WEEK 34, 2020
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ARTS & CULTURE

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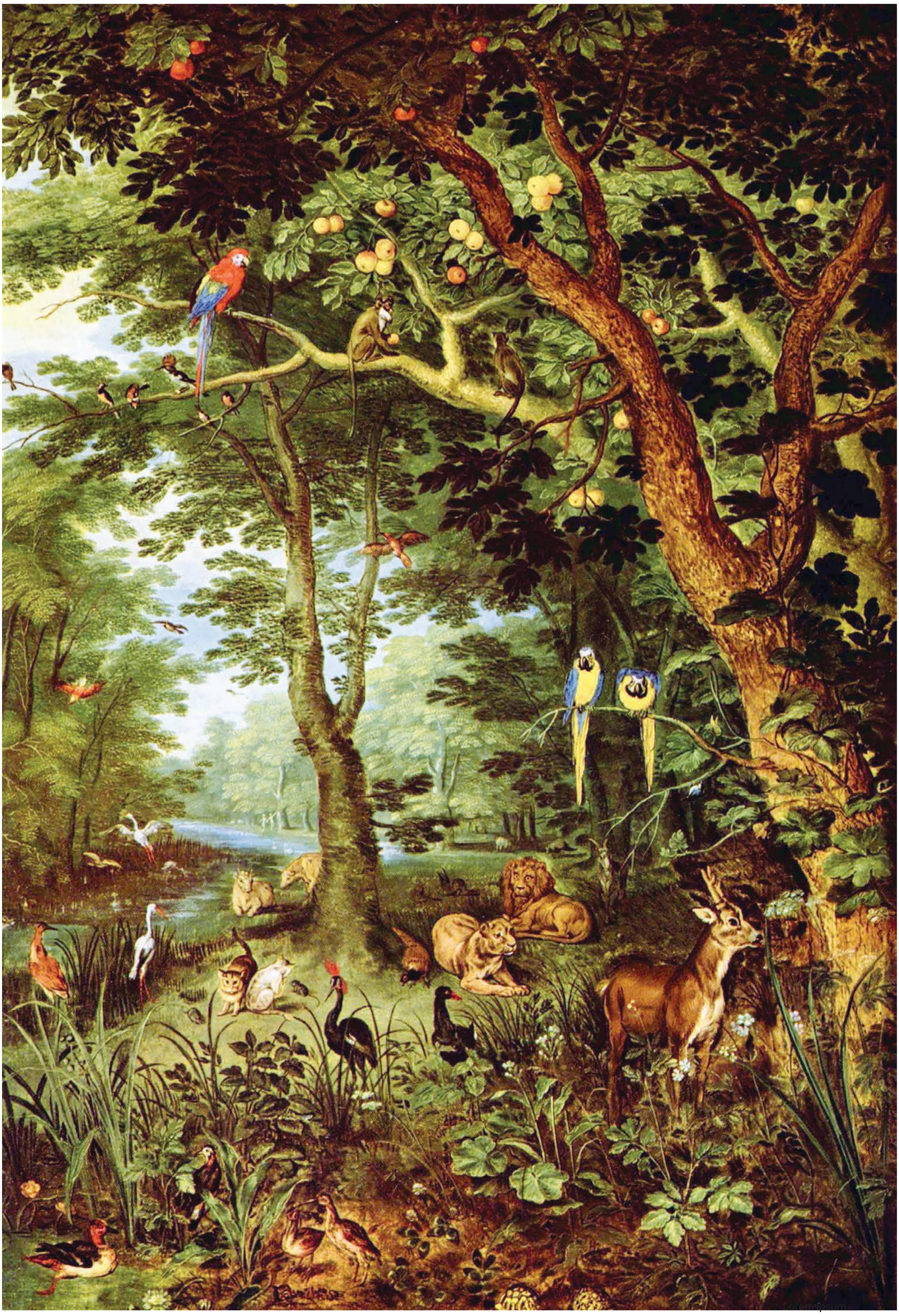

All Good in the Garden

A metaphor for our ultimate desire...4

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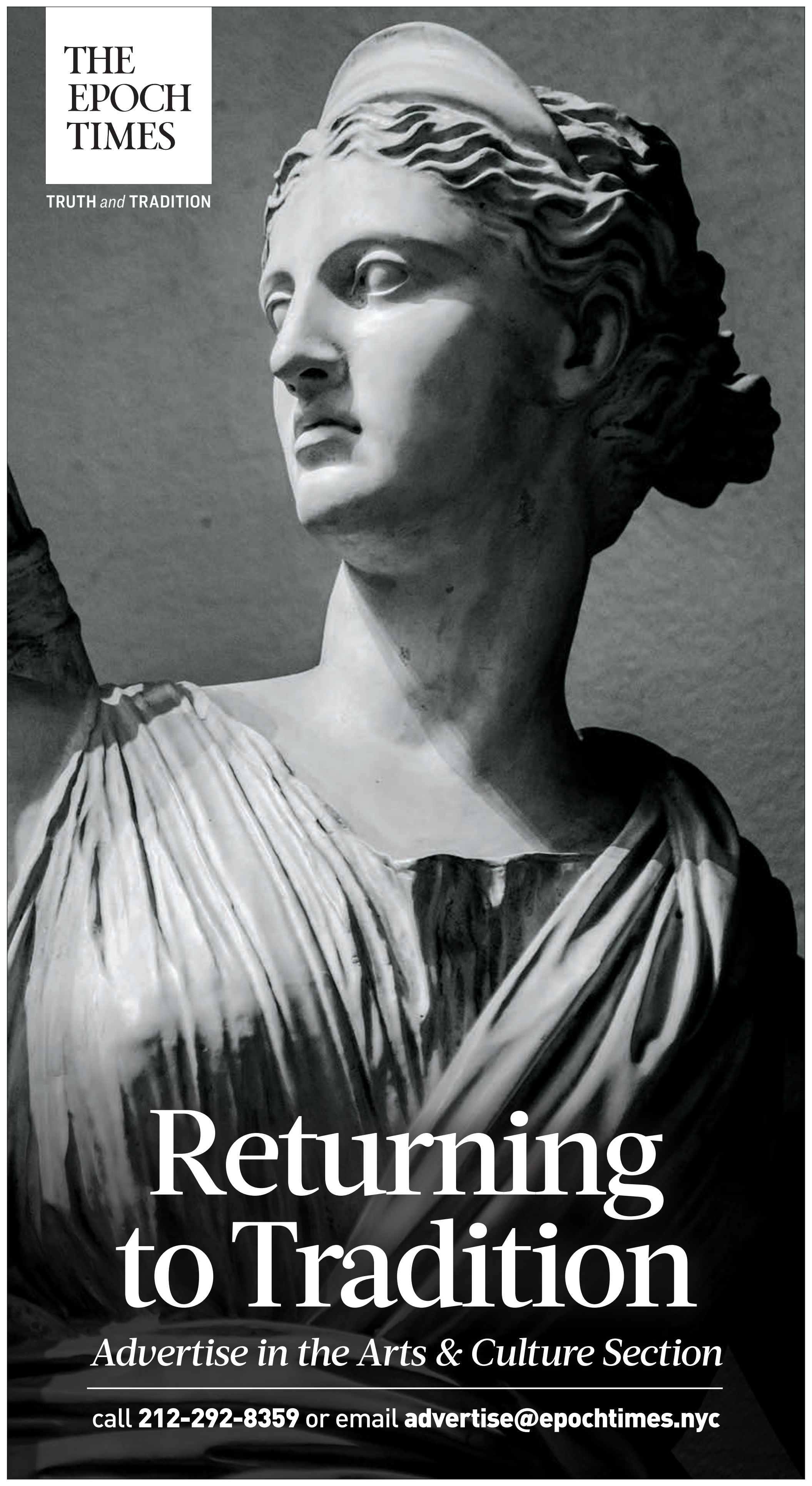
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LITERATURE

WORD PLAY

EXCURSIONS INTO ENGLISH

JEFF MINICK

Enough. Enough of COVID-19. Enough of the Marxist rioting in Portland. Enough of "cancel culture," corporations and celebrities embracing political correctness at every turn, and sports teams taking a knee during the national anthem for reasons no one can discern anymore.

No more, my friends. Not today.

It's time to have some fun.

It's August, and some of you will take your pleasure in backyard barbeques with friends and family. Where permitted, some of you will hie yourselves off to the shore or the mountains. Some will pack kit and kids into the van, and slip away for the weekend to the cool creek and broad meadows of Grandpa's farm.

As for me, I intend today to wade in the delightful waters of that most remarkable of seas: the English language.

DAVID P BAILEYS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Join me in the beautiful sea of words.

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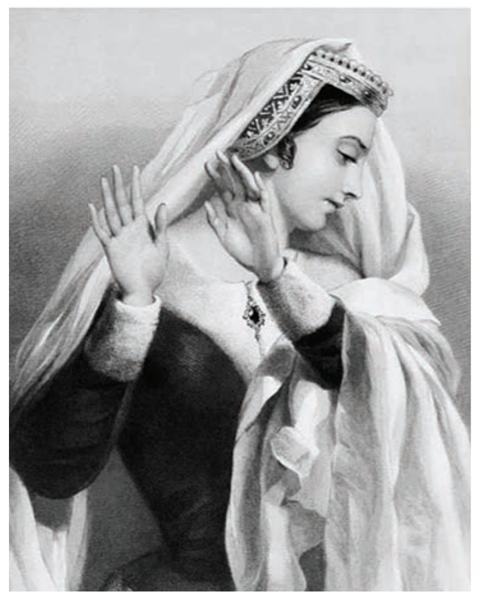
Lady Anne utters a delightful insult to wicked Richard III: "Out of my sight! Thou dost infect my eyes." J.W. Wright's drawing from "The Heroines of Shakespeare" by Charles Heath.

