

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

## POETRY

## Milton and the Sublime Part 2

The power of 'Paradise Lost' to astonish

JAMES SALE

In Part 1 of this article, we looked at how Keats in his poem "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" established a moment of pure sublimity in its final line; we looked at how he did this. The poem's structure is a movement: from mentioning something very small, a book, to something much bigger, a peak in Darien, which seemed to represent the very height of thinking or of ego. But this peak was dwarfed in size by the next mention, the Pacific Ocean—the unconscious, perhaps—the enormity of which stilled the critical faculty into silence and left Cortez and his men, like us, stupefied in wonder. In other words, the poem left them and us experiencing the sublime.

Keats is certainly a great poet, but now we come to one of the world's greatest masters: John Milton and his "Paradise Lost." Here, we don't deal with sublimity in a line or two, but in huge stretches or chunks of writing in which the sublime is consistently maintained. So, I hope you will want to read the whole excerpt for yourself ("Paradise Lost," book 4, lines 774–1012), and this can easily be found online. I shall, I hope judiciously, select some choice excerpts from this passage to make my points.

### 'Paradise Lost' and Sublimity

To quote Dr. Samuel Johnson, and to give what I consider to be a true flavor of Milton's poem, consider this: "The characteristic quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantic loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish."

How, then, does Milton do this?

This excerpt I have chosen begins at a highly significant and charged moment: Satan has escaped from Hell, crossed the void of Chaos and Anarchy, and arrived in Paradise, the Garden of Eden. We almost sympathize with him as he grieves to see the innocence before him, and which he has lost, but which he is determined to corrupt.

Meanwhile, now aware of Satan's forbidden presence in the Garden, the archangel Gabriel leads a force of angels to apprehend him. Two of them, Ithuriel and Zephon, searching the Garden, suddenly come across Satan, but not as they—or we—expect him:



PD-US

Satan, in his temptation of Eve, is usually depicted as a snake, as in this illustration by William Blake. But Milton also has him appear as a toad in his epic poem "Paradise Lost." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

**Surely, this is the highest form of poetry, and like some incredible Gothic cathedral is not the result of chance or random ideas or jottings, but of inspiration and technique.**

"... these to the bower direct  
In search of whom they sought: Him  
there they found  
Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve,  
Assaying by his devilish art to reach  
The organs of her fancy..."

Unexpectedly, the great adversary of God Almighty is "squat like a toad" at the ear of Eve. In this one compressed image—compressing the very frame and form of Satan—we perceive how changed he is, how far fallen from the great "hero" who fought in heaven's fields.

Indeed, the angels aren't sure who they have encountered:

"Him thus intent Ithuriel with his spear  
Touched lightly; for no falsehood can endure  
Touch of celestial temper, but returns  
Of force to its own likeness: Up he starts  
Discovered and surprised. As when a spark  
Lights on a heap of nitrous powder, laid  
Fit for the tun some magazine to store  
Against a rumored war, the smutty grain,  
With sudden blaze diffused, inflames the air;  
So started up in his own shape the Fiend.  
Back stepped those two fair angels, half amazed  
So sudden to behold the grisly king;  
Yet thus, unmoved with fear, accost him soon."

The "spear" that touches lightly in this



PUBLIC DOMAIN

A portrait of John Milton, 1670, by William Faithorne.

case is "truth," which "no falsehood can endure." Under its touch, Satan must appear as he is. What brilliant and surprising imagery: "spark ... lights ... nitrous powder" and then the rumor proves true. Satan has brought the war to Paradise. This is not a toad, and as the "smutty" (like a bad firework) grain explodes, we see him. Note how "inflames the air" not only connotes the firing of gunpowder but also has that secondary sense of "inflammation": Wherever he is, Satan causes inflammation of the system.

The toad has now become the "grisly king"—normal size, as it were.

Continued on Page 4



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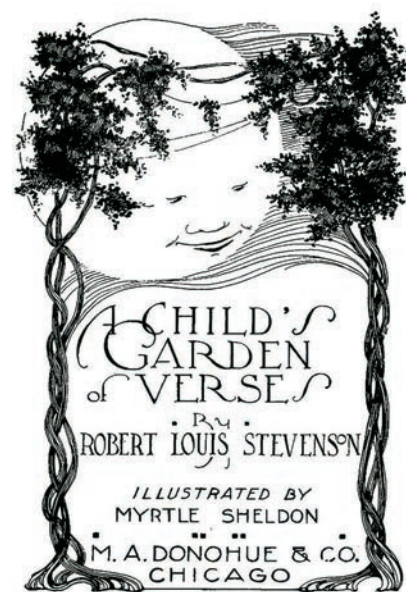
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CHILDREN'S POETRY

# The Mr. Rogers of Children's Poetry: Robert Louis Stevenson

JEFF MINICK

Television's Fred Rogers, the creator and chief actor of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," won accolades and fame for his ability to connect with small children. He spoke their language, understood their emotions, helped them understand the bigger world while also rendering it a place of enchantment, and acted as a gentle guide to life in general. The children watching his show often felt as if he was conversing with them directly. As one young viewer said, "I can't leave now. Who will Mr. Rogers talk to?"



Title page of a 1916 U.S. edition of Robert Louis Stevenson's book of children's poetry.

To "A Child's Garden of Verses," first published in 1885 and regarded as one of the most influential children's books of the 19th century, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) brought similar magic. In most of his poems, he wrote from the point of view of a child and addressed his young readers as equals. Like Mr. Rogers, he is tender, whimsical, engaging, and wise. We may remember him primarily as a

writer of such novels as "Treasure Island," "Kidnapped," and "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," but his children's poetry has also endured and has found a home in children's anthologies and, of course, in "A Child's Garden of Verses," which remains in print today.

### The Birth of a Dreamer

As an infant and into his adolescence, Stevenson required the care of a full-time nanny. He was sickly, plagued by a terrible cough, often weak, and suffered from horrible nightmares. His lung impairment, which lasted throughout his lifetime, forced him to spend much of his boyhood in bed. During that time, he developed his powers of the imagination, turning his bed covers into battlefields and castles, as shown in his poem "The Land of Counterpane" (a word meaning bedspread or quilt), and imagining exotic historical figures—kings, queens, and a troupe of others—parading through his room or down the street outside.

Later, Stevenson credited his nanny, Alison Cunningham, or "Cummy," with helping him through the long illness of his boyhood. Until his death at age 44, he often wrote letters to his former nanny and dedicated "A Child's Garden of Verses" to her. Here are the first two stanzas of "To Alison Cunningham":

"For the long nights you lay awake  
And watched for my unworthy sake:  
For your most comfortable hand  
That led me through the uneven land:  
For all the story-books you read:  
For all the pains you comforted:

For all you pitied, all you bore,  
In sad and happy days of yore:—  
My second Mother, my first Wife,  
The angel of my infant life—  
From the sick child, now well and old,  
Take, nurse, the little book you hold!"

ALL PHOTOS BY PUBLIC DOMAIN



A watercolor illustration for the poem "In the Land of Counterpane," in the 1905 edition of "A Child's Garden of Verses" by Robert Louis Stevenson.

