WEEK 47, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

COURTESY OF SUSAN PATERSON

"Silver and Eggs," by Susan Paterson. Oil on panel; 27 1/2 inches by 18 inches.

FINE ARTS

Paintings Full of Little Treasures

Artist Susan Paterson's still-life paintings

LORRAINE FERRIER

Canadian artist Susan Paterson meticulously creates realistic still-life paintings. Her harmonious paintings evoke an inner calm, while paying homage to the fine craftsmanship of the past, and an awe for these once everyday objects.

Paterson hopes her paintings cause people to pause, to ponder, and to marvel for more than a moment at the still-life treasures unfolding before them, she said in a phone interview.

Her art today would've been completely different if she had paid attention to some of her college professors or to those who said her paintings were "not real art."

*Continued on **Page 4***

THE EPOCH TIMES

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HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

The specter of communism did not disappear with the disintegration of the Communist Party in Eastern Europe

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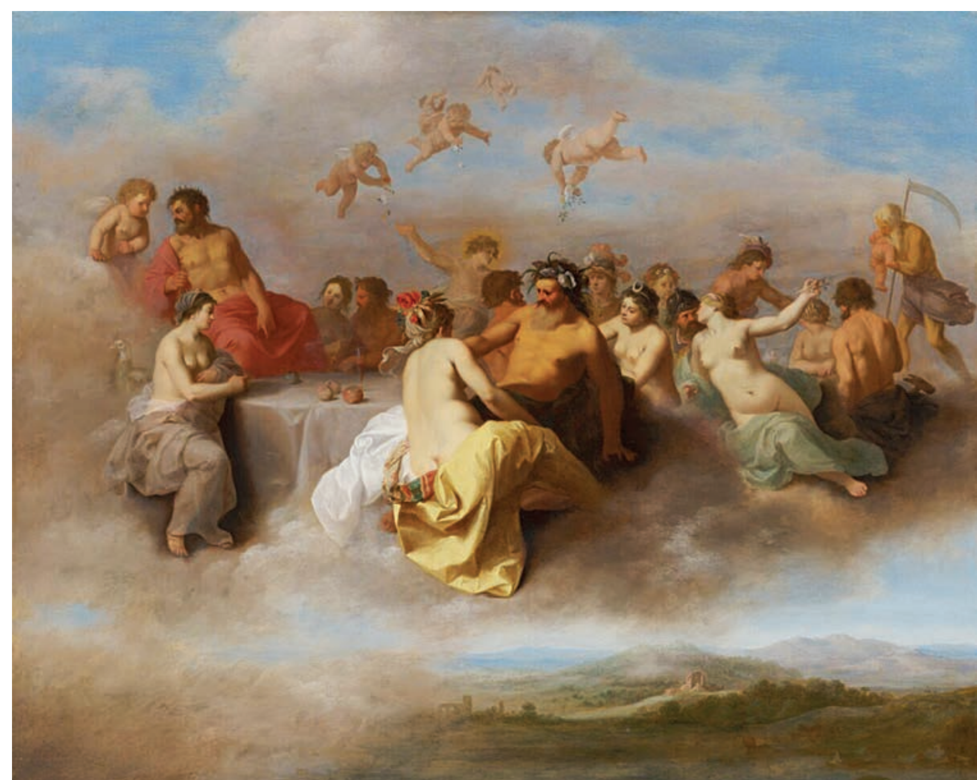
PUBLIC DOMAIN



Some of our nation's elites seem to think they are Olympians who can determine our fates. "A Gathering of Gods in the Clouds," circa 1630, by Cornelis van Poelenburgh. Mauritshuis, The Hague.

LITERATURE

'The Birth-Mark':

An Allegory for Our Time

JEFF MINICK

The plot of the short story is simple.

Aylmer, a scientist, marries the beautiful Georgiana, whose face bears a small birthmark in the shape of a hand, as if "some fairy at her birth-hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek." Though some of Georgiana's suitors believe the mark enhances Georgiana's beauty, once she and Aylmer are wed he finds he can only look at his wife with a growing disgust.

When Georgiana realizes that the mark repulses her husband, she agrees to his plan to remove it so that she will then look unblemished and perfect. After much experimentation, Aylmer invents a potion that he is absolutely certain cannot fail to remove the mark.

Georgiana drinks this liquid and falls into a deep sleep, at which point the mark begins to vanish. Aylmer is delighted to see the mark disappearing and is congratulating himself and his assistant when Georgiana wakens to tell him she is dying.

"As the last crimson tint of the birthmark—that sole token of human imperfection—faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight."

Good Things Come in Small Packages

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) first published "The Birth-Mark" in 1843 in The Pioneer, a short-lived literary publication founded by James Russell Lowell. In 1846, Hawthorne included the story in his collection "Mosses From an Old Manse."

In many of his short stories and novels, Hawthorne employed allegory and symbolism, meanings hidden behind the characters and the story, some of which are difficult for the casual reader to discern. His stories require patience from his audience and a willingness to dig a bit for the gold and silver embedded in his prose.

"The Birth-Mark" is such a story. Though published 177 years ago, it presents us with some real treasures of insight into our culture and the times in which we live.

Perfection

Some among us, particularly those on the extreme left, seek to bring about a utopia, a paradise, a heaven on earth. Like some of Hawthorne's contemporaries, they constantly push for reform, telling us that if we can just erase our societal blemishes—the economic inequalities, "systemic racism," "white privilege," the demands of nature and biology on gender, fossil fuels, and so on—we will enter nirvana.

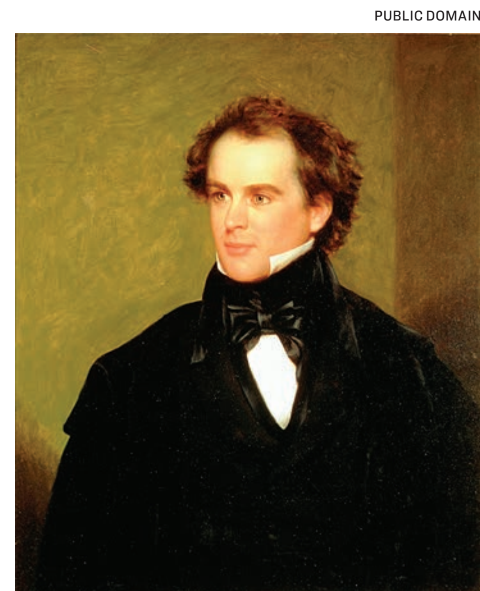
Hawthorne thought otherwise.

