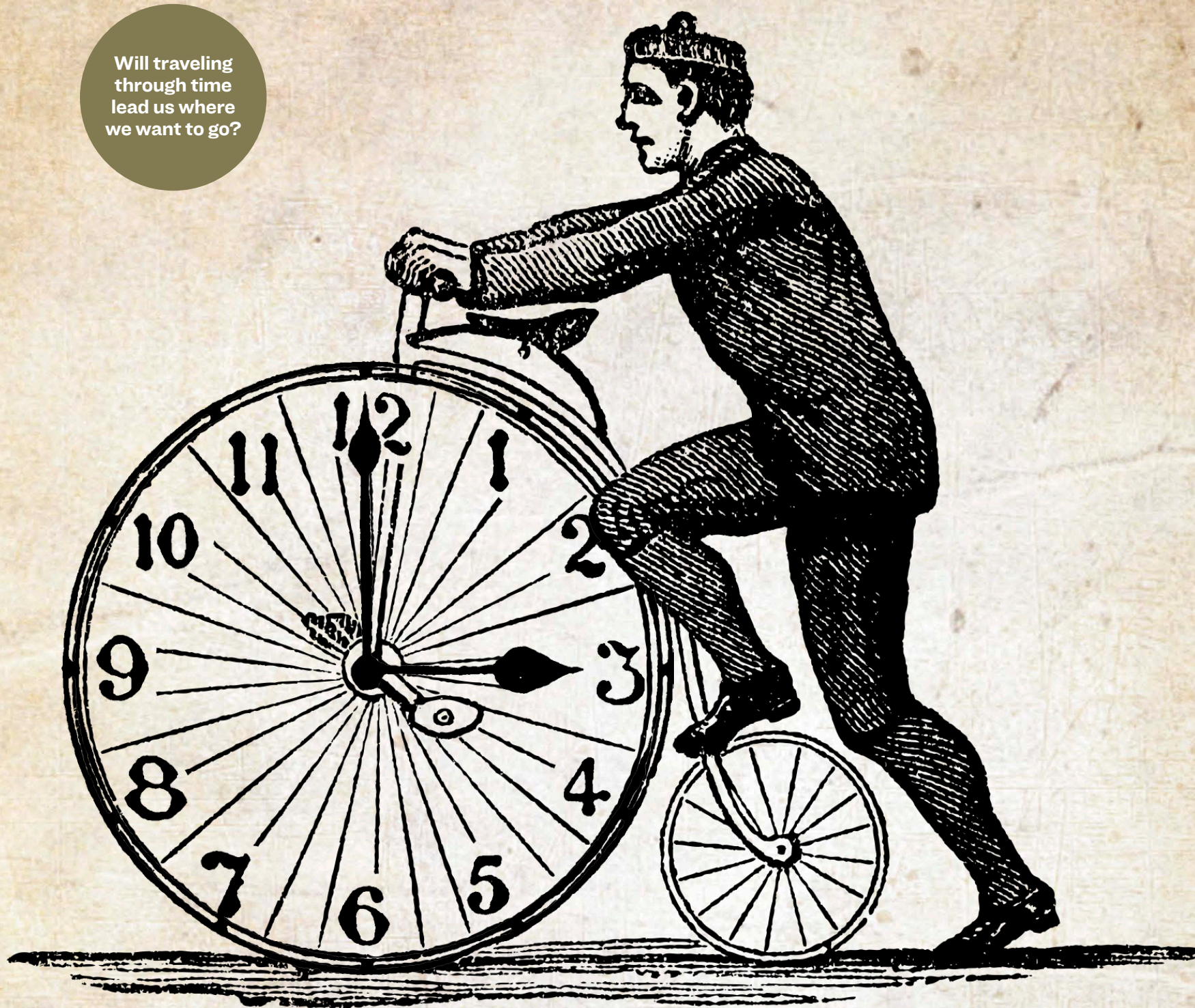


THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

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Will traveling through time lead us where we want to go?



LITERATURE

‘The Time Machine’ An Everlasting Matter of Time

SEAN FITZPATRICK

In writing “The Time Machine” 125 years ago, Herbert George Wells not only invented the catchphrase “time machine,” but he also invented a time machine of imagination, for its pages whisk the time-bound reader beyond the constraints of the numerical continuum of space and experience, leaping into a bizarre future that is both beautiful and brutal in its features. “The Time Machine” is both science fiction and social fiction, and as time has shown, the impossible dreams of science tend to come true, as do the impossible nightmares of society.

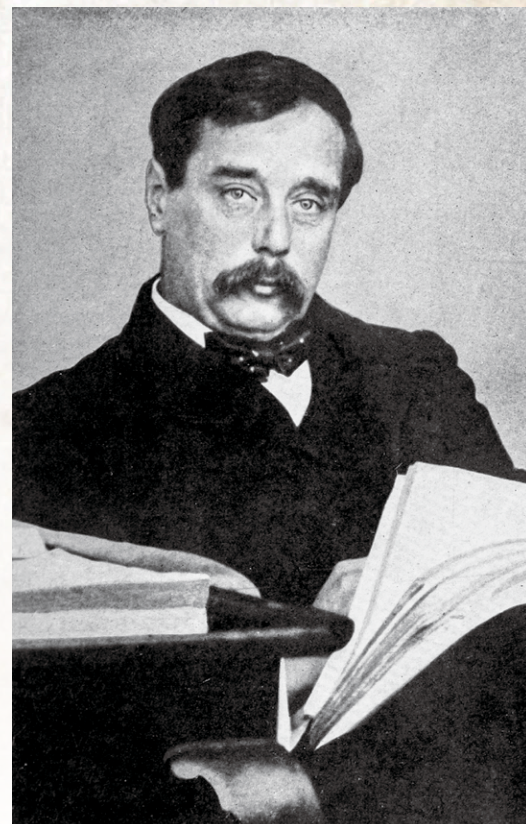
It is hard to tell if “The Time Machine” is ahead of its time or behind it. It is probably both, for time and one’s position in it, according to the story and its theory, is relative. That time is a flimsy thing, however, is not terribly surprising. That there is such a thing as time at all, this rolling measure of change, is the larger shock, especially as it is infinite by definition but finite by design. But the most important thing about time is not what we can do with it, but rather what we must do in it—before it runs out.

‘The Time Machine’

The novella is largely a story within a story, detailing the firsthand account of a gentleman known only as the Time Traveler after he returns from his time machine’s maiden voyage to the year A.D. 802,701. The first thing he finds in this distant epoch is not a high-tech megalopolis buzzing and blazing with futuristic wonders, but rather a silent, solitary figure of antiquity.

