

WEEK 38, 2019

THE EPOCH TIMES  
ARTS &  
TRADITION

COURTESY OF NIKO CHOCHELI



Niko Chocheli's drawing is a classical interpretation and takes its inspiration from "The Transfiguration," 1516–1520, by Raphael.

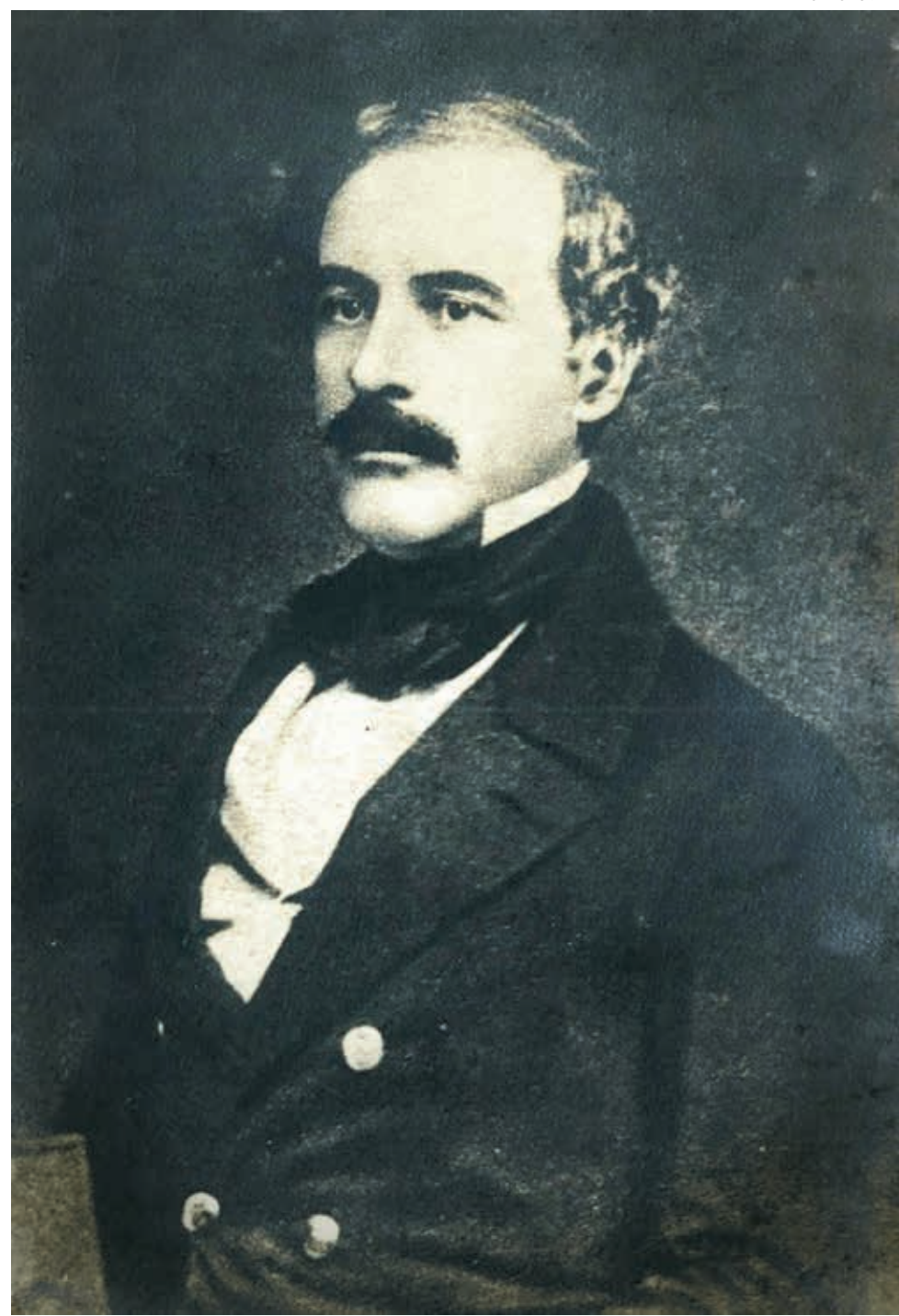
An Artist's Quest:  
***'Not a Day Without Beauty'...4***

THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH and TRADITION

# A NEWSPAPER GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD READ

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Robert E. Lee around age 43, when he was a brevet lieutenant-colonel of engineers, circa 1850.

HISTORY

## Mothers and Sons: Ann Carter Lee and Robert E. Lee

The hand that rocks the cradle

JEFF MINICK

On battlefields around the world, soldiers have cried out for their mothers as they lay dying. And memorably, Abraham Lincoln once said, “All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.” In our series “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle: Mothers and Sons,” we will look at a number of famous men strongly influenced by their mothers. Not all these women were angels, but their love, disposition, and sense of principle left an indelible stamp on their sons.

He was a member of one of Virginia’s most illustrious families. His father was a Revolutionary War hero who later gained a reputation as a scoundrel in business and a hothead in politics. His mother was a Carter, also one of Virginia’s first families. He became a soldier, an Army engineer, superintendent of the United States Military Academy, and one of America’s greatest generals.

Unfortunately for his reputation in our politically correct times, he fought for the wrong side.

**An Exemplar, No Matter Your Side**

Today, some revile the once-revered Robert E. Lee, savaging him for owning slaves and leading Confederate troops against the government of the United States. No matter that he believed secession to be a tremendous mistake; no matter that he fought not for slavery, which he regarded as evil, but for his beloved Virginia; no matter that he was a gentleman in the best sense of that word; no matter that he called for the reconciliation of North and South after his surrender at Appomattox: No, some of our self-righteous citizens have determined to tar and feather the long-dead Lee, demanding this American hero be erased from our histories and from the public square.