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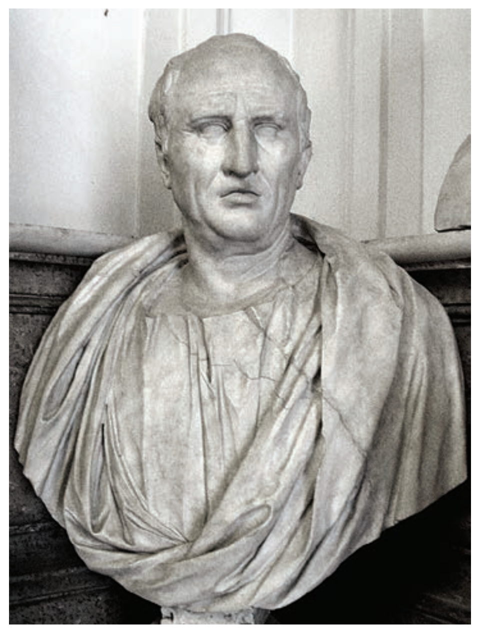

A bust of Cicero, before A.D. 50. Cicero is considered one of Rome's greatest orators and prose stylists. The Capitoline Museums, Rome.

> In my imagination, I wade in the roiling tides of this immense ocean of the English language.

Amusements

If we leave aside archaic words, and depending on which source we believe in regard to numbers, English has approximately 171,000 words available for usage. If we Google "How many different words does the average person use every day?" we find debate about this question as well, though most experts believe that we know the meanings of 30,000 to 40,000 words, but typically use only 5,000 in most of our speech and writing.

This last limitation spills over into the classroom and publishing outfits. It is common for editors, teachers, and writers to remind others to use short, everyday words in their essays and compositions, contending that long or unusual words will either confuse readers or give the impression that the author is showboating.

Too bad, in a way.

In "The Best Words," Robert Hartwell Fiske (1948–2016), once the editor of "Vocabula Review" and author of several books on language, celebrates unusual words that might liven up any conversation. Here are just a few of them.

You're at a party speaking to a friend about the ridiculous edicts of your governor, and your friend comments on the dangers of these edentulous (toothless) laws. You comment that such is life in a kakistocracy (government by the worst, most unscrupulous, or least qualified citizens.) The pulchritudinous (having great physical beauty, comely) young woman who has joined your circle and whom you've studied throughout the evening (you are, after all, a philogynist, one with a fondness for women)—does she look bewildered or impressed? Then she says, "The governor's circle of mephitic (poisonous, noxious, having a foul odor) advisers are just as much at fault as he," and you realize you've just met the girl you want to marry.

Word Wit

Fiske plays with words straight up, offering definitions and then giving readers examples from books, magazines, and newspapers.

Not so with lexicographer Peter Bowler. In "The Superior Person's Book of Words," he taps unusual words on the shoulder and then dances with them. His definitions are clear and sharp, but his examples of usage are intended to amuse himself and his readers.

"Famulus n. A medieval sorcerer's apprentice. A pleasing appellation for your husband when he is helping you in the kitchen by peeling potatoes, drying the dishes, etc.—or when you are entertaining. 'Come into the living room and make yourselves comfortable while I have my famulus mix some drinks.'"

"Fabulist n. An elegant euphemism for liar."

"Evanescent adj. Fleeting, vanishing, impermanent. When your wife's weekly number is the Grand Prize-winner in the lottery but you admit to her that you omitted to buy her ticket that week, her effervescence is evanescent."

Note Bowler's tart style, which prevails through this book and the others in "The Superior Person's" series.

Communications 101: Precision

Unlike Bowler, many of us are often sloppy with our words.

Take, for example, the use of the word "like," which many, especially young people, inject throughout a conversation and which is more contagious than any virus. "I was, like, in the store," says Sally. "And like, this guy wasn't wearing, you know, a mask, so I was like, what's up with you, dude? Don't you, like, read the sign on the door or like, listen to the news?"

Arrrggghhhh.

Once, young people from the ancient Greeks to American politicians of the 19th century were taught and valued the tools of rhetoric and oratory. Today, those skills gather dust in the attic of education, a strange fate given that we live in "The Age of Communication."

We may lack the training of a Demosthenes, Cicero, or Lincoln, but thinking before we speak and editing our written words, even those in emails to friends, allows us to communicate with grace and clarity.

Digs, Rebuffs, and Put-Downs

Ours is the age of insult, both in the public square and on social media. We hurl out imprecations and barbs faster than a tennis machine can spit out yellow balls.

Unfortunately, we see a lack of style at work in this arena as well. Our verbal slings and arrows are all too often reduced to a handful of words, the ugliest of which derive from Anglo-Saxon, short, nasty shots that reveal us as jackanapes or popinjays.

This crude, degraded language may offend another, but certainly it offends our rich language.

If we must prick an offender with a verbal rapier, let's look to the godfather of insults: William Shakespeare. Here are just a few of his many creative put-downs:

> "Thou art a boil, a plague sore, an embossed carbuncle." ("King Lear")
> "Out of my sight! Thou dost infect my eyes." ("Richard III")
> "A pox o' your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog!" ("The Tempest")

Surely, if we put our minds to work and our pens to paper, we could conjure up similar amusing jibes and defamations suited to our time.

Ebullient Elegance

Earlier this year, I read and reviewed David Lane's play "Dido: The Tragedy of a Woman." That review opened with these lines:

"What kind of a nut writes a play about antiquity using blank verse, sentences as convoluted as any in Shakespeare, and words which, outside of Elizabethan theater, have sounded in no human ear in hundreds of years?

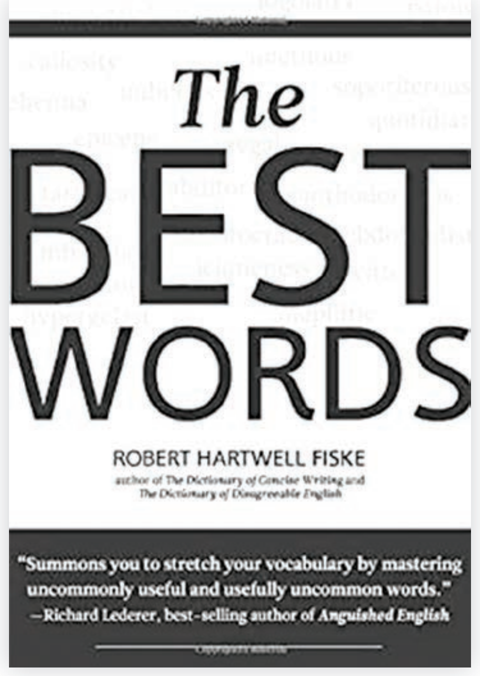
"Apparently, my kind of nut."

Here is a guy enthralled by the beauty of the English language.

Look at this sample of Lane's verse-play, taken from the scene where Nissus speaks to Aeneas after the gods have ordered him to leave Carthage and Dido, and resume his quest for a homeland:

> "Aeneas—if thou art the man and not
> The region ghost that quits its grave to live
> Again calamity—thou wannest white
> As alabaster; sweat thy tangled brow
> Bedews, as if my poring eyes might read
> Therein disaster. Is't the Kindly Ones
> Who shake the hissing hair have lately paid
> Thee sudden courtesy and made thy eyes
> So start and wilder? Find thy tongue and tell,
> For I have care to know thee whole or ill."

Not everyone's cup of coffee, to be sure, but in "Dido" I found an exuberant love of our mother tongue whose high spirits were infectious.


The BEST WORDS
ROBERT HARTWELL FISKE
"Summons you to stretch your vocabulary by mastering uncommonly useful and usefully uncommon words." —Richard Lederer, best-selling author of Anguished English

"The Best Words" by Robert Hartwell Fiske celebrates unusual words.

Waters of Exhilaration

Earlier, I compared the English language to a sea made up of sounds, syllables, and sentences in which we can immerse ourselves time and again. I like to imagine language in this way, an ocean whose sandy beach is always glittering and white with sunshine, whose blue waves invite us to kick off our shoes, roll up our trousers, and wade into waters that never fail to delight, a shore where we can pick up and marvel at new words like a child finding a sand dollar.

There are no storms on this coast, no black clouds, no tsunamis or hurricanes. There is only the sweetness of exploration, the beauty and pleasure of words. In my imagination, I wade in the roiling tides of this immense ocean, seeing what the waves bring to shore and taking immense delight when something new or different attracts my attention.

"Come on in, everyone," I want to shout. "The water's fine."

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.

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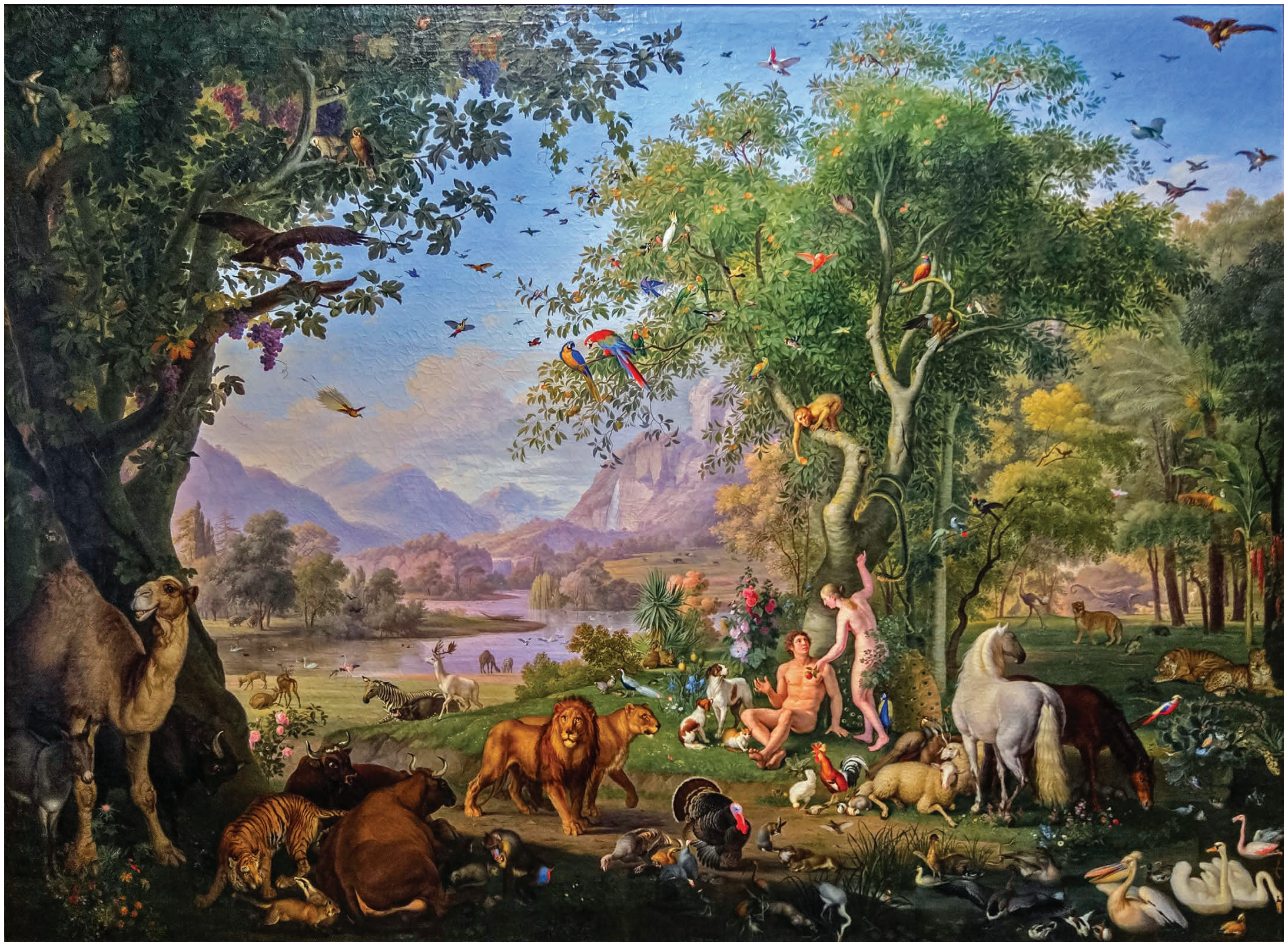

