

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

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▲ "Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1," 1871, by James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Oil on canvas; 56 3/4 inches by 64 1/8 inches. Orsay Museum, Paris.

FINE ARTS

## 142 Years Overdue: 'Whistler's Mother' Visits Philadelphia

A once-in-a-generation chance to see the nation's most beloved Whistler painting

By Lorraine Ferrier

Most of us will recognize the portrait of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's mother, Anna, that he painted. It's one of the most celebrated American paintings, and the first work by an American artist that the French government bought. Yet it's a portrait that nearly never came to be.

Whistler (1834–1903) had been painting "The Girl in Blue on the Seashore" (now known as "Annabel Lee") when his model, Maggie, became ill and failed to show up for a sitting.

"Disappointments are often the Lord's means of blessing," wrote Whistler's mother in a letter to her sister on Nov. 3, 1871. She recounted how the incident led Whistler to paint her portrait instead, something that he'd long intended to do.

Sixty-seven-year-old Anna felt unwell, too, when she posed for her por-

**Whistler's family, friends, and peers received the painting well.**



▲ As one of the nation's most beloved paintings, "Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1" has been reproduced many times, from a poster urging men to enlist with the Irish Canadian Rangers to the 1934 postage stamp "In memory and in honor of the mothers of America."

trait in her son's studio. For two to three days she "stood as a statue," hiding her sickness from her son, so as not to cause him any distress. When she could stand no more, he changed the composition and painted her seated.

Whistler took around three months to complete the piece. Anna wrote of one instance when Whistler grew frustrated with the painting: "I silently lifted my heart, that it might be as the Net cast down in the Lake at the Lord's will, as I observed his trying again, and oh my grateful rejoicing in spirit as suddenly my dear Son would exclaim, 'Oh Mother it is mastered, it is beautiful!' and he would kiss me for it!"

In the painting, a poised Anna sits in profile-view, facing a Japanese-style curtain or kimono embroidered with silver. She wears a white muslin bonnet and a black dress, and she rests her hands on a handkerchief and her feet on a footstool. (Anna had taken to wearing black after her husband died some 20 years prior.) Whistler's print

"Black Lion Wharf" hangs on the wall.

He placed objects in the portrait that signified his style and influences, including Japanese motifs such as the curtain, and his monogram signature of a stylized butterfly. And on the wall, he rendered the print that was part of a series he made of the River Thames, a subject close to his heart and home at 2 Lindsey Row (now 96 Cheyne Walk), in Chelsea, London.

**The Portrait's Checkered Reception**

Whistler's family, friends, and peers received the painting well, marveling at his draftsmanship and the good likeness that he'd achieved. "Isn't it the very way Mrs Whistler sits with her hands folded on her handkerchief! Oh it is exactly like her!" the daughter of Whistler's patron said. Poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote to Whistler, saying that the portrait "must make you happy for life and ought to do good to the times we are living in."

*Continued on Page 4*



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▲ Peter Freuchen lived among the Inuit for a while. "A Greenlandic Settlement by a Fjord, Summer," 1883, by Carl Rasmussen. Oil on canvas. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark.

BOOK REVIEW

# Peter Freuchen's Fascinating Life of Adventure

By Dustin Bass

It is nearly impossible to be saved from obscurity. With each passing decade, the chances of someone's name being completely lost to history increases dramatically to the point of certainty, regardless of their accomplishments or of how interesting their lives. Even the subject of Reid Mitenbuler's recent book, a biography about arguably the most interesting person you'll ever read about, was discovered by mere happenstance.

It was an oil painting of a bearded, peg-legged gentleman that piqued Mitenbuler's interest. The painting hung in an old New York mansion that was home to The Explorers Club. The subject of the painting was Peter Freuchen, and his story exceeds imagination.

Mitenbuler's "Wanderlust: An Eccentric Explorer, an Epic Journey, a Lost Age" has rescued the Danish polar explorer from potential obscurity. The biography is no short piece of work; indeed, a life like Freuchen's is far too full of adventure for a minimalist approach. Mitenbuler has written a captivating and engrossing biography that captures Freuchen in all his nuance, bravado, humility, and courage.

### Peter Freuchen's Wanderlust

At the onset of the book, Freuchen is met with a choice, a career choice. He was a med student on the path to becoming a doctor, but there was a strong desire for adventure, specifically polar adventure.

Freuchen was possessed of an adventurous spirit and was born during the age of polar explorers, when men sailed toward and were often met with extreme hardship, if not tragedy. He was part of the 1906 Danmark Expedition, which met with both extreme hardship and tragedy when three of its members, including expedition leader Ludvig Mylius-Erichsen, perished.

Freuchen was different from most polar explorers. He not only explored the region but also lived there, making his home in Greenland and living among the Inuit. Mitenbuler presents a man who seemed to love, or at least easily acclimated to, the extremes—from weather to adventures to relationships. Freuchen's desire to write of his experiences, both in exploration of the Far North and the peculiar societies of the Inuit, provides an insight into what Mitenbuler rightly terms "a lost age."

### A Lost Age

As the book progresses, we witness the raw existence of the frigid North recede as modernity reaches its icy shores. We witness this "progress paradox" (an economic term used by Mitenbuler) through Freuchen's eyes. Indeed, the era of exploration that we esteem with such nostalgia had, in a considerably short time, given way to capitalism and industry. It is a paradox as it leaves us wishing for the past while simultaneously being grateful for the advancements of the modern era. In a sense, Freuchen is a human analogy of the times in which he lived. He was a picture of both the receding and dying past and the progressive and hopeful future.