Yet, if we examine those histories and biographies, we find not only Lee the general but also a man with impeccable manners, always considerate of others, scrupulous



General Robert E. Lee in 1866.



EVERETT HISTORICAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

in his personal affairs, and a devout believer—“It is all in God’s hands” has been attributed to him, in moments of crisis.

In “Clouds of Glory: The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee,” Michael Korda notes that both Northerners and Southerners regarded Lee not only as a hero but also as a kind of secular saint and martyr.

And it was his mother who helped make him so.

Lee’s father, Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee, became celebrated as a leader of cavalry during the Revolution and was a close friend of George Washington, delivering his funeral oration with its famous tag “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

Though Henry Lee served in high political office after the war—he was once governor of Virginia—he lost money in land speculation, quarreled frequently and bitterly over politics and money, and was once, in 1812, almost beaten to death by a Baltimore mob outraged by his opposition to the war with Britain. Henry Lee spent the last five years of his life outside the United States, fleeing his creditors and trying to regain his health. He finally died, broken in wallet and in spirit, on Cumberland Island in Georgia.

**Steadfast Faith and Duty**

Fortunately for Robert, his mother, Ann Carter Lee, was made of stronger stuff.

Here was a woman who faced tremendous obstacles. Long before the death of her husband, Ann received little support from him, financial or otherwise, and depended on generous relatives for sustenance and living quarters. Often sickly, she managed the household and raised her five children, of whom Robert was the fourth.

Despite their straitened circumstances and her ill health, Ann was determined to bring up her children well: to be ladies and gentlemen, to be truthful, to manage their money, to take pride in their heritage yet practice humility, and to pursue their religious faith in earnest.

Robert was 12 years old when his older siblings left home, and the burden of caring for his ailing mother and overseeing the household fell on his shoulders. He “carried the keys,” as was said then, and oversaw the day-to-day workings of their home.

Later, Robert would bring the tender skills he had learned while caring for his mother to his own wife, who was also sickly for much of their marriage.

Perhaps Ann’s two greatest gifts to her son were a love for God and a devotion to duty.

Ann was a fervent Christian. Though none of her letters to Robert are extant, we do find evidence of her spirit in a letter written to Robert’s brother, Smith. Near death, Ann encourages Smith to “repel every evil and allow yourself to indulge

in such habits only as are consistent with religion and morality.”

And though Robert may never have written the famous words attributed to him—“Duty is the most sublime word in our language. You should do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less”—that dictum served as his lifelong lodestar. Its light was acquired first from his mother’s lips and then reinforced by his many responsibilities as a youth.

### Perhaps Ann’s two greatest gifts to her son were a love for God and a devotion to duty.

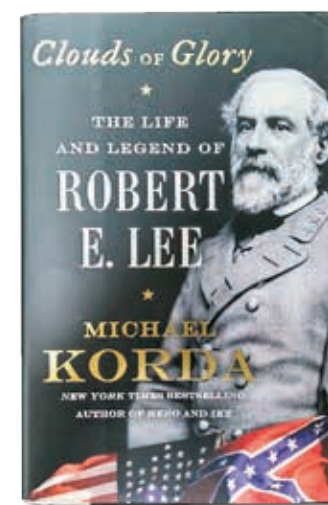
In 1824, when Lee was seeking an appointment to West Point from Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, his mother’s cousin, William Henry Fitzhugh, wrote in a reference letter to Calhoun that Robert “is also the son of one of the finest women the state of Virginia has ever produced. Possessed, in a very eminent degree, of all those qualities, which peculiarly belong to the female character of the South, she is rendered doubly interesting by her meritorious & successful exertions to support, in comfort, a large family, and to give all her children excellent educations.”

The bond between mother and son was so strong that after Lee had departed for West Point, Ann wrote to a cousin: “How can I get along without Robert? He is both a son and a daughter to me.”

Lee graduated from West Point in June 1829 and returned home to find his mother dying. He resumed his care for her, mixing her medicines and sitting for hours by her bedside, until on June 26 she slipped away, free from her many trials and leaving behind the young soldier who would become one of Virginia’s most beloved sons.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

“Clouds of Glory: The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee” by Michael Korda.



THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH and TRADITION

## COVERING IMPORTANT NEWS OTHER MEDIA IGNORE

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TRUTH AND TRADITION

"Annunciation Angel," by Niko Chocheli. Sanguine on paper. One of a number of preparatory drawings for "The Annunciation," a large oil painting commissioned by the renowned La Salle University Art Museum when Chocheli was artist-in-residence. All drawings were made as educational tools to demonstrate a classical approach to creating a painting.

LA SALLE UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM



## FINE ARTS

# An Artist's Quest: 'Not a Day Without Beauty'

Niko Chocheli's lifelong pursuit of orthodox beauty

## LORRAINE FERRIER

Georgian Artist Niko Chocheli has dedicated his life to learning, teaching, and conveying beauty onto canvas, paper, and more.

As a fine artist, illustrator, and iconographer, Chocheli's work has been exhibited widely: with over 40 national solo shows and over 40 international group exhibitions, including in Europe, India, and Australia.

Chocheli has been awarded the title of honorary professor from the Tbilisi State Academy of Fine Arts and an honorary doctorate. In 2009, he received a lifetime achievement award from the Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, for his contributions to local art and culture.

Here, he explains how beauty has led him throughout his life: from growing up in Soviet-occupied Georgia to continuing his father's teaching tradition by starting his own fine art school.

**The Epoch Times:** What was it like growing up as an artist in Georgia?

**Niko Chocheli:** We had 3,000 years of statehood; that's a long time. And it left behind thousands of monuments. There are ancient castles and fortresses, majestic cathedrals, and monasteries. Of course, in Soviet times, anything about churches, religion, and spirituality was persecuted and strictly prohibited.

But you can see the monuments everywhere. Imagine if you are a young person and you're growing up, and you're surrounded with this history everywhere. Every stone is an inspiration. I sometimes



Artist Niko Chocheli.

“We study the great masters to help us to see.”

Niko Chocheli, artist

joke that when you're in Georgia, you cannot take a bad picture; everything in the background is picturesque.

Growing up there and being surrounded with all that inspiration was a very powerful stimulus for me to carry on learning about art.

Both my parents, Leila and Robert Chocheli, were traditionally trained artists, so they knew how important it was for me to understand and to appreciate the tradition. My father dedicated most of his life to teaching. He started the Chocheli School of Fine Art in the 1950s in Tbilisi, Georgia. So it was very natural for me, almost like an annex for his school, to carry on his legacy and tradition here in this country. That's how it all came about—how it started here in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

My father's teaching methodology was that instead of indoctrinating me in academia from a very young age, which a lot of artists do with their children, he always believed that I should grow and develop on my own. He would simply surround me with beauty and art. He would not force me to learn or memorize something. Rather, it had to come from my own discovery of those things.

There is this funny story about the great Italian composer Gioachino Rossini. One of his students had a friend who supposedly had a strange penchant for collecting torture instruments. The student was telling Rossini about it and then suddenly Rossini asked, "Does he have a piano in his collection?" And of course the student said, "No, I don't think so." Then Rossini said, "Well, that shows that he was never taught how to play music as a child."

You don't want to associate those things with being forced to do them when you were little. My father understood that. When I grew up and started asking him questions, that's when he stepped in and started to give me what I needed. When I was young, I was inspired and was taught by example, and by visiting places, and when the time came, I enrolled at my father's school, where he would give me individual training, which has never really stopped. Even today, when I paint something, it has to—at least a little bit—go through my father's very sharp and experienced eye because I value his opinion.

**The Epoch Times:** How easy was it for you to access great art in Soviet-occupied Georgia?

**Mr. Chocheli:** Under Soviet occupation, you could travel all throughout the Soviet bloc but you couldn't travel anywhere in the West. You couldn't leave the country to travel to England, France, Italy, or any of those places.

Only when I started to realize that there is the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery in London, the Prado Museum in Madrid, all those places, then I realized, well, I can't really go and see them. Yet, I was hopeful.

I'm not minimizing what was going on in Georgia. As a matter of fact, Georgia was one of the countries most hit, so to speak, in the Soviet era. Churches were especially persecuted; thousands of people were killed or tortured for their faith, for their beliefs, for the truth. On the surface everything looked fine, but behind the scenes the country was occupied.

That's why I always tell my friends here:

"You should be so appreciative of what you have in America. When you wake up, and you go to the church of your choice, and you know that no one is going to arrest you, and your parents are not going to lose their jobs, and you're not going to be deemed crazy if you believe in God, that is a blessing."

I tell my students, who have these grand museums in their neighborhoods with so much incredible art: "It's next door. You should go and camp there. I had to fly to another country in order to see a painting I wanted to see."

**The Epoch Times:** Please tell us about your art practice.

**Mr. Chocheli:** My philosophy is to pursue beauty. My Eastern Orthodox Christian faith leads me to understand that God is the ultimate Creator. By creating something beautiful, you connect to the divine.

You know it's like lighting a candle, and it has been said by much wiser people than me, that when you light a candle, you light up the room, and the candle burns down but the light doesn't diminish; it continues to burn and illuminate everything. One has to be that way. And it's not just about painting. It's how you live, what you believe, what you do, and what you consider is important.

With my work, I try to retain a true tradition. I want people to be aware that we are part of a tradition. It should not be lost. It should not be forgotten. It's beautiful, it's true, and it's important, so I try to retain that link. My studio may be small, but I try to carry a torch.

Teaching is never just a job for me. It has become my mission, because I understand the importance of it.

**The Epoch Times:** What's involved in learning the fine art styles and techniques of the great masters?

**Mr. Chocheli:** That's a very big question. The heart is the number-one instrument—not the brain, but the heart—to develop feelings. You have to let beauty strike you. If you are not moved and stricken by it, then how can you make someone else experience it?

As an artist, your work is not only about yourself. You have to go beyond yourself and help engage the viewer in the dialogue. It has to also speak to someone, or art loses its timelessness and it just

becomes your own personal piece.

If you want to give it to others, you have to make them feel with your eyes and make them experience it with you. So learning to see is the beginning. We study the great masters to help us to see.

There is a wonderful quote by the great French master Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. I really love his writing. He said: "Address yourselves to the masters. Therefore, speak to them. They will answer you, for they are still living. It is they who will instruct you; I myself am no more than their quiz-master."

Nowadays, a lot of art schools try to teach students art straightaway. You can't really teach art that way. Art is so deep and so personal; an artist is something you become, so you can't infringe on the very delicate things in the heart of a person.

Art schools teach the very tangible skills; they teach a craft and knowledge. Then the person himself, or herself, will build upon those skills.

What is involved in learning fine art is, of course, hard work: working on yourself first, then drawing, painting, sketching, studying, copying, observing, learning to see, and a lot of reading.

I always read books.

**The Epoch Times:** Do you mean classic literature?

**Mr. Chocheli:** Absolutely. They can inspire you from a young age; they want you to create because the words you are conversing with are written by the most intelligent, talented, and gifted people. They tell you things that you try to imagine.

As you study art and see those stories being re-enacted in the great canvases, if you don't know those stories, you miss so much because then you'll look at it and say: "Who are they?" and "What do they represent?" When you know the story, then you understand how an artist has dealt with it.