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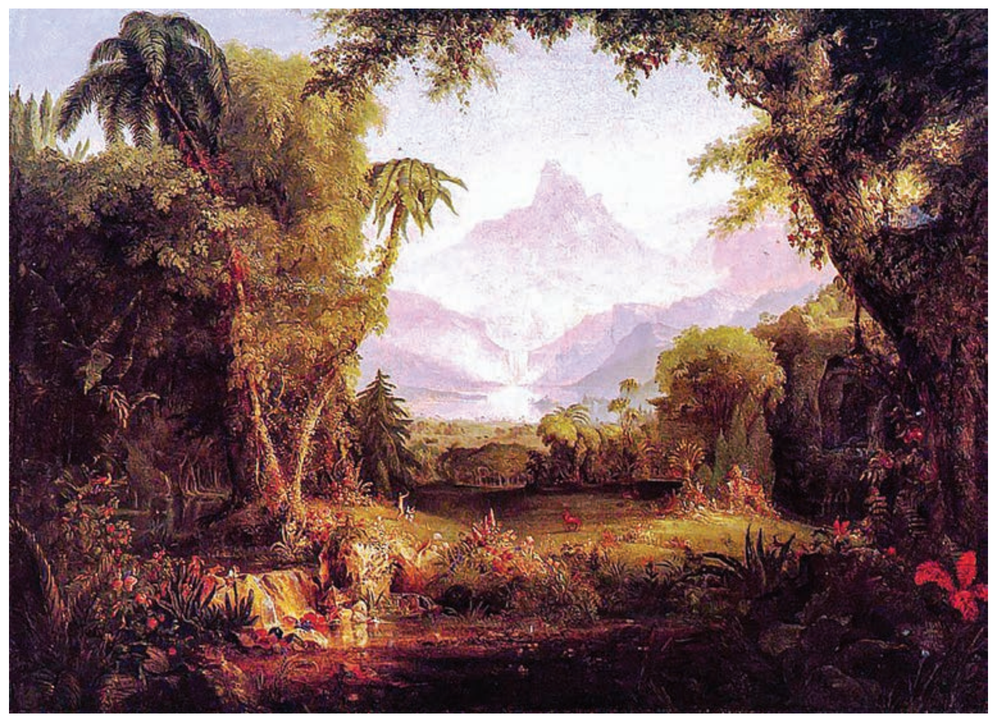
"Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden," between 1800 and 1829, by Johann Wenzel Peter. Vatican Pinacoteca.



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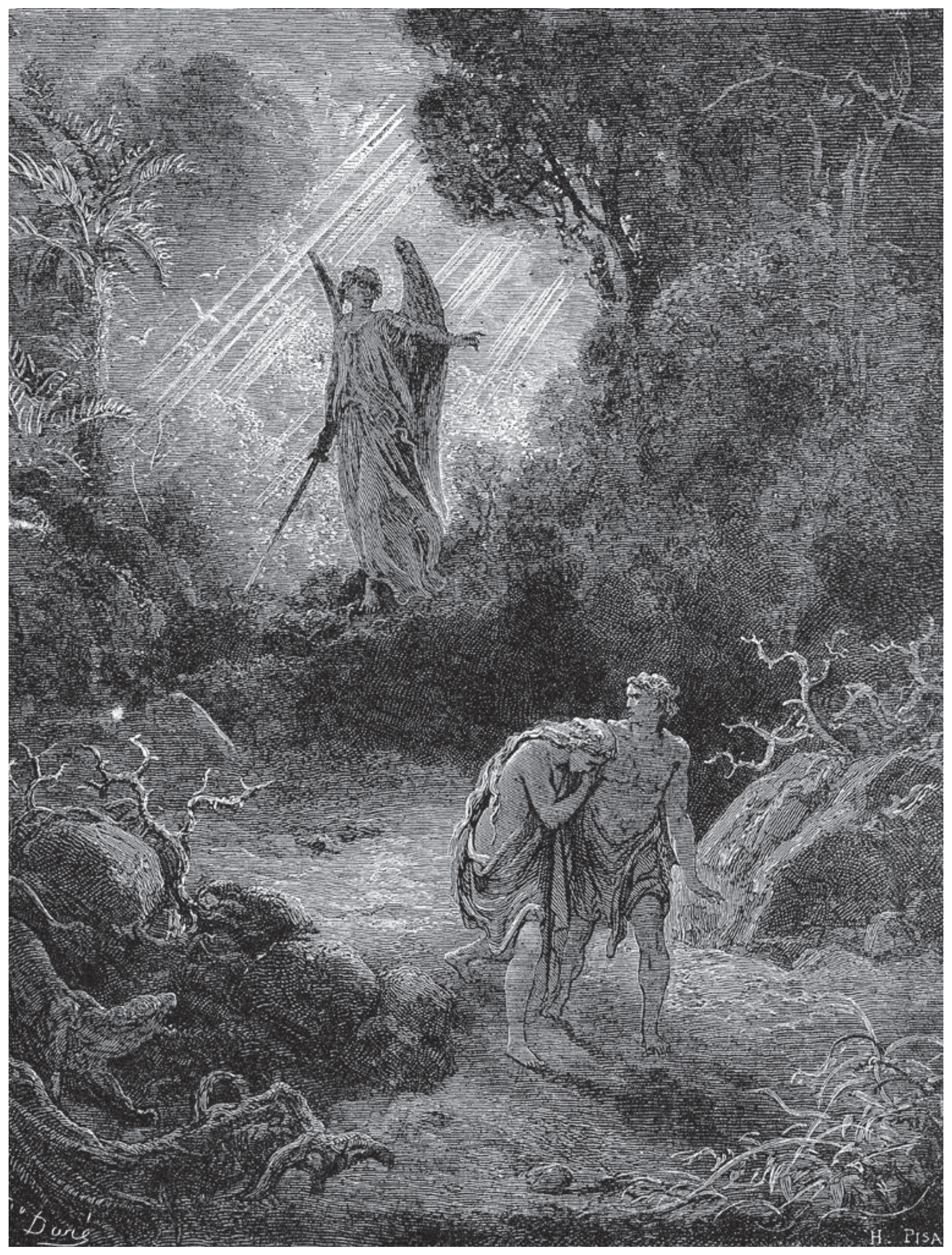
"The Garden of Eden," circa 1828, by Thomas Cole. Amon Carter Museum of American Art.



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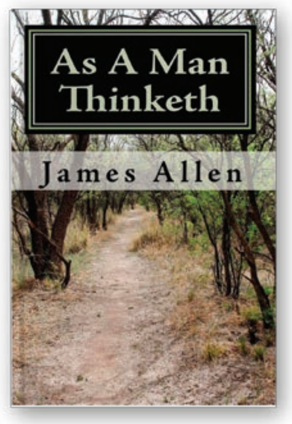
"The Expulsion of Adam and Eve From Paradise," 1866, by Gustave Doré for "La Grande Bible de Tours."

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

All Good in the Garden



Author James Allen sees the mind as something to cultivate.

JAMES SALE

Metaphor is a primary way through which we understand the world; we cannot really know what anything really is except by way of comparing it with something else.

Aristotle observed: "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor; it is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in the dissimilar." That is why, of course, we rate poets so highly. As preeminent writers, they more than any other human beings have the gift of coining (there, another metaphor) fresh images expressing the similarity in the dissimilar. In other words, they expand our understanding of reality in new and luminous ways.

Essentially, using metaphors is the way we linguistically and conceptually "map" (to use another metaphor; I shall stop now drawing attention to this ubiquitous phenomenon) our reality: It provides a way of seeing that enables "things" to be not just inert things—discrete objects out there, stacked in their isolations—but meaningful "somethings," which exist in dynamic relationships of similarity and dissimilarity with other somethings.

But some metaphors seem to—and do—assume a kind of principal importance in our thinking and so in our understanding of the world. One such metaphor—and symbol—is the metaphor of the garden.

The Garden: A Symbol, a Metaphor

The importance of the garden as a way we understand the world cannot be overstated. We find in all religions, past and present, traces of the garden: the Garden of the Hesperides where Zeus married Hera, the Pure Land or Western Paradise of Buddhism, the Zen dry gardens, and of course more besides, including the Garden of Eden.

Catholic priest and author Timothy Radcliffe shares a Chinese proverb on this topic: "If a man wishes to be happy for a week, he should take a wife; if he plans happiness for a month, he must kill a pig; but if he desires happiness forever, he should plant a garden." (I am assuming the same is true for women, naturally!) But the point is that gardens are inescapably connected in our minds with paradise and states of bliss.