Possibly the most analogous is his time in Greenland during World War I.

Nothing really changes in his immediate world, but there are hints and echoes of the massive and irreversible alterations taking place outside that world—alterations that would inevitably reach him, no matter where he chose to reside. Some affected him more deeply than others, such as the loss of his first wife, Navarana, an Inuit, from the Spanish Flu (an illness he himself barely survived), or the much later Nazi occupation of his homeland of Denmark (a time in which he became part of the Danish Resistance).

### Survival of Various Sorts

"Wanderlust" displays Freuchen as a man who seemed almost otherworldly, and indeed many people in his day viewed him as such. His massive build, thick scraggly beard (which helped cover scars from frostbite), and missing foot (also due to frostbite), combined with his gift for storytelling (both verbal and literary), kindheartedness, and his pursuit of righting social wrongs make him a celebrity for both yesterday and today.

His survival both physically and monetarily was often by sheer will, whether it was combating loneliness and mental fatigue in the polar regions, forcing himself to write novels and screenplays in America and Denmark (including the landmark MGM film "Eskimo," in which he also starred), or facing down Nazis. That will—that gifting—to explore, survive, and dictate enables us to experience and understand his past, a world that seems now obscure and unreal.

Mitenbuler has reproduced the incredible and unfathomable life of Freuchen in a seamless, enjoyable, thoroughly re-

searched, and properly balanced biography. That pursuit of balance, which I believe Mitenbuler achieves, typically culminates in biographies where the views and social norms of the past (the subject) and the present (the reader) collide.

Mitenbuler, in his epilogue, brilliantly addresses that balance by stating, "Evaluating the past is always a challenge, walking that fine line between smug superiority and warped nostalgia." This is a view to which we all should adhere. Such a balance would result in a fine existence, even if we are doomed to obscurity.

*Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast. He also writes two weekly series for The Epoch Times: Profiles in History and This Week in History.*

BOOK REVIEW

# A Biography of a WWII Hero at Iwo Jima

A Native American warrior with PTSD

By Mark Lardas

Ira Hayes was one of the six Marines photographed raising the flag at Iwo Jima. In popular memory, he is the Native American who became a Marine hero at Iwo Jima and died at 36, a drunk.

"Ira Hayes: The Akimel O'odham Warrior, World War II, and the Price of Heroism" by Tom Holm shows that there was more to Hayes. It reveals him to be an intelligent, sensitive man scarred by Post Traumatic Shock Disorder (PTSD) who, due to ignorance about the disorder, was never allowed to heal.

Holm examines Hayes and his tribe, the Akimel O'odham. With long military traditions, the tribe was a longtime U.S. ally against Spain, Mexico, and other Native American tribes. Yet ultimately, the tribe's reward was to be robbed of their water rights and wealth. They became impoverished in the late 19th century.

Hayes, coming from a warrior tradition, fit naturally in the Marines and became an outstanding soldier. Holm shows him as smart, outgoing, and sensitive in high school. In boot camp, he was disciplined and sober, the one who did not drink on leave. Hays became parachute and Raider qualified. In combat on Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, he proved a brave and competent combatant.

### The Misfortune of Fame

Being photographed raising the U.S. flag at Iwo Jima led to Hayes's unwanted participation in the Seventh War Bond tour.

By Iwo Jima's end, he was suffering from PTSD, then called combat fatigue. He watched close buddies die, comrades at Bougainville and Iwo Jima. He felt that the dead were the heroes, not him. Tribal tradition taught modesty as an important warrior value and discouraged contact with the dead, which were ever-present at Iwo Jima.

Instead of needed rest, Hayes was

forced into public view. His actions were spotlighted, and celebratory drinks were pushed on him. Under this stress, all three surviving Marines overindulged. Hayes, a Native American, was singled out for drinking. Pulled from the tour, he was sent back to his unit without being allowed home leave.

There were other stresses as well. A dead buddy, one of the other flag raisers, went uncredited. Hayes was ordered to stay silent about this fact, and left the Marines to be free to tell the truth.

After defending his county, he could not vote in Arizona. With untreated PTSD, made to feel worthless, and singled out and punished for his drinking because he was a "drunken Indian," he spiraled down.

Holm's book makes for grim reading, but it remains worthwhile. Although a tragedy, Ira Hayes's life is worth honoring.

*Mark Lardas, an engineer, freelance writer, historian, and model-maker, lives in League City, Texas. His website is MarkLardas.com*



"IRA HAYES: THE AKIMEL O'ODHAM WARRIOR, WORLD WAR II, AND THE PRICE OF HEROISM"

By Tom Holm  
Twelve  
Aug. 1, 2023  
Hardcover  
320 pages

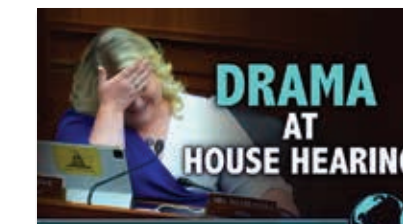


▲ Ira Hayes and the image that made him famous and, perhaps, ruined his life.

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NEWS HIGHLIGHTS



## House Democrats Walk Out on Expert Testimony on Gender Surgery

During a recent committee hearing, House Democrats tried to block Rep. Kat Cammack from playing a video of a gender reassignment surgery expert who admitted there are a lot of unknowns with the procedure, and then walked out.



