WEEK 25, 2020

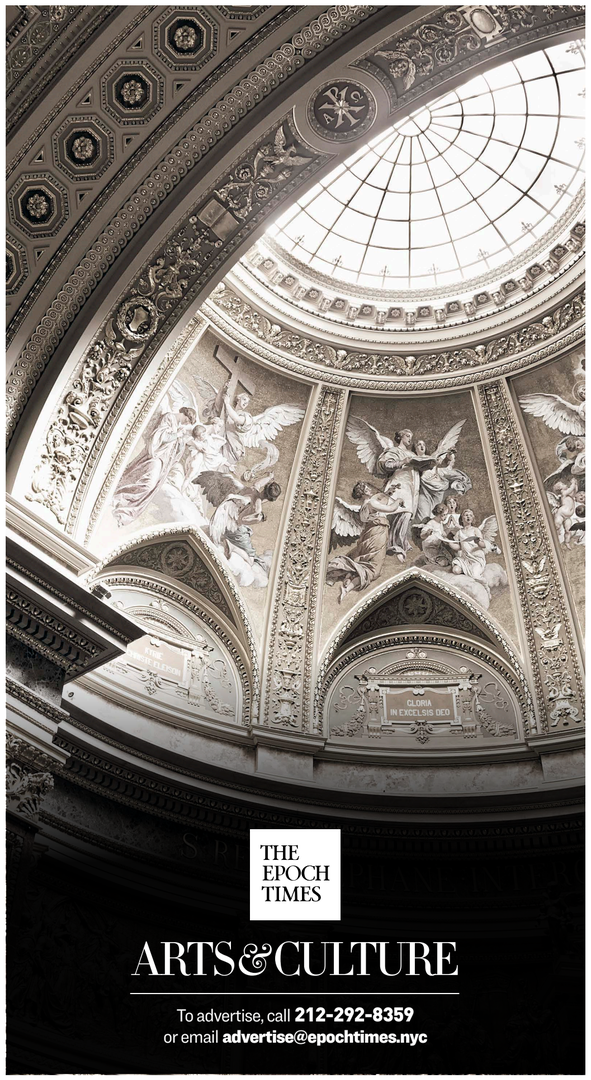
THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

Danforth Pewter's captain oil lamp.

Danforth Pewter: Made by Many Hands

A family of pewterers since 1755...4



PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Aeneas Flees Burning Troy," 1598, by Federico Barocci. Borghese Gallery, Rome.

LITERATURE

LOVING FATHERS

A Literary Look at Dads

JEFF MINICK

I don't get no respect." Comedian Rodney Dangerfield made that catchphrase the heart of his act.

Sometimes these days, it's fathers who get no respect.

The Diminished Dad

In the last 50 years, we've gone from "The Waltons" to "The Simpsons," from hardworking and loving father and husband John Walton to Homer Simpson, who is often more a child than his children. Advertisers give us the doofus dad who couldn't boil an egg. Some female celebrities cheer for single motherhood. For many women, the welfare state, a sort of institutional sugar daddy, has replaced the father.

Of course, some dads don't deserve respect. They abandon their families, or refuse to make child payments, or don't even bother to know their children at all.

Here's a few books where Dad is the good guy.

Like life, literature can portray fathers in a bad light. Shakespeare's King Lear forces his daughters to compete for his attention and his kingdom, Johnny Nolan of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" loves his wife and children but is a drunkard who can't support them, and Pat Conroy's "The Great Santini" gives us a Marine Corps pilot who verbally and physically abuses his wife and children, particularly when he's been drinking.

But here's the good news: Literature is also filled with a multitude of fathers who love their families, provide for them, guide their daughters and sons, and are worthy of emulation. Let's look at just a few of these books where Dad is the good guy.

Dads for the Youngsters

'Horton Hatches an Egg'

Fooled into sitting on a bird's egg while the mother, Mayzie, heads for the beach, Horton the Elephant goes through different trials to keep the egg safe and warm. "I meant what I said," declares the faithful Horton, "and I said what I meant. An elephant's faithful one hundred percent!" The egg hatches, revealing a sort of elephant bird, and the stout-hearted Horton has kept his word.

With a little tinkering, the refrain by Dr. Seuss's Horton's might serve as a motto to all good fathers: "I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. A father is faithful one hundred percent!"

'Little House' Books

In Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House" series, Charles Ingalls, known to readers as Pa, gives himself fully to his family, friends, and faith. He finds delight and pleasure in music—his fiddle playing is the family's chief source of entertainment—works hard, and faces up to the challenges of life on the prairie. His optimism anchors his family in the toughest of times.

For sale online are coffee mugs and T-shirts inscribed with "What would Charles Ingalls do?" Enough said.

'Something Wicked This Way Comes'

Charles Halloway, a character in Ray Bradbury's 'Something Wicked This Way Comes," feels himself ancient at 54 years old, yet he steps up to the plate to protect his young son Will and his son's friend Jim from Mr. Dark and the evil carnival he commands. Halloway epitomizes Dad as defender and protector.

"The father hesitated only a moment. He felt the vague pain in his chest. If I run, he thought, what will happen? Is Death important? No. Everything that happens before Death is what counts. And we've done fine tonight. Even Death can't spoil it."

Classical Fathers

The 'Aeneid'

It is night, and Troy has fallen to the Greeks. In one famous scene of the "Aeneid," Virgil gives us Pius Aeneas carrying his father, Anchises, on his back and holding his son by the hand as they escape the burning city. (One note to dads: Aeneas loses contact with his wife, Creusa, during this flight, and though he returns to look for her, she is by then deceased. Being a good dad means taking care of your spouse as well as your children.) Anchises so loves his son that he even revisits him after death to offer advice and encouragement.

"Do you suppose, my father, that I could tear myself away and leave you?" Aeneas asks Anchises when trying to convince him to escape the Greeks. That filial devotion reveals not only a Roman reverence for the paterfamilias, but also a son who loves his father.

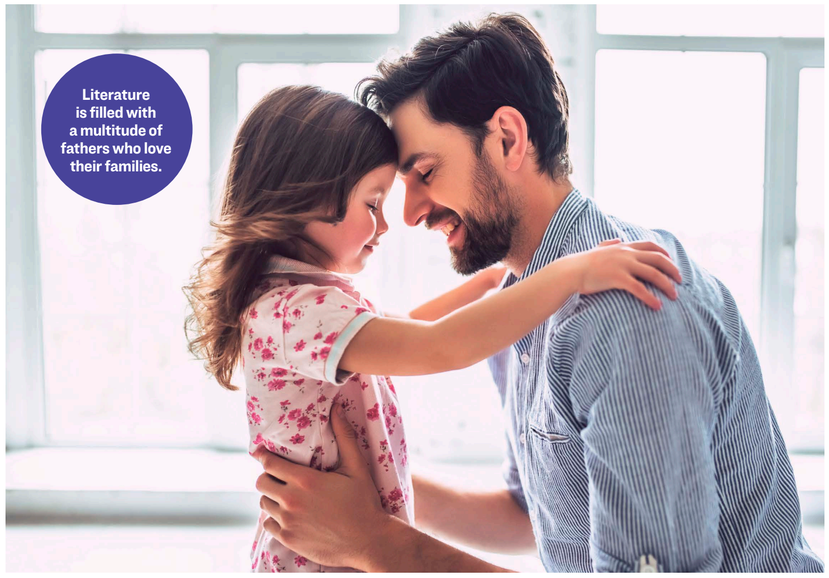
'A Christmas Carol'

Charles Dickens's classic tale portrays Bob Cratchit, the clerk of the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge, as a man who endures poverty and harsh working conditions, but who always brings home to his wife and children a cheerful disposition. In Scrooge's visitation to the Cratchit household with the Ghost of Christmas Future, we learn that the lame Tiny Tim has died. Even with that disaster, Cratchit encourages his other children to love each other and to be as virtuous as Tiny Tim.

Cratchit has a gift for paying attention to his children. At one point, he tells his wife about Tiny Tim: "Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see."

Ebenezer Scrooge and Bob Cratchit in "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, illustrated by John Leech.

4 PM PRODUCTION / SHUTTERSTOCK



'Les Misérables'

In Victor Hugo's classic novel, Jean Valjean, an ex-criminal who turns his life around, promises a dying woman that he will find her daughter, Cosette, and bring her to her bedside. Unable to keep that promise, Jean Valjean educates Cosette and loves her as if she were his daughter.

Many fathers today find themselves raising and mentoring children who are not their biological offspring. Jean Valjean serves as a splendid reminder of the loving sacrifices made by these men.

Fatherly Advice

MGM

Thomas Mitchell plays the loving father of Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) in the 1939 film adaptation of "Gone With the Wind."

'Gone With the Wind'

In this novel of the South during the Civil War and afterward, Irish immigrant and Georgia plantation owner Gerald O'Hara may display some erratic behavior, particularly after his wife dies, and he has a taste for whiskey, but his love for his daughters is imperishable. In O'Hara, writer Margaret Mitchell gives us a father who despite many personal trials remains steadfast in his affections.

By telling Scarlett, "The land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for, worth dying for, because it's the only thing that lasts," O'Hara plants an idea in his daughter's head that will carry her through adversity when so many around her have given way to despair.

'The Chosen'

David Malter, the father of Reuven, is an Orthodox Jew, a writer, scholar, and humanitarian. Reb Saunders, a highly revered Hasidic Jew, is father to Danny, a brilliant young man who wants to study psychoanalysis rather than follow in his father's footsteps as a religious leader. In this novel, Chaim Potok examines fatherhood through the eyes of two men who love their sons but take utterly different paths in raising them. This excellent book might be shared and discussed by fathers and their teenage sons—and daughters—for its deep insights into fatherhood, conflict, and love.

In this passage, David Malter tells his son that he must take responsibility for his life: "A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life. It is hard work to fill one's life with meaning. That I do not think you understand yet. A life filled with meaning is worthy of rest. I want to be worthy of rest when I am no longer here. Do you understand what I am saying?"

Endnote

In "The Gift," poet Li-Young Lee recollects his father pulling a metal shard from his hand when he was a boy. To distract his son from the pain, his father tells him a story, and Lee writes:

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

A prayer, tenderness, the flames of discipline—these are just a few of the marks of the good father.

To all of you fathers trying your best to turn children into loving, thinking, and responsible adults, the above authors and I salute you.

Happy Father's Day!

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.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Danforth Pewter: Made by Many Hands

A family of pewterers since 1755

ALL PHOTOS BY DANFORTH PEWTER

LORRAINE FERRIER

Renowned American pewterers Danforth Pewter have been making metalware by hand for generations. Apart from a hundred-year break just after the Civil War, the Danforths have been bringing pewterware to American homes since colonial times.

Around 1634, widower Nicholas Danforth set sail from Framlingham in England with his six children in tow, to begin a new life in Boston. (Framlingham may sound familiar: Danforth's Farms in Massachusetts, was owned by Thomas Danforth, and he renamed the farms Framingham, without the "L," as an allusion to his birthplace. Danforth Farms can still be seen on the Framingham town seal.)

But it wasn't until a century or so later that the first Danforth became a pewterer, explains Danforth Pewter's CEO Bram Kleppner in a phone interview. In 1755, Thomas Danforth II opened a pewter workshop in the British colony of Connecticut, in the town of Middletown. That workshop still stands.

At that time, almost everybody ate off of pewter and drank out of pewter, except the wealthy who ate off of porcelain and drank out of glass, Kleppner explained. Pewter "has a lot of great qualities: It doesn't rust. It doesn't tarnish. It doesn't break when you drop it, and it's easy to wash. So it was the common tableware for American households," he said.

In his workshop, Danforth made teapots, tankards, plates, and so forth, marking each piece he made with a touchmark (trademark) of a rampant lion. Every Danforth pewterer after him used the rampant lion until the Revolution in 1776. "The Danforths apparently supported the cause of independence and they thought the rampant lion looked too British, so they switched to an eagle as their touchmark to keep it clear which side they were on," Kleppner said.

After the Civil War, in the late 1860s (and as a sign that nothing ever really changes, Kleppner said), the American pewter industry was wiped out by cheap imports from China that made porcelain and glass more affordable for working people.

The last of the early American Danforth pewterers was Thomas Danforth Boardman. And "as they say, 'he died with his boots on,'" Kleppner said. He worked up until the day he died in 1873, when he was in his late 80s.

For over a hundred years, the Danforth touchmark gathered dust until fate intervened.

(Above) Molten pewter being poured into a cast.

(Left) Judi Danforth solders the stems onto pewter wine glasses.

Danforth Pewter CEO, Bram Kleppner.

> **They did what young artists in the 1970s in Vermont did: They rented an old farm and they set up a workshop in the barn.**
>
> *Bram Kleppner, Danforth Pewter CEO*

In 1975, Fred and Judi Danforth began making pewterware in Middlebury, Vt., from their barn workshop.

Destined to Be a Danforth Pewterer

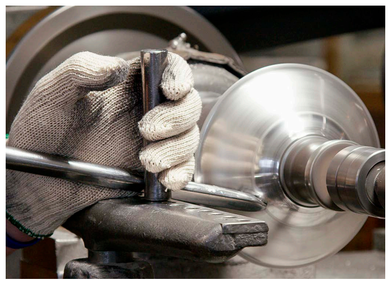
Nearly 300 years after the Danforths took the eagle as their touchmark, a new Danforth pewterer picked up the family tradition. Fred Danforth grew up in Ohio, knowing a lot about his ancestors through his father's interest in genealogy. And although he knew that some of his ancestors had been pewterers, he was heading toward a career in woodworking—that was until he met Judi Whipple.

Whipple grew up in New Hampshire. Having always been creative and drawn to the arts, she studied metalwork at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York, where she was introduced to pewter. She immediately fell in love with the metal and became a pewter designer and worker.

Fred met Judi in Vermont when they were in their 20s. When Fred introduced himself, Judi said "Oh, did you know there were some guys who worked pewter in early America named Danforth?" And Fred said, "Oh yeah, those were my great-great-grandfathers," Kleppner explained.

Fred and Judi discovered that they were both craftspeople and artists. And "Judi sort of said: 'Look, you're a Danforth; you can't be a woodworker. You need to work pewter. So forget what you're planning, buddy, and let me show you your destiny and fate,'" Kleppner said. That's how Fred became a Danforth pewterer.

The couple traveled to Nova Scotia, Canada, where they spent a year or so as apprentices in a pewter workshop. Then in 1975, they moved to Woodstock, Vermont, where "they did what young artists in the 1970s in Vermont did: They rented an old farm and they set up a workshop in the barn," Kleppner said. They displayed their pewterware on a table by the side of the road. When people would stop to look, Fred and Judi would take them around the workshop, and they'd walk customers across the street to their home where they'd set up a little pewterware display in the corner of their living room. On the weekends, they sold their pewter at county fairs and craft markets. Through the 1970s, their pieces sold well, and they were able to earn a living as artisans.



Spinning pewter is similar to casting a pot on a potter's wheel; both take a steady hand and years of practice.

Danforth Pewter worker Jake Michaud inspects a handspun pewter oil lamp base.

(Above) The base of Danforth Pewter's oil lamps are handspun on a lathe. Spinning pewter is a highly skilled process that takes years to master.

(Left) Danforth Pewter Jefferson cups are made by spinning pewter.

