scale to her body. Van Eyck placed people and objects into his paintings intuitively, rather than using the mathematical perspective and precision adopted by his Italian contemporaries.

#### 'As Best I Can'

Van Eyck's attention to detail extended to frames. He painted the frame for "Madonna at the Fountain" as mock marble, adding his motto "ALS ICH CAN," meaning "as best I can." The motto is also believed to be a pun on his name: "as best 'Eyck' can." He was one of the first painters to sign his works, and this painting, dated 1439, is one of the last of his signed works.

Private devotional Madonna paintings such as this were in high demand

THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA NATIONAL MUSEUM, MADRID





#### **JAN VAN EYCK'S LIFE**

It's believed that Jan van Eyck (circa 1390–1441) was born into gentry and that his older brother, the painter Hubrect van Eyck, raised him. Van Eyck's art training is unknown. He spent his career as a court painter, traveling far and wide and also among high society. In 1422, he worked at The Hague as a painter at the Court of John of Bavaria-Straubing, ruler of Holland. In 1425, he went to Bruges, Belgium, and became the court painter for the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, who sent him to faraway lands on diplomatic missions. Some of those trips may have taken him to the Holy Land via Italy and also to the Ottoman empire.

in van Eyck's day. In "Madonna at the Fountain," Mary holds the Christ child, who contorts himself to get comfortable, as any baby would; yet with his arms outstretched, he seems to make the sign of the cross.

Of course, we know this is no ordinary portrait of mother and child, and the painting is rich with symbology to remind us. Mary stands in a garden full of flowers such as roses, irises, violets, forget-me-knots, and lilies of the valley: symbols of beauty, refinement, and purity. Van Eyck accurately painted water flowing from the fountain, symbolizing Mary, the mother of God, as a life-giving source. In the Middle Ages, Mary represented trust and loyalty.

#### 'The Annunciation'

In "The Annunciation," van Eyck put Mary in the church to hear the angel Gabriel announce Christ's immaculate conception. Van Eyck painted Mary's words upside down to show that she's directing her words to heaven, speaking directly to God.

The panel is filled with a kind of graceful stillness and harmony that captures the moment perfectly. The splendid Gothic church architecture is painted with such precision that even the wood grain on the paneled ceiling got van Eyck's fastidious attention. The floor tiles reflect stories from the Old Testament. The irises in the foreground show purity. And Gabriel dressed in opulent red velvet richly covered in jewels perhaps denotes the importance of the event, and the sublime gaiety of heaven. Not only could van Eyck paint with fine

craftsmanship, he also painted finely crafted objects and captured on canvas the fine arts of sculpture and architecture. He used grisaille, painting in pure white and gray tones, to render sculptures so real that you can almost feel the cold surface of the stone in his painting.

The exhibition notes that in the "Annunciation Diptych," Mary and the archangel Gabriel are painted solely in white and yellow ochre, giving the appearance of alabaster statues. In the diptych, van Eyck limited himself to four colors, including red for the frame and black for the background. These four colors hark back to antiquity, when Pliny claimed that the artist Apelles's best works used that exact palette of colors.

#### **Faith and Beauty**

Scholars are at odds as to whether van Eyck's "Saint Barbara of Nicomedia" is a finished grisaille work or an under-drawing of an unfinished painting.

(Above) Panels from the van Eyck brothers' Ghent Altarpiece are on display as individual artworks, in the "Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution" exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent, in Belgium. In the foreground, a bust of Jan van Eyck looks out onto his art.

(Right) Portrait of Margareta van Eyck,1439, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on panel; 12.6 inches by 10.2 inches. Groeningemuseum, Bruges Museums, Belgium.

(Right)

"The Madonna at the

inches by 4.75 inches.

**Royal Museum of Fine** 

The exhibition "Van

*Revolution" is at the* 

Museum of Fine Arts

Ghent until April 30;

to find out more visit

MSKGent.be

Eyck: An Optical

Arts, Antwerp.

Fountain," 1439, by Jan

van Eyck. Oil on panel; 7.5



Within this small work, barely an inch taller than a sheet of letter paper, van Eyck rendered Saint Barbara enormous, disproportionately so, but perhaps significantly, because she's larger than the tower that her father once imprisoned her in. Maybe van Eyck was conveying that faith can overcome any obstacle no matter how big or impossible a situation may seem. She holds a prayer book and a palm leaf, again, perhaps indicating that any earthly imprisonment cannot contain her faith.

Quite clearly, van Eyck fits Gombrich's description of a Northern artist who excelled in painting the "beautiful surface of things," but van Eyck's astute attention to gestures and symbols could fulfill Aristotle's belief about art: "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance."





(Above) Hieronymus Bosch's central panel of the triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights." Prado Museum, Madrid. (Top right) The egg is dead center and atop a head, in a detail from "The Garden of Earthly Delights." (Middle right) A detail from the central panel of Hieronymus Bosch's triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights." Prado Museum, Madrid.

# Of Eggs and Creators

#### MANFRED VON PENTZ

t is a fairly safe guess that our orebears, blessed with less information but more fanta-L sy, wisdom, and poesy, were rather awed by the egg's mystery.