SCAN TO WATCH

FACTS MATTER



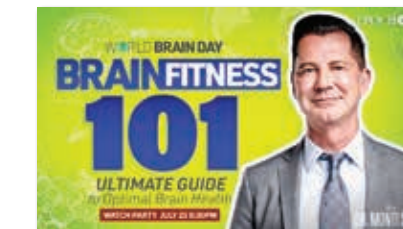
## New COVID Vaccine Bombshell Emerges

A systematic review of autopsies of people who died following vaccination was recently published by Lancet, only to be censored 24 hours later. We look at the conclusions of this study, as well as the rationale (or lack thereof) for why it was pulled down.



SCAN TO WATCH

THE DR. MONTI SHOW



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Health is key to success in this world. But sadly, most of us are not getting the right health information to live our best lives. Join Dr. Monti as he gathers top medical experts to explore how we can create a healthier and happier life.



SCAN TO WATCH

AMERICAN THOUGHT LEADERS



## How Hidden Actors Distort Reality, Manipulate the Public, and Enforce Consensus

Jan Jekielek sits down with investigative journalist Matt Taibbi, one of the key investigators of the Twitter Files, which exposed collusion between social media companies, the nonprofit sector, and the federal government to censor Americans.



SCAN TO WATCH

CROSSROADS



## Project NextGen Rushes COVID Vaccines; Abortion Story Reveals a Fake Narrative Strategy

The Biden administration has allocated \$5 billion in funding for COVID-19 vaccines, but there is a confusing lack of guidance. A story on abortion published by establishment sources has been debunked, and is now an example of a fake narrative.



SCAN TO WATCH



▲ A glass negative of Anna Mathilda McNeill Whistler, date unknown, by Harris & Ewing. Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



▲ A photograph of artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler in 1878, with his monogram signature of a stylized butterfly. Library of Congress.

## FINE ARTS

# 142 Years Overdue: 'Whistler's Mother' Visits Philadelphia

Continued from Page 1

While those closest to the artist celebrated, some of the public—artists and critics alike—largely puzzled over the painting's sparse scene and limited palette.

Whistler's painting and its name—he titled the painting "Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother"—brought forth both support and criticism. He entered the piece in the 104th Royal Academy of Arts Exhibition in 1872. It was rejected. The general consensus? A beautiful painting devoid of color. One commentator said that the title deflected from Whistler's delightful characteristic painting with its subtle distinctions between hues and tones.

Yet some experts condemned the academy's decision. A painter and the director of The National Gallery, Sir William Boxall, threatened to resign from the Royal Academy of Arts council if the portrait wasn't

hung. Then, Whistler's painting was hung high above a door in the academy, almost out of view.

"Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother" challenged the traditional artistic values, where God's creations reigned supreme and that official title didn't help.

**The Deviant Path: 'Art for Art's Sake'**  
Whistler worked on the cusp of modernism. In his world of the late-19th century, photography had gained popularity and representational art fell out of favor. Many artists sought novel painting styles in the mistaken belief that photography could capture a truer picture than any painter could, when, in fact, a photograph captures shapes—not the nuances of light and character. This new technology threatened the artists' livelihood and even drove some to suicide.

Whistler's portrait of his mother, more

frequently known simply as "Whistler's Mother," sits firmly between the traditional art of painting true to life and the experimental style of the time that favored stylization and loose brushwork. It foreshadows that Whistler would eventually deviate from realistic art and embrace the avant-garde.

Traditional artists hone their technical skills to communicate universal ideas that uplift humanity, often regardless of a viewer's mother tongue. "In traditional work the ideas are embodied in intelligible imagery. They are conveyed directly," art scholar and critic Michelle Marder Kamhi wrote in her book "Bucking the Artworld Tide: Reflections on Art, Pseudo Art, Art Education & Theory."

But that changed as the 20th century approached. "The twentieth-century modernist bias has conveyed the very false impression that innovation, originality, and seriousness of

purpose were exclusive to the avant garde, and that 'traditional' painters were a homogenous group, all alike in their degree of conservatism and general lack of artistic depth, sincerity, and imagination," Ms. Kamhi wrote.

As part of the aesthetic art movement, Whistler believed in "art for art's sake."

"Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, such as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it; and that is why I insist on calling my works 'arrangements' and 'harmonies,'" he explained in "The Red Rag," which was published in "The World society paper on May 22, 1878.

Most of Whistler's works have musical titles regardless of their subject matter, a practice that he started after a critic commented that the portrait titled "The White Girl," was a "Symphony in White," and so the artist changed that piece's title.

And Whistler renamed the painting "Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1" after he painted Scottish essayist, historian, and philosopher Thomas Carlyle's portrait titled "Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 2."

Whistler believed in beauty, placing more importance on the position of the tones and colors than on the object portrayed. "My picture of a 'Harmony in Grey and Gold' is an illustration of my meaning—a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot," he wrote in the essay.

He felt that artists shouldn't merely imi-



▲ "Les Derniers Jours D'enfance (The Last Days of Childhood)," 1883-85, by Cecilia Beaux. Oil on canvas; 45 3/4 inches by 54 inches. Gift of Cecilia Drinker Saltonstall, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

tate nature, like photographs do. "Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music."