So you need to read. You need to know mythology. I love fairy tales; I read those. Those things inspire the imagination and produce much fruit.

An artist's formative years cannot just be about learning how to draw. If you don't have substance inside, then you just become a technician and that's all.

We have to look at our history. I lecture on art history because I want my students to be aware of this. Literature, poetry, music, and architecture are all sisters—the great masters called them the Muses—but they are children of one parent, and that parent is beauty. This is my understanding of what art is, and I think it is not just my own. It's based on my extensive studies and readings from masters: Beauty is what art is all about, not just depicting a truth or a fact.

Hard work and learning can teach you how to be a good master, to draw things, but it doesn't make you a great master. It doesn't make you an artist, as you're just reproducing, like photography, and capturing things as they are. Artists change things as they want them to be and make something else.

The masters said that to attain the highest standard and expression in

portraiture, the painting has to be better than the original. Now think about that.

When you look at portraits by Rembrandt, for example, you realize that it's not just a depiction of a person. It's kind of a masterpiece. It's not just a concrete person: You see depth, and you see an inner world. It transforms the sitter, whoever a person was (real or imagined), and makes them better. And it makes you better by standing in front of this great work. It ennobles you. This is what great fine art is all about.

I have this favorite quote: "Nulla dies sine linea" ("Not a day without a line") attributed by Pliny the Elder to the great ancient Greek artist Apelles. I am often tempted to pin those words over my studio doors because it is true, "Not a day without a line." Maybe "Not a day without beauty" would be my paraphrase.

I also teach my students to draw without a pencil or brush: to draw with their eyes. Because, really, if you think about it, you don't stop being an artist once you leave your studio. You are an artist no matter where you are. When you cannot draw with your hands, you still look at things as an artist and imagine: How would it be if I would paint this? What colors would I use to do this kind of style, or line?

There is a lot involved in learning styles, techniques, and the philosophy of art. The art schools and art colleges are not carrying on that tradition. It's like reinventing a bicycle right now, while the great masters were already driving Porsches or Mercedes.

There is a tradition. The masters have been given this knowledge, and they carried it on and passed it on to the younger generations since the Renaissance. Now suddenly, anything goes. That's why it is valuable to return to the past to learn the good lessons. To learn what is true and what is important and then, of course, re-enact it in the world that we live in.

What they created doesn't age, and it doesn't lose its relevance. Because even in the 21st century, I can look at a painting which was done 600 years ago, and I can relate and connect to it.

Art that is not that way is based on fashion or some fad or some kind of sensation. It fades away like fashion. Now it's hot, but tomorrow it might not be anything interesting. It can be compared to a newspaper and a book: You read the newspaper; it's important and it's relevant now, but tomorrow, it's yesterday's news. But with a good book, you don't throw that away. You put it on the shelf, and you return to it again and again. Classical, true art is timeless.

When you realize that, then you understand there's a choice: to create something which is timeless and eternal or something which is instant, quick, and is going to fade away.

To find out more about Niko Chocheli's art and the Chocheli School of Fine Art, visit [NikoChocheli.com](http://NikoChocheli.com)

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

“If you don't have substance inside, then you just become a technician and that's all.”

Niko Chocheli, artist



"Muse of Eloquence," by Niko Chocheli. Graphite on colored paper.

## LITERATURE

# THE BEST OF C.S. LEWIS'S FICTION: 'Till We Have Faces'

JEFF MINICK

Though he died over 50 years ago, C.S. Lewis remains popular both as a writer of Christian apologetics and as a novelist. Critics regard his "Narnia" books as childhood classics, and with sales of those books topping 100 million over the years, many children and their parents clearly agree. Some of the young people I used to teach touted Lewis's space trilogy, which I have yet to read. The students and I did read together "The Great Divorce," Lewis's novel exploring the divisions between heaven and hell. Of all Lewis's novels, however, I would contend that his last and perhaps least-read fiction—"Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold"—is also his best.

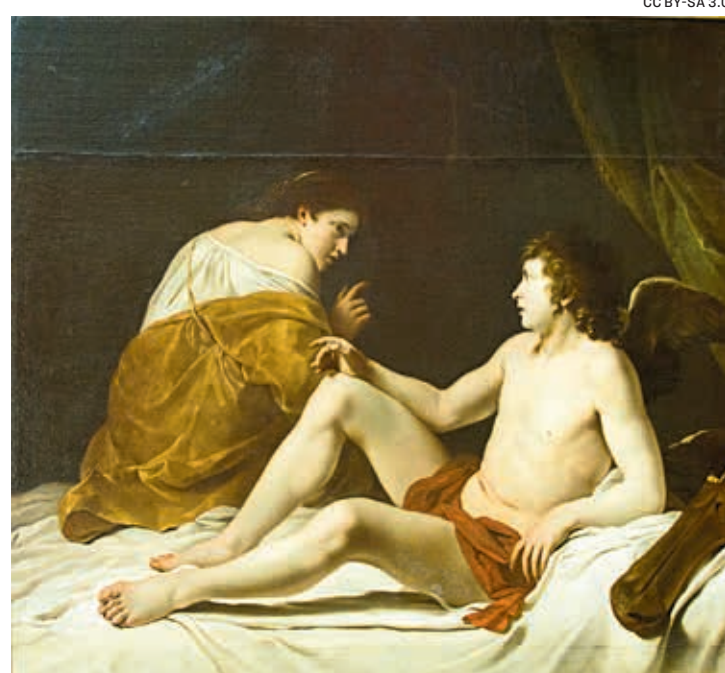
The myth retold is that of Cupid (Love) and Psyche (Soul). In the account by Apuleius, from which Lewis takes his story, Venus, jealous of the mortal Psyche's beauty, instructs her son Cupid to make Psyche fall in love with a monster. Instead, Cupid falls in love with Psyche. He comes to her only at night, having given her explicit instructions never to look on him. When she breaks her promise—wax dripping from her candle wakes the god—Cupid flees, and Psyche eventually finds herself in the thrall of Venus, for whom she must perform near-impossible tasks. Cupid finally rescues her, pleads to Zeus

for help, and is allowed to marry Psyche, now an immortal like her husband.