From these small beginnings, and with a lot of hard work, Fred and Judi's business grew. They learned as they went, offering wholesale to gift shops and the like, and then in the late '80s the business changed overnight.

At a trade fair in New York, a Walt Disney representative offered them the opportunity to become a licensee, making Winnie the Pooh figurines. For around 10 years, the Disney contract brought Danforth Pewter expansion and healthy profits, which the Danforths shared with their artisans. "All the people who worked at the company were getting nice bonus checks during the Disney years," Kleppner explained.

The Disney license ceased in the late 1990s, and over the next decade or so, Danforth Pewter had to find its place in the market again. It was a tumultuous time, when Fred and Judi had to make hard decisions, such as to lay off people, something they'd never had to do before. The business settled into profitability around 2011 when Kleppner became CEO of Danforth Pewter, although he'd been involved with the company since 2007.

Then in 2015, Kleppner had a different challenge when, after 40 years, Fred and Judi retired. Fred and Judi's partnership worked very well artistically, businesswise, and in their relationship. Kleppner said: "They've been married for a very long time—to this day, you see them together and they obviously just delight in each other's company, which is lovely."

The workshop now continues without the Danforths at the creative helm, although they do still help the business.

The Danforth Pewter Artisans

All Danforth Pewter's artisans are locals from Middlebury, Vermont, a small rural town nestled in the midst of rolling hills, agricultural land, farms, and tiny villages. Some of the artisans have worked for the company for 30 years, with many more having been there for over 20 years, Kleppner said.

Everything is taught in-house. "We have now been in business for 45 years, and I'm pretty sure we have never hired anyone with experience working with pewter," he said.

In the workshop, two main metalwork techniques are used: casting and spinning. Bronze mold casting (lost-wax casting) has been around for thousands of years, and Danforth Pewter uses the technique for a small number of castings, Kleppner said.

Spinning pewter is only a couple of hundred years old, and Kleppner likens the process to casting a pot on a potter's wheel.

Spinning pewter is highly specialized. "We can train someone to cast, and to prep, and finish [a piece of pewter], in a week, but it does take months and months to train someone to spin pewter successfully. It's easy to rip the metal, or to have it deform, or to have it fold—there's lots of ways it can go wrong," Kleppner said.

After a couple of years of practice and some specialized homemade tools, an experienced pewterer makes spinning pewter look easy."It's really magic when you see it," Kleppner said. "It's a smooth and very kind of rhythmic process."

The pewter is spun at room temperature; as pewter is mostly tin, it's soft enough to shape without heat. The pewterer places a thin pewter disc on a lathe, and as it spins the pewterer pushes against it using a metal tool with just the right amount of pressure so that it transforms from a disc to a plate, a bowl, an oil lamp, or a vase, for example.

Or Danforth Pewter pewterers can spin a Jefferson cup. It's often thought that Thomas Jefferson designed the Jefferson cup, which is "almost true," Kleppner said. Jefferson had commissioned a silversmith he'd met in France, when he was ambassador there, to make him a set of silver cups. The silversmith made the designs, which Jefferson modified.

Many Hands Make Pewterware

Just like Jefferson's cup, a Danforth Pewter product is the result of people working together. Kleppner explains that even as the company has grown—opened retail stores, and taken on big design orders or wholesale customers—"each piece is still made by hand and in fact made by a lot of hands."

Making a holiday ornament is a good example, he says. Lead designer Timothy Copeland creates a design and then makes a model either by hand carving some jewelers wax, which was Judi's preferred technique, or modeling it on a computer and a little mill and then carving it out of a material called butter board.

The carved design then goes to a mold maker. The lead mold maker used to be Fred and Judi's housecleaner. She learned the technique 35 years ago, when Judi needed help making molds, and she's been a mold maker ever since. The molds are made out of vulcanized rubber and are then passed to a caster, who sets the temperature and pressure and gets the mold ready to pour the molten pewter into it. The pewter is then cast and then removed.

The pewter ornament is then passed to a prepper, who files away the line where the two halves of the mold come together and corrects any other imperfections. If there is anything missing, the pewter piece gets thrown back into the crucible to be melted and reused.

From the prepper, the pewter goes to the finisher, who runs it through a process that gives the metal its characteristic look. Then if the ornament needs to be colored, it goes to the enameling room where someone applies the color by hand. In the assembly room, someone ties a ribbon on the ornament and then puts it in its box to be sent to one of the Danforth Pewter stores or shipped out for a customer order.

Many hands at Danforth Pewter continue to pass on the Danforth metalwork tradition. Regardless of whether artisans are a Danforth by blood, pewterware looks like it will course through Middlebury and the Vermont valley for generations to come.

To find out more about Danforth Pewter, visit DanforthPewter.com

FINE ARTS

Celebrating the Exotic and Mundane in All Its Minutiae

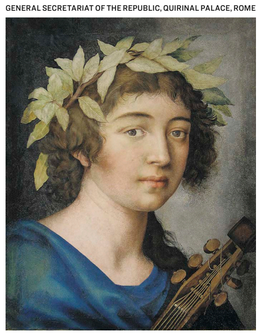
The charm of Giovanna Garzoni's art

LORRAINE FERRIER

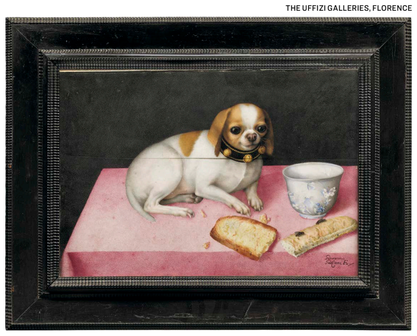
THE UFFIZI GALLERIES

Yixing vase containing diverse flowers on a marble table between two shells, with butterflies above, 1659–1660, by Giovanna Garzoni. Tempera with traces of black pencil on parchment; 26 1/8 inches by 18 7/8 inches. Cabinet of Drawings and Prints, The Uffizi Galleries, Florence.

GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE REPUBLIC, QUIRINAL PALACE, ROME



THE UFFIZI GALLERIES, FLORENCE



(Left) Self-portrait as Apollo, circa 1618–1620, by Giovanna Garzoni. Tempera on parchment, laid down on linen; 16 1/2 inches by 13 inches. General Secretariat of the Republic, Quirinal Palace, Rome. **(Right)** Lapdog with biscotti and a Chinese cup, circa 1648, by Giovanna Garzoni. Tempera on parchment; 10 7/8 inches by 15 1/2 inches. Palatine Gallery, The Uffizi Galleries, Florence.

An adorable lapdog looks out of a picture frame, as if we've interrupted him nibbling on some rather delicious-looking Italian biscuits. He sits attentively on top of a pink table cloth, beside a Chinese porcelain cup. In the short moment that he glances at us, two flies take the opportunity to settle on the food. This rather whimsical painting is an iconic image by Italian Baroque painter Giovanna Garzoni.

This painting is one of the 100 or so works in the exhibition "'The Greatness of the Universe' in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni," at the Pitti Palace in Florence, Italy. It's the largest comprehensive monographic exhibition ever held on Garzoni and reveals new scholarship about the artist.

Garzoni's charming paintings, illuminations, and drawings are on display alongside many exotic curios and decorative arts of the type she featured in her artwork, such as Renaissance bronzes, tropical shells, and porcelain and ivory pieces.

Garzoni specialized in miniature portraiture, still life paintings with exotic curios, and accurate depictions of the natural world in all its minutiae.

Painting From the Heart

It would be easy to dismiss Garzoni's work as pretty still life paintings and endearing portraits, yet she is an important personality in Italian painting. Incredibly successful and renowned throughout Europe, Garzoni painted still lifes at a time when the genre was just emerging in Renaissance Italy. This was around the time of the Protestant Reformation, when religious art was forced into decline.

