

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



In “Paradise Lost,” Milton enlarges our souls with his poetic lines telling of a courageous Seraph, Abdiel, who faced a multitude of fallen angels with only his faith to defend him. An illustration by Gustave Doré for John Milton’s “Paradise Lost.”

## LITERATURE

# Milton and the Sublime *Part 3*

# Enlarging Our Souls With ‘Paradise Lost’



**‘Sublimity is, so to say, the image of greatness of soul.’**

*From “On the Sublime,” attributed to Longinus, Greek writer*

## JAMES SALE

Do we want to be better people? Do we want our character to improve? And do you want your own soul to realize its full potential? If so, then coming into contact with the sublime and specifically sublime literature can change you. Reading Milton’s “Paradise Lost” can show us the way to enlarge our own sense of being through its imaginative power.

In Part 2 of this series of articles on the sublime, we saw how Milton scaled up imagery or size as a method of creating a sense of wonder in us. But before returning to our analysis of Book 4 and more, it might be pertinent just to remind ourselves of why Longinus (whom we cited extensively in Part 1 of this series) considered this so important.

In the famous essay conventionally attributed to him, “On the Sublime,” Longinus argued that “When a writer uses any other resources he shows himself to be a

man; but the Sublime lifts him near to the great spirit of the Deity.”

Keep in mind here that the word “Deity” is not predicating Christianity, since he was almost certainly a pagan. But what he is saying is that all other writing techniques outside of the “sublime” are human inventions and techniques, and have human effects. But in this one special case—the sublime—we get lifted near to the great spirit of the Deity.

This special case clearly is transformative: We cannot, our souls cannot, but be enlarged by being near Deity. We become, in short, better people—more like the divine, in fact, to the extent that we can be in this life.

And the converse is also true, as Longinus says, for he argues: “Wherever a man takes to worshipping what is mortal and irrational in him, and neglects to cherish what is immortal, these are the inevitable results.”

*Continued on Page 4*



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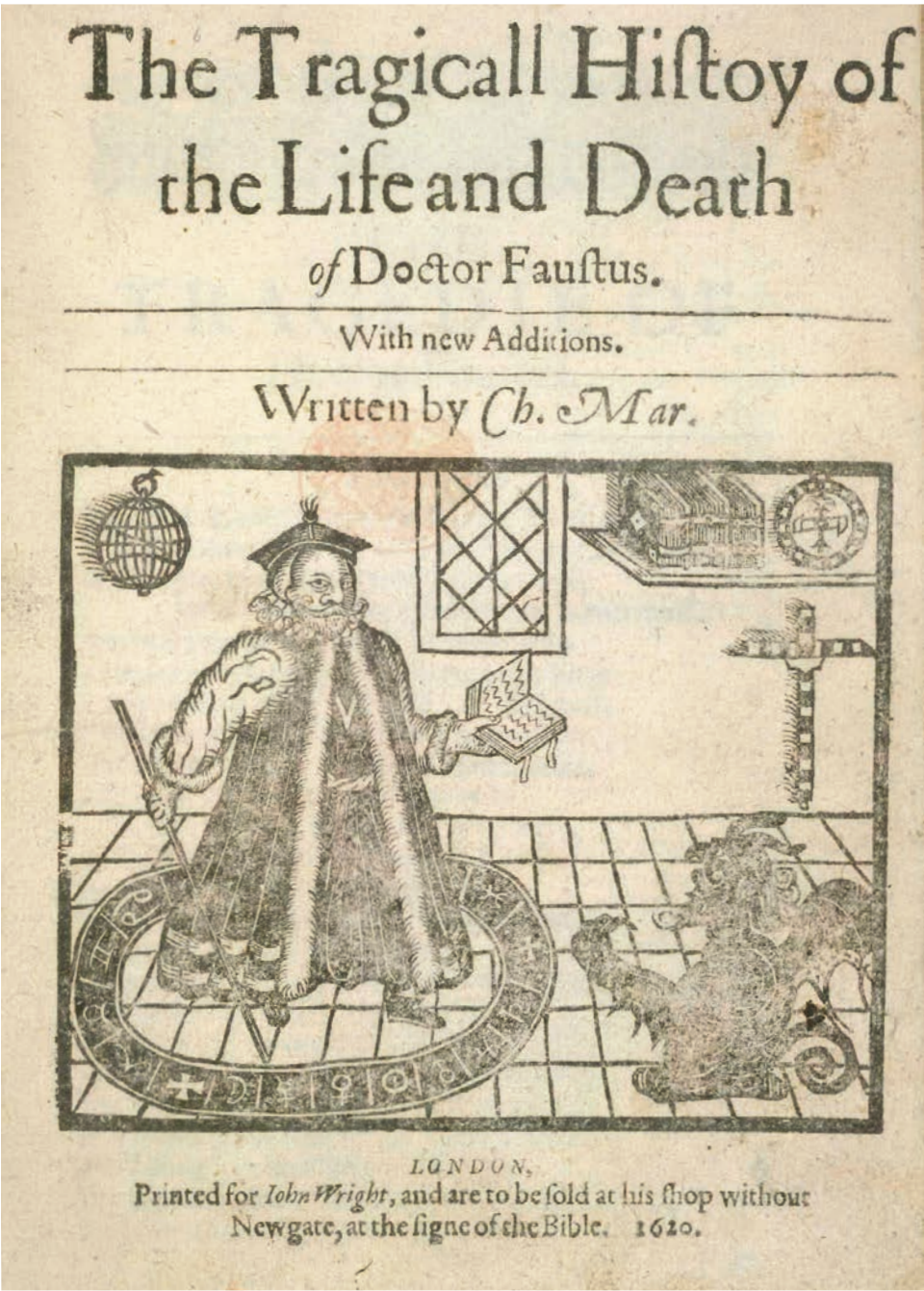
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Title page of a 1620 edition of Christopher Marlowe's "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus," with a woodcut illustration of Doctor Faustus and a devil coming up through a trapdoor.

# The World, the Flesh, and the Devil

Christopher Marlowe’s ‘The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus’

JEFF MINICK

A member of Congress wakes one night and finds Lucifer standing at the foot of his bed and staring at him. “What do you want?” he asks.

“I want to give you everything you desire or could imagine,” Lucifer answered. “You’ll be reelected in every election. You’ll have a fortune beyond your wildest dreams, beautiful women, mansions, expensive cars, a yacht. You name it, and it’s yours.”

The Congressman sat up in bed. “Wow, that sounds great! But what’s in it for you?”

“In 24 years, you give me your immortal soul,” Lucifer replied.

The Congressman was astonished, but then burst out laughing. “No, really, come on. What’s the catch?”

That old joke, or its variations, speaks volumes about modernity. Like our ancestors, we still see evil in the world, but in our age of science, psychology, social science, and statistics we nearly always look to genetics, circumstances, or environment as explanations for wickedness. Childhood abuse accounts for the man who shoots up a tavern; a boatload of debt drives the executive who embezzles money and bankrupts her company; ideology infects and sickens the dictator who orders millions executed.

Rarely in these explications do we hear about evil or the human soul. And certainly no one in the public square brings up the devil.

Which brings us to “Doctor Faustus.”

**The Basic Plot**

Christopher Marlowe’s 17th-century play “The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus,” now routinely referred to as “Doctor Faustus,” is based on the stories told of Johann Faust, a German magician and alchemist who became a Renaissance legend. In Marlowe’s play, Faustus is a professor and intellectual star at the University of Wittenberg. Eager to win greater fame and power, he turns

away from logic, reason, and theology and seeks to gain power through the use of magic.

Very quickly in the play, Faustus finds himself in league with Lucifer and his emissary, Mephistophilis. He signs a contract in his own blood affirming that in exchange for his soul, these dark powers will give him all that he wishes for the next 24 years. For the most part, Faustus abuses or wastes these powers, thinking of little but his personal gain, spending time playing jokes on the pope, for example, or demanding the affections of Helen of Troy.

Meanwhile, Faustus dithers back and forth between God and Lucifer, inclined to seek forgiveness from God but then returning to his alliance with evil. Finally, he believes that his time for the possible expiation of his sins has run out and he sees himself as doomed. “For the vain pleasure of four and twenty years,” Faustus says near the end of the play, “hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity. I writ them a bill with my own blood. The date is expired.”

And so Faustus dies, estranged from heaven, his body torn apart by demons, and his soul dispatched to hell. The play ends with these lines:

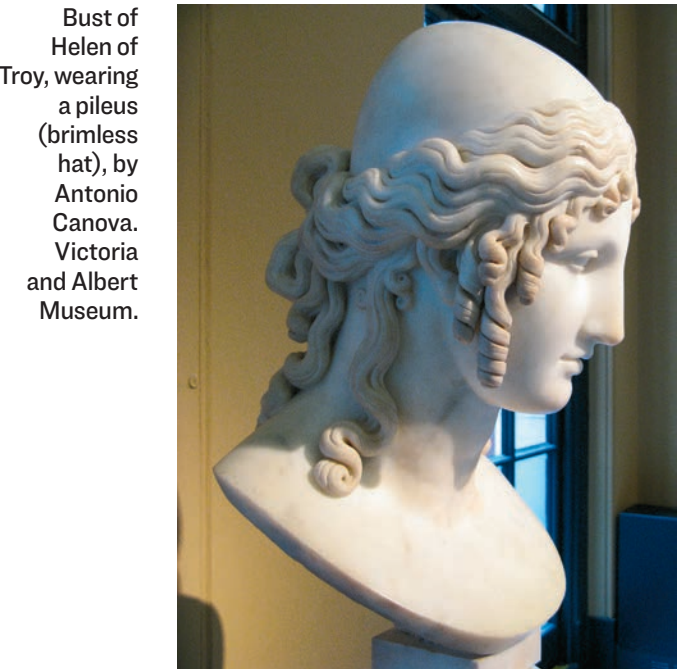
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise  
Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits  
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

**Pride Goeth Before a Fall**

His enormous ego and intellectual arrogance at first blind Faustus to the consequences of his flirtations with the diabolic. In Act 1, for example, when Mephistophilis pays his first visit, Faustus tells him:

The word “damnation” terrifies not me  
For I confound hell in Elysium.  
My ghost be with the old philosophers!

And when Mephistophilis tries to



warn Faustus about the loss of heaven that awaits him if he continues this course, Faustus replies:

What, is great Mephistophilis so passionate  
For being deprived of the joys of heaven?  
Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude  
And scorn those joys thou shalt never possess.

Even after he has met Mephistophilis and signs the diabolical contract, the hubristic Faustus declares, “I think hell’s a fable.”

In the end, Faustus’s overweening pride brings his destruction.

**Power**

Had I as many souls as there be stars  
I’d give them all for Mephistophilis.  
By him I’ll be a great emperor of the world,  
And make a bridge through moving air  
To pass the ocean with a band of men;

Here in this early scene, we hear Faustus speculating on the power that will soon belong to him, the ability to control the earth and all that dwell upon it. This newfound power will not draw on logic or reason, but on magic and the supernatural—the dark arts that allow their practitioner to step outside the order and laws of the physical realm and so control nature and human beings.

“Power tends to corrupt,” Lord Acton famously stated, “and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Faustus will soon learn this lesson in corruption known to every absolutist monarch and dictator who ever lived.

**Lust**

In Act 5, near the end of the play, Faustus implores Mephistophilis to grant him the affections of Helen of Troy.

That I may have unto my paramour  
That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,  
Whose sweet embraces may extinguish clear  
These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,  
And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.

Mephistophilis grants this wish, and when Helen enters, Faustus speaks the most famous lines of this play:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.  
Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!  
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips.

We may construe these lines as compliments rendered by a man smitten with beauty, a bouquet of words to win affection, but something more sinister lies at the heart of this laudatory speech. Helen has no power to make Faustus immortal, and the lines “Her lips suck forth my soul” and “heaven is in these lips” tell us that Faustus, like so many others before and after him, has mistaken the pleasures of the flesh for the raptures of heaven.

**An Upside-Down World**

At one point, Lucifer and Belzebub entertain Faustus by parading before him the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery. After these seven explain themselves and exit the stage, Faustus exclaims, “O, how this sight doth delight my soul!”

Lucifer then reassures him, “But Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.”

Here Faustus, encouraged by Lucifer, turns the moral order on its head.

Scenes such as this one, found throughout the play, demonstrate the give-and-take between the tempted and the tempter. Lucifer and Mephistophilis offer a banquet of enticements, and Faustus, so brilliant as a scholar, lacks the foresight and wisdom to refuse them.

**Lessons From ‘Doctor Faustus’**

**Mephistophilis offers a banquet of enticements, and Faustus, so brilliant as a scholar, lacks the foresight and wisdom to refuse them.**



The devil Mephistophilis in Faust stories goes by many names. “Mephisto,” after 1883, by Mark Antokolski.

Is there a more appropriate play than “Doctor Faustus” for the 21st century?

Some of us may no longer believe in hell or Lucifer, the Father of Lies; but the “Faustian bargain,” when we exchange our principles or upright character for power, fame, or wealth, remains very much in play. The same temptations faced by Faustus—the blind pride, the burning desire for power, the greed, the belief that we can be as gods and shape the world and human beings as we wish in spite of their nature, and the same catastrophic falls into ruin and disgrace—occur all the time in our postmodern world. We can daily read the stories of these modern-day versions of Faustus in our newspapers and online blogs.

Some American politicians and statesmen, for example, believed we could build a modern nation-state out of Afghanistan. Others more recently told us that our departure from that country would be orderly, an analysis far removed from reality. Some experts are certain that we humans can control manifestations of nature, like gender or the climate. Some Hollywood moguls believe they can take sexual advantage of actors and actresses, too far above the law to be in danger of detection or punishment. Because of pride and their conviction that they know what’s best for the rest of us, some of our elite—members of our Congress and our governors, men and women in media and academia, the big tech gang—behave like Faustus as well, wielding power as if they were great emperors of the world.

This self-exaltation often leaves such people, and the rest of us as well, blind to the ending of their own stories, oblivious to the possibility of shame and wreckage ahead of them, the demolition of their good name and character. They overlook what Faustus realized with only one hour left on his contract:

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,  
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn’d.

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



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LITERATURE

# Milton and the Sublime *Part 3*

## Enlarging Our Souls With ‘Paradise Lost’

Continued from *Page 1*

These “inevitable results” of neglecting the divine (and so the sublime), he defines as “Violence, and Lawlessness, and Shamelessness—engendered in the soul of pitiless tyrants.” These, then, are compelling reasons for reading and studying sublime works of literature.

**Exploring ‘Paradise Lost’**  
It might be instructive to look a little closer at why the reference to and creation of the sign of Libra in the heavens in Book 4 (lines 774-1012; and this can easily be found online) is so potent, so astonishing, and so sublime.

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,

First, there is an understated astrological progression: Satan begins as a toad at the ear of Eve, the woman, who represents Astraea, the Greek virgin goddess of justice, innocence, purity, and precision. Astraea, the perfect woman, ascends to become the constellation Virgo. This is where Satan begins his tempting of Eve.  
Following, we now come to the judgment of Satan’s power as we move from Virgo to the sign of Libra, the Scales, but proleptically leading to—as Satan eventually will effect in the poem—the next sign, Scorpio (“betwixt Astrea and the Scorpion sign,” Book 4, line 995). Scorpio has traditionally represented death, and also resurrection since the eagle is a hidden symbol associated with this sign. Thus, Milton, in describing Satan fleeing from the Garden,

The Fiend looked up, and knew  
His mounted scale aloft: Nor more;  
but fled  
Murmuring, and with him fled the  
shades of night. (Book 4, lines 1010-12)

also anticipates (by allusion to the Scorpio sign) the banishment of mankind from the Garden, and so too humanity’s death, both of which Satan will return to engineer. But what an astonishing progression in scale and in conception! Satan flees, therefore, because the sign of Libra infallibly informs him that he will lose the contest; the balance will not weigh in his direction. After all, the Eternal creates in this one moment (though this is left ambiguously open) the seventh sign of the zodiac, Libra.  
Thus, the scale of all this—the stars themselves acting in concert with God’s will—is nothing short of astonishing; that is, sublime. And this exactly corresponds with how, as we cited in the first part of this article, Longinus describes the effect of sublime writing: “Adding word to word, until it has raised a majestic and harmonious structure—can we wonder if all this enchants us, wherever we meet with it, and filling us with the sense of pomp and dignity and sublimity, and whatever else it embraces, gains a complete mastery over our minds?”  
But this ability that Milton has to evoke the sublime in his poetry is not confined to just one short excerpt. Wherever we look, we find more examples of it. In Book 5, for example, we see another incident in which Milton astonishes us with the sublimity of his conceptions and of his writing. This time, however, rather than scaling up the size to create his effects (as in Book 4), he seems to do the reverse.

**But Small Can Be Big Too!**  
Consider these small excerpts from Book 5 of “Paradise Lost”:

... For how shall I relate  
To human sense the invisible exploits  
Of warring Spirits? how, without remorse,  
The ruin of so many glorious once  
And perfect while they stood? how last unfold  
The secrets of another world, perhaps  
Not lawful to reveal? (Book 5, lines 564-70)



In “Paradise Lost,” Milton associates Greek constellations with Bible stories. For example, he links Eve, the first woman in Genesis, with Astraea, the Greek virgin goddess of justice, innocence, purity, and precision who ascends to heaven to become the constellation Virgo. “Astraea Leaves the Earth,” circa 1665, by Salvator Rosa. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

**The scale of all this—the stars themselves acting in concert with God’s will—is nothing short of astonishing; that is, sublime.**

Here, the angel Raphael is relating to Adam what happened in heaven at the beginning that led to the fall of a third of the angels of heaven. Here, we are not starting small, in other words; we are starting at the gigantic level of billions of beings—a number beyond imagination—and beings, heavenly creatures, we can barely comprehend, as Raphael makes clear. We are entering into this world that is so incredibly above and beyond our own, our comprehension of it is going to be stretched, and we are going to be astonished!  
But note what subsequently happens in the narrative:  
... This report,  
These tidings carry to the anointed King;  
And fly, ere evil intercept thy flight.  
He said; and, as the sound of waters deep,

Hoarse murmur echoed to his words apostrophe  
Through the infinite host; nor less for that  
The flaming Seraph fearless, though alone  
Encompassed round with foes, thus answered bold.  
Oh alienate from God, Oh Spirit accursed,  
Forsaken of all good! I see thy fall  
Determined. ... (Lines 869-79)  
Satan, having enticed a third of the host of heaven to join his banner and revolt against God, finds there is one solitary Seraph whom he cannot suborn: Abdiel. “Fly,” or run away, Satan enjoins the Seraph, lest “evil intercept thy flight.” And to this, the “infinite host”—spiritual beings and powers whom earlier we are told are “an host innumerable as the stars of night”—applauds like the “sound of waters

deep, Hoarse murmur.”  
Notice again the scale of it. The overwhelming scale: infinite, deep, and that threatening sense of “murmur,” often used in the sense of murmuring against someone. Here, it is against Abdiel. Satan seems to have achieved what he wanted: the acclamation and support of his followers.  
And here, we now go in the reverse direction: Not bigger still or more scaled up, but instead we revert to one small human virtue, perhaps the most basic and admirable of all—courage. The pivotal virtue as Winston Churchill remarked: “Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities ... because it is the quality which guarantees all others.”  
And where is courage most evident? When the odds are overwhelming, when the desire to go with the crowd is its most intense, when alone and without companions, we face the ultimate test. When we are small and face the big (think David versus Goliath). From the infinite host, suddenly the focus is on the Seraph, “fearless, though alone/ Encompassed round with foes.” That is a sublime moment; we are astonished at his courage.  
And then the Seraph’s retort:

... For soon expect to feel  
His thunder on thy head, devouring fire.  
Then who created thee lamenting learn,  
When who can uncreate thee thou shalt know. (Lines 892-95)

He answers Satan, not only revealing his bravery but also his faith: “Soon expect to feel.” The Seraph’s certainty of knowing what will happen before it happens is based on the nature of inexorable reality, or in this case, the nature of God.  
Book 5 ends with the following account of Abdiel:

So spake the Seraph Abdiel, faithful found  
Among the faithless, faithful only he;  
Among innumerable false, unmoved,  
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;  
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought  
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,  
Though single. From amidst them forth he passed,  
Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained  
Superior, nor of violence feared aught;  
And, with retorted scorn, his back he turned  
On those proud towers to swift destruction doomed. (Lines 896-907)

One could spend a whole article simply describing the brilliance of these two sentences (yes, only two!): The verbal felicities like the alliteration, the diction with its contrasting mono- and polysyllabic words, and the wonderful, winding syntax that leads to that terrifying last line.  
But we conclude by referring back to Longinus, where we started. For Longinus said: “Sublimity is, so to say, the image of greatness of soul.” And when we read sublime material, we too are enlarged, our souls become bigger, and we become better people, even if by almost imperceptible increments. And this is why it is important to insist at all times that the sublime be at the heart of

### BEHOLD THE BEAUTY

## A Glimpse of a Heavenly Paradise

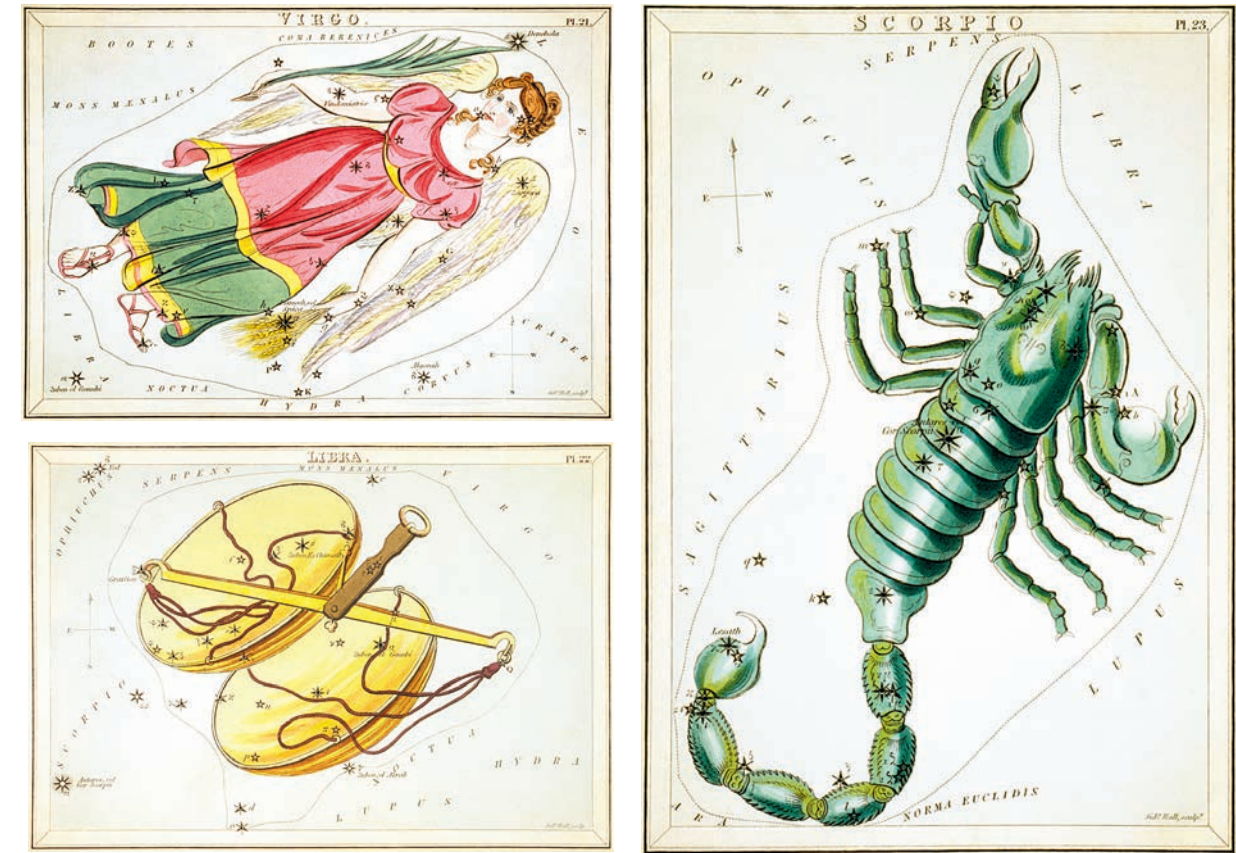
Rare and sublime, The Cleveland Museum of Art’s 15th-century “Amitabha Triad” features three divine beings central to Buddhist belief. Only a hint of the gilt remains of this once-hallowed Buddhist treasure, yet the deities’ meditative serenity shines on.  
Each deity is sitting on a lotus-flower throne in readiness to welcome Buddhist adherents to the Western Paradise (Buddha Amitabha’s heaven). In the center, Amitabha sits cross-legged in the lotus position and is flanked by two heavenly attendants: the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Ksitigarbha. Each of the divine beings makes a different heavenly gesture, called a mudra, with their hands.  
Buddhists believe that bodhisattvas are on earth solely to save living beings from the pain and suffering that comes from being bound by the cycle of birth, life, and death—a cycle that Buddhists call samsara.  
Buddhist relics were once kept inside each figure, but those relics are long lost.  
**Sacred Treasure**  
In an article on the museum website, Ghichul Jung, director of the Sustainable Korean Culture Institute, explains

A Seraph, a celestial being usually depicted with three sets of wings, is shown here on a cope or chasuble worn by a priest at Mass.

The front pages of a 1668 edition of “Paradise Lost,” with an adapted title page and a later engraving of the work’s author, John Milton, by William Faithorne.

Milton alludes to three constellations in Book 4 of “Paradise Lost”: (L-R) The Virgo, Libra, and Scorpio constellations as depicted by engraver Sidney Hall, circa 1825, in “Urania’s Mirror,” a set of constellation cards published in London. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

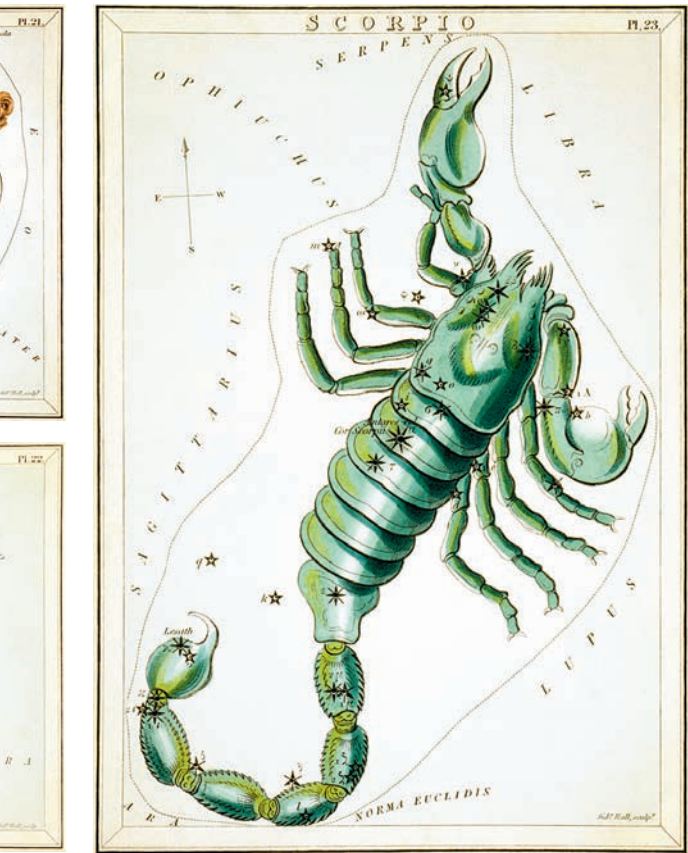
our educational system. For through it, our eyes are opened and lifted up to that which is greater than we ourselves are.  
*Part 1 of “Milton and the Sublime” explores sublimity in poetry. Part 2 looks at how “Paradise Lost” astonishes readers.*  
*James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, “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*



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Jung explains that during this period, there were three ways these Amitabha triads were used. Some were placed in a box and buried as sacred offerings in a pagoda or a sacred place. Other Amitabha triads were placed in a hall or monastery for public devotion. Smaller triads were used for private devotion, and this is what The Cleveland Museum’s piece was used for. Jung believes the piece was commissioned by a ruling family.  
Examining the object further, Jung deduced the draping and a mark on the third eye (in the middle of the forehead) was stylistically similar to a Ming Dynasty Chinese Buddhist statue at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that was created in 1411.



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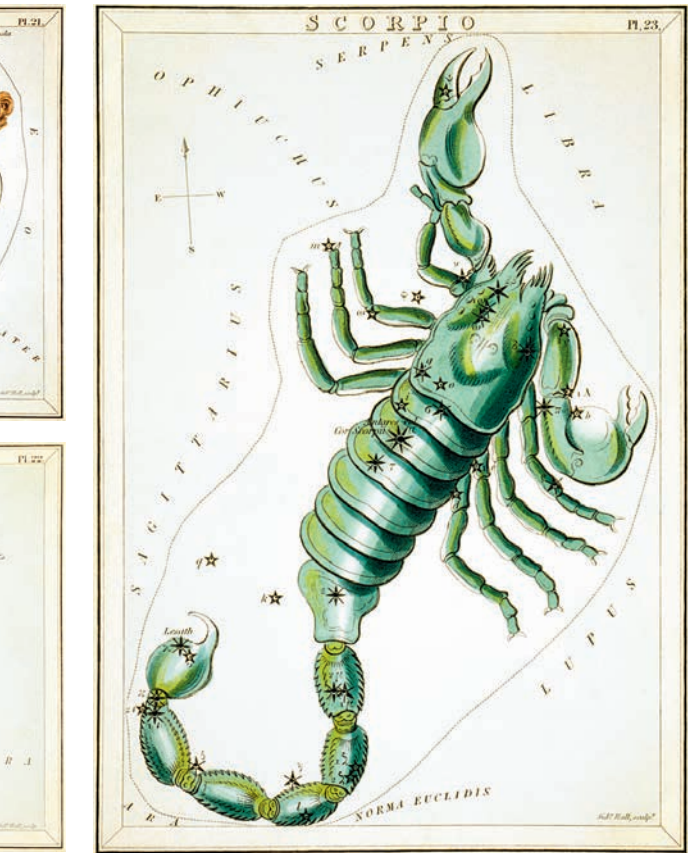
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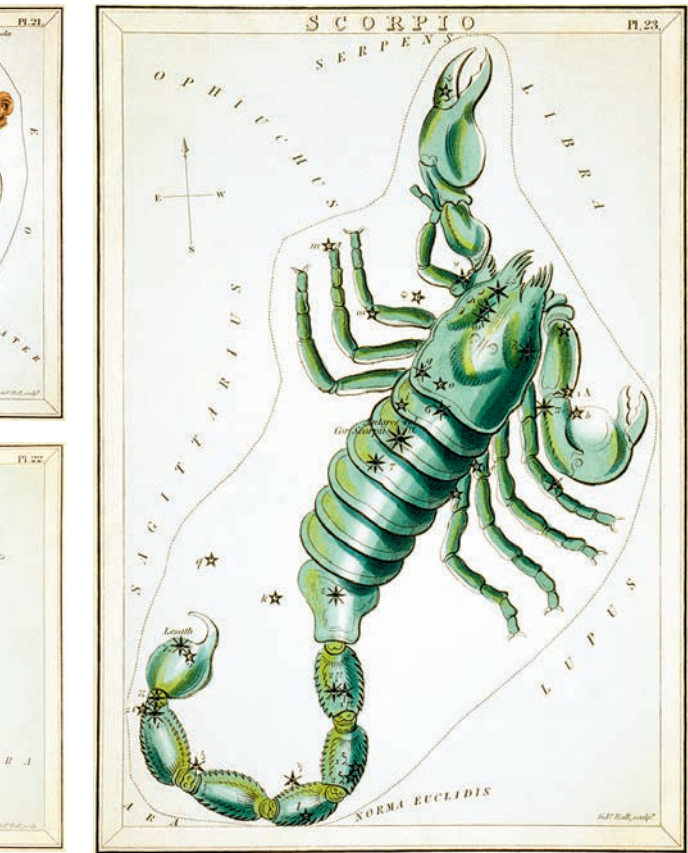
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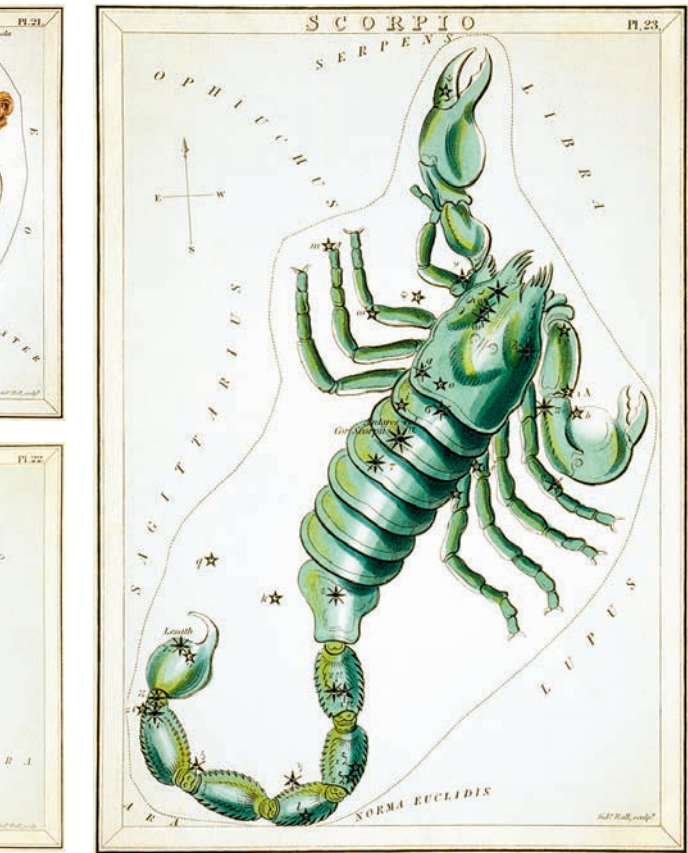
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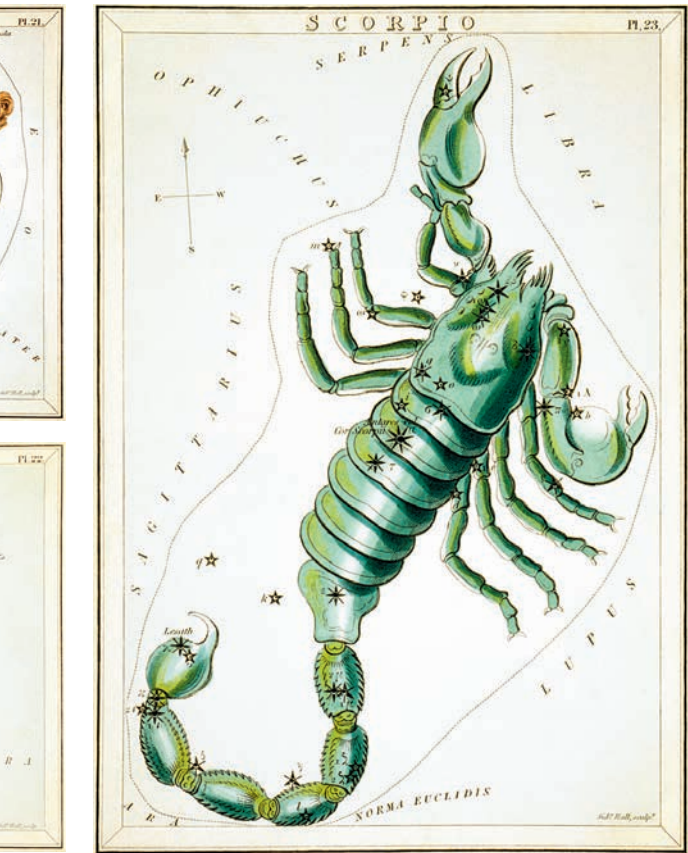
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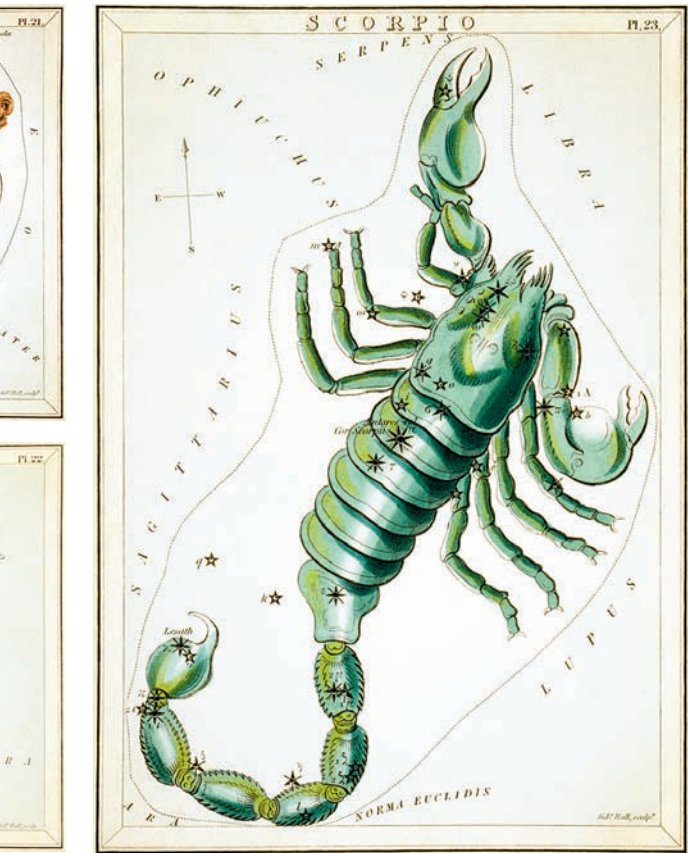
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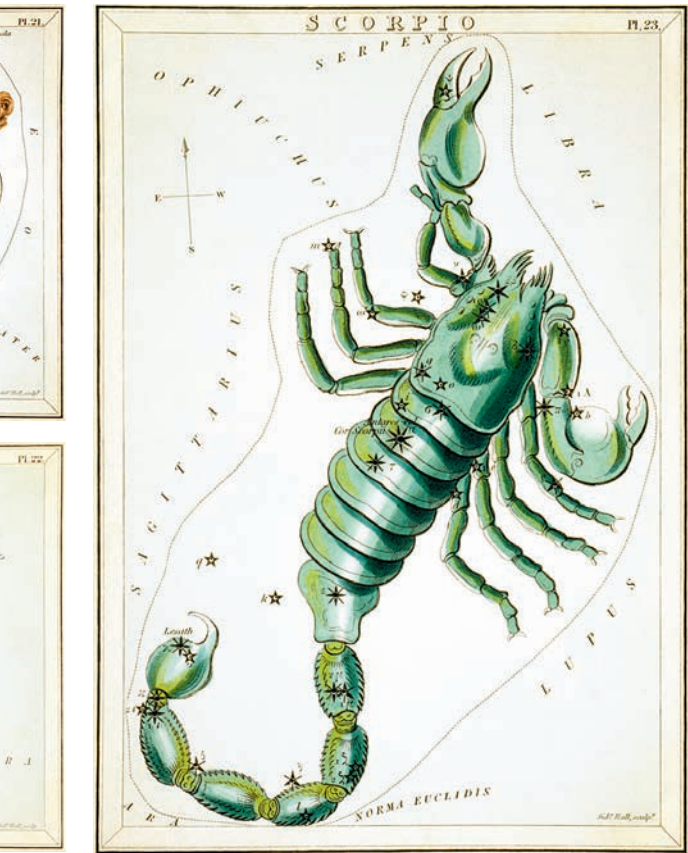
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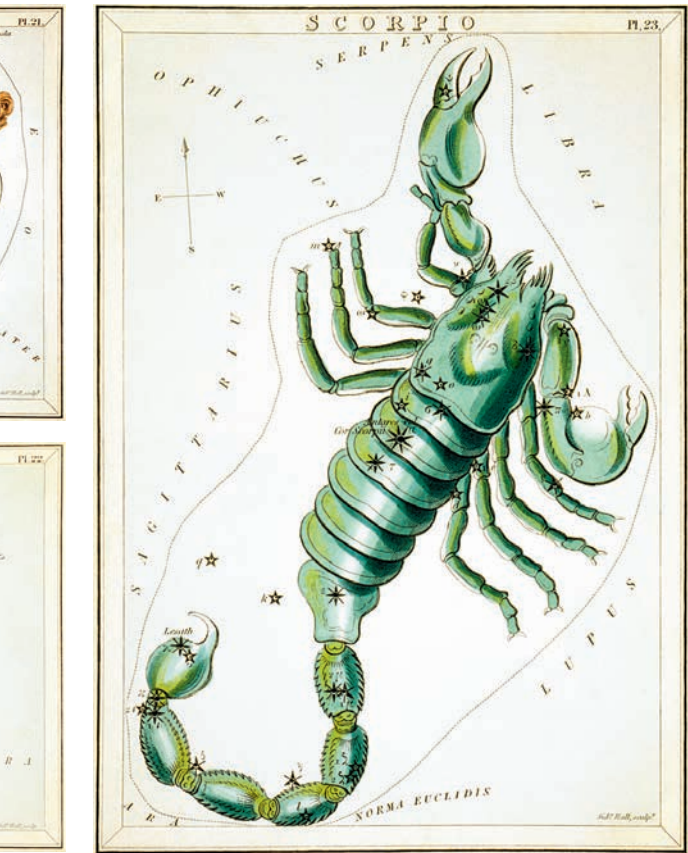
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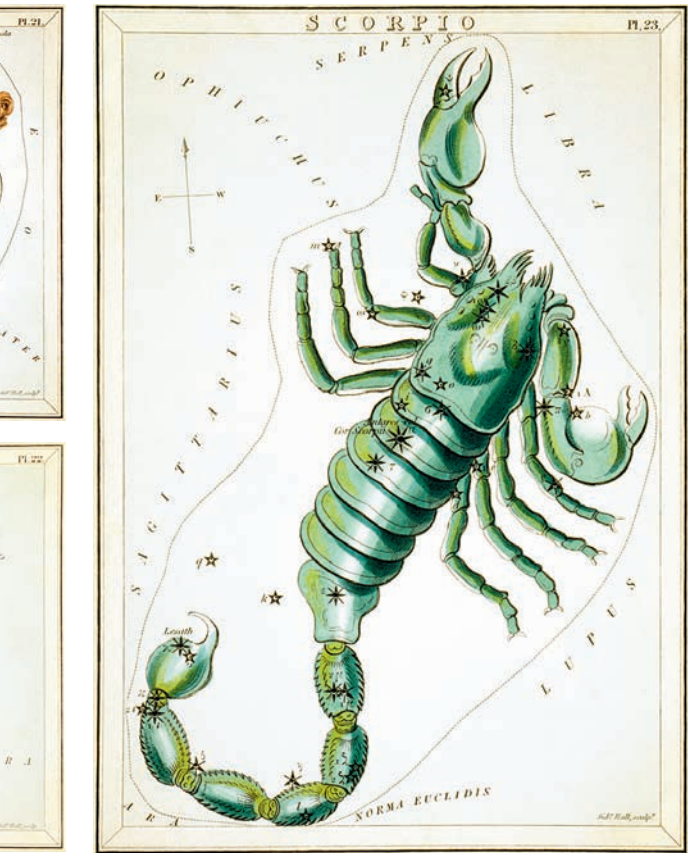
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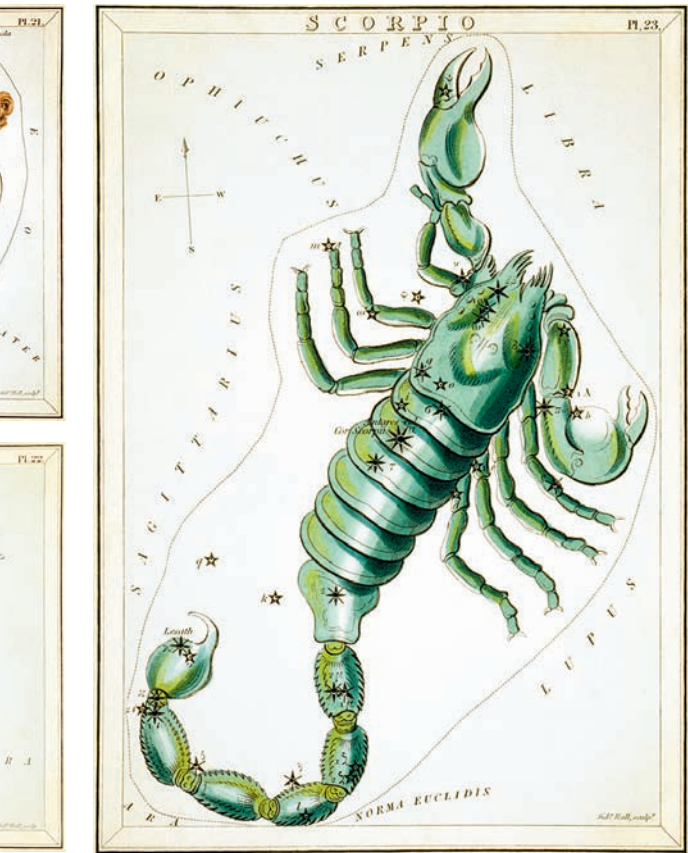
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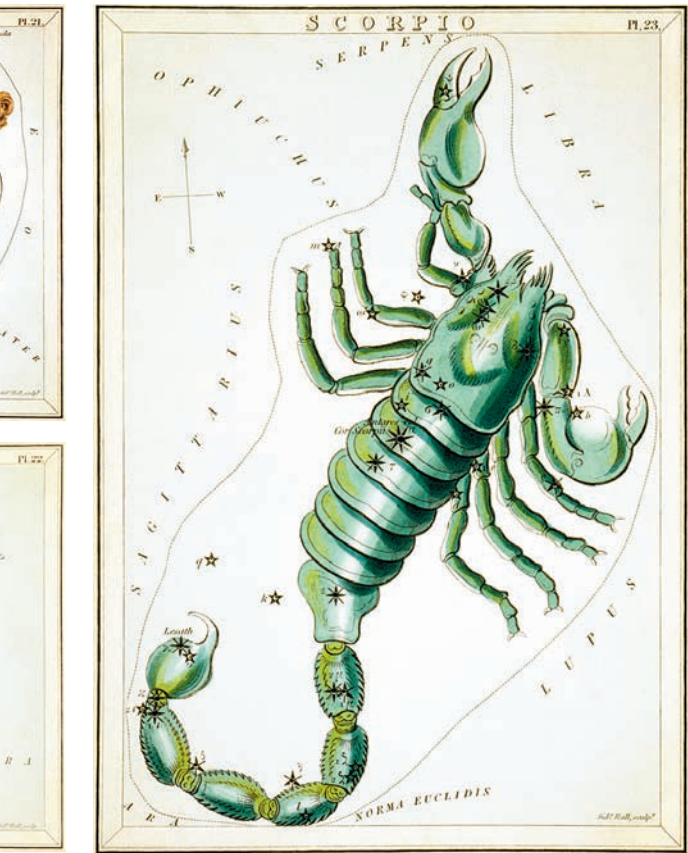
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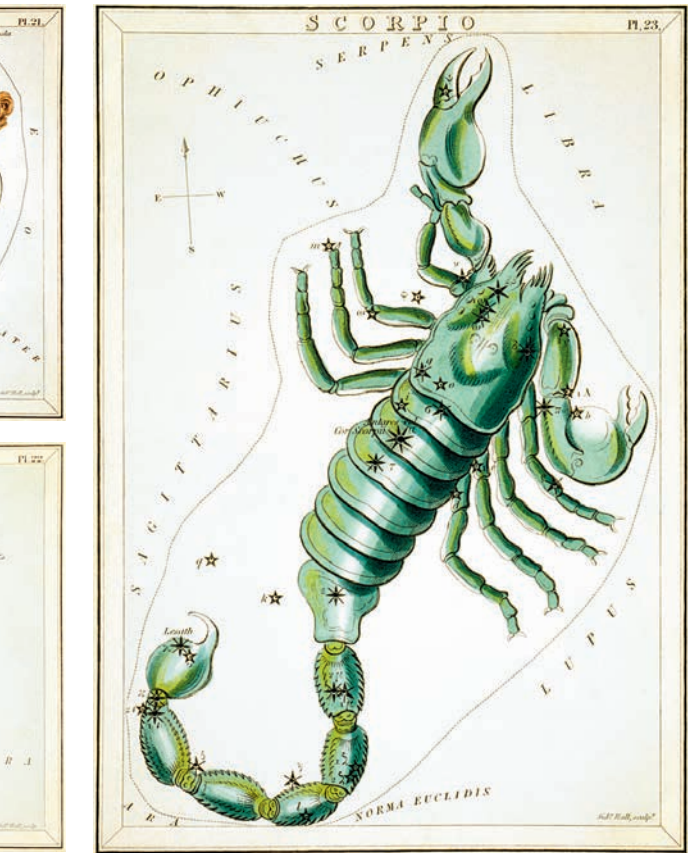
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(Left) Burl Ives in the role he is likely remembered best for today: the voice of the narrator, Sam the Snowman, in the stop-motion-animated TV special “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” (Right) Burl Ives performed in many venues, including television. He appears with Dinah Shore watching Gale Storm strum a ukelele for a Dinah Shore Christmas television special, circa 1955.

AMERICAN TREASURES

# Burl Ives: Legend of Folk Music and Much More

MICHAEL KUREK

If nothing else, younger readers will at least know the distinctive, slightly scratchy voice of the great Burl Ives from the perennial Christmas songs “Holly Jolly Christmas” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” These songs are both from the beloved NBC stop-motion-animated TV special of the latter title (1964), still aired annually, in which Ives performed the voice of the banjo-playing snowman-host and narrator.

Older readers will know Burl Ives for much more, be it his contributions to radio, Broadway, folk music, country music, Hollywood films, or television. Many of us saw him pop up in these venues for decades, but perhaps we never connected the dots. To see all that Ives did, laid out together in one list, is to realize just what a head-spinning whirlwind of a career he enjoyed.

The thing that all his appearances had in common, though, was his fundamentally endearing, teddy-bear personality. He was the sparkling-eyed, down-home uncle anyone might wish for, if they didn’t have one.

An American Minstrel

Ives was born in 1909 in rural Illinois, one of seven children, to a farming family. His pipe-smoking grandmother taught him all manner of English, Scottish, and Irish

Ives’s fortunes were not immediately found in film but back in New York on several radio shows. His own show, called ‘The Wayfaring Stranger,’ rode the early wave of interest in folk music.

folk songs, most of which were ballads that told a story. One day, he was singing with her in the garden the old folk song “Barbara Allen,” when he happened to be overheard by his uncle. His uncle invited him to sing it at a local veterans’ reunion meeting, where his singing was much appreciated, so Burl took up the banjo and kept on singing. He tried to go to college and even joined the football team, but he had no interest in academic studies and dropped out in his junior year, destined to become a quintessential American minstrel.

Guitar in hand, he next became an itinerant folk singer during the decade of his 20s (the 1930s), doing odd jobs as he went. He eventually became a regular on WBOW Radio in Terre Haute, Indiana, and then gradually made his way to New York. He took some vocal and acting training there, and in 1938 landed a small, nonsinging role on Broadway in Rodgers and Hart’s “The Boys From Syracuse.” Then he set out with one of his cast mates, Eddie Albert, for Hollywood, where the two shared an apartment.

Ives’s fortunes were not immediately found in film but back in New York on several radio shows. His own show, called “The Wayfaring Stranger,” rode the early wave of interest in folk music that made famous such names as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Will Geer (later to star as Grandpa in the 1970s hit TV show “The Waltons”). In fact, Ives was a member of a folk group called The Almanac Singers with those singers.

On his radio show, Ives popularized such enchanting tunes as “The Blue Tail Fly” (better known as “Jimmy Crack Corn”), “Froggie Went a-Courtin’,” “The Old Gray Goose,” “Little White Duck,” “I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly,” and songs celebrating the rail-riding hobo life, like “Big Rock Candy Mountain.” Ives was later dubbed “America’s mightiest ballad singer” by poet Carl Sandburg.

Actor and Anti-Activist

During the 1940s and 50s, his radio and music recording work progressed steadily, but it was increasingly supplemented by acting roles both on stage and in film. The first of over 20 films that Ives made in the next four decades was the little-known 1946 “Smoky,” from a Will James novel.

His Broadway credits included “Paint Your Wagon,” “Showboat,” and famously, the role of Big Daddy in the critically acclaimed Tennessee Williams play “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,” both on stage (1955) and in the film version (1958). Ives also

proved a dauntingly serious film actor in “The Big Country” (1958), for which he won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor.

By the 1950s, the folk-music movement and some of its performers had become associated with pacifist and leftist causes. For his association with them, and for having performed as the entertainment for some labor union events in his youth, Ives came under suspicion when identified in the 1950 pamphlet “Red Channels” and was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952.

He made a convincing argument to them that he was not by any means a communist sympathizer and that America’s treasury of great folk songs, at least the ones he sang, were in fact very patriotic. He went on to “name names,” implicating as communists a few of the people in the folk movement (none remembered today). Ives’s cooperation satisfied the committee and exonerated him for the remainder of his career, but alienated him from many of the folk performers who did not appreciate his testimony.

Burl Ives’s status as a true American icon was also built upon his rich catalog of works devoted to children and family entertainment. Musically, he recorded 20 children’s albums and appeared in various family movies, like “So Dear to My Heart” (1948), “Summer Magic” (1963) with Hayley Mills, “Pinocchio” (1968), and in TV specials like “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” (1964), “Daniel Boone” (1969), “The First Easter Rabbit” (1976), and “The New Adventures of Heidi” (1978).

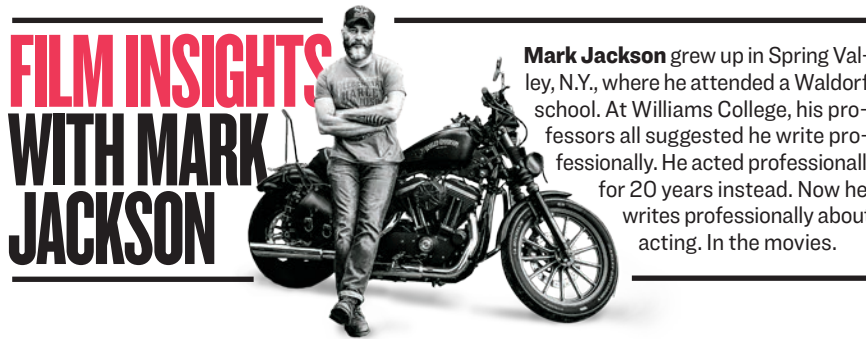
Burl Ives was often seen smoking a cigar or a pipe, and it followed that in 1994, at age 85, he was diagnosed with oral cancer. The disease claimed his life in 1995, just before his 86th birthday. Now, more than 25 years later, his legacy and contributions to American music and culture remain strong and continue to endear themselves to new generations.

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



(Right) Actor Burl Ives holding his Best Supporting Actor Oscar for the film “The Big Country,” at the 31st Academy Awards in 1959. (Left) Burl Ives, pictured here circa 1945, began as a folk singer.

Burl Ives’s status as a true American icon was built upon his rich catalog of works devoted to children and family entertainment.



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

## Tweak the Soundtrack and It’s Still a Winner

MARK JACKSON

I saw “Backdraft” when it came out in 1991. Loved it. Saw it three times. It felt very cutting-edge, especially all the eerie shots of rolling fire, which, unbeknownst to everyone at the time, director Ron Howard created by playing fire footage in reverse. Billy Baldwin was a big star, Jennifer Jason Leigh was still riding a popularity wave as America’s sweetheart from “Fast Times at Ridgemont High,” Kurt Russell was in top form, Ron Howard was starting to surf a big wave as a director, and Robert De Niro had not yet quite become a caricature of himself. In 2021, I’m amazed at how dated it feels, considering that there’s nothing more perennial and ubiquitous than firemen.

The things that tend to date movies more than anything are soundtracks. In 1991, the soundtrack for “Backdraft” felt perfect; now it feels overly dramatic and cheesy. Soundtracks, when dated, cease to sync with the action, and they start drawing at-

‘Backdraft’

Director  
Ron Howard

Starring  
Kurt Russell, William Baldwin, Robert De Niro, Donald Sutherland, Scott Glenn, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Rebecca De Mornay

MPAA Rating  
R

Running Time  
2 hours, 17 minutes

Release Date  
May 24, 1991

★★★★★

Gain new respect for firefighters. (L-R, front) Scott Glenn, Kurt Russell, and William Baldwin star in “Backdraft.”



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

## Bonnie and Clyde, the Realistic Version

MARK JACKSON

“Bonnie and Clyde” (1967) could have been made in today’s post-truth era, considering it glorified two notorious outlaws by having the exceptionally beautiful Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty portray them.

Also, communism (which is what post-truth is a harbinger of) is represented in the 1967 movie. How? It supported the notion of Bonnie and Clyde being laudable robbin’ hoods, who robbed the Depression-era bankers, who were driving America into the ditch of economic ruin. Both the insidious institutional redistribution of wealth and the violent gangster robbery version are inherently communist. And communism is part of the current zeitgeist again—only it’s got a few new monikers.

Ironically, in these confused times, here comes a more traditionalist take: In Netflix’s 2019 “The Highwaymen,” a subdued, slow-burn, somber police procedural, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow are presented as coldblooded murderers. “The Highwaymen” also re-establishes how it was with the more upright social mores of that era, and feels vastly more realistic than its famous 1967 cinematic predecessor.

The Doings

Texas Governor “Ma” Ferguson (Kathy Bates) hires two former Texas Rangers to come out of retirement: the legendary rifleman Frank Hamer (Kevin Costner) and his former partner Maney Gault (Woody Harrelson).

Following Bonnie and Clyde’s 1934 Midwest killing spree, Hamer and Gault track the deadly duo

across Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and eventually to the couple’s famous bloody death by machine-gun ambush in backwoods Louisiana. Naturally, because this is a film called “The Highwaymen” and not “Bonnie and Clyde,” when it comes to Bonnie (Emily Brobst) and Clyde (Edward Bossert), these two mad-deni- gally elusive, ruthless outlaws are intentionally sidelined.

‘The Highwaymen’ feels vastly more realistic than its famous 1967 cinematic predecessor.

Director John Lee Hancock creates a powerful air of mystery and danger by never showing the killers’ visages until the last minute. This ramps up a visceral, human response to the fact that here are basically two demonically possessed, sweet-faced kids with lethal weaponry stashed under the dashboard. The following relentless rain of lead that reduces them to macabre dancing puppets in the metal kill-box of their handsome new Ford V8 is all the more powerful.

While the pacing is slow, tension is nevertheless high throughout, which is a difficult thing to pull off. The most powerful scene comes when Hamer tracks down Clyde’s father, Henry (William Sadler), a mechanic, who insists his boy wasn’t born under a bad sign. “All he did was steal a chicken.”

Hamer observes that there had to

attention to themselves to the point where it feels like you brought along an annoying friend who can never stop talking during the movie. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s “Predator” is a good example of a formerly top-notch action film that you now constantly want to tell the soundtrack to cease and desist.

So You Wanna Be a Fireman?

“Backdraft” is a coming-of-age drama about prodigal son Brian McCaffrey (William Baldwin) following in his dad’s and older brother Stephen’s (Kurt Russell) footsteps, and becoming a Chicago firefighter. Brother Stephen is the hero brother, but he’s also become so reckless that his long-suffering wife (Rebecca De Mornay) has given him the boot.

Woven throughout that narrative is another: an ongoing investigation by arson forensics expert (and former firefighter) Donald “Shadow” Rimgale (Robert De Niