

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE



Who is Elise? A portrait, circa 1820, by Zacarías González Velázquez. Oil on canvas; 32.4 inches by 25.6 inches. Lázaro Galdiano Museum.

MUSIC

‘FÜR ELISE’

The Mystery of the World’s Most Popular Piano Piece

KENNETH LAFAVE

I am about to put the lid down on the piano keyboard in my 6th-grade music class when a particularly animated student runs up to me and says excitedly, “Teacher, I can play ‘Für Elise!’” I encourage her to do so, but the result is just the famous first four notes, an E and the D-sharp below it, repeated, played back and forth in endless seesaw.

We know from the title that it was written ‘for Elise,’ but who was she?

I tell her I think there’s more to it than that, but she is happy just knowing the first notes. Though not particularly musically gifted, nor a fan of much music outside of pop, she is mesmerized by this little classical piano piece written more than 200 years ago. So are millions and millions of others.

The popularity of Beethoven’s intermediate-level bagatelle (something like “a trifle” or “simple piece”) is astonishing. I can count on the fingers of one hand the

number of my beginning piano students who have not, at some point, asked, “When will I get to play ‘Für Elise?’” As of Jan. 1, 2020, Google reported millions of searches for “Für Elise” each month. A YouTube performance of it, posted 14 years ago, has registered 59 million views, and a YouTube tutorial on the piece has garnered 53 million hits.

Continued on Page 5

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A Day in April That Some Past Poets Implore Us to Remember

JEFF MINICK

It was dawn, April 19, 1775, and the British troops who had left Boston earlier that night arrived at Lexington, Massachusetts, in search of caches of arms gathered by American colonialists and hoping to arrest Sam Adams and John Hancock.

Assembled on Lexington's town green was a collection of civilians: militia roused to confront the British by riders like Paul Revere. The British commander ordered the militia to throw down their arms and disperse. Suddenly a shot rang out, fired by an unidentified rifleman. The British troops responded by cutting loose with their muskets, killing eight of the colonials.

Afterward, the British marched toward nearby Concord, still in search of arsenals of weapons, where they were met by a larger force of colonials. After a brief battle, the British forces retreated, and the militia followed them back to Boston, shooting at them from behind trees, hillsides, houses, and stone fences. That day 250 British soldiers died or were wounded, while the militia forces suffered about 90 casualties.

And so was born the American Revolution. Still to come was the Battle of Bunker Hill, as well as the abandonment of Boston by the king's troops and naval forces, and more than a year after Lexington and Concord, the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The battles fought on that April day, which eventually led to the creation of an American republic, were not forgotten by later generations. Poets of the 19th century, in particular, remembered and celebrated the heroism of these early patriots.

Midnight Ride

In 1860, just before the outbreak of the Civil War, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote "Paul Revere's Ride" about the Boston silversmith who helped spread the news of the approaching British forces "to every Middlesex village and farm." (Incidentally, Revere never cried "The British are coming!" as the colonialists at that time considered themselves British.)

Some consider "Paul Revere's Ride" a work aimed at the younger set, perhaps because childhood is when most of us first read or heard these verses. Indeed, Longfellow's poem begins "Listen, my children, and you shall hear/Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere."

Yet this interpretation seems wrong-headed for two reasons. For one, the poem may have been written, as some critics claim, to inspire New England on the eve of the Civil War. Here are the last lines:

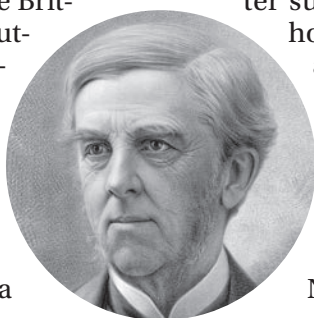
For, borne on the night-wind of the



Silversmith Paul Revere and several other messengers on horseback sounded the alarm that the regulars were leaving Boston. A painting by J.S. Copley, 1768. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

In addition, "Paul Revere's Ride," especially given its mid-19th century origins when such folk ballads were popular, seems aimed at an audience of all ages. Read the poem—the meter suggests the galloping of a horse—and the vocabulary and historical references alone make clear that Longfellow intended this piece for adults as well as children.



American physician and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., circa 1879, Armstrong & Co. Boston, Mass. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Concord Bridge

Now there's an ironic name, Concord. As on that long-ago day in 1775, concord, which is defined as harmony or agreement, was far from the minds of those involved in the shooting match that ensued.

In "Concord Hymn," which was sung to commemorate the completion of the battle monument on that site in 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson begins with these well-known lines:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot hear round the world.

In this opening, Emerson gives us two important takeaways on the Battle of Concord. First, the Minute Men and colonial militia truly were "embattled farmers." Yes, shopkeepers also stood in their ranks, but here's the point: The first combatants in the American struggle for liberty were not professional soldiers. They were ordinary working-class men.

The battles fought on that April day eventually led to the creation of an American republic.

Moreover, that famous phrase "the shot heard round the world" was accurate. It truly would ring around the world. From these two battles, small as they were, America was born.

The other stanzas of Emerson's short piece enjoin Americans to remember these "heroes" who dared "to die and leave their children free."

Additional Tributes

Other 19th-century poets paid homage as well to April 19 and those first conflicts of the Revolution.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was a physician, father to a Supreme Court Justice, poet, and essayist (his book "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" was a huge success in his lifetime), wrote "Lexington" in his early 20s, with its reminder—much like the one issued by Emerson—to "tell to our sons how their fathers have died."

As part of a longer poem called "Psalm of the West," Southerner Sidney Lanier's "The Battle of Lexington" also dramatically celebrated the dead of this conflict. Here, Lanier describes the death of Caleb Harrington, who did indeed fall as the poet tells us:

He hath crawled to the step of his own house-door,
But his head hath dropped; he will crawl no more.



"The Battle of Lexington," (1910) by William Barnes Wollen. National Army Museum.

Clasp, Wife, and kiss, and lift the head;
Harrington lies at his door-step dead.
Maine poet Dora B. Hunter's "The Minute-Man" also paid homage to those early citizen soldiers: Who dared to dream that these scattered groups
Could rout the orderly British troops?
That these farmer youth half-armed, untrained,
Could keep the fame of their State unstained?
But when His Majesty's soldiers came
To the spot now wearing so proud at name,
The minute-men marched down from the ridge

And won the day at the old North Bridge.

Remembering Our Debts

So who were these men who stood, muskets in hand, against military professionals that April morning?

Philadelphia's Museum of the American Revolution website gives us the following description of those who opposed the British forces at Lexington, in an excerpt taken from Arthur Turtelot's book "Lexington and Concord: The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution":

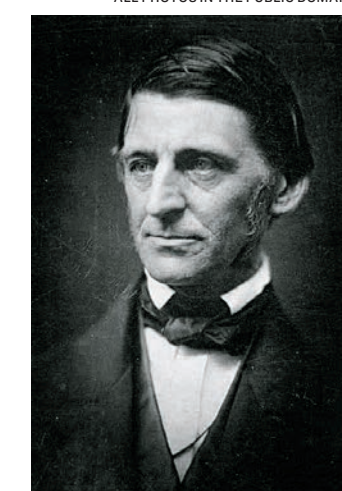
"Among the oldest was Ensign Robert Munroe, the old veteran officer who had fought other wars on the British side.

At sixty-three, he could have been excused from duty as a minuteman, but old men of his type are not easy to put aside, and he joined his two sons and two sons-in-law in the field ... The oldest of all was Grandfather Moses Harrington, sixty-five, whose youngest son Caleb was with him. ... There were other father-and-son combinations. ... There were also very young men, twelve in their teens and a score in their twenties. Most of them were farmers, but there were also tradesmen among them."

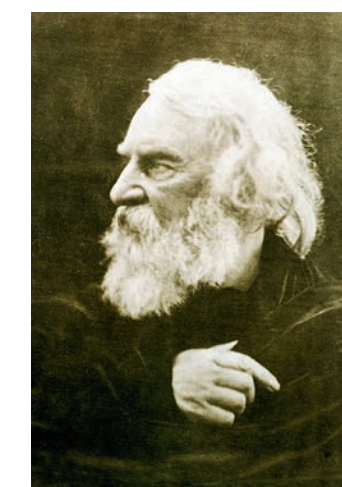
This April 19, we might pause a moment and reflect on these men and the poets who revered and honored their sacrifice on the altar of liberty. As we endure our own national trials and tur-

bulent times, let's summon up thoughts of these early patriots. Let's look back at them and take inspiration from their courage, their convictions, and their fervent love of freedom.

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. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1857.



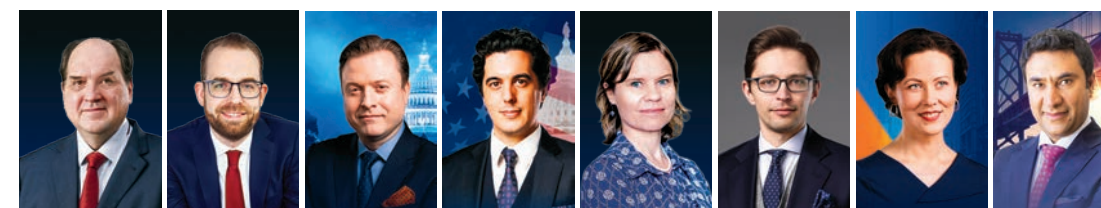
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron in 1868.

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THE EPOCH TIMES

DECORATIVE ARTS

How an Imprisoned Alchemist Found the Secret of ‘White Gold’: Pure Porcelain

‘The Luxury of Clay: Porcelain Past and Present’ exhibition at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, in Washington, D.C.

LORRAINE FERRIER

Chinese artisans had already been making porcelain for thousands of years when Venetian merchant Marco Polo first brought porcelain from China to Europe in the 14th century. Polo’s discovery started Europe’s enduring love of porcelain.

European porcelain has a fascinating story to tell. “From functional pieces and decorative objects, to fine art and tableware, porcelain has been continually reinvented and played an important role in history,” Rebecca Tilles said in a press release. She is associate curator of 18th-century French and Western European fine and decorative arts at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, in Washington, D.C.

Europeans admired porcelain’s strong yet delicate, solid but translucent nature, calling it “white gold” due to its pure white color and high import costs. They began to import porcelain from China and also set about making their own. But China’s porcelain proved hard to emulate.

In China, artisans created true or hard-paste porcelain from ground micaceous rocks (rocks containing mica) mixed with kaolin clay (white china clay). Firing the mix caused the micaceous rock to vitrify, or turn glass-like, and the kaolin strengthened the ceramic form. The kaolin was key to the fine china’s whiteness, and it was also a secret that Europeans didn’t discover until the 18th century.

In the late 16th century, the Grand Duke of Florence, Francis I, created a workshop to mimic Chinese porcelain. His artisans took over 10 years to create Medici Porcelain, but the ceramic was short-lived as it proved difficult and expensive to make, and the pieces were prone to cracking due to its soft-paste formula. Artificial or soft-paste porcelain contains clay and ground glass and is fired at a lower temperature than hard-paste porcelain, resulting in a softer form than the latter. In addition to the basic clay, Medici Porcelain is believed to consist of glass, sand, and powdered rock crystal. Today, only around 60 Medici Porcelain pieces survive.

In the early 18th century, Saxon elector and Polish king Augustus the Strong was determined to create true porcelain. He tasked physicist Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, along with alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger, to find the secret element in China’s hard-paste porcelain. Augustus was so determined to make the discovery that he kept Böttger under lock and key until he came up with the correct formula.

Von Tschirnhaus died before the formula was announced, and Böttger is usually credited with having discovered the secret element, kaolin, in 1709. Augustus established the first porcelain manufactory in Europe, the world-renowned Meissen Manufactory in Dresden, Saxony, in Germany. When Augustus died in 1733, he had amassed 29,000 pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and some 8,000 pieces from



1

EDWARD OWEN/COURTESY OF HILLWOOD ESTATE, MUSEUM & GARDENS



2

1. Covered “soldier” vases, 1750–70, by an unknown artist of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), Jingdezhen, China. Hard-paste porcelain with famille rose enamels (rose-colored overglaze enamels) and gold; 72 inches by 28 inches. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens. Note: Only one of these vases is in the exhibition.

2. Ice cup from the Cameo Service, circa 1779, by Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory, Sèvres, France. Soft-paste porcelain. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens.

3. Pair of pug dog figurines, circa 1750, by Meissen Manufactory, Saxony, Germany; and Paris, France. Hard-paste porcelain and gilt bronze. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens.

his collection still remain in Dresden. Visitors to “The Luxury of Clay: Porcelain Past and Present” exhibition at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, in Washington, D.C., can learn more about the history of porcelain, its development and spread throughout Europe, and its legacy.

Curated by Tilles, the exhibition includes more than 140 porcelain objects, the majority of which are from the collection of Hillwood’s founder, the late Marjorie Merriweather Post, who was a discerning porcelain collector. For the first time since the 1960s, rare Meissen and Du Paquier porcelain will be on display from the collections of Hans Syz and Alfred Duane Pell, conserved at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Also on display are Post’s pieces from Sèvres, Imperial Russian porcelain, and diplomatic gifts between Russia and Western European countries, to name a few.



3

COURTESY OF HILLWOOD ESTATE, MUSEUM & GARDENS

Europeans admired porcelain’s strong yet delicate, solid but translucent nature.

One exhibition highlight is an 18th-century hard-paste porcelain “soldier” vase (one of a pair) from China, featuring “famille rose” enamels (opaque pink-colored overglaze enamels). Tree peony blossoms bloom on boughs that wind around and up the vase, alongside crab tree blossoms, chrysanthemum flowers, and tassels of love-lies-bleeding, to name a few familiar flora. Most of the flora are meaningful motifs. For instance, the peony represents wealth and opulence, and the chrysanthemum symbolizes a strong life of positive energy. A lotus bud tops the lid. The Chinese believe that the lotus flower, which grows in mud before it blooms, signifies purity and righteousness.

“The Luxury of Clay: Porcelain Past and Present” exhibition at Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, in Washington, D.C., runs until June 26. To find out more, visit HillwoodMuseum.org

MUSIC

‘FÜR ELISE’

The Mystery of the World’s Most Popular Piano Piece

GOTHENBURG MUSEUM OF ART / CC BY-SA 4.0

Continued from Page 1

What is the root of its unrivaled popularity? Why this piece, and not a Chopin prelude or a Bach minuet or even the first movement of Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata? It demands some looking into. Let’s start with a bit of history.