For exhibition curator Sheila Barker, Garzoni's "starting point is always the heart, the fulcrum of people and things, which she then subjects to almost microscopic analysis. In particular, Garzoni focuses her attention on the exotic items in her patrons' collections, organizing them in compositions that speak of the growing cosmopolitanism in the life of Europe's courts and the intense circulation of goods throughout the world," she said in a press release.

Garzoni lived in the courts of Venice and Turin and frequented the courts of Rome, Paris, and London. Documents recording her as a frequent visitor to the court of King Charles I are exhibited for the first time. And Garzoni's patrons were among the most prestigious in Europe, for example, the Medicis in Florence, the Barberinis in Rome, and Cardinal Richelieu in Paris, whose portrait by Garzoni is included in the exhibition.

Giovanna Garzoni Through Her Paintings

Born around 1600 in Ascoli Piceno, in the central Italian region of Marche, Garzoni is believed to have learned oil painting from her maternal uncle Pietro Gaia, in Venice, when she was a young girl. Gaia was an apprentice to Palma the Younger, one of the most notable artists of the Venetian school. Garzoni would've learned the great Venetian tradition of painting that included great masters such as Giorgione, Tintoretto, and Titian.

Garzoni's paintings themselves can paint a picture of her artistic life and the influential circle she was part of.

At just 20 years old, she painted herself as the Greek god Apollo. In the painting, Apollo's characteristic laurel leaf wreath crowns Garzoni's head, and her long curly hair is loosely tied to one side. Her curls serve as a guide that brings the viewer to the stringed instrument she holds close to her chest.

Apollo, as the patron of music and inventor of stringed instruments, is a fitting character for Garzoni to embody. She sang and played string instruments, even entertaining the Medici court with her music about a year prior to the painting's completion. Rather aptly, Apollo guides youths as they come of age. Perhaps Garzoni recognized that her career as an artist was being shaped by experiences such as those that she'd just had at the Medici court.

Around the time of her Apollo self-portrait, Garzoni studied calligraphy in Venice and compiled "Libro de' Caratteri Cancellereschi Corsivi," a book containing cursive characters. Remarkably, Garzoni completed "Galleon at Sea" with black ink in one continuous curl of a stroke, showing her immense skill as a calligrapher.

As testimony to her artistic talent, one of Garzoni's first commissions was to paint one of a series of paintings of the apostles, for the church of the Hospital of the Incurable (Ospedale degli Incurabili) in Venice. Tintoretto also painted for the series. Unfortunately, the church was demolished in 1831.

Portrait of Zaga Christ, 1635, by Giovanna Garzoni. Watercolor and bodycolor on parchment mounted on card, later silver frame; height 2 1/4 inches. Philip Mould & Co., London.

PHILIP MOULD & CO., LONDON

In 1630, she traveled to Naples where she painted for the Duke of Alcalá, a Spanish nobleman and important art collector, who served as the viceroy in Naples. Also under the duke's patronage was the prestigious painter Artemisia Gentileschi. The two ladies became good friends, with Garzoni treating Gentileschi somewhat as a role model.

In 1635, Garzoni painted a rare portrait when she was at the court of the House of Savoy in Turin. Her portrait of Zaga Christ, who claimed to be an Ethiopian prince, is the earliest known European portrait miniature of a black sitter, said Emma Rutherford, portrait miniatures specialist at the art dealers Philip Mould & Co., on a video on the company's website.

In the portrait, Zaga Christ is depicted in European dress even though he hailed from Ethiopia. On the back, Garzoni's signature script is written in both Italian and Amharic, an ancient Ethiopian language. Christ must've been a fascinating sitter for Garzoni to paint, with his cocoa complexion and strong black curls. And the conversation might well have been interesting too, as he was in Europe to gain support in reclaiming the Ethiopian throne. He claimed that he was the rightful heir, after his father had been murdered.

Giovanna Garzoni's Middle Age

In 1639, nearing 40 years old, Garzoni was in Paris, with Cardinal Richelieu as a patron. Her pen and watercolor drawing of a lioness with one eye open was rendered during that time with virtuosity and confidence similar to her earlier galleon calligraphy piece. The lioness is executed with relatively few brushstrokes and pen marks, resulting in a clear, crisp image.

From 1642–1651, Garzoni was in Florence, mostly under the Medicis' patronage and mainly working in miniatures. In 1648, she painted a miniature of Raphael's "Madonna of the Chair" ("Madonna della Seggiola"). While Raphael had painted in oils on panel, Garzoni used her favorites: tempera on parchment. She also used a lighter color palette; notably, her Mary wears a cream rather than green shawl, and her Christ Child is adorned in soft peach rather than the gold that Raphael had wrapped him in.

Just a year after her painting of the Madonna, Garzoni used a similar color palette for a different subject in her "Old Man of Artimino." Here, an old farmer holds two hens, and arranged in front of him are the fruits of his labors: Preserved meats, cheese, eggs, fruits, and vegetables are among his farm animals and wild birds. The rather barren rocky landscape dominates the scene, hinting at a hard rural life.

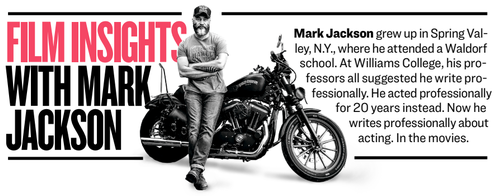
Garzoni settled in Rome in 1651, although she still took commissions from the Medici in Florence. One of the particularly beautiful still lifes, painted between 1659 and 1660, which seems typical of her exotic flower paintings, is a Yixing vase full of flowers on a marble table between two shells; a butterfly flutters above.

In the bold spirit of her youth, Garzoni had painted herself as Apollo, full of hope at her career ahead. In her old age, one of the leading Italian Baroque painters, Carlo Maratti (the future restorer of Raphael's art), painted her portrait as testimony to her fame.

Maratti was the principal of the Academy of Saint Luke in Rome, an organization intent on elevating artists (painters, sculptors, and architects) beyond artisans. Garzoni frequented the academy and left her wealthy estate to the academy's Saint Martina Church on the condition that she would be buried there. Her wish was granted in 1670.

To find out more about "'The Greatness of the Universe' in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni," exhibition, which runs until June 28, visit Uffizi.it

Inspired by Garzoni's work, American organization Advancing Women Artists (AWA) launched "The Garzoni Challenge" to coincide with the duration of The Uffizi exhibition. AWA asked artists around the world to create art inspired by Garzoni's work. To see the results, visit AdvancingWomensArtists.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.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Choose the Girl, Stupid!

MARK JACKSON

'For Love of the Game'

Director
Sam Raimi

Starring
Kevin Costner, Kelly Preston, John C. Reilly, Jena Malone, Brian Cox, J.K. Simmons

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
2 hours, 17 minutes

Release Date
Sept. 17, 1999

★★★★☆

"For Love of the Game" is the rather uninspired title for the third movie in the triumvirate of renowned Kevin Costner-as-baseball-player movies. The other two films are "Bull Durham" and "Field of Dreams." The better title would be something like, "Choose the Girl, Stupid."

Basically, what you've got here is the story of a super-alpha and the woman who loves him. This kind of alpha male is almost always a canine-like pack animal, and that means his all-consuming passion and talents are tied up in 1) sports teams, 2) war-fighting teams, and 3) today, rock bands. Any situation involving dudes in "All for one and one for all!" mode, with a pecking order. Wasn't that the Three Musketeers? That was a sword-fighting team. Which is a subset of a war-fighting team.

It's quarantine time: I binge-watched all three seasons of "The Unit," which is about the U.S. Army's Delta Force teams, and also all three seasons of "SEAL Team," which is the Navy's version of the same thing.