Now, why do I go on about metaphor here when clearly, in the first instance, it would appear that gardens are symbols? Well, the garden is a symbol, but it also functions as a metaphor because we are always using it to compare (similarities) and contrast (dissimilarities) with aspects of our reality.

Perhaps, to make this clearer, I should suggest that the greatest symbol of all is light. But immediately once we have the idea of light, we cannot help but reflect on its absence or its opposite. Indeed, we see through light, and so metaphorically we understand also that we can be "enlightened." The symbol, then, because it is so primary to our consciousness, becomes almost infinite in its metaphorical applications. And so with the garden.

In the Beginning and Our End Goal

If we return now to the starting point of Western civilization, we find a garden. It all started in a garden, the Garden of Eden. What does this mean? In the beginning, it means that human beings were—if we take the nuances from the original ancient languages—in an enclosure, a park, a place planted with trees, flowers, and herbs. In brief, a paradise where security was unquestionable, where life simply grew in its own luxuriant splendor, and where all the animals were named and under the direct control of human beings.

The thing about a garden is that it is not a wilderness, not a chaos, and not a dangerous and shifting setting, but a place of security, stability, organization, purpose, and peace. This last word, "peace," is very important as "peace of mind" is often considered to be the ultimate goal of all our strivings.

Often, too, we focus on the wrong thing to bring us this peace of mind: If only we had enough money, or power, or knowledge, then we would feel secure and this would bring us peace of mind. All the true spiritual traditions deny that money, power, and knowledge will bring us peace. On the contrary, they will entrap and destroy our very souls if we allow them to take us over: Think Dr. Faustus!

At the same time, those same spiritual traditions also assert that there is a Nirvana, or Heaven, or place where we can find the peace that passes all understanding. And we understand as well that where we are now is not where we should be. At some deep psychological and spiritual level, we feel that the world is not ideal, but that it should be; we should be in the garden.

Interestingly, it is not just religious or spiritual people who feel this. Atheists and Enlightenment thinkers do so too. To take the most famous of all, Voltaire ended his novel "Candide" with the injunction "One must cultivate one's own garden." Notice that the summit of Enlightenment wisdom is to be found in a garden: something local and near, something we have created, and not just a patch of land, a remote mountainside, or a valley or an enclave. But a garden.

This looking back to the garden is effectively looking back to perfection that we wish to regain.

The Modern Approach

At the beginning of the 20th century, the writer James Allen stated in his book "As a Man Thinketh": "Man's mind may be likened to a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it must and will bring forth. If no useful seeds are put into it, then an abundance of useless weed-seeds will fall therein, and will continue to produce their kind."

This text proleptically anticipated the whole personal development and human potential movement of the late 20th century. We now have—to take just one example from a plethora—tools like Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) that aim to reprogram the mind in order for it to be more effective, more useful, and ultimately more at peace with its own functioning. The tool, then, helps us "cultivate" our own garden of the mind. NLP does this partially through the "Linguistic" component of its process. Linguistic? Through words and how they impact us and others.

Since our Fall from The Garden, of course, we have found that peace of mind extremely elusive. We need to keep in mind at this point that the "Fall" is not an exclusive Judaic or Christian construct, a delusion that has falsely hypnotized the Western mind. For when we think about it, all serious religions believe in the Fall, or their versions of it; all religions acknowledge the imperfection of the world and desire to return to that state of paradise they consciously or intuitively recognize as being our real destiny.

Indeed, the word "religion" itself means, etymologically, to bind, or to discipline oneself so that one attains the paradisal state we were meant to have. Instead of evolution (though I do not deny aspects of its theory) and simplistic ideas of "progress," we know that there has been some aboriginal calamity that wrecked us all, and we want to know the way back.

But, of course, the cherubim with flaming swords bar our access. And instead of peace of mind, we find weeds and thorns and a wilderness all around us—certainly no garden.

Paradise on This Side of Heaven

Humans ever since have been trying to re-create this garden, this true garden where they can be and feel themselves to be their true selves. There is a hankering, a longing for it, which is perfectly captured at the end of Milton's famous poem "Paradise Lost" (Book 12, lines 641–5):

> "They looking back, all th' Eastern side beheld
> Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,
> Wav'd over by that flaming Brand, the Gate
> With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes:
> Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;"

We find, too, in Dante, that at the top of the Mount of Purgatory (Canto 28 onward) the Earthly Paradise has not been lost but is still there as the critical exit point, as it were, to heaven itself.

That reminds one of how the ancient Greeks had the Elysian Fields for the dead, although some—like Herakles—might attain heaven itself. In ancient Egyptian lore, the paradise was known as the Field of Reeds, which the scholar Jacobus Van Dijk describes as "idealized farmland," that is, a place where life is cultivated, grows, and is purposeful. A field, then, like a garden, is not a wilderness but a place that is measured, contained, and purposeful.

And this leads on to the observation that we certainly do not lack those who have deliberately sought to create and re-create literal gardens of Eden here on earth: Think of Nebuchadnezzar II's Hanging Gardens of Babylon or in 18th-century England, Capability Brown's hedge maze at Blenheim Palace, to name but two, albeit in time these gardens all decay.

But if we think for a moment about James Allen's quotation, the real gardens we want are in the mind. Here, I think, we find the greatest achievements of humanity, for surely that is what the arts are. Great art is when (to mention just three disciplines) the colors, or the sounds, or the words become gardens—metaphorically speaking—in which we can refresh our thoughts, our feelings, and our spirits through contemplation and participation in these works.

In real art there is measure, containment, and purpose: The colors have patterns, the sounds have harmonics, and the words are structured in such a way as to be the very opposite of random. Indeed, in this last case, a million monkeys with a million typewriters hitting the keys for a million years would not come close to producing one page of Shakespeare's collected works.

In this world today of increasing chaos and randomness, a focus on gardens and especially those of the mind—art—would not go amiss. We strive, we seek, we find … busyness, and so miss the mark of what a great life might be. So far as this world is concerned, the garden is the ultimate symbol of where satisfaction may be found. And if we extend its meaning metaphorically, we need to be demanding great art from our artists, composers, and poets so that we might find refreshment from all the weariness without and about us.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.

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(Left)
Considered the masterpiece of English landscape architect Capability Brown: the Marlborough Maze at Blenheim Palace.

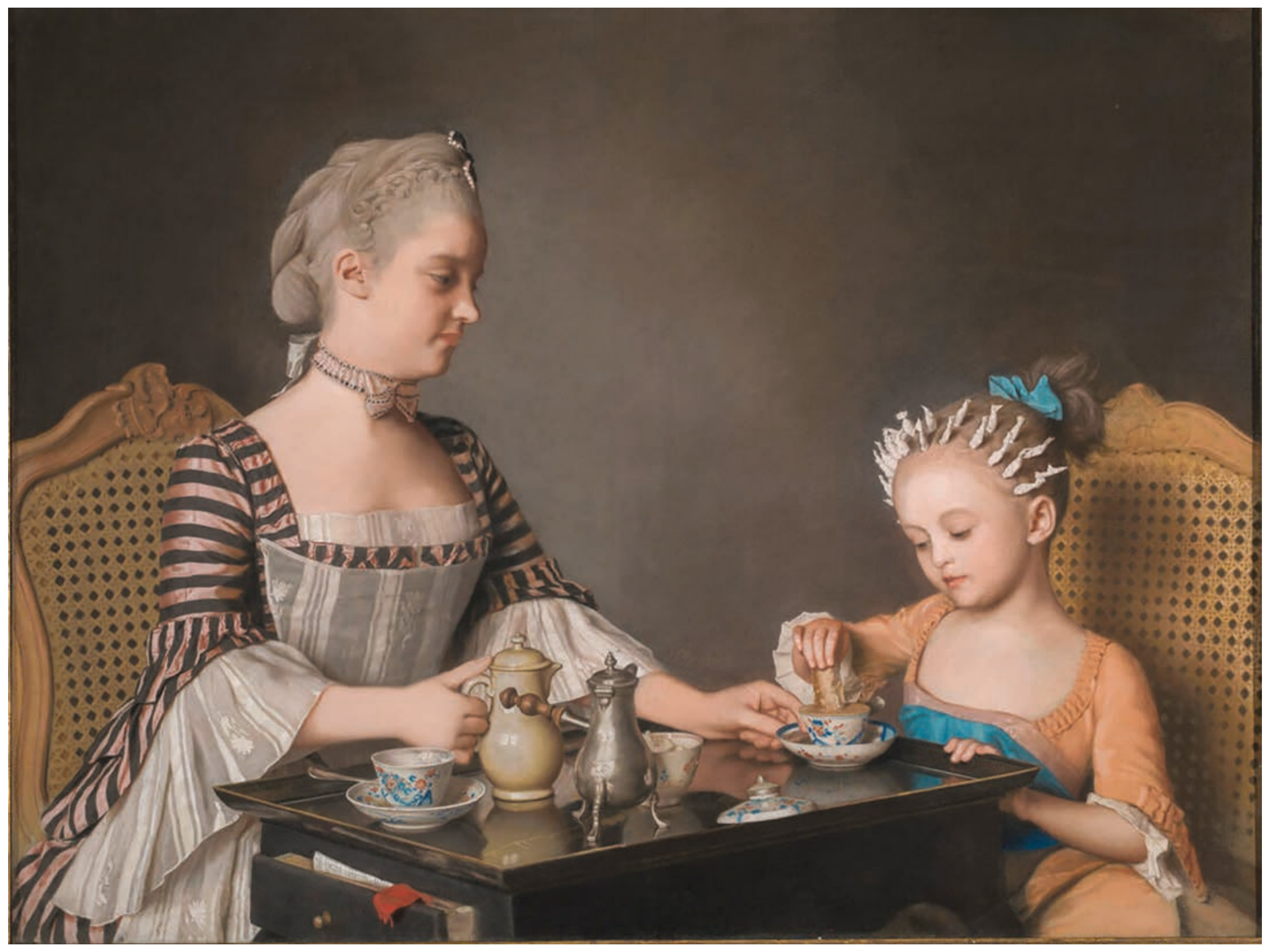
FINE ARTS

An Extra-ordinary Pastel Breakfast

'The Lavergne Family Breakfast' by Jean-Etienne Liotard

LORRAINE FERRIER

THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



"The Lavergne Family Breakfast," 1754, by Jean-Etienne Liotard. Pastel on paper stuck down on canvas; 31 1/2 inches by 41 3/4 inches. From the estate of George Pinto under the acceptance in Lieu scheme.