How was it possible, the ancients might have asked themselves, that out of a chalky wafer-thin vessel and its sticky contents real life could break forth? Did God present the observer here with a clear and overwhelming proof of his omnipotent presence? Could it be that he himself hid as an eternal spark within the thin shell? (What an incredible thought!) Were God and egg of the same essence?

Then it can be hardly surprising that some of antiquity's most important personages hatched out of an egg.

Take the Chinese Pangu, who burst forth from an egg and then set about creating the world. Or Brahma, an Indian deity, who was born from a golden egg and afterward created the world. Ra, a falcon-headed god of the Egyptians, originated from an egg and then sailed the sun disc every day in his ship of papyrus from horizon to horizon, which is an amazingly beautiful concept.

#### From Swans to Easter Eggs

The Dioscuri Castor and Pollux, roving twins of Hellenic origin with a habit of abducting voluptuous damsels, as seen in Rubens's marvelous canvases, are an interesting example of the egg birth because their mother was the calm and beautiful Leda. Seduced by Zeus himself in the disguise of a swan, she must have been fairly overwhelmed-not so much by his song but by his majestic grace, since he commanded, genetically speaking, the best references possible

The egg laid by Leda contained not one yolk but two, and the resulting twins, by the way, stand symbolically for an intrinsic psychological phenomenon: the

lifelong battle of our inner angel with our inner devil. Both can be found, expressively sculptured, on the façade of Christendom's marvelous font of wisdom, Notre Dame of Paris. The same perception is expressed in the Far Eastern yin and yang.

The ancient Greeks saw the heavenly dome as the inside of an eggshell and themselves, a most perplexing observation, as unborn or unfinished within. Whereby the shell consisted of seven layers or spheres that needed to be opened one after the other in order to attain enlightenment and eternal life.

The Christian custom of hiding painted eggs for children on

The Oberried Altarpiece, left and right wings,circa 1521–1522, Hans Holbein the Younger. University Chapel of the Cathedral, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.

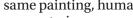
based on old lore in which the open- complex extravagance. ing of Christ's tomb is compared to In another amazing detail of the the hatching of a chick (and the same painting, human beings are chick itself compared to a pilgrim).

#### The Egg in Art

In the world of the fine arts, the egg has been used in manifold variations. William Blake's (1757–1827) little angel has just done what we all dream of: He breaks out of his confinement and gazes with a wondrous expression at the world as if he sees it for the first time in all its splendor. In Hieronymus Bosch's (1450-1516) triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights," an egg can be found perched atop a head

in the absolute center of this fantastic and incred-

ibly



seen entering an egg, which could mean that they have regained the state of innocence and so are able to reunite with their Creator.

A particularly fine example of using the egg as an artistic metaphor is "The Oberried Altar" by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543). There it shines by night as a pale moon and blazes during the day as a bright sun for the poor shepherds and the wise Magi, for whose sovereign, as an ideal, it serves as a radiant crown.

"The Brera Madonna" by Piero della Francesca (1420-1492) has it floating, in one of the most grandiose representations ever painted, above the Virgin and her child. That the egg is suspended on a thin thread from a large seashell-possibly the one in which Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, was born—suggests the theme can be elevated to a metaphor of far-flung significance. Perhaps the Hellenic myth merges with Christian canon into a resplendent doctrine, suggesting that the highest possible wisdom attainable within a human lifespan is the wisdom of Love. It also offers another explanation as to why in Catholic churches the holy water at the entrance is kept in a vessel that has the form of a seashell.

These are just a few interesting observations as to the use and essence of that divine invention called the egg. They might help you to recall the power of expression, awareness of beauty, and the depth of thought and feeling that our Indo-European culture has accumulated in its long and glorious history.

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





### 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty': Ben Stiller Tells a Manhood Rite of Passage Tale

#### MARK JACKSON

en Stiller's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" is about a bullied, ineffectual man-boy who reimagines his own bullying scenarios into fantasies in which he gets to be the alpha dog. James Thurber's original comedic essay became Stiller's 2013 movie, which frames the story as modern man's quest for the sacred masculine in these confusing times, when cosmically, the yin (female) aspect is in ascension and yang (male) is in decline.

My elementary school class teacher, Bill Lindeman, used to read James Thurber's hilarious 1939 story to us every year. (In the Waldorf school system, a class teacher commits to taking a class from first through eighth grades—which is a heroic thing to do.) Here's an excerpt from "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty":

"The Commander ... walked over and twisted a row of complicated dials. 'Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!' he shouted ... The crew, bending to their various tasks in the huge, hurtling eight-engined Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned. 'The Old Man'll get us through,' they said to one another. 'The Old Man ain't afraid of Hell!'

..."'Not so fast! You're driving too fast!' said Mrs. Mitty. 'What are you driving so fast for?' 'Hmm?' said Walter Mitty. He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd.

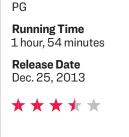
"'You were up to fifty-five,' she said. 'You know I don't like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five.' Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the roaring of the SN202 through the worst storm in twenty years of Navy flying fading in the remote, intimate airways of his mind. 'You're tensed up again,' said Mrs. Mitty. 'It's one of your days. I wish you'd let Dr. Renshaw look you over.""

