

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



Remington's lifetime work included more than 3,000 sketches, illustrations, and watercolors, with dozens of oil paintings and 22 sculptures.

TAKING YOU THERE

Frederic Remington Hurls You Into the Wild West With 'The Rattlesnake'

WAYNE A. BARNES

There are eras in American history from the colonial days to the revolution, then Manifest Destiny, stretching our nation to the far sea. First came mountain men, then pioneers and buckskin heroes like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, "Wild Bill" Hickok and "Buffalo Bill" Cody, who captured our national imagination. The

Civil War erupted and interrupted, but the westward expansion continued in the years that followed. Migration in growing numbers settled the vast territory of the American West. The golden spike completed the transcontinental railroad in 1869, an exclamation point in our nation's history.

Frederic Remington was born in upstate New York in 1861 and reveled in this era like few before him. He was trained in art

"The Rattlesnake," 1905, revised 1908, by Frederic Remington. Bronze sculpture. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

at Yale, but he also played football. An artist's eye combined with rough-and-tumble experiences married within his personality. The West called to him. He found work as an illustrator for Harper's Weekly but was also a field correspondent. The public's desire for Western stories was insatiable.

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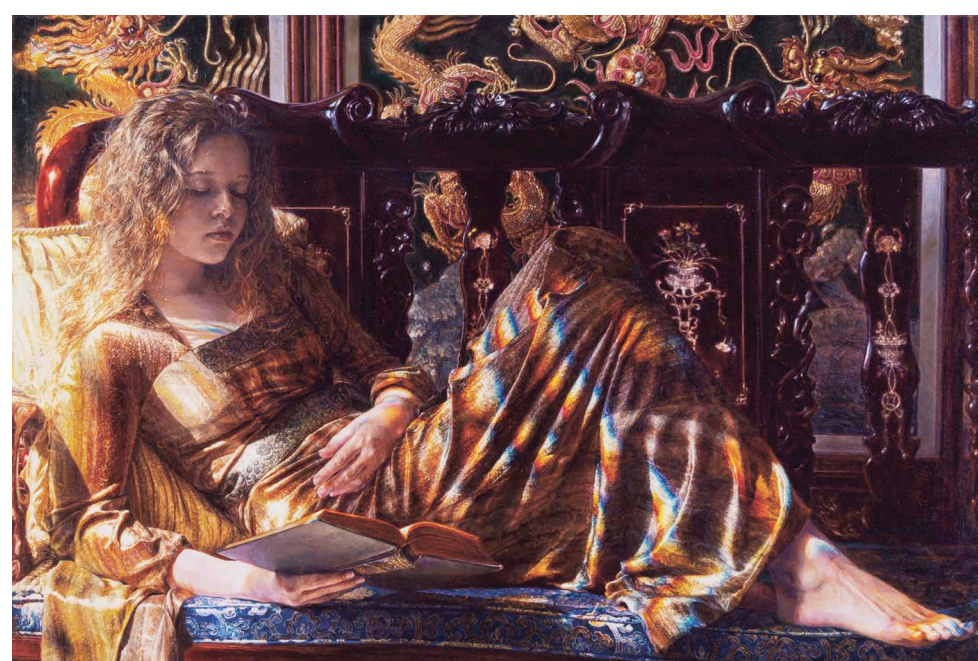
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A Book of Hope in a Bad Season: 'That Hideous Strength'

One of 12 Great Books

JEFF MINICK

In a recent article about Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe," I made a New Year's resolution to read old books unfamiliar to me. Having selected Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "The Devils" as my next conquest, I had just commenced that story of Russian radicals when another book, not quite so old but still important, snared my attention and lured me temporarily away.

Let me explain. During the past month, my daily online explorations revealed that for several years George Orwell's dystopian novel "1984" had often made the bestseller lists at Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Readers were also buying Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," and Penguin had reprinted Sinclair Lewis's "It Can't Happen Here," a novel about fascism swallowing up American democracy.

All these novels are over 70 years old, and it gladdened my heart to see readers turning to these modern classics to get a take on our current politics.

Some online articles also cited C.S. Lewis's "That Hideous Strength" as a novel suited to our unsettled times. Much of Lewis's work is familiar to me. My children and I shared the "Narnia" series; "Mere Christianity" and "The Screwtape Letters" helped me explore my faith; and my all-time favorite, "Till We Have Faces," a retelling of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, I taught to my students.

But I'd never read Lewis's space trilogy, of which "That Hideous Strength" is the capstone.

Inspired by the recommendations and hoping to find some light in our dark times, I checked out the book from the library, temporarily said goodbye to Russia, and began reading.

'That Hideous Strength' Set in England, "That Hideous Strength" is a tale of the struggle between power-hungry utopians who wish to create a totalitarian government and those who resist them. The utopian crew belong to an organization called the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments, or N.I.C.E., innocuous enough in name.

Like some of our organizations and political proposals today, the elites of N.I.C.E. set out to retool society, culture, and even human nature.

Opposing them is a handful of people led by an otherworldly director. Though they seem without resources, cosmic forces—including a resurrected Merlin—come to their rescue. N.I.C.E. and those associated with that institution are destroyed, and Britain and the world are saved.

Throughout the book, we find similarities to our own time. Here, for example, a young man being groomed for N.I.C.E. asks Miss Hardcastle, the head of police for the organization, why educated people would ever believe the propaganda she has proposed he write for the newspapers. Her reply drips with contempt:

"Why you fool, it's the educated reader who can be gulled. All our difficulty comes from the others. When did you

meet a workman who believes the papers? He takes it for granted that they're all propaganda and skips the leading articles... He is our problem. We have to recondition him. But the educated public, the people who read the high-brow weeklies, don't need reconditioning. They're all right already. They'll believe anything."

Here, too, we find several key differences that distinguish "That Hideous Strength" from "Brave New World" and "1984."

In the Beginning

The novels by Huxley and Orwell drop the reader into a world where a totalitarian government has already taken power. In "Brave New World," a small group rules the rest of the people for their common good, controlling them by propaganda, "sleep learning," drugs, sex, and entertainment.

The totalitarians in "1984" control their subjects through fear, a widespread system of hidden cameras and microphones, the implementation of "doublethink," and like their equivalents in "Brave New World," by the erasure of the past.

In "That Hideous Strength," we are at the beginning of this drive for total control. Lewis introduces us to a cabal of scientists, police officers, intellectuals, and journalists intent on domination and greedy for power.

When they attempt to recruit Mark Studdock, who is a sociologist, into their ranks, Lord Feverstone shares a part of this vision with him:

"It does really look as if we now have the power to dig ourselves in as a species for a pretty staggering period, to take control of our own destiny. If Science is really given a free hand it can now take over the human race and re-condition it: make man a really efficient animal. If it doesn't—well, we're done."

Here again are sentiments we hear from some public officials today.

A Fairy Tale for Grownups

In his "Preface," Lewis describes "That Hideous Strength" as a fairy tale.

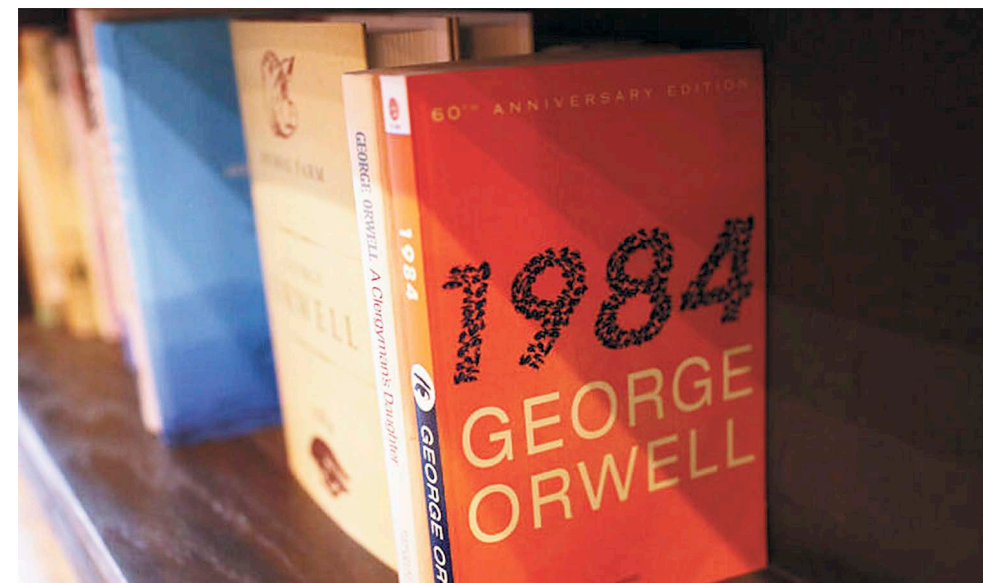
Compared to "1984" and "Brave New World," that description is apt. Neither of these two books contains any element of the magical or the supernatural.

In "That Hideous Strength," however, we find heavenly creatures coming to aid human beings, the magician Merlin brought back to life, and interference from interplanetary beings in the affairs of Earth.

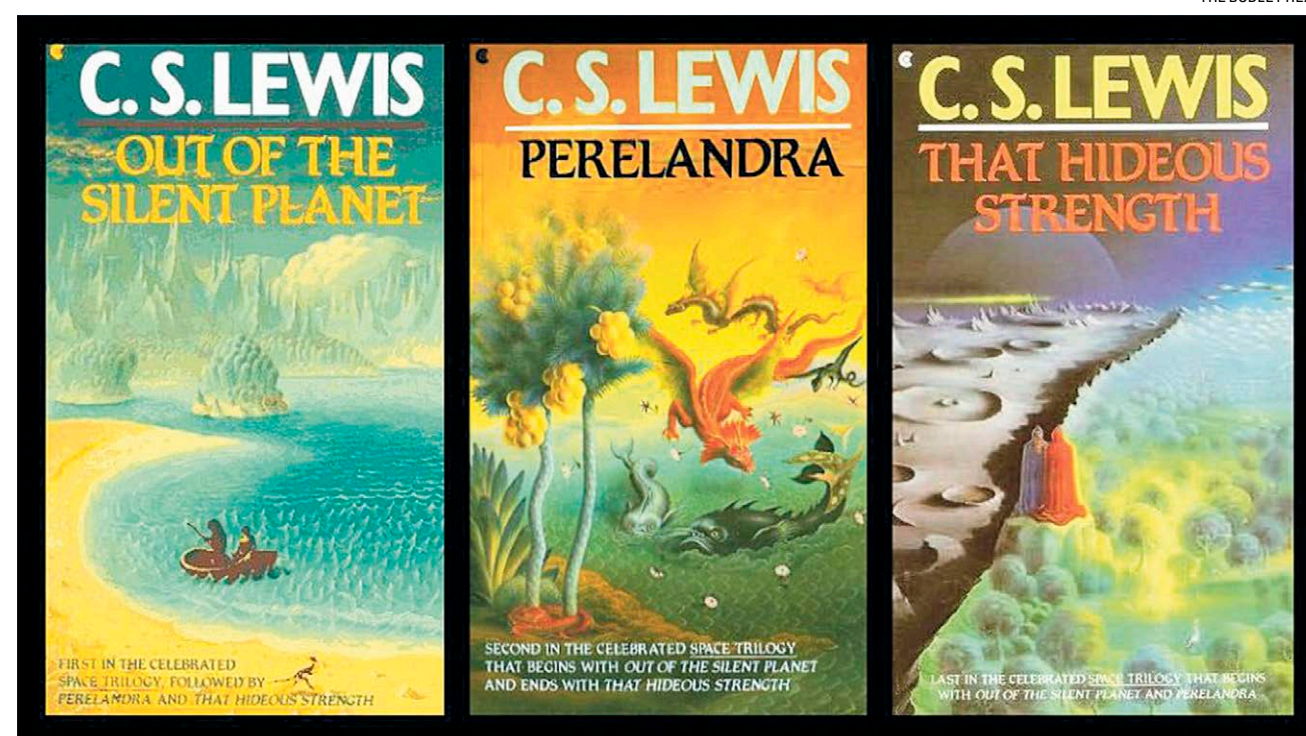
At first, the appearances of Merlin, the goddess Venus, the visitors from space, and other such characters put me off a bit. To be fair to the story, I have not read the two earlier volumes—"Out of the Silent Planet" and "Perelandra"—where we meet some of these beings and the heroic Elwin Ransom, who plays a key role in "That Hideous Strength." Nonetheless, these strange creatures at first seemed intrusions into the story, unnecessary and even false.

And then the scales fell from my eyes, and I understood.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES



A copy of George Orwell's novel "1984" sits on a bookstore shelf. The 72-year-old dystopian novel has regained popularity in recent years.



Darkness Versus Light

As I read more of the story and reflected on the philosophy driving it, I came to see that Lewis is describing the struggle between good and evil. His novel reminds us that we are not striving so much against flesh-and-blood enemies but instead against dark ideas aimed at degrading us, powers intended to diminish our ideals of liberty and individualism.

While some of the characters in "That Hideous Strength" are indeed wicked in and of themselves—Miss Hardcastle, is a sadist less interested in creating a new world order than in personal power—most of them are either chasing after power and advancement, or are deluded by grand thoughts of utopia. "The Kingdom of God is to be realized here—in this world," says the fanatical Mr. Straik, and he means that literally.

Most of us forget at times, or else refuse to recognize, the existence of a struggle between good and evil. Those words are unfashionable these days, yet Lewis is telling us that this battle is real. We may be blind to this warfare, in part because of our obsession with material goods, but behind the scenes the struggle goes on.

"Ideas have consequences," philosopher Richard Weaver once wrote. As Lewis demonstrates, those ideas have led men to create gulags and concentration camps, to silence opponents, and to

destroy the real—good, truth, beauty—for the illusions of utopia.

Love and Marriage

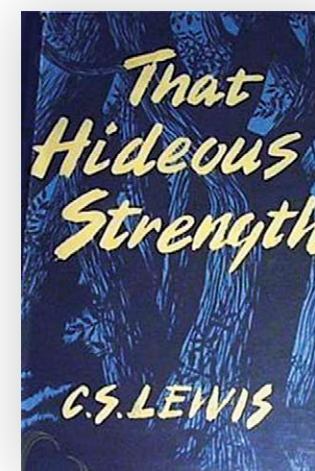
Finally, unlike his contemporaries Huxley and Orwell, Lewis includes as a secondary theme in "That Hideous Strength," an examination of the meaning of love and its place in marriage. Using the troubled marriage of Jane and Mark Studdock as his vehicle, he explores what one character calls "companionship."

During a conversation with the director, who eventually reveals himself as the heroic Ransom, Jane opens up and speaks with him about her failing marriage. He then offers her some gentle suggestions and ideas.

Jane prides herself on being a modern woman, what we would today call a feminist, and the director's advice seems quaint and old-fashioned. When she says, "I thought it was in their souls that people were equal," the director replies: "That is the last place where they are equal... Equality guards life; it doesn't make it. It is medicine, not food." And when she speaks of equality in marriage, he says to her: "No one has ever told you that obedience—humility—is an erotic necessity. You are putting equality just where it ought not to be."

Never had I considered obedience or humility as erotic necessities, but I will

C.S. Lewis's lesser-known Space Trilogy has as its final installment an important tale for our times.



The first edition of "That Hideous Strength," subtitled "A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups."

ponder those words and Lewis's many other comments on companionship for a long time.

A Story for Our Time

Many parallels between "That Hideous Strength" and our own age exist: a riot engineered by those in power and the story twisted in the press, the smearing of political opponents, the murder of a man who tries to leave N.I.C.E., the use of blackmail, the religious strains of ideology, and the arrogant emphasis on the self.

Like "1984" and "Brave New World," Lewis's tale of totalitarianism is a warning to us. "Those who call for Nonsense," says a leader of the resistance near the end of the story, "will find that it comes."

Our present Nonsense reveals the truth of her words.

But unlike Huxley and Orwell, Lewis ends his story with the triumph of good over evil, and with the restoration of love and hope. After a long absence and a struggle to return to his wife, Mark finally makes his way to St. Anne's Manor, the headquarters of the resistance and where Jane has taken up residence.

There Mark encounters an apparition by a doorway in a wall, "a woman divinely tall, part naked, part wrapped in a flame-colored robe... It was opening the door for him. He did not dare disobey ("Surely," he thought, "I must have died"), and he went in: found himself in some place of sweet smells and bright fires, with food and wine and a rich bed."

Here in this chamber of warmth, beauty, and light, and not in the cold corridors of power and dominion or in a laboratory, is where we become more fully human.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

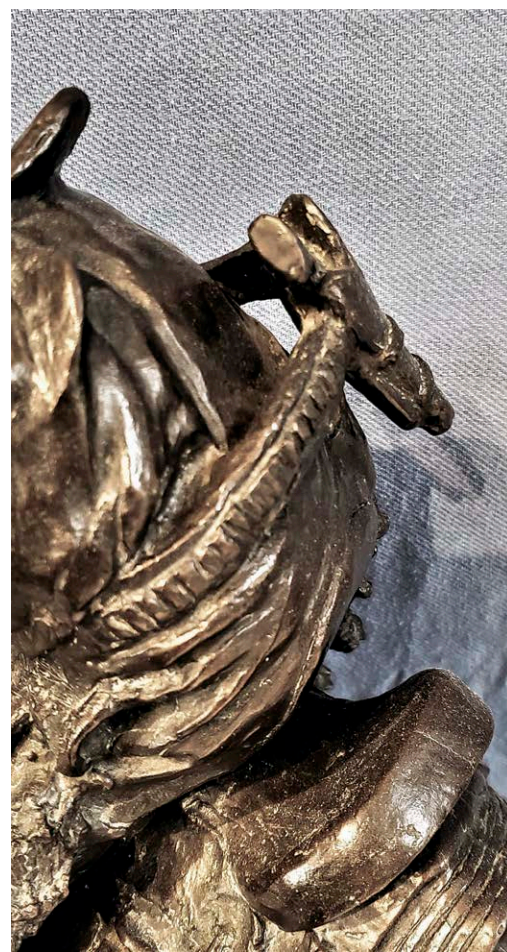
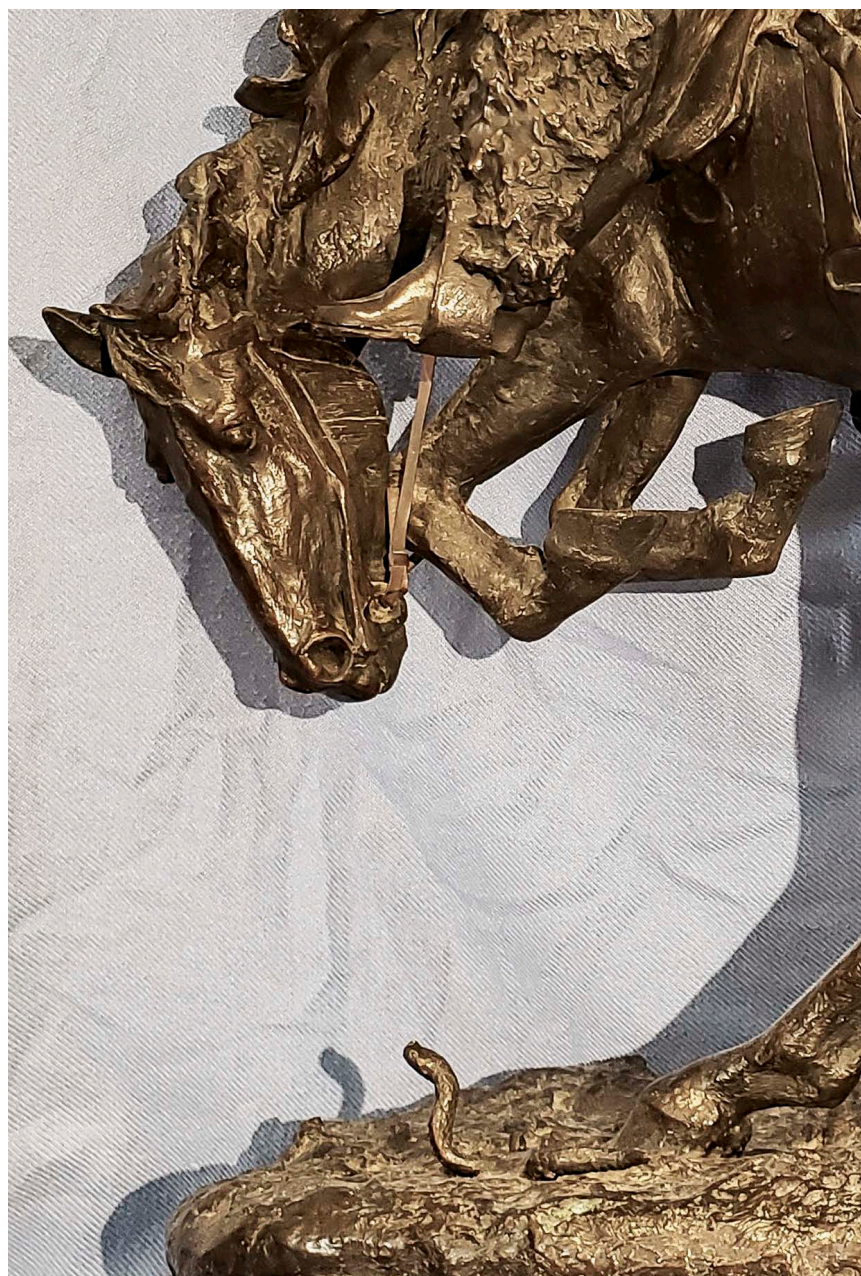
Unlike Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, C.S. Lewis ends his story with the triumph of good over evil.



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(Above)
The rider is lifted off his saddle, his Colt revolver flung away from his body.

(Left)
The horse is going out of his mind with fear, but can't take his eyes off it.

(Right)
"The Rattlesnake," 1905, by Frederic Remington. Bronze sculpture.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF WAYNE A. BARNES

TAKING YOU THERE

Frederic Remington Hurls You Into the Wild West With 'The Rattlesnake'

Continued from Page 1

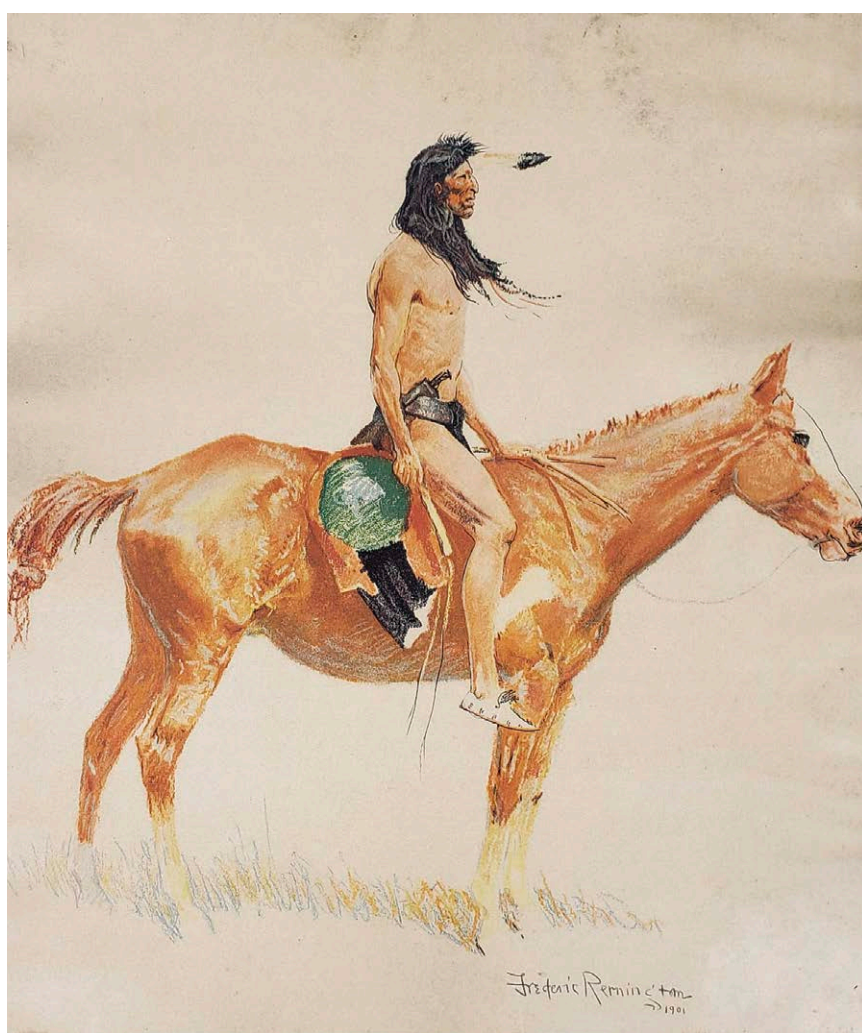
His drawings went from merely accompanying his articles to paintings that gained a level of maturity so that even art critics placed his work on a unique pedestal. Albert Bierstadt was covering massive canvases with "Rocky Mountains" (1863) and "Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California" (1868), which played well back East and introduced Europeans to our glorious scenery. In the foreground of almost all of his paintings were miniature settings with daily life among teepees, wagon trains, or pioneer encampments. It was those tiny figures that Remington enlarged and which became the center of his attention. He brought drama and adventure—the action—of the West to East Coast civilization, and they ate it up.

Few noteworthy artists worked both in painting and sculpture. Perhaps Michelangelo is the best known with his painting of the massive ceiling in the Sistine Chapel and his neoclassical sculptures of "David" and "La Pietà." Almost 400 years later, Remington was an artist on his own terms—drawing, painting, sculpting—and all the while, writing about it. This additional dimension gave a play-by-play quality to the many adventures he re-created on canvas: cowboys, trappers, scouts, the Lakota and Navajo Nations, and even up San Juan Hill to chronicle Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders in turn-of-the-century Cuba. Remington's life, and his portrayal of so many scenes displaying true grit, was quite extraordinary.

While his forefathers in art, and even his contemporaries, sculpted impressive images, almost all of them memorialized a moment of stillness—a kiss, a tranquil human form in pose, another merely thinking. Those sculptures remain as still today as the moments they were created. But Remington did something quite different, even audacious. His subjects were not graceful and relaxed, but rather, they were rugged folk, rough and ready.

He prided himself in capturing movement, an often-violent instant, sometimes death-defying, that would be gone in the blink of an eye. That would be almost everyone's eye but Remington's, for he held the image in his mind, later to draw and then mold into clay.

Observers of his sculptures could stand, staring at each piece, feeling the motion—and the emotion—of the subject, the angst, the surprise, sometimes the terror and the passion within it. They could feel it, again and again, because Remington took them down this path.



"Cheyenne Scout," 1901, by Frederic Remington. Lithograph; 20 inches by 17 inches.

The agony in the equine is so great that nothing can restrain his turbulent motion.

In 1895, "The Bronco Buster" was his first endeavor at sculpture after 20 years of drawing and painting. With a strong following, the piece was an immediate hit. His popularity surged. Even the Rough Riders gathered to present one to Lieutenant Colonel Teddy Roosevelt.

Remington's lifetime work included more than 3,000 sketches, illustrations, and watercolors, with dozens of oil paintings and 22 sculptures. He also penned two books and over a hundred magazine articles and stories. But in 1909, at the age of only 48, Remington passed away from an infection following an appendectomy. He had been at the peak of his career. The art world and much of society mourned the man who almost singlehandedly shaped how Americans pictured the West.

Meeting a Remington

In the 1990s at an antiques show in San Diego, a friend who knew my propensity regarding art, tugged at my elbow to tell me there was something I simply had to see, and at a reasonable price. Wary of his admonition, I trekked across the convention hall until I saw it.

When the most exquisite piece of its kind

you have ever seen speaks to you, and the price is manageable, you drive home with a chunk of bronze in your car that will be with you till the end of your days.

'The Rattlesnake'

After Remington produced "The Bronco Buster," it would be 10 years before he returned to a similar subject. It could have been the very same mount and rider, but the psychological viewpoints are dramatically different.

"The Bronco Buster" portrays a planned action, one the cowboy even looked forward to. In breaking the wildness from a wilderness beast, taming it for work on the ranch, separating cattle or roping a runaway calf, the work is exciting but normal. "The Rattlesnake" is the opposite.

The subject was not a mount and rider going slowly down a slope, or even taking a planned ride on a wild mustang, everyday Western activities. No, this was from a unique incident on the trail that the rider could not anticipate and simply steer his horse around. When the rattlesnake commenced its rattling and the horse had a hissy fit—to the great surprise of the rider—that was the moment Remington captured. There was no photograph to take and review in his studio, and no horse could hold such an impossible pose to model for him. This required detailed knowledge of equine anatomy and was all birthed from memory.