There isn’t much, and what there is, is cloudy. We know from the title that it was written “for Elise,” but who was she? The original manuscript reads: “Für Elise am 27 April [1810] zur Erinnerung.” In English: “For Elise on April 27 as a reminder,” or “in recollection,” or “as a memento.” My German is far too limited to make a judgment call on which.

In any case, these words, which are rarely mentioned when the piece is written about, indicate a past relationship with “Elise.” But what sort of relationship? The two possibilities that come readily to mind are “student” and “romantic interest.” In 1810 Therese Malfatti, age 18, was both, making her a prime candidate.

What? I thought we were looking for someone named “Elise”?

Beethoven never bothered to publish the piece, despite a great demand for his music.

Here’s Where It Gets Tricky

Beethoven apparently thought very little of what, two centuries down the line, would become an earthshaking keyboard “hit.” He never bothered to publish it, despite a great demand for his music. The composer died in 1827, 17 years after composing “Für Elise,” and the piece languished another 40 years before its publication in 1867 by the musicologist Ludwig Nohl. Nohl claimed that one Fraulein Babeth Bredl of Munich had given him a signed manuscript of the composition, and that Bredl in turn claimed that she’d received the manuscript from Therese Malfatti upon the latter’s death in 1851.

In 1810, Malfatti was a student of Beethoven. The composer reputedly fell in love with her (one of his more common practices) and proposed marriage. She declined, Beethoven being more than twice her age. There was no title to the Bredl/Malfatti manuscript, just a dedication. To Nohl, the piano rondo (a work having the structure A-B-A-C-A) seemed like one of the composer’s bagatelles, of which he had written 24. So he brought it out as “Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor.” Above the title he inscribed the dedication as he read it in the autograph score: “Für Elise.” And the rest is history.

Well, not quite. Some have speculated that Nohl misread the dedication, which was actually “Für Therese,” lending strength to the theory that Therese Malfatti was the dedicatee. (After all, the manuscript was in her possession at the time of her death.) While it’s hard to see how the distinctive initial letters “Th” could be missed by any reader, and equally challenging to understand how “r” could be read as “l” and “e” as “i,” it is true that Beethoven’s handwriting was as notoriously sloppy as his house-keeping.



Beethoven’s musical score for “Für Elise.”



If only we could examine the original signed manuscript. But we can’t. It’s lost!

‘Für Therese’?

This casts doubt on the whole enterprise. How could anyone lose track of such an important manuscript? Could it have been “lost” deliberately in order to cover up fraud? One contemporary musicologist, Luca Chiantore, has even suggested that there never was an autograph score, that Nohl simply cobbled the piece together from some of Beethoven’s sketches. Supporting this thesis is the curious fact that Theresa Malfatti, assuming there was indeed an autograph score in her possession, did not publish it herself. A baroness, she surely could have afforded to do so, and just imagine the prestige accompanying the posthumous publication of a work by Beethoven dedicated to you. Had she done this, we all might be playing “Für Therese.”

Dig deeper and the layers produce still more mystery. A sketch from 1808 has been discovered that is a fairly complete version of the “A theme,” the opening tune that my student knew the first four notes of. Did Beethoven keep the sketch until 1810, and then add the other two sections?

It turns out that the year 1810 cannot be positively confirmed as the year of the work’s composition, though it’s the best bet based on available scholarship. Finally (more or less), Beethoven scholar Barry Cooper unearthed an 1822 revision of “Für Elise” (if in fact an earlier, completed version ever existed) that contains most of the elements of the piece we know, but wildly misplaced. To the tens of millions familiar with the known version, the 1822 revision will be exceedingly bizarre. Pianist Mark S. Zimmer has recorded it. Listen if you dare.

And the Winner Is ...

And still we ask: Who was Elise? Sticking with the accepted (if not 100 percent confirmed) year of 1810, and eliminating Theresa Malfatti because she was not named “Elise” and handwriting mistakes can only account for so much, we have two remaining candidates:

Could “Für Elise” have simply been written for a piano student? “At the Piano,” 1884, by Albert Edelfelt. Gothenburg Museum of Art.



A portrait of Elisabeth Röckel (1814) by Joseph Willibrord Mähler. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Elisabeth Röckel. In 2010, musicologist Klaus Martin Kopitz produced evidence linking Beethoven romantically to Röckel, a soprano, around the time of the piece’s composition. The singer was sometimes called “Elise” by friends.

Elise Barenfeld. In 2014, musicologist Rita Steblin made a case for the only candidate whose given name actually was “Elise.” In 1810, Barenfeld was 13, living near Beethoven in a house belonging to Johann Maelzel, a friend of Beethoven’s who later invented the modern metronome. Regarded as a piano prodigy, Elise may have taken lessons with Beethoven. If so, he very well may have written the piece in memory of their time together as teacher and student.

Personally, I vote for Elise Barenfeld. Not only is she the only one with that given name, but “Für Elise” does not feel like a romantic composition. Rather, it has the character of a personality portrait.

My interpretation: The A section is a portrait of the student, Elise. It captures her youth and freshness. The B section is, perhaps, a piece assigned to the student. When it frustrates her, she breaks into the “angry” 32nd notes that conclude the section before returning to the A section. The C section is surely Beethoven himself, a smiling self-portrait of his irascible reputation. After a few student-like arpeggios and a chromatic scale, we return to the A section one last time.

That “Für Elise” is the portrait of a student sans romantic angle is supported by the fact that it is a student favorite, not a Valentine’s Day tune or a courting song. It’s a piano piece about playing the piano. Young pianists hear themselves in it and rejoice. We have Beethoven, and whoever “Elise” was, to thank for this.



A portrait of Therese Malfatti (circa 1834), widely believed to have been the dedicatee of “Für Elise,” by Karl von Saar. Oil on panel. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Former music critic for the Arizona Republic and The Kansas City Star, Kenneth LaFave recently earned a doctorate in philosophy, art, and critical thought from the European Graduate School. He’s the author of three books, including “Experiencing Film Music” (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).

BOOK REVIEW

‘Bully of Asia’

Why China’s Dream Is a Threat to World Order

A deep dive into the history of tyrannical China

DUSTIN BASS

When thinking about China, one can easily adopt the words of Winston Churchill when he called Russia “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” China truly fits such a description. It heralds its ancient history while holding strongly to a current form of government that wished to eliminate that history. It claims to be the nation that embraces the technological advancements of the future, while simultaneously utilizing those advancements to maintain its historically tyrannical rule.

Steven Mosher has made the China “riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma” easier to grasp with his book “Bully of Asia.” Mosher has a lifetime of study and experience with China; it started in the mid-1970s. He was actually invited by the Chinese regime in 1979 to be the first American social scientist to visit mainland China.

Tying the Past to the Present

His book provides in-depth analysis of the country’s history going back thousands of years. Mosher discusses the outcome of the Warring States era and how the dynasties ebbed and flowed. One of the most eye-opening moments of Chinese history is the reign of Qin Shihuang, who was the first ruler of the Qin Dynasty in the third century B.C.

His brutal reign was absolute, even going so far as to try to “eradicate thought itself.” His imperial edict called for the removal of classical and philosophical works, the end of political and philosophical discussion, the end of private schools, and the burning of imperial archives, save his memoirs. Those who broke these rules were subjected to cruel punishments, none so cruel as the punishment suffered by 463 Confucian scholars.

