

Reviews (Films / Documentaries / TV Shows / Podcasts)

1917 [film].

Directed by Sam Mendes. 2019.

Dreamworks Pictures; Reliance Entertainment; New Republic Pictures. 119 minutes.

1917 is a harrowing story about two soldiers who try to prevent a suicidal attack by delivering an order by hand to a headstrong colonel. It takes place during World War I in 1917 as the Germans are nearly defeated and the Allied armies are ready to drive them out of France and Belgium. This film is director Sam Mendes's twelfth motion picture and perhaps one of his best. Mendes, along with the film's director of cinematography, Roger Deakins, have crafted a haunting, yet beautiful film that will have a lasting impact on audiences. Their decision to shoot the film in a way that makes it appear as if there are no cuts from editing works flawlessly. The story of Lance Corporal Thomas Blake (played by Dean-Charles Chapman) and Lance Corporal William Schofield (played by George MacKay), the film's protagonists, follows their journey across a wide range of different environments along the frontlines. From the muddy trenches to a ruined city to pristine woods with a raging river, the locations' production quality is impeccable. This helps to set the atmosphere of two contrasting worlds: one utterly consumed by war and the other left untouched by its destructive tendrils. Thanks to the work of Mendes and Deakins, beauty can be found in both worlds of this depiction of World War I.

The film opens with a shot of Tom Blake and Will Schofield sitting in what appears to be a field of flowers and grass, a stark contrast to what one imagines when thinking of World War I. They are suddenly summoned by the general to deliver a message to the Devonshire Regiment, a unit in which Blake's brother Joseph is enlisted, to stop an offensive they are scheduled to launch the following morning. Blake and Schofield immediately set off, though Schofield—after his combat experience at the Somme—has reservations about going on such a dangerous operation as a runner. As they cross "No Man's Land," we are reminded of the war's true destructiveness. Bodies litter the landscape, mud and flesh melding into a never-ending quagmire that is nearly impossible for Schofield and Blake to navigate. This landscape is reminiscent of Mordor from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which was likely inspired by his time serving in World War I. Once they have crossed "No Man's Land," they stumble upon an abandoned German trench network. These trenches are much deeper and more fortified than the seemingly rudimentary ones that the British have constructed. In one of the dugouts, the two men walk into booby-trapped barracks and are nearly killed by a cave-in.

After narrowly escaping the dugout, Schofield and Blake make their way to a farmhouse to catch their breath. Their walk through the unblemished land behind the trenches stands in stark contrast to where they have just been. Just as they seem to be getting ready to move on from the farmhouse, a German plane is shot down

and crashes into the stable where Blake and Schofield are standing. The surviving pilot fatally stabs Blake, forcing the disillusioned Schofield, hesitant from the beginning, to continue without his friend Blake. Schofield then hitches a ride on a truck with another British company that had stumbled upon him after the airplane crash. He discovers that these men are passing through the town that is on the way to his destination. Schofield, hell-bent on arriving with his message for the Devonshires on time, soon has to get off at the destroyed bridge that leads into the town of Écoust-Saint-Mein and go on foot. As he is crossing the destroyed bridge, a German sniper engages and nearly kills him. Schofield is ultimately able to kill the sniper, but not without being knocked down the stairs and hitting his head, rendering him unconscious.

When he finally comes to, Schofield realizes it is nearly morning, and he needs to hurry to deliver the message to the Devonshires. Flares light the ruins of the town, and the film's score takes the audience into a dreamlike haze of wonder and awe. As he slowly makes his way through the town, Schofield is spotted and chased through the streets by a group of isolated Germans who were making camp in the ruins of the city. After finding a place to hide from the Germans, he stumbles upon a French woman and a baby. The film slows down for a brief moment as it shows the devastation that the war has inflicted upon the populace of this town. Though he is disillusioned from the fighting, Schofield maintains his humanity as he gives the French woman and baby some food to eat. Against the advice of the French woman to stay, he knows that he must leave to deliver his important message. As he slips away, Schofield is spotted again and nearly killed. To escape, he jumps into a raging river to flee the pursuing Germans. When he finally reaches the shore after navigating rough waters, he notices that dawn has come, and he breaks down, thinking he is too late. Then, out of nowhere, he hears singing and is drawn to the luring call. As he gets closer, he realizes that this is another British unit, and he eventually discovers that these are the Devonshires, prepping for their push over the top. Schofield, exhausted from everything he has been through, rushes to Colonel Mackenzie's headquarters, determined to stop the suicidal attack by any means necessary.

As Schofield makes his way through the trenches, he stumbles through the chaos of men moving about and preparing for their assault. During his navigation of the labyrinth of trenches, the Germans begin to shell the mustering British force. Men are thrown about as debris and shrapnel make Schofield's monumental task of delivering the message to Colonel Mackenzie's dugout alive seemingly impossible. As the trenches are clogged with men prepared to go over the top, Schofield risks everything by climbing up the ladders in the trenches to avoid the massed troops and make it to his journey's ever-so-close end. Schofield rushes along the lip of the trench and sets off for the headquarters, exhausted and bloodied, yet ever determined to finish his mission. Men begin to pour out from the trenches as the first wave starts their assault. Schofield, realizing that his time is nearly up, picks up speed and, after dodging bullets and shells, finally makes it

to the colonel's bunker. This scene highlights Schofield's determination to complete the mission for his friend Blake, who could not make it this far to save his brother Joseph. Schofield has a hard time entering the colonel's room, though he will not take "no" for an answer and forces his way into the room to read the message. Colonel Mackenzie (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) is reluctant to call off the attack, but finally obeys the order, and the following waves of men are ordered to stand down. With his mission over, Schofield wants to see if he has been able to save Blake's brother.

After delivering his message to the colonel, Schofield visits the hospital because he has heard that Blake's brother Joseph was part of the first wave. As Schofield makes his way to the back, he encounters many casualties being taken to triage and the medical tents. This disheartens him because he cannot find Joseph in any tent he goes to. With Schofield ready to give up hope that Joseph is alive, he asks one last person on the off chance that he may know where Blake's brother is located. This last man turns out to be Blake's brother Joseph. After they talk for a little while about Tom, Schofield walks to a tree in a field, pulls out a picture of his family, and finally rests.

While *1917* may technically be a war film, it does not play out like many other in the genre such as Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* (2011) or the same director's renowned World-War-II film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Mendes's *1917* is a "smaller," more personal story that does not include any major action set pieces like the opening to the aforementioned *Saving Private Ryan*. *1917* takes the audience on a tense journey from the wasteland known as "No Man's Land" to the ruins of a shelled-out city to a forest untouched by the war. The lack of cutting helps engage the audience even more than a traditionally shot film. While it may seem like a gimmick meant to wow critics and film enthusiasts, the lack of cuts puts one on edge because anything can happen at any second. The planning and coordination of such a feat will astonish even the most casual moviegoer as the camera follows our protagonists through thick and thin, all without cutting away from what is going on. The film, though it is a fictional story, is inspired by the men who served in World War I, including director Sam Mendes's grandfather. This includes the often-overlooked men of colonial territories as well such as Indians and Africans. *1917* depicts World War I in a unique way as it does not focus on trench warfare and massive battles. It depicts a beautifully shot personal story of perseverance through adversity that all audiences will enjoy, regardless of their knowledge of World-War-I history.

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Barbarians: Season 1 [TV series].

Directed by Barbara Eder and Steve St. Leger. 2020.

Gaumont; Netflix. 6 episodes (42-52 minutes).

During the age of Augustus, Rome enjoyed great stability and strength, which makes the defeat of three of its legions in the Battle of Teutoburg Forest (9 AD) an awe-inspiring feat to this day. Although there have been many recreations of this event, the TV series *Barbarians* is in a league of its own, as the actors playing the Romans speak classical Latin, those playing the Germans speak German, and the actor portraying Arminius speaks in both languages. Based on true events and shot in Hungary, the first season of *Barbarians* recounts the life of Arminius, a Roman-raised German who is credited as the first person to unite the tribes of Germania to defeat the thought-to-be unstoppable legions of Rome. Released on October 23, 2020, for viewing on Netflix, the series is directed by Barbara Eder, who is known for *Thank You for Bombing* (2015) and *West of Liberty* (2019), and Steve St. Leger who is known for *Vikings* (2013) and *Vikings: Valhalla* (2022).