### The Joys of Childhood

Despite the physical miseries of his younger years, Stevenson celebrated happiness, nature, and mystery in his poems for children, keen to make them aware of the magic of being alive. In "Rain," for example, he sought to expand their imaginations, reminding them of the world beyond their own backyard:

"The rain is raining all around,  
It falls on field and tree,  
It rains on the umbrellas here,  
And on the ships at sea."

"Escape at Bedtime" directs our eyes to the stars. Here's the first verse:

"The lights from the parlour and kitchen  
shone out  
Through the blinds and the windows and  
bars;  
And high overhead and all moving about,  
There were thousands of millions of stars.  
There ne'er were such thousands of leaves  
on a tree,  
Nor of people in church or the Park,  
As the crowds of the stars that looked  
down upon me,  
And that glittered and winked in the dark."

And most readers, I suspect, have read or know by heart Stevenson's "Happy Thought":

"The world is so full of a number of things,  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as  
kings."

### Through the Eyes of a Child

With a few exceptions, Stevenson wrote his poetry in first person, a child speaking for children. "Foreign Lands" gives us a child climbing a tree, looking first into a neighbor's garden and then at a "dimpling river," and at last speculating on what might be seen from a much higher tree:

"To where the roads on either hand  
Lead onward into fairy land,  
Where all the children dine at five,  
And all the playthings come alive."

Here, the poet remembers that childhood dream which entertained the notion that our dolls and toy soldiers might somehow breathe with life.

Those with small children or grandchildren who have battled to get the kids into bed while the sun is still shining will smile at "Bed



in Summer." In this poem, the child laments having "to go to bed and see/ The birds still hopping on the tree," with this ending:

"And does it not seem hard to you,  
When all the sky is clear and blue,  
And I should like so much to play,  
To have to go to bed by day?"

### Innocence and Experience

Most parents want their young ones to remain free from the experiences of adulthood—everything from politics to sexuality—until they are mature enough to handle such topics. Instead, we want them to exercise their imaginations, to build forts, dash about the yard pretending to be pirates, or dress up in a gown and tiara and so to become a princess.

In "Block City," Stevenson began with a question, "What are you able to build with your blocks?" and then proceeded to describe his "Castles and palaces, temples and docks" that he built as a child. Like my own grandchildren, the boy puts together his city of blocks, but then eventually dashes it down: "Block upon block lying scattered and free,/ What is there left of my town by the sea?"

"The Land of Story-Books" touts the importance to the imagination of literature and pictures:

"These are the hills, these are the woods,  
These are my starry solitudes;  
And there the river by whose brink  
The roaring lions come to drink."

◀ One of Robert Louis Stevenson's poems as used and illustrated in "A Little Book for a Little Cook," 1905.

The poem ends with this verse:

"So, when my nurse comes in for me,  
Home I return across the sea,  
And go to bed with backward looks  
At my dear land of story-books."

### Wonder

To most small children, the entire world is a place of wonderment and the miraculous. Their senses and perceptions are fresh, still being unpackaged with each passing day, so that even the smallest act—finding a penny in a parking lot, eating a slice of watermelon on a hot August afternoon, exploring the woods at the edge of the yard, listening to Mom read "Three Billy Goats Gruff"—is freighted with a significance that escapes adults.

In all these poems, Stevenson clearly aimed at enhancing this childhood sense of wonder. His verse reinforces this sense of awe and mystery our kids feel, though they lack the vocabulary and skill to express that wonderment. But even for those of us grownups who read these poems to the younger set, Stevenson has a message. He reminds us to remember the magic of our own childhoods, however far removed in years we are. "Block City" finishes with these words:

"Yet as I saw it, I see it again,  
The kirk and palace, the ships and the men,  
And as long as I live and where'er I may be,  
I'll always remember my town by the sea."

May we all do the same.

Endnote: Many different editions of "A Child's Garden of Verses" are available in libraries, bookstores, and online stores. For readers wishing to purchase the book, I urge you to compare these volumes, keeping in mind that the illustrations add immensely to the reading pleasure of these poems for both young and old.

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](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

Charming illustrations add a good deal to a child's pleasure in reading. Carmen L. Browne's illustration for the 1917 book "Sunny Rhymes for Happy Children."

With a few exceptions, Stevenson wrote his poetry in first person, a child speaking for children.

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POETRY

# Milton and the Sublime

## Part 2

The power of ‘Paradise Lost’ to astonish

Continued from Page 1

And this is where we begin to see the parallel with Keats’s poem. Like the book in Keats, we now have the toad in Milton—both are small things that suddenly increase in size. In Keats, the book inflates to the mountain peak on Darien; in Milton, we have the toad become the full-sized devil himself.

**A Great Confrontation**

But then they exchange words. Satan is not going to come along easily! A brilliant exchange of sarcasm and threats ensues, and Gabriel joins the fray:

“So threatened he [Gabriel]; but Satan to no threats Gave heed, but waxing more in rage replied. Then when I am thy captive talk of chains, Proud liminary Cherub, but ere then Far heavier load thyself expect to feel From my prevailing arm, though Heaven’s King Ride on thy wings, and thou with thy compeers, Used to the yoke, drawest his triumphant wheels In progress through the road of Heaven star-paved. While thus he spake, the angelic squadron bright Turned fiery red, sharpening in mooned horns Their phalanx, and began to hem him round With ported spears, as thick as when a field Of Ceres ripe for harvest waving bends Her bearded grove of ears, which way the wind Sways them; the careful plowman



The relief of Adam and Eve from “Paradise Lost” on the portal of the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Cyril and Methodius, by Vaclav Levy.

doubting stands, Left on the threshing floor his hopeless sheaves Prove chaff. On the other side, Satan, alarmed, Collecting all his might, dilated stood, Like Tenerife or Atlas, unremoved: His stature reached the sky, and on his crest Sat Horror plumed; nor wanted in his grasp What seemed both spear and shield: ...”

In this excerpt alone, can one not feel the heroic pulse of the verse as two great adversaries confront one another? I particularly love that detail “While thus he spake, the angelic squadron bright/ Turned fiery red, sharpening in mooned horns/ Their phalanx, ...” The fiery red, the color of blood and war. But notice again that as we are propelled toward some almighty bust-up—a classic fight perhaps between such as Achilles and Hector, or Aeneas and Turnus—the scale is suddenly increased yet again:

(Above left) Satan overlooks all of paradise, in an illustration by Gustave Doré for “Paradise Lost.”

(Above right) Ithuriel and Zephon searching the Garden for Satan in an illustration by Gustave Doré for “Paradise Lost.”

**The Eternal creates in this one moment the seventh sign of the zodiac, Libra.**

“... Satan, alarmed, Collecting all his might, dilated stood, Like Tenerife or Atlas, unremoved: His stature reached the sky ...”

Suddenly, from being merely devil-sized, he is now “dilated” like a giant mountain, like a Titan (as Atlas was), enormous in strength and power. And this corresponds to the third transmutation in Keats’s poem. In Keats we have the book, the mountain Darien, and then the Pacific Ocean. Here we have the toad, the devil-sized Satan, and finally the mountain tall as the sky in this epic confrontation. These changes in scale, whether we are conscious of them or not, excite us and begin to amaze us, too. Where will this end?