Qin was surrounded by advisers known as Legalists who helped to create, as Mosher puts it, “the world’s first totalitarian state.” The comparisons between Qin

and the Legalist program and Mao Zedong and the Communist Party are practically identical, and Mosher has no difficulty tying the two together.

Believing the ‘Hegemon’ Dream

The author identifies the idea of the Chinese “hegemon.” This is the crux of the book. The idea of the hegemon is the belief that China is destined to reign globally. An example of this would be the “All-Under-Heaven Complete Map of the Everlasting Unified Qing Empire,” which was published in 1806, before the country was brought low by the Opium Wars. The hegemonic dream requires that one man stand supreme above all others—a very Maoist image—which is an idea that Mosher connects to the Shang Dynasty, a dynasty that stretched to the very foundation of the state in 1766 B.C. The author points out that the ruler identified himself as “I the single one man.” In other words, as Mosher puts it, “no one else mattered.”

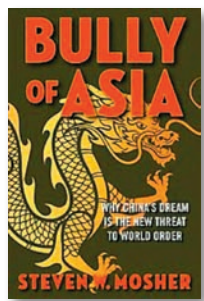
This dream of absolute rule by one man over “all under heaven” has more than survived through the millennia and, according to Mosher, has affected the way the Chinese see other nations and races. He has coined this view of the rest of the world as “national narcissism.” The concern about this expansive narcissism is that it has “provided a ready-made justification for hegemony.”

Resolving the China Problem

Mosher has assembled an incredible read that is both fascinating in historical breadth and disturbing in describing how that history has informed China’s present manifestation, and most definitely will inform its foreseeable future. As alarming as the book is—and for every American and Westerner alike, it should raise red flags (sans the golden stars)—the author does provide solutions. A few of those include the North Korean issue, Taiwan’s independence, and the addition of more China analysts who will continue analyzing the threat from the East



A portrait of the first Qin Dynasty ruler, Qin Shihuang of the third century B.C. The work appears in Jane Portal’s (Ed.) “The first emperor: China’s Terracotta Army.” Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007.h



The book explores how China’s deep past influences its present.

‘Bully of Asia: Why China’s Dream Is a Threat to World Order’

Author

Steven W. Mosher

Publisher

Regnery Publishing

Date

Nov. 27, 2017

Pages

256

Hardcover

in hopes of creating more solutions.

“Bully of Asia” is a highly recommended book for readers of all kinds. One can know that there is a problem without understanding the problem itself. This book from the preeminent scholar on China will greatly help people understand the problem that is Red China.

Dustin Bass is the host of Epoch TV’s “About the Book: A Show about New Books With the Authors Who Wrote Them.” He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.

BOOK REVIEW

Getting Serious About Saving America

Getting serious about saving America

ANITA L. SHERMAN

Let me share this from the beginning: I met Matt and Mercedes Schlapp years ago when I was editor of a local newspaper in Culpeper, Virginia. I was covering a GOP event where they were the guest speakers. Keep in mind that this was well ahead of the 2016 presidential race, and there was no indication that President Donald Trump would be the Republican Party candidate. They spoke on other issues; all of the election stuff was a coming attraction.

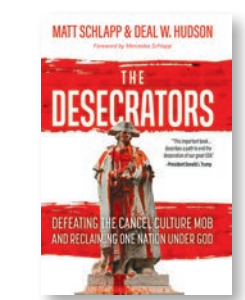
As I listened and observed them, I was struck by their forthrightness, their faith, and their commitment to family. As I recall, either all or several of their five daughters had accompanied them. The couple were gracious and sincere, they moved easily in the crowd, and clearly their roles as “mom and dad” were their highest priority. Much has happened in the political arena since then.

The Schlapps are regular faces on national media platforms. They believe former President Trump to be a fighter. They continue to be in the public eye, but they also remain targets for their outspoken beliefs about the sanctity of faith, family, and foundational values.

Fast-forward and we are roughly two years away from another presidential race. And, once again, there is much at stake.

Committed Conservatives

A former White House political director, Matt Schlapp is the chairman of CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference). In “The Desecrators,” he partners with Deal W.



The read is short, crisply written, and offers Americans a path to recovery and an end to the desecrators.

‘The Desecrators: Defeating the Cancel Culture Mob and Reclaiming One Nation Under God’

Author

Matt Schlapp and Deal W. Hudson

Publisher

TAN Books

Date

Feb. 22, 2022

Pages

232

Hardcover

Hudson, host of “Church and Culture” on the Ave Maria Radio Network and former editor of Crisis Magazine.

Mercedes Schlapp pens the foreword, giving the reader an inside look as to their “why” in the decision to write this book—a decision not without risk. He expresses the hope that the reader will be encouraged to engage and join in building up rather than tearing down, and not desecrate lives and communities.

For Schlapp and Hudson, the battle is on sacred ground.

For them, the desecrators are going straight for the jugular, attempting to destroy respect for America, the church, and citizen virtues—virtues that the founders considered necessary in order for the country to grow and flourish.

While they list a litany of forces that threaten democracy—such as cancel culture, Black Lives Matter, shaming, and critical race theory—they also highlight where many are standing up against these forces at school board meetings, town councils, state legislatures, and so forth. More and more Americans are moving beyond “whispering” their support to openly voicing their opinions in public forums.

Tired of conservatives being bullied, the authors urge Americans to reject being shamed and put on the defensive. Shrug it off and stand with confidence to say that America has millions of good people. One shouldn’t think otherwise.

Hudson is a convert to Catholicism and the Schlapps are devout Catholics. As such, their faith plays a major role in guiding their decisions, political decisions included. They give a fair amount of space in the book to the role that Christians, specifically Catholics, can play in the outcome of elections. They are transparent in their praise for certain church leaders and their keen disappointment in others when it comes to pro-life issues.

While people may be disenchanted with their local churches, particularly after many were closed during the pandemic, the authors encourage people to seek the greater,

universal truths that faith provides.

Suffering for Beliefs

Schlapp and Hudson don’t mince words when it comes to the persecution that they have experienced in their professional and personal lives. They’ve lost business. They’ve lost friends. They have felt firsthand the sting of prejudice and humiliation by standing strong with their life-affirming and conservative beliefs. Their hope is that anger, hostility, and hatred do not become America’s daily bread.

Whether you are a Trump fan or not, much of his victory in 2016 signaled the need for a champion, a righter of wrongs.

Schlapp and Hudson are taking a fighting stance. They are razor sharp about pointing out the ongoing threats to civil society and the tactics being used to undermine the country. They would like to see the negative narrative turned to one more nurturing. They end the book by summarizing steps that Americans can and should take to win the country back. In many ways, they are modern-day crusaders on a mission that they believe is to save the heart and soul of America, a country threatened.

The read is short, crisply written, and unashamedly biased, offering Americans a path to recovery and an end to the desecrators.

Their hope is that others will join in the good fight. As they state: “We offer this book as a blueprint to find the gumpion to fight back and to defend the societal order centered on the family which has been so enduring. This moment in history is at a crossroads: the America envisioned by the founders hangs in the balance, as do freedom-loving individuals around the globe.”

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist with 20 years’ experience as a writer/editor for several Virginia publications. A bibliophile, film noir fan, and Blackwing pencils devotee, she loves the stuff of stories. Reach her at anitajustwrite@gmail.com

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Director Lawrence Kasdan’s Classic Western

MICHAEL CLARK

Although individual preferences may vary, the majority of movie fans and most critics essentially agree that the best installments of the “Indiana Jones” and “Star Wars” franchises are “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and “The Empire Strikes Back.” Both had different directors, but each was produced by George Lucas and written by the then unknown Lawrence Kasdan. These were the first two films Kasdan had penned and, needless to say, they delivered him instant industry clout.

For his first two efforts as both writer and director—“Body Heat” (1981) and “The Big Chill” (1983)—Kasdan delivered two great examples of anti-tentpole character studies that were clearly aimed at older audiences not especially interested in pyrotechnics, chase scenes, and overblown special effects. Despite their limited appeal, both productions were critical and box office hits. With his third feature, Kasdan produced what is arguably the finest overall film of his career.

In the Spirit of Ford and Hawks

A crowd-pleaser by any definition of that term, “Silverado” incorporated everything Kasdan had absorbed as a boy growing up in West Virginia while devouring classic Westerns. As with “Raiders” and “Empire,” “Silverado” isn’t terribly original in content or form, meaning that all three contain the same motifs found in all previous Westerns and, in particular, everything in Howard Hawks’s and John Ford’s most iconic movies.

There’s a leading man (Kevin Kline as Paden), his sidekicks (Kevin Costner as Jake, Scott Glenn as Jake’s brother Emmett, and Danny Glover as Mal), a few (sometimes not-so-obvious) bad guys and their crews, a handful of damsels in distress, an unseen dog, peril, gunfire, some comic relief (thank you, John Cleese), and deadly confrontations that lead to redemption and the triumph of good over evil.

It’s a basic storytelling blueprint that even if followed correctly, employing only the basic ingredients, can still go awry. It is through Kasdan and his brother Mark’s screenplay, which brims with deep character development spread out evenly to nearly a dozen key speaking parts, that “Silverado” differentiates itself from thousands of other instantly forgettable also-rans.

Old Friends Reconnect

After a dialogue-free opening-title sequence featuring Emmett, the story kicks off in earnest after Paden has been ambushed by some thugs who relieved him of his horse, guns, and a very special hat, leaving him in only his red long johns. After wandering into a local town, Paden recognizes his horse, confronts the thief, and shoots him dead. About to be arrested by soldiers, Paden is vouched for by Cobb (Brian Dennehy), an old friend with obvious sway and pull. Although it’s never spelled out, it is implied that Paden and Cobb used to participate together in endeavors not thoroughly legal in nature.

Cobb lends Paden some money to buy some new duds and tells him to meet him at a nearby watering hole run by Stella (Linda Hunt), with whom Paden immediately bonds. As it turns out, the establishment is owned by Cobb, who also happens to be the town’s sheriff. Cobb eventually hires Paden with the unspoken understanding that he is owed a favor, although the latter doesn’t immediately catch the former’s drift.

Not wanting to rush things, the Kasdans take their time in providing backstories for Jake, Emmett, and Mal. The brothers are on their way to visit their sister and her family but hit a snag when Jake is prosecuted for murder and is scheduled to hang the next day. Mal is trying to stave off those attempting to steal his family’s land while trying to reconnect with his sister Rae (Lynn Whitfield), now a prostitute who is under the close watch of Slick (Jeff Goldblum), the local card shark.

Thanks in large part to John Bailey’s sweeping, panoramic cinematography and composer Bruce Broughton’s Oscar-nominated throwback, period-centric score, “Silverado” is a production that is larger in scope than the sum of its parts would initially indicate. So popular is the film’s music among score enthusiasts, it was rereleased twice with expanded versions in 1992 and in 2005.

Perhaps a Tad Too Long?

If there is anything to find fault with “Silverado,” it would be the 133-minute running time. Very few movies need more than two hours to get things done and “Silverado” is no exception. There are easily three or four scenes totaling around 15 minutes that could have been cut without any loss of continuity or sacrifice to the narrative but, on the other hand, there are likely many devoted fans of the film who probably wouldn’t mind if it had run three hours or longer.



(L-R) Danny Glover, Kevin Kline, Scott Glenn, and Kevin Costner in “Silverado.”

‘Silverado’ is a production that is larger in scope than the sum of its parts.

‘Silverado’

Director:

Lawrence Kasdan

Starring:

Kevin Kline, Kevin Costner, Scott Glenn, Danny Glover, Brian Dennehy, Linda Hunt

Running Time:

2 hours, 13 minutes

MPAA Rating:

PG-13

Release Date:

July 10, 1985

★★★★★

It’s worth mentioning that Kasdan’s rough cut did exceed three hours, a great deal of which included the fleshed-out subplot involving Hannah (Rosanna Arquette), a member of a wagon train who catches the eye of both Paden and Emmett. In the “making-of” bonus material included on the DVD release of the film, Kasdan expressed regret in having to jettison most of Hannah’s story.

Breakthrough Performances Galore

With the possible exceptions of Glover, Cleese, and Dennehy (and perhaps Kline and Goldblum, who also starred together in “The Big Chill”), “Silverado” showcased breakthrough performances from the rest of the cast, including Jeff Fahey and Richard Jenkins in extended cameo roles. Few of them fared better than Costner (whose flashback scenes were cut from “The Big Chill”), who demonstrated crack comic timing that no other filmmaker (including Costner himself) has taken advantage of since.

Produced decades after Westerns fell out of favor with general audiences, “Silverado” proves to be a reminder that the memorable movies keep things simple and rely on the human element rather than too many post-production bells and whistles. Alongside Clint Eastwood’s “Unforgiven” (1992) and Costner’s “Dances With Wolves” (1990), “Silverado” might just be one of the last great American Westerns.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.



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

The Tale of How a Snail Became Very Fast

MARK JACKSON

The summer of 2013 generally produced a yawn-fest of giant robots, monsters, and oceans of digital wizardry, none of which could hold a candle to the simple story of a cartoon snail. If you haven’t caught it already, you and the kids still have a chance to be thoroughly engrossed in the tale of a tiny toon named Theo, in “Turbo.”

In the Garden

Theo the snail (voiced by Ryan Reynolds) heads the call to adventure and leaves the garden and lawn he lives in. He wants to be ...

‘Turbo’ contains many good lessons for kids.

Turbo (voiced by Ryan Reynolds) tears up the track at the Indy 500, in “Turbo.”



a race-car driver?! Yes! He, tiny garden snail, like in Sheryl Crow’s song from that other cartoon movie about racing, “Cars,” wants to “get real gone.”

The problem is that while Theo dreams of going 200 miles per hour, he’s got a top speed of about 0.8 inches per minute. Is that not sad? Up until this telling, he’s lived his life with a badly wounded heart because life is just unfair like that, and that is a very important lesson for the kids. The kids will also learn, like in that Rolling Stones song: “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need.”

Deep down, Theo knows that he’s a member of the speedster tribe, whereas his brother Chet (Paul Giamatti) is very content to go to work every day at “The Plant” (it’s a tomato plant). Chet is a classic crab. A crab-who-destroys-dreams. Constantly pulling his day-dreaming brother back into the crab bucket. No, Chet’s not a crab. He’s a snail; both snails and crabs have shells, and ... never mind.