Episode 1 begins with a scene of Cherusci villagers (a Germanic tribe in the first century) carrying out daily tasks while children run and play. The camera follows one of the children as he runs into his family's dwelling and plays with his older sister, Thusnelda. It is apparent they are of higher status, as their parents negotiate with the *reik* (chief) of another tribe who wishes to marry Thusnelda. Shortly after this exchange, a Roman force arrives to announce the election of Publius Quinctilius Varus as military governor and to demand tribute in three days' time, which violates a previous agreement between the Cherusci and Rome. After this humiliating exchange, the Cheruscan leader, Segimer, calls a meeting of the tribes in an attempt to unite and fight against the Romans. This fails, however, as many believe that even a united Germania cannot stand against Rome.

The episode continues to introduce characters as a Roman officer enters Varus's camp and is greeted as his son; another member of the village, Folkwin Wolfspear, emerges as Thusnelda's love interest. Three days later, the Romans return to collect tribute and forcefully seize livestock and grain. In retaliation, Thusnelda attacks a Roman officer and is assaulted. The boy from the first scene, Ansgar, is struck in the head after rushing to her aid and is brought to the seers to remedy his crippling brain damage. Back at Varus's camp, the newly arrived officer is ordered to execute a Germanic noble. Despite his insistence that German law prohibits a man taking another man's life, the officer has no choice but to behead the prisoner. The first episode ends things on a thrilling note as Thusnelda and Folkwin deal a symbolic blow to Rome by stealing the legion's eagle standard. However, Varus's son finds a necklace that Folkwin has left behind and appears to recognize it. To add to the confusion, this man also speaks German and has a German auxiliary whipped after listening to him defame Rome. With the dissident dealt with, the officer then heads to the Cherusci village and greets Segimer with the words, "hello, father."

Episode 2 provides additional context on Arminius, the Roman officer who confusingly speaks both German and Latin. A flashback shows young Thusnelda, Folkwin, and Ari (Arminius) hunting a wolf and making necklaces out of its teeth. But this time of comradery ends as Roman soldiers take Ari away as part of an alliance and peace agreement with Rome, which explains why and how he came to learn Latin and attained the rank of a Roman officer. Returning to the “present,” acts of subterfuge occur as Thusnelda’s father, Segestes, tells Varus that Folkwin had taken the eagle standard and Segestes expresses his desire to become chief of the Cherusci. Outside the village, Ari visits the grave of his late mother, reunites with his childhood friends, and they all go to visit Segimer. However, Ari is confronted by Berulf, who had witnessed his uncle’s execution while working in Varus’s camp, and challenged to single combat. Because Berulf is much larger, Ari is overpowered and faces death before being saved by Folkwin. Despite being severely wounded, Arminius retrieves the eagle standard and returns to the Roman camp. Meanwhile, Varus gathers a force with Segestes, heads to the village, and demands that Folkwin Wolfspear be brought to him. When Segimer refuses, the fugitive’s family is rounded up and crucified. Varus then returns to camp and tasks Arminius with bringing back Folkwin’s head. As the episode ends, Wolfspear finds his family strung up and is taken under Berulf’s protection.

Episode 3 starts with the hunt for Folkwin Wolfspear as Arminius and his auxiliaries find Thusnelda and Segimer cutting down the crucified family. The viewer gains a sense of how conflicted Ari is as he must choose between following Roman orders and allowing for the burial of his kinsmen. But his true allegiance begins to show as he has the family cut down and properly buried. Meanwhile, Wolfspear and Berulf seek refuge with the Bructeri tribe. *Barbarians* does well in showing there was no sense of national unity, when they are betrayed, and Berulf loses his life while escaping. Ansgar’s mother attempts to kill her son by blindfolding and walking him off a cliff, but his sister Thusnelda intervenes, Ansgar is left in the care of the seers, and Thusnelda searches for Folkwin, who leads all but one of his surviving followers into the Dark Land, a sacred site where Germans refuse to go. But this respite is short-lived as the man who refused to follow is captured by Arminius, gives up Folkwin’s location, and is killed. Arminius then takes his Roman force to the Dark Land, kills the remaining fugitives, and brings Wolfspear to his knees. However, Ari’s allegiance shifts further as he then kills his Roman followers to save his friend.

Episode 4 starts on an ominous tone as Ansgar has a premonition of fire and bloodshed. Back in the Dark Land, Ari and Folkwin discuss their next steps. Ari tries to explain that he is still a prefect of Rome, but is then reminded of how his kinsmen are being treated. Although not fully certain of where his loyalties lie, Ari takes the head of a dead German, because they all look the same to Varus, and returns to camp. While this is happening, Varus coerces Segimer into being replaced by his son as *reik*, whereupon Segimer drowns himself in a sacred swamp. When returning with the alleged head of Folkwin Wolfspear, Ari learns of his

father's fate and is further insulted when Varus states that this is what Ari was meant to do and that a barbarian-born Roman cannot aspire to be anything more. Varus then orders him to find a wife and report back. Filled with rage, Ari returns to and destroys the inside of his tent before receiving news that one of his men from the Dark Land has survived and is in the infirmary. With no time to waste, he rushes to the infirmary, strangles the surviving Roman, and spots Talio, the auxiliary he had punished in the first episode. Ari draws his sword but is halted by the physician's return. Meanwhile, Thusnelda and Folkwin venture to the Bructeri camp to convince them to fight against Rome, this time with the ruse that Thusnelda is a seer. After a heated exchange and a failed attempt to convince the Bructeri leader, Folkwin kills him, Thusnelda takes out his heart, and marks the new *reik* with blood. As Ari prepares to return to the Cherusci camp, he brings Talio and informs him of his plan to rebel against Rome. The auxiliary agrees to join him, and they arrive to see that Segestes has assumed the position of *reik*. Throughout several of the episodes, Hadgan, the *reik* who had negotiated to marry Thusnelda, appears and threatens Segestes. However, Arminius and his force are too numerous for both men, and the village's leadership is peacefully relinquished to Ari. The episode ends with Ari boldly suggesting he marry Thusnelda to make it seem as though he is following Varus's orders and to legitimize a united Germania, but he is then struck by Folkwin.

Episode 5 is the beginning of the end as Folkwin begrudgingly agrees to allow Ari and Thusnelda to marry. The marriage commences in front of a ribbon-covered tree, and merriment continues in the *reik*'s hall as tribes pledge their allegiance to Ari. However, other *reiks* remember the execution of Berulf's uncle and refuse to back him. As night falls, the ceremony ends with Arminius and Thusnelda wrapped in white linens, performing a dance, and ultimately not consummating the marriage. After watching from afar, Folkwin laments the perceived loss of Thusnelda, gets drunk in the woods, and picks a fight with a Roman patrol, resulting in him being taken prisoner. While out on patrol the following morning, Talio finds Folkwin's necklace and a charred corpse and reports back to Ari and Thusnelda. With no time to mourn, the couple leaves to meet Varus. Ari finds himself in another conflicted situation, as his adoptive father Varus presents him with a sword of the equestrian class, the second highest *stratum* (rank) of the Senate. In a state of shock, Ari accepts the promotion but is berated by Thusnelda upon leaving the tent; he reminds her that he has to continue to play his role. With Varus at ease, Ari begins the next phase of his plan: he takes his force, rounds up the children of the tribes, and calls a meeting. When the enraged *reiks* arrive, Ari reveals that he had no intention of surrendering the children to Rome but merely wanted to show how easy it was for them to be taken from ununified tribes. This stratagem works, the remaining tribes unite, and Ari and Thusnelda consummate their marriage under the assumption that Folkwin is dead. With the tribes united and Ari delivering a false report of rebellion along the territories of Teutoburg

Forest, all seems set for war. Yet, news that Folkwin Wolfspear is still alive reaches Segestes, who informs Varus, who is in the middle of conversing with Arminius.

Episode 6 begins with tension as Arminius stands in front of Varus and his officers after Segestes has sold him out. With no choices left, Ari bluffs and boldly confesses his plan to betray Rome. This tactic catches Varus off guard, as he laughs, berates Segestes, asks for his son's forgiveness, and prepares the legions to march. After barely escaping death, Ari spots Folkwin, brings him up to speed, and sends him with Talio to meet up with the legions. In the forest, Thusnelda prays at a nearby tree, where Hadgan unsuccessfully attempts to force himself on her but then leaves with his men before the ambush starts. Riding alongside Varus, Arminius suggests the legions divide and leads his legionaries into an ambush. Everything works as intended, as three Roman legions are systematically divided and slaughtered. As the tides turn in favor of the Germans, Segestes's and Hadgan's forces enter the fray. In a state of disbelief, Varus falls on his sword, and the Germans emerge victorious. That night, Ari is hailed as king of all the tribes, Thusnelda learns she is pregnant, and Folkwin vows to kill Arminius. The season ends with an unknown rider carrying off Varus's head, leaving the viewers wondering about a sequel.

While the series is enjoyable to watch, it takes considerable artistic license with the Battle of Teutoburg Forest. There are a few Roman authors from whom this show could be drawing, such as Tacitus, Paterculus, or Dio, whose accounts describe the real Arminius as a German-born, Roman officer who served as an auxiliary, but not as someone raised by Varus. However, unlike docudramas such as *Rise of Empires: Ottoman* and *The Last Czars*, there is no panel of historians and authors who provide context (but then, *Barbarians* is intended to be a series like *Vikings* rather than a docudrama). As a result, it is up to the viewers to understand the subtle references to policies and events in Roman history. Being well-versed in Roman history and understanding Latin makes watching *Barbarians* an especially entertaining and immersive experience. However, viewers with no prior knowledge will still be entertained by thrilling battle scenes, ominous foreshadowing, and a love-triangle, while learning about Rome's failure to subjugate Germania during the age of Augustus – or ever.

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Dance of the 41 [film].

Directed by David Pablos. 2020.

Canana Films; El Estudio. 99 minutes.

Imagine living in a time when your gender determines your privileges and status in your household, when your marriage provides the opportunity to achieve ambitious political aspirations, but when a major part of your identity can only be

explored through acts of betrayal and secrecy at the risk of losing what matters most to you and experiencing public shame. This is the world into which acclaimed Mexican director David Pablos invites viewers with his film *Dance of the 41*. In his work, Pablos transports us to Mexico City at the end of the nineteenth century when businessman and politician Ignacio de la Torre (1866-1918) was married to Amada, the daughter of then Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, and also leading a double life.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in Mexico and across the world, roles of leadership and power were reserved for men. Power is a major theme in this film, and Pablos thoughtfully represents power struggles and dynamics as the idea of power becomes more abstract when focusing on the relationships between men and women in Mexico's first family. Racist attitudes were also quite common during this period (and Amada was the daughter of an Indigenous woman), but this is not a major storyline in Pablos's *Dance of the 41*.

The story progresses rather quickly with the opening scene setting the tone for several dynamics and complicated relationships featured throughout the film. Ignacio, played by Alfonso Herrera, arrives late at an opulent event and initially receives congratulatory greetings on his recent engagement to the president's daughter, Amada, portrayed by Mabel Cadena. Before leaving the party, Ignacio and Amada cross paths with her father, the president, and his nephew Felix. After congratulating Ignacio on his recent appointment to congress, Felix also comments on the president's generosity for rewarding Ignacio with such a "nice wedding gift." President Díaz is quick to remind Ignacio that his appointment to congress can be taken away if he does not make his daughter happy. Pablos instantly provides the audience with a glimpse of Ignacio's double life by cutting to an image of a dark bedroom where Ignacio can be seen rising from a bed with two other men, none of them clothed.

The development of Ignacio's priorities quickly comes into play on the day of his wedding to Amada. On the evening of their wedding, an overjoyed Amada prepares for bed only to encounter an intentionally inebriated Ignacio who is portrayed as viewing their sexual intimacy as a chore which he does not enjoy. Pablos paints a dark and depressing image of Amada looking up hopefully at her husband, while he stares off into the distance, handles their sexual encounter roughly, and avoids any emotional connection with his wife. After Ignacio's pattern of disinterest in his marriage is established, Pablos zooms in on Ignacio's social priorities. Ignacio, along with other men who hold elite social and political positions, such as senators and bank board members, belong to a clandestine society which provides a space for men who secretly identify as homosexual to gather freely, smoke cigars, dress in women's clothing, engage in sexual encounters with one another, and conduct various other activities that were not deemed socially acceptable or morally appropriate at this time. Ignacio appears to be quite comfortable in this space and much more relaxed than he has been shown in any other scene of the film up until this point. Additionally, Ignacio becomes

romantically interested in a colleague named Evaristo Rivas, a fictional character portrayed by Emiliano Zurita. It is not long before Ignacio's prioritized commitment to the secret society and his romantic relationship with Evaristo result in an increasingly lonely and frustrated Amada. Seeking answers to Ignacio's whereabouts, as it becomes a topic of discussion in social circles that she is already struggling to fit into due to her perceived Indigenous ancestry, Amada searches through the drawers in Ignacio's home office and finds romantic letters that are signed by "Eva" (Evaristo). When Amada invites Evaristo to their residence behind Ignacio's back, a furious Ignacio dismisses Evaristo from his home and asks him to never return. Amada, well aware of the romance that is taking place behind her back between her husband and Evaristo, demands that Ignacio impregnate her and at the very least "maintain appearances."

At this point in the film, a major power shift occurs. Up until now, Ignacio has held most of the power simply for being the man in his household, as well as a member of congress, coming and going as he pleases, despite the pain this is causing to Amada. But his secret is no longer much of a secret, and his wife is so unhappy that she is willing to use the leverage she has with her father, the president, to control the behavior that Ignacio has so carelessly displayed at her expense. Amada uses her connections as a member of the first family to have Ignacio followed by a team of guards. When Ignacio tries to send them away, he is informed that he is welcome to take this matter up with the president. Ignacio begins to experience distress at this point in the film because, for the first time in his marriage, he cannot do whatever he pleases as conveniently as he has done before. He appears to scale back on his participation in his routine activities with the secret community, but it is not long before he appears desperate to re-connect with his lover and friends. The next event Ignacio is shown attending with the secret community is their annual ball. The event starts out cheerfully, but it ends up making historic headlines, exposing and thwarting the entire organization. Ignacio is shown preparing for the evening by styling himself with makeup, jewelry, and a woman's ball gown like many other men in attendance. He dances the night away, seemingly feeling freer than he has in some time. The light, joyous mood of the event quickly fades as the event is raided by police guards who arrest all participants. Once a list of the arrested ball attendees makes its way into the president's hands, the latter determines that, rather than the 42 names listed on the document, he sees only 41 names, suggesting that he does not want his son-in-law Ignacio's name on the list to spare his family shame and explaining the film's title, *Dance of the 41*. This scandal was the first time homosexuality was discussed in Mexican media. In the film, Ignacio is sent for and released from the holding cell, while the other members are subjected to physical abuse, public shame, and ridicule. Although he is no longer a prisoner serving a physical sentence in a cell (like his lover), Ignacio becomes a prisoner in his own home and in his marriage. Amada, who had been suffering so much emotionally in the earlier parts of the

film while Ignacio was thriving, now appears to have the upper hand in her household.

Dance of the 41 is not director David Pablos's first time working on a film filled with dramatic storylines and complicated romances. His body of work also includes the 2015 film *Las Elegidas*, which focuses on a young man who falls in love with a teenage girl despite forcing her into his family's prostitution ring. Mirroring *Dance of the 41* with its characters experiencing cognitive dissonance, romances layered with betrayal, and characters struggling with oppression, there are some obvious differences. *Las Elegidas* is not based on true, documented historical events like *Dance of the 41*, but the film did require Pablos to conduct research by speaking to actual sex-trafficking victims in order to make sure his actors would be able to approach their roles with delicacy and authenticity.

Most films in the LGBTQ genre that are based on true events typically fall into the subcategories of documentary, such as Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1990), or drama based on true events of everyday people facing struggles with their identity, such as Russell Mulcahy's *Prayers for Bobby* (2009). In *Paris is Burning*, Livingston chronicles the nightlife culture of everyday transgender and drag queens in New York during the 1980s. In *Prayers for Bobby*, Mulcahy tells the story of a gay teenage American boy who committed suicide due to his mother's religious intolerance. It is still rather uncommon to encounter a widely distributed dramatic film that focuses on a documented historical event involving political figures and members of the LGBTQ community, which makes Pablos's *Dance of the 41* a unique film in our time.

Dance of the 41 tells a story rich in details ranging from documented historical events, via oppressive behaviors and attitudes that were perfectly acceptable and unchallenged back then, to identities and lifestyles deemed morally and legally reprehensible during this time. The film's use of classical music is sublime and includes Franz Schubert's sentimental love song "Gently my songs entreat" (played beautifully on the piano by Ignacio, but merely attempted by Amada); Georges Bizet's "Habanera" from "Carmen," which celebrates love as a rebellious bird; and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's aria "Hell's vengeance boils in my heart" from "The Magic Flute," in which a mother demands that her daughter murder her rival. Scenes in the film may feel a bit jumpy at times, and the progression of time is never directly addressed, which often leads to the perception that events happened closely together despite them occurring years apart. However, Pablos directed the film wonderfully and focused on the aspects of the story that were most significant to keep viewers fully engaged. The film is definitely one to consider viewing if you enjoy topics like Mexican politics, Mexican history, or LGBTQ history.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Eric Morales of Anaheim, California, earned his B.A. in Communication Studies at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) (2015). He is currently pursuing an M.A. in History at CSUF.

The Dig [film].

Directed by Simon Stone. 2021.

Magnolia Mae Films; Clerkenwell Films. 132 minutes.

It is a basic instinct to yearn for recognition, be it from the masses or from a person who sets your heart a flame. It is the idea of being noticed by those one yearns for the most that drives a person's ambition. But what happens when you are cast aside by those who snatch your deserved spotlight, forcing you to remain anonymous? The fear of losing recognition and credibility drives people's ambition to excel in their career field so that their name remains immortalized. However, there are many overlooked, unrecognized names in history that never achieve notoriety. *The Dig*, directed by Australian filmmaker Simon Stone, displays the drawn-out process of an excavation site metaphorically stolen and rebranded. Stone is primarily known for his theatre work, and this new movie often reflects the intimacy of a stage production. *The Dig* revolves around the excavation of the Anglo-Saxon Sutton Hoo treasures near Woodbridge in Suffolk, England, from 1938/1939, on the eve of World War II. The main excavator, Basil Brown (1888-1977), portrayed by Ralph Fiennes, finds himself in the middle of an excavation of what he understands to be an Anglo-Saxon ship burial site, replete with jewel-encrusted treasures. While Brown performs his work, the film also focuses on Edith Pretty (1883-1942), the owner of the land where the dig is taking place, played by Carey Mulligan, who is battling a heart illness and coping with the loss of her husband back in World War I. *The Dig* allows the audience to experience England after the Great War, while also feeling the country's anxiety due to the threats posed by Nazi Germany during this time. The film illustrates that some things should never remain buried but, once discovered, can change lives in ways both good and bad.

The Dig opens with Basil Brown and Edith Pretty who are interested in the mysterious mounds on Mrs. Pretty's property in Suffolk. After Mr. Brown provides his salary quote for such an excavation, he quickly gets to work. He soon discovers a wooden floorboard and incorrectly assumes it is from the Viking Age. When the floorboard breaks during excavation (00:09:50), Mr. Brown is discouraged, and it is here that we understand the difficulties of preservation without proper tools and techniques during this time. This particular scene reflects the reality that not everything pans out as easily as planned. Mr. Brown feels he has failed Mrs. Pretty and loses sight of his original purpose and passion for a career in archaeology. It is not until he finds himself buried alive under an avalanche of dirt that the flame for discovery is reignited once more; however, it is foreshadowed here that his name would be buried while the greatest discovery of his career would be exhumed.

Mrs. Pretty embodies the empty feeling of life after World War I. As the widow of a Royal Air Force fighter, Mrs. Pretty is shown walking through a metaphorical trench toward her late husband's grave on the property site. (00:13:20) Life stands

still for those left bereft by the losses of the Great War, and the past echoes in the present whenever the deafening war planes of the RAF fly over the excavation site throughout the film. As Mrs. Pretty suppresses her loss, we learn that she suffers from an untreatable heart disease, and she is the only person not mocking the warning announcements regarding air raids while walking to her doctor's appointment. (00:38:28) Meanwhile, soldiers are burying statues with sandbags to protect them from impending air raids. While Mrs. Pretty is considering her diagnosis, her world is once again being shattered by a course of events similar to the one that had taken her spouse. The film signifies the importance of acknowledging crucial details in life, whether it is an illness or grieving the loss of a loved one.

The film then steers toward its crisis. As the excavation continues, it draws the interest of the British Museum. Mr. Brown's credentials and expertise are called into question, and the excavation is taken over by Charles Phillips (1901-1985), an archaeologist from the British Museum. (00:42:21) As Mr. Brown displays his intelligence regarding the type of ship and possible valuables buried underneath, tensions arise regarding who the artifacts from the dig belong to. Mirroring the disruption and comprehensive impact of World War II on people's lives, this dispute highlights the significance of the excavation: once something is uncovered, it is difficult to keep it concealed from the public eye.

Meanwhile, we are introduced to Rory Lomax, Mrs. Pretty's cousin, who lends a hand in the project by photographing finds and documenting progress. Rory admits his eagerness for joining the RAF and is constantly scolded by his cousin. He represents the naive attitude toward the reality of war when he is confronted with a malfunctioned RAF plane crashing mere kilometers from the dig site into a nearby river. As he jumps into the water to try and save the pilot, he realizes the pilot is already dead. (01:17:07) Prior to this event, the contrast between Mrs. Pretty and her cousin Rory was clear, as Rory did not have the faintest idea of the cost of war while Mrs. Pretty was still recovering from her personal losses sustained during World War I. Discovering the gruesome consequences of war shocks Rory, and he then ponders whether joining up is worth it. This contemplation and the concern for his own safety overcomes Rory to the point where he silently realizes he may never return to his family.

We are subsequently introduced to new characters, a married couple named Stuart Piggott (1910-1996) and Margaret "Peggy" Piggott (1912-1994). Taking a break from the excavation site, we now focus on the married couple's lack of emotional connection and Peggy's neglect by Stuart. Peggy finds herself rejected multiple times when initiating romantic acts toward her husband and questions whether her husband loves her or not. It is suggested, but not confirmed, that Stuart is romantically involved with another male scientist from the British Museum: they are seen exchanging loving glances at one another at the site and in a pub. Assumptions aside, Peggy's pivotal point is when she speaks alone to Rory Lomax in his make-shift campsite near Mrs. Pretty's property. During their

conversation, Peggy remarks she owns the coin Jesus supposedly displayed to the Disciples, dating back to the time of Caesar Augustus, and she then proceeds to question what will be left once they are gone from the Earth, and whether or not her story will be told. (01:20:08) Peggy longs for acknowledgement and appreciation in the present, rather than being ignored and forgotten by her husband. *The Dig* calls on us to consider whether or not we are living in the “here and now” and ask, rather than regretting everything we may have failed to do in the past: “What if?” It is the liberating feeling to be seen by someone, after having been kept in the dark for so long, that radiates off Peggy when she and Rory start taking an interest in each other.

As the film nears its end, Mrs. Pretty showcases Mr. Brown’s discoveries to the public, and during her speech she rightfully credits him as the finder (01:31:42). In “reality,” Basil Brown’s pivotal role in the discovery of the Sutton Hoo treasures was not widely acknowledged by professional scholars and archaeologists until fairly recently. It is at this time in the film, though, that the truth of Peggy’s feelings toward her husband and Rory reveal themselves when she confronts her husband and explains he should not come back to her after visiting the pub with the other British Museum curators. Rory and Peggy share their feelings for one another, and even though it seems like a happy ending, this is, in fact, not to be. The film takes a solemn turn when a voice on the radio announces Germany’s invasion of Poland and states, “consequently, this country is at war with Germany,” confirming everyone’s justified anxiety throughout the film. (01:42:3). The pretense of bravery is over, and we witness the public’s true concern over the new war with Germany. The public had never really recovered either, and now Mrs. Pretty is not alone in having these feelings.

Films featuring archaeology are often associated with the “Indiana Jones,” “Mummy,” or “Tomb Raider” franchises; however, these are purely fictional and have very little to do with the realities of scholarly inquiries into the material culture of the past. *The Dig* heightens one’s appreciation for what truly matters in life. Rather than suppress your true feelings for someone, there is always time to express your fondness. What you do today will be perceived by those in the future, and therefore it is vital to appreciate your time in the present. *The Dig* broadens our perspective on self-discovery and reignites our appreciation for life in general. After viewing, the only question in my mind was: How do I want to be remembered? If you are interested in historical drama, specifically the post-World War I and pre-World War II era, as well as love affairs and a case of an underdog standing his ground, I recommend that you watch *The Dig*. Maybe you, too, will take into consideration your legacy and reignite your drive for recognition, just as I did.

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Freud [TV series].

Directed by Marvin Kren. 2020.

Satel Film; Bavaria Fiction; Österreichischer Rundfunk. 8 episodes (45-58 minutes).

Would you associate Sigmund Freud with medicine and psychotherapy, or with murder conspiracies and cults? Take all four and you have the Netflix series *Freud*, a re-imagined biography of Sigmund Freud. Marvin Kren, an Austrian director, earned his directing experience at the Hamburg Media School in 2009 and produced *Freud* in 2020. The Austrian-German production follows a major crime conspiracy, with the 30-year-old Sigmund Freud caught in the middle while he wants to change the world. The series consists of eight episodes, each lasting approximately 45-58 minutes. There is a lot to unpack and connect, so this is not a show to watch in the background.

The series begins with the episode *Hysteria* and introduces Sigmund Freud as a young neurologist presenting his research to a medical committee. He encourages his housemaid, Lenore, to participate in a presentation that would prove his theories of hypnosis. Though Freud considers it to be a psychological revolution, it is evident that others find it ridiculous, including Lenore. Freud mentions an educational trip to the Hôpital Salpêtrière in Paris, which happens to be a trip he took in real life. The episode transitions to correspondence from his fiancée, Martha Bernays. She relates her mother's concerns with regard to Freud due to his as of yet unsettled academic position and finances. These factors lead to a delay in their marriage. Though hypnosis is not a practice in modern medicine, you want Freud to succeed and prove to the medical committee his theories are correct.

Freud is invited to a party where he hopes to network and where several important characters are introduced: Clara von Schönfeld, the Countess Sophia von Szápáry and her husband Count Viktor von Szápáry, as well as Fleur Salomé (the latter's foster daughter and a medium), all of whom take part in a séance. In the episode's final minutes, Freud returns to the Szápáry household and encounters Fleur who begs him to treat her for her memory loss. Although the hypnosis initially succeeds, it takes a wrongful turn as Fleur has a seizure. The whole ordeal with Freud and Clara von Schönfeld angers the Countess Sophia.

After the party, in the episode *Trauma*, Viktor and Sophia encounter horse riders who inform the couple that their homeland—Hungary—is at war and that they are the last of the Szápárys. Meanwhile, Freud, still facing ridicule, and other doctors are led to a patient considered to be blind and paralyzed. Although Dr. Leopold von Schönfeld (Freud's professional rival) believes the patient is faking, Freud sticks a needle through her leg resulting in no reaction, thus proving that she is, in fact, paralyzed. Yet the other doctors are not convinced. Following this rejection, Freud leaves the room and is informed that Clara von Schönfeld, the girl from the séance (and Dr. Leopold von Schönfeld's younger sister), has gone missing since that night. Alfred Kiss, the police inspector looking for Clara,

receives a telegram from an unknown sender, reporting the deep tunnels of Vienna's sewer as the location of her abduction. Although many have come forward claiming to know Clara's whereabouts, they suspect the telegram to be true and can recover Clara. Freud takes Clara on as a patient and attempts to hypnotize her. Meanwhile, Fleur Salomé is the one actually hypnotized, and she sees what has happened in the tunnels two days ago. She also sees the culprit in her horrific vision: Leopold von Schönfeld. Freud skeptically believes her while the others consider her insane. Later that night, Sophia hypnotizes Fleur to get her to confess where she had been and threatens her.

The following day, in the episode *Somnambulant*, Freud hears for the first time about "Táltos," a Hungarian mythological figure with supernatural powers. Back at the hospital, he attempts to speak to Leopold von Schönfeld, but the latter seems to be in a dream-like state, induced by Sophia. Freud follows Schönfeld into a salon and observes that he seems to move with a purpose, although he is under hypnosis. Freud attempts to make a connection between the events surrounding Officer Georg von Lichtenberg (killed by Inspector Kiss in a duel), von Schönfeld, and Fleur, but to no avail. At one of the Szápárys' seances, Fleur has another vision. Immediately after she visits Freud to be hypnotized, she sees the opera singer Franktisek Mucha as a murderer of two people. Feeling that Freud knows too much, Sophia hypnotizes Freud and orders him to kill himself, as she had previously done with von Schönfeld. Though Freud managed to fight against Sophia's order he struggled.

In the next episode, *Totem and Taboo*, Viktor Szápáry meets with the Crown Prince Rudolf, who declares that he wants to meet Fleur again. Viktor follows this order, for he and Sophia wish to establish a personal connection with the Crown Prince to save their home country. Meanwhile, Freud and Inspector Kiss find out that Leopold von Schönfeld was in fact Clara's kidnapper, proving Clara to be correct in her visions. However, they then find von Schönfeld's dead body in his apartment, confirming that he has obeyed the countess's orders under hypnosis. In his apartment, they also find a symbol on the wall, painted in blood. Transitioning back to Fleur and the Szápárys, Fleur agrees to visit the Crown Prince under false pretenses. She believes he only wants to hear about his future. Yet, the countess whispers into Fleur's ear, "No matter what will happen, you'll let it happen, and when you wake up tomorrow, you won't remember it." She adds that Fleur is turning into a Táltos, foreshadowing upcoming drama. At the Crown Prince's apartment, his true intentions with Fleur are revealed. When he attempts to rape Fleur, a power overcomes her for the first time. She overpowers the Crown Prince. Following this encounter with the Crown Prince, Fleur visits Freud. Though Freud recognizes something to be wrong, he succumbs to her seduction and they sleep together.

In Episode 5, *Desire*, Freud reveals that Fleur had screamed "Táltos" all night. Freud questions her about the name, but she seduces him once again. The pair get caught by Lenore and his future brother-in-law. Returning home, Fleur is still

under an uncontrolled power, and while the Szápárys are frightened, they are also excited that the “Táltos” hypnosis had worked. Meanwhile, after hearing a piano playing in the neighboring apartment, Freud discovers that the apartment is empty. Lenore informs him that a musician once lived in the apartment before committing suicide. Freud becomes interested in the apartment and goes out of his way to learn more about the young musician. Later that night, the Szápárys host another one of their seances, and Fleur’s powers overcome her again, this time frightening the Szápárys.

In the second-to-last episode *Regression*, Freud uncovers that the musician who used to occupy the neighboring apartment was sent to the same mental hospital he currently works in, leading him to ask Professor Theodor Meynert for more information. Upon asking Professor Meynert, Freud finds out that Fleur Salomé has been admitted. This concerns Freud because he believes that she will go into her alter ego again. Professor Meynert is concerned of Freud’s obsession with Fleur. The Szápárys enter the room with Freud, and they accuse each other of being “poison” to Fleur. After the altercation, Professor Meynert threatens to admit Freud into a mental hospital and bans him from entering his hospital in the future. The episode ends with Freud freeing Fleur from the mental hospital and with the murderous opera singer killing numerous officers.

After the previous séance, the Countess expresses regret for what has happened to Fleur, but that is quickly changed when Viktor convinces her that it must be done for their home country. Meanwhile, Freud hides Fleur in the abandoned next-door apartment. In this room, Fleur sees the ghost of the dead musician playing piano. Her panic over seeing the ghost alerts Professor Meynert who is in search for them both. However, Freud manages to stay hidden. Later, he is in his apartment with Lenore and Inspector Kiss. He realizes Fleur is gone and goes searching for her. He is led into a room where he faces people from his past and his inner demons. It is then revealed that Fleur and Freud are unconscious in the living room and merely traveling through Fleur’s mind. It also becomes evident that Fleur and Táltos are the same person. Fleur wishes to get out of the darkness—to rid herself of her Táltos alter ego—and Freud dedicates himself to help.

In the series finale, *Suppression*, Sophia and Viktor prepare for a party at the court of the Austrian emperor. When Sophia feels Fleur’s presence, she and Viktor ignite a murder spree by spreading the message, “Táltos will come over you. Leave no enemy alive!” Fleur finds Sophia and Viktor in the midst of the murders, and the two are themselves murdered. After the chaos, Freud continues his work on “The Power of Hypnosis.” Martha Bernays, Freud’s fiancée who seems to be a mere afterthought in the series, is impressed by his work and accepts to marry Freud, despite his affair with Fleur and against her family’s wishes. At dinner, it seems that Freud feels accepted for his work on hypnosis. Despite this acceptance, Freud burns his book. The following day, he returns to work only to resign, proclaiming that his work for the mentally ill is ineffective. He sees Fleur later that

day in Vienna, although she is supposed to be in hiding. Although she is being hunted by the secret police, she has no fear because she feels free. She expresses that Táltos is her power now, and with Freud's help she has come to know herself. They express their warm regards for each other and go their separate ways. The episode and series end with Sigmund Freud in his office waiting for his next patient. In this final scene, we even see a psychoanalyst's couch, first utilized by Freud in real life.

Freud is a show most may not expect. For instance, it does not focus on Freud's psychotherapy or theories. Instead, Freud is a participant in a crime series and uses hypnosis as a way of helping Fleur and others. The series does indicate that Freud, much like in real life, sought to change the world with his theories. Although the series is not historically accurate—apart from some references to historical personalities, spectacular locations, and costumes—and contains several “slow” scenes, it is worth watching. In fact, I look forward to any future *Freud* episodes to find out what may happen to Fleur. Those devoted to the crime genre and fantasy may find the series compelling and may not even consider how it relates to the historical figure of Sigmund Freud. Additionally, they may be interested in shows like *The Valhalla Murders* or *Vienna Blood* to get further taste of crime-thriller series, with the latter also featuring a connection to Sigmund Freud.

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Monumental Crossroads: The Fight for Southern Heritage [documentary film].
Directed by Tim Van den Hoff. 2018.

Gander Yonder Pictures. 87 minutes.

How should one honor one's ancestors? If you are faced with evidence that your ancestors were morally wrong in a cause they fought for, do you still owe them anything? If your answer is “yes,” you find yourself in the company of many Americans whose ancestors died in the deadliest conflict on United States soil. If you are from the North or have some historical knowledge of the Civil War, you might find it outrageous that anyone could defend statues honoring men who willingly fought to keep millions of men, women, and children in chains. However, if you were to talk to Americans in the Deep South, you would get a vastly different opinion, not just on these statues that are on the minds of Americans everywhere, but also on the cause of the war itself. In what seems like a recent political and social dilemma that has gripped our nation, the statues that immortalize the long-dead soldiers and leaders of the Confederacy of the 1860s have become a topic of debate, specifically, whether they should be torn down, or whether they have any historical significance and should stay up. The documentary *Monumental Crossroads* was directed by Dutch filmmaker Tim Van den Hoff who has created other works on the rising tensions between left and right

politics, increasing nationalistic views, and social justice movements. His most recent film, *The Toxic Reigns of Resentment* (2019), discusses why the rise in nationalism and dividing politics is also leading to a rise in xenophobia. In *Monumental Crossroads*, Van den Hoff tries to answer the question of why the statues of Confederate soldiers and leaders have become so divisive during the last few years of political and social unrest in the United States. What makes this documentary unique is the number of differing opinions on why these statues either should or should not be torn down, from the perspective of African Americans who are involved in new Civil Rights and social justice reforms, via those who try to take a neutral approach to the discussion, to local leaders of chapters of organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans who put up most of these statues in the first place.

Monumental Crossroads travels through the United States' Deep South to find out why a large majority of people in the Southern states have taken the stance of defending the statues of their ancestors. To explain how the debate concerning the statues began, Van den Hoff starts in Charleston, South Carolina, with the 2015 shooting of nine Black church members by gunman Dylann Roof. Hoping to start a race war with the shooting, Roof was photographed holding the weapon and Confederate battle flag, but instead, he started a heated debate not just on the Confederate flag and the statues, but on the Confederacy and the cause of the war itself, dividing Americans once more.

Van den Hoff then moves on to New Orleans, Louisiana, a prominent slave-trading hub before the Civil War and current home of multiple statues of Confederate generals. Showing just how prominent the ideologies of Southern apologists dominate the city today, we see the footage of a protest by Southern heritage supporters who are trying to prevent the removal of the city's Robert E. Lee statue. It is here that we get our first of many renditions of the "Lost Cause" and Neo-Confederate talking points by statue supporters. One man states that in removing the statues they are erasing White history and attempting to remove White people from the nation. A second narrative features a writer for a local newspaper and supporter of the statues: looking through a historical lens, Owen Courreges believes that the statues honor historical figures and states that the monuments should be seen as war memorials, adding that much of the populace is apolitical toward the statues and unwilling to spend public money on taking them down. These two narratives at the beginning of the film may both be advocating in favor of keeping the statues, but for different reasons. Moving on to an art gallery, Van den Hoff interviews local African American spray paint artist bMike who was involved in the takedown of the monuments. bMike states that the discussion around the statues glorifies White opinions but silences Black voices and ignores their feelings on what these statues represent. He also dispels the myth or conspiracy theory that the debate on the statues is a new phenomenon bolstered by new-age political correctness to destroy White history and heritage, the ultimate goal being the complete elimination of the White race. He explains that,

since his youth, his elders – who lived through the eras of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights movement – had explained to him that those statues were put up to remind Black people to stay in their place in society and look up at the statues in case they forget where they are.

The film's next section features some of the most memorable characters interviewed by Van den Hoff. A man at a bar complains that the takedown of the statues is a result of political correctness overtaking the country. Right after this, Van den Hoff interviews a woman who is attempting to get funding from the city to restore overgrown African American cemeteries. The film shows the difference between the local cemetery of over 17,000 Confederate soldiers, which has received care from the state since its founding, and a historically African American cemetery that is now a forest. This interview illustrates that Southern Whites who sympathize with the Confederacy do not see the entire picture of how African Americans are treated in both life and in death. By far the most intriguing interview is that with H. K. Edgerton, a Black supporter of the Confederate monuments and former local president of the NAACP in Asheville, North Carolina. Edgerton gives a unique opinion on the flag and the monuments, arguing that African Americans should claim the flag and monuments as theirs because the South is their homeland. He also tries to put the injustices that have plagued African Americans for centuries on African slavers who sold slaves to Europeans rather than on the White populace. Edgerton finishes by stating that integration in America from Northerners only hurts African Americans and that most Americans are misinformed about slavery in the South. He claims that slaves and their masters had a relationship no different from any other family.

The film's last interviews feature the local vice president of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Lisa Thomas, and Mike Landree, the executive director of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who both echo the "Lost Cause" talking points seen throughout the documentary. Thomas explains that the statues have nothing to do with White supremacy but are instead honoring their ancestors and culture, making them no different from any other people in America doing the same for their ancestors and culture. Landree however, takes a revisionist stance, stating that the Confederate soldiers were fighting the Second War of Independence and that the war was really about the roles and functions of the state and federal governments. Landree adds that agendas surrounding the statues are driving the narrative, preventing honest discussion. To show that the "Lost Cause" indoctrination is continuing to this day, the film follows school children on a field trip to a local Civil War living-history museum. Reenactors at one point tell the children that, while owning a slave is wrong, the Confederate flag is not a representation of slavery but, rather, the American flag, completely ignoring the cause of the four years of Civil War. Being highly impressionable, the children absorb this information and are then bused back to school. Van den Hoff ends the film by stating that while most individuals believe that they are honoring their ancestors by defending these monuments and reenacting battles, they are limiting

their Southern heritage to the four years of war that were fought to preserve slavery.

While not a perfect documentary, *Monumental Crossroads* understands the difficult discussion about the monuments and handles it in a mature and respectable way. Van den Hoff is by no means supporting the keeping of the statues, but he does give a differing perspective on those who defend them. This film wants those who are part of the discussion to understand how and why those who defend the monuments are so passionate in their opinions. The most unique part of the film is the multitude of opinions, presented by a diverse group of Southerners, on why the monuments should be kept, because their rationales are wildly different—from a local newspaper writer who see the monuments as historical war memorials and local art pieces, via a Black Confederate supporter who sees them as a monument to African Americans as much as White Southerners, to the upper echelon of local Confederate memorial organizations who state they are simply defending their heritage and owe it to their ancestors. The reason we see no interviews with extremists like the KKK is because viewers should already know where they would stand; instead, we hear from those who seem harmless in their opinions but are unknowingly repeating propaganda that has reverberated for over a hundred years and is now embedded in their beliefs. The last part of the film, in which we see that school children today are still being taught propaganda and pro-Confederate viewpoints is a skillful touch by Van den Hoff to show that the struggle is ongoing and will probably not end soon.