I ask this question, of course, because in Keats’s poem it led to what might almost seem an anticlimax: silence upon a peak. But it is not an anticlimax; on the contrary, as I have shown, it is an astounding ending and resolution. And here, Milton does not disappoint either because if the fight had actually occurred, then it is highly likely that we, as readers, would be disappointed; instead,

what Milton does is introduce a fourth level of scale and transformation!

**When The Eternal Enters the Fray** Satan is all worked up, ready to slug it out, but Gabriel is clearly “in the moment,” alert to all the signs—whatever they be—of the cosmos, and looking “up” so spies:

“The Eternal, to prevent such horrid fray, Hung forth in Heaven his golden scales, yet seen Betwixt Astraea and the Scorpion sign, Wherein all things created first he weighed,”

We get the amazing sense that to prevent the destruction of Earth in such a “horrid fray,” The Eternal creates in this one moment (though this is left ambiguously open) the seventh sign of the zodiac, Libra.

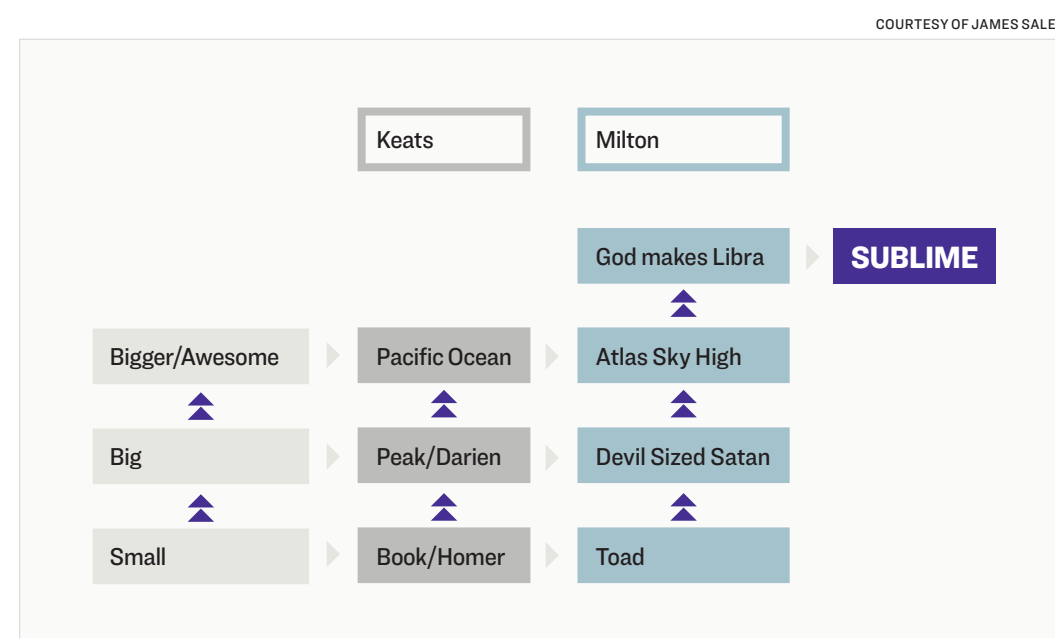
Aside from anything else, the sheer concept of it is sublime. Just imagine it: Dwarfing in size Atlas or Earth itself is a sign from Heaven. (Keats, too, packs into

his poem an astronomical reference to the planet Uranus, recently discovered at the time, though it isn’t as critical or sublime as in Milton’s usage for various reasons.) Surely, this is the highest form of poetry, and like some incredible Gothic cathedral is not the result of chance or random ideas or jottings, but of inspiration and technique.

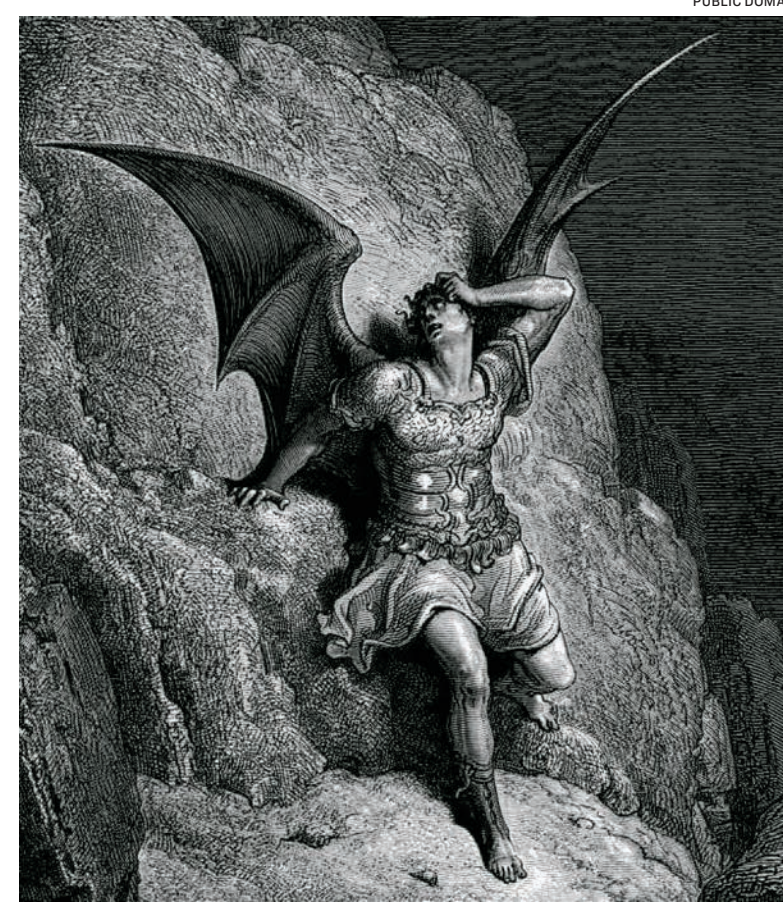
In my third article in this series on the sublime, we will look at some amazing aspects of this fourth level of transformation, as well as how Milton achieves the sublime in an almost reverse way as well.

To see Part One of this article, visit <https://ept.ms/ParadiseLostPart1>

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



A diagram showing how the poetry of Keats and Milton use imagery to describe the sublime.



Satan as he would appear at his normal size. An 1866 illustration by Gustave Doré.

ARMCHAIR ART

## A Virtual Tour of the Mauritshuis, in The Hague



Johannes Vermeer’s painting (R) “Girl With a Pearl Earring,” circa 1665, is probably the most well-known work of art in the Mauritshuis Collection.

**LORRAINE FERRIER**

With much of Europe gradually opening up after months of varying levels of lockdown, many of us may not be comfortable traveling across the Atlantic just yet.

It’s not the same, but in these unprecedented times, we can take solace in online art offerings. One great choice for seeing a world-renowned European collection is at the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, in The Hague, Netherlands.

If you’ve never heard of the Mauritshuis before, you would certainly know of its most celebrated painting. Here’s a clue: “Most people know us by that one painting by Johannes Vermeer,” Mauritshuis director Martine Gosselink says on the virtual tour. That painting is “Girl With a Pearl Earring.” That painting, along with 35 other paintings from the museum’s collection, can all be enjoyed in an online tour.

Late last year, the Mauritshuis became the first museum in the world to fully digitize its entire collection in gigapixel format, which, according to the press release, means that each image is 1,000 megapixels. That’s more than 100 times the size of images on your smartphone.

On the Mauritshuis website, Gosselink warmly introduces the museum tour with a brief history of the museum, which is located in a former 17th-century city palace built by the governor of Dutch Brazil.

The Dutch masters, of course, form the core of the Mauritshuis’s collection, in particular those of the 17th-century Dutch Golden Age. Three Vermeers and four Rembrandts are in the collection.

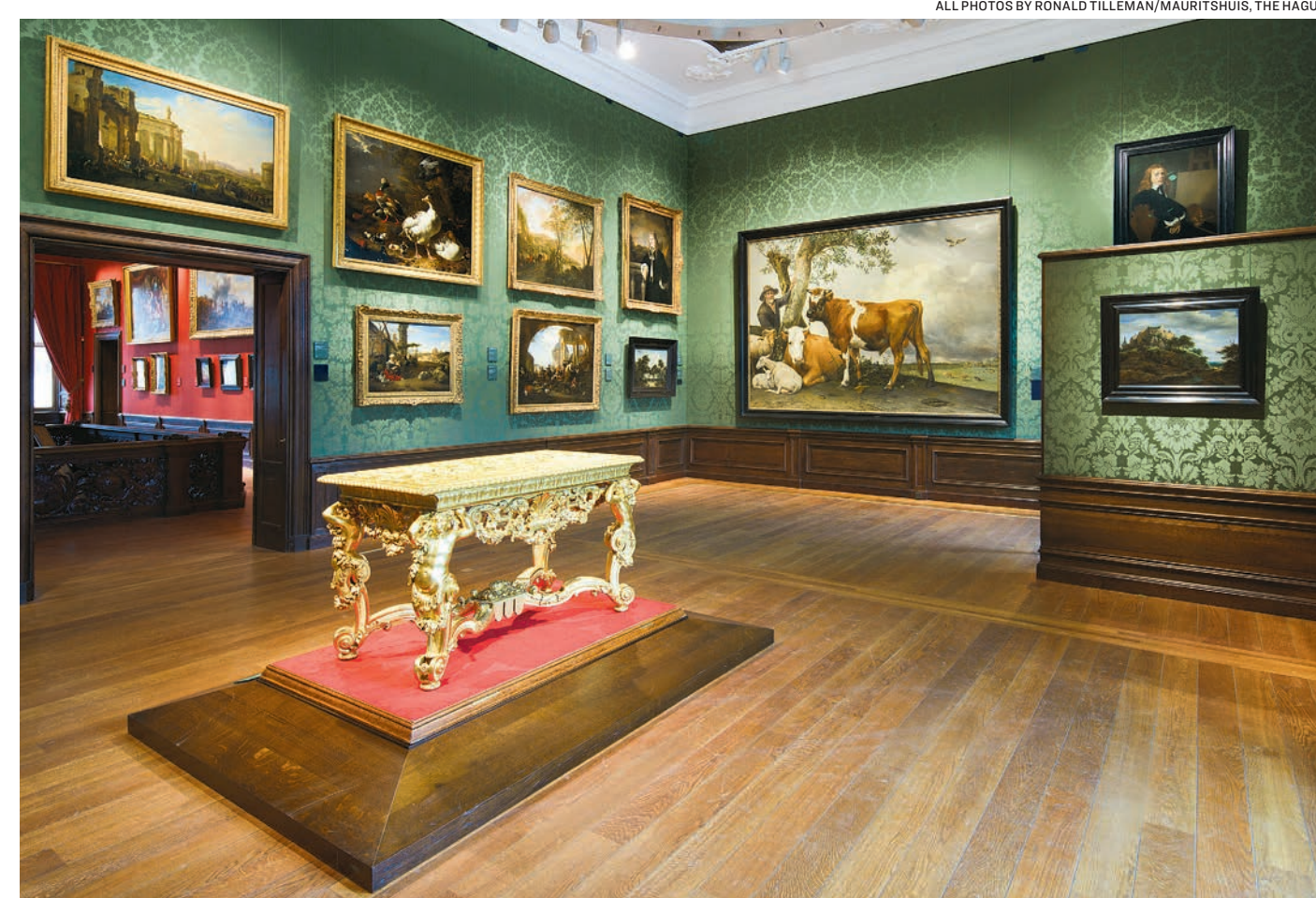
Online visitors can enjoy a virtual wandering through the stunning interiors while viewing each artwork through a number of different interactive tools. For example, in her introductory talk, Gosselink shows us a summary of the museum’s masterpieces. In one Rembrandt painting, “The Anatomy

Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp,” we can see a lively, young Rembrandt studying in an anatomy class. Then in one of his last self-portraits, we can see him as an old man.

Or visitors can opt to explore the museum on their own. For instance, clicking on Vermeer’s painting “Girl With a Pearl Earring,” you can opt to hear an audio about the work, then choose to see specific details of the painting with an explanation of how Vermeer painted the girl, and then you can home in on details in either the normal painting view or an infrared version.

All these options are fascinating, yet they’re nothing compared to seeing the paint on canvas in person. But the tour is certainly a brilliant way to see a master collection and appreciate the great artistry involved both in creating and caring for these great works.

To take a virtual tour of the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, visit [Mauritshuis.nl](http://Mauritshuis.nl)



Pictured in the center is one of the many masterpieces in the Mauritshuis Collection: “The Bull,” 1647, by Paulus Potter. Potter rendered his bull in a huge scale and in minute detail.

ALL PHOTOS BY RONALD TILLEMAN/MAURITSHUIS, THE HAGUE



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF JUSTIN RYAN KENDALL



## FINE ARTS

# Making Classic Masterpieces Available to Americans

Sculptor Justin Ryan Kendall's Fountainhead Gipsoteca

## LORRAINE FERRIER

From his basement studio in Brooklyn, New York, American sculptor Justin Ryan Kendall creates affordable plaster casts of classic masterpieces. At any one time, he could be simultaneously casting a mask of Mary from Michelangelo's "Pietà," a bust of Costanza Bonarelli by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, or a fragment of a work, perhaps the nose of "David" by Michelangelo.

Kendall is so keen to preserve important historic masterpieces via his plaster cast reproductions that he's somewhat pausing in his career as a sculptor to develop his plaster cast business, he said in a telephone interview.

Recently, he won first place for his sculpture "Prometheus" in the Fully From Life category at the Art Renewal Center 14th International ARC Salon Competition (2019–2020).

Primarily traditional art teachers and students order his plaster casts as study aids to copy and to develop their skills. But the casts also appeal to lovers of art and art history.

## In Florence

Kendall first began collecting plaster casts in the cradle of the Renaissance—Florence, Italy—where he was studying at The Florence Academy of Art. The academy is a private school, founded by fellow American artist Daniel Graves in 1991.

After he graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a bachelor's in fine arts, Kendall spent two years saving up for his tuition at the academy. Since he is interested in traditional art practices, he now considers the time he spent at the university to have been a failed process.

He found The Florence Academy of Art online and was astounded by the high level of the sculptures from the likes of alumni Alicia Ponzo and Cody Swanson, and former program director Robert Bodem. He thought that perhaps the academy was just showcasing the most talented artists and the best of the students' art on its website. But when he became an academy student himself, he saw that the students start at different skill levels and all develop to a high standard.

Of his time at the academy, he said, "[It was] a true Renaissance for me, in a lot of

1. Plaster cast bust of Costanza Bonarelli by Gian Lorenzo Bernini; 25 inches tall.

2. Plaster cast mask of Mary from the "Pietà" by Michelangelo; 14 inches by 10 inches.

3. Plaster cast mask of "David" by Michelangelo; 27 inches by 18 inches.

4. Plaster cast mask of Laocoön from the sculptural group "Laocoön and His Sons" by Agesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus; 16 inches by 11 inches.

5. A life-size plaster cast portrait of a woman by Gaetano Cellini; 15 inches tall.



Sculptor Justin Ryan Kendall creating his award-winning sculpture "Prometheus" in clay. Kendall won two awards for the finished sculpture at the 14th International ARC Salon Competition (2019–2020): first place in the Fully From Life category and an honorable mention in the sculpture category.

ways." Before moving to Florence, he'd only seen the masterworks of artists he admired, such as Bernini, Donatello, and Michelangelo, in books or on the computer screen. But, of course, being in Florence, not only did he learn traditional art skills, but he also had many of the original sculptures close by to admire and copy. "Being able to see a sculpture in person, you can't substitute for that," he said.

## Learning From the Masters

Kendall's fascination with plaster casts began at the academy. Copying plaster casts of masterworks is part of the academy's traditional atelier training. It's a tradition that dates from centuries ago, when students needed to proficiently draw the casts first before moving on to rendering paintings or sculptures.

Kendall learned a lot by replicating the works of past masters. "The plaster casts are really great learning tools," he said. He advises aspiring artists to copy masterworks too: "Identify the artists you admire, and then just try copying their work."

During his studies in Florence, Kendall started purchasing a few casts from local craftsmen to copy and refine his artistic skills. He not only copied the casts but also repaired them. Often when plaster casts are made, imperfections such as air bubbles may form, he explained.

An imperfect plaster cast is problematic. If that cast is to be used to make more casts, the silicone rubber used to make the mold will perfectly replicate the minutest of details.

## Affordable Casts for All

Back in the United States, Kendall used the plaster casts he collected in Florence to create molds and plaster casts. He first made a few available to friends and posted a few images of them on Instagram. It was a low-key approach to start with, and a way that he could fund his plaster cast collecting. It wasn't until the summer of 2020, after he started to expand his collection, that he began to promote the plaster casts as a business.

He named his business The Fountainhead Gipsoteca (Italian for "plaster cast collection"). "I decided to use 'Gipsoteca' for part of the name as a nod to my time in Florence and the history of Italian sculpture in general," he said.

When he promoted the plaster casts on

Facebook's groups for artists, he got positive responses. "People were kind of excited. These plaster casts are normally pretty expensive ... so it's nice to be able to offer something affordable," he said.

Kendall is creating a certain kind of camaraderie through his business, a sort of network of traditional artists who love to tell him how they're working with the casts. "So it's been fun. I've been meeting a lot of really cool people. ... What's really cool is when an [atelier or academy] teacher buys them, and then they send or post photos of the work that their students do from the cast. It's always nice to see," he said.

Beyond the plaster casts being used as study aids, Kendall says, "It's also a good way to introduce people to classical sculpture for those that can't get out and see it in person."

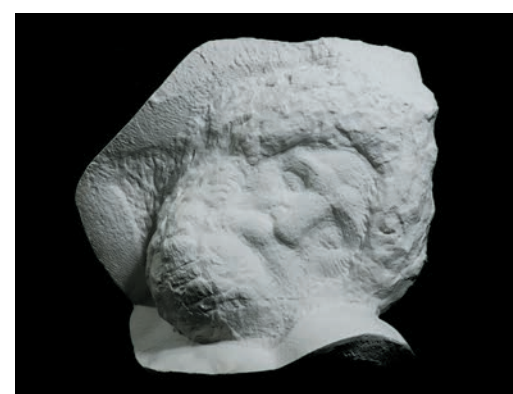
## Preserving Inspirational Art

Kendall is fascinated with each plaster cast he owns. And since he's been back in the United States, and far away from the original sculptures, his collection of some 40 or 50 plaster casts constantly informs his own art. "If I'm sculpting a portrait, I now have casts of works by Bernini, Michelangelo, and some less-known or even unnamed artists, where I can see what they did. I can hold it in front of me and really see it," he said.

One of his particular favorites is a mask of "The Bearded Slave" by Michelangelo, which was cast from an unfinished sculpture that was to be part of Pope Julius II's tomb, although that project was eventually abandoned. Kendall enjoys the large scale of the unfinished face and all its details. And he loves that Michelangelo didn't finish the piece. "You can get a sense of how he carved, and how he worked. And just seeing the process—kind of paused forever—is really interesting," he said.

Kendall's plaster cast collection is far from finished. In the future, he would love to increase the variety of his collection, including the addition of life-size statues. He also intends to create more of his own sculptures and open a teaching studio. And one of his long-term goals is to open a gallery or museum where students and art lovers alike can come to copy, touch, and purchase plaster cast pieces.

To discover more about sculptor Justin Ryan Kendall's plaster casts, visit [FountainheadCasts.com](http://FountainheadCasts.com)



Plaster cast mask of "The Bearded Slave" by Michelangelo; 24 inches by 20 inches.



(L–R) Nikita Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi), Georgy Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor), Anastas Mikoyan (Paul Whitehouse), and Lavrentiy Beria (Simon Russell Beale) try to appear dismayed at Stalin's apparent death, in "The Death of Stalin."

## FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Get Inspired About America

## MARK JACKSON

Writer-director Armando Iannucci, who created HBO's political satire "Veep," has with "The Death of Stalin" created a period satire that shines a light on the scrambling, flailing, and power grabs of the political cockroaches and cronies in Joseph Stalin's inner circle, immediately following his death. It feels pretty timely in light of our current political chaos.

The events surrounding the 1953 death of Stalin (Adrian McLoughlin)—the second leader of the Soviet Union—starts off with a scene in a concert hall, where a piano concerto has just been performed.

Stalin, who'd been listening to it on the radio, calls up the concert venue and demands a recording. However, nobody'd thought to make a recording, so the horrified sound engineer rushes out and bullies the departing crowd back into their seats, and wheedles, cajoles, and threatens the pianist (Olga Kurylenko) to re-do the whole concert. Saying "no" to comrade Stalin would, of course, mean immediate execution. On his watch, death squads are perennially rounding up "enemies" and shooting them.

Stalin soon undergoes the titular death, which looks heart attack-ish. Then, members of his Central Committee—Nikita Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi); Vyacheslav Molotov (Michael Palin); Field Marshal Zhukov (Jason Isaacs), who is leader of the Red Army; and Georgy Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor), the mealy-mouthed secretary who takes charge—immediately start up a political version of a rugby scrum. They vie for power with all manner of jealousy, posturing, subterfuge, thinly veiled threats, outright threats, doublespeak, backstabbing, and mercurially shifting alliances.

Best positioned to replace Stalin is Lavrentiy Beria (Simon Russell Beale), chief of the secret police. The sadistic (and pedophilic) Beria's snide and bullying behavior does not endear him to the rest of the Stalin administration, and he's soon targeted for a takedown.

## No Russian Accents

The entire cast use their natural accents, which range from posh British to Cockney to Tambor's and Buscemi's American, with no attempted Russian accents anywhere, which puts it all somewhat in a Monty Python milieu, a feeling that is heightened, naturally, by the presence of Python emeritus Michael Palin in the cast.

## 'The Death of Stalin'

Director  
Armando Iannucci

Starring  
Steve Buscemi, Jason Isaacs, Jeffrey Tambor, Michael Palin, Simon Russell Beale, Olga Kurylenko

## Rated

R  
Running Time  
1 hour, 47 minutes

Release Date  
Sept. 8, 2017

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The film is a good primer for what America can look forward to if we don't abide by our Constitution.

(Above) (L–R) Anastas Mikoyan (Paul Whitehouse), Lazar Kaganovich (Dermot Crowley), Nikita Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi), Georgy Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor), and Nikolai Bulganin (Paul Chahidi) preside at Stalin's funeral; and (below) (L–R) Soon-to-be-leader Nikita Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi), pianist Maria Veniaminovna Yudina (Olga Kurylenko), and chief of the secret police Lavrentiy Beria (Simon Russell Beale) view Stalin's body, in "The Death of Stalin."

Iannucci doesn't take the tragedy of the story lightly; we do hear gunshots galore. But all the gunshots combined with the constant, bumbling attempts of politicians to feign woe and grief about Stalin's death while being secretly delighted, and the constant attempts to avoid saying anything that can be misconstrued by colleagues in the insidious way that communism loves to misconstrue—it all eventually functions, again, as a running gag with a distinctly Python-ian flavor, thereby highlighting the absurdity of communism.

The following bit of Python-ism, reworked slightly, could have easily fit in the script:

Dennis (Eric Idle): "What I object to is you automatically treat me like an inferior."

King Arthur (Graham Chapman): "Well I am king."

Dennis: "Oh, king eh? Very nice. And how'd you get that, eh? By exploiting the workers. By hanging on to outdated imperialist dogma which perpetuates the economic and social differences in our society."

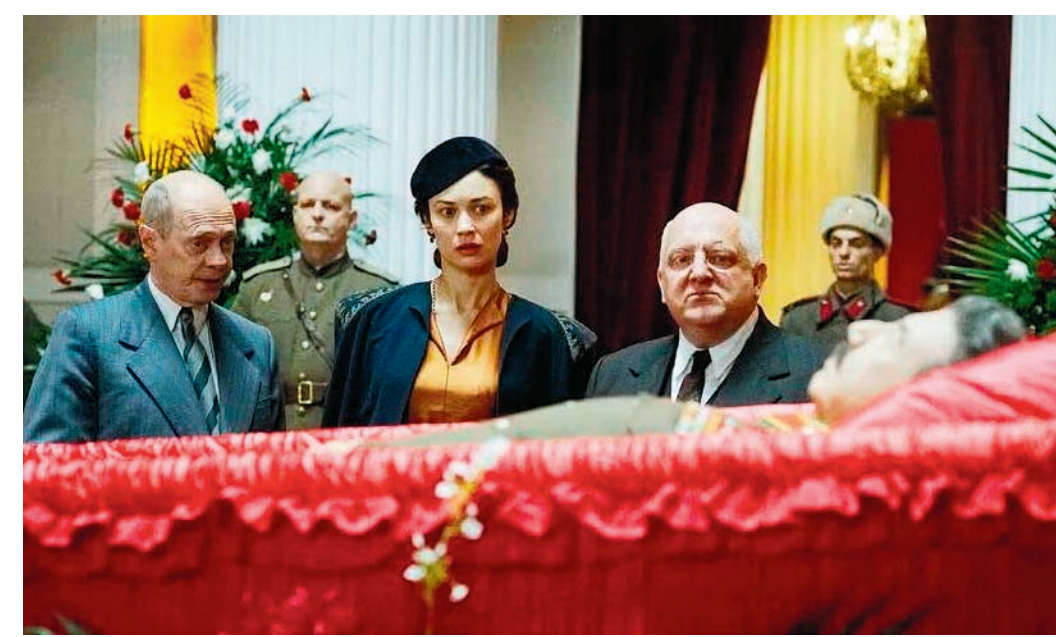
Compare it to the real script:

(Zhukov punches Beria):  
Field Marshal Zhukov: Want a job done properly, you call the army. Take his belt off. It's hard to run away with your pants falling down.

Nikita Khrushchev: (to Malenkov) If you want to talk to General Zhukov, now's your opportunity.

Zhukov: Spit it out, Georgy. Staging a coup here.

Georgy Malenkov: He's got a knife by his ankle.



(Top) Field Marshal Zhukov, leader of the Red Army (Jason Isaacs, front with rifle); (middle) pallbearers (first two visible, L–R) Nikita Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi) and Vyacheslav Molotov (Michael Palin); and (above) men awaiting execution in a labor camp in Soviet Russia, in "The Death of Stalin."

Lavrentiy Beria: You're a disgrace!

Lazar Kaganovich: Give his head a good kicking. Make you feel better.

Vyacheslav Molotov: All in good time.

Lavrentiy Beria: Oh, I'm gonna enjoy peeling the skin from your self-satisfied face.

Zhukov: (holds up the little knife and scoffs) Not with that, you won't."

## Did It Go This Way?

The real death of Stalin most certainly didn't go like it's portrayed here, but who really knows how much backstabbing went on? How many of his supporters instantaneously morphed into power-addicted madmen?

For those unfamiliar with the extent of Stalin's dedication to the staggering death count of his fellow countrymen and women, "The Death of Stalin" is a painless way to take this bitter pill of knowledge. Basically, if Russians weren't being arrested or shot dead in the streets, they were on one of Stalin's lists to either be executed or sent to the Siberian Gulags.

All of the above is, as mentioned, deeply farcical with sight gags galore, but since it's grounded in a fair amount of political reality, if you're feeling the need to have a "history lesson" without getting depressed by the utter horror and sickness of the reality, "The Death of Stalin" is not a bad way to go. It's also a good primer for what America can look forward to if we don't abide by our Constitution.

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REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

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# Against All Odds: The Courage of Washington Crossing the Delaware

ERIC BESS

We are often encouraged to realize our dreams over the course of our lives. Some want to start a business; some want to be mathematicians or scientists; and others want to play music, act, or create. Quite often, however, we are bombarded with difficulties when we try to reach our goals.