#### Since Social Distancing Has Nixed **New Movie Production ...**

Now's the perfect time to mine the world's movie treasury for stories that help us improve our lives. James Thurber's short story had already been made into a film starring Danny Kaye in 1947. Ben Stiller's version swapped out the classic, henpecked husband narrative (of the Thurber story) for the modern-day soft man who never received that which was always the birthright of all

#### 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty Director Ben Stiller

Starring Ben Stiller, Kristen Wiig, Shirley MacLaine, Kathryn Hahn, Adam Scott. Patton Oswalt Rated





Mountain guides, played by Rinjee Sherpa (L) and Losang Thonden (C), and Walter Mitty (Ben Stiller) trek on the Himalayas.

Walter Mitty (Ben Stiller) lives out his manhood in fantasies until he chases after a real quest, in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."



The quest by Walter Mitty (Ben Stiller, L) ends when he finds manliness guru Sean O'Connell (Sean Penn), a famous Life magazine photographer.

men in tribal life down through the ages the manhood rite of passage.

Misunderstanding what the rite of passage actually is, and how necessary it is for men, has become endemic in our society. It's long been OK in our society to passively allow boys to drift listlessly toward manhood without ever giving them a chance to test their boundaries or letting them discover, for example, that when they're feeling completely worn out from giving it their best shot, they're only actually at 40 percent capacity.

That passive approach can't produce a man. Without sending that kayak of boyhood down some death-defying white-water rapids, it's in danger of drifting out onto the sea of eternal boyhood. It can eventually lead to a nation of largely untested men, living quiet, dutiful lives, doing good-boy things without having discovered their true An Example of a Traditional strengths and talents. Or as it's labeled in the Hero's Journey-their gold.

The global male community woke up in the 1980s and decided that this nicemen are required to simply avoid causing trouble and end up living desperately unfulfilled lives, is definitely not OK. The fully realized yang males of tribal life were bred to be tough-as-nails warriors. Men are supposed to be magnificent powerhouses, who any woman feels safe around, but he can also cook, change diapers, and administer a tremendous foot massage.

The counterargument is generally that not everyone is a warrior, or lives in a warrior culture, like Sparta of ancient Greece. Which is as true as it is meaningless. The mature male psyche archetypically, inherently, has four quadrants: warrior, king, lover, and magician.

Nowadays, men's inner warriors and kings are weak or nonexistent. The young men today even have the lover quadrant crumbling and fading away, due to ram- to simply avoid pant porn-watching. Even women have come to now think that porn is fun and good. Porn is killing men.

The only archetype fully functioning for male millennials is the inner magician, **unfulfilled lives.** what with the ability to figure things out with lightning speed via technology. The result: More and more 30-year-old boys are currently still living at home with their mommies.

#### Walter Mitty's Quest for Manhood

Here's the movie's baseline: Wimpy guy (Ben Stiller), surrounded by wimpy men at work, lost his father at a young age—grew up with two women (mom, Shirley MacLaine; and sister, Kathryn Hahn). Mitty can't even ask out office colleague Cheryl (Kristen Wiig).

His quest: to find the missing photo negative that's supposed to go on Life magazine's final cover before everybody gets processor for 16 years, and like most print media nowadays, Life magazine is going digital and downsizing.

He feels drawn to this quest by a guru of manliness, Life magazine's renowned field photographer Sean O'Connell (Sean Penn), who appears to wave to Mitty from a photo. He needs to find O'Connell to find that missing negative!

Taking a leap of faith, Mitty buys a plane ticket to Greenland, literally leaps onto a helicopter during liftoff, and then leaps (by mistake) into the freezing ocean. Doh! He fights off a shark, but he narrowly misses finding Sean O'Connell! Then, he uses his long-lost youthful skateboarding skills to by-fire necessary to forge a real man. (dangerously) cover a lot of ground quickly and make up for lost time.

Still on O'Connell's trail, eventually Mitty climbs a mountain, a metaphor for and subconsciously aid and abet in keepelevating his moral stature. Then, when his guides refuse to accompany him further, he accepts the challenge of this dangerous ordeal and goes it alone, miraculously, to the mountaintop.

There he finds O'Connell—that epitome of manliness—camped out on a Himalayan peak, waiting for the "ghost cat" (snow leopard) to appear in his telephoto lens. Mitty has hereby literally and figuratively found manliness, and his spirit animal (always part of a youth's quest for manhood) in the bargain!

Now that he knows where the missing photo is and his quest is complete, there follows manly male bonding! Mitty's never understood bonding before. He bonds with Tibetans playing soccer.

As a warrior, Walter Mitty is now capable of confronting the situation of being wrongly arrested by security at the airport. He further gains admiration from the adult-boy who's been badgering him about his ridiculously lame eHarmony profile, as Mitty regales the eHarmony rep with tales of newfound adventurousness.

Back at the job, Mitty stands up to the belittling, bearded boss (Adam Scott), gains universal admiration (and personal satisfaction) by his tracking down of the final cover photo of Life magazine, and gets the girl.

#### **Rite of Passage**

Women are internal, and men are external. I'm talking about physiognomy. Back in tribal life, there wasn't a lot of patience for guy, worthless-wretch approach, where the concept of transgendering, because there were more pressing issues to consider, like survival. The tribal girls, once they married and bore a child in tremendous pain sans epidurals, automaticallythrough that "built-in" ordeal—became mature women (not that that shift can't happen with epidurals).

For a boy to become a man, he needs an external challenge—an ordeal he doesn't think he can overcome. The example I always like to give is the traditional African Masai tribe rite of passage: The Masai are cattle herders. If the local lion population is not thinned occasionally, the lions will eat all the cattle and the tribe will perish.

#### Today men are required causing trouble and end up living desperately

So, in order to become a man, a warrior, and a guardian of the tribe, a 16-year-old boy, weighing approximately 130 pounds, must take on a full-grown, 800-pound African male lion, one-on-one, in a duel to the death. With a thin spear. Think about that for a minute.

When the boy had completed his martial training, and the time came for him to track and kill the lion, the elders, uncles, and warriors would go and get the boy; they would have to literally rip the boy out of his mother's arms. Because she would be so distraught, knowing that her little boy was going to come back with the fired. Mitty's been a lowly photo-negative face of a powerful warrior, set in stone, which she would no longer recognize (nor would she be allowed to address him in her previous mothering manner). Or he would not come back at all. One way or another, she was never going to see her little boy again.

In certain tribes where the rite of passage is not quite this do-or-die extreme, the mothers would do more play-acting of their grief-strickenness (which included some eye rolling and discreet chuckling). They were onboard with the elaborate theatricality because they knew the village depended on strong men, and they wanted their sons to undergo the baptism and trial-

Without tribal support, left to their own devices, some mothers nowadays would rather not undergo this painful sacrifice, ing their sons in an over-prolonged state of boyhood.

So if you—a man reading this article who didn't get to play high school football or join the military—find yourself daydreaming too much about exacting revenge for slights and bullying and wishing for a better life situation (like getting out of mom's basement), have a gander at "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," and then go sign up for a Vision Quest, or a New Warrior Training Adventure, or some Brazilian jiu-jitsu classes, and get a new lease on life.

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#### **REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART**

# When Temptation Is Really Something Worse



A detail from "Death and the Miser" circa 1485–1490 by Hieronymus Bosch. Oil on panel, 36 5/8 by 12 3/16 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

**ERIC BESS** 

For some time, the United States has struggled with an opioid epidemic. Now, because of social distancing, many who are combating an addiction are no longer able to attend group meetings or go to gyms to help them cope.

While some might find solace in meditation practices, others might look closely at art to find inspiration. Hieronymus Bosch's us insight and encouragement in resisting all types of addiction.

#### Bosch and the Brotherhood

of Our Lady Though the life of Hieronymus Bosch (circa 1450–1516) is shrouded in mystery, it is known that he was a religious man. He was a member of a religious confraternity, the Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Lady, for which he created works of art.

Founded in 1318, the Brotherhood of Our Lady, which celebrated its 700th anniversary in 2018, is a type of Judeo-Christian "secret" society with a mission that claims "to care for its age-old material and immaterial cultural heritage, the promotion of Christian solidarity and brotherly ties while taking into account modern-day developments and problems."

As a member of the Brotherhood of Our Lady, Bosch created moralist paintings that warned viewers about the consequences of their actions. These paintings were informed, at least in part, by two medieval texts titled "Ars Moriendi" or "The Art of Dying," which were written and printed in 1415 and 1450, the first about 60 years after

the initial appearance of the Black Death. The short version of "Ars Moriendi" provided a series of 10 images divided into devil using one of five temptations to win the soul of a dying person. These five temptations include infidelity, despair, impatience, spiritual pride, and avarice. The accompanying image in each pair shows the appropriate response to the temptation.

Moriendi" are to help a dying person navigate the battle between good and evil that occurs within that person's soul.

#### 'Death and the Miser'

avarice in his painting "Death and the he makes destructive decisions he may not

Miser." The miser is shown in a bed at the end of his life. An angel sits behind him and urges him to look above and beyond causing havoc in more ways temptation, while a demon presents him

The miser doesn't seem to acknowledge the angel nor does he look up. Instead, he appears to reach for the money bag and looks at Death, who creeps around an open door with an arrow in hand and ready to take the old man's life.

In the lower section of the image, the miser is depicted before he was dying. He is storing money away in a bag that a demon holds open for him. He holds a rosary in his hand and a key hangs from his waist. painting "Death and the Miser" may give The rosary is for his spiritual beliefs, and the key is for the chest in which he locks away his money.

In "Early Netherlandish Painting," authors John Oliver Hand and Martha Wolff suggest that the rat-like demon under the chest is holding something like a financial document, which strengthens the suggestion that the miser is tempted by avarice.

#### An angel sits behind him and urges him to look above and beyond temptation, while a demon presents him a money bag.

A Deeper Look at Temptation Bosch depicted the battle over the soul of a miser tempted by avarice. The angel who urges the miser to look up provides the appropriate response to the temptation.

The temptation is earthly yet ephemeral. We come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. This dying man cannot take the money he has hoarded with him after death. Instead, he should let pairs. In each pair, one image shows the it go and move beyond and above worldly temptations. Why is the miser still concerned with his money, with death around the corner?