At first glance, everything in the pastel painting "The Lavergne Family Breakfast" seems rather ordinary: A mother and daughter sit at a table eating breakfast. Similar scenes could play out in homes across the country. But look closely and you'll see that 18th-century Swiss artist Jean-Etienne Liotard has conveyed the resplendent nuances of human nature.

Lauded as Liotard's masterpiece, "The Lavergne Family Breakfast" was acquired in May by London's National Gallery. (It had been on loan to the gallery since October 2018, the first time it was shown in public.) The pastel painting has been in Britain since 1755 when it was bought by Liotard's most important patron, Viscount Duncannon.

In the painting, an elegant lady dressed in fine silk attentively tends to her daughter. With perfect posture and poise, the mother patiently steadies the teacup and saucer with her left hand as her daughter dips a biscuit into the hot milky drink. This tender mother-daughter moment appears calm and still, yet the painting is full of tiny movements.

Every mother can relate to the scene as the mother in the painting simultaneously juggles many tasks. While steadying the teacup with her left hand, she holds a jug in her right hand as if she's just poured her daughter's drink. Her daughter, being so eager to eat, has dipped her biscuit in at once. A tiny spill can be seen to the left of the saucer.

The little girl, whose head is almost crowned by the paper curlers she's slept in, holds onto the table with her left hand as if to resist her natural impulse to hold the teacup herself, which no doubt her mother has told her is too hot for her to handle.

Liotard's attention to these minutest of details elevates the scene from the ordinary to the extraordinary, with each detail making the picture relatable to us even now, nearly 250 years later.

Liotard put his sitter's very nature onto paper.

Pastel Painting's Golden Age

Liotard worked in the golden age of pastel painting, according to Christie's website. Although pastel had been around since the Renaissance, it wasn't until the 18th century, initially in France, that the medium became popular.

Pastels use the same pigments as oil paints but are mixed with a binder and made into sticks. They appealed to the growing middle-class clientele as a cheaper alternative to oil paints. Plus, the immediacy of pastels allowed the artist to capture fleeting expressions almost as quickly as they happened, as opposed to waiting for a layer of oil paints to slowly dry.

The powdery nature of pastels made the paintings fragile, yet the refraction of light on the powder created the most luminous pictures. Pastel paintings have kept their color saturation more often than oil paintings, since pastel paintings cannot be varnished, which often discolors or damages the oil paint.

Jean-Etienne Liotard

Liotard (1702–1789) first trained as a miniaturist in Geneva and then as a portraitist in Paris. In his lifetime, he was a pastellist known across Europe for creating intimate and illuminating paintings. (He also created in oil, chalk, and enamel.) His often candid paintings were highly regarded in the courts of London, Vienna, Paris, and The Hague, and he commanded high prices for his commissions.

Nowadays, few likely know of Liotard; most of his oeuvre was made for private households and kept behind closed doors in family collections to be treasured for generations. It's this aspect of Liotard's art that is most fascinating. He put his sitter's very nature onto paper. Whereas portraits destined for the public realm often showed the sitter's standing in the world—a public persona that would be idealized—Liotard's paintings were different; he showed his sitters in private moments and noticed every little thing about them and their surroundings.

For instance, in "The Lavergne Family Breakfast," Liotard rendered the mother with dark circles under her eyes, perhaps a sign that she'd been woken early by her little girl. And he breathtakingly depicted so many different materials, such as the delicate Chinese porcelain reflecting on the lacquer tray, and a silver coffee pot and pottery jug that both reflect the windows on their surfaces.

"The Lavergne Family Breakfast" reflects just one aspect of Liotard's artistry. His output was prolific and not limited to painting. He even wrote a treatise on painting. And his interests varied: He was a collector, dealer, and traveler. Liotard's work deserves the high level of attention he gave to his marvelous works.

To find out more about Jean-Etienne Liotard's "The Lavergne Family Breakfast," visit NationalGallery.org.uk

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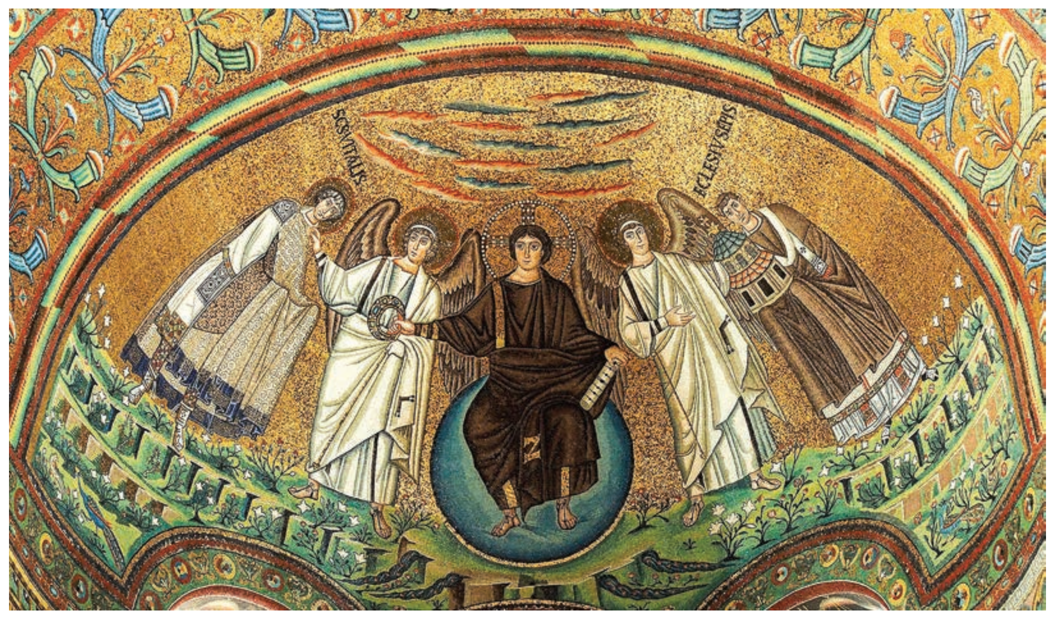


The apse mosaic in the San Vitale Basilica, in Ravenna, Italy. The UNESCO World heritage site was built in A.D. 547.

HISTORY

What Are the Origins of Cathedrals and Chapels?

THE CONVERSATION

Cathedrals and chapels have played vital roles in the development of Christian culture.

As a scholar of the Bible, Judaism, and Christianity, I have come to learn the historic importance of these structures and the pivotal role they play in the practice of many Christians' faith.

Early Christian Architecture

Cathedrals and chapels not only provide a space for worship, but they are also vessels for the display of religious iconography and art.

Until the early fourth century A.D., much of early Christian art and space for worship occurred in catacombs—subterranean locations where Christians would bury members of their community.

It has traditionally been thought that Christians used such catacombs due to persecutions by the Roman government. However, such persecutions were periodic and not sustained. Other explanations have been offered regarding the regular use of the catacombs as a result.

In any case, such tombs became the repositories of art expressions in the early decades of the religion.

Prominent scenes include depictions of the Bible that highlighted deliverance from death.

Depictions of Jesus of Nazareth appear in these catacombs, but often borrowing from the likeness of the Greek god Hermes, who functioned as a messenger deity as well as a carrier of souls in the afterlife.

The cross as a widely displayed symbol of Christian faith would become more frequent only after the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century.

Development of Cathedrals

With imperial backing, Christians began to build their places of worship, known as "churches" from the Greek "kuriake" ("belonging to the lord"), above ground.

Such building practices borrowed from two main areas of precursors: ancient temples and places of Roman administration.

Ancient temples across cultures, including the one in Jerusalem, generally were thought of as spaces where the god or goddess lived.

Many ancient and modern Christians believe that Jesus is physically present in communion—the ritual that in some Christian thought involves the actual transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus.

As such, cathedrals such as the Basilica of San Vitale in Italy, constructed in the sixth century A.D., contain mosaics to depict Jesus as actually present in communion. These buildings tap into a widely held religious history that the deity dwells in the holy place.

Many of these ancient, pre-Christian temples, including the Temple in Jerusalem, were oriented from east to west. Christian cathedrals for the most part in both the ancient and modern worlds used this east-to-west axis as well. Some traditions placed communion toward the east—called "oriented"—and others toward the west—called "occidented."

Notable exceptions occurred, such as in the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago, originally a Baptist school, whose chapel is oriented north to south.

The second major source for early Christian churches was Roman administrative buildings. The very name "cathedral" means "seat," and in Roman society referred to the location where governors would adjudicate and oversee their districts. When the pope speaks from his seat of power, he speaks "ex cathedra."

Roman temples had a different structure, but the Roman basilica, with its resonances of governance and imperial backing, was instead chosen, along with the east-to-west orientation of ancient temples, as the basic design for such cathedrals.

How Chapels Came to Be

In contrast to the often large and impressive designs of cathedrals, chapels in Christianity represent a smaller-scale conception of religious worship.

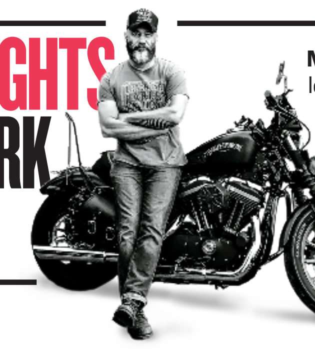
The term "chapel" derives from Martin of Tours, a bishop in the early church from France who was wearing a cloak while walking past a poor man. Martin was reminded of Jesus's words in the Gospel of Matthew that helping the poor was, in effect, to help and worship God. Martin gave the poor man his cloak, and the destitute person revealed himself to be Jesus himself.

Pieces of this cloak, having touched Jesus, were thought to hold special significance. As a result, small structures were built to house them. These small structures were known as chapels, derived from the Latin "capella" for "little cloak."

These spaces of worship did not have musical instruments to accompany the service. As a result, the term "a capella," meaning "according to the chapel" or "in the chapel style," reflects the manner of worship in the small church.

Samuel L. Boyd is an assistant professor at the University of Colorado–Boulder. This article was first published on The Conversation.