## An Ancient Tale Retold

In "Till We Have Faces," Lewis does much more than simply recount this ancient tale of Cupid and Psyche. Their story serves as the skeleton to which Lewis adds nerves, blood, tissue, and flesh, bringing the myth to life, but with darker and deeper ramifications than Apuleius's version.

Here, Psyche's half-sister Orual, a princess and then the queen of the semi-barbaric Glome, is the narrator of the novel, and "Till We Have Faces" is her complaint against the



Detail of "Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss," 1793, by Antonio Canova. The Louvre.

## The myth retold is that of Cupid (Love) and Psyche (Soul).

gods. Ugly in countenance—she eventually takes to wearing a veil—and embittered by events, particularly due to her belief that the gods have stolen her beloved sister from her, Orual becomes a powerful ruler. She fights alongside her soldiers in battle, frequently condemns those who refuse to do her will to slavery or death, and demands much of her counselors, particularly Barda, her best general; and the Fox, the Greek who tutored her in her youth and remains her wisest adviser.

From time to time, Orual and the inhabitants of Glome suffer from plague, drought, and warfare, but Orual's greatest and most constant agony derives from the absence of her sister, who loves, and is loved by, Cupid.

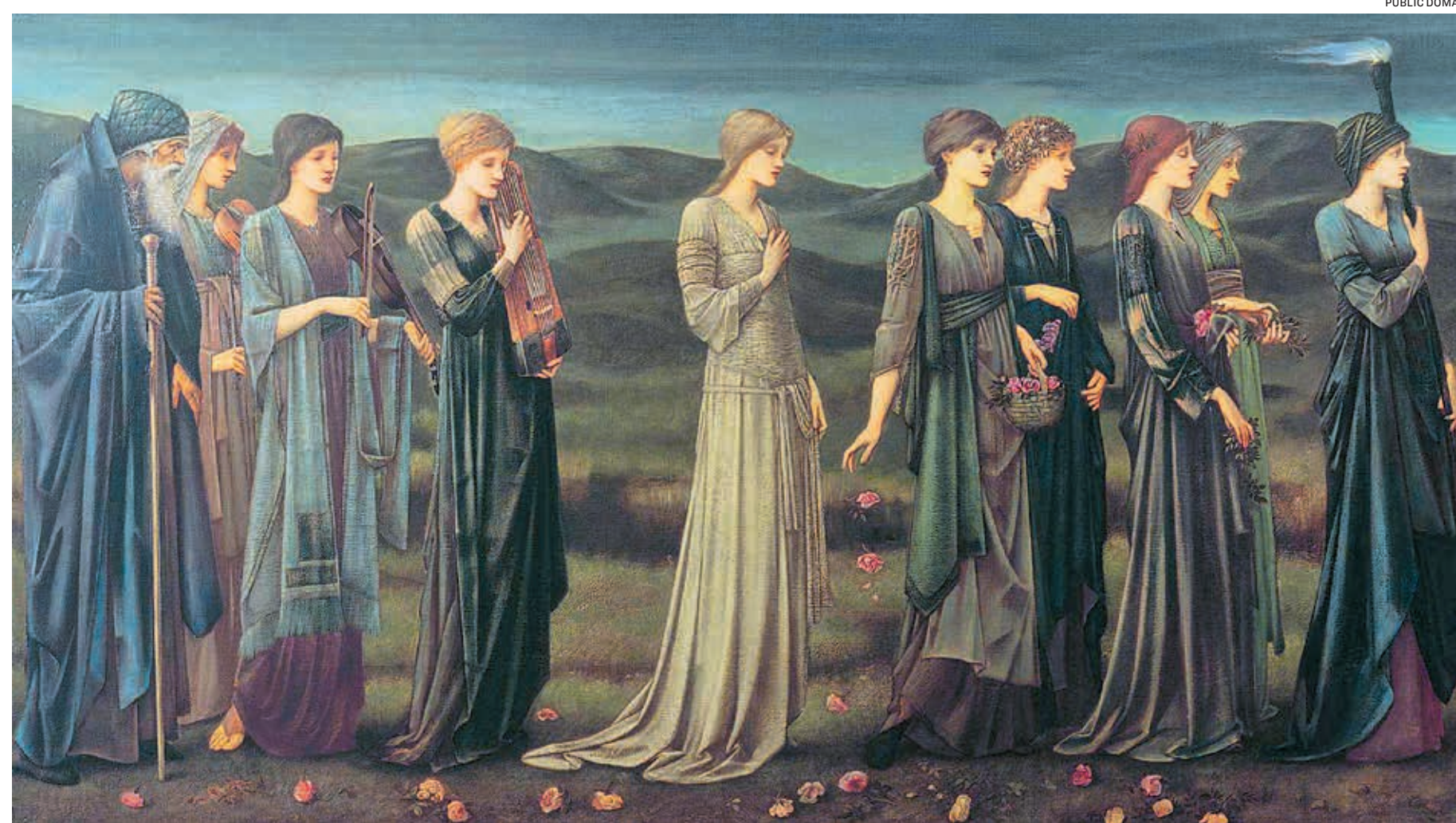
Orual is manipulative, self-pitying at times, by turns cruel and kind to those around her, and obsessed with the notion that the gods are wicked. She has a hand in the death of Barda, whom she overworks, and keeps the Fox close by her side, though she says, "I knew

you were breaking your heart for the Greeklands. I ought to have sent you away. I lapped up all you gave me like a thirsty animal ... I've batted on the lives of men. It's true. Isn't it true?"

## A Look at Ourselves

It is true. Orual batted on the lives of the Fox and Barda. And as we come to know this queen, many of us may find ourselves looking into a mirror. For what is true of Orual is true of many of us as well.

That human beings so often love one another poorly is a theme in several of Lewis's books, particularly in "The Four Loves," "The Great Divorce," and "The Screwtape Letters." The mother who always hovers over her son, demanding his affection in return; the husband jealous of his wife's acquaintances; the woman who wants her best friend to have no other companions than herself. All believe themselves paragons of love, but they fail to see that the bricks and mortar of their affection build not a palace but a prison for those they cherish.



"Psyche in Hell," 1865, by Eugène Ernest Hillelmacher. To perform one of her impossible feats for Venus, Psyche must venture into hell. Here Charon rows Psyche past a dead man in the water and the old weavers onshore.

Orual does indeed love Psyche, just as she does Barda and the Fox, but hers is a love made up of fences and bars.

As in other novels by Lewis, he makes excursions into philosophy and theology. The novel's title, for example, comes from a line in the book: "How can we meet the gods face to face till we have faces?" By faces, Lewis means that when we are to confront the Divine, as Orual eventually does, we must be our real selves, with our masks and veils gone, our pretenses stripped away, and our souls revealed.

## 'What Would Become of Us?'

Mercy, too, enters into the premises of this story. Near the end of "Till We Have Faces," when the gods grant an audience to Orual, she meets with the Fox, resurrected from the dead. He is to bring her before her judges:

"My judges?"

"Why, yes, child. The gods have been accused by you. Now's their turn."

"I cannot hope for mercy."

"Infinite hopes—and fears—may both be yours. Be sure that, whatever else you get, you will not get justice."

"Are the gods not just?"

"Oh, no, child. What would become of us if they were? But come and see."

What would become of us if they were? What both the Fox and Lewis intend by that horrifying question is that justice untempered by mercy would be hideous indeed. We see the results of that situation every day on our electronic screens, where judgment without any show of mercy is commonplace, where some are condemned without any sort of quarter or charity.

At the end of another fine novel, Graham Greene's "Brighton Rock," an elderly priest speaks these words to a young female penitent in the confessional: "You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone else ... the appalling ... strangeness of the mercy of God."

"Till We Have Faces" reminds us that we too, if we so wish, may

practice an appalling strangeness of mercy, that we can love well, that we can find beauty even in suffering, and that when we do these things, we can, as does Orual, become "beautiful ... beyond all imagining."

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.



C.S. Lewis's book "Till We Have Faces."



## ICONIC FILMS

### DON'T TAKE

# Tarantino's Bruce Lee

## SERIOUSLY

MARK JACKSON

Our Epoch Times series "Iconic Films" aims to reacquaint or introduce movie fans to films that warrant a first, second, or 25th look. They also form the substratum on which today's filmmakers build.

Martial arts legend Bruce Lee's reputation has lately been taking a major pie in the face due to Quentin Tarantino's latest film, "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood." Bruce look-alike actor Mike Moh does an uncanny, hilarious send-up of Lee, ascribing to him a giant, self-involved ego—which it's actually not hard to imagine Bruce Lee as having had.

However, Bruce's daughter and executor of his estate, whom Tarantino pointedly avoided consulting regarding his derogatory if successfully comedic portrayal of her father, came out against Tarantino's

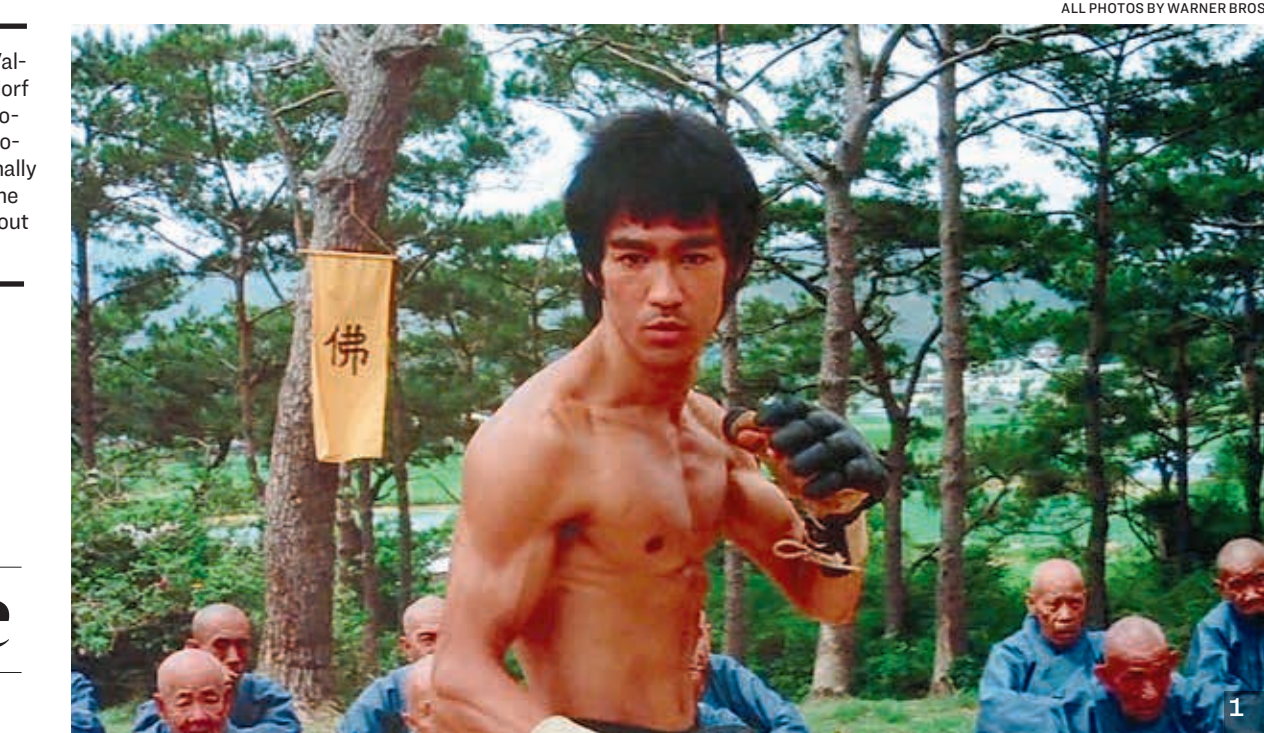
besmirching. So did Dan Inosanto, Lee's premier student. It seems Bruce Lee was a humble man.