This question leads me to an insight into the deeper nature of some temptations. It's not that the miser is simply tempted In other words, the images in "Ars by money and puts some away from time to time. It's not money that is the problem. Rather, the miser is an addict. What may have started as a temptation is now a fullblown addiction.

The miser's addiction, like all addictions, Bosch presents the fifth temptation of is irrational and overwhelms him so that

#### THE AMBASSADOR OF GOOD FICTION C.J. Box's 'Long Range' Goes the Distance

An interview with the bestselling author **FRED J. ECKERT** 

Why should you read a novel about a nice guy, good family man, Wyoming game warden who keeps getting involved in contentious issues that lead to major crimes he ends up solving when others botch it?

Because it's by C.J. Box. An incredibly talented storyteller, one of America's best writers in any genre, Box is always a great read, offering terrific entertainment that's also interesting and informative.

Since 2001, when his "Open Season" won four major Best First Novel awards, Box's novels, 27 to date, have sold more than ten million copies in the United States, been translated into some 30 languages, and continue to rack up prestigious awards.

This fall, ABC will launch a new television series, "The Big Sky," based on his Cassie Dewell femalecop-turned-private-investigator novels. Another television series based on his Game Warden Joe Pickett novels is in development with Paramount TV Studios, but

release details are not yet available Box's latest—"Long Range"—No. 20 in his highly acclaimed Joe Pickett series, has a half dozen plots and subplots. One involves Joe assisting a fellow game warden elsewhere in Wyoming to investigate the death of a hunting guide, who was attacked by a grizzly while with a client whose eyewit-

ness account is highly suspicious. The novel's main focus is on the attempted murder of a tyrannical judge in which the bullet meant for the judge hits his wife. Joe is hauled

He has a rare talent for bringing to life the Wyoming setting in a way that carries you there, and for creating characters you feel you know and can see.



'Long Range' C.J. Box G.P. Putnam's Sons 368 pages

hardcover

back home because the judge wants anyone in the area in any way connected with law enforcement working on this case.

What follows is C.J. Box at his best-which is synonymous with crime mystery writing at its best. He has a rare talent for bringing to life the Wyoming setting in a way that carries you there, and for creating characters you feel you know and can see: Joe; his smart, everhelpful librarian wife; his falconer best friend who's a former outlaw with a special forces background; his awful mother-in-law; a drug cartel hit man; and more, including a new sheriff who's as arrogant as he is inept and who charges the wrong person with the crime.

Having such a mix of plots and subplots is a very difficult task for even the cleverest writer, but the skill with which C.J. Box orchestrates them and seamlessly brings them all together in the end makes it ever so easy on the reader.

This is a riveting, nail-biting mystery that will keep you on the edge of your seat from early on until the end.

C.J. Box spoke with me by phone from his ranch near Saratoga, Wyoming:

**RET. AMBASSADOR FRED J. ECKERT:** How would you describe your character Joe Pickett? **C.J. BOX:** Joe Pickett is one of 50 Wyoming game wardens. He has a huge district and he's often without backup. As is true of real game wardens, he's often pulled into crimes and crises unrelated to enforcing game and fish regulations. He's heavily armed, alone, and he tries to do the right thing even

though he screws up from time to

time. He and his wife, Marybeth, have three daughters.

MR. ECKERT: Is there any—much—of you in Joe? Is he based on anyone you know? A composite? MR. BOX: Joe is a composite of what I'd consider a very common Western man. Obviously, every character in a fictional novel must share or reflect some of the author's personality in varying degrees. I was never a game warden, although I was a state employee for a few years, and I try to spend as much time as I can outdoors. I've met several game wardens over the years who could be Joe Pickett. I have three daughters myself.

**MR. ECKERT:** Why a game warden? And why one who's such a normal, likable, good guy? Did you worry this would be considered too plain vanilla by a publisher and readers? Ever imagine such a character would become a favorite of millions of readers worldwide? MR. BOX: I never anticipated that Joe Pickett would go beyond book one—"Open Season"—and I certainly never thought of a long series. I was most interested in exploring the Endangered Species Act, and the best conduit for the plot I'd come up with was a game warden. I remember wanting to avoid so many clichés within the mystery/crime genre where the protagonist has a dark past, emotional baggage, and he never loses a showdown or fight. I wanted a normal guy who works hard, loves his family, and does his best. In a way, it was kind of subversive. I was thrilled when so many readers embraced the idea. A survey my publisher once did shows that 51

percent of my readers are women.

MR. ECKERT: You've produced a large stack of novels with each succeeding one fresh, never waning, even though most have the same cast of characters. How have you managed to succeed in keeping this up long past the point where so many novelists have produced all the best work they can and are coasting? What's your strategy here? MR. BOX: I try to incorporate real-life events, controversies, and themes into every novel, so each book is much more than a whodunit. I love researching subjects and incorporating them into the book, and I think this helps keep them fresh. Also, Joe and the family age in realtime so the characters get older and develop.