Monumental Crossroads is a great starting point for those who are interested in the discussion on the morality of these monuments. We are currently seeing the most social change since the 1960s, and this discussion seems to encompass the entire country. It is also suitable for those interested in the history of the Civil War and the lasting impacts of the amendments and policies that followed. That said, *Monumental Crossroads* understands that it is not a historical piece on Civil War history but, rather, a discussion piece on American accountability. A mature discussion on a nation that is just now coming to grips with its difficult and racist past is difficult to make, but Van den Hoff does it well. The multiple perspectives shown here leave viewers wondering whether some of the interviewees are willingly ignorant or whether something more heinous is at play. *Monumental Crossroads* alerts to the danger that arises when history is not just forgotten, but outright ignored. Hopefully, this documentary's theme will resonate with viewers and make them ask themselves whether or not they owe anything to their ancestors—no matter what they did.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: *Jacob Romero of Huntington Beach, California, is currently pursuing a B.A. in History at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).*

Noble Blood [podcast].

Hosted by Dana Schwartz. 2019 to present.

iHeartRadio; Grim and Mild Entertainment. 60+ episodes (30-35 minutes each).

People the world over engage in poor decision-making, familial drama, and questionable romantic choices every day; one need only turn to the internet to see such incidents on public display. But add a royal crown to the situation, and, well, one may end up with a far bloodier and deadlier outcome than anticipated. *Noble Blood*, a podcast hosted by Dana Schwartz, delves into the stories of some of history's most captivating royals, examining the scandals, tragedies, and triumphs of those with the blood of nobility coursing through their veins.

Noble Blood is the brainchild of Dana Schwartz, an American author and journalist, and is produced by Grim & Mild Entertainment. Considering Schwartz's catalogue of work, a history podcast would seem out of place. She has written four books: *And We're Off*, a young adult novel; *Choose Your Own Disaster*, a memoir; *The White Man's Guide to White Male Writers of the Western Canon*, a comedic book based on her viral parody Twitter account @GuyInYourMFA; and *Anatomy: A Love Story*, a story in the gothic tradition that combines romance and mystery. Her journalistic works typically focus on pop culture and current events, infusing humor with social commentary. So, a podcast that focuses on the sometimes sordid and scandalous details of past royals, does not quite seem to fit until one considers the careful, level-headed approach that she takes regarding all her subject matters. While *Noble Blood* may examine the scandals surrounding an individual, Schwartz takes great care not to fall into sensationalism. Rather, she takes pride in correcting the record in places where myth, legend, and fiction have taken the place of fact, unmasking the nuanced narrative behind what may have long been presented as truth.

In Episode 49, "The Mad Tyrant," Dana Schwartz delves into the life of King George III of England (ruled 1760-1820) from his birth in 1738, a dangerous two months early, to his death after nearly a decade of battling what physicians of the time diagnosed as madness. Great attention is paid to King George III's relationship with the American colonies, which he so famously "lost." The king was a rigid, traditional man who saw it as his duty to defend Parliament's legal right to raise taxes as they chose, thus his support of the taxation of the colonies was far less about absolutism and far more about protecting the power of the parliamentary system. (17:03) And as Schwartz is quick to point out, such sentiment was not uncommon in Britain. Thus, the king's commitment to support Parliament's decision that Britain take action to protect its property and officials would not have been seen by the people of Britain as tyrannical. In fact, King George experienced a rather high level of popularity later in his reign, so when he experienced his second bout of "madness" in 1810, the people of England were quite concerned. While his insanity has been often tied into the narrative of the American colonial fight for independence, in actuality, he did not experience a

decline in his mental health until thirty years after the events of the American Revolution. In addressing the illness that plagued him in the latter half of his life, Schwartz offers a sympathetic view toward his plight, remarking repeatedly on the sad and tragic nature of it: "He became a shell of his former self, wandering through a palace with a long white beard, rambling incoherently, forgetting the identities of his loved ones, and then forgetting himself [...] The King of England's life ended bleakly, a prisoner in his own palace. The most powerful man in the country with absolutely no power anymore." (05:06) In relaying the reality of King George III's madness, particularly its treatment by doctors, Schwartz evokes a sense of pity for the man, an odd feeling when contrasted with the knowledge that he was, after all, a powerful monarch with extreme privilege.

Highlighting untold tales is a recurring theme in the *Noble Blood* podcast, and such stories are not limited to those with a direct path to inherit a throne. In Episode 45, "Love from Poland," Schwartz focuses on the life of Krystyna Skarbek (a.k.a. Christine Granville, 1908-1952), the daughter of a Polish count and a Jewish heiress, who went on to become one of the most famous secret agents in British history. Skarbek's story reads like a James Bond novel, a spy thriller that finds her skiing across the border of Hungary into Nazi-occupied Poland to deliver British propaganda and news materials to underground printing presses, escaping Hungary via the trunk of a vehicle driven by a member of the British Embassy, and parachuting into France to join the resistance. Schwartz celebrates the legacy of a woman whose name is not often heard in America when speaking of World War II: "She was the first female British special agent and their longest serving female agent, a woman who had lived a life filled with adventure and bravery [...] who had lived life only on her terms." (27:03) After Poland had been invaded and World War II broke out, Skarbek could not remain uninvolved after seeing the injustices committed in the country where she had been raised. She attempted to enroll in active combat, but was rejected given her gender and as a result turned toward the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) as a means of offering her services. At one point, Skarbek brazenly rescued a number of other agents from execution by the Gestapo by bluffing that she was the niece of British General Bernard Montgomery and wife of one of the captured agents. Promising retribution should any harm come to the prisoners, Skarbek convinced the officer in charge that British forces were on their way. (20:15) Krystyna Skarbek had the type of life that many would call unrealistic if it was presented as a film or novel. Schwartz commemorates her life, but also examines her death, one that poses a danger to women today. While serving as a steward on a passenger liner with the Union-Castle Line, a British shipping line that operated between Europe and Africa, Skarbek caught the attention of fellow steward Dennis George Muldowney. Even though she openly declined his amorous advances, he continued to pursue her. On June 15, 1952, Muldowney stabbed Skarbek to death in the stairwell of the Shelbourne Hotel in London, England. Skarbek had survived

World War II, but could not survive the entitlement of a man facing romantic rejection.

Schwartz does not limit the podcast to the European continent and its nobles. Several episodes focus on the royalty of Africa and Asia including Episode 42, "Queen Njinga's Cleverness." As queen of what is now northern Angola, Njinga (1583-1663) ruled the united kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba while deftly circumventing attempts of colonization by Portugal. A diplomat and a warrior queen, she reigned for thirty-seven years after the deaths of both her father and brother, serving as "an inspiration to the spirit of African independence against colonialists." (04:10) From a young age, Njinga received training in diplomacy and fighting, excelling in both. Her father, who became king of the Ndongo when she was 10 years old, had her participate in numerous official government duties, preparing her for a life of battling against Portuguese forces both physically and politically. Schwartz is attentive in the characterization of Njinga and her legacy, recognizing the subject's complexity: while Njinga was fiercely anti-colonial, a woman holding power in a male-dominated society, a warrior and a fighter, she was also an elite woman who lived off the labor of other, collaborating in the slave trade and fighting other African people on behalf of the Portuguese. (05:24) As Schwartz posits, "it is in many ways more empowering to tell the stories of heroic figures as contradictory characters full of weakness and failures of insight. It enables us to see our own choices and potentials more clearly and to understand that imperfect people can have a powerful, liberating impact on the world." (05:42)

In order to construct each episode of *Noble Blood*, Schwartz and her podcast team conduct a great deal of research, collecting and reading through numerous primary and secondary sources. For instance, as Schwartz weaves together the story of King George III, Schwartz references a number of accounts that document his life, acknowledging the presence of bias as needed: "one source, albeit a biased source with a grudge against the Prince of Wales, claimed that George could not read until he was eleven years old, but more accurate reports state that he could read and write in both English and German by age eight." (Episode 49, 07:28) Acknowledging bias is especially crucial in episodes that deal with royals in Africa like Njinga. Many of the surviving sources were written by Christian missionaries and imperialist Europeans who were not interested in depicting the indigenous population in an accurate manner: "As a female African ruler, propaganda from European missionaries would paint her in incredibly racist and sexist terms, claiming she was a cannibal and extremely promiscuous." (Episode 42, 04:37) Schwartz is careful to delineate the apocryphal from fact, openly stating when a piece of information is likely a rumor. Occasionally, Schwartz will directly mention the type of source (a letter, diary entry, church record, article, book, etc.) and its context. In the episode "Queen Njinga's Cleverness," she often cites leading historians and their works. For example, she specifically references Dr. Linda Heywood as well as Aurora Levins Morales's article "Historian as Curandera" in the discussion of presenting an accurate and nuanced depiction of a complex

historical figure like Queen Njinga. More often than not, though, she relies upon phrases like “by most accounts,” “reports state,” “a source reports,” and “quoted as saying” to relay that the information being presented is from another source. Her information is frequently synthesized from a variety of primary and secondary sources rather than from a singular text. Given that the podcast is intended for the general populace, such omissions are understandable as they allow for a smooth narrative style; it is a story, not a research paper. While the podcast does serve to educate its audience about the lives of historical figures, it must also fulfill the purpose of entertaining the listener.

And in entertaining its audience, *Noble Blood* certainly succeeds. I frequently recommend this podcast to friends and family members who have even a passing interest in history. Each episode of *Noble Blood* constitutes a single story, typically running around 30 to 35 minutes. (At the time of writing, there are over 60 total episodes with new releases every two weeks.) Personally, I hardly notice the time passing and am always left wanting to know more. Dana Schwartz’s delivery style is a large part of this as her tone is polished but passionate. Her voice invites the audience into the story, placing emphasis on important details and vivid descriptions. Truly, this podcast is worth the time, and I highly recommend it. If *Noble Blood* catches your attention, there are several other podcasts that may draw your interest. In the same vein, the podcasts *Lore* and *Unobscured* (also produced by Grim & Mild Entertainment) seek to illuminate the darker side of the past, pairing thorough primary and secondary source research with a narrative style that enthralls the audience. *Lore* focuses on true-life scary stories, examining the creatures, people, and places that make up the history behind common folklore because sometimes truth is more frightening than fiction. *Unobscured*, on the other hand, has twelve-episode seasons (four seasons in total at the time of writing) which center on a single subject such as Jack the Ripper or the Salem Witch Trials, combining narrative storytelling with interviews from prominent historians. As with *Noble Blood*, these are topics and historical figures who have been revisited numerous times in stories and media, but time has stolen away perspective, obscuring reality. All are worth listening to whether you are a devoted historian or simply someone who enjoys occasionally dabbling in such topics.

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The Professor and the Madman [film].
Directed by P. B. Shemran (Farhad Safinia). 2019.

Voltage Pictures; Fábrica de Cine; Definition Films; et al. 124 minutes.

The history behind the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) is both interesting and complex. However, it has never been the topic of a feature film, which is not

surprising, given the general public's general disinterest in philology or lexicography. Yet, P. B. Shemran's recent film, *The Professor and the Madman*, illustrates that a dramatization of this story can work astoundingly well. *The Professor and the Madman* is a biographical drama set in the second half of the nineteenth century. Initial research for the *OED* began in 1857, and its first pages were printed in 1884.

Most of the film is loosely based on the interaction between the Scottish amateur philologist James Murray (1837-1915), who became the editor of the *OED* project in 1879, and the American army surgeon Dr. William Chester Minor (1834-1920), one of the *OED*'s most active volunteer contributors. The film follows their two largely separate, yet intertwined life stories. While Murray is working on the project in Oxford, Minor is locked up in a mental asylum (Broadmoor) and labeled as "insane" for murdering a man by the name of George Merrett, but – when tried in a court of law – he had been found not guilty by reason of insanity, which is why he had subsequently been sent to an asylum. When Murray applies for the position of editor for the *OED* project, he is initially looked down upon by some of the board members at Oxford because he had not finished school, after dropping out at the age of fourteen, and never obtained an academic degree. The reason he is eventually offered the editor position is because of his proficiency in numerous ancient and modern languages. In addition to his intelligence, Murray shows his resourcefulness when, at a dinner where opposing views fly across the table, he suggests that the best way to capture the diversity of a language would be to find volunteers from wherever English is spoken.

Eliza Merrett, the widow of the man that Minor had shot, adds an important layer to the film and allows Minor to have a character arc. Minor tries to send money to her, as poverty had forced her to resort to prostitution. However, she is unwilling to receive any support from her husband's murderer. Since, at this time, most academic interaction takes place by means of written correspondence, Minor is able to volunteer his lexicographical services for the *OED* project despite his incarceration. When Minor becomes one of the *OED*'s most industrious and prolific contributors, Murray visits him at Broadmoor and is surprised to meet in him an inmate rather than (as he had expected) a staff member. When Murray sees Minor's shackles, he tells him that he is not alone. The screenplay contains numerous subtle messages like this, and its frequent use of symbolism fits well with the film's subject matter.

Eliza Merrett eventually accepts Minor's help, soon grows attached to him, and thanks him for everything he has done for her, and all the money and gifts he has sent. Her children, too, are told to thank Minor toward the end of the film, but the children are not comfortable seeing him, and the eldest daughter even attacks him because of the anger she feels toward her father's murderer. Eliza tells Minor that she used to be angry at him, and he replies that she should still hate him. When she shows affection toward him, his insanity spirals out of control, and he harms himself. Eventually, he is deported back to the United States. The film ends with

the unfortunate news that they were not able finish what they had set out to do, so work on the *OED* continues (and the full first edition would not be published until 1928). The final scene is bittersweet and shows Murray leaving his workspace to go outside and spend time with his family.

The acting in *The Professor and the Madman* is excellent. I believe that the standout actor is Mel Gibson as James Murray. For an actor, the Scottish accent is one of the hardest to attempt. Gibson makes it seem natural. Sean Penn (as William Chester Minor) and Natalie Dormer (as Eliza Merrett) do a fantastic job as well. Their relationship, transitioning from her hate to mutual care, seems very authentic. The screenplay and cinematography set the tone exceedingly well. The sets are grand and transport viewers back into the nineteenth century. *The Professor and the Madman* was filmed in Dublin, and there was a legal dispute because of the production company failing to arrange for filming days in Oxford, ultimately resulting in Mel Gibson not promoting the film. This is a shame, because the film deserves to be promoted. Its script is unlike other Mel Gibson films, which usually feature a fast-paced plot, a macho man, and grotesque violence. *The Professor and the Madman* takes a much different approach. The screenplay is subtle, there is no overacting, and instead there is clear character development. When it comes to Minor spiraling into insanity, the script allows for room to breathe: there is not just screaming and yelling, and there are subtle moments when Minor seems completely lucid. There is a brilliantly written line when Murray is sitting on a bench next to Minor, and Murray, reflecting on how brilliant Minor is, says, "A professor and a madman working together, but which is which."

If you enjoy *The Professor and the Madman*, I recommend that you also read the non-fiction monograph on which it is based, namely, *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*, by Simon Winchester (1998). The main differences between film and book are that the film seems to end on a happier note, and the depiction of the mental hospital is more intense in the book. A film that is somewhat similar in style and tone to *The Professor and the Madman*, and also features excellent acting, is Joe Wright's 2017 drama *Darkest Hour*, a film about Winston Churchill and his refusal to negotiate with Hitler.

In sum, *The Professor and the Madman* is a very well-made film. It features great acting and a set design that makes the time period appear distinct and vibrant. The film's characters may not be especially likable, but they are relatable. Although I absolutely enjoyed the material, the screenplay may be a bit too slow for some. There are long sections in this film where there is nothing but clever and subtle dialogue. Overall, the film provides a unique perspective on the *Oxford English Dictionary* project. I hope that, in the future, other intellectual projects will receive the cinematic attention they deserve. The story of *The Professor and the Madman* is simply too good to not be widely known.

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