I recently came across a painting I often went to visit when I lived in New York: "Washington Crossing the Delaware" by Emanuel Leutze. Leutze's depiction makes me consider the importance of freedom and how vital courage is when we wish to achieve something great.

## An Inspired Leutze

Despite being considered an American painter, Leutze was actually born in Germany. He spent his youth in Philadelphia with his father until the age of 25, at which point he returned to Germany to enroll in the Royal Art Academy in Düsseldorf. By the time he had returned to Germany, he had already grown to appreciate the ideals of freedom that so many Americans held dear.

Back in Germany, governmental restrictions on liberty caused Leutze to "compose an enormous homage to George Washington and the exemplary spirit that declared independence for the British colonies in North America," according to the book "Washington Crossing the Delaware: Restoring An American Masterpiece," published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Leutze decided that he would portray, as accurately as possible, a historical rendition of Washington crossing the Delaware River. It was Christmas night when Washington attacked the Hessians (German soldiers supported by the British). Before this point, the American troops were being beaten badly. The Christmas night of 1776, however, would prove to be a turning point in the war.

Inspired by this story, Leutze employed his American friends to be models for the group of men depicted in his painting, including Col. James Monroe, who is holding the flag, and Gen. Nathanael Greene, who is depicted in the foreground as leaning over the boat's edge. "The others represent the loyal ranks of local fishermen and militiamen cast into service for the dangerous trek across the river," the website states.

Leutze went so far as to acquire replicas of the uniforms from the U.S. Patent Office to get as accurate a depiction as possible. He also used Jean-Antoine Houdon's sculpted bust of Washington as a reference for his painting.

Leutze painted two versions of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," with the first being damaged by a fire in 1850 and then destroyed during World War II. The second is now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

"The painting's popularity—due to its scale, theme and iconic subject matter—ensured that the image was emblazoned on the minds of mid-19th-century Americans," the museum states. And it continues to endure as a "staple of the American art historical canon, and as one of the most recognizable images to the museum-going public."

## 'Washington Crossing the Delaware'

In the painting, Leutze depicts Washington as the focal point, with his sword sheathed but revealed. The general stands courageously at the front of the boat, which is traveling to the left, and so he faces the danger ahead of him.

Three men at the very front of the boat and two men toward the back help navigate the boat through the icy waters. Some of the other men toward the rear of the boat seem worried, which reveals the danger of the event and contrasts with the calm confidence of Washington.

Behind Washington is Monroe, who holds the flag, and Greene, who leans over the boat's edge. They both stare intently toward their objective.

There are several boats in the distance that accompany Washington's in the icy waters of the Delaware. The cool colors—



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"Washington Crossing the Delaware," 1851, by Emanuel Leutze. Oil on canvas, 12.4 feet by 21.3 feet. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**This painting and the event it captures can serve as a reminder of the courageous state of mind often required to achieve our everyday goals.**

blue, green, purple—add to the sense of cold that Leutze depicts.

Washington crosses the Delaware at night. Leutze chose to depict the planet Venus, the morning star, at the top left of the composition, which suggests the coming dawn.

According to the Metropolitan Museum, "The star plays an important role in the composition, both in setting the time of the event during the hours just before dawn and as a symbol of the dawn of hope during the darkest days of the American Revolution."

## Against All Odds

Initially, the American troops were losing the Revolutionary War. The British were proving both strong and efficient. Because of these difficulties, the new nation could have redacted its Declaration of Independence and given up, but the emerging nation didn't, and herein lies the risk and reward of freedom and success.

Freedom and success are cherished because they don't come easily; they require sacrifice and the ability to navigate hardship and difficulties with the type of cool confidence and courage exemplified by Washington.

Washington faces the difficulty ahead; he doesn't run from it or worry about it. He has a goal—a goal of freedom—and the significance of accomplishing his goal seems to fuel his courage.

Interestingly enough, in a nation founded on individual freedom, Washington can't accomplish this task alone. He needs the help of all of the others depicted. They all must secure their individual freedom by working together.

All of the soldiers must confront the dangers ahead and the icy waters that are right in front of them. Both the journey and the destination of this night are riddled with danger, difficulty, and complications. Even the darkness on the right side of the sky suggests the soldiers' past challenges.

What's important, however, is the end goal of freedom, which is represented by the morning star. Without letting the dif-

iculties stop them from moving forward, the soldiers move toward the morning star; the soldiers move toward success and freedom.

As we move throughout our lives and try to accomplish our goals, this painting and the event it captures can serve as a reminder of the courageous state of mind often required to achieve our everyday goals and the deep appreciation we should have for freedom itself.

*The traditional arts often contain spiritual representations and symbols the meanings of which can be lost to our modern minds.*

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



(Left and below) Details of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," 1851, by Emanuel Leutze. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



MUSIC

# Perseverance in Love Wins in the End

The famous Schumann versus Wieck battle

MICHAEL KUREK

Two extremes predominate in writing about the great composers: a tendency to romanticize and mythologize them into inspired demigods, and the current tendency to pull their statues down from their pedestals or perhaps their little composer busts from our pianos. This second view focuses on all of their human flaws, whether real or imagined on scant evidence. One thing is usually above guesswork, though, the concrete historical record in things such as birth certificates, deeds, and lawsuits.

The romance of Robert and Clara Schumann involved legal proceedings that tell their own fascinating story, without any need for embellishment. First, the backstory: In 1828, at age 18, Robert was compelled by his family to matriculate at law school in Leipzig, but he had become increasingly enamored by the music of Franz Schubert and was already a fine pianist and composing some piano music and songs. Music eventually won out, of course, and apart from law school, Leipzig offered the opportunity to take piano lessons with the renowned piano teacher Friedrich Wieck and to live in a room in the Wieck house. Wieck had a 9-year-old daughter named Clara. She was already a child prodigy and concertizing and gaining fame as a pianist, and she found a kindred spirit and friend in Robert, who was a little over nine years older.

## A Romance Blooms and Is Curtailed

During the summer of 1834, at 24, Robert became engaged to the 16-year-old Ernestine von Fricken, who had been adopted by a wealthy, noble family, but he also began to feel a mutual attraction with Clara, who had turned 16 herself in September. In December, when Clara was giving a concert in Zwickau, Robert and Clara secretly declared their love for each other. The catalyst to break the engagement with Ernestine finally came during the following year, after Ernestine was discovered to be illegitimate and would have no dowry. Meanwhile, Friedrich Wieck had discovered his famous daughter's relationship with Robert and in 1835 ordered them to cut off all contact with each other and to burn their letters.

Wieck had determined that Robert, though his own gifted piano student and well educated, was fundamentally lazy, drank too much, and would amount to little in the future. Certainly, he felt Robert was no match for his extraordinary Clara. In truth, Clara and Robert were both extraordinary, and that became their great bond.

The lovers endured a 16-month forced separation, but it wasn't spent in vain. Robert composed his masterful Fantasy in C Major, Opus 17 for piano in 1836. He also co-founded and began editing the traditionalist musical publication *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Journal for Music). Clara began her transition from child prodigy to young piano virtuoso and composer in her own right, completing her very substantial Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 7 and performing it with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835.