The artist could isolate those elements and "compose" whatever picture he wanted to, Whistler believed. However, this practice effectively puts the artist's creation before God's. Rather than realism, therefore, Whistler favored stylized pictures full of impressions, especially in his later works. His print "Black Lion Wharf," which hangs in his mother's portrait, is a good example. It's a hectic scene, as barges and sailboats rush past the warehouse-lined riverbanks. Rather than create the picture in perspective, he reversed it—detailing the distant warehouses and loosely sketching the foreground objects and figures.

centuries prior. Whistler knew the print either from a copy he'd seen in Philadelphia or from an original print his brother-in-law owned. (Some scholars believe that Rembrandt etched his mother's candid likeness directly onto the plate, while she sat before him—a technique called "live etching.") Exhibition visitors can see similarities between the works for themselves via the late 18th-century copy of the print by Italian Francesco Novelli that's on display.

## Whistler favored stylized pictures full of impressions, especially in his later works.

### Visiting Philadelphia

Anyone visiting Philadelphia can judge "Whistler's Mother" for themselves. "The Artist's Mother: Whistler and Philadelphia" exhibition explores the portrait that Whistler painted of his mother, its connection with Philadelphia, and how it inspired eight other artists to portray mothers.

Philadelphia last hosted Whistler's painting in 1881 as part of a "Special Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists at Home and in Europe," at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

The current exhibition highlights how painters looked to their peers, past and present, for inspiration. Whistler, for instance, painted his mother in a pose similar to one of Rembrandt's etchings of his mother, "The Artist's Mother, Seated in an Oriental Headdress: Half Length," which the Dutch master created some two

centuries prior. Whistler knew the print either from a copy he'd seen in Philadelphia or from an original print his brother-in-law owned. (Some scholars believe that Rembrandt etched his mother's candid likeness directly onto the plate, while she sat before him—a technique called "live etching.") Exhibition visitors can see similarities between the works for themselves via the late 18th-century copy of the print by Italian Francesco Novelli that's on display.

Beaux's endearing painting of a mother and child is of her sister and nephew, as Beaux was just 12 days old when her mother died.

Tanner saw Whistler's painting when it was exhibited in Pennsylvania and possibly also in Paris, where he later lived. In contrast to Whistler, Tanner used soft, warm brown tones to create a tender portrait of his mother gently rocking in her chair with a shawl slung over the back and a fan keeping her cool from the intense heat. Just as

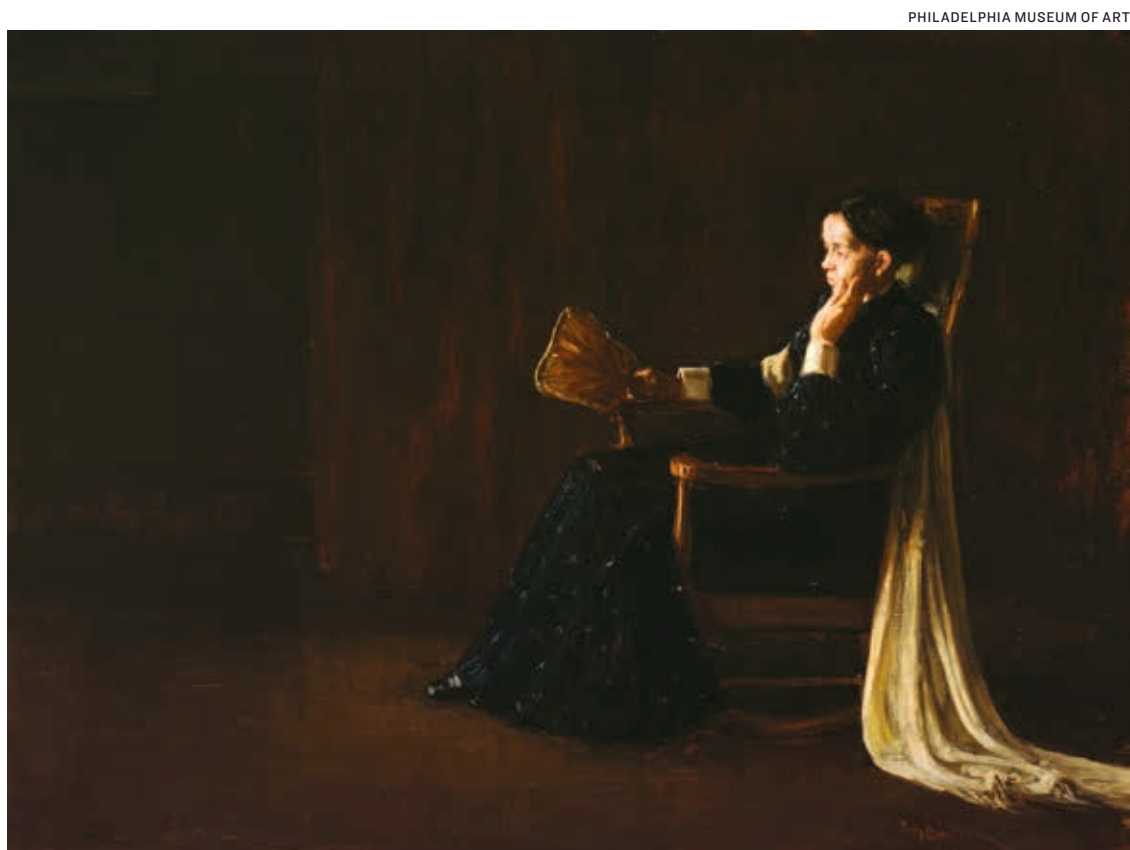
with Whistler's work, the French government purchased Tanner's portrait of his mother.