The Army and Navy wives therein depicted constitute a rare breed of women who will willingly compromise in matters of love. They know better than to try to force their spec ops soldier or sailor to make an either/or choice between them and his high-adrenaline military job, because he will always choose his wolf pack first.

This is a bitter pill for women to swallow. Because many women want an alpha; they're hard, tough, manly men—forces of nature. They provide power, safety, humor, excitement, adventure, often dashing good looks, and they can make an excellent baby and provide for it.

And yet no woman wants to play second fiddle to anything else in her man's life. But these guys are wired to choose the team first. So what's it gonna be, Billy, the team or the girl?

Billy Chapel (Kevin Costner) must choose between baseball and romance, in "For Love of the Game."

When It Rains It Pours

One horrific, soul-crippling day, Detroit Tigers 40-year-old veteran and star pitcher Billy Chapel (Kevin Costner) is informed by the owner (Brian Cox) that the team has just been sold to a corporate conglomerate, whose first item of business will be to sell Billy to the San Francisco Giants. Billy pitched 4,100 innings, over 19 years, for Detroit exclusively.

That's Billy's Hiroshima. His Nagasaki (on the same day) is Jane Aubrey (Kelly Preston), Billy's soulmate-girlfriend of five years, telling him that she's leaving him and moving to London to upgrade her journalism career.

All that ... and then Billy has to go out on the mound and pitch the last game of the season against the very cocky, World Series-bound New York Yankees.

And so, during this seemingly meaningless game against the Yanks, we learn via numerous flashbacks of the life and times of Billy Chapel. It turns out Jane and Billy meet cute on an off-ramp. Her rental car's broken down just as he's driving his rental car into New York for a game. Jane's a freelance writer for cosmetics magazines. She's clueless of the fact that Billy's a future Hall-of-Famer because she's completely oblivious to the world of baseball.

Billy, used to vapid baseball groupies, is thrilled by Jane's intelligence and independence. Jane surprises herself by a momentary lapse into groupie-ness in the face of Billy's megastar wattage, not to mention being bowled over by the fact that underneath all that hunky-ness is humor and gentleness.

The flashbacks chronicle the relationship from its see-each-other-when-Billy's-in-town-for-games beginnings, to Billy's complete acceptance of Jane's daughter (whom she didn't tell him about for a good long while), and on into the fights and problems, and ultimately the round-peg and square-hole, war-of-the-sexes dilemma of the alpha who refuses to put the nest before the wolf pack.

And even though Billy did display a rare capacity in an alpha—the largesse and lack of knee-jerk territoriality to consider raising another male's offspring—he still insists on having his cake and eating it too. So—the team. Right Billy?

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Jane Aubrey (Kelly Preston) in "For Love of the Game."

Hold on There ...

I mentioned it was a meaningless game used as a vehicle to pitch us numerous flashbacks. Well, at the top of the seventh inning, Billy looks at the scoreboard and suddenly asks his catcher, Gus Sinski (John C. Reilly), "Were there any base runners tonight?" And Gus says, "No." Can you say: "Will Billy pitch a no-hitter?"

Earlier, the owner had asked Billy to think about whether he had anything left to prove, seeing as how he'd already secured a place for himself in Cooperstown. The great ones don't flail around, embarrass themselves, and need to be told when it's time to quit.

And so here comes a deus ex machina: If Billy pitches a no-hitter, it'll be just the Shangri-La an elite athlete hopes for—to give it his all, leave it all on the field, make his mark, go down in history, and walk away with no regrets. Is it a bit too picture-perfect? Well, sure. But this is one of the reasons we do like Hollywood.

'For Love of the Game' of 1999 steals from 1988's 'Bull Durham.'

Execution

"For Love of the Game" of 1999 steals from 1988's "Bull Durham" with its sotto voce inner and outer monologues and brain-chatter of the players (here mostly Billy's) and the reverse of the catcher-pitcher dance Costner did in the earlier film. "Durham" is the more powerful movie, so I'm inclined to say that Costner's more believable as a catcher than a pitcher, but the fact is, Costner is simply and utterly baseballic. Baseballeriffic.

Costner and Preston's chemistry together is as outstanding as the chemistry between Costner and Susan Sarandon in "Durham," because—pfffffft—what actress wasn't going to have major chemistry with Costner in his baseball-portraying prime?

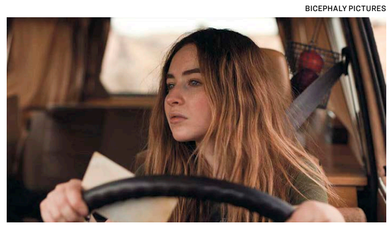
Probably, if you interviewed couples out on a movie date after seeing "For Love of the Game," the guys would say it's a dude movie and the gals would swear it's a chick flick. And they'd both be right. Which is normally a difficult party trick to pull off, but not that difficult if the no-hitter game allows the alpha dog to tie a neat bow, leave the pack behind, and choose the nest. Bingo. Everybody's happy.

FILM REVIEW

A Homeless-Teen Tale

MARK JACKSON

BICEPHALY PICTURES



Nola (Sabrina Carpenter) in "The Short History of the Long Road."

'The Short History of the Long Road'

Director
Ani Simon-Kennedy

Starring
Sabrina Carpenter, Steven Ogg, Danny Trejo, Maggie Siff, Rusty Schwimmer, Jashaun St. John

Rated
Not Rated

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes

Release Date
In select theaters June 12, and on digital and VOD June 16

★★½☆☆

"The Short History of the Long Road" is a somewhat scant indie road movie about a father-daughter team roaming the American Southwest in a cozily appointed VW Westphalia RV van.

Teenage Nola Frankel (Disney Channel star and pop singer Sabrina Carpenter) and her dad Clint (Steven Ogg) have been on the road since Nola was a tot.

They've evolved a nomadic van culture unto themselves, which involves money-making via loquacious Clint's handyman talents, but also more than a mild smear of chicanery: shoplifting, gas siphoning, foreclosed-house squatting, and sometimes other-people's-swimming-pools-invading. It's easy to see how necessity can come to be the mother of invention. And also stealing.

Clint's homeschooled Nola and handed down his love of libraries (free books). And for a while it's real nice. Sort of a quieter, kinder, much less criminally oriented, dad-daughter version of "Thelma & Louise": traveling in a desert landscape with fun radio music. And Steven Ogg's trademark Canadian goofiness and immense delight in making his hair look as silly as possible.

I was thoroughly enjoying Steve-as-Clint's performance, especially his quiet monologue about how a 100-pound Pacific octopus can sneak through a cherry-tomato-sized aperture, eat a fish from another tank, and then sneak back into its own tank, but then Clint abruptly exits stage right, and young Nola is left to fend for herself.

She soon sees her choices clearly: get taken care of by charity, or do like dad and remain on society's outskirts. The third choice is to go on a quest to find mom (Maggie Siff from "Sons of Anarchy").

Post-Clint

Nola van-drifts hither and thither, like a slightly feral juvenile hermit crab seeking a shell to hole up in. She quickly ditches a foster home, pays off van repairs by working for an avuncular auto mechanic (Danny Trejo), and befriends a beautiful Oglala girl named Blue (Jashaun St. John) who stands forlornly outside the autobody shop due to home-front dad-abuse.

All in all, it's an emotionally muted environment, the most dramatic instance being when feng-shui-ing the van, Nola throws Clint's clothes into a Salvation Army bin, only to soon after get blindsided with the anguished realization that his clothes are all she has left of him—and the bin is padlocked.

Will Nola find Cheryl (mom) based on the ancient photo of the Mercury Bar that Cheryl and Clint had in Albuquerque—and get closure? Will she go to college? Will she continue to drift? Will Blue ditch her mean dad?