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.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Perfect POTUS Portrait

MARK JACKSON

DAVID JAMES/DREAMWORKS II DISTRIBUTION CO., LLC.

Daniel Day-Lewis as President Abraham Lincoln in a scene from the dramatic historical biography "Lincoln," a film about Lincoln's struggle in the Civil War and the fighting in his cabinet over the decision to emancipate slaves.

Our nation currently and unfortunately suffers from even deeper skepticism toward government than ever before, which is why it's inspirational to go back and have a look at "Lincoln," Steven Spielberg's wonderful biopic.

As Spielberg mentioned in the production notes, "In this day and age when so many people have lost faith in the idea of governance, it's a story that shows that you can achieve miraculous, beautiful things through the democratic system."

The Script of 'Lincoln'

Published in 2005, Doris Kearns Goodwin's 944-page mega-bestseller, "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln," provided just the ingredients that Spielberg had been hoping to find in order to tell a Lincoln story. Out of that massive tome, he and writing superstar Tony Kushner settled on telling the story of the 16th president's passing of the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution: the abolition of slavery.

This particular slice of Honest Abe's life distills his essence. It provides insight into his family life, emotional life, and political genius. It's packed with suspense, drama, and crisis. Can Lincoln end slavery—and hold the Union together—before the South surrenders?

To the Manor Born

Similar to Ben Kingsley being born to play Gandhi, Daniel Day-Lewis was born to play Abraham Lincoln. Day-Lewis simply is him. The hair and makeup is brilliant, and Day-Lewis utterly inhabits the 6-foot-4-inch gangling ranginess and faltering walk.

Despite the somber weightiness of those ancient sepia-toned historical images, America's 16th POTUS is brought to life as an avuncular, prolifically jokey raconteur, and although one assumes a man of that size and historical gravitas to be a basso profundo, Day-Lewis nails the president's real voice, which was apparently surprisingly tenor. (It's a sort of Mike Tyson moment.) And then you immediately acclimatize and have the odd, slightly eerie sensation of feeling in your bones that this was the definitive voice, and here it is, speaking to you out of the distant past. In a split second, one moves from "Oh, there's Daniel playing Abraham" to a wholesale suspension of disbelief—we witness Lincoln. Movie magic indeed.

Sally Field, if not heavily supervised, will normally suck all the air out of a room, but not here. As Mary Todd Lincoln, she grounds the great man's wife in believability, while leaving lingering questions as to the validity of the classic phrase "Behind every great man, there's a great woman." As per this great "Lincoln," there's a woman, in any case.

And while "Lincoln" is not quite on par with Spielberg's magnum opus, "Schindler's List," it's close. Part of Spielberg's artistry lies in the creation of atmosphere, and a heartwarming Americana is strongly palpable throughout.

John Williams's cello-laden score and the chiaroscuro dark browns, blacks, muted blues, and hazy grays evoke deep American nostalgia as surely as do the words Antietam, Fort Sumter, Ticonderoga, William Tecumseh Sherman, Gettysburg, Confederacy, and Martha Washington.

It takes a minute to downshift to a time where things moved slower, people memorized political speeches, quoted Euclid, and savored sophisticated insults. Tommy Lee Jones as Thaddeus Stevens has a great line: "Slavery is the only insult to natural law, you fatuous nincompoop."

Pick Your Battles

In the aftermath of "Lincoln," one feels like one has come to know the man. One feels the warmth, love of humanity, and the high moral stature on display in his attempts to change history and save people. In one of the movie's most powerful scenes, President Lincoln rides out on horseback to witness Civil War battlefield carnage. He is stunned and at a loss for words.

There should be an amendment to the Constitution that all American presidents be required to get astride a horse and personally go see the carnage of their wars. "Lincoln" illustrates the weightiness of the decisions a U.S. president must carry.

For Lincoln-like times, may the high moral stature, humor, and courage on display in "Lincoln" shine the light of hope on the path of all future American leaders.

'Lincoln'

Director
Steven Spielberg

Starring
Daniel Day-Lewis, Sally Field, David Strathairn, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, James Spader, Hal Holbrook, Tommy Lee Jones

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
2 hours, 30 minutes

Release Date
Nov. 16, 2012

★★★★☆

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Cain Faces Abel in a Mixed Martial Arts Bout

MARK JACKSON

Tales of fathers versus sons and brother-against-brother conflicts contain ingredients that unfailingly make grown men cry. "Warrior" will make tough guys bawl (watching alone, at home, of course).

"Warrior" is the archetypal story of how parental divorce, the early death of the mother, and a distant (or violent) father wreak havoc on the bond between brothers, uniting them only in their hatred of the father and deep resentment of each other.

"Warrior" is secondarily a movie about the world's fastest growing sport: mixed martial arts (MMA), which, outside of the actual military, is the modern-day world of warriors. It's a calling; these men (and as of March 28, 1997—women) absolutely love what they do. If you like the fight game, "Warrior" will have you hollering and jumping out of your seat.

A Quick History of MMA and Modern Fighting

In the 1960s, there was no kicking of another person in a fight. That was for girly-men. In the early 1970s, along came Bruce Lee, whose spectacular, high roundhouse and spinning back-kicks were high-tech weaponry, and kicking was suddenly cool.

The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) debuted in the early 1990s, pitting various martial art styles against each other; karate went up against wrestling, kung fu versus muay Thai, judo versus boxing, and so on. When it all shook out, Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) dominated with impunity.

The UFC then started sorting fighters, per their style, into either the striking camp or the grappling camp, and it became clear that anyone mastering both would have no peer. Standup fighters (strikers) quickly swarmed to get a good ground (grappling) game, and vice versa.

Rapidly, fighters assimilated boxing and karate for punching and kicking, muay thai for elbows and knees, wrestling and judo for takedowns, and jiujitsu for chokes, cranks, and joint-locks.

Jiujitsu is also called "submission fighting." The fighter being strangled, neck-cranked, or joint-locked is forced to submit, or "tap out" (tap the mat, the opposing fighter, or quit verbally), or risks breaking bones or losing consciousness—colorfully known as "tap, snap, or nap."

'Warrior'

Director
Gavin O'Connor

Starring
Joel Edgerton, Tom Hardy, Jennifer Morrison, Frank Grillo, Nick Nolte

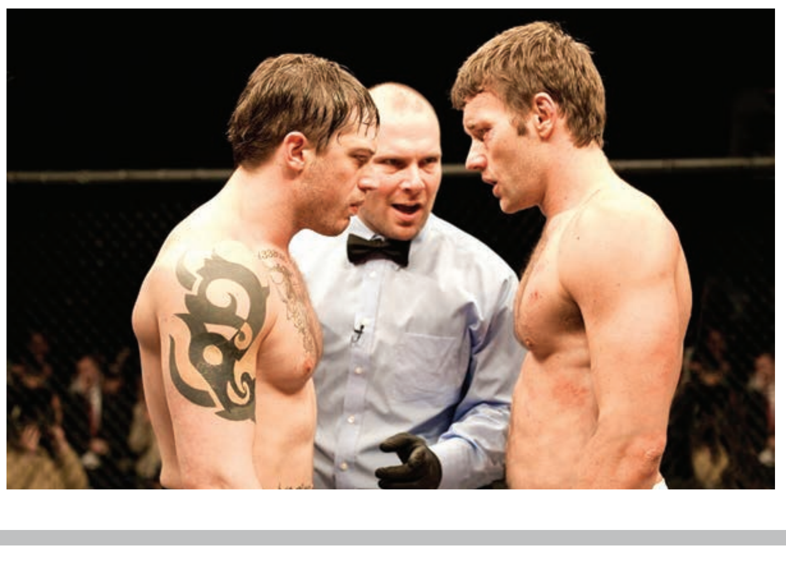
Rated
PG-13

Running Time
2 hours, 20 minutes

Release Date
Sept. 9, 2011

★★★★☆

CHUCK ZLOTNICK/LIONSGATE



Brothers face off in the ring. (L–R) Tom Hardy, Anthony Tambakis, and Joel Edgerton in "Warrior."

The Story

There are two brothers. One, Tommy Conlon (Tom Hardy), is a former Marine with a tragic secret; the other, Brendan Conlon (Joel Edgerton), is a high-school physics teacher and family man.

Tommy enlists the father he hates (Nick Nolte), but who trained him to great victories in wrestling as a youth, to train him again for Sparta, a fictitious MMA worldwide event with a winner's purse in the millions.

Brendan, facing foreclosure on his house and wanting to keep his family from homelessness, goes back to moonlighting—forbidden by his wife, Tess (charismatically played by Jennifer Morrison)—taking illegal MMA fights for money. This eventually puts Sparta in his sights, thus setting the brothers on an inevitable collision course.

Two siblings fighting each other in the world's top MMA venue? An overly convenient deus ex machina script ploy? It could happen. Think: the Williams sisters at Wimbledon. Also the "Manning Bowl": NFL quarterback (Indianapolis Colts) Peyton Manning versus younger brother (N.Y. Giants) Eli Manning.

It could have happened in the actual UFC with brothers Nick and Nate Diaz, except that they respect each other too much to beat each other half to death. The UFC draws such a massive crowd because it's the closest human beings can come to killing each other, without actually killing each other.

While the two lead actors in "Warrior" would get quickly pulverized in a pro (or even amateur) MMA cage fight, despite their black belts, they are professional chameleons. They built muscle, trained like fiends; one's a Brit, the other's an Aussie—and they both come off as 100 percent all-American.

Nick Nolte won an Oscar nomination for this performance, with good cause. It's a role that's directly in his power alley of grizzled ex-powerhouses—arguably easy for him. But one of the definitions of acting is being private in public, and Nolte's courage to be this vulnerable, along with the natural raw power of his personality, is jaw-dropping.

As mentioned, being a warrior is a calling for some men and women. Traditionally, the warrior spirit takes joy in hardship and pride in the forbearance of pain. It lauds commitment, fearlessness, honor, integrity, accountability, and, yes, mercy. All men (and many women nowadays) have an inner warrior, which loves these things.

The shadow side of the warrior is the stronghold of rage, hatred, bullying, jealousy, competitiveness, domination, bragging, ruthlessness, wall-to-wall tattoos, and bloodlust. Unfortunately, men also love these things.