Lifting itself above birch trees and rhododendrons is a gigantic white marble sphinx, set on a mighty bronze pedestal. This is the image, the great irony, that meets the Time Traveler when he comes to find out what has happened to the world of men—and it is a foreboding figure.

The sphinx is a mythical symbol of the blind genius of man and his inevitable degradation, hearkening back to the Oedipus cycle, when that tragic hero came to Thebes to seek his fortune, overthrew the sphinx and her riddles about the decay of man, only to seal his doom. The sphinx had the last laugh as Oedipus gouged out his eyes in horror and fled weeping to the wilds.

Continued on **Page 4**

A portrait photo of English writer Herbert George Wells, circa 1918.

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FILM

In Praise of Womanhood: A Look at Hollywood Wives and Mothers

JEFF MINICK

A friend recently contacted me about the movie “Birds of Prey.” She’d read a review of the movie in The Epoch Times and was as appalled as the reviewer by the violence of a movie aimed at a young female audience. My friend wrote of older Hollywood films: “If a woman had to be strong (say her husband was at war), she did so displaying all of men’s best traits: honor, integrity, self-sacrifice. Here (that is, in “Birds of Prey”), the criminal violence of women is applauded.”

She added that we’ve gotten to the point where female characters in the movies must be as hardened and as violent as males, “which is no credit to women any more than it is to men.” My friend has a point.

Since the 1960s, our culture has encouraged women to become more like men in their competitive drive, toughness, and work ethic outside the home. Unfortunately, “women’s liberation” has also come to mean not only the right of women to enter the workforce, the universities, and the professions, but also liberation from the family and the home, and even from femininity itself.

Many of today’s Hollywood films celebrate women who succeed as professionals, politicians, and athletes, which is generally to the good. Much less attention is given to those women, like so many I know, who follow the traditional pathway of mother and wife, who give their hearts and minds to raising children and making a home, and who display the same sense of duty and integrity as any man I know, but with a womanly twist.

Old Flicks

This was not always the case.

From 1930 to 1970, actresses like Katharine Hepburn, Loretta Young, Lauren Bacall, Audrey Hepburn, and Bette Davis played strong women on the big screen, heroines who stood up for themselves and others without behaving like men.

In “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,” for example, wife and mother Katie Nolan (Dorothy McGuire) raises her daughter and son while also helping earn enough money to pay for rent and food. Her husband, Johnny, a singing waiter and an alcoholic, barely manages to scrap together money to support the family, and so the intrepid Katie helps put food on the table.

When Katie turns against her sister for her wild ways, their mother says to her: “You have forgotten to think with your heart. There is a coldness growing in you, Katie.” She is reminding her daughter to be charitable and to feel the emotions of womanhood.

“Gone With the Wind” focuses on Scarlett O’Hara (Vivien Leigh) as she ruthlessly battles for money and power in the years following the Civil War. Scarlett steals away her sister’s fiancé and marries him for his money. She becomes sharp and tough as any man in matters of finance.

In stark contrast to Scarlett stands her friend Melanie (Olivia de Havilland), a woman endowed with a different courage and grit who practices such virtues as kindness, loyalty, and mercy. Even when others inform her that her husband, Ashley, was seen embracing Scarlett, who spends much of the movie in love with Ashley, Melanie brushes those accusations aside and continues her friendship. In adhering to virtue, Melanie serves as an example of female goodness to those around her.

In the popular Christmas movie “It’s a Wonderful Life,” Mary Bailey (Donna Reed) is the gentle, patient,

and loving wife of George (Jimmy Stewart), but she becomes a lioness when she must protect him. When the evil Mr. Potter absconds with some of George’s money needed to set his accounts straight, it’s Mary who leaves her home and appeals to George’s friends and clients for help, and so rescues him from financial ruin.

Modern Hollywood Wives and Moms

Though many more movies today than in the past depict women as superheroes, soldiers, professionals like doctors and lawyers, or outspoken champions of some political cause, some writers and directors have produced films featuring wives and mothers as exemplars of virtue and strength.

In “Tender Mercies,” Rosa Lee (Tess Harper) is a young widow whose husband has died in Vietnam, leaving her to support herself and her young son by operating a gas station and a run-down motel in rural Texas. The movie begins when she agrees to employ Mac Sledge (Robert Duvall), a broken-down, penniless alcoholic who was formerly a star in the world of country music, on the condition that he’ll give up the bottle.

Let’s celebrate the differences between men and women rather than trying to delete them.

As Rosa Lee and Mac become friends, they grow closer and eventually wed. Through all of Mac’s struggles both before and after their wedding—a failed attempt to sell a song, his battles with his ex-wife, the death of his daughter—Rosa Lee acts as his spiritual guide, often in such an understated way that some in the audience may miss her attempts to protect and love him.

“We Were Soldiers” tells the story of Colonel Hal Moore (Mel Gibson) and the battalion he led against North Vietnamese forces in 1965 in the Ia Drang Valley. Before his departure for overseas duty, the film introduces us to his wife, Julia (Madeleine Stowe), a mother of five who clearly loves her husband.

In his absence, Julia organizes a group of base wives, and a tender scene of one of their meetings shows us women who are proud to be mothers and wives, making the best of their long separation from their husbands.

And when notifications of the deaths of some of these men begin arriving via a cab service, it is Julia who nobly steps up, orders the cab driver to bring the telegrams to her, and takes them in person to her neighbors and friends. Here, Hollywood gives us a wife and mother who is as noble and virtuous as any ancient Roman matron.

A Female Perspective

Ron Howard’s “Cinderella Man” gives us Russell Crowe as heavyweight boxer James J. Braddock and Renée Zellweger as his wife, Mae. It’s the depths of the Great Depression, the Braddocks are stone-broke, and then Jim gets a chance to return to the ring. Mae is upset—she doesn’t want to see him hurt again—and she storms off to the apartment of Joe Gould (Paul Giamatti), Braddock’s promoter and trainer, to confront him.

There, she discovers that Gould and his wife have sold all their furniture, in part to help pay for Jim’s training. At one point, Mrs. Gould sends her husband out of the room, and the two women have this conversation about their husbands:



Olivia de Havilland as Melanie Hamilton, a sweet Southern belle who could be as tough as nails if needed, in *Gone With the Wind*.”

MRS. GOULD: “Can you ever stop yours? When he sets his mind to a thing?”

MAE: “I wish I could.”

MRS. GOULD: “See, I never know who it’s harder on—them or us. We have to wait for them to fix everything. And every day ... they feel like they’re failing us. Really, it’s just the world that’s failed, you know.”

That dialogue may be politically incorrect by today’s standards, but the few words spoken by these two women—it’s almost impossible to imagine a similar dialogue between two husbands—deepen our understanding of the love and pity they feel for the men they love in this time of economic hardship.

Erasures

For the past three or four decades, some in our culture have worked to erode the boundaries between male and female. They’ve told us we need to make our boys more like girls and our girls more like boys. They’ve replaced biological sex with gender identifica-

tion, meaning we can choose whatever sexual persona we wish.

Movies like “Birds of Prey” further blur these distinctions.

In part, this social engineering explains the mess and chaos of our current culture. Those who are attempting to drastically alter human nature must shoulder some of the blame for the weakened state of marriage and family life in our nation, and for the confusion and mayhem that so often plagues our relationships.

Hollywood deserves some of the blame for this decline in standards, but the truth is that we all bear some responsibility for the turn we have taken and some obligation, however small, to reverse it.

Vive la Difference!

We might begin that reversal by celebrating the differences between men and women rather than trying to delete them.

Consider the virtues. These moral linchpins of life—courage, temperance,

charity, and all the others—are the common property of both sexes. The difference lies in how men and women pursue and practice those virtues.

Allow me a personal example. When my wife died in 2004, some male friends offered assistance, mostly financial, but it was the women, mostly the mothers of my students, who stepped up to help me through a terrible time. They provided free childcare for my 9-year-old son, they delivered meals on a regular basis to my home and classroom for the next six months, and they frequently telephoned or sent notes to encourage me. Without the kindness, generosity, counsel, and tender mercies of those women, that year would have gone much worse for me and my son than it did.

Women, let me tell you something you already know: Our culture doesn’t need you to become good men. Our culture needs you to be good women.

I’ll close by saluting all of you, good men and good women, for the gifts you bring to a broken world.

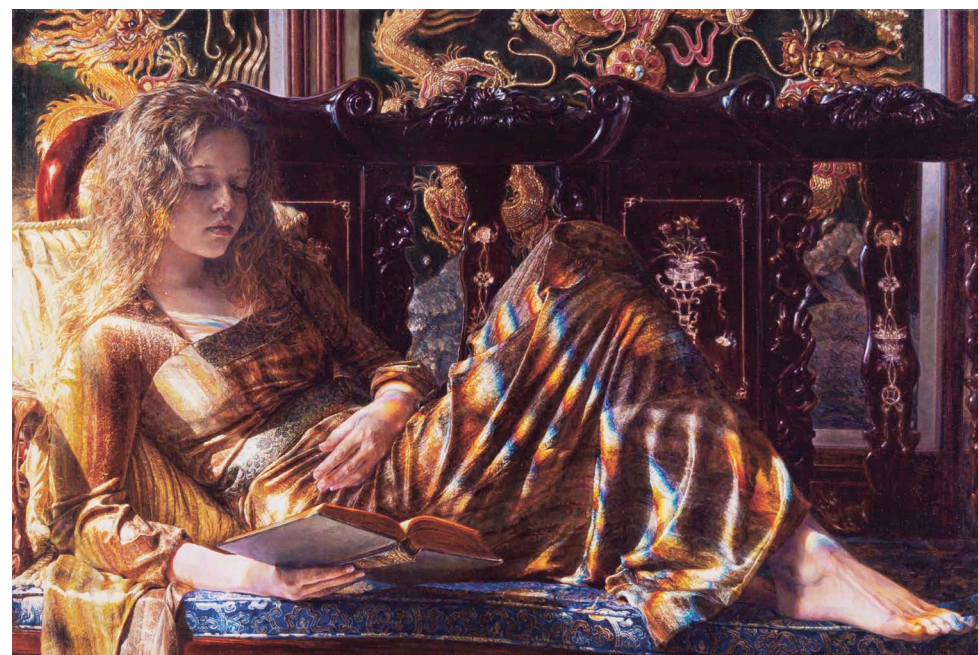


A 1940s publicity portrait of actress Loretta Young, at a time when Hollywood allowed its female characters to display feminine virtues.



Margot Robbie as the deviant Harley in Quinn in the recent film “Birds of Prey.”

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.



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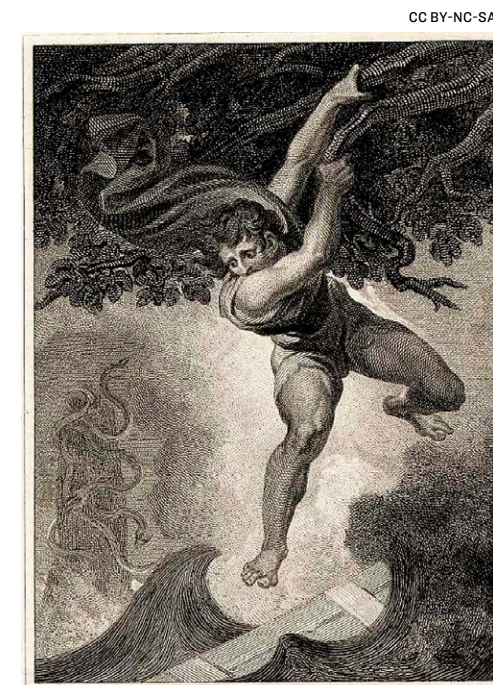
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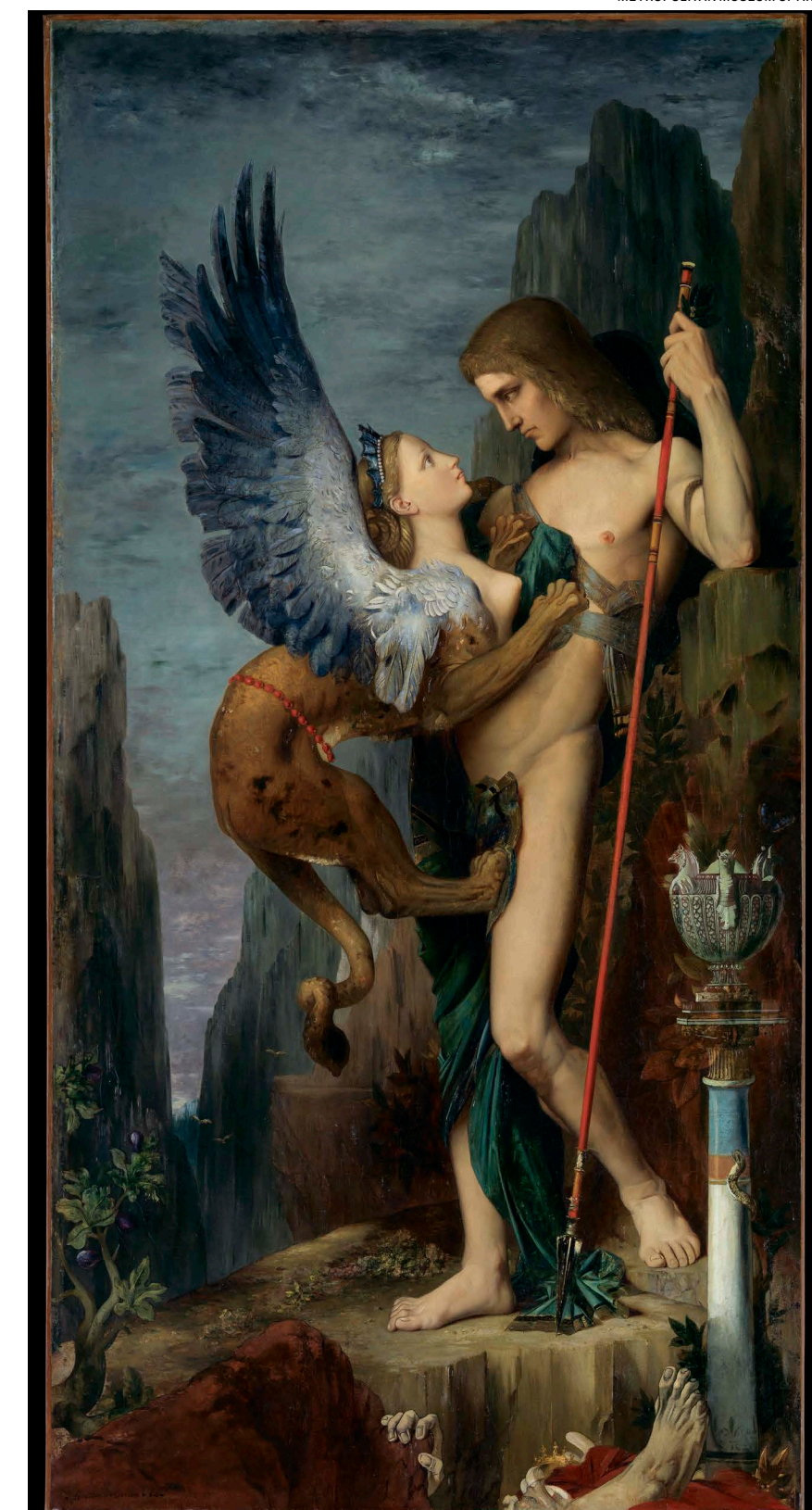
Thomas Cole's series of five paintings, "The Course of Empire," is a time machine of sorts. It shows the rise and fall of man's morality and civilization. His fourth in the series is "The Course of Empire: Destruction," 1836. Oil on canvas, 39.5 inches by 63.5 inches. New York Historical Society.



"Odysseus Between Scylla and Charybdis," engraving of Odysseus looking down in terror at the whirlpool Charybdis, with Scylla as a sea monster writhing around rocks at left. After a watercolor by Fuseli, the illustration was for Alexander Pope's translation of Homer's "Odyssey." 1806. The British Museum.



Mother Teresa in 1979.



Oedipus, representing the genius of humankind, may have defeated the sphinx temporarily but, in a sense, the monster triumphed. "Oedipus and the Sphinx," 1826, by Gustave Moreau. Bequest of William H. Herriman, 1920.

LITERATURE

'The Time Machine'

An Everlasting Matter of Time

Continued from Page 1

As errors of enlightenment show time and again, man's fall is all a matter of time. The key to the future has always been in the past.

The Time Traveler discovers that after 800,000 years, the world is peopled with two classes, or tribes, of evolved humanoids: the beautiful but brainless Eloi (a name resembling Elohim, a Hebrew word for God) and the crafty and cunning Morlocks (a name resembling Moloch's, a Canaanite idol associated with child sacrifice).

The Inversion of Society

As a sociological thought experiment, "The Time Machine" exhibits a deep angst about the shaky middle ground of socialism, the political philosophy that Wells himself was devoted to. In his story, the effects of industrialization are carried out to an unfathomable extremity, and the imagined result is an ominously fathomable reversal: the eventual and perhaps inevitable corruption of the soft aristocracy and the underground supremacy of the hardy underworld laborers.

The manmade balance between the privileged and the underprivileged devolved, given time, into an environmental, symbiotic tyranny, with the Morlocks breeding and slaughtering the cattlelike Eloi for food, in a strange animalistic perversion of human civilization. The inversion of the powerful and the debasement of the weak in their rise to their own primal power is both fascinating and disturbing.

But most disturbing of all is that the future is marked by the loss of any clear intelligence, because intelligence is no longer needed in a world so perfected by systems; it returns gradually to a natural state.

"It is a law of nature we overlook, that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger, and trouble. An animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism. Nature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instinct are useless. There is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change. Only



British author H.G. Wells and American actor, director, and producer Orson Welles following the radio dramatization of Wells's book "The War of the Worlds."

It is hard to tell if 'The Time Machine' is ahead of its time or behind it.

those animals partake of intelligence that have a huge variety of needs and dangers."

"The Time Machine" is yet another of Wells's works, like "The War of the Worlds," that point at, and even pry at, the fragility of society—a fact that stares us all in the face as we cower in masks and succumb to pandemic pandemonium. Indeed, the works and ways and wars of man follow a type of mathematical trajectory, like time itself, leading to inescapable ends once their causes have been set in motion.

Moreover, as a fallen being, man tends to fall and so does his civilization. Even the rising of empires seems only, in retrospect, a preparation for those inevitable falls that trace the course of human history like a downward spiral. Time is like a clock, a

great wheel that turns and returns; and man is like the Greek villain Ixion, crucified on that wheel of never-ending torment. For every advance, for every miracle of science, for every political perfection, man only stands to fall further.

There is no golden age—there is only revolution. Though man eradicates hunger, disease, and everything that causes strife, he only opens himself up to new calamities, new weaknesses, and a new shade of the curse that is his for all time. Chimerical communist utopias only make way and give purpose to capitalist dystopias, the Scylla and Charybdis of civilization, and even the natural state is one born of insurgency and pain despite man's efforts to achieve convenience, control, and calm.

H.G. Wells's "The Time Machine" reminds us that nothing can escape the tyranny of time, for nothing can stand independently on this earth forever, though man longs for the mysterious meaningfulness of everlasting life. G.K. Chesterton commented on this cruel paradox in "The Everlasting Man":

"Mr. H.G. Wells has confessed to being a prophet; and in this matter he was a prophet at his own expense. It is curious that his first fairy-tale was a complete answer to his last book of history. "The Time Machine" destroyed in advance all comfortable conclusions founded on the mere relativity of time. In that sublime nightmare the hero saw trees shoot up like green rockets, and vegetation spread visibly like a green conflagration, or the sun shoot across the sky from east to west with the swiftness of a meteor. Yet in his sense these things were quite as natural when they went swiftly; and in our sense they are quite as supernatural when they go slowly. The ultimate question is why they go at all; and anybody who really understands that question will know that it always has been and always will be a religious question; or at any rate a philosophical or metaphysical question. And most certainly he will not think the question answered by some substitution of gradual for abrupt change; or, in other words by a merely relative question of the same story being spun out or rattled rapidly through, as can be done with any story at a cinema by turning a handle."