**MR. ECKERT:** Have you always wanted to be a writer? MR. BOX: Yes. I think writers are hard-wired to be writers, even if they're never published. I recall walking down the aisles in my local Casper, Wyoming, library as a 12-year-old to figure out where my book would be shelved one day.

MR. ECKERT: What writers had the greatest influence on you and in what way?

MR. BOX: My favorite literary stylist is Thomas McGuane. I'm also a fan of Jim Harrison, Flannery O'Connor, A.B. Guthrie, Raymond Chandler, Cormac McCarthy, Charles Portis, and Joseph Heller. All have strong styles.

MR. ECKERT: What did you do before becoming a full-time novelist? MR. BOX: I worked on ranches and for energy companies growing up,

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want to make-like ignoring the encouragement of the angel. Sometimes addiction can reveal how we as human beings feel about our self-worth. Maybe the miser feels he needs money to compensate for his perceived insecurities and inadequacies. We can become addicted to things that make us feel worthy or that seem to fill an emptiness in our lives; we can become addicted to things that prevent us from experiencing the pain of taking a good long look at who we are truly.

And who are we, truly? Many find meaning in their lives through their religious or spiritual practice. The miser wants to be—or believes himself to be—spiritual, as we see by his rosary. But is he truly a spiritual person? This is where the meaning of avarice is not quite what it seems on the surface.

It's clear to me that the miser wants to be a person of faith, but his addiction to hoarding money is too strong and he is unable to let it go. Bosch depicted the healthy miser as straddling two ways of life: He holds on to both his rosary and his money.

Yes, the miser is greedy for money, but he is also greedy in another way. He wants the best of both worlds: He wants the satisfaction of hoarding money, and he wants the rewards of being a spiritually inclined person.

But his avarice, like most addictions, will ultimately neither satisfy nor reward him and, in the end, will destroy his life.

Bosch has shown me that addiction and spirituality are incompatible. I cannot be a spiritual person and indulge in worldly addictions. Addiction only interferes with my ability to lead a spiritually righteous life. The angel pointing above is a reminder for me that my own spirituality will deepen when I put my efforts, the strength of my will, toward transcending my addictions. And in doing so, the art of dying well becomes inseparable from the art of living well.

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions we explore in our series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

90 percent of what I know. After

that, I worked for the Wyoming

Division of Tourism and then for

24 years as the owner of an inter-

national marketing company that

represented five western states in

New Zealand. But I always wanted

Europe, Asia, and Australia and

MR. ECKERT: Wasn't journalism

better back when you worked as a

journalist—less biased and agenda

driven, more serious in question-

during the inverted pyramid and

every story conform to a precon-

ceived narrative. In order to get

back to that, I'm afraid most of the

journalism schools in the country

straight-news era. Although I wrote

features as well, I didn't try to make

ing and drawing out facts and

MR. BOX: I learned journalism

to be an author.

truth?

# Easter: For the Love of Family and Fabergé

A lavish Russian tradition started by Czar Alexander III

#### LORRAINE FERRIER

n 1885, Czar Alexander III gave his wife, Empress Maria Feodorovna, a most extraordinary Easter gift: a white enamel "Hen Egg." The unassuming egg opened to reveal a golden yolk, within which was a gold enameled hen. Hidden inside the hen was another surprise—an imperial crown with a ruby pendant.

Alexander III was so enamored with the jeweled egg he had commissioned from Peter Carl Fabergé that the ruler commissioned him to make an egg every Easter for his beloved wife. Hence, the iconic Fabergé Easter egg tradition was born.

Two imperial eggs—the Catherine the Great Easter Egg and the Twelve Monogram Egg—are in Washington's Hillwood Museum. The Hillwood Estate is the former home of Marjorie Merriweather Post, heiress to the Post cereal empire, which became the General Foods Corporation. Post collected 18th-century French

decorative arts and Russian imperial art. The museum boasts the largest collection of Russian art outside Russia, said Wilfried Zeisler, Hillwood's chief curator, in a phone interview.

It is thought that Alexander III himself came up with the idea for these novel Easter eggs, Zeisler explained. And when Alexander III died, his son Nicholas II continued the family tradition, but he commissioned two Fabergé Easter eggs a year—one for his mother, Maria Feodorovna, and the other for his wife, Alexandra.

The Fabergé workshop made 52 imperial eggs, but because the Russian Revolution happened between March 1917 and June 1923, only 50 imperial eggs were ever received.

From 1885 to 1900, the imperial eggs were kept in the imperial family's private quarters and perhaps only enjoyed by those who had an intimate association with the imperial family, Zeisler explained; that is, until Fabergé exhibited some of his collection, including the impe-

rial eggs, at the World Exposition in Paris, and then the world knew and wanted Fabergé's creations.

To Mother, With Love

The two imperial eggs in Hillwood's collection were both originally given by Nicholas II to his mother. Fabergé's Twelve Monogram Easter egg made in 1896 commemorates Alexander III who died in 1894. "This egg was a very touching gift from Nikolay to his mother," Zeisler said. The surprise inside the egg, which has long since been lost, was a little square of gold stacked with six miniature portraits of Alexander III.