But Theo breaks free of the tomato plant and suburban lawn and goes on a dangerous journey! Snatched by marauding crows, he falls off a thruway overpass, lands on a car’s speeding windshield, and ultimately, sort of like Jonah and the whale, he’s sucked down a teenage drag racer’s nitro-burning Camaro’s supercharger—and enters the belly of the beast!

Instant death? No, we’re just getting started. In one of the movie’s fascinating sequences, the “camera” dives in, magnifying the goings-on in the microcosm of Theo’s physical transformation. The blue nitrous oxide, like some kind of magical high-energy matter, invades Theo’s subatomic particles, and BOOM! He’s suddenly got a supernatural ability—blazing speed.

He’s like the Flash now, snail version. But wait! There’s more! There are other supernatural abilities: His eyes light up like car headlights, and he’s got a built-in alarm, an ignition remote, and a radio. Theo just “got real gone.” Meet Turbo!

Humans

Tito Lopez (voiced by Michael Peña) is the co-owner of a Mexican restaurant in a small California backwater reminiscent of the culturally bypassed atoll in Radiator Springs, in “Cars.” Tito has a little side action going; he races snails. Tito discovers Turbo’s talent, envisions dollar signs, and enters Turbo in the Indianapolis 500.

Turbo’s pit crew is staffed by fellow speed-infatuated snails that sport amusing-low-tech versions of his supernatural abilities. They’re voiced by, among others, Snoop Dogg, Maya Rudolph, and Samuel L. Jackson. It’s sort of a Greek chorus that’s dangerously close to a minstrel show, but really, who else but Samuel L. Jackson would you want to have voice a line like, “Don’t test me, crow!”

“Turbo” contains many good lessons for kids, such as how, in order to be able to achieve the things one wants to achieve in life, one usually has to endure some hardship or danger, and learn to cooperate with others. Especially well conveyed is the joy of attaining one’s blistering-speed bliss. The snail’s-eye view of finally being able to burn up the track at 200-plus mph is thrilling to the point of making you check your adult self: “Why am I getting this happy in a child’s cartoon about an oxymoronic fast snail?” Well, it’s because the unlocking of one’s true bliss is not child’s play—it’s for all ages.

‘Turbo’

Director:

David Soren

Starring:

Ryan Reynolds, Michael Peña, Samuel L. Jackson, Paul Giamatti, Snoop Dog, Maya Rudolph, Luis Guzmán, Bill Hader

MPAA Rating:

PG

Running Time:

1 hour, 52 minutes

Release Date:

July 17, 2013

★★★★★



PUBLIC DOMAIN

At the Top of His Game Cecil B. DeMille's Triumph

'Ten Commandments,' a testament to freedom

STEPHEN OLES

"The Ten Commandments" (1956) has kept several generations of kids glued to the TV around Passover and Easter time, but Cecil B. DeMille's epic is rarely taken seriously. Seen on a small screen, faded, panned and scanned, interrupted by toothpaste commercials, it can look pretty corny.

But a 2010 restoration revealed the film to be, for all its well-known flaws, as visually splendid as a medieval cathedral, created like a cathedral by a brilliant team of faith-inspired artists and craftsmen. Seen on a big screen or on Blu-ray, minus the toothpaste, the restored movie stakes a claim for itself as a major work of religious iconography, a populist Sistine Chapel.

Cecil B. DeMille (1881–1959) began in the theater, acting and writing. He shot his

first movie in a rented barn: "The Squaw Man" (1914). Fame and success came quickly. In 1922, he invited fans to write in with suggestions for his next picture. The surprise winner was 1923's "The Ten Commandments."

The idea made Paramount executives nervous. Even with DeMille's stellar track record, a new Bible film was risky, especially one without the sex appeal of "Samson and Delilah." With the colossal spectacle audiences now expected from the director, and lots of special effects, the remake might cost more than anybody had ever spent on a movie. (Spoiler alert: It did.)

In the 1923 version, the modern story was a letdown after the exciting Exodus scenes, so DeMille eliminated it. Since the Bible tells us nothing about Moses from his babyhood to age 30, the script added stories from other ancient Jewish and Christian sources. It also added a DeMille staple: Two men in love with the same woman. To make this work, Moses couldn't be cast as the earlier film had, as an elderly patriarch. He had to be young and virile: Charlton Heston.

The film's acting and writing are often called stilted, but its grand, historical

Rear projection placed cloud effects behind Charlton Heston in a climactic scene in "The Ten Commandments." Trailer screenshot, from the DVD of "The Ten Commandments," 50th Anniversary Collection Paramount, 2006.

circus story. The cast included a young actor who'd appeared in only one other film: Charlton Heston.

His Own Remake

In 1952, at an age when most directors have retired, DeMille was coming off two big hits. How could he top them? With an even bigger epic, of course: a remake of his own work "The Ten Commandments."

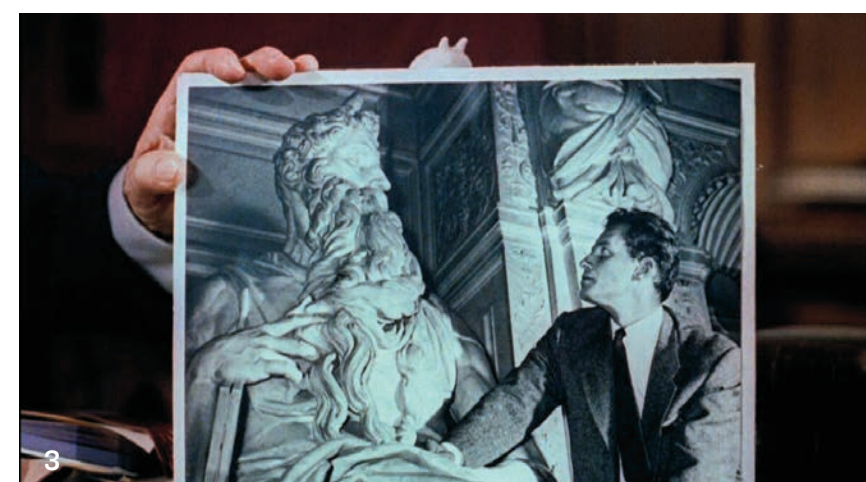
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The film's acting and writing are often called stilted, but its grand, historical



CECIL B. DEMILLE FOUNDATION COPYRIGHT 2022



1. Cecil B. DeMille directing his 1923 version of "The Ten Commandments."

2. Yul Brynner (center) was perfect casting for the role of the Egyptian pharaoh.

3. Cecil B. DeMille holds a photograph of Charlton Heston looking at Michelangelo's "Moses." Heston's resemblance to the sculpture helped him win the role of Moses in "The Ten Commandments."

scope demanded larger-than-life performances and dialog that wouldn't sound too modern. The movie's forthright, declarative style, reinforced by Elmer Bernstein's powerful music, recalls the Victorian dramas of DeMille's youth—with all primary colors and no shades of gray.

For the seductive princess Nefretiti (not to be confused with Nefertiti, who reigned a century earlier), DeMille wanted Audrey Hepburn, but her figure, perfect for Givenchy, was too slim to fill out the clinging gowns, so Anne Baxter got the part. She wasn't ideal either, not quite credible as a temptress and prone to chewing scenery, but she's not bad. Other roles went to Vincent Price, Yvonne De Carlo, Edward G. Robinson, and Judith Anderson.