When Aylmer first tells Georgiana of her birthmark "this slightest possible defect ... shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection," Hawthorne writes: "Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand."

Not Aylmer. In spite of his wife's beauty and her sweet nature, he finds the mark unbearable. Removal of that tiny imprint will leave Georgiana perfected.

Aware of the foibles of others as well as of those we ourselves commit, most of us can love our family and friends while accepting their "birthmarks." Those who seek perfection in others, and in our culture and society at large, are naive in their quest and, like Aylmer, doomed to failure.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



Portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1840, by Charles Osgood.

Experts and Science

We have heard much from experts this past year, particularly in regard to the pandemic, and by now most of us are aware that many of these specialists either send mixed messages or are mistaken altogether. When they advise us to wear masks, our public officials order us to cover our faces, and we do so without giving too much thought to the consequences, though other experts consider masks useless.

Aylmer regards himself as a scientist and an expert of sorts, yet when Georgiana slips into her husband's scientific library and looks at the records he has kept regarding past experiments, she finds "his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed. His brightest diamonds were the merest pebbles, and felt to be so by himself, if compared to the ideal at which he had aimed."

Such failures, the gap between the ideal and reality, remain just as true today. The revolutions in Russia, China, and elsewhere promised to bring into being brave new worlds, but instead delivered murder, misery, and oppression. The months-long lockdowns of the 2020 pandemic were supposed to afford Americans protection from a virus, but

PD-US

Can science really offer us perfection? "The laboratory," 1895, by John Maler Collier. The Athenaeum.

they have also ruined untold numbers of businesses, put millions of people out of work, and created mass anxiety and widespread depression.

Often the experts point us to some upward, sunlit hill, but on arrival we find ourselves left with pebbles rather than diamonds.

Beauty and Humanity

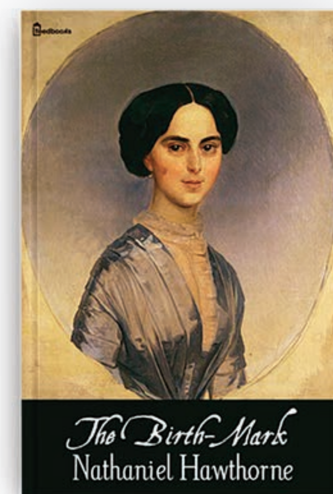
Aylmer fails not only as a scientist but also as a lover and a husband. Instead of appreciating his wife for her gentle spirit and lovely appearance, he focuses on a small mark on her cheek.

Many of us do the same today. We judge the clerk in the grocery store by her weight rather than by her merry laughter and sparkling eyes. We decide that a man is ignorant because of his mountain accent before uncovering the wisdom he has gained from a hard-knock life.

Some of us judge our country in the same way. Instead of seeking goodness and amendment regarding America, we want perfection. We condemn the great men and women of our past for their flaws while ignoring or belittling their struggles and accomplishments. Like Aylmer in regard to that mark, we want to eradicate America's flaws and faults, and in the process may kill the American spirit altogether.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"The Birth-Mark," first published in The Pioneer in March 1843.



Those who strive for perfection in others end up on a path of destruction.

Often the experts point us to some upward, sunlit hill, but on arrival we find ourselves left with pebbles rather than diamonds.

Pride

"The Birth-Mark" stands as a warning about the dangers of pride and the blindness that often accompanies it.

At the end of the story, Hawthorne tells us that Aylmer "need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the self-same texture with the celestial ... he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and living once for all in eternity, to find the future perfect in the present."

In a sense, Aylmer makes himself a god, as many do today. He determines the fate of his wife, a human soul, based on his own delusional beliefs in science, expertise, and perfection. Some of our American elites follow this same path today, believing they live on Olympus and know best how others should live their lives.

The Weight of Truth

A work of art—a book, a poem, a painting—becomes a classic not because of its age but because of its truth. When we can develop a relationship with a particular piece of art, when we can walk away carrying in our hearts certain gifts it has given us, only then does it deserve the title of "classic." Michelangelo's "Pietà," Cervantes's "Don Quixote," Shakespeare's "Hamlet," Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus"—these and other works stick with us because they broaden and enrich our souls, making us more self-aware while at the same time connecting us more deeply to humanity. They contain a truth that even after hundreds of years still speaks to us, still acts as a mirror in which we can see our own reflection.

And that's why we still read Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" so long after it first appeared in print. These antique words strike a chord in us, and we leave them a little wiser and better able to see and understand the world around us.

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

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FINE ARTS

Paintings Full of Little Treasures

Artist Susan Paterson's still-life paintings

*Continued from **Page 1***

Determined to Paint Real Art
While the rest of her family—her parents, brother, and sister—were musically gifted, Paterson found her harmony through painting. At age 12, she began oil painting classes, falling in love with the medium. She continued the classes until she went to college.

In the late 1970s, Paterson started at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada. She recalls only a couple of professors teaching true to the realist tradition. The remnants of traditional atelier training were still there, yet they were not being used. For instance, the college had the traditional plaster casts for drawing practice, but they were gathering dust since new professors were not concerned with developing traditional drawing and painting skills; instead, they began to teach abstract and conceptual art.

Paterson almost quit after one professor wanted her to paint an abstract painting: She couldn't. Conceptual and abstract art had never interested her. "It didn't seem like much of a challenge. I never understood it at all," she said. Paterson won out, and she never painted that abstract picture.

She persevered at college, graduating in 1980, the year that is considered the last time that students at Mount Allison received some traditional realist training.

One of her professors was a watercolorist, so after college Paterson naturally found herself favoring watercolor paintings rather than oils. For many years, she happily painted landscapes from photographs, exhibiting her art in the Maritime provinces, and sometimes in Toronto and Vancouver.

Around 10 years ago, Paterson's art changed. She was planning a watercolor painting akin to the traditional Dutch floral paintings. And while online researching the Dutch tradition, she stumbled across a traditional Dutch oil painting course at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The course ran over a whole term, which didn't suit her, so she wrote to the museum requesting a workshop.

The workshop was a pivotal point in Paterson's career. She learned the different mediums and mixtures used in Dutch oil painting. She was particularly interested in the different glazes used. She also learned how to create a lively, interesting still-life composition by arranging objects in a box with one light source. From then on, Paterson specialized in still-life paintings.

The Enduring Appeal of Still-Life Paintings
Paterson often gets told that her paintings—full of bygone treasures such as aging lace tablecloths, highly polished silver teapots, and blue-and-white porcelain bowls—remind people of their grandparents' belongings. It's one of the reasons why she believes that still-life paintings should be given more credit: The objects in a still-life painting are often familiar to people, whereas portrait paintings of a stranger, which are deemed easier to sell, can be harder to hang in a home, she explained.

It seems that Paterson's paintings are an extension of the decorating style in her home. She lives in a 120-year-old house filled with old and antique objects.

For her paintings, she found some of the objects in antique shops and others were gifts from friends or heirlooms from her grandparents. "Lots of people give me silver, especially because nobody wants it anymore. They don't want to have to polish it," she said.

Her enthusiasm for old and antique items also comes from her grandparents. "It's so regal, all of it. I just love the workmanship, the craftsmanship, that goes into all these pieces," she said.

Discipline
Often, budding artists are unaware of the amount of work and discipline it takes to produce such detailed art like hers, she said. "People think you have to be inspired to go up there to your studio and paint, but I do treat it like a job," she said.

"I work Monday to Friday, six or seven hours a day, and I just love it. ... Seeing [a painting] come to life in front of you, at every stage more and more detailed, and more and more lifelike, it's a thrilling process."

Sometimes a painting can take three to four months to complete, so she normally works on two or three paintings at a time while the oil paint slowly dries. Sometimes she's even had to polish a silver piece in her arrangement, and more often has had to dust the pieces as the dust settles on them over time.

Larger works, such as "Artist's Collection," can take 200 hours to create. She can spend 35 to 50 hours on the drawing alone to get every aspect of the composition accurate before her paintbrush connects to paint and panel.

In the Studio
Most of Paterson's pictures have triangular compositions with taller objects in the middle and one focal piece. Every other object in the painting is arranged to complement the main object and bring the viewer's attention to it, she said. Often she places eggs in her paintings, enjoying how the pure white shell breaks up the picture and how the simplicity of the form captures shadows.

Paterson notices and carefully captures every inch of detail. "I just love detail," she said. She especially enjoys depicting the reflections on the silver. Reflections surround us every day, yet we may not notice them, she said. She piques people's interest as she points them out in her paintings. "You see different worlds in the silver reflected back at you," she said.

Often favoring a monochromatic palette, particularly gray, Paterson delights in subtle colors and white flowers especially. "But every once in a while, it's nice to call up the orange and yellow paints and do something a little different," she said. At those times, she'll paint richly colored fruit such as a juicy sliced peach, a bowl of fresh cherries, or a plate of ripe strawberries.

Painting fruit brings a different pace and challenge because Paterson paints from life and often the fruit doesn't last long. First, she'll draw the fruit and then transfer her drawing onto the panel in preparation to paint. But the fruit she actually depicts will be a fresh arrangement, because even on the second day the highlights aren't quite as crisp, she explained.

The Budding Realist Tradition of Painting
In 2014, Paterson organized an exhibition along with six Nova Scotia-based realist artists at the Dalhousie Art Gallery based at Dalhousie University; 28 Nova Scotian artists exhibited. It was the most popular show in the entire history of the gallery, she said.

Despite the show's popularity, it wasn't enough to secure an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax. The gallery refused the show, but it later opened the exhibition at its adjunct gallery in Yarmouth.

For the past 10 years, Paterson has seen a positive rise in realist art. "I think people are just getting tired of conceptual art and some of the paintings that they don't understand, and wanting to get back to something that's a little more understandable. I think a lot of people felt alienated and just stupid going to museums because they can't relate," she said.

"Now, there's such an explosion of schools that teach the old traditional ways, which I would've loved," she said.

"I'm so happy about it because for so many years I was kind of alone in that department, for the most part. For a long time, I'd been told these paintings are 'not really painting,' 'not real art,' and to 'loosen up' and always change my art. But I always stuck with it, and now it's really paying off."

She's grateful for organizations such as the New York-based Art Renewal Center (ARC), which help promote realist ateliers and artists through events such as the International ARC Salon. Paterson's painting "Artist's Collection," came second in the still-life category of the 14th ARC Salon. Two of her paintings, "Silver and Eggs" and "Studio Reflections," have just been shortlisted for the semifinals of the 15th ARC Salon.

Paterson gets a lot of requests for commissions, but she doesn't do them anymore. She simply paints her little treasures: "I just am really happy doing what I want to do, using the props that I have, that I love," she said.

To find out more about Susan Paterson's art, visit SusanPaterson.ca

"Teapot and Lace." Oil on panel; 29 1/2 inches by 17 1/4 inches.

Canadian artist Susan Paterson enjoys painting each and every detail in her still-life paintings.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUSAN PATERSON

"Artist's Collection," by Susan Paterson. Oil on panel; 31 inches by 29 inches.

(Left) "Red Pear." Oil on panel; 10 inches by 10 inches.

(Right) "White Peony Bouquet." Oil on panel; 18 inches by 18 inches.

"Silver and Cherries." Oil on panel; 10 inches by 14 inches.

"Studio Reflections." Oil on panel; 16 inches by 13 3/4 inches.

(Left) "Blue and White Dish With Blueberries." Oil on panel; 9 inches by 12 inches.

GRAEME DAWES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Poetry is associated with love, but it can evoke anything our minds can imagine.

POETRY

Rediscovering the Art of Poetry

EVAN MANTYK

There is something magical about a well-written poem. Using nothing more than ink on paper, one can experience the same thrill as produced by a scene that costs millions of dollars to put on the big screen; one can experience the same momentous payoff that may take hundreds of pages of novel reading to reach. No screen, no battery, no app required—heck, not even electricity required.

And yet, if you were asked to mention a magical experience of reading a poem that you recently read, chances are you would be hard-pressed to produce one. That is the reality of poetry reading today. The really good poetry was written by some dead poet, who is eternally removed from the present. As good as a poem may be, the feeling of connection that one receives from a living writer, whether in a novel or social media post, is simply not there.

The Society of Classical Poets has set out to change that. Over the last decade, the New York-based nonprofit has been supporting the creation of great, new poetry by living poets. These poets still use the techniques that have been used for centuries and even millennia and, in fact, in most world cultures regardless of the language.

The Society hosts an annual poetry competition inviting poets from all over the world to write on any topic of their choosing, so long as the poem uses some form of traditional meter and other traditional techniques, like rhyme or alliteration. (Note: Meter is the measured use of sounds that gives poems their enchanting song-like quality.)

'Song of the Rose' brings to life the simple joy and beauty of love between a couple.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Illustration of a rose by Ludwig van Houtte.

Song of the Rose

by Joseph Charles MacKenzie

The rose awakens, ere the sky [ere: before]
Has wakened to the sun;
And we, my one true love and I,
Awaken with a tender sigh,
To love until the day has run
And all our pains are done.

We part the burdens of the breast,
The weight of passing cares,
And gather roses, take our rest,
And count the ways that we are blest,
Each offering the other's prayers,
In our old hymns and airs.

For, the sky looks down upon the rose,
The stars upon the sky, and God
On all things, and our hearts He knows,
And Fair Love's face will He disclose
To those, in silk or leather shod,
Who soar, or search, or plod.

One of the 2019 winning poems by Charles MacKenzie for the annual Society of Classical Poets contest.

A Winning Rose

Last year's First Place winner of the Society's competition was Joseph Charles MacKenzie of New Mexico. One of his winning poems, "Song of the Rose," is featured here. It brings to life the simple joy and beauty of love between a couple.

He draws on the timelessly attractive and irresistibly sensuous imagery of the traditional rose.

A healthy rose naturally projects a rich and sweet sensation, and here it is accentuated by the excess of similar rhymes in the poem that seem to fold around each other in a rhyme scheme expressed as abaabb—a scheme that mimics the abundant and folding petals of a rose.

The richness, almost decadence, that we find at the beginning of the poem is, in the middle stanza, tempered by the beauty of the interaction with the divine in our daily lives: "offering the other's prayers."

By the final stanza, we have transitioned to a profoundly spiritual message and love between a couple that is of the purest and noblest form. The poet does this with an elegant elevation of imagery, step by step: "the sky looks down upon the rose,/ The stars upon the sky, and God/ On all things, and our hearts He knows." We have, in just 18 short lines, an entire experience of the spectrum and wonder of love between a couple that is worth savoring.

'Rimini' is a masterpiece in its depiction of an ominous atmosphere.

Rimini

by Joseph Charles MacKenzie

I stand before the Adriatic sea,
Unwreathed of confidence in things to be,
Time's wind-born song of spray and transient foam
With each wave's death dies one more death in me.

Behind, the glories of eternal Rome;
Above, a blank morn's achromatic dome;
Below, the ebb and flow of all my days,
A distant sail, a vagrant thought of home.

I stand, a rock beneath the bone-blanched haze;
Lost eons rustle sand beneath my gaze;
The salt-breeze asks where all my Aprils fled,
And where my hopes, and where my fleeting Mays.

I ponder paths abandoned, where they led,
The swell of life, the outflow of the dead
Who wait to waken where their grey stones lie,
And muse on what might stir a dreamless head.

The green sea groans a long and wistful sigh;
The chant of fishermen draws near, and I
Wait on for thee, the sun my sea would wed,
One day, beneath a resurrected sky.

An Italian City

Mr. MacKenzie's other poem, "Rimini," is a masterpiece in its depiction of an ominous atmosphere. Rimini is an Italian coastal city on the Adriatic Sea, and this conjunction of geography sets a sweeping scene for the poem to begin, giving the sense that something vast is about to take place.

And yet it is not merely geography at play here, but history and civilization as we know them, signified in the ancient imperial capital of Rome. This is seen in the contrast between "eternal Rome" and the blank morning sky—the sky itself is described as a "dome" that mirrors the great and ancient domes of Rome.

If Rome is behind us, then what new domes lie ahead? These grandiose images intermingle with the life of our narrator, who has lost confidence in the future and ponders paths abandoned. We get the sense that something grand is left behind, but something grand still lies ahead. But what? But how? The tensions are relatably human yet eerily mysterious.

There is not one mention of autumn in the poem, but the poem perfectly captures that morbid yet exciting atmosphere of the season right on the cusp of death and decay all around, though instead of leaves there are waves: "with each wave's death dies one more death in me." Like autumn that follows the fruits of spring, the poem's narrative follows the joys of spring: "my Aprils fled" and "my fleeting Mays."

This unstated autumnal feeling is also reflected in an expectation of renewal from the next spring, the traditional time of course of Easter and celebrating the Resurrection—the thinly veiled "resurrected sky." All of this too is unfolding ominously with a rhyme scheme that runs aaba bcbb. Each stanza's third line plants a seed that forms the next stanza's rhyme, the ominous future unfolding before us in verse. This is great poetry!

The Society of Classical Poets invites poets of all stripes to participate in this year's competition, which is accepting submissions until Dec.31. You can also visit the Society's website, ClassicalPoets.org, to read more such poetry.

Evan Mantyk is an English teacher in New York and president of the Society of Classical Poets.

DUBA DP/ SHUTTERSTOCK

Standing on a Rimini beach on the coast of Italy, looking over the Adriatic Sea.

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON

Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally for 20 years instead. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

'Heaven Is for Real'

Director
Randall Wallace

Starring
Greg Kinnear, Kelly Reilly, Connor Corum, Margo Martindale, Thomas Haden Church

Rated
PG

Running Time
1 hour, 39 minutes

Release Date
April 16, 2014

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

'Heaven Is for Real': Daring, Disarming, Dogma-Challenging

MARK JACKSON

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF TRISTAR PICTURES

America's best products are movies and music. So what's the deal with Christian movies? While they unfailingly have the best of intentions, they tend to share an overly saccharine sweetness. But is it that they're actually too sweet, or that today's society has become too sophisticated and jaded? The latter, of course. "Heaven Is for Real" falls solidly in the saccharine category; however, the story itself is quite interesting. It's also true.

The Pastor and His Son

Todd Burpo (Greg Kinnear) is an Iowan pastor, volunteer fireman, wrestling coach, and business owner. He's a do-gooder of extreme do-goodness. He keeps it real; his fracturing an ankle sliding into home at the local softball game is the type of experience that immediately goes into his small-town Sunday sermon.

When his wife, Sonja (Kelly Reilly), insists that it's time for a vacation, the family sets out for Denver, shouting "We Will Rock You!" in the car.

Todd's 4-year-old son, Colton (Connor Corum), ruptures his appendix and gets an MRI. It's bad. Pastor Todd goes to the hospital chapel and throws chairs around, hollering heavenward, "Don't you take my son!"

Highly recommended for those struggling with belief in spiritual realities.

Meanwhile, back home, word gets around. The entire community becomes engrossed in prayers for the pastor's son. Colton lives.

Back to life as usual? Not really. The boy is starting to say some very interesting things. When they go to the Denver petting zoo to hold Rosie the tarantula, Colton says, "I've been here before." He also says, "The angels sang to me." When Todd asks when they did that, Colton replies, "When you were in the other room, yelling at God."

Colton says he met Jesus and explains that Jesus has a multicolored horse. Jesus has "markers" too, he says, pointing at both hands and feet. Well, if pastor Todd is going to talk about his busted ankle in church, he's most definitely going to tell his flock about his son's revelation that Jesus owns a multicolored horse.

Leap of Faith

You'd think that a congregation of true Christian believers would cotton to this.

(Above) Connor Corum plays 4-year-old Colton Burpo, an Iowan boy who saw heavenly scenes while in surgery, in "Heaven Is for Real." **(Middle left)** Todd Burpo (Greg Kinnear, L) asks his son, Colton (Connor Corum), if he recognizes Grandpa in a photo taken before Colton was born. **(Middle right)** (L–R) The movie depicts a warm family. Daughter Cassie (Lane Styles), mom Sonja (Kelly Reilly), and son Colton (Connor Corum). **(Right)** (L–R) Sonja Burpo (Kelly Reilly), Colton Burpo (Connor Corum), and Todd Burpo (Greg Kinnear).

(Left) Colton Burpo (Connor Corum, L) and his father, Todd Burpo (Greg Kinnear), have a bedtime story. **(Below)** (L–R) Mom Sonja (Kelly Reilly) and dad Todd (Greg Kinnear) scold daughter Cassie (Lane Styles) for getting into a schoolyard fight.

You'd think that they'd cotton to it like multicolored cotton candy. You'd be wrong. No. Noooo. It scares people. If Preacher Todd keeps preaching like that, he just might get fired. Especially with newspaper reporters sniffing around, trying to get stories about the boy who went to heaven.

When the article comes out, the teasing starts. In one of the movie's funniest scenes, schoolyard brats and bullying boys tease Colton's older sister. They didn't know who they were messing with.

This, of course, sets up one of the many Christian teachings: "You should have turned the other cheek." Which is the kind of thing a religious movie needs to be careful with.

It needs to be explained in detail why turning the other cheek is a good thing, because in this day and age, that's long become something to scoff at, especially with everyone now embracing the concept of the inner warrior who takes no guff. And because most of us enjoy the concept of a tiny girl with tremendous Clint Eastwood attitude destroying some schoolyard punks.

Here's an explanation I like: Everyone knows what karma is. It's the energy of bad deeds that follows people like a black cloud of original sin from lifetime to lifetime, like Ebenezer Scrooge's chains.

If someone punches you in the face, a sizeable glop of your karma comes off you and lands on them. That person just made your karmic load lighter. Hello? Thank you? "Thank you, sir, and may I have another?!" Turn the other cheek, let him punch you again, and take another sizable piece of your karma off you, lighten your load, and add it to his own personal stash of karmic debt.

More Colton Clairvoyance

Meanwhile, the proofs and clues that Colton actually went to heaven keep piling up. To relate all of them is to spoil the movie. So I'll just say one more: We see Colton in heaven with Jesus. A little girl comes up to him and hugs him for a very long time. Later, back in Iowa, Colton asks his mom:

"Did you know I have a sister?"

"Well, of course you have a sister."

"No, I have two sisters. One died in your belly."

"What was her name?"

"She didn't have a name. You hadn't named her yet."

Sold! Heretofore skeptical mom buys the multicolored cotton candy on the spot. Now Sonja's a believer. As Colton says, "I see it, so I believe it."

Maybe if you see this movie, you'll believe it too. Maybe. It's a challenge. Because while we talk about faith, we usually mean faith where you believe without seeing. But when, all of a sudden, the reverse situation occurs, when someone has seen, has had a vision—we don't really know what to do with that because we ourselves, personally, might not have had any such visions. It's a little shocking. It's comfortable to go to church and feel a warm feel about Jesus in heaven, but what if some kid actually goes to heaven, sees Jesus, hangs out with Jesus? Can we believe that?

Highly recommended for those struggling with belief in spiritual realities. Warning: Eat popcorn instead of candy while watching. Because what will you have if you combine candy with the saccharine sweetness of "Heaven Is for Real?" Diabetes. You will have diabetes. But if you've lost your faith—you just might find it again.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Sustaining Our Empire:
Thomas Cole and 'The Course of Empire'

ERIC BESS

ALL PHOTOS PUBLIC DOMAIN

"The Course of Empire: The Savage State," circa 1834, by Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas, 39 1/4 inches by 63 1/4 inches. New-York Historical Society.

Thomas Cole was a 19th-century American painter who became popular for his landscape paintings. Born in England, Cole moved to the United States at a young age, and America is where his love of art developed.

As a young man, Cole fell in love with the beautiful wilderness of New York's Catskill Mountains, where he would later establish a studio. The Catskills would serve as inspiration for many of his paintings.

During this time, he met Luman Reed, a successful merchant who opened a private art gallery in the area. Becoming Cole's patron, Reed commissioned him to produce a series of five paintings that would later be called "The Course of Empire." These became some of Cole's signature works.

I have to ask: Where is our great nation headed? Is there a way to extend and potentially sustain into the future the truth and beauty of an empire's consummation?

"The Course of Empire: The Arcadian or Pastoral State," circa 1834, by Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas, 39 1/4 inches by 63 1/4 inches. New-York Historical Society.

According to ExploreThomasCole.org, Cole wrote the following about his ideas for the series in a letter to Reed:

"A series of pictures might be painted that should illustrate the History of a natural scene, as well as be an Epitome of Man—showing the natural changes of Landscape & those effected by man in his progress from Barbarism to Civilization, to Luxury, the Vicious state or state of destruction and to the state of Ruin & Desolation.

"The philosophy of my subject is drawn from the history of the past, wherein we see how nations have risen from the Savage state to that of Power & Glory & then fallen & become extinct…"

Cole felt that this series embodied the very "mission" or purpose of an artist:

"I have been dwelling on many subjects, and looking forward to the time when I can embody them on the canvas. They are subjects of a moral and religious nature. On such I think it the duty of the artist to employ his abilities; for his mission, if I may so term it, is a great and serious one. His work ought not to be a dead imitation of things without the power to impress a sentiment, or enforce a truth."

"The Course of Empire: The Consummation of Empire," 1835–1836, by Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 inches by 76 inches. New-York Historical Society.

The Course of Empires

The series "The Course of Empire" consists of five paintings that depict five stages of a civilization's evolution.

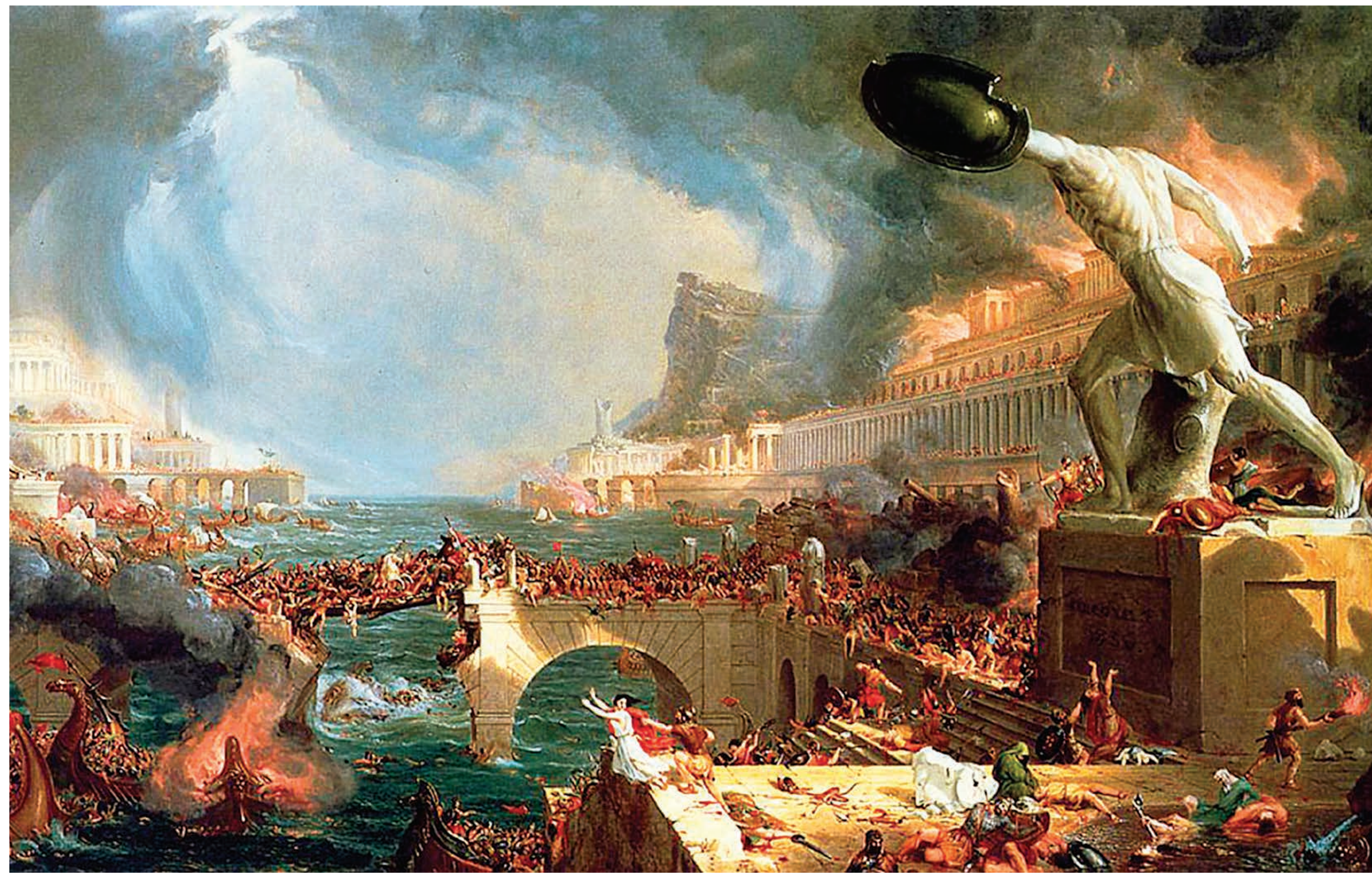
The first period of an empire is a primitive state. "The Savage State" is a landscape painting that depicts nature as the dominant force. The sky looms heavy over the earth, where foliage thrives uninterrupted. The figures are dwarfed by the enormity of their environment, and they live off of the land and use crude materials to hunt.

The empire's second period is the emergence of some civilization. In "The Arcadian or Pastoral State," Cole depicted a landscape with more organization and order than in "The Savage State."

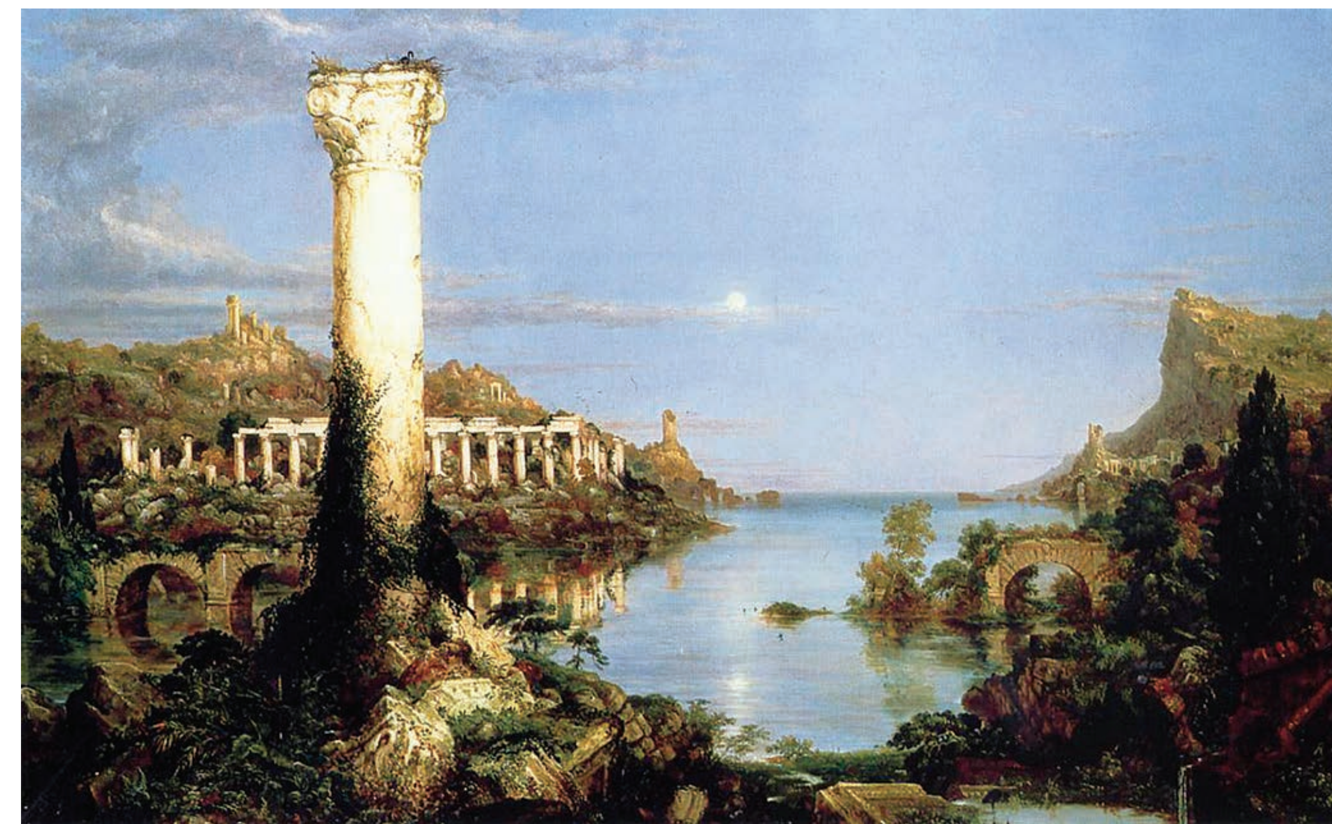
The figures don't appear to be dominated by nature here but, instead, live in harmony with it. They dance, fish, domesticate animals, and there's a temple in the background, which suggests that they worship and have faith. The sky is clearer here than in "The Savage State."

The third period of an empire is the apex of a culture, as shown in Cole's "The Consummation of Empire." Nature is almost completely absent from this depiction. Instead, the figures have dominated nature and civilization is shown at its height.

> **The philosophy of my subject is drawn from the history of the past, wherein we see how nations have risen from the Savage state to that of Power & Glory & then fallen & become extinct.**
>
> *Thomas Cole*



"The Course of Empire: Destruction," 1836, by Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas, 39 1/4 inches by 63 1/2 inches. New-York Historical Society.



"The Course of Empire: Desolation," 1836, by Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas, 39 1/4 inches by 63 1/4 inches. New-York Historical Society.

There are temples and statues representing the gods, extravagant dress and adornment, and order. All are surrounded by beauty, no one seems to want or need anything, and the sky is clear.

The fourth period is full of turmoil. In "Destruction," Cole depicted a moment of mayhem. A tumultuous sky blocks the light of the sun. The temples that may have once housed the gods are on fire. People are scurrying or fighting; all are in a state of unrest.

There's a large headless statue at the top right of the composition. In warlike fashion, this statue lunges forward and extends its broken shield toward the sky.

The final period of the empire is its demise. In "Desolation," Cole depicted the ruins of the once great nation. All of the material comforts that its inhabitants created for themselves are gone, and now—in the twilight—the moon illuminates the nation's destruction.

Sidestepping Destruction

As the political divide in our country grows, there is noticeable unrest bubbling below the surface. We seem to be coming dangerously close to what Cole presented as the period of destruction.

I have to ask: Where is our great nation headed? Is there a way to extend and potentially sustain into the future the truth and beauty of an empire's consummation?

Let's look closer at the period of destruction to see what its characteristics are, and then let's see if any of the earlier depictions in the cycle offered by Cole provide us with possible solutions.

There are three things that stand out for me in "Destruction." First, the sun is blocked by clouds. Second, the temples are on fire. And third, the headless statue lunges forward with its shield pointed at the sky.

I see the sun as representing that which illuminates what is otherwise dark. In other words, the sun is symbolic of wisdom. Here, wisdom is blocked by smoke coming from the burning temples. I believe the temples here to be houses of this empire's gods, and their destruction suggests the obscuring of wisdom.

One could argue, however, that maybe these buildings are not temples but government buildings, bathhouses, dwellings, businesses, and so on. Even if this is the case, historically a nation's gods were integrated into all aspects of society.

The fact that these buildings are burning represents—for me—a loss of the divine element that would have once been integrated into society, and consequently a loss of the wisdom associated with divinity.

The statues of gods that were present in the previous painting in the series are absent. Instead, there's the lunging, headless statue with his shield pointing to the sky.

The head is often associated with wisdom, so the fact that the head is missing from this statue, and the fact that statues of the gods are now absent, suggests that the empire has moved from a belief in the wisdom granted by gods to one that discards wisdom and belief in gods.

Also, the figure lunges forward and doesn't protect itself with its shield but points the shield toward the heavens, as if that is where it directs its anger.

The series 'The Course of Empire' consists of five paintings that depict five stages of a civilization's evolution.

Is it that the figure wants to resist or attack the heavens in its headless irrationality? And is this desire to resist or attack partly responsible for the destruction that the empire now faces? Are the inhabitants of this empire at each other's throats because they have forgotten heaven's dictates? Does a resistance toward or an attack on the heavens and the wisdom it represents result in destruction and eventually desolation?

In "The Arcadian or Pastoral State," figures are depicted in harmony with nature, and the temple in the background suggests worship and faith. These are the precursors to the abundance that's shown in "The Consummation of Empire."

Are harmony, worship, and faith necessary to increase an empire's longevity and avoid destruction? Are these questions predicated on a moral foundation with which every nation, at some point, struggles?

How can we repopularize morality so as to reinvigorate the harmony, worship, and faith that will serve as the foundation of our empire's continued sustenance and even flowering?

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart."

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

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Correction

The article "A Closer Look at the Supreme Court," published on Nov. 5, misquoted the Supreme Court building inscription. It should read "Equal Justice Under Law." The Epoch Times regrets the error.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Western Revolutionizes Genre With Rousing Tale of Hope

IAN KANE

The 1930s marked the beginning of the film industry's "Golden Age of Hollywood," which lasted well into the 1940s. Part of that distinction was due to technological breakthroughs. After all, silent pictures began to give way to the "talkies," color films began to gain ground (although they were still relatively expensive to produce), and many genres, such as crime, drama, and romance, showed a deeper sense of sophistication. However, Westerns were rarely considered "serious" films and largely remained cheaply made and unrefined—until the highly revered film auteur John Ford saw potential in the unrecognized B-movie actor John Wayne, and they teamed up to make 1939's "Stagecoach," revolutionizing the Western genre forever.

The film opens in the dust-choked town of Tonto, Arizona. On one of the settlement's busy avenues, a trail-worn stagecoach pulls up to drop off a delivery and several passengers. A scratchy-voiced man named Buck (Andy Devine) is its driver. He soon departs, and his route includes various stops, eventually ending in the town of Lordsburg.

We are introduced to an assortment of characters from a cross-section of society. Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt) is a heavily pregnant, upper-middle-class lady on her way to meet her husband, an officer in the cavalry; Doc Boone (Thomas Mitchell) is an alcoholic doctor; Dallas (Claire Trevor) is a prostitute whom the law wants out of town; Hatfield (John Carradine) is a Southern gentleman and a gambler; Samuel Peacock (Donald Meek) sells whiskey for a living; Henry Gatewood (Berton Churchill) runs a local bank; Tonto's Marshal Curley Wilcox (George Bancroft) is an intrepid lawman in search of a fugitive named the Ringo Kid (John Wayne). And finally, we have cavalry officer Lt. Blanchard (Tim Holt).

UNITED ARTISTS

Claire Trevor and John Wayne in his breakthrough role as the Ringo Kid.

All travel the eponymous stagecoach for various reasons: Marshal Wilcox wants to ride shotgun with Buck because he believes Ringo wants to exact revenge on a man for killing his father and brother and may be traveling to Lordsburg (later to become New Mexico); Lt. Blanchard and a small detachment of his soldiers have been ordered to provide escort to Dry Fork, one of the stops along the way. The cavalry shows up just before the stagecoach leaves to warn Marshal Wilcox that Geronimo's war party has been sighted in the area.

Despite the potential danger, Lt. Blanchard informs the group that another cavalry detachment will relieve him and his men and continue to escort the stagecoach into Lordsburg. With a few whips of his reins, Buck sets out into the rugged expanse of the Old West with his six passengers, and the cavalry detachment in tow.

The group's journey becomes increasingly fraught with danger.

Shortly after leaving Tonto, the group comes across Ringo. Lips chapped and bathed in dirt and grime, Ringo tells Marshal Wilcox that he got stranded when his horse went lame. Although the lawman and the fugitive are on friendly terms, the former has a job to do and takes Ringo into custody.

The stage eventually reaches Dry Fork but discovers that the expected cavalry force has moved on to another town called Apache Wells. Since Lucy was to meet her husband at Dry Fork, she is understandably concerned for his well-being but determined to travel on to Apache Wells.

However, Lt. Blanchard informs the travelers that he and his men are under orders to return to Tonto. Since the expected detachment at Dry Fork isn't there, the stagecoach must travel on without a military escort.

It's in the tiny settlement of Dry Fork, far from the more enforced societal moorings of civilization, that we begin to see the increasingly complex characterizations of each traveler. Some assumed roles even turn on their heads.

For instance, whereas Gatewood is initially perceived as a more respectable member of society since he's in finance, he reveals himself to be underhanded; he's embezzled money from the Tonto bank he oversees. Conversely, Ringo, who is part of the criminal underclass, turns out to be a relatively decent man. Heck, even the drunkard Doc Boone manages to rise to the occasion when he sobers up to deliver a baby.

But as they travel, the group's journey becomes increasingly fraught with danger. Will these strangers be able to put their differences aside in order to survive the perils that await them?

PUBLIC DOMAIN

A poster for the film that changed how Westerns were viewed: "Stagecoach."

With a taut screenplay written by Dudley Nichols (the original story was authored by Ernest Haycox), Ford has created a masterful Western that challenged many preconceived societal roles, especially within a genre that had been filled with plot clichés and rote characters.

"Stagecoach" is a supremely hopeful film that carries a positive message of unity—a breath of fresh air in these highly divided times.

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

'Stagecoach'

Director
John Ford

Starring
John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Andy Devine

Running Time
1 hour, 36 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
March 3, 1939 (USA)

★★★★★

"WHEN THINGS ARE CHAOTIC TO THE EXTREME, ORDER MUST BE RESTORED."

—THE FOUR BOOKS, ZHU XI

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