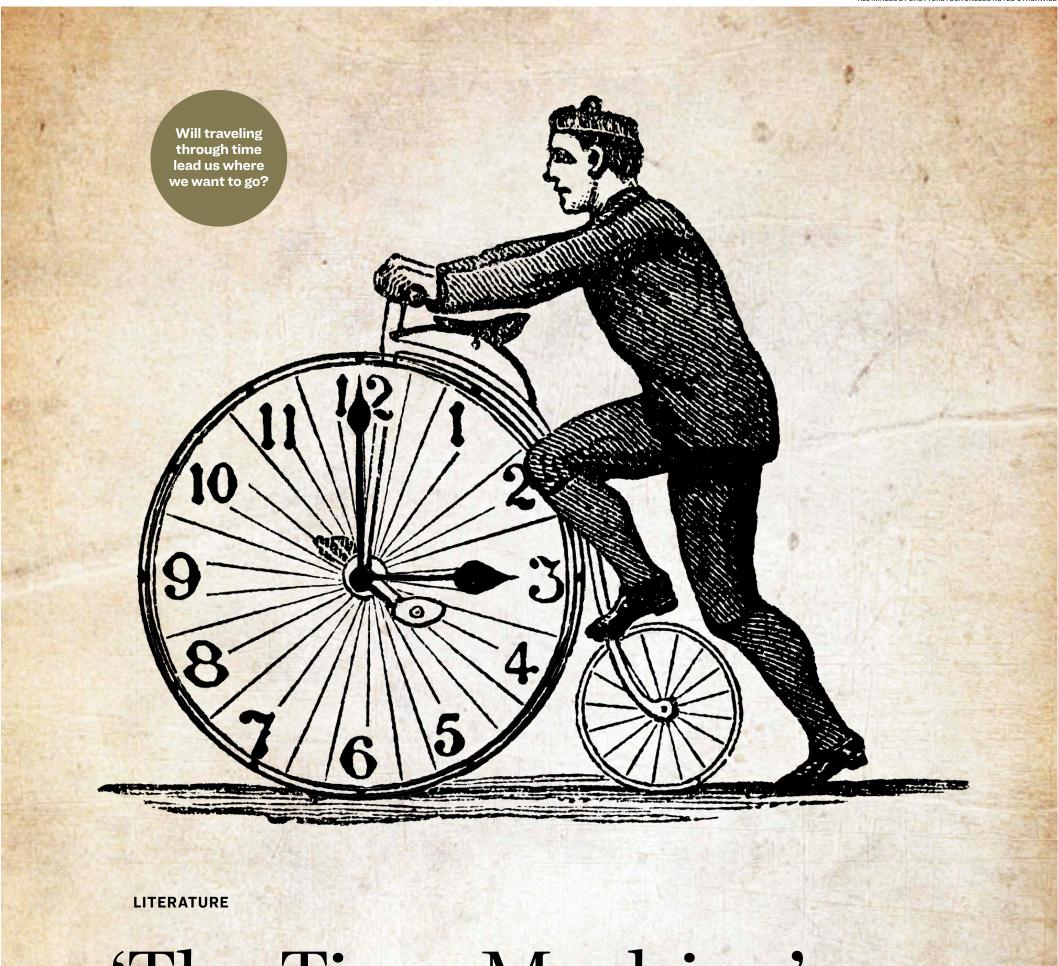
# THE EPOCH TIMES ARTS CULTURES CULTURES



# 'The Time Machine'

### An Everlasting Matter of Time

SEAN FITZPATRICK

n 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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# 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 no

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."

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 12, 2021

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

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.

family life in our nation, and for the

confusion and mayhem that so often

#### 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



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HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

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.



# '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 a cinema by turning a handle." their causes have been set in motion.

Moreover, as a fallen being, man tends to "We all have our time machines, don't fall and so does his civilization. Even the rising of empires seems only, in retrospect, take us back are memories ... And those a preparation for those inevitable falls that that carry us forward, are dreams." Even if trace the course of human history like a our dreams are different than Wells's, we downward spiral. Time is like a clock, a all dream for redemption as we look back

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 heaven on earth, and 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

we?" H.G. Wells remarked. "Those that

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 by traveling through time, like a soothsayer in this, in the fullness of time, that lies a or a scientist, that we are enlightened, but strange and secret peace, for the magniby traveling beyond time into unchanging tude 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."

Mother Teresa in 1979.

But what he, and perhaps Mr. Wells the secularist, missed is the point that it is not timelessness where deities laugh with the stars, indeed—but not with the laugh of the sphinx.

And to travel beyond time, one does not

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 spec-

An unlit candle and an age-old faded

tapestry mark the end of life. For Win-

tacles resting on a Bible.

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.



"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.





METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

1826, by Gustave Moreau. Bequest of William H. Herriman, 1920.

#### **BEHOLD THE BEAUTY**

# 'The Way of All Things'

#### **LORRAINE 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 wineglass 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 life represents the dimming of once brilin a more reflective time, looking back on liant 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."

einger, the extinguishing of the flame of *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.



**THEATER** 

# The Antidote to the Theater of Misery: The Natural Theater

#### **ROBERT COOPERMAN**

Look I know it's not a perfect show... but none of that matters . . . it does what a musical is supposed to do . . . it gives you a little tune to carry in your head . . . A little something to help you escape from the dreary horrors of the real world.

It's been 15 or so years since these lines were spoken by the "Man in Chair" in "The Drowsy Chaperone." Unfortunately, what struck me most upon seeing this otherwise fun and engaging musical were those final lines, particularly the bit about "the dreary horrors of the real world." Is that true? Do we attend theater not simply to forget about our pedestrian trials and tribulations, but to evade a reality that is just too much to American play is the underlying view that bear? In a world of "dreary horrors," is there the world is not an irredeemably hostile

world—and especially the United States is a rotten place, defined by bigotry, hypocrisy, and despair. This cheery view is often reflected in our theater, where miserable malcontents spend precious stage time lamenting their inadequacies and victimization, their failed relationships, and addictions. About the best we can hope for, according to another inexplicably popular show, is to be "next to normal."

Despite our being bombarded by this necessary." message day in and day out, it does not have to be the prevailing view in this country and certainly not one fostered by the arts.

#### **Enter the Natural Theater**

The Natural Theater takes its cue from the multiple meanings of the word "natural," starting with its use by our country's founding generation. We've all read (I hope) the Declaration of Independence, which references "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God." These laws endow all of us (yes, all of us!) with our natural, unalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. thus fall victim to it), but rather by striving This forms the philosophical underpintounderstand why their lonely stance is ning of our nation, from which we get the worth the struggle and what that struggle

Constitution as well as our unique and unprecedented approach to freedom.

Overall, it is a very positive but not Pollyannish view of life, one where we savor our liberty (after all, we were born with it) but recognize that we will struggle against our own natural tendencies as fallen human beings. As James Madison famously wrote (as Publius) in Federalist 51: "If Men were angels, no government would be nec-

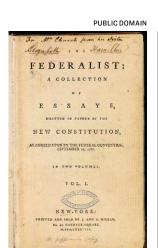
So, what has this brief history lesson to do with theater? Simply this: If we accept the idea that we are born free with natural rights, then we should expect this worldview to manifest itself in our cultural outcomes, including the arts.

What we should sense when we watch an For years, we have been told that the beings cause a temporary disturbance that the action will sort out when the curtain

This is not automatically the recipe for a "happy ending," however. It may be that the play ends with acceptance of the inevitabilities of life, with death a very real consequence. But even in death, something has either been set right or reaffirmed. To put Madison in a theatrical context, "if men were angels, no theater would be

The plays of the Natural Theater place the source of adversity either within a society that separates itself from the laws of nature or in the individual who has pursued a course in life that distances him or her from an otherwise well-functioning civilization. The protagonists of the Natural Theater are not defined by their victimization but by their heroic qualities (Oh, to have heroes again!) and capacity for self-reflection.

These characters do not seek refuge by declaring the world either mad or absurd (and



The title page of the first edition of "The Federalist: Written in Favour of the New Constitution, as Agreed Upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787," 1788, by Publius, a pseudonym for Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison. Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

An example of Theater of Misery: A scene Philip Ridley's "Mercury Fur" in which young men are in the business of selling hallucinogenic drugs, among other nefarious services, in a harrowing, gritty future. means in a larger sense for the furthering of the liberty that is natural to humankind.

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Where shall we find these plays? The truth is, we've had them for centuries. What has made plays such as "Oedipus Rex" and "Hamlet" remain vital and enlightening? Why have we turned our backs on plays about significant people who, for better or worse, command our attention?

Conversely, why do we fail to show an appreciation for the significance of everyday people who live their lives within the structure of an orderly society? Why have we instead tried to force a significance onto characters who are defined by the poor choices they've made or their alleged victimization by a hostile society? This type of theater represents an unnatural plane of existence, a world we neither aspire to nor want, where strength of character is eclipsed by the "unfairness" of life's realities. Surely, this is not the world the Founders envisioned, as they considered the elevation of character to be the glue that holds our republic together.

Consider, for example, Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." Why has "Our Town" endured? To be sure, there are no characters of worldly significance in the play. The conflicts in the small town of Grover's Corners that present themselves throughout the course of the action do not pose an existential threat to the masses (as does the plague in "Oedipus Rex"). And yet, the play examines the humanity shared by everyone—significant or not—who starts the morning with a new life and finishes the day contemplating the inevitability

Grover's Corners institutions, such as family and the church, help maintain the social order and provide refuge from the hostilities of the world, which are ever present but surmountable. "Our Town" endures because it depicts on stage the brilliance of the American founding—and the accompanying society it creates—without ever waving a flag.

#### Where We Are Now

The fact is, we have a scarcity of plays that conform to Natural Theater coming from our contemporary playwrights. Why is that? Part of the reason may be that we have devalued the philosophy of our founding to the point that it is considered—particularly in academic circles—to be merely one choice as a standard of living out of many, and not a particularly instructive

Another speculation is that the pervasiveness of Hollywood writing, with its reliance on sexual promiscuity, broken relationships, and the elevation of the least essential elements of our society (the criminal, the insane, the addicted, the victim) has raised a generation of writers incapable of embracing essential truths about human nature and who are content to equate violence and misery with deep meaning. Writers of this sort tend to use the theater space as a forum for group agony.

Plays of the Natural Theater use the theater space for collective redemption, lifeaffirmation, and, above all, the recognition that humanity is blessed, even in its darkest

Now perhaps more than ever, we need a return to Natural Theater, and I call on first our playwrights to seek higher ground. Our country cannot continue to thrive with art that debases it or seeks unity in misery. Instead, we should celebrate the world that our Founders set in motion, which is our one sure path to achieve true liberty in the natural sense of the word.

Robert Cooperman is the founder of Stage Right Theatrics, a theater company dedicated to the preservation of the founder's vision through the arts. Originally from Queens, New York, he now lives in Columbus, Ohio, where he earned his doctorate at The Ohio State University.

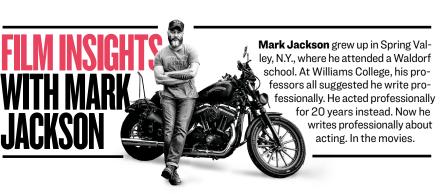


The 2019 Chicago production of the ancient Greek tragedy "Oedipus Rex" shows that classic plays endure. Oedipus (Kelvin Roston Jr.) and his daughter Antigone (Aeriel Williams) with Creon (Timothy Edward Kane) in back, in the





(Left) Butch Cassidy (Paul Newman, L) and the Sundance Kid (Robert Redford), trying to figure out who's relentlessly tracking them, in "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." (Right) Bear Claw (Will Geer, L) and Jeremiah Johnson (Robert Redford), in "Jeremiah Johnson."



# 5 Westerns That Capture the Essence of the American Wild West

#### **MARK JACKSON**

Here are five Westerns, from the late '60s on, that capture the essence of the American Wild West of the 1800s-two humorous, two serious, one comedic-dramatic, all top-notch, all good watchin'.

'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid' In 1969, this Western won four Oscars, was a massive hit, but got critically trounced. It's stood the test of time. Why? Four words: Robert Redford, Paul Newman.

Butch (Paul Newman) is the amiable bank & train robbing boss of the notorious Hole-in-the-Wall Gang, based in the Wyoming Rockies. The Sundance Kid (Robert Redford) is Butch's best bud and partner, but really more of a lone operator. Butch is the ideas guy, and Sundance is the fastest gun in the West.

Butch's gang pulls one too many robberies of freight trains owned by Mr. E.H. Harriman of the Union Pacific Railroad They're warned off numerous times (to no avail) by Harriman's hilariously hapless, loyal-as-a-dog, nasally bookkeeper Woodcock (George Furth), who braves getting dynamited rather than let Butch into the train's money safe.

Harriman, completely fed up, puts together a crack posse of super-persistent lawmen led by a legendary native tracker, like hellhounds on Butch and Sundance's trail.

The two, like a couple of harried Wiley E. Coyotes, can't shake this posse, which is the source of the movie's main running gag: the two outlaws peering around this butte or over that bluff, head-scratching, and muttering, "Who are those guys?" Talk about "runnin' from the law"—this is the definitive example.

Following a narrow escape, Butch has the bright idea of ditching the USA for Bolivia, taking Sundance's schoolteacher girlfriend, Etta Place (Katharine Ross), with





**Butch** Cassidy and the Sundance Kid' features the two leads in their golden era of 1970s mega-moviestardom.

them. Having fantasized about arriving in a cosmopolitan place, the chicken and llama-dung-filled train station produces a hilarious slow burn from Sundance, who's furious that he let himself fall for another of Butch's hare-brained schemes.

"Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" features the two leads in their golden era of 1970s mega-movie-stardom. Brad Pitt's archetype was similar to Redford's, but Pitt's charisma paled in comparison to the '70s peak-career Redford, and the shockingly handsome ol' blue-eyes Newman had no peer, then or since. It features classic alphamale buddy dialogue; the ribbing and oneupping is classic.

Best moment: Needing to jump off a high cliff into a river to escape the lawmen posse, Sundance hems and haws, and Butch says, "Would you make a jump like that if you didn't have to?" Sundance: "Well I have to and I'm not gonna." Sundance's wincing look of fuming shame when he's forced to admit he can't swim, under the barrage of Butch's derisive hooting, is priceless.

The only false, cutesy note was Newman joy-riding a newfangled contraption called a bicycle, to the extreme-muzak-friendly tune "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head."

#### 'Jeremiah Johnson'

Robert Redford in beard mode, same as Clint Eastwood, looks supremely rugged and suited to portraying characters of the American West. What the hat-and-ponchowearing, stubble-bearded Eastwood is to the high plains desert, the bush-bearded, fur-capped Redford is to deep-snow hunter-trappers of the Colorado Rockies.

Reflecting America's post-Vietnam War mood, Johnson, a war-weary mid-19th century U.S. Army vet, wants to get away from it all and find some peace, living in nature in the Rockies. This is the definitive lonewolf mountain man tale.

Johnson, a greenhorn in the ways of wilderness survival, fortunately crosses paths his nature to ... blend in. with a seasoned gray-beard trapper named

Jeremiah becomes royally frustrated with splashes about, trying to grab himself a trout. Looking up suddenly, he sees a taciturn Crow brave sitting on his horse a ways off in the distance, silently observing this inept clown show.

Meeting Paints His Shirt Red (a member of the Crow tribe) years later, Bear Claw you. He says you fish poorly." As the old trapper further explains, "Paints His Shirt Red speaks English fine. He just does this to aggravate me."

Johnson unavoidably violates an Indian burial ground and winds up losing his new Indian wife and their adopted child to a vendetta between himself and the Crow tribe. Johnson, however, proves a match for their warriors in one-on-one combat.

"Jeremiah Johnson" features gorgeous of modern life.

The only problem with "Jeremiah," similar to "Butch Cassidy," is the cheesy '70s music and the long pauses, which, in the 1970s seemed normal. Now, if a pause goes longer than 10 seconds, fingers itch for smartphone checking. Scratch that; that was the case 10 years ago—now, cellphones to the village compound." are on throughout entire movies. Makes you want to get away from it all.

#### 'Unforgiven'

(Top) William Munny

(Clint Eastwood) in

(Middle) Beans (L,

Depp), in "Rango."

(Bottom) Hugh Glass

voiced by Isla Fisher) and

Rango (voiced by Johnny

(Leonardo DiCaprio) get-

ting mauled by a grizzly,

"Unforgiven."

Of all the Clint Eastwood Westerns, "Unforgiven" carries the most gravitas. It's also the movie Eastwood starts spoofing his age to hilarious effect, trying to catch pigs and slipping in the mud, attempting to mount his horse and falling off, and, as a former gunfighter with a reputation not to be messed with (probably his "High Plains Drifter" character)—no longer able to shoot straight. William Munny (Eastwood) is a widower and drinking after marrying. His wife died scratch out a living on their hog farm and than any other film.

trying to be the kind of man his wife would have wanted him to be.

When a prostitute is disfigured by a pair of cowboys in Big Whiskey, Wyoming, her fellow house-of-ill-repute workers offer a reward to kill them. Big Whiskey's Sheriff Little Bill Daggett (Gene Hackman) is not happy about this arrangement, disallowing, as he does, vigilantism in his town.

Two groups of gunfighters, one led by Munny and the other by a Brit, Bob (Richard Harris), come to collect the reward, clashing with each other and the sheriff.

This is Eastwood's tribute to realism, cutting out the romance of the Western (that he himself fueled more than any other actor) down to the harsh, bare-bones, existential struggle of suffering that was, by and large, the diet of the American frontier.

This recommendation of Wild West Westerns would not be complete without one cartoon entry, and it's gotta be "Rango," although an excellent case could be made for the 1960s hit cartoon "Road Runner."

"Rango" has got all the Western, desert-y romance stuff (along with talking tarantulas and rattlesnakes drinking in saloons) and supports the early American myth that the western frontier was the place where you could manifest your dreams.

In an aquarium situated in the back of a car, lives a nameless, green chameleon (voiced by Johnny Depp). His is the unlikely cartoon story of a pet chameleon's hero's journey to the West.

He has a tremendous imagination, this lizard; he sees himself as an actor. But pretending that the inanimate objects in his aquarium are his friends and fellow actors has grown boring. He knows he needs a challenge. He's having an identity crisis. It's the height of the existential quandary particular to the chameleon: He wonders how best to stand out, when it's deeply in

His aquarium is jolted out of the car, and Bear Claw (Will Geer), who teaches him he's off on his transformational hero's jourrimitive skills as well as proper etiquette in 💎 ney, accidentally winding up in a frontier dealing with the native Crow tribal warriors. town called Dirt, where he becomes the Highlights: Trying to fish an icy creek, town's new sheriff. After seeing the word "Durango" on a bottle of cactus juice, in a his fishing gear, jumps into the river, and bar filled with all manner of drinking vermin, the chameleon claims that his name is ... Rango.

Being a classic goofy Johnny Depp character, Rango fakes it till he makes it, with all manner of bluster and mishap. When someone asks if he killed some outlaws known as The Jenkins Brothers, Rango claims to interprets for Johnson: "He says he knows have done it with just one bullet. And so on and so forth.

> Eventually exposed as a sham and disgraced, he makes his way back to the twolane highway he came from and collapses. This part is, believe it or not, deeply tragic and moving. He is then carried over the desert in a dream, where he encounters The Spirit of the West. The Spirit gives Rango courage.

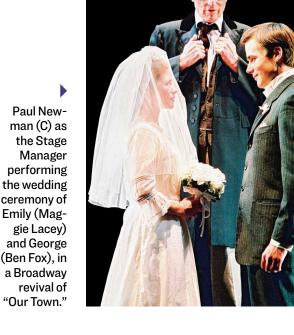
This Spirit of the West is one of the film's most inspired concepts, for the Spirit, although you never really see his face, has a wilderness scenery, humor, and, like 2015's hat, two-day beard, poncho, smokes a che-"The Revenant," provides the viewer with root, speaks in a husky whisper, and drives an immediate appreciation of the comforts a golf cart containing a bunch of Academy Awards. He's voiced by Timothy Olyphant, doing a dead-on Clint impression.

Rango eventually grows into his new role (this was his challenge, you see) and brings sustenance to Dirt in his role as sheriff. Which is known in the parlance of the hero's journey as "Bringing the gold back

#### 'The Revenant'

The main reason that "The Revenant" is on this list is that it depicts more than any Western to date, the miasma of suffering that hung over humankind, pre-industrial revolution. When it was freezing, there was no central heating; when it was boilinghot in the summertime, there was no air conditioning or bug spray; when food was scarce—which it always was—hunger hung about like a vulture; and when people took ill, they were dead and buried in no time.

It harks back to the lessons of the sages, with two young kids, who gave up shooting that life on earth is for the sole purpose of paying back karma through pain. "The of smallpox in 1878, but he continues to Revenant" depicts this, as mentioned, more





JOAN MARCUS/GETTY IMAGES





# Reuniting With the Divine: 'Sacred Love and Profane Love'

**ERIC BESS** 

s 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.

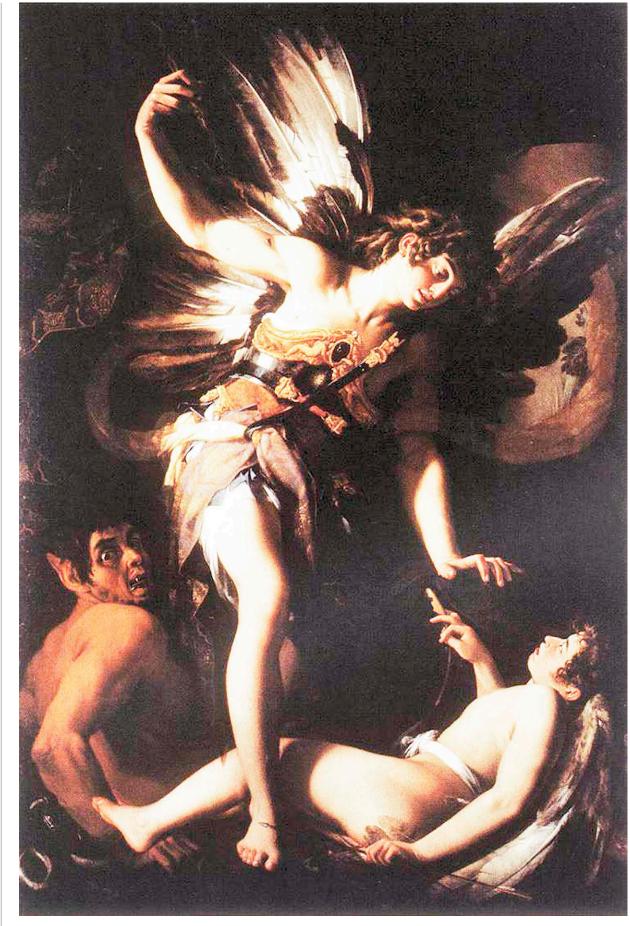
In the tenebristic fashion of this time. all of the figures are positioned against a background of darkness, which heightens their three-dimensionality and helps us focus on their interaction.

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



(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



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

Sacred Love is

represented

between the

Devil and the

child, wearing

ornate armor

and with an

otherworldly

arrow in his

right hand.

standing

upright,

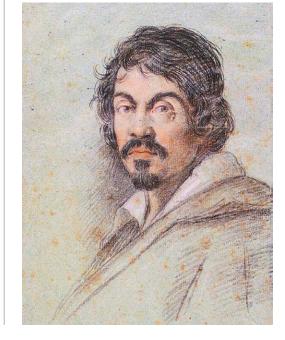
the Devil is very telling. The Roman god Cupid is often associated with using his arrow to instill lascivious desires in gods and humans alike. The Devil is often associated with tempting humans away from God and toward worldly pleasures.

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:

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



desires even when their power seems great or their number many. How might we identify the ways in and acts so that we might transcend them and reconnect with the divine

which we hide profane thoughts, speech, through sacred love? How can we strengthen the righteousness in our hearts and minds so that we may subdue the evil in our lives?

would be used to separate humans from

used to reconnect humans to the divine.

Sacred Love is love—a deep desire and

The positioning of the figures suggests

Cupid from the Devil. He stands between

that Sacred Love has come to separate

Cupid and the Devil and positions his

arrow at Cupid's heart. A prick from his

from the Devil's influence and reunite

Cupid with his divine nature.

arrow would elevate (that is, save) Cupid

The positioning of the figures reiterates

the power of Sacred Love: Our righteous

thoughts, when powered by a transcen-

dent love of the divine, will overpower,

overwhelm, and subdue all base and evil

the divine, the sacred arrow must be

care—for the divine.

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).



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, 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 contrabass)—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 thril 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 guar anteed to gain a new favorite in this lush, emotional serenade. If you begin to wonder how Tchai-

kovsky 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 ninepart 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 quicksilverfast 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.





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** 

irected 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 stand ing 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





(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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