"We all have our time machines, don't we?" H.G. Wells remarked. "Those that take us back are memories ... And those that carry us forward, are dreams." Even if our dreams are different than Wells's, we all dream for redemption as we look back

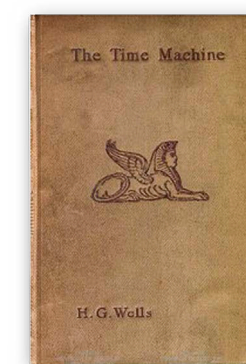
with regret. Wells was plagued with dark and anxious dreams, and the salvation he dreamed up in "The Time Machine" was more of a damnation.

The only redemption we can discover is not through levers, cylinders, and cogged wheels of brass and iron that sped the Time Traveler across the edifice of time, but through faith in things timeless. It is in this, in the fullness of time, that lies a strange and secret peace, for the magnitude and magnanimousness of eternity somehow gives extension to our ephemeral existence. Time, as Aeschylus said, brings all things to pass.

Gazing at the stars that stood, sparkled, and swirled in unfamiliar arrangement in the skies ages and ages hence, the Time Traveler said, "Looking at these stars suddenly dwarfed my own troubles and all the gravities of terrestrial life."

But what he, and perhaps Mr. Wells the secularist, missed is the point that it is not by traveling through time, like a soothsayer or a scientist, that we are enlightened, but by traveling beyond time into unchanging timelessness where deities laugh with the stars, indeed—but not with the laugh of the sphinx.

And to travel beyond time, one does not



The first edition of H.G. Wells's famous novel.

require a time machine, but only time management. In the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."

Sean Fitzpatrick serves on the faculty of Gregory the Great Academy, a boarding school in Elmhurst, Pa., where he teaches humanities. His writings on education, literature, and culture have appeared in a number of journals including Crisis Magazine, Catholic Exchange, and the Imaginative Conservative.

BEHOLD THE BEAUTY

'The Way of All Things'

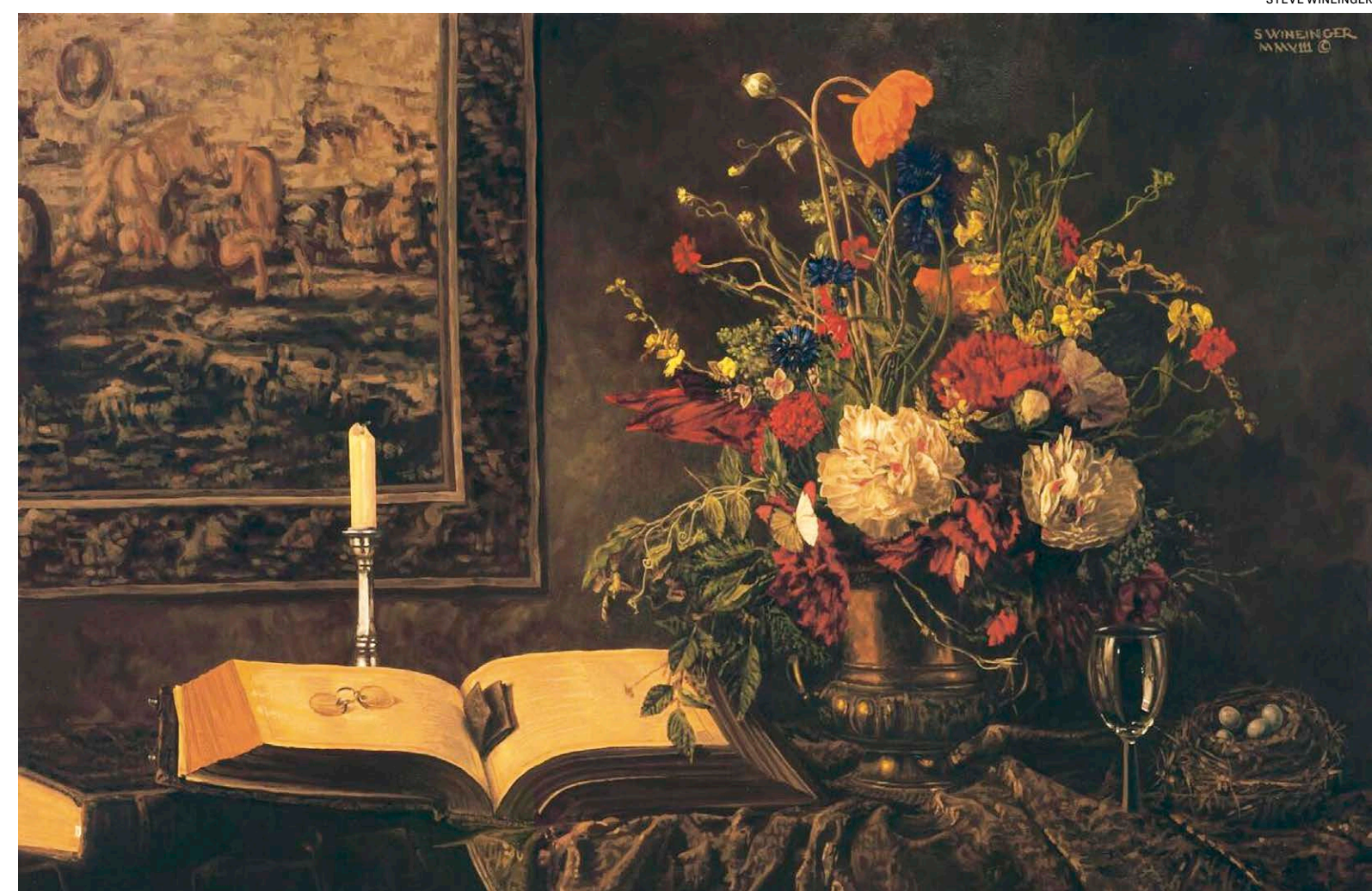
LORRANE FERRIER

Each one of us is marvelously unique, but birth and death come to us all. Realist artist Steve Wineinger of Spokane, Washington, depicts this arc of life in his still-life painting "The Way of All Things."

In the painting, Wineinger starts the story on the right-hand side, just as the ancient Greek or Hebrew texts read from right to left, he says in an email.

First, on the right side of the painting, a bird's nest full of dainty blue eggs represents birth. Near the nest is an empty wine-glass symbolizing the delights and tireless adventures of childhood and youth on the road to adulthood. "The race from birth to adulthood is only briefly interrupted by a carefree existence mostly consumed with the play of childhood," Wineinger says.

A riot of vibrant flowers, of many different colors and kinds, mimics the variety and splendor of a life lived well. Wineinger says that the flower arrangement represents a life full of the achievements of adulthood. "Once the activity of our most productive years slows down, we find ourselves in a more reflective time, looking back on



our lives and family," he says. Wineinger hopes, by that time, reflection will be done through wisdom-tinted spectacles. And he's depicted this period of time as spectacles resting on a Bible.

An unlit candle and an age-old faded tapestry mark the end of life. For Wineinger, the extinguishing of the flame of life represents the dimming of once brilliant achievements. "The accomplishments

of even the most remarkable life are remembered by successive generations as a tapestry whose colors and sharpness fade with time."

Wineinger ponders: "A fatalistic view, perhaps. But this is 'The Way of All Things.'"

To find out more about Steve Wineinger's art, he may be contacted at srwfineart@gmail.com

"The Way of All Things," 2008, by Steve Wineinger. Oil on canvas.

REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Reuniting With the Divine: ‘Sacred Love and Profane Love’

ERIC BESS

As the profane runs rampant, there is little left that is sacred. Sacred love has been turned on its head, and people today often value vice instead of virtue. Love, however, used to be sacred. The controversial painting “Sacred Love and Profane Love” by Giovanni Baglione might give us insight into the sacrality of love.

Baglione’s Feud With Caravaggio
Unfortunately, Baglione’s painting “Sacred Love and Profane Love” is mired in controversy. Baglione and the painter Caravaggio were enemies. Caravaggio wrote defamatory poems about Baglione and criticized his ability to paint. Baglione took him to court over it in 1603. Baglione painted two versions of “Sacred Love and Profane Love.” The version above was painted in response to Caravaggio’s painting “Love Victorious.” In “Sacred Love and Profane Love,” Baglione painted Caravaggio as the Devil, and visually accused Caravaggio of sodomy, an accusation that caused Caravaggio to leave the city.

“Sacred Love and Profane Love” depicts the Devil consorting with Cupid (Profane Love) at the bottom of the composition. The Devil looks back at us as if he is startled. Profane Love holds an arrow in one hand and a bow in his other. He looks up at the angelic representation of Sacred Love that looms over him.

Sacred Love is represented standing upright, between the Devil and the child, wearing ornate armor and with an otherworldly arrow in his right hand. In contrast to Profane Love’s ordinary, childlike appearance, Sacred Love is depicted with an idealized and calm face.

In the tenebristic fashion of this time, all of the figures are positioned against a background of darkness, which heightens their three-dimensionality and helps us focus on their interaction.

The Sacred and Profane

Baglione’s intentions may not have been pure when he painted this, but it doesn’t mean that we can’t extract meaning from the painting that may inspire our hearts and minds toward goodness. Maybe from a close look at this work, we can gather a deeper understanding of the opposing elements of sacred and profane.

In the tenebristic fashion of this time, all of the figures are positioned against a background of darkness, which heightens their three-dimensionality and helps us focus on their interaction.

The use of the word “love” denotes, at least in part, a desire or caring for something. Thus, these two contrasting representations of love may be symbolic for what we care about or desire.

The depiction of Cupid in consort with

Sacred Love is represented standing upright, between the Devil and the child, wearing ornate armor and with an otherworldly arrow in his right hand.

“Sacred and Profane Love,” 1602, by Giovanni Baglione. Oil on canvas; 94.5 in by 56.3 inches. National Gallery of Ancient Art, Rome.



the Devil is very telling. The Roman god Cupid is often associated with using his arrow to instill lascivious desires in gods and humans alike. The Devil is often associated with tempting humans away from God and toward worldly pleasures.

The rendezvous between the Devil and Cupid suggests that Profane Love represents a desire for base and even evil pleasures that keep humans separated from the divine.

Sacred Love, however, stands over them both. The Devil and Cupid are painted in the lower register of the composition, but Sacred Love transcends them both, suggesting that Sacred Love transcends, rises above, the desires and cares characteristic of Profane Love.

Sacred Love wears armor, which suggests that he is protected from the temptations that Profane Love represents. He, however, also has a weapon of his own: his arrow.

If the sacred and profane are true opposites, and here the profane arrow

would be used to separate humans from the divine, the sacred arrow must be used to reconnect humans to the divine. Sacred Love is love—a deep desire and care—for the divine.

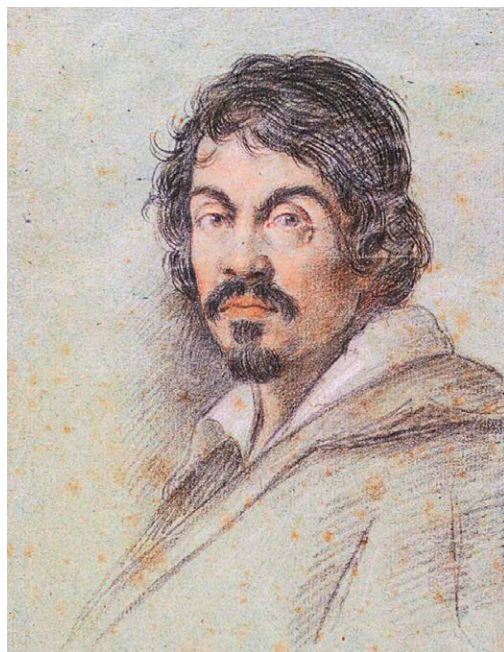
The positioning of the figures suggests that Sacred Love has come to separate Cupid from the Devil. He stands between Cupid and the Devil and positions his arrow at Cupid’s heart. A prick from his arrow would elevate (that is, save) Cupid from the Devil’s influence and reunite Cupid with his divine nature.

The positioning of the figures reiterates the power of Sacred Love: Our righteous thoughts, when powered by a transcendent love of the divine, will overpower, overwhelm, and subdue all base and evil desires even when their power seems great or their number many.

How might we identify the ways in which we hide profane thoughts, speech, and acts so that we might transcend them and reconnect with the divine through sacred love? How can we strengthen the righteousness in our hearts and minds so that we may subdue the evil in our lives?

The traditional arts often contain spiritual representations and symbols the meanings of which can be lost to our modern minds. In our series “Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart,” we interpret visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We do not assume to provide absolute answers to questions generations have wrestled with, but hope that our questions will inspire a reflective journey toward our becoming more authentic, compassionate, and courageous human beings.

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



(Left) An engraving of painter Giovanni Baglione, 1625, by Ottavio Leoni. (Public Domain)

(Right) A chalk portrait of the painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, circa 1621, by Ottavio Leoni.



Strings make up the bulk of an orchestra.

MUSIC

Why the Strings Are the ‘Backbone of the Orchestra’

MICHAEL KUREK

Growing up, I always enjoyed hearing the nicknames given to various musical instruments. We were told that the organ is the “king of instruments,” while the harp is the “queen of instruments.” The bassoon is “the clown of the orchestra,” and, at least in jazz circles, the clarinet is the “licorice stick.” To play the piano is to “tickle the ivories.” The drums are the “skins.” Both the terms “horn” and “axe” can refer generically to a person’s instrument, whatever it may be.

Then we had “Tubby the Tuba,” personified as a chubby boy, and who can forget that the oboe was the duck and the clarinet the cat in Sergei Prokofiev’s “Peter and the Wolf”? And in Camille Saint-Saëns’s “Carnival of the Animals,” the string double bass aptly plays the elephants, the cello the swan, and the xylophone the skeleton bones. In “The Instrument Song,” the horn sounds “so forlorn.” The instruments are truly fascinating, especially to children.

The ‘Backbone of the Orchestra’

But what about the strings? In fact, the strings can take on just about any characterization. We never tire of their warm, human-like tone the way we can tire of, say, the oboe’s nasal and reedy sound. The strings can play almost endlessly, because their players’ lungs or lips do not wear out from constant breathing and blowing. The string group in five sections—violins (split into first and second violins), violas, cellos (properly called the violoncello), and the double basses (also called contrabasses)—can collectively cover the entire range of the piano, save the bottom three keys, much wider in range than the other orchestra sections.

They can pass off a melody from high to low, sounding seamlessly like one instrument, while such a figure passed from flute down to oboe to clarinet and bassoon would reveal a distinct change of tone color with each. They can play incredibly soft or loud, fast or slow, hold long tones endlessly with imperceptible changes of the bow up and down, and play all sorts of special effects, like pizzicato (plucking with the finger instead of bowing), whistle-like harmonics (touching a string lightly and bowing), and scratching tremolos (rapidly bowing back and forth on one string).

In fact, in most orchestral works, the individual string players’ parts are typically many pages longer than the other instruments’ parts because they play almost all the time, while the others frequently rest. For all these reasons, the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908) called the strings the “backbone of the orchestra” in one of the first books to be written on orchestration, his “Principles of Orchestration” (written 1873–1908).

What makes them the backbone is that the strings can stand alone for any length of time, but when woodwinds and brass are featured on the melody, the strings are often still played, too, though in the background. When the wind instruments do play as a section without strings, it is usually not for more than a few seconds, lest the composition begin to sound like a band piece rather than an orchestra piece.

Teaching my university orchestration class, I have always showed the students scores and pointed out how Brahms,

for example, employed what is called “homogenous orchestration,” where parts are often “doubled,” that is, played together by strings and a woodwind and a brass instrument blending in unison. Tchaikovsky, on the other hand, is known for “family orchestration,” where a melody will be passed around, with a phrase first played by the strings alone, then echoed purely by the woodwinds alone, and then by the brass alone. Both composers do have all the families play together, too, especially at climactic moments, so it’s only a relative comparison.

Strength in Numbers

I used to wonder as a child how and why our city orchestra could round up so many string players, as many as 70, but so few winds, no more than 23, especially when my school only had a band program with no string players. Where did all those hundreds of marching band members on the field disappear to after graduation, and where did all these string players come from? Apparently, there must have been lots of kids taking violin lessons somewhere, awaiting their turn to be in the majority. The reason for the numerical disparity is simply the disparity in the volume between the instruments. If you had 70 winds on stage with those 70 strings, you might have a hard time even hearing the latter.

I also wondered if, perhaps, all those marching band kids found it quicker and easier to learn a wind instrument than learn to play at the same skill level on a string instrument. So I interviewed Luciano Marsalli about it; he’s a remarkable young college senior I know majoring in violin performance at Vanderbilt University:

MICHAEL KUREK: Are string instruments harder than other instruments to learn to play?

LUCIANO MARSALLI: Yes! To give just one example, instruments with any sort of keys allow their players to immediately gain the satisfaction of playing in tune at a very early stage. We have no marked indications for where to place our fingers—no keys and no frets. We must spend years training our left hand to know exactly where to place our fingers on the strings to produce the correct pitches, which requires precision at the level of millimeters. We are forced to engage in a physical process that is both unnatural and asymmetrical with both hands.

MR. KUREK: Why did you choose to play the violin, as opposed to the more immediate rewards of other instruments?

MR. MARSALLI: Without parental support, I never would have made it past my early years on the instrument. I would have neglected my violin studies without the insistence of my parents, something which I now consider a great gift. In growing older, I came to love the violin myself, for many of the same reasons that make it so difficult. In mastering the violin, there is an all-encompassing mastery of music that one encounters: The instrument attains such a versatility that it becomes an extension of oneself, capable of any expression. This is all the more evidenced by a rich repertoire of pieces written for the instrument.

MR. KUREK: If you could only choose one role as your primary activity, would you

rather be a soloist, player in a string quartet, or a member of an orchestral string section, and why?

MR. MARSALLI: I would almost certainly choose to be in a string quartet. The thrill of being “the one” in any solo setting is certainly alluring, and by contrast, the wonderful unity of playing in an orchestra is a truly fulfilling musical experience. But, for me personally, playing in a small ensemble is the perfect balance between the two. A quartet seems to be the greatest number of players who can all be communicating with each other at once. You can attain a perfectly homogeneous result while still achieving a great deal of intellectual individualism.

The String Orchestra Showcasing It All

A piece you might hear at any orchestra concert is “Serenade for Strings,” Op. 48 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893). Typically, it would be scheduled first in the program, and then the other members of the orchestra would join the strings for the rest of the concert.

It would seem that almost everyone has heard his ballet “The Nutcracker,” but many may be unfamiliar with Tchaikovsky’s romantic, deeply affecting serenade for the string family alone. If you did enjoy that ballet, you are guaranteed to gain a new favorite in this lush, emotional serenade.

If you begin to wonder how Tchaikovsky got such a rich sound out of the strings in the opening part of the piece, it is because four of the five sections (listed above) are playing “divisi,” Italian for divided. That means, for example, that eight (half) of the sixteen first violins are playing one note and the other eight playing a different note. So instead of five-part harmony, you are hearing nine-part harmony. It might help to imagine two barbershop quartets singing together where each person has a different note, so the harmony sounds thicker and richer. From there, Tchaikovsky puts the strings through all their paces, showcasing a delightful, tuneful catalog of about everything they can do.

In four movements totaling around 30 minutes, we are treated to quicksilver-fast music, exquisitely slow and poignant music, and an elegant waltz. He composed the “Serenade” in 1880, and George Balanchine (1904–1983) choreographed it as a ballet in 1934. The waltz from the serenade even became a song in the 1945 movie “Anchors Aweigh,” called “From the Heart of a Lonely Poet,” performed by Kathryn Grayson. In 1983, NBC used excerpts from the serenade as a lead-in to commercial breaks in its broadcast of an NFL Playoff game between the San Diego Chargers and Pittsburgh Steelers.

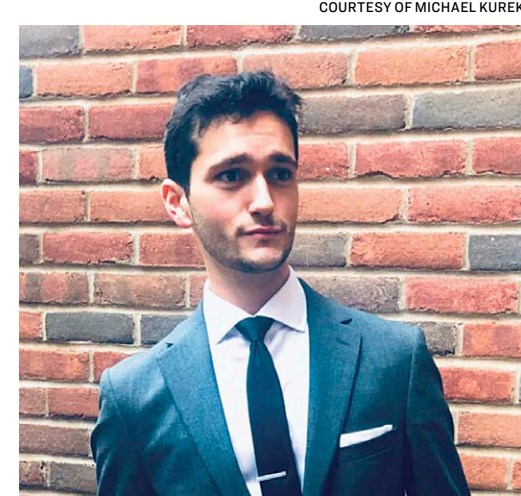
American composer Michael Kurek is the author of the recently released book “The Sound of Beauty: A Composer on Music in the Spiritual Life” and the composer of the Billboard No. 1 classical album “The Sea Knows.” The winner of numerous composition awards, including the prestigious Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has served on the Nominations Committee of the Recording Academy for the classical Grammy Awards. He is a professor emeritus of composition at Vanderbilt University. For more information and music, visit MichaelKurek.com



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, circa 1888.

They can play incredibly soft or loud, fast or slow, hold long tones endlessly with imperceptible changes of the bow up and down, and play all sorts of special effects.

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Violinist Luciano Marsalli.



Conductor Rodrigo Müller rehearsing the author’s Billboard No. 1 composition “The Sea Knows” with the strings of the Orquestra Sinfônica de Limeira in São Paulo, Brazil.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

An Uplifting Tale About Racial Injustice

IAN KANE

Directed by Robert Mulligan ("Summer of '42," 1971; "The Other," 1972), "To Kill a Mockingbird" is a 1962 film based on a 1960 book of the same name, written by award-winning American author Harper Lee. Elements in the book and film parallel aspects of Lee's younger years, although we now know that the book is more fiction than autobiographical account. But irrespective of how close the novel is to real-life events, the tale still shows the value of standing up to injustice.

The film opens in the small, fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama. A lawyer of goodwill, Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) is going about his morning routine when a local farmer, Walter Cunningham (Crahan Denton), shows up to deliver a sack of chestnuts to him, albeit clandestinely.

Atticus's young, precocious daughter Jean Louise (Mary Badham), nicknamed "Scout," insists that she alert her father to the delivery. Cunningham is visibly pained when he hands the bag over to Atticus. When the farmer leaves, Atticus asks Scout not to notify him of Cunningham's future arrivals; since the chestnuts are a way of paying off his legal debt, and because Cunningham has no money, forcing him to face Atticus shames the farmer.

We learn that compassion, justice, and standing up for what's right are beliefs that Atticus Finch holds dear.

It is here that we first get a gander at Atticus's incredible thoughtfulness and compassion, as well as the hard times of the period in which the film is set (1933-1935), in the aftermath of the stock market crash of 1929.

Although the main plot involves Atticus's



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(Top) Lawyer Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) handles the most challenging case of his career, in "To Kill a Mockingbird."

(L-R) Scout (Mary Badham), Dill (John Megna), and Jem (Phillip Alford) spend the summer interested in their neighbor "Boo" Radley, in "To Kill a Mockingbird."

steadfast effort to defend a black field hand, Tom Robinson (Brock Peters), the first act of the film is mainly told from the perspectives of Scout, her older brother, Jeremy (Phillip Alford) nicknamed "Jem," and their visiting buddy, Dill (John Megna).

Through these children, we are gradually introduced to the town and its goings-on. Also through them, we learn of a subplot involving a strange, reclusive young man who lives down the street, named Arthur "Boo" Radley (Robert Duvall).

Soon, we discover more about the legal case that Atticus has taken on. Robinson has been accused of brutally raping a young

woman named Mayella Ewell (Collin Wilcox Paxton), despite evidence to the contrary.

Atticus is increasingly harassed not only by the Ewells' oft-drunken and menacing patriarch, Bob (James Anderson), but other townsfolk as well. Atticus's willingness to defend a black man in the segregated South isn't exactly popular.

Throughout, the Finch family's home life is detailed, and we learn that compassion, justice, and standing up for what's right are beliefs that Atticus holds dear and, therefore, reinforces in his children. It is also revealed that his dear wife passed away at some point in the past. The family's kind-but-stern black maid, Calpurnia (Estelle Evans), has taken over as a surrogate mother to the kids, even chastising Scout for some misdeeds in order to rein in the child's feisty nature.

Things heat up midway through the film. In one of its most dramatic scenes, Atticus stands guard overnight in front of the town jail, which is housing Robinson. He is protecting the suspect from being lynched. Lo and behold, a large posse shows up to administer what they consider to be vigilante justice. Atticus bravely stands defiant in the face of their threats, but it looks like the mob will not be deterred from their form of "justice."

Just when things seem to be going south (no pun intended), Scout suddenly appears.

The kids had gotten wind that Atticus might be in trouble and had gone to the jail. Scout notices the farmer Cunningham among the mob and naively reminds him of the way Atticus generously handled his legal fees. Cunningham calls off the mob just in the nick of time.

When Robinson's trial is underway, we see glimpses of how segregation worked back in the day. Black folks have to swelter in the top loft of the courthouse, while whites sit in the cooler main area downstairs.

Eventually, a central question emerges, for all of his kindness and compassion: Will Atticus prevail in defending a wrongfully accused, poor black man in the racially divided South?

First of all, even as a fan of Gregory Peck, I must say that this has to be one of his finest performances. His righteous demeanor and unwillingness to stand down in the face of racism are displayed with utmost skill not only in his character's subtle gestures but also his facial expressions. Child actors Badham and Alford are also convincing as his two children, Scout and Jem, respectively.

Through this film, we get a lens into what it was like in the racially charged South of yore when blacks often ended up on the wrong side of both lynch mobs and racial inequality in general. "To Kill a Mockingbird" is a fantastic cinematic adaptation of Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and, ultimately, an uplifting yet cautionary tale about judging others based on differences.

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

'To Kill a Mockingbird'

Director
Robert Mulligan

Starring
Gregory Peck, John Megna, Frank Overton

Running Time
2 hours, 9 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
March 16, 1963 (USA)

★★★★★

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