But the whole situation took me back ... Imagine, if you will, New York City's Times Square in 1974—a dangerous red-light district as far as the eye could see; pimps, pickpockets, con men, junkies, winos, ladies of ill-repute. No peeper-scooper laws ... fairly hellish.

Among the endless offering of grind-house movies and porn, at the height of Bruce Lee's fame, one movie house played a nonstop loop of all five Bruce Lee movies, from dawn till dusk. I and my little Bruce-worshiping buddies, at age 14, would get dropped off by Chris Schelberg's Aunt Edith, and we'd go sit in that movie house, pretty much from dawn till dusk. We did it a bunch of times.

## Will the Real Bruce Stand Up

So who was Bruce Lee, really? Tarantino takes too much leeway in



damning Lee's reputation. Even though, I must admit, I enjoyed the heck out of Mike Moh's impression.

Lee's most famous film, 1973's "Enter the Dragon," put Chinese kungfu on the American map and started a whole nunchaku craze. Boys made nunchucks by sawing two sticks off a broom handle and connecting them with a chain. They were quickly outlawed.

Everything about Bruce was revelatory. Karate practitioners learn the "kiai"—the vocalizations that enhance striking power. But Lee's vocalizations were a mix of raptor-like screams, monkey-like howls, and the odd keening growls of tomcats getting ready to rip each other to shreds. Nobody had ever heard anything remotely like it. And all accompanied by a glare the likes of which can only be matched by the most zealous of Maori haka dancers.

Bruce Lee, it can be argued, was the godfather of modern MMA, and it's definitely mixed martial arts that's

artistically depicted in the opening scene of "Enter the Dragon."

The movie opens on an MMA match taking place in a Chinese Shaolin temple. But instead of monk robes, Lee's wearing MMA-style shorts, shin guards, and fingerless MMA-style gloves. In my estimation, this iconic fight started a million martial arts careers. The coolness factor was through the roof, showcasing Bruce's off-the-charts magnetism, and well as the humor he incorporated in much of his choreography.

An example of coolness and humor: He slips a punch by backflipping onto his hands, exploding back onto his feet again while simultaneously delivering a staggering face-punch. He then ducks another punch by dropping to his knees while simultaneously delivering an exaggerated hammer-fist to his opponent's toes, causing the man to yelp and hop around. I've never seen an actual hammer-

strike to the foot in a real MMA fight, but the concept is hilarious.

## Get to the Movie Already

"Enter the Dragon" is about a deadly martial arts tournament held on an island near Hong Kong by a renegade Shaolin monk named Han (Kien Shih), who uses the tournament as a cover for his opium and prostitution trade.

Lee (a very original name, played by Bruce Lee) is recruited by an international intelligence agency as a sort of kungfu James Bond to go infiltrate the tournament and sleuth about, in order to discover how Han's selling drugs. In a dig at Clint Eastwood's "Dirty Harry," which came out two years prior, Bruce's character says, "Why not take a .45 and, bang, settle it?" Conveniently, no guns are allowed on the island. And as Lee further quips, "Anybody can pull a trigger."

To sprinkle on some personal motivation, Braithwaite (Geoffrey

Weeks), the very British agent who recruits Lee, reveals that it was Han's bodyguard O'hara (Robert Wall) whose imminent gang-rape of Lee's sister (played by chop-socky legend Angela Mao) caused her to commit suicide to avoid that outcome.

In addition to Lee, there are two other main characters: Roper (John Saxon) is an inveterate gambler up to his ears in debt to the mob, and Williams (karate champ Jim Kelly) is the nod to the early 1970s "blaxploitation" explosion, as well as the black power movement, rocking a giant afro and matching maroon bellbottoms and jean jacket. He's on the run from beating the daylight out of two racist cops.

They're both in need of tournament money, and it turns out, Roper and Williams were in the same Vietnam War platoon. Both highly proficient martial artists, they team up to get con-job side bets going in the tournament. These two, plus Lee, head out on the same Chinese junk to Han's island.

## Competing and Spying

Lee's tournament fight is electrifying, and it introduced the world

to his blinding speed.

Lee also sneaks about in the middle of the night, finding hidden passageways and such. The underground maze of tunnels is the staging ground for Lee's iconic nunchuckery, along with some vehement whacking of Han's staff via, well, a staff. Apparently, the young Jackie Chan is in one of these guards-versus-Lee showdowns.

At the end, Lee of course goes up against the treacherous ex-Shaolin monk, Han, the blasphemer, who's got a whole shrine dedicated to the left hand he once lost. It's like a curated museum showcase for the various lethal attachments he can twist onto his left wrist socket: an iron hand, one that looks like five cutting-block chef knives, a hairy bear claw, etc. And round about is a house of mirrors, and only Han knows how to tell the reflections from the real thing.

## Bruce's Legacy

While Bruce Lee was not a member of the "27 Club" of rock stars who died at the age of 27, thereby becoming instant legends, Lee's



1. Bruce Lee, the godfather of modern Mixed Martial Arts, in the legendary "Enter the Dragon."
2. John Saxon (L) and Jim Kelly play other competitors in a martial arts tournament.
3. Han (Kien Shih) is the operator of a drug and prostitution ring.

## 'Enter the Dragon'

Director Robert Clouse

Starring Bruce Lee, John Saxon, Jim Kelly, Ahna Capri, Kien Shih, Robert Wall, Angela Mao, Betty Chung, Geoffrey Weeks, Bolo Yeung

Running Time 1 hour, 42 minutes

Rated R

Release Date Aug. 19, 1973

★★★★★

The opening scene, however—along with the fight with O'hara, and the climactic showdown with the many-handed Han—is truly classic.

What "Enter the Dragon" really showcases is Lee's phenomenal physical-specimen status, and the high-wattage charisma of his groundbreaking personal fighting style. His style was absolutely cat-like in its always-land-on-the-feet surefootedness and lightning speed.

In 1974, one left the theater going, "What did I just hear? What did I just see?" Hence followed watching eight straight hours of Bruce Lee hoops to analyze and re-analyze in hopes of gaining insight into this amazing new world of transcendental butt-kickery.

## Follow Up

If you are renting "Enter the Dragon," make sure to follow up with "Birth of the Dragon," about the alleged only fight Bruce Lee lost, to a Shaolin monk sent to teach him a lesson about why martial artists shouldn't stoop to mixing various martial arts techniques.

As the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) has demonstrated, well-rounded fighters who master submission grappling as well as all striking techniques prevail. Traditional martial arts, however, were about transcending the material, and through dedication to improving moral stature, they resulted in the development of supernatural abilities that transcended all physical techniques.

Lastly, in terms of Quentin Tarantino's "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood," while I appreciate his Bruce-spoof, Tarantino really shouldn't be besmirching Bruce's legacy in order to contribute to his own.

# A Trail-Traversing Tale Manages to Convey Its Inspirational Message

IAN KANE

We've seen a marked uptick in recent times of films that tell the stories of older folks. Thanks to advances in modern medicine, we are living longer, which enables the pursuit of second and even third careers, and also means that many have the chance to actualize lifelong dreams—unachievable in previous generations.

Some of these films have been heartfelt and engaging, without being too saccharine or corny, such as the touching drama "Astronaut." Others have been flops, such as the super-unfunny comedy "Supervised."

Director Simon Hunter's ("Mutant Chronicles," "Lighthouse") new outdoorsy drama "Edie" is definitely on the more heartfelt and sentimental side. It's a classy little British film about an elderly woman, the titular character, Edie (Sheila Hancock), and her attempt to fulfill a lifelong dream: scaling a mountain in the Scottish Highlands, which she was prevented from doing in years past.

The film's setup is handled at a slow-burn pace. After her overbearing husband passes away, 83-year-old Edie is carted off to a nursing home by her daughter, who doesn't seem to care for her much. However, early on it becomes quite evident that Edie isn't the type who is simply content to just wither away in a hospital bed: Scotland and its Mount Suihven await!

Soon, the film switches gears and changes into more of an odd-couple-type scenario when Edie runs into the much younger Jonny (Kevin Guthrie), who just so happens to own a thriving outdoors shop.

What follows are lots of scenes of Edie being cantankerous yet surprisingly able-bodied. Her moun-

**The new outdoorsy drama "Edie" is definitely on the more heartfelt and sentimental side.**

Kevin Guthrie and Sheila Hancock.



**'Edie'**

**Director**  
Simon Hunter  
**Starring**  
Sheila Hancock, Kevin Guthrie, Paul Brannigan  
**Running Time**  
1 hour, 42 minutes  
**Rated**  
NR  
**Release Date**  
Sept. 6

★★★★☆

tain-traversing scenes are very convincing. And Jonny reminds the audience (to a sometimes annoying degree) how uplifting and encouraging her mountain-climbing odyssey is.

For the most part, the central pair of the film has a pretty natural chemistry—Edie as the determined dream-realizer and Jonny as the rugged supporter.

However, although the main characters seem like interesting people, the film's storyline sometimes steers off into hackneyed and clichéd territory with sometimes blustery and over-serious writing. The training sequences, in particular, seem contrived to the point of being grating. And the score (by Debbie Wiseman) is sometimes overwhelming.

Yet, the film's overall message—

that it's never too late to fulfill your dream—is so positive that it never completely dissolves into mushy melodrama.

Unsurprisingly, Hancock handles her role with aplomb. She is no doubt a fine, gifted actress. However, the character she portrays sometimes comes off as a little too harsh. Perhaps if the writers (along with Hancock) could have shown Edie as slightly kinder, it would have nudged the film along a more sympathetic path.

While the two lead actors turn in impressive performances, overall, the supporting characters feel lightweight in comparison. Most seem underdeveloped. It's as if the writers simply didn't know what to do with them.

On the whole, the film oscillates

back and forth between a somewhat breezy comedy and a heartfelt drama. As it rolls into its final and more seriously toned third act, the script's occasional comedic bits seem out-of-place and jarring. These attempts at slapstick humor harm its overall dramatic pacing, which reaches its zenith as Edie attempts to ascend the exquisitely beautiful mountain.

In all, Hunter's handling of "Edie" immerses you in the beautiful environs, complete with believable, interesting lead characters and a story that manages to paint a life of former disappointment only now being fulfilled. I only wish that it had been a little less predictable.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

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