Too Safe

While the film captures Nola's constant, self-perpetuated miasma of shame of being kicked out of parking lots, apprehended shoplifting hotdogs, and filching leftovers from diners, it fails to stress the fact that the world is a seriously dangerous place for attractive, young, homeless teenage girls. While Nola's resourceful and knows how to avoid the child welfare system, she's underage, driving without a license, and basically penniless. She better not run afoul of law enforcement because then it'll be the long history of the short road to jail.

Also, with this drifter lifestyle, it seems logical that Nola would have been more adept at stealth. At one point, she cluelessly allows herself to get seen, in the house she's squatting in, by a crowd of aggressive male skater-punks who drain the house pool to skate in it, and then crash her squat to party on wine and weed. Had this film been one degree grittier, that's a gang rape waiting to happen right there. I'm thankful not to see such images, but with all the trafficking going on today, while already somewhat sad and dreary, it might be better to make teenage female homeless drifting look even less romantic.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

A Rule in Common: Norman Rockwell's 'Golden Rule'

ERIC BESS

Recent events concerning the death of George Floyd have unleashed anger across the United States. Peaceful protests are being conducted, but unfortunately, these are often overshadowed by the looting and rioting of a few instigators.

Everyone is expressing their anger: either at George Floyd's death, racism, the protests, or the looting and rioting. I'm of the opinion that, irrespective of race, we become what we practice. I'm left asking a potentially unanswerable question: "What are we practicing, and where will it lead us?"

Painting Freedom and Truth

I was recently reminded by Norman Rockwell's painting "Golden Rule" that, despite our differences, we have a lot in common with each other. Norman Rockwell was a 20th-century American painter and illustrator, who for 47 years painted 321 covers for The Saturday Evening Post. He, in pursuit of freedom and truth, depicted the honest nuance of American life during his time.

Race relations became tense in the mid-20th century in the United States, and Rockwell wanted to complete paintings about this issue. The Saturday Evening Post, however, had a strict policy that limited what he could paint to mostly white people, a policy that eventually caused Rockwell to leave his position at the Post for one at Look magazine.

Before he left, however, The Saturday Evening Post did begin to relax its stance on the depictions of races other than white people. One of the first multiracial images to grace the cover of the Post was Rockwell's "Golden Rule," painted and published in 1961.

A Rule in Common

In the "Golden Rule," Rockwell did his best to represent as many different ethnicities and cultures as possible. In 1955, he traveled around the world and took pictures of many different people engaging in the traditional aspects of their cultures.

He also began to read about the belief systems of different cultures and found that the golden rule was something familiar to many of them:

"I'd been reading up on comparative religion. The thing is that all major religions have the Golden Rule in Common. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Not always the same words but the same meaning," according to the Norman Rockwell Museum website.

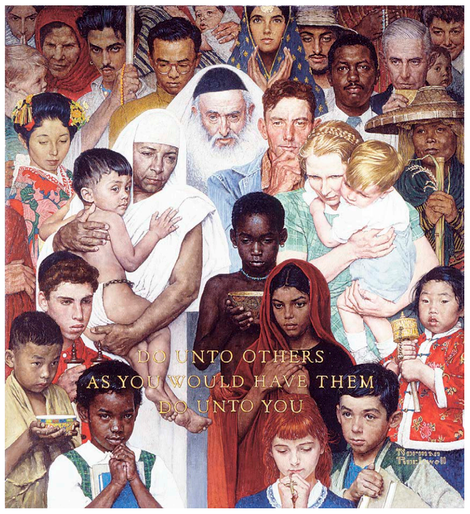
He, in pursuit of freedom and truth, depicted the honest nuance of American life during his time.

Rockwell took the information he gathered from his research, along with the pictures he took of people and cultures around the world, and decided to use it as inspiration for "Golden Rule." "He picked up a few costumes and devised some from ordinary objects in his studio, such as a lampshade as a fez. Many of Rockwell's models were local exchange students and visitors," the website states.

Shortly after revealing the painting, Rockwell talked about the people he used as models: "[The man in the upper right corner is] part Brazilian, part Hungarian, I think. Then there is Choi, a Korean. He's a student at Ohio State University. Here is a Japanese student at Bennington College and here is a Jewish student. He was taking summer school courses at the Indian Hill Museum School… [The rabbi is] the retired postmaster of Stockbridge. He made a pretty good rabbi, in real life, a devout Catholic. I got all my Middle East faces from Abdalla who runs the Elm Street market, just one block from my house."

Rockwell was inspired to depict as many different representations of people as possible. He found, in his community, people of all races and backgrounds and united them under a statement that has served as a cornerstone for compassion: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." He not only represented this idea, but, in representing it, he also practiced it.

COURTESY OF NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM COLLECTION



"The Golden Rule" by Norman Rockwell. Oil on canvas. Cover of the April 1, 1961 Saturday Evening Post. Copyright 1961 SEPS: Licensed by Curtis Publishing, Indianapolis, Ind.

The Practice of Kindness

Seeing all of these beautiful figures of different ethnicities and backgrounds painted with respect and united by a statement encouraging compassion stirs within me a joyful solace. It also makes me consider the Confucian saying, "Don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you."

Here, we have what I'll call both active and nonactive kindness. As human beings, we want respect, and we don't want disrespect. We all want to be respected and heard despite our differences. We also don't want ourselves or our families disrespected because of perceived differences. Where is freedom when difference is absent and/or suppressed?

As a black, representational artist, I have to consider color daily. I'm a black person with a lighter complexion, and I've lived in a liminal space where my lightness brings my blackness into question, but I'm never considered light enough to be white. The absence of clearly belonging to one race or the other, initially agonizing, resulted in my trying to live by a creed of personal authenticity for which I am now grateful.

The consideration of color in my art is also the process of my trying for harmony among the colors I choose, a harmony I want extended through the colors that make up the human race, an assemblage of lights and darks of muted orange—the paint color that is the basis of all flesh tones.

For me, Rockwell's painting serves as not only a call to action, a directive, but also a reminder of what we deeply desire irrespective of our differences: kindness. What else is there to practice other than what we wish for ourselves?

For more information about Norman Rockwell and his work, please visit the virtual Norman Rockwell Museum, as the museum proper is currently closed due to the lockdown.

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 I explore in my series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.

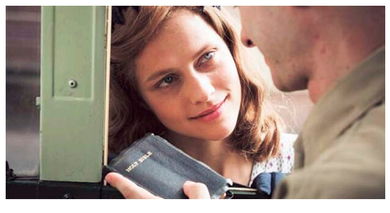
Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

Conviction and Selflessness Amid the Horrors of War

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUMMIT ENTERTAINMENT

Medic Desmond Doss (Andrew Garfield) pulls Sgt. Howell (Vince Vaughn) to safety in "Hacksaw Ridge."

The heroic 77th Infantry Division climbing Hacksaw Ridge.



(Left) Teresa Palmer and Andrew Garfield in "Hacksaw Ridge."

(Below) Medic Desmond Doss (Andrew Garfield) saved 75 lives in the battle of Hacksaw Ridge.

'Hacksaw Ridge'

Director
Mel Gibson

Starring
Andrew Garfield, Sam Worthington, Luke Bracey

Running Time
2 hours, 19 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
Nov. 4, 2016 (USA)

★★★★½

IAN KANE

Following his directorial successes of "Braveheart" (1995), "The Passion of the Christ" (2004), and "Apocalypto" (2006), Mel Gibson jumped back into the director's seat in 2016 with World War II film "Hacksaw Ridge."

The film follows the real-life heroics of Desmond Doss (Andrew Garfield), who was patriotic enough to enlist in World War II but who wouldn't touch a rifle because of his rock-solid religious beliefs as a Seventh-day Adventist.