Ex-Marine Tommy embodies more of the shadow warrior; Brendan is the opposite, training to Beethoven in order to cultivate his inner ability to remain emotionally calm and unmoved. This naturally sets up a powerful dissonance, which calls for a powerful resolution.

"Warrior" is an emotional roller coaster, an extremely fun sports movie, and it delivers dissonance and resolution on a grand scale. When all is said and done, the menfolk will experience catharsis on par with a good Superbowl win. And you don't even have to wait till January.

Actually, you might need to wait a couple of Januarys due to the pandemic. The UFC, however, can't be stopped by any virus; they've come up with a "Fight Island." No crowds. Just Fights. After watching "Warrior," you might end up a UFC fan too.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Eyes to the Future

'Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus'

ERIC BESS

There comes a moment in life in which we are made to reflect on who we are and who we wish to be. We stop casting blame for our circumstances and put effort into becoming the best version of ourselves. We may spend weeks, months, or even years cultivating ourselves into the heroes of our own stories.

But, there's also that moment in life in which we are seduced by our own complacency; we become lax in our efforts and fall victim to temptations for which we will later suffer.

I recently came across a painting by the Pre-Raphaelite painter John William Waterhouse titled "Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus." This painting stimulated in me a curiosity for how we deal with temptations and their consequences.

The Orphean Journey

According to Greek legend, Orpheus was born to the god of music, Apollo, and one of the muses. Orpheus played the lyre and sang beautifully, so beautifully that he was able to influence his immediate environment with his music.

Orpheus fell in love with and married Eurydice. One day, Eurydice was bitten by a poisonous snake while attempting to escape an attacker. She died and began her journey into Hades.

Orpheus, inconsolable, decides to use the magic of his heavenly inspired music to enter Hades and save Eurydice. He sings his songs and plays his lyre so beautifully that he charms Charon, the ferryman who transports souls across the rivers Styx and Acheron, and Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the gates of Hades.

Orpheus sings and plays his way to the god Hades himself. On meeting Hades, Orpheus requests that Eurydice return to earth with him. Hades, moved by Orpheus's beautiful music, agrees to return Eurydice to him on one condition: Orpheus cannot look back at Eurydice until they have left Hades.

Orpheus begins his journey with Eurydice out of Hades, but he is unsure if she is actually following him. He cannot hear her or feel her presence. Close to exiting Hades, Orpheus cannot bear it any longer and turns to look into Eurydice's eyes, and as he does, she vanishes back into Hades.

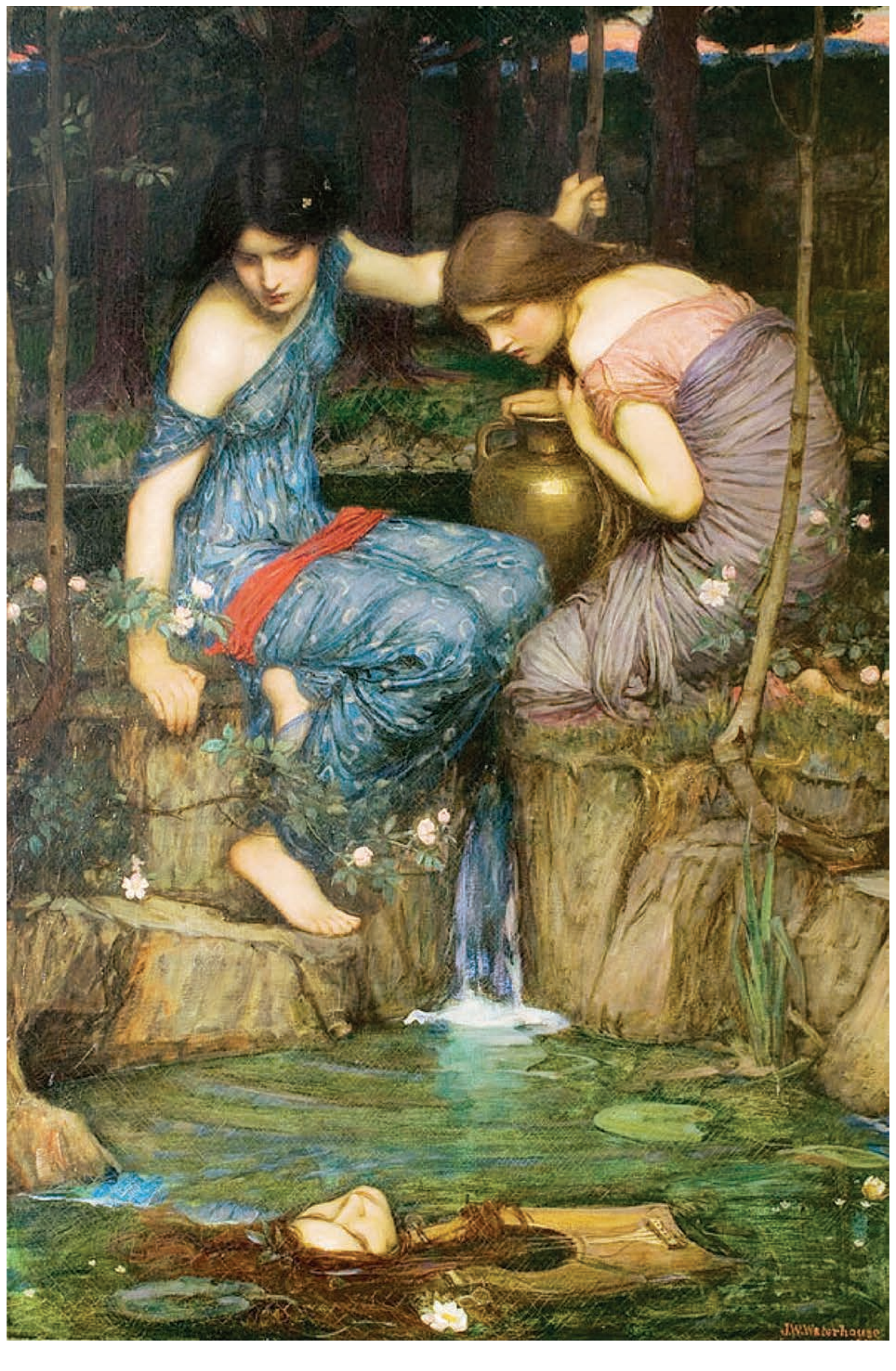
Distraught, Orpheus puts his lyre away and refuses to sing anymore. He roams aimlessly until Dionysian maenads (manic female revelers) come upon him and rip him to pieces because of his depression. Other versions of the story suggest that the maenads rip Orpheus to pieces because he preached that Apollo, instead of Dionysus, was the greatest god.

Orpheus's limbs were carried out to sea, and his head, whispering Eurydice's name, washed onto the shore of Lesbos where it was buried by the muses.

'Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus'

In "Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus," Waterhouse depicted the moment in which Orpheus's head and lyre float toward two nymphs. The nymphs seem to be gathering water at either dawn or dusk when the head and lyre happen upon them, and they look intently at the two floating objects.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



"Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus," 1900, by John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas, 58 5/8 inches by 38 7/8 inches. Private Collection.

The focal point is the two nymphs: Their light complexion stands out against the darkness of the background, and this area of high contrast holds the viewer's attention. Their line of sight and the water that flows from the rocks beneath them lead our eye to the secondary focal point: the head of Orpheus and his lyre.

Eyes to the Future

Orpheus's story makes me think about the power of art. Art, when influenced by the heavens, can stir the soul in indescribable ways. Orpheus uses his heavenly inspired power of music to save Eurydice from Hades. To me, it's as if all of Orpheus's singing and lyre playing was practice for when he'd need to use them to save another human being.

But Orpheus, overwhelmed by extreme desire for the one he loved, is unable to control the temptation to look at her. His inability to control temptation causes him to lose two things: Eurydice and his heavenly connection to music.

Ironically, temptation causes him to lose the very thing he desired. He suffers deep depression for his inability to control this temptation and is literally torn to pieces because of it.

The consequence of Orpheus's inability to overcome his temptations haunts him into his afterlife. He, I think, becomes obsessed with a past he can't change. Even in death, his head says the name compelled by his desire, and he floats alongside a lyre he cannot play.

Orpheus played the lyre and sang beautifully, so beautifully that he was able to influence his immediate environment with his music.

Waterhouse depicts the two nymphs as distracted from their task when they see the objects float past them. They are stopped from collecting water—a source for sustaining life—by the floating head and lyre, which for me are representations of the consequences of falling victim to temptation.

Is it the case that temptation distracts us from the important things in life, the things that would sustain and fulfill our lives? Can the consequences of our own temptations negatively impact those around us?

With our eyes to the future, how might we deal with a past that haunts our present?

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).

A Celebration of Books and Reading

JEFF MINICK

ANDRII KOBRYN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Nothing is quite as transportive as reading a great book.

Before I entered first grade—at that time, Boonville, North Carolina, offered no kindergarten—adults kept telling me, "When you go to school, you'll learn to read."

When my busy mom found the time to read us bedtime stories, often from the Childcraft volumes we owned, I always felt as if there was a particular magic in books, and was eager to explore the world of words and stories.

When Mom picked me up at the end of my first day of school, I was mostly silent on the short drive home. As I got out of the car, Mom said, "You seem upset, Jeff."

Most inveterate readers treasure those books introducing us to authors and stories.

"They didn't teach us to read!" I shouted, nearly bursting into tears.

Soon, of course, Mrs. Whisnut introduced us to the world of Dick and Jane, Sally and Spot, and I became a lifelong bibliophile, an ardent lover of books.

Good News in a Gloomy Time

Though the daily headlines these days often tumble some of us into dark moods, rays of sunshine do break through the black clouds. Recently, a reader sent me the results of a survey conducted by StorageCafe looking into hobbies and leisure activities taken up in our time of pandemic and quarantine. Gardening, cooking, exercise, and learning new skills like candle-making or calligraphy all made the list, but the great news for book lovers is that the number of people turning to books for pleasure and relief has shot way up.

Writer Mirela Mohan reports that "reading for leisure ranked third in people's preferences with 27% of respondents claiming they plan to spend approximately 105 minutes daily on average reading a book."