The egg itself is decorated with the crowned monograms of Alexander III and Maria Feodorovna, on darkblue enamel set with diamonds. But the golden scrolls are not painted on. Zeisler explained that Fabergé traditionally used gilt enamel or painted enamel on the eggs, but for this egg he used the champlevé enamel technique. "It's a very difficult and very elaborate technique which was very rarely used by Fabergé," Zeisler said. There are only a few examples of champlevé enamel in Fabergé's work.

iature

With champlevé, the craftsman cuts into a thick piece of metal to create recesses that are then filled with enamel. On this egg, the gold is the precious metal shining through and the blue is the enamel.

**Catherine the Great Easter Egg** Hillwood's Catherine the Great egg is a completely different piece by Fabergé. "It's a beautiful interpretation of the French 18th-century style, and that's also why I think it was appealing to Marjorie Post, because it was what she was collecting at that time," Zeisler said.

The egg is made of gold, with diamonds, pearls, and beautiful pink enameling featuring the four seasons and allegories of the arts and sciences, he explained.

The surprise inside the Catherine the Great egg is also missing. It was a

> things to do when you're not busy writing or promoting your books? MR. BOX: I'm a fly-fisherman and I can see my favorite river from our little ranch. It takes less than 10 minutes to get to it.

MR. ECKERT: Other things you like a lot?

MR. BOX: My wife Laurie, reading, running my dogs, hunting birds, the Denver Nuggets, working out, Manhattans, cigars.

MR. ECKERT: And what are some things you just can't stand? MR. BOX: Blind extremism, arrogant and stupid bureaucrats and public officials, and political correctness.

**MR. ECKERT:** For example? MR. BOX: I consider myself an environmentalist but more of the classic conservationist stripe. There are and must be trade-offs. Too many people who claim to want to save the planet do it by repressing freedoms, bossing people around, and denying poor people a better life. It's turned into a twisted kind of cult religion in too many cases.

**MR. ECKERT:** Anything else? MR. BOX: I live in a part of the country with a fairly large indigenous population. They refer to themselves as Indians or sometimes Natives. The Sioux-owned and operated newspaper in South Dakota is called "Indian Country News." When an "enlightened" copyeditor reads my novel and changes every "Indian" or "Native" description to "Native American," I push back. Also, I can't stand how our elites in Washington and on the coasts assume they know better than we do about everything when they've screwed up so many times.

MR. ECKERT: I think it's fair to say that readers of your novels will not detect any bias you might have on

Great in a sedan chair, which was an Catherine the automaton, Zeisler explained. On re-Great Easter Egg, 1914, by Fabergé. empress wrote to her sister, Queen Made by Henrik Immanuel Wigstrom Gold diamonds, pearls. opalescent enamel opaque the surprises were part of the egg's enar mel, silver, platinum, and mirror; 4 3/4 inches. Bequest of Marjorie

Merriweather

Post, 1973.

Easter eggs was started long before Fabergé. Everyone would prepare eggs to give to family members or staff: from the simplest painted chicken eggs or wooden eggs, to crystal or elaborate eggs-the most elaborate eggs being, of course, those by Fabergé, Zeisler said.

ceiving her Easter gift, the dowager

Alexandra of England: "It is an unbe-

lievably beautiful and superbly fine

piece of work. Fabergé is the greatest

Many of the Fabergé egg surprises

were beautiful, precious objects in

their own right and were often sepa-

rated from the egg rather than kept

hidden away inside. But some of

structure. For example, by pushing

a button, a frame would come out,

In Russia, the tradition of gifting

or an object would appear.

genius of our time.'

*To find out more about* Hillwood's Fabergé eggs, visit HillwoodMuseum.org

> any political or social issues. Is this a conscious effort? MR. BOX: I don't write novels with an agenda, and I don't read novels with an agenda. I like to tackle controversial subjects, but I do it by providing both sides and trusting the reader to make up their mind. Readers want to learn something and be entertained. They don't want to be hit on the side of their

> MR. ECKERT: You obviously love Wyoming, the West, and the great outdoors. What makes it so special for you? MR. BOX: I could write 27 books to

head with a shovel.

answer this question (and I have!). But in a nutshell, I love the landscape, culture, history, and people.

MR. ECKERT: You've seen your writing dreams come true. Is there anything else you would love to accomplish? MR. BOX: I want to keep writing for a long time. And I want to be awash with grandchildren and rising trout.

MR. ECKERT: What's coming next from C.J. Box? MR. BOX: I'm about three-quarters through the 21st Joe Pickett novel, called "Dark Sky." It should be out in March 2021. And another Cassie Dewell novel should be out in August 2021.

The "Ambassador of Good Fiction" series will be recommending to our readers a work of fiction, giving information not just about the novel but also what makes its author worth checking out—and, when possible, interviewing that author.

A writer and favorably reviewed novelist himself, Fred J. Eckert has been a Member of Congress and twice served under President Ronald Reagan as a United States Ambassador.

and my first job out of college was would need to be leveled, and most for a small weekly newspaper in journalism professors given their Wyoming where I think I learned walking papers.

> MR. ECKERT: Talk about what it took for you to make it big as a writer. MR. BOX: Research and then perseverance. I deconstructed novels I loved to figure out how the writer made them work and how they shaped the narrative. This wasn't learned in a creative writing class. Then, I worked at it for 20 years.