Scene Stealer Brynner as Rameses

Heston's sonorous voice and stalwart demeanor served him well as Moses, the first of many historical heroes he would play on the screen, but it's Yul Brynner as the pharaoh Rameses who really steals the movie. Rarely has an actor fit a part so perfectly. In ancient Egypt, nobles shaved their heads; Brynner already did. Though actually Russian, his exotic masculinity, piercing gaze, and indefinable accent are so right for Rameses that it's hard to imagine another actor in the role. Brynner rocks his flashy outfits and glittering regalia as if born to wear them. Even his ripped physique is an

asset, since Rameses is shirtless for much of the movie.

Back in 1927, H.B. Warner had played Jesus in DeMille's favorite of all his films, "The King of Kings." By the 1950s, the actor was dying, forgotten in a nursing home. DeMille wanted him so badly to play the old blind man who can't walk but offers a tree to plant in the Promised Land, he sent an ambulance to pick him up. When Warner was too weak to finish his lines (taken from Psalm 22), DeMille let him say as much as he could: "I am poured out like water. My strength is dried up to the dust of death," Eyman reports. It was Warner's last role and one of many occasions when the director remembered and showed kindness to people who had worked for him, even decades before.

Yul Brynner as the pharaoh Rameses really steals the movie.

In his career, DeMille peddled plenty of hokum, but for this film he insisted on historical accuracy. For three years, his team accumulated research that was later published as a book. No detail was overlooked. According to film scholar Katherine Orri-

son, blue-eyed cast members had to wear brown contact lenses. Even the scrap of cloth that proves Moses is the son of slaves was woven "on authentic looms of the period ... using the same dyes ... and the pattern that represented the Levite tribe."

Eye-Popping Visuals

Visually, "The Ten Commandments" is magnificent. All of art history flows through its beautiful images. Every ornate costume, set, and prop contributes to DeMille's meticulous, pageant-like storytelling. Every scene, carefully composed in Technicolor's gem-like hues, seems to evoke a Renaissance painting.

When it comes to spectacle, DeMille outdid himself. The flight out of Egypt, the raising of the obelisk, the revelation on Mt. Sinai, and of course the parting of the Red Sea are unforgettable. The big scenes team with thousands of extras and animals. How did the director find so many actors on location in Egypt? President Nasser, remembering DeMille's respectful treatment of the Saracens in "The Crusades" (1935), put the entire Egyptian army at his disposal.

Steven Spielberg called the movie's Red Sea scene "the greatest special effect in film history," reports Emanuel Levy on his website Cinema 24/7, but it's marred by black lines (called fringing) around the picture elements. Granted, it was 1956, but

that wasn't the problem. The premiere date was set, so there wasn't time to fix or even finish the effects, not even the lackluster burning bush that DeMille hated when he saw it.

"The Ten Commandments" was DeMille's last, most expensive, and most successful production. He gave his heart and soul to it, and almost his life. Eyman explains that while filming the tremendous Exodus scene and inspecting a camera high atop a tower, the 74-year-old director suffered a massive heart attack. Told by his doctors to rest in bed for a month on oxygen, he replied: "Forget it, gentlemen!" He was back on the set the next morning.

In a spoken prologue cut from the film on television, DeMille calls his movie "the story of the birth of freedom." He asks, "Are men the property of the state, or are they free souls under God?" That indeed is the question. After 66 years, "The Ten Commandments" remains, perfectly imperfect, a testament to what Hollywood achieved and could achieve again, motivated by faith, freedom, and tradition.

Stephen Oles has worked as an inner city school teacher, a writer, actor, singer, and a playwright. His plays have been performed in London, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Long Beach, California. He lives in Seattle and is currently working on his second novel.

BOOK REVIEW

Why All Believers Must Unite Against Communism

CHUNG HO/HO/EPOCH TIMES



Falun Gong practitioners gather to support the withdrawal of 390 million people from the Chinese Communist Party and its associate groups, in Brooklyn, N.Y., on Feb. 27, 2022.

TREVOR LOUDON

I have just read one of the most sobering yet optimistic books of my life.

This work answers the burning question that many of us are asking: How do we stop this wonderful planet from swiftly collapsing into an earthly hell?

We must aim for heaven. We must aim not to contain or appease, but to decisively defeat evil. And by far, the most dangerous evil today is communism.

We must work with all other believers in Divine Providence to defeat evil in the here and now, to ensure that God's purpose for this world is fulfilled. To regain Earth for good, we must cast aside our squabbles and unite with others of faith and goodwill. We have very little time, but good may yet prevail.

So says the author of a timely and profound new book, "The Triumph of Good: Cain, Abel and the End of Marxism."

Thomas Cromwell is a British-born American journalist, a veteran of a quarter of a century of work in the Middle East, and the holder of a 130-stamp passport.

Cromwell takes a religious and philosophical approach to a very practical matter. That is, how do we preserve and enhance human liberty and dignity in the face of what many see as unsurmountable odds?

Cromwell writes:

"History demonstrates that the forces of evil can be defeated and the sacrifices of so many in the struggle against evil may not be in vain. To achieve an ultimate triumph of good we can never accept the supremacy of evil. Rather we must keep in mind our God-given destiny to live as a human family in a world of goodness and keep pressing on to achieve that goal."

As a boy, growing up in the early 1960s in beautiful and peaceful New Zealand, a sense of optimism was the norm. The older generations had been through the Great Depression, and two world wars, but things were looking up. Our culture was positive and optimistic. Yes, there were many problems, but we knew we would overcome them. Nuclear war with the Soviet Union was always a threat, but even then, we knew that our older brothers the "Yanks" would defeat any enemy. "The goodies always win in the end" was a common phrase among my schoolmates. Quaint and corny maybe, but we absolutely believed it.

Even then, my home country was pretty secular, but we were still living in a Christian culture. "Godzone" we proudly called our nation—from "God's own country."

Even the atheists and agnostics among us had some sense of Divine Providence—a better future was almost inevitable.

We face a world today where a major war could break out at any time. The Communist Party of China and its allies in Moscow and Tehran have seized the strategic advantage over a weakly led America and a badly divided Europe.

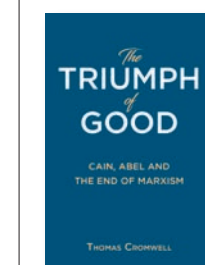
The world balance of power is swiftly moving in favor of a new "Axis of Evil," more powerful than any before it.

Human liberty is on the wane all over the world—even in the once "free" countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Israel, and the United States.

Even freedom of speech—the most precious freedom of all—could be lost forever.

It's hard to be optimistic in such dark times. Especially as so many have abandoned God and all faith in his providence. Pessimism is now more ubiquitous than the CCP (Chinese

The greatest victories come from the darkest times.



The most dangerous evil today is communism, as outlined in "The Triumph of Good."

'The Triumph of Good: Cain, Abel and the End of Marxism'

Author

Thomas Cromwell

Publisher

East West Publishing;

Date

Dec. 17, 2021

Pages

560, Paperback

Communist Party) virus.

What if the "goodies" don't really win in the end?