This increase is good news for our republic for several reasons. So many of us acquire our political and cultural information from television's mass media, where truth and objectivity are sometimes in short supply. From these commentators, we rarely hear the stories of political corruption told, for instance, in Peter Schweizer's "Profiles in Corruption: Abuse of Power by America's Progressive Elite." Reading books such as this one makes for more informed voters.

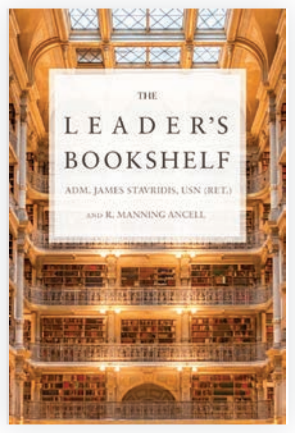
Reading history and biographies can also strengthen our patriotic spirit. Right now, I am caught up in David Rubenstein's "The American Story: Conversations With Master Historians," in which Rubenstein interviews such great biographers as David McCullough, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Robert Caro on past American presidents and other leaders. These lively interviews tell us much about the men and women who helped shape our nation.

Good literature also has an effect on us and so on our country. At their best, novels, stories, plays, and poetry allow us to learn life lessons without ever leaving our living room sofa. We can immerse ourselves in the psychological agonies of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov in "Crime and Punishment," and so learn the consequences of great wrongs without committing those wrongs ourselves. Young women can step into the shoes of Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," and receive lessons in love, commitment, and matrimony.

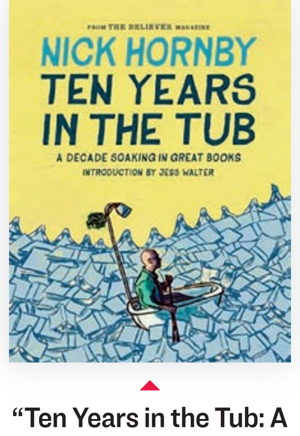
In Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," we explore from the comfort of our den a communist gulag, which should stiffen our resolve to fight against any government creating such a brutal and oppressive system.

Pleasures

Then, there are the pure and simple joys derived from reading. For me, few sights are more glorious than watching someone, especially a young person, utterly absorbed by a book. Though most customers in my local coffee shop are picking away on their electronic devices, as I am doing while writing these words, some sit over their beverages entranced by words on paper, oblivious to the music and conversations around them.



"The Leader's Bookshelf" by Adm. James Stavridis, USN (Ret.) and R. Manning Ancell.



"Ten Years in the Tub: A Decade Soaking in Great Books" by Nick Hornsby.

All book lovers know this feeling. We are physically present in the coffee shop, the library, or at home, but mentally and emotionally we are removed from these places. No—we are instead riding with Dave Robicheaux as he tears along Louisiana highways tracking down a killer, we are walking with Frodo and Sam on their quest to destroy the Ring of Power, we stand beside Scarlett O'Hara as she tries to save her plantation and family after the Civil War.

In this sense, books differ radically from movies. I love movies, but in the theater or on our televisions, we are watching the action as outsiders. The power of film to move us from laughter to tears, to inspire us, to entertain us, is extraordinary, but we are always watchers of the actors and the story.

With books, we become participants. We can imagine ourselves as Jim Hawkins battling against Long John Silver and his band of mutineers in "Treasure Island," or we can get inside the skin of the narrator desperate to escape his pursuers in Geoffrey Household's "Rogue Male."

Paper and Print

Many today go to their tablets or other electronic devices, and read e-books. The advantages here are that readers can carry libraries in their satchels or purses, pay less for the electronic book, and reduce the number of bookcases in a small apartment.

Books differ radically from movies. With books, we become participants.

But some of us, including myself, much prefer a physical book, a tangible object to hold in hand, marking favorite pages with bits of paper and passages with pencil. We open a new book in the store or library, and the scent of fresh print is like an exotic perfume. We pick a novel from the shelves of our used bookstore, scan the timeworn pages, and delight in reading the occasional notes made by some previous reader—"Right on!" "I disagree 100 percent"—or the inscriptions often found on the first blank page, such as "To Bill, whose love puts me over the moon, Brenda" and "To my daughter, the sweetest girl in the world, Happy Birthday, Love Mom."

Moreover, for those of us who spend so much time staring at a computer at work or school, a book brings a welcome break from the screen. We replace the cold plastic of a keyboard with paper, and instead of striking those keys with our fingertips or reading an online essay by means of a cursor, we leisurely turn the pages of a novel or a collection of essays.

Books About Books

Most inveterate readers treasure those books introducing us to authors and stories. We open these collections of reviews and reading suggestions, and feel as if we have stumbled across a pirate's chest of gold doubloons and shining rubies.

In my home library are several such books. Nick Hornsby's "Ten Years in the Tub: A Decade Soaking in Great Books" contains scores of his reviews for "The Believer." Here are long, funny, quirky, and always engaging columns touting not only certain books, but also making the case slantwise for reading itself.

Retired Adm. James Stavridis and R. Manning Ancell's "The Leader's Bookshelf" is a compilation of literature recommended by more than 200 four-star military officers. The choices range from Douglas Southall Freeman's three-volume "Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command" to Orson Scott Card's science fiction classic "Ender's Game." Stavridis and Ancell also look at what younger military leaders are reading and give advice on how to build a personal library.

James Mustich's "1,000 Books to Read Before You Die: A Life-Changing List" contains authors long familiar to me—Dickens, Hemingway, Shelby Foote, Anne Tyler—but also scores of unfamiliar writers such as Tijs Goldschmidt, Lucy Grealy, and Christopher Hibbert. Every time I open this book, the truth of the adage "Too many books, too little time" smacks me upside the head.

Cheers

Let me end by lifting my glass to all of you readers out there. May you live long, and fill your house and your mind with books, books, and more books.

As for those not in the habit of reading, let me encourage you to give it a shot. Awaiting you are stories that allow you to time-travel into the past or to the future, that give you deep insights into your humanity, that give valuable advice, that whisk you off to distant lands or help you better understand your neighbors, friends, and family.

Books are the magical railway cars that carry us out of ourselves and more deeply into ourselves, all at the same time.

Hop aboard and see what happens.

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.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Moving Past Cynicism to Truth

IAN KANE

ALL PHOTOS BY TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Based on a true story, "Call Northside 777" tells how Frank Wiecek (Richard Conte, front R), here escorted by an officer to his cell, is found innocent of murder.

The highly tumultuous Prohibition era of American history catapulted Chicago to new heights of violence. Under the terms of the 18th Amendment, Prohibition made the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages illegal in the United States. Of course, many people found a way to get to alcohol anyway, even if it meant visiting one of the many speakeasies that dotted the Windy City.

Prolific director Henry Hathaway's noir drama "Call Northside 777" takes place in 1932, an especially deadly year in Chicago's history. During that year alone, one person died for every single day of that year. One such person was Officer Bundy, a Chicago cop. Eager to blame someone for the crime, the police round up a couple of Polish men, Frank Wiecek (Richard Conte) and his good friend Tomek Zaleska (George Tyne).

The two suspects are hauled in for some intense bouts of questioning. After detectives grill them for extended periods of time, the officers find some inconsistencies in their suspects' stories that eventually lead to the two receiving 99-year sentences.

Eleven years later, the editor of the Chicago Times, Brian Kelly (Lee J. Cobb), spies a peculiar advertisement in the back of his newspaper. It reads: "$5,000 REWARD for killers of Officer Bundy on Dec. 9, 1932. Call Northside 777. Ask for Tillie Wiesek 12-7 p.m."

Kelly brings the ad to the attention of one of his reporters, P.J. McNeal (James Stewart). McNeal is a hardened journalist with an ever-skeptical demeanor. He quickly scoffs at the ad, thinking it is some kind of scam. But from the outset, Kelly seems to think that there is something more to the ad that bears investigation.

McNeal calls Northside 777 and is directed to a location where Tillie is working. When he arrives there, he finds a woman scrubbing floors on her hands and knees in the darkened halls of a building. He learns that she is Tillie Wiecek (Kasia Orzazewski), Frank Wiecek's mother.

In a heart-wrenching scene, Tillie describes how she's been working as a cleaning lady for 11 years to save enough pennies from her meager wages to accumulate the $5,000 reward. She quickly asks if McNeal can help her so that she can get her son out of prison since she wholeheartedly believes he is innocent of the murder. As McNeal doesn't believe in Frank's innocence, he turns down her offer.

But McNeal, touched by Tillie's motherly devotion to her son—and seeing a good story angle—does a write-up on Wiesek's story titled "Slaves to save $5,000—offers it to clear her son," with a picture of Tillie down on her hands and knees scrubbing a floor. The sob story quickly becomes popular, and Kelly, still having a hunch that there is something more to the matter, tasks McNeal to follow up.

The follow-up article creates even more public interest, and soon McNeal is off to the state prison to visit Frank. At first, McNeal doesn't believe in Frank's side of the story: It doesn't have much to it, other than a few sparse details. But McNeal's supportive wife, Laura (Helen Walker), begins to wear down his wall of cynicism by encouraging him to dig deeper. Like Kelly, she thinks that there is more to Frank and Tillie Wiesek's story.

Delving into the case, McNeal uncovers some curious details that either have been hidden from him by the local police or are otherwise hard to track down. Will he eventually come to believe in Frank's innocence, or will his unusual investigative techniques get him into waters too deep and dangerous for him to handle?

Film's Heart in the Right Place

What I like about this film is that it touches on many themes. There's a cynical examination of what some institutions (both public and private) will do in order to protect their reputations. There are other things covered too—such as the power of a mother's relentless love and support, and the importance of encouragement from a faithful friend or spouse.

"Call Northside 777" is a noir film with its heart in the right place and some seriously feel-good moments in its dramatic ending sequences. Its excellent acting performances and deft direction make it a gripping thriller that transcends many of the genre's clichés.

'Call Northside 777' has some seriously feel-good moments in its dramatic ending sequences.

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

'Call Northside 777'

Director
Henry Hathaway

Starring
James Stewart, Richard Conte, Lee J. Cobb

Running Time
1 hour, 52 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
March 1948 (USA)

★★★★☆

In the film's most touching scene, P.J. McNeal (James Stewart) talks to Tillie Wiecek (Kasia Orzazewski) to find out why she put out a $5,000 reward to find a murderer.

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