> MR. ECKERT: Where do you get your plot ideas? How do you then proceed to write the book?

MR. BOX: Ideas are everywhere you look. Once I have two or three major plot points, I research the hell out of them and then try to figure out how to pull a reader through them in a page-turning way. I'm an outliner, so I kind of "storyboard" each novel before I start writing.

MR. ECKERT: What's your idea of fun

Author C.J. Box.

This is a riveting, nail-biting mystery that will keep you on the edge of your seat from early on until the end.





#### **ARTS & TRADITION**

#### **POPCORN AND INSPIRATION**

## An Inspiring Epic Depicting the Best of Great Britain

A scene from "Battle of Britain," which pits Britain's Royal Air Force against the German Luftwaffe.



#### IAN KANE

ritish Prime Minister Winston Churchill once addressed members of the House of Commons backin June of 1940: "The 'Battle of France' is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin." The following month, Nazi Germany fulfilled Churchill's prophetic statement and began unleashing its aerial onslaught upon Great Britain in earnest.

What better material to draw on from the annals of World War II than one of the most valiant defenses in the history of warfare—the Battle of Britain? The titular film, "Battle of Britain," was helmed by Guy Hamilton in 1969, who along with the film's star-studded cast, told the famous tale with the utmost skill and talent. It was a massive effort that won't soon be repeated.

Great Britain was still licking its wounds from the debacle at Dunkirk, where its forces (along with other Allies) had to evacuate from France in the face of the superior German military that was steamrolling through Western Europe. Germany had plowed through not only France but also Norway, and now Hitler turned his attention to the next logical Allied target: Great Britain. The island nation had its back against the wall. The German war machine was actually planning a grand-scale amphibious invasion of the island's shores, but the Royal Air Force (RAF) clung stubbornly to its air superiority over the North Sea and other regions between the UK and Germany.

The film is mainly about the RAF's defense of its territory against the seemingly overwhelming might of the German air force—the Luftwaffe.

In a scene that illustrates this David and Goliath factor, an unnamed senior civil servant (Harry Andrews) apprises Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding (Laurence Olivier) of the odds they face, saying: "We've got 650 planes!" To which Sir Dowding replies: "And they have 2,500 aircraft, haven't they?" No wonder the Germans viewed (albeit mistakenly) the weakened British as relatively easy prey.

#### **Gambling on Guts**

The Luftwaffe went to work by first attempting to level Great Britain's infrastructure, both military and civilian. The film shows how the Germans concentrated many of the bombing runs on the southern portion of the country—hitting factories and airstrips in order to grind the island's industry to a halt.

But the British had an ace up their sleeve; they'd developed a very-long-range radar system that tipped them off to the German air raids far in advance. This allowed them to prepare and even counter the raids in some cases, sending German aircraft spiraling down to their fiery doom.

From the outset of the film, you can see the German military's leaders brimming with confidence, including their overall commander Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring (German actor Hein Riess). But they didn't quite count on the resourcefulness and, in many cases, gutsy determination of the British, who fight for every square inch of airspace around their island with indefatigable grit.

#### Director Guy Hamilton manages to effectively convey a period that marked a pivotal change in the war.

In one scene, we see freshly recruited RAF airmen scrambling to their training sessions, along with their commanders, the likes of whom include Squadron Leader Canfield (Michael Caine). Göring soon turns his attention to London, and a major bombing of both the British capital and other metropolitan centers soon follows. The RAF responds by conducting its own daring air raid over Berlin.

Much of the film is dedicated to re-creating aerial dogfights as the two powers vie for supremacy. Like other epic-scale war films that were popular during the immediate post-war eras of the 1950s and '60s, so many stars are cast in the film that none get an overabundance of screen-time, just enough so that audiences relate to the characters and their individual causes.

With a punchy, well-paced screenplay written by James Kennaway and Wilfred Greatorex and some phenomenal aerial photography that shows the Allied air forces locked in mortal combat with the Luftwaffe, Hamilton manages to effectively convey a period that marked a pivotal change in the war.

The battle itself was the first military campaign in wartime history to be almost completely fought by air forces.

The only drawback to be found in the film is a half-baked, melodramatic romantic subplot involving one of the RAF's commanders, Squadron Leader Colin Harvey (Christopher Plummer), and Section Officer Maggie Harvey (Susannah York). The romantic scenes feel forced and unnecessary. ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MGM

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Robert Shaw, one of the film's many stars, playing Squadron Leader Skipper in "Battle of Britain."

Overall, "Battle of Britain" is a super-patriotic piece of cinema that should appeal to both warfilm junkies as well as those who appreciate high drama and high stakes. The production values hold up well by today's standards, and the cast seems genuinely respectful of the historical significance that the movie portrays, as well as their individual characters. It is truly a fantastic drama that is both immersive and inspiring for the entire family.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlight-Ent.com

#### 'Battle of Britain'

Director Guy Hamilton Starring Laurence Olivier, Christopher Plummer, Michael Caine, Susannah York, Robert Shaw

**Running Time** 2 hours, 12 minutes

Rated

G

**Release Date** Oct. 24, 1969

 $\star$   $\star$   $\star$   $\star$ 



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