The film opens in small-town Virginia, where we see Doss's tumultuous family life (the young Doss is played by Darcy Bryce), complete with alcoholic father Tom (Hugo Weaving), who when drunk abuses Doss's mother, Bertha (Rachel Griffiths). In one touching scene, the young Doss asks his mother why his father hates the family, and she remarks that he doesn't hate them; he hates himself. Later, it is revealed that Tom is suffering from issues related to his service during World War I.

Despite this, Doss and his brother Harold "Hal" (Nathaniel Buzolic) volunteer for military service. (Desmond joins the Army as a combat medic, while Hal enlists in the Navy.) Doss falls for a local nurse, Dorothy (Teresa Palmer), who isn't too happy to see her new beau sign up for military service. Knowing what a kind soul Doss is, she marries him before he is shipped off to basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Needless to say, Doss's religious beliefs and open passivity toward violence don't go over too well with either his superiors or his peers. To them, his status as conscientious objector is viewed as cowardly.

Doss endures beatings and unfair cleaning duties because of his beliefs, but somehow he manages to persevere despite the constant abuse—even when faced with an eventual court-martial. His father manages to sober up enough to pull a last-minute favor for Doss, which spares him the court-martial.

The second half of the film is mainly set in the titular location on the island of Okinawa. Doss and his unit, part of the 77th Infantry Division, have to climb a sheer 400-foot-high cliff using some thick cargo netting that has been established there. If that isn't exhausting enough, when they manage to get to the top, they are almost immediately attacked by the Japanese soldiers, who have already dug in. Soon it's a blood-drenched plateau.

Through their valiant efforts, Doss's platoon begins to make some ground against the Japanese. However, the Americans soon discover that they've underestimated the number of enemy soldiers they're facing when it is revealed that their foes have tunnel networks running underneath the ridge. In one spectacular scene, the Japanese mount a massive Banzai Charge (human wave attack) that pushes the Americans back to the edge of the cliff.

In spite of this setback, Private Desmond Doss selflessly scuttles back and forth between the cliffside and battlefield, saving the lives of 75 wounded American soldiers (as well as a few Japanese soldiers for good measure). He managed this amazing feat without ever touching a gun. Well, that's not entirely true: He does grab a rifle and roll it up into a blanket in order to transport his wounded direct superior, Sergeant Howell (a game Vince Vaughn), out of danger.

The film does a great job of conveying the horrors and tragedies of war. In fact, the combat scenes are almost a little too gratuitous in some parts. Personally, I felt the romantic subplot was so well done that it was too bad Teresa Palmer wasn't given more screen time. (She's a fantastic actress.)

The rest of supporting cast of "Hacksaw Ridge" is excellent as well, and it's entertaining to see the idiosyncrasies of Doss's unit. Although when push comes to shove, they perform their duties (and then some).

Gibson regards Desmond Doss with the utmost respect—and rightfully so. It's not every day that we get to see an unabashed display of conviction and selflessness in a single human vessel.

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

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

A Costume Drama of Love and Ambition

Fans of costume dramas should look no further than this tale of ambition and ill-fated love.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS

'The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex' from 1939

Can a queen be a woman, too? Queen Elizabeth I endures this dilemma in the Warner Bros. 1939 costume drama "The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex." This Technicolor movie brought 16th-century England to life with opulent costumes and lavish sets, earning five Academy Award nominations.

Our question, however, is whether movies made over 80 years ago entertain modern audiences. Through streaming services, home media, and Turner Classic Movies, classic films are now widely available. Most people need only see the right old movie to appreciate Hollywood's Golden Age. A good place to find your good-film fit is within a favorite genre. Fans of costume dramas should look no further than this tale of ambition and ill-fated love.

Queen Elizabeth I (Bette Davis) and Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex (Errol Flynn), in "The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex."

A Queen Must Do Her Duty

At 63, the aging Queen Elizabeth I (Bette Davis) has long been England's sole ruler, but she deeply loves Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex (Errol Flynn). When he returns from military victory with public adoration, the queen tells adviser Sir Francis Bacon (Donald Crisp) that she must put royal duties above her feelings for Essex. Upon Essex's arrival in court, she denounces his profitless military victory, which burdened England's overtaxed people. Offended when she promotes two comrades above him, he angrily leaves London.

While Essex is away, Elizabeth pines for him. She is tormented by their mutual pride, her age, and suspicion that he prefers the beautiful Lady Penelope (Olivia de Havilland). She can banish all mirrors from her sight but cannot forget their age discrepancy. She longs to bring Robert back without humbling herself. When she learns of her troops' defeat in Ireland, she summons Essex for military advice.

When Essex returns to London, Penelope seeks his affection, but he loves Elizabeth. As soon as Elizabeth and Robert are alone, they renew their romance, but their wooing is interspersed with as much fighting. Elizabeth persuades Essex to take a military post in London, safe from arrows as well as from malicious plotting by enemies at court who want them parted. However, Essex soon accepts those enemies' challenge to attack Ireland. Before he leaves, they swear their love, Elizabeth giving him a ring which guarantees forgiveness.

The lovely Olivia de Havilland plays Lady Penelope, the rival for the Earl of Essex's affections.

The Facts and Fashion of History

Many characters in this film, including Queen Elizabeth I, Robert Devereux, and Sir Francis Bacon, are real historical figures. The story was based on Maxwell Anderson's Broadway play "Elizabeth the Queen," which included fictionalized romantic elements from the 1695 novel "The Secret History of the Most Renowned Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, by a Person of Quality." Robert Devereux was a favorite courtier of Queen Elizabeth, although there is no proof that they were lovers before his cruel execution for treason.

Queen Elizabeth I has been frequently depicted on stage and screen. Her long, powerful reign made her legendary, and her status as the Virgin Queen has piqued curiosity for generations. Although she never married, historians speculate whether some of her favorites, such as Robert Dudley, who was Essex's stepfather, were lovers. This film's story focuses on the centuries-old legend about a ring of forgiveness and intercepted messages.

Although many events in this story are fictional, the lavish depiction of the Elizabethan court truly brings Shakespearean England to life. Historical architectural features like large fireplaces and opulent chairs, and authentic details like quills and swords, create an authentic setting in which Queen Elizabeth and her court come to life. The costumes feature period details, and many of the actors resemble the actual people they are playing.

Many thought Bette Davis, at 31, too young to play the queen. However, she physically transformed into the aging monarch by shaving her hairline two inches back to imply baldness under her red wigs and replacing her own eyebrows with tiny drawn-on ones. Her heavily powdered face replicated the ghostly makeup Elizabeth wore. She further conveyed age by walking stiffly and making her voice harsh. The heavy gowns were stifling under the hot lights, but this great actress wore them with the ease of Good Queen Bess herself.

Love and Animosity

This film was the second and last romantic pairing of Bette Davis and Errol Flynn. Surprisingly, Olivia de Havilland, Flynn's famous screen sweetheart in seven movies, plays a supporting role in this film, while his love interest is Bette Davis. Although Miss Davis was only one year older than her co-star, her character is over 30 years older. Romances in which the woman is significantly older were rare in classic films, in which the men were usually older. However, this story's May-September romance is very endearing.

Few couples depicted in film have as tumultuous a relationship as Elizabeth and Essex. They love each other deeply, but each is headstrong and proud. The strength and stubbornness that each cherishes in the other causes frequent arguments about politics and foreign policies. They truly have a love-hate relationship, with fondness turning to loathing in a moment. This animosity was not difficult for the actors to achieve, since Bette Davis was disappointed at the casting of Errol Flynn as Essex instead of Laurence Olivier. Thus, their relationship was tense during filming.

Errol Flynn as Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, a historical figure who is cast in a fictionalized romance.