However, love willed out, and the couple began corresponding in secret and catching a brief rendezvous when they could. In 1837, Robert formally asked Wieck for his daughter's hand in marriage and was summarily



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An 1847 lithograph of Robert and Clara Schumann.

refused. It may come as a surprise to some today that a father then had such absolute power over whom his daughter could marry, but such was the case. Yet two more years passed, and Wieck began to threaten Clara with disinheritance and to take the couple to court (something like a restraining order) if she didn't cut off completely from Robert.

## The Couple Battle for Their Love

Clara decided to fight back and consulted a lawyer of her own. She signed an affidavit granting Robert the legal power of attorney over her, and she sent that document to Robert. In turn, he took that to his attorney in Leipzig and asked him to seek an out-of-court settlement with Wieck, but Wieck was intransigent, and the matter was set to go to court. Robert was so pessimistic about his chances that he wrote to Clara saying that he had been so distraught the previous day that, had they been together, he would have suggested they commit joint suicide.

Things went from bad to worse. Wieck stated that he would never relent and boycotted the court hearing, and Clara packed up her bags and moved to Berlin to live with her mother, who had separated from her tyrannical father (and ultimately divorced him). Wieck then made a proposal to the court: He would allow Clara to marry Robert if she gave up all the money she had earned concertizing for the last seven years, paid him a monthly fee to store her piano and belongings in his house, and if Robert would agree to guarantee him a huge sum in the event the marriage failed.



Clara Wieck in an idealized lithograph by Andreas Staub, circa 1839.



A lithographic portrait of Robert Schumann by Josef Kriehuber in 1839.



An illustration from the 1906 book "Famous Composers and their Works," v. 2.

They eventually ended up in court, where Wieck had filed a complaint that Robert was an alcoholic and financially unable to support his daughter as a pianist, due to a hand injury. Robert had tried out a finger-strengthening mechanical device called a dactylion, which actually did injure one or two of his fingers. Fortunately for us, this did cause him to put his greatest energies thereafter into composing. Wieck also circulated his complaint publicly in all the cities in which Clara was scheduled to perform in the coming months. Robert told Clara, "Can nothing be done to save us from such nastiness?"

Robert fought back with testimonies of his good character from the Leipzig town council, police, and even the composer Felix Mendelssohn. The court took several months to make a decision but finally settled fully in the couple's favor. At last, they were free to marry and did so on Sept. 12, 1840, the day before Clara's 21st birthday. Had they waited just one more day, she would have been 21 and legally free to marry without her father's permission!

The Schumanns went on to have eight children, and Friedrich Wieck finally softened his heart and decided to reconcile with them, in part to be able to enjoy his grandchildren.

American composer Michael Kurek is 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](https://www.MichaelKurek.com)

**Clara and Robert were both extraordinary, and that became their great bond.**



The grave of Robert and Clara Schumann in Bonn, Germany.



## REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# A Multifaceted Character Study of a Politician From a Bygone Era

IAN KANE

Celebrated American director John Ford is probably best remembered for his excellent Westerns, such as “Stagecoach” (1939) and “Rio Grande” (1950). As a consequence, many of the non-Western films either have been underrated or flew under the cinematic radar.

For one such film, “The Last Hurrah,” Ford couldn’t have picked a more fascinating storyline. Based on a 1956 bestselling book of the same title by Edwin O’ Connor (and adapted by screenwriter Frank S. Nugent), the film is centered on a fictional Irish-American politician named Frank Skeffington (Spencer Tracy).

It is set in an unnamed East Coast city, where Skeffington has successfully served four nonconsecutive terms as mayor. As his “last hurrah,” the film begins as he has announced his intent to run for mayor for a fifth term. (He also served as a governor.) But times have changed. It’s true that Skeffington has a large cadre of political lackeys and hangers-on, including a veritable army of ward heelers. But a decline in ward-based politics, shifting demographics, and the rising popularity of television (something Skeffington isn’t quite comfortable with) are all elements that stand in his way.

Also, besides Skeffington’s up-and-coming mayoral rival, a war veteran named Kevin McCluskey (Charles B. Fitzsimons), numerous political enemies are arrayed against him. These foes include the Protestant Bishop Gardner (Basil Ruysdael), Catholic Cardinal Martin Burke (Donald Crisp), powerful banking head Norman Cass (Basil Rathbone), and highly influential newspaper mogul Amos Force (John Carradine).

## A Fading Era

Skeffington wants someone to document his last ride out into the political sunset. But his son, Frank Skeffington Jr. (Arthur

Walsh), is a ne’er-do-well who is more interested in fast women and nightclubs than his father’s career. Therefore, the elder Skeffington enlists his nephew Adam Caulfield (Jeffrey Hunter) to follow and observe his day-to-day political endeavors.

As the film progresses, we get insights into Skeffington’s inner circle, such as his ever-loyal lackey “Ditto” Boland (Edward Brophy), “Cuke” Gillen (James Gleason), and John Gorman (Pat O’Brien). Just like Skeffington, all of these men are older and products of a bygone political era. However, they are also fiercely loyal and very experienced in the game of politics.

“The Last Hurrah” is as much a character study as it is a political drama or satire. Through Tracy’s ample acting chops, Skeffington is revealed to be a multidimensional personality with sometimes contradictory characteristics.

For instance, when a wake is held for an unpopular friend of Skeffington’s at the local funeral home, Caulfield follows him there and begins to think that Skeffington is attending the wake for selfish, political reasons. But he finds out that Skeffington is there sincerely in recognition of his deceased friend. Indeed, we see Skeffington secretly give the widow (Anna Lee) \$1,000.

Later, however, Skeffington confronts the funeral parlor’s hapless director, Johnny Degnan (Bob Sweeney), and threatens to manufacture some unfavorable press about the funeral parlor unless Degnan lowers the cost of the lavish funeral. These different elements of Skeffington’s character—sometimes a benefactor, other times a bully—are interesting to behold, and the film’s peppy comedic turns keep everything from becoming too dark.

While Spencer Tracy is in his usual top form, I never realized how Jeffrey Hunter’s acting was. Like many performers, Hunter’s life had a series of bad breaks and he died at the young age of 42. And although I love seeing Dianne Foster in any film, and she received third billing, she was shown in



Spencer Tracy (L) and Jeffrey Hunter in “The Last Hurrah.”



(L-R) Dianne Foster, Spencer Tracy, and Jeffrey Hunter.

## ‘The Last Hurrah’

**Director**  
John Ford

**Starring**  
Spencer Tracy, Jeffrey Hunter, Dianne Foster

**Running Time**  
2 hours, 1 minute

**Not Rated**

**Release Date**  
1958

★★★★★

only a few scenes as Caulfield’s wife Maeve, unfortunately. The rest of the supporting cast is also a pleasure to watch.

Ironically, “The Last Hurrah” is one of John Ford’s last great non-Western films. (The excellent “How the West Was Won” came out just a few years later, in 1962.) It’s a fascinating film based on real-life former Boston mayor and Massachusetts Governor James Michael Curley, as well as a highly entertaining character study of a complex man.

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



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