### A National Treasure

In 1891, when the French minister of the interior, Leon Victor Auguste Bourgeois, wrote to Whistler requesting the piece for the French nation, he doubted that Whistler would agree to the meager amount; he could offer him only 4,000 francs. However, Whistler agreed to the sale, saying that of all his paintings, he preferred "formal recognition" for his mother's portrait more than any other. The sale of her portrait to the French government marked the beginning of Whistler's success.

An artist can control only so much of the image that he paints; he can't control the viewer's experience. Whether in "Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1" we see Whistler's "arrangement" of colors alone or his mother is up to us. Either way, it's a painting that the nation loves and that Whistler loved. Before selling the work, he kept the portrait near him, hanging it in his studio and bedroom. When his friend commented on the beauty of the portrait, Whistler paused and then said, "Yes, one does like to make one's Mummy just as nice as possible."

"The Artist's Mother: Whistler and Philadelphia" exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art runs through Oct. 29. Jennifer Thompson, the museum's Gloria and Jack Drosdick curator of European painting & sculpture, and curator of the John G. Johnson Collection, arranged the exhibition. To find out more, visit [PhilaMuseum.org](http://PhilaMuseum.org)



▲ "Portrait of the Artist's Mother," 1897, by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Oil on canvas; 29 1/4 inches by 39 1/2 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



▲ "The Artist's Mother Seated, in an Oriental Headdress, Half Length," 1792, by Francesco Novelli, after Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. Etching; 6 3/16 inches by 5 3/8 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



▲ "Black Lion Wharf," 1859, by James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Plate 1 from "Sixteen Etchings of Scenes on the Thames and Other Subjects (called The Thames Set)"; published in 1871 by Ellis and Green, London. Etching; 6 inches by 9 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

## LITERATURE

## The Broken Nose: Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro

By Yvonne Marcotte

You can't un-see it: the broken nose. Even in the skilled hands of artist Piero della Francesca (circa 1415–1492), the deep indent at the bridge seems not quite normal. Yet the obvious physical defect in a formal portrait might be seen as a badge of honor for a cultured aristocrat who improved the lives of his people.

The Duke of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro, built a fortune as a condottieri, or captain of a mercenary army of knights, to fight for various warring cities and states. As both a military and civic leader, he inspired loyalty and devotion from his subjects.

Federico cared for the families of killed or wounded soldiers. He walked the streets of Urbino, unarmed and without guards, seeing about the welfare of the residents.

His mercenary work financed the hill town of Urbino, and it became a cultural center due to his support of the arts. But he was more than a soldier and civic leader. He studied history and philosophy. He was known as "the light of Italy" in the early Renaissance for his patronage of upcoming artists and writers, including a young Raphael.

At his palace in Urbino, Italy, the duke had his own beautiful workplace: a studiolo, or small private study. He also built a great library and set up a scriptorium as a center for writing and copying important works.

### Noble Profile

The elaborately framed portrait (circa 1465–72) by Piero della Francesca is one of the most popular stops at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The beautifully framed painting is the right side of a diptych, or a two-paneled painting, which is shared with a portrait of his beloved wife, Battista Sforza, whose profile faces toward his.

The duke's profile references those on classical coins of Roman emperors and portrait medals, and adds to the nobility of the portrait. One might say that this was the duke's "best side" since he had lost his right eye and underwent surgery to allow him to see better with his left.

The background depicts the duke's lands, prosperous with ships in the harbor, a bustling city, and rolling mountains. As if looking down from a high point, we see a sprawling domain. The court of Urbino was great and growing.

The back of the painting is also decorated with images of the duke on a chariot with symbols of the virtues of justice, insight, courage, and restraint. A Latin inscription reads: "He rides illustrious in glorious triumph, as he wields the scepter in moderation. The eternal fame of his virtues celebrates [him] as equal to the greatest dukes."

The Metropolitan Museum of Art now owns an entire studiolo from the duke's palace in Gubbio, Italy, which has trompe l'oeil (a technique that "fools the eye") decoration.

As Piero della Francesca shows in this portrait of the duke, looks don't count as much as good deeds and inner character. A guide to the Uffizi Gallery states: "With his rational, almost metaphysical style, the great artist achieves the perfect representation of the Renaissance man, aware of the centrality of his role in the universe and the importance of his intelligence and his culture."



▲ "Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro," circa 1465–72, by Piero della Francesca. Oil on panel; 18.6 inches by 12.9 inches. The Uffizi, Florence, Italy.



▲ There is more to this world than we can see or know. "Phantasy," 1896, by William Savage Cooper.

## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# Why We Need Wonder

Wonder, philosophy, and civilization

By Walker Larson

Wonder undergirds all true philosophy and culture.

Originally, "wonder" meant far more than mere idle curiosity. Dennis Quinn, a professor of English, wrote an entire book on the subject of wonder—"Iris Exiled: A Synoptic History of Wonder"—wherein he begins to sketch a definition for us: "Wonder, always considered a passion, was classified by Aquinas and many before him as a species of fear." At first glance, calling wonder a type of fear may strike us as odd. But Mr. Quinn goes on to explain that wonder involves fear because it makes us aware of all that we don't know, and it makes us afraid of remaining ignorant.

The delight involved in wonder follows from this "fear" because it intensifies the joy of finding something out. For example, when children are confronted with a majestic mystery, such as the tides of the ocean, they will experience a certain awe in the face of grandeur, along with being aware that they are ignorant of its cause. The desire to enter more deeply into this mystery will excite a child and spur him or her to search for answers. The deeper the sense of wonder, the more profound the joy when the child begins to understand the role that the moon plays in the tides

(although that is, in itself, another layer of mystery).

Mr. Quinn writes: "It is true that wonder arises from something that is unpleasant, consciousness of ignorance, and that until one knows, one remains in this condition. But the only way that one can profitably flee from ignorance is by desiring and attempting to know, and these are pleasant activities. A man imprisoned will find his



▲ Celebrating is a means of taking part in the wonder of the world. "The Dance of the Villagers," 1630–35, by Peter Paul Rubens. Oil on panel. The Prado Museum, Madrid.

to understand when we think of our experience, for example, of listening to a regal and moving piece of music or catching our first glimpse of the mountains—we grow still, we are present in the moment, we are filled with both peace and longing, and we are attracted to the object of our wonder.

## Wonderment and Wisdom

In his "Metaphysics," Aristotle explains that wonder is the beginning of all philosophy, and thus the beginning of wisdom:

"It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too, e.g. about the changes of the moon and of the sun, about the stars and about the origin of the universe. Now he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant (thus the myth-lover is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders); therefore ... it was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy."

Without the humility and yearning that wonder inspires, deep philosophy is impossible. All of our treasures of Western philosophy, including the insights of Aristotle himself, which indeed form much of the basis for Western civilization as we know it, would have been impossible had not certain men looked up and been struck with reverent awe in the face of the mysteries and grandeurs of the world around them.

If possessing wonder is a prerequisite to true wisdom, the inverse is also true. A lack of wonder has dire consequences.

Without wonder and appreciation, there is nothing to celebrate.

## The Wonderless

Literature professor Anthony Esolen has argued that those who lack wonder may easily lose even their moral bearings. Without humility and awe at what exists around us and the "drawing out from oneself" that wonder causes, we tend to turn to selfish pursuits, such as pleasure, money, or power. Mr. Esolen uses Shakespeare's "The Tempest" as an example: The characters Antonio and Sebastian do not appreciate or wonder at the magic of the island on which they are shipwrecked. Blind to the marvels about them, Antonio and Sebastian think only of power and how to attain it—even if that means murdering the rightful king.

Shakespeare's insistence on the importance of wonder can be seen in the name he chose for the virtuous, innocent girl at the center of the play: Miranda. Miranda is a name derived from Latin, meaning "wonder" or "to be wondered at." Because Antonio and Sebastian refuse to wonder at anything, including Miranda, they fall prey to villainous desires.

## Wonder and Civilization

According to philosopher Josef Pieper in "Leisure: the Basis of Culture," culture is a grand feast, a grand celebration of the world through art, music, dancing, and even religion. Culture serves to foster that spirit of treasuring all that a society holds most dear, all that is worth celebrating in human life and in the world. Pieper writes: "To hold a celebration means to affirm the basic meaningfulness of the universe and a sense of oneness with it, of inclusion within it. In celebrating, in holding festivals upon occasion, man experiences the world in an aspect other than the everyday one."

This spirit of celebration, which is the soul of culture, can only be the result of the reverent fear and love found in true wonder—wonder at all that is powerful and grand in our lives and in our cosmos. Without wonder and appreciation, there is nothing to celebrate. When there is nothing to celebrate, there is nothing to cultivate. When there is nothing to cultivate, there is no culture.

Tragically, through centuries of increasing skepticism, doubt, and rejection of the past—as embodied in, for example, Critical Theory—Western civilization has lost much of its ability to wonder. Skepticism is the very antithesis of wonder, and so, we might say, it is the antithesis of real philosophy and culture.

Perhaps, then, an important step in the restoration of culture is the restoration of our sense of wonder.

Walker Larson teaches literature at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife and daughter. He holds a Master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in *The Hemingway Review*, *Intellectual Takeout*, and his *Substack*, "TheHazelnut."

## FILM REVIEW

# An Edge-of-Your Seat Underwater Thriller

2 sisters take a dive and we are right there with them

By Michael Clark

A remake of the 2020 Swedish film "Breaking Surface," the German-produced action thriller "The Dive" is one of the rarest of beasts: It's just as good, if not better than what inspired and preceded it.

Co-written by "Breaking Surface" filmmaker Joachim Hedén and director Maximilian Erlenwein (making his English-language feature debut), "The Dive" shares a great deal of thematic and stylistic ground with the fact-based "127 Hours" and the shark thriller "47 Meters Down." All three movies have been tagged as "survival" dramas, and time is a key factor in all of them.

We find out more during the opening title sequence here than in the entire first act of most films, but not because the writers are telling us too much too soon. The point of view goes back and forth from the inside of a car to sprawling aerials following the car down a sandy road hugging a seaside cliff. It is indicative of everything that will follow; images will be either claustrophobic or wide open. There are very few medium-range images to be found here.

## Estranged Sisters

Inside the car are sisters Drew (Sophie Lowe) and May (Louisa Krause), and within a minute it's obvious that they're not emotionally close. In fact, they are quasi-estranged, meeting only once a year to scuba. These trips are always arranged by the jovial and perky Drew, with the stoic and imperturbable May going along only because it offers her a break from a monotonous and demanding job working on an oil rig.

The reasons for the rift between Drew and May are never fully explained, but we are given hints via several blink-and-you'll-miss-them flashbacks. In these passages, preteens May and Drew, portrayed respectively by Shire Richardson and Stella Uhrig, are in shallow beachside waters alongside their unnamed father (David Scicluna).

The father is testing the girls' ability to hold their extended breath underwater, and we get the distinct impression that he's not going easy on them. This will figure heavily throughout the bulk of the narrative.

## Like Topaz

Filmed but not specifically set on the island nation of Malta, the visuals are stunning

and, again, there's great contrast. The dry land is desert, and the azure blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea are piercing and clear and as flawless as topaz.

Both women are seasoned divers yet May appears to have the most state-of-the-art equipment. An example of this is the intercom masks, which will allow them through-water radio contact when underwater, rather than the standard scuba hand signals. The through-water radio factor ends up being both a blessing and a curse.

It is evident that Mr. Erlenwein and Mr. Hedén did their scuba-based homework, which not only prepares the uninitiated but also will impress seasoned divers and thus convince them of the content's authenticity.

After submerging, the sisters make a brief pit stop in an underwater cave and then return to the open waters. Not long after, they are caught in the middle of a massive aboveground landslide.

Solely because of their respective locations, Drew is able to escape relatively unscathed, but May's legs become pinned under a sizeable boulder, which can't be moved with their collective muscle. Calm as she can be, May instructs Drew to go to the surface and fetch the jack from their rental car and return before her 20 minutes of air is depleted.

At this point, only 23 minutes of the 91-minute run time have passed and this is where I will stop revealing plot details.

Even if not close, two sisters will do anything to save the other.

## 'The Dive'

Director Maximilian Erlenwein

Starring Sophie Lowe, Louisa Krause, Stella Uhrig, Shire Richardson, David Scicluna

Running Time 1 hour, 31 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date Aug. 25, 2023

★★★★★

Drew (Sophie Lowe, L) and May (Louisa Krause), in "The Dive." ▼



FALKUN FILMS

## TV SERIES REVIEW

# King Arthur Tale on Another Level

A 10-episode TV series with magical trappings

By Joe Bendel

According to legend, Saint Derfel was once one of King Arthur's mightiest warriors before he entered monastic life. His biography is more the stuff of myth than historical fact, but the young Arthur Pendragon certainly would have needed men of sturdy ilk to unify the tribes and fiefdoms of post-Roman Britain against the Saxon invaders.

Of course, he would also need a strong sword and a sage adviser who has a talent for foretelling the future. Viewers will see Arthur Pendragon become King Arthur from the perspective of the future Saint Derfel through realistically worldly means with only relatively mild fantastical assistance, in creator-writers Kate Brooke and Ed Whitmore's 10-episode "The Winter King," based on Bernard Cornwell's novels.

It is fair to say that High King Uther Pendragon of Dumnonia is disappointed when his illegitimate son Arthur survives battle with the Saxons, while the heir apparent, Prince Mordred, does not. In his grief and fury, the king banishes Arthur across the Channel to Normandy, which works out to the young Pendragon's advantage.

While Arthur thrives as a warrior with a reputation for honor, King Uther finally has a second legitimate heir. However, the new Prince Mordred is born with a clubbed foot (and his late older brother's name). Merlin, the official Druid adviser to the court, has visions of the newborn's brutal despotism, but King Uther brusquely dismisses such mystical warnings.

Arthur will never reconcile with his fa-

ther, but he dutifully protects his infant brother from both Merlin and the nearby rival kingdom of Siluria. Yet Arthur also envisions a united Britain that will probably require a strong leader like himself taking the throne.

To do so, sacrifices must be made, including old friends, just like Prince Hal turning his back on Falstaff in Shakespeare's "Henry IV," except with more bloodshed. Yet it is Pendragon's unconventional integrity that inspires young Derfel Cadarn, a founding he saved from Silurian raiders, who becomes a squire to Owain, the champion of Dumnonia and sworn protector of the infant king.

## 2 Recent Books

Mr. Cornwell's novel "The Winter King," the first in his "Warlord Chronicles" trilogy, was published around the same time as Jack Whyte's "Camulod Chronicles," which tried to establish logical, non-fantastical explanations for the Arthurian legends. Mr. Cornwell's books were comparatively cagier in their approach to magic, frequently depicting the practice but ambiguously leaving its efficacy open to question.

Given the success of fantasy TV/streaming adaptations, it is not surprising that Ms. Brooke and Mr. Whitmore retain some magical trappings, especially the

visions of Merlin and his protégé Nimue, but their premonitions are more often curses rather than blessings. (At least that is how they are depicted thus far in the five episodes provided for review.) It is not a particularly romantic series either, considering Guinevere has yet to appear halfway through.

Regardless, Ms. Brooke and Mr. Whitmore nicely incorporate Mr. Cornwell's main political themes, including the conflict between the increasingly popular early Christian Church and the traditional pagan Druidic establishment, as well as the challenges in uniting the clannish kingdoms of Britain against their common Saxon enemies. This is basically medieval nation-building, which was just as difficult then as it is now. Likewise, tax-collecting more resembles thuggery than governing, at least as practiced by Owain (which is still often true in modern times).

## A Dark, Dark Age

"The Winter King" immerses viewers in a rough world, as befits the grimness of the Dark Ages, without overindulging in dirty, grubby realism with respect to things like sanitation and hygiene. Consider it sufficiently realistic, especially the hack-and-slash swordplay.

Iain de Caestecker is reasonably rugged

and masculine-looking, which makes him a solidly workman-like young Arthur. He lacks the screen charisma to overshadow Richard Harris in "Camelot," but he is far superior to the badly miscast Charlie Hunnam in the 2017 film, probably the last big-budget King Arthur release.

Stuart Campbell is far less convincing as Cadarn, who looks more like a moody teenager than a warrior in training. However, Ellie James is eerily haunting as the ethereal Nimue, while Nathaniel Martello-White is appropriately wise and weird as Merlin. Eddie Marsan also impresses, playing against his usual nebbish typecasting, as the ferocious High King Uther.

Despite the supernatural visions, "The Winter King" is arguably the most grounded production of the Arthurian legends to date. That does not necessarily make it the best (John Boorman's "Excalibur" is still hard to beat), but it deserves credit for its grit and grime. Recommended for fans of medieval historicals.

"The Winter King" premieres on Aug. 20 on MGM+.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit [jbspins.blogspot.com](https://jbspins.blogspot.com)

## 'The Winter King'

Director Otto Bathurst, Farren Blackburn

Starring Iain de Caestecker, Nathaniel Martello-White, Eddie Marsan, Ellie James

Running Time 10 episodes

MPAA Rating TV-MA

Release Date Aug. 20, 2023

★★★★★



MGM+

Arthur Pendragon (Iain de Caestecker), in "The Winter King." ▼

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# The Courage of a Common Man, Korean-Style

Taxi driver and journalist resist tyranny

By Ian Kane

The dawn of the 1980s marked a time of great chaos in South Korea. President Park Chung Hee, who ruled the country with an iron fist for over 17 years, had recently been assassinated. Another dictator, military strongman Chun Doo-hwan, quickly seized control in a coup d'état and began cracking down on pro-democracy movements composed of students and other South Korean citizens who stood up against his tyranny.

Director Hun Jang's 2017 humbly titled film "A Taxi Driver" is a dramatization of real events that transpired in 1980. It's mainly focused on the titular character, a taxi driver named Kim Man-seob (Song Kang-ho), but also on an intrepid West German journalist, Jürgen Hinzpeter (Thomas Kretschmann).

Things kick off in the sprawling South Korean capital of Seoul, where Kim ekes out a marginal existence as a cabbie. We learn that he's a widower and now dotes on his young daughter, Kim Eun-jeong (Eun-mi Yoo).

Kim is having a hard time supporting himself and his daughter, and is four months behind on their small apartment's rent. Kim hears reports about students rising up against Chun Doo-hwan's new dictatorial government in the city of Gwangju, but since it's so far south of Seoul, he doesn't take them too seriously, especially since he's simply trying to survive.

One day, while eating lunch in his cab company's cafeteria, he overhears a loud-mouth fellow employee boasting about how he'll soon be getting paid a large sum of money to transport a foreigner to Gwangju. Kim craftily intercepts the foreigner first, a man who happens to be Hinzpeter posing as a missionary, and later a businessman, although he's really a journalist working for the German broadcast company ARD.

As Hinzpeter settles into the back



SHOWBOX

◀ Jürgen Hinzpeter (Thomas Kretschmann, L) and Kim Man-seob (Song Kang-ho, C) being stopped at a military blockade, in "A Taxi Driver."

seat of Kim's taxi, a clash of cultures ensues, and they attempt to communicate through Kim's spotty English skills. After driving for a while, the two men encounter a roadblock set up by the military, are turned back, and are forced to take various back roads to Gwangju.

Hinzpeter is determined to get to the southern city since he mistrusts the South Korean government's official reports on the uprisings, which underplay their severity. Kim is equally motivated to complete the trip and thus solve his current money problems.

Eventually, Kim and Hinzpeter come across a truck full of student protesters when they reach Gwangju and meet Gu Jae-sik (Ryu Jun-Yeol), who proves useful because of his English skills. They also learn of the human rights atrocities being committed by the military and that martial law has been imposed on the city.

Whereas Kim originally thought the student protesters were annoying and troublesome, the violent crackdown on dissent in Gwangju changes his mind, and he begins to use his prior military experience to aid the protesters. Other cabbies join the burgeoning

resistance movement against the brutality of the soldiers. Hinzpeter also risks his life by capturing on film all of the chaos unfolding in the city in what would later be referred to as the Gwangju Uprising or, alternately, the Gwangju Massacre.

### A Buddy Road Movie

The film starts off as a comedy-drama about a humble Seoul cabbie and gradually turns into a buddy road movie with hectic action scenes and characters with interesting motivations. In the movie's opening scene, Kim sings along to a catchy pop song playing on his cab radio, which instantly makes him relatable, while toward the end he backs up his new friend, Hinzpeter, and also helps to rescue ordinary citizens in need.

The film does not highlight any martial artists or grand figures making highbrow decisions, just everyday folks exhibiting tremendous bravery in the face of tyranny and relying on a shared sense of humanity and community, even when speaking different languages.

"A Taxi Driver" is an engaging and educational historical drama that sheds

light on a tumultuous period of South Korea's history. It's also well-paced and features great performances by its talented cast.

"A Taxi Driver" is available on Hoopla, Roku, and Amazon.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality.

### 'A Taxi Driver'

**Director**  
Hun Jang

**Starring**  
Song Kang-ho,  
Thomas Kretschmann,  
Yoo Hae-jin

**Running Time**  
2 hours, 17 minutes

**Not Rated**

**Release Date**  
Aug. 11, 2017

★★★★☆

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