'The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex'

Director
Michael Curtiz

Starring
Bette Davis, Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Donald Crisp, and Alan Hale

Running Time
1 hour, 46 minutes

Rated
Not Rated

Release Date
Nov. 11, 1939 (USA)

★★★★★

Although Robert's rebelliousness infuriates Elizabeth, she loves him because he alone treats her like a woman, not a queen—defying her, fearlessly contradicting her, turning his back on her, and even playfully shoving her. Essex loves Queen Elizabeth for her strong character and determination, seeing past her age. They share a mutual love for England, but that national loyalty divides them, since they have different beliefs about political policies. Ultimately, the very things that unite them separate them, making this a compelling, moving, yet tragic love story.

Duty Before Desire

The moral of this story is that leaders must put duty before their personal desires. That duty is especially hard for royalty, who inherit rather than choose positions. Queen Elizabeth and Robert Devereux are parted forever for England's sake. Essex knows that he would destroy Elizabeth by sharing her throne, since he would try to impose his own governmental ideas. Elizabeth knows that England needs her as its ruler, so she must forego her personal desire to marry Essex.

Can this film be enjoyed by modern viewers? Its historical setting was centuries old in 1939, so it doesn't contain cultural references that can date a film or that 21st-century audiences might not understand. The vibrant Technicolor footage is more familiar to modern viewers than the black-and-white cinematography of many vintage films. (Don't be confused by the original black-and-white trailer; the film itself is indeed "thrillingly filmed in Technicolor.")

In addition, the film stars iconic performers like Bette Davis and Errol Flynn, whom many may recognize at least by name. Even if unfamiliar with them, anyone who enjoys dramatic acting will appreciate their dynamic performances in this movie.

Made 81 years ago, this film is just as entertaining and inspiring today as in 1939. The moving story of ill-fated romance between dynamic historical figures jumps out of history books into a dramatic, albeit fictionalized, story of love, ambition, and personal sacrifices that good rulers must make for their countries.

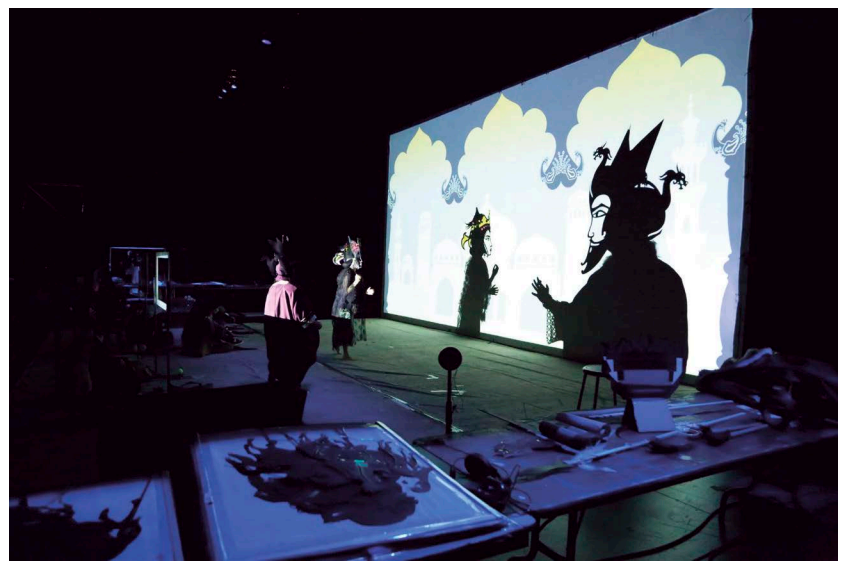
Tiffany Brannan is an 18-year-old opera singer, Hollywood historian, travel writer, film blogger, vintage fashion expert, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.

THEATER REVIEW

Spellbinding Live-Action Video of Ancient Persian Epic Poem

ALL PHOTOS BY FICTIONVILLE STUDIO

A scene from "Feathers of the Fire: A Persian Epic" with Zaul, the hero, and the sea monster.



A backstage look at the production, showing a live actor performing.

"Feathers of Fire: A Persian Epic" is like a Disney fairy tale. It's such an engrossing cinematic spectacle—exhilarating journeys, giant monsters, kings and queens, larger-than-life heroes, lovers lost and found, and an enchanting story about the triumph of love against all odds—that you'll forget you're watching a puppet show. That's because "Feathers" is really more than an ordinary puppet show.

The ancient tale is an escape into another world and another time, told using specially designed shadow puppets, masks, costumes, and animated backdrops.

Originally presented as a play at the Brooklyn Art Museum (BAM) in 2016, "Feathers of Fire" has been transformed into a live-animation video by Fictionville Studio, and is now available for streaming on Vimeo.

Created and directed by Hamid Rahmanian, a filmmaker and visual artist (who once worked for the Walt Disney Company), the silver-screen film recalls Disney movies such as "The Lion King" and "The Jungle Book." The story, which has hints of "Romeo and Juliet," is taken from the "Shahnameh" ("The Book of Kings"), an ancient Persian epic poem written around the late 10th century by the Persian poet Ferdowsi.

In 2013, Rahmanian adapted a portion of the epic into a beautifully illustrated book for a modern audience, and then decided to extend the adaptation into an entrancing theatrical puppet show, which played at the BAM in 2016. He has turned it into a video presentation available for all.

An Ancient Tale Comes Alive

"Feathers" begins with the birth of Zaul, an unwanted albino son, who is abandoned by his father because of his unusual appearance. Zaul is rescued and raised by a magical bird, the Simorgh. When Zaul returns to his homeland, Simorgh gives him three magical golden feathers to burn in case he ever needs her, which he does when he falls in love with the forbidden Rudabeh.

The ancient tale is an escape into another world and another time, told using specially designed shadow puppets, masks, costumes, and animated backdrops. The images transport us effortlessly to charming fantasy landscapes: raging rain-swept seas, soaring mountains, hordes of marching soldiers—all of which necessitate split-second timing with light and video settings that are projected through 160 shadow puppets (created from cardboard and colored celluloid) and over 100 digitally animated scenes.

Unlike in most shadow theater, the imagery is not limited to 2D projections. Actors, in compelling performances, wear masks so that their bodies are in silhouette and their heads appear to be those of the shadow puppets.

While the puppets and masks are stunning, the real bewitching aspect of "Feathers of Fire" lies in the vast collection of backdrops and digital projections that provide a sense of depth, movement, and detail. From city to country to fauna and flowers in rainbow colors to explosive fireworks, from astronomical saucers spinning in the heavens to towering waves crashing and cresting on the sea, every image is more breathtaking than the last.

Viewers not only can watch stunning entertainment but can also get a glimpse of what happens behind the camera and enjoy the process of creation as the puppet extravaganza is prepared for presentation to a theater audience. Rahmanian and a talented troupe of artists have collaborated on this marvelous spectacle.

Delivering the silhouetted shadows is Larry Reed, and the dazzling technical magic is by Mohammad Talani, who programmed the digital animations, backgrounds, and choreography for the two projectors that heighten the illusion of movement and depth. The film also features an evocative original musical score by Loga Ramin Torkian and Azam Ali.

Although "Feathers of Fire" must have been extraordinary when it was first presented on a theatrical stage, it's hard to believe that it could have been more spellbinding than it is in this extraordinary video stream. Indeed, because everything in the film moves so seamlessly and realistically, "Feathers" may be more compelling and more seductive on screen than it was on stage.

'Feathers of Fire: A Persian Epic'

Tickets:
$4.95 at Vimeo

Running Time
1 hour, 13 minutes

Available:
Through June 30

As an arts writer and movie/theater/opera critic, Betty Mohr has been published in the Chicago Sun-Times, The Chicago Tribune, The Australian, The Dramatist, the SouthtownStar, the Post Tribune, The Herald News, The Globe and Mail in Toronto, and other publications.