Cromwell traces the roots of our present troubles back to the earliest days of Creation—to Adam and Eve's sons Cain and Abel.

Cain, in a fit of jealous rage, brutally murdered his brother Abel—a good and virtuous man. This first "victory" of evil over good has been echoing through every era, every civilization, and every culture, primitive or advanced, ever since.

Communism, fed by the vices of jealousy, envy, and malice, comes directly from Cain and his inspirer.

The progress and liberty that we have agonizingly and slowly managed to win over several millennia comes from Abel and his godly virtues.

Good men have fought Cain in every era and lost most battles. But they have been winning the war. Progress, however excruciatingly slow, has been made.

Cromwell lays it all out in fascinating chapters such as "The Origin of Evil," which quite rightly blames man's willful alienation from God. He traces the birth of civilization, the role of science, and the continual sabotage by Cain's ever-present henchmen.

His book brings us through history to the modern era, where we have seen an incredible increase in material prosperity coupled with an ever-increasing separation from God. Free men have grown arrogant and complacent, and that has given the Devil his opening.

In an age where man should be enjoying general material abundance and the spread of liberty across the globe, we face a resurgent communist movement that threatens to destroy us—a specter that could drag us down into a Dark Age like

we have never seen.

Imagine, if you dare, a global North Korea with American surveillance technology.

But as Cromwell consistently tells us, the answer is right in front of us.

All who believe in God and goodness must unite against the communist evil. We must show the courage that only faith can give us to smite down this foulness once and for all.

The greatest victories come from the darkest times, because that's when good men get off the fence and commit themselves to truth and virtue. Then and only then may we hope for the triumph of Divine Providence.

Cromwell has written a great book for our time. This is a guide to navigate the darkness and to push through and beyond the evil around us.

Cromwell is an optimist, and after reading his book, so am I. With courage, faith, and God's providence, we can not only defeat communism in all its corrupt manifestations but also usher in a new and great era of goodness and godliness. We may never see heaven on Earth, but we can apply divine principles to make this amazing world even better. I'm sure our as yet unborn grandsons and granddaughters will thank us for our efforts.

Urge every person who believes that spirit is stronger than matter to read this book.

Trevor Loudon is an author, filmmaker, and public speaker from New Zealand. For more than 30 years, he has researched radical left, Marxist, and terrorist movements and their covert influence on mainstream politics. He is best known for his book "Enemies Within: Communists, Socialists and Progressives in the U.S. Congress" and his similarly themed documentary film "Enemies Within."

DISNEY+



Oscar Isaac as Steven Grant and alter ego Marc Spector in "Moon Knight."

TV MINISERIES

'Moon Knight'

Marvel's Jewish Superhero

JOE BENDEL

It took years to confirm in the pages of his Marvel comic book, but Marc Spector was indeed one of the first Jewish superhero alter egos, along with the Fantastic Four's Ben Grimm. In the comics, his father, Elias, was identified as an immigrant rabbi who survived the Holocaust.

The Marvel hero now has his own streaming series, but it is unclear how much of his Jewish heritage will be reflected, at least from the first four (out of six) episodes provided for review. (But there are press reports of the casting of his Jewish parents, presumably to be seen in later flashback scenes.)

Regardless, when viewers first meet Spector, he is not in the best of shape. The mercenary still serves as the empowered avatar of the fictional Egyptian moon spirit of vengeance, Khonshu, but he must share a body with the persona of nebbish Steven Grant, thanks to his severe dissociative identity disorder. Spector only comes out at times of extreme physical stress, but such

'Moon Knight'

Director:
Mohamed Diab

Starring:
Oscar Isaac, Ethan Hawke,
May Calamawy

Running Time:
6 episodes

MPAA Rating:
Unrated

Release Date:
March 30, 2022

★★★★★

instances happen plenty often in "Moon Knight," adapted by head-writer Jeremy Slater and showrunner Mohamed Diab.

Superhero in London

It might sound ironic that a Jewish-American mercenary would do the dirty work of an Egyptian higher being, but that is part of the tension that the comic explored. Regardless, Spector certainly seems to know his way around the Middle Eastern country when the action shifts to Egypt, but it starts in London, where his shy Grant identity works as a gift store clerk someplace very much like the British Museum. Although bullied on the job, Grant displays a knowledge of ancient Egyptian culture well above his lowly position. Of course, that will come in handy later.

Tormented by vivid dreams and bouts of sleepwalking, the confused Grant ties his leg to a bedpost each night and tries to forestall sleep as long as possible. Yet he inevitably comes to at awkward moments, finding himself battling thugs loyal to Arthur Harrow, a sinister cult leader. Harrow's notion of justice approaches the fanatical. He too once served as Khonshu's earthly avatar, but he came to the conclusion that the avenging immortal is not sufficiently proactive.

Egyptian Antagonist

Harrow now secretly plots to release Khonshu's old antagonist, Ammit, who has been held in stasis within her secret tomb. Khonshu is definitely a bit of an overbearing blowhard (whose stern voice constantly reverberates in Spector/Grant's head), but he believes that issues of guilt and innocence should still be adjudicated fairly. Ammit would ruthlessly cut down anyone she judged to be inclined toward criminal deviancy, like a manifestation of "Minority Report" from Egyptian antiquity. What really distinguishes "Moon Knight" from the recent crush of superhero programming is the ancient Egyptian themes and motifs. There is a lot of hieroglyphics, sarcophaguses, and flying scarabs. The Moon Knight suit that Spector can summon to channel Khonshu's superpowers also comes equipped with some impressive crescent-shaped throwing weapons.

Yet showrunner Diab (who is probably best known for the film "Cairo 678," which blisteringly critiqued the misogyny of Egyptian Islamists) also maintains the hardboiled noir vibe of the early comic

books. For a while, the "Moon Knight" comic book was criticized for its "Batman"-like vibe, until it started to lean more forcefully into the ancient Egyptian backstory.

Big, Bad Villain

Marvel's latest series also boasts a truly creepy villain in Arthur Harrow, played with surprisingly chilling menace by Ethan Hawke. Reportedly inspired by David Koresh, viewers can also find echoes of cult leaders like Charles Manson and Jim Jones in the hippie-ish New Age messianic megalomaniac. It is the serenity masking his ruthlessness that makes Hawke's performance so creepy.

What distinguishes 'Moon Knight' from superhero programming is the ancient Egyptian themes.

Oscar Isaac plays the Spector persona with a steeliness that suits the show's noir vibe, but he is a bit too whiny and sheepish as the meek Grant. However, F. Murray Abraham's booming voice is perfect for the stentorian Khonshu. Although the visions of the Egyptian immortal are computer generated, he plays an intriguing role in the narrative, especially when he interacts with his rival Egyptian higher beings.

There are some nicely choreographed fight sequences and the Khonshu character design is pretty striking, but the Moon Knight suit often looks a little weird in close-ups. Regardless, Hawke gives one of the best supervillain performances of any of the Marvel/Disney+ series, so far.

Diab and Slater keep it almost entirely free of wider Marvel MCU references, so casual viewers can watch it without referring to the internet for an explanation of any stray cameos. As long as it eventually acknowledges Spector's Jewish heritage in a respectful way, it should satisfy long-standing fans of the superhero.

Recommended as something a little different from Marvel, "Moon Knight" started streaming March 30 on Disney+.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit JBSpins.blogspot.com



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