The rider has a slender, sinewy body, with an aquiline nose. A bushy mustache covers most of the lower half of his face. It is thick and wide, but a popular style at the time among chaps-wearing, derring-do cowboys. Holding on for dear life, his upper body careens forward, and he still has to deal with the rattling reptile.

What must have gone through his mind? A broken leg for himself or his steed could have deadly consequences. A snake bite would be even worse, and with no one to come to the rescue.

Let's go down the path with this cowboy and his trusty steed.

Taking You There

In the sounds of nature, animals aren't taught which ones mean danger. Millennia of time tells them when to stay and when

to go, when to relax and when to respond, and to do it immediately.

Act, and act quickly! Move! Get away! This was going through the mind of the rattlesnake.

Coiling provides the leverage for its V-shaped head to stand erect, several inches above its body—the pose of a viper strike. A forked tongue shoots out and withdraws; then its mouth holds open, baring fangs as deadly as a wolf or bear, with venom to back them up.

Some say the high-speed shaking of the rattle is a defense mechanism, but it is really announcing: "Because you have entered my territory, my safe space, uninvited, I am going to attack you. If you do not withdraw, you will face the consequences of your poor decision, and this is your only warning."

All of this was conveyed instantaneously by the whipping back and forth of the snake's tail, its response to more than half a ton of unstoppable, four-legged bulk trampling its way.

The rider was unaware of the danger until it was already beneath him. He realized that he was about to be thrown right onto the cause of the trauma. He had to think fast, calm down, and gain control of his mount, even with an overdose of adrenaline speeding to both of their hearts.

In a flash, the horse is bucking up, nearly spilling over. The core of his body whips into a deep curve and his eyes are transfixed by those of the serpent, almost paralyzing him. He is going out of his mind with fear, but can't take his eyes off it.

Neighing begins and then becomes a screaming whinnying the rider has never heard before.

The snake shakes its rattle in a frenzy, unnerving all within earshot to preserve its ground-bound life. A horse's legs are long and fragile: up from his hooves, his pastern, fetlock, and cannon, to his knees, tender open areas within the viper's reach.

The ruckus continues, a visceral reaction, a brash braying, a horrifying whinnying, breath sucked in, nostrils flaring, air whipping in and out through his lungs, stomping, kicking every which way, trying to escape the dread of the here-and-now, the horror of the creature at his feet.

Through all the bucking, almost turning over, the rider is thrown back then violently forward. Head bent down, exasperated, his

left hand grasps the base of his horse's mane. His right darts up to hold onto his hat, a reflexive but futile action.

The saddle horn crushes into his gut and he flings forward again. Erratic jerking slings the belt with his Colt revolver away from his body.

All hell has broken loose in the corpus of the horse, and the rider foresees the worst. The agony in the equine is so great that nothing can restrain his turbulent motion. His forelegs pull up tightly, close to his body, as far from the danger as possible. Gravity brings him hurling back down before he goes, again, immediately skyward. All the while, the viper's fangs and the buzzing, beating, vibrating, dizzying, and gut-wrenching sound on the ground has nearly driven the steed insane. Hooves kick up a cloud of dust, so close to the smell of grime and panic.

In this moment of madness, the snake's tail end continues its heart-stopping drumming. Then, without notice, a serpentine shadow slithers off through the woods.

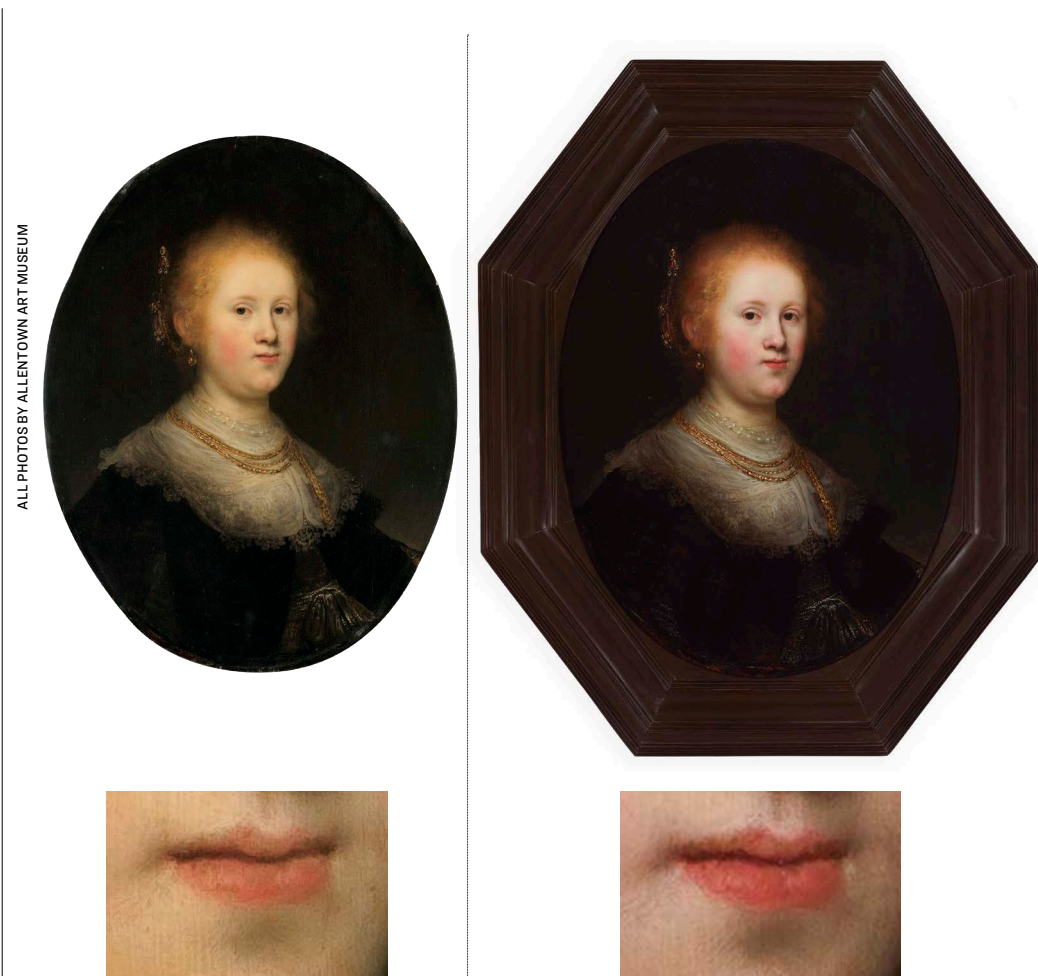
When the danger is finally gone, there is no quick return to calm, so high had been the adrenaline rush for mount and rider. These are moments you relive, that will bring nightmares to both man and beast. And if snakes do dream, this one will curl up in its hole, recalling two enormous hooves crashing down, so close to ending its rattling days in the underbrush.

In the split-second image of the sculpture, we don't know if the viper struck. That was likely Remington's plan—an action shot like no other—no time for hesitation; act now, as fast as you can!

But then what? I wrote the ending I saw, but we don't know. That is the eternal beauty of the piece.

Some pieces of art move me so that I am compelled to write about them—what they look like, but more often, how I see the scene in its own history. This is what the series "Taking You There" is about.

Wayne A. Barnes was an FBI agent for 29 years working counterintelligence. He had many undercover assignments, including as a member of the Black Panthers. His first spy stories were from debriefing Soviet KGB defectors. He now investigates privately in South Florida.



ALL PHOTOS BY ALLENTOWN ART MUSEUM



"Portrait of a Young Woman," 1632, by Rembrandt van Rijn, prior to its conservation (L), and after (R), with a close-up of the woman's lips, also before and after. Oil on panel; 29 1/2 inches by 22 3/4 inches. Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1961. Allentown Art Museum.

Unmistakably Rembrandt: 'Portrait of a Young Woman'

LORRAINE FERRIER

An age-old artwork can sometimes distort the truth. This was certainly the case for Rembrandt's "Portrait of a Young Woman" at the Allentown Art Museum, in Pennsylvania. For more than four decades, visitors to the museum viewed the portrait not as a work by Rembrandt but by his workshop.

In the 1970s, art experts mistakenly deattributed the portrait because conservators over the centuries had altered it to such an extent that it was deemed unrecognizable as a Rembrandt original.

Today, the portrait has been restored and is back on display—as a painting by Rembrandt—in the museum's exhibition "Rembrandt Revealed." The exhibition reveals why the portrait was deattributed and how it was reattributed to Rembrandt. The exhibition also gives interesting insights into the process and challenges of art attribution.

Not Rembrandt

In the early 1920s, art scholars began to question whether the artwork had actually been painted by the Dutch master. In the 1970s, art experts deemed it an important work by the "Workshop of Rembrandt van Rijn."

The painting's lack of clarity in the clothing and jewelry was one of the reasons for the demotion; another was that the lady's head showed "indistinct brushwork."

Conservator Shan Kuang, who restored the painting between 2018 and 2019, said in the museum's member magazine that anyone who saw the portrait prior to its restoration would have viewed the young lady through "a dirty windshield."

Over the centuries, various conservators—with a genuine heart to enhance the portrait and in line with the fashions of their time—varnished the painting to such an extent that it created a thick, dark buildup. For example, restorers in the early 20th century used varnish to hide the texture of the painted surface, as was the taste at the time.

The portrait's numerous varnished layers concealed Rembrandt's characteristic delicate brushstrokes, obscuring the lady's porcelain skin. In addition, conservators had overpainted parts of the portrait, muting details such as her hair ornaments, glistening gold necklace, and the touches of lace on her dress.

Revealing Rembrandt, by Chance

Kuang's first task, at the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, at New York University, was to remove the different layers of overpaint and varnish. She differentiated the various layers, using an electron microscope and digital photography, and carefully removed any added elements. It was during this routine work that Kuang made the exciting discovery: The original brushwork was by Rembrandt's hand.

A fresh analysis of Rembrandt's signature was also carried out. In the past, there had been confusion as to whether the signature was genuine, but the conservation center confirmed it was indeed his.

The restoration was not limited to the portrait. Prior to its restoration, the portrait was displayed in a 19th-century reproduction of a heavily carved 18th-century gilt frame. A new frame was commissioned to reflect how the portrait may have been displayed in a 17th-century Dutch home. Frame historian and framemaker Timothy Newbery made the eight-sided ebonized pearwood frame in his workshop in Scotland.

Now, visitors to the museum can see the painting truly attributed to Rembrandt and nearer to how the portrait left his studio, nearly 490 years ago.

The Allentown Art Museum's exhibition "Rembrandt Revealed" runs until May 2. To find out more, visit AllentownArtMuseum.org



TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Truth and Her Twin, Part 2: Mendacium Writ Large

JAMES SALE

While truth and lies can look the same, they are like identical twins, who can be very different indeed, as the painting “The Twins, Kate and Grace Hoare” (1876), by John Everett Millais, suggests. Kate (L) holds a riding crop and her demure sister, a hat. The Fitzwilliam Museum.

As a religious level, for example, Christ said that in knowing the truth, the truth would set us free, and this idea was matched by his healing of the physically infirm—some of whom could not even move. By healing, not just curing their bodies, he set them free. Truth has this remarkable quality: It frees us. But not just at a spiritual level—this is also true at a political one. If we cannot move, for example, as during a lockdown, a curfew, an embargo, and so on, then we are not free politically. Not to be misunderstood: There may be good reasons for curtailing freedom in a lockdown—such as public health, but nevertheless, the restriction denies one’s freedom.

This issue, then, is really important. In a way, what I am saying is that the acceptance of Mendacium—Lies or Error—is the precursor to loss of freedom. It is neither necessarily nor immediately apparent that we lose our freedom, but if enough people collectively subscribe to Mendacium, then as sure as night follows day, our freedoms

(Above left) While truth and lies can look the same, they are like identical twins, who can be very different indeed, as the painting “The Twins, Kate and Grace Hoare” (1876), by John Everett Millais, suggests. Kate (L) holds a riding crop and her demure sister, a hat. The Fitzwilliam Museum.

(Top right) In healing the lame, Jesus made manifest the dictum that the truth sets one free. “Christ Healing the Lame at the Pool of Bethesda,” 1640s, by Pieter van Lint. Oil on panel. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

(Above right) Art inspired by the divine, as it was in the past, can affect us in profound ways. John Habgood, the former Archbishop of York, believed that the fact that art today is divorced from religion might reflect the “trivialization and disorientation of art itself.” “Praying Hands,” circa 1508, by Albrecht Dürer. Albertina art museum in Vienna, Austria.

Truth is inside, is internal, and is the only twin who can really stand.



Scholar Camille Paglia in 2015.

quence, we each achieve different results for ourselves. On an individual level this is obviously true, but we have seen in history plenty of collective efforts to reverse this situation. As Jordan B. Peterson put it, “If there was any excuse to be a Marxist in 1917, there is absolutely and finally no excuse now.”

The encroachment of Mendacium onto the domain of Veritas often seems to start with small things. In the UK, for example, politician and military historian Robert Oulds, in his book “Moralitis,” comments on student unions which “ensure freedom from speech through ‘no-platforming’ and ‘safe spaces.’” Notice the rather witty, “freedom from speech,” not “of speech.” It almost seems funny until one reflects that we are talking about the young university generation whom we once thought went to college—like we once did—to broaden and expand their minds.

Weren’t universities places that had famous debating chambers? No more it seems. Most students today cannot abide an idea that contradicts their uninformed prejudices. Worse, this intolerance is like an insidious cancer, which spreads so that soon the whole body is riddled with it.

Quoting Dalrymple again, we end up with “a society of ‘emasculated liars’ who are very easy to control.”

Our Way Back to Truth

How do we resist this insidious undermining of all that we hold dear? Clearly, there is no easy answer, for if there were, we wouldn’t have the problem. But I make two suggestions that seem relevant.

One is honest journalism of the type that The Epoch Times espouses. There has to be resistance to the fake news and social media control that currently now appertains. In a way, this is immediate and frontline stuff.

But the deeper, longer-term stuff is related to the kind of culture we live in and the values it espouses, or claims to espouse, for frequently actions belie espoused values. In particular, I feel that our arts are of primary importance in this battle for the hearts and souls of the people, especially the younger generation. Why is this? Because it is the arts—literature, drama, music, and visual art—that most affect our emotions. In the absence of any pervasive spiritual or religious tradition, our sense of the creative can only derive from these sources.

The trouble is, so much of “art” today is either entirely nihilistic or not art at all! John Habgood (former Archbishop of York) some while ago observed: “The fact that not much art these days seems to be inspired by explicitly religious themes may, however, be a reflection of the trivialization and disorientation of art itself.”

The problem is that people no longer believe in anything, including something as basic as form itself. In poetry, we now have “free verse,” meaning, usually, poetry with no structure at all. And without form, very little beauty—or truth. What is true of today’s poetry is also true of the other art forms. We all know this about the arts but, as with the emperor’s new clothes, like to pretend otherwise.

Thus, we need to press for art that rediscovers the myths of old, but for a contemporary generation. The great critic Northrop Frye said: “A myth is designed not to describe a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to that one situation. Its truth is inside its structure, not outside.”

This is the real twin, Veritas, which compels assent because her truth is inside, is internal, and is the only one that can really stand.

To see Part 1 of “Truth and Her Twin,” visit ept.ms/Veritas-1

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, “Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams” (Routledge, 2021). He won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is “Hellward.” For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit TheWiderCircle.webs.com



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

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Making a Case for Bringing Back Sacredness to Art

MARK JACKSON

Director Darren Aronofsky resurrected Mickey Rourke’s career with “The Wrestler,” and worked a similar boon of blessings for Natalie Portman in “Black Swan.” She won the Oscar for her performance, and she seemed in 2010 to have blossomed into the Meryl Streep of her generation.

The role of elite ballerina Nina Sayers checked off many of the things on the list that attract Mr. Oscar—dramatic weight loss, all-consuming immersion in a demanding skill set (ballet), and shape-shifting disappearance into a character. Indeed, her brief transformation at the end, into the actual Black Swan of the title, is as bona fide a shape-shift as one will ever see in cinema—that moment alone was almost worth the price of admission.

The Attainment of Perfection

The film is a dark tale of obsession with artistic technique: the ruthless ambition, the sacrifice, the obsessive compulsiveness. It tells of how a dancer manages to capture two out of the three main ingredients that, according to Socrates, constitute great art: truth and beauty. What’s missing to a certain extent is goodness.

The plot is straightforward: Mousey, introverted good girl wants and wins lead role, has the technical chops, but would appear to lack the requisite personality to play the entire role, which contains two extremes. She’s inherently the white swan—chaste, demure, perfect—but can Nina summon up the Dionysian as well as the Apollonian, and also inhabit the Black Swan believably?

Can an artist embody an extreme range? If not, can the issue be forced; and if so, what’s the cost? These are the questions “Black Swan” poses.

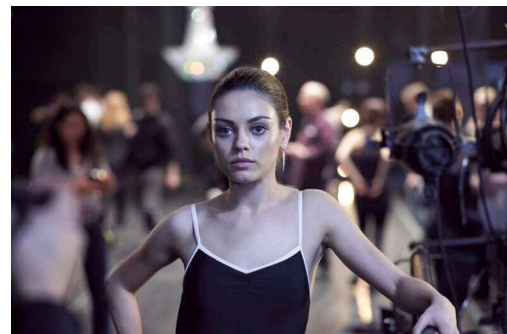
Erica Sayers (Barbara Hershey) is the ballet version of the overprotective horror-mom in “Carrie,” vicariously living dreams of success through her daughter. Thomas Leroy is one of Vincent Cassel’s stock-in-trade charismatic creeps, this time in the form of a tyrant choreographer.

And Lily (Mila Kunis) is seductive as the dancer with the chaotic, dark fire that Portman’s Nina lacks. Kunis’s Lily draws Portman’s character into her world of hook-ups in bars, pill-enhanced mood control, and laissez-faire attitude toward practice, ostensibly to become her friend, but we quickly sense a darker, ruthless competitiveness behind her motives.

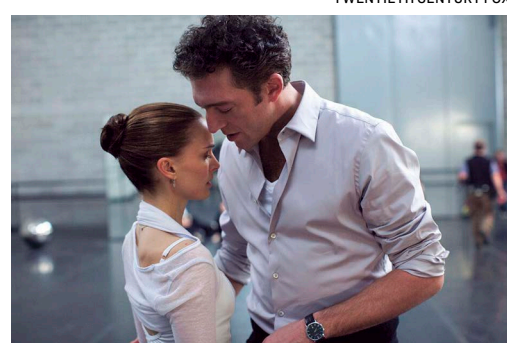
Nina allows herself to be drawn in since, as one theory goes, to be true in art one should really live it. As Charlie Parker famously said, “If you don’t live it, it won’t come out your horn.” However, a lot of what he lived was heroin addiction, so maybe ... that doesn’t apply to ballet as much? Director Aronofsky says otherwise.

Nina’s apparent above-and-beyond ambition for gaining recognition for having achieved perfection is underscored throughout the film by self-mutilations that demonstrate the lengths she’s willing to go to in order to access her inner Black Swan. Since our shortened attention spans need to be held more and more these days by the shock techniques of the horror genre, there are many in this film.

The dark grays, blues, and blacks make it a somber, heavy film. The self-mutilation is dis-



Lily (Mila Kunis), the dancer with natural Black Swan energy.



(Above) Stage-mother Erica Sayers (Barbara Hershey) and her ballerina daughter Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman). (Left) Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) and choreographer Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel).



(Above) Natalie Portman as the White Swan in her shape-shifting, Oscar-winning performance as obsessive, delusional prima ballerina Nina Sayers in “The Black Swan.” (Right) Natalie Portman as the Black Swan.

The secular performance of Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) is never intended to uplift and inspire the audience; she dances entirely for herself.



(Above) Stage-mother Erica Sayers (Barbara Hershey) and her ballerina daughter Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman). (Left) Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) and choreographer Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel).

‘Black Swan’

Director Darren Aronofsky

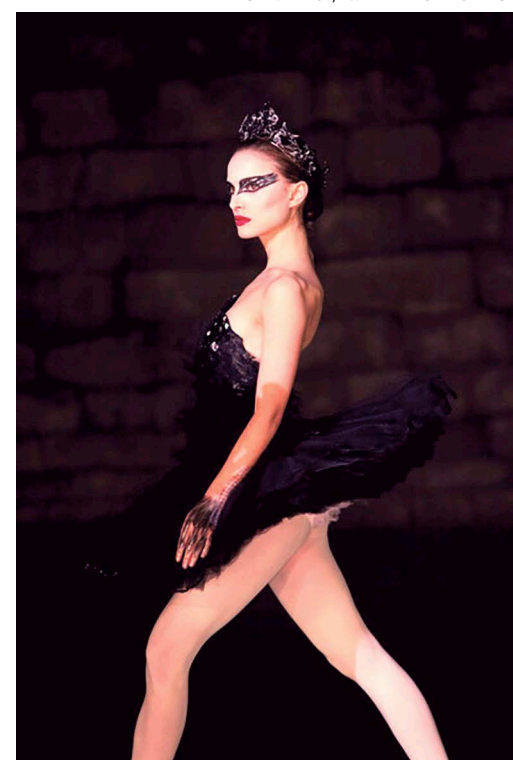
Starring Natalie Portman, Mila Kunis, Winona Ryder, Barbara Hershey, Vincent Cassel

Rated R

Running Time 1 hour, 48 minutes

Release Date Dec. 17, 2010

Ratings 4 out of 5 stars for execution, 1 star for moral content



king, and the human emotions were left out of it. This was intended to leave the performer as an empty vessel or conduit through which the divine could be channeled. Now, authentic human emotion is paramount; it’s far more interesting to our modern tastes. For a fascinating pseudohistorical depiction of how this shift occurred, see Claire Danes’s Shakespeare performance in 2004’s “Stage Beauty.”

We want to see real emotion, not fake. But in the distant past, when art was meant to depict the divine, it was with the intention of uplifting the observer spiritually, and not to impart a sense of satisfaction in baser human emotions such as revenge (that exist throughout Shakespeare’s work). In terms of the original use of art, even Shakespeare’s secular poetry, beautiful as it is, was a fallen art form. The original theater was church services—wholly in the realm of the sacred.

And so Nina’s secular performance is never intended to uplift and inspire the audience. She dances entirely for herself and willingly drops her spiritual level, allowing the demons to enter, “for the sake of true art,” as Aronofsky depicts it.

The question that Aronofsky seems to be posing is whether it is possible to strive for artistic perfection and authenticity for reasons other than an ambitious obsessive-compulsive, narcissistic personality and needing to show off.

Back to the Sacred

What of healing? If art didn’t have a healing capacity, the field of art therapy wouldn’t exist. We know that art can heal, and that healers are not motivated by a need for attention. The dark conclusion of “Black Swan” (which I won’t give away) is the logical outcome of art that’s trending further and further away from art’s origins.

What of goodness? The film shows the dramatic sacrifice that happens when the third ingredient—Socrates’s concept of goodness—goes missing.

Can we in modern times reintroduce the sacred into art? This is definitely achievable. Here’s a quote taken from the classical Chinese dance website of Shen Yun: “Almost every culture looked toward the divine for inspiration. Art was meant to uplift, bringing joy to both the people who created and experienced it. It is this principle that drives Shen Yun performers and their art.”

Professional dancers from around the globe have agreed that Shen Yun attains a level of perfection in dance that is rarely seen. So this positive intention, to display divine images, with the intent to heal through joy and beauty is the key to attaining perfection without the deleterious side effects.

Initially gave “Black Swan” a rating of 4 out of 5 stars. Now I feel like downgrading it to a 3.5 just because it’s dark, depressing, scary, and has drugs and gratuitous sex. Wait! I’ll let the rating stand for technical aspects, but as I find nowadays that I don’t really want to see ballet, one of our last remaining pure art forms, demeaned in that setting anymore, I’ll give it two ratings (see above).

Nevertheless, director Darren Aronofsky has actually done an excellent service by showing how art has reached the extreme of a downward, demonic trend. Now that we’ve reached that extreme, perhaps things will turn around.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Rousing Biopic About a Real American Hero

IAN KANE

There are many heroes who initially don't seem destined for greatness. This certainly is the case with Alvin York, a real-life American hero who went above and beyond the call of duty during World War I.

York's heroics are retold in director Howard Hawks's fascinating "Sergeant York," a 1941 patriotic war movie. The film opens in the Valley of the Three Forks of the Wolf, nestled in the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee. The local pastor, Rosier Pile (Walter Brennan), is leading his parish in a powerful Christian hymn titled "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder."

When the hymn concludes, the pastor begins his sermon, which is interrupted by gunfire that erupts from somewhere outside of the church. York (Gary Cooper) and his fellow booze-swilling cohorts are riding around town and shooting their pistols off in a belligerent bout of drunkenness.

Even while drunk and disorderly, York manages to shoot his initials into a tree right outside of the church, "A V." If there's one thing that good ol' country boy York does well, it's to hit a target with unnatural accuracy.

York's mother (Margaret Wycherly) goes to the settlement's general store (which is coincidentally owned by Pastor Pile) to make amends for her son's transgressions, and it is here that we learn the widow's family is destitute. The only thing the Yorks own is a small patch of land.

While there, Mrs. York suggests, in a beautiful Southern drawl, that the pastor have a talk with her older son, Alvin, to tell him that "A little religion wouldn't do him no hurt."

Meanwhile, York and his buddies take to swilling even more booze at the local bar and get so soused that they get into some fisticuffs with other drunken ne'er-do-wells. His younger brother, George (Dickie Moore), marches into the place and tells him that his mother wants him to come home. York returns home with his tail tucked between his legs and makes amends with his stern but fair mother, who greets him at the door with a bucket of cold water in an effort to sober him up.



Gary Cooper in "Sergeant York," in his Oscar-winning performance.



Pastor Rosier Pile (Walter Brennan), also the proprietor of the local general store, talks with his parishioner Mrs. York (Margaret Wycherly), in "Sergeant York."

Trying to make amends, York begins tilling his family's fields. Pastor Pile then travels to the York property and does try to persuade the youth to become a man of faith. But York is stubborn and shrugs off the pastor's endeavors.

Later, while out hunting for foxes with his younger brother and some friends, York falls under the spell of local country girl Gracie Williams (Joan Leslie). Although she is also attracted to him (in a shy manner), she figures that he isn't quite marriage material

because of his family's circumstances.

This motivates York to ditch the booze and set his sights on a larger patch of property called the "bottomland." Unfortunately, while working his tail off to obtain the land, he gets hoodwinked by a conniving wheeler-dealer, Nate Tomkins (Erville Alderson). This causes York to return to the bottle, and in a fit of drunken fury, he sets off to kill Tomkins.

Perhaps through divine intervention, a bolt of lightning strikes him, bending his rifle's barrel and thus rendering it useless. York views this as a wake-up call and he begins attending Pastor Pile's services, much to the solace of his family, who are regular attendees.

York undergoes a total Christian conversion, which compels him to be a better man. He makes amends with local folks, including Tomkins.

However, World War I intrudes and all of the local men must register for the draft. Because of his religious conversion, York has become a pacifist. But Pastor Pile advises York to register anyway, and he reluctantly obliges.

When York is selected for Army service, a conundrum arises: Can he serve his country and go to war, while being against killing his fellow man?

Focus on the Hero

While the first two acts of the film paint a beautiful tapestry of York's upbringing in the backwoods of Tennessee, the final act showcases his extraordinary honor and courage in the face of adversity on the battlefields and in the trenches of the Great War.

For a film set in 1941, "Sergeant York" has an exceptional level of character development that enables it to transcend mere propaganda. Through Hawks's more-than-capable guidance, Cooper is set free to deliver one of his finest, most compelling performances, buttressed further by Wycherly as his stalwart, ever-supportive mother. The excellent supporting cast carry their own weight without being too obtrusive.

"Sergeant York" is a deeply moving film that should inspire even the most ardent of pessimists out there. Its sincere dedication to unusual heroism, patriotism, and selflessness is something that should be witnessed. Be warned: Bring a handkerchief or box of tissues to wipe away all of those tears.

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

'Sergeant York'

Director
Howard Hawks

Starring
Gary Cooper, Walter Brennan, Margaret Wycherly, Joan Leslie

Running Time
2 hours, 14 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
Sept. 27, 1941 (USA)

★★★★★

Feb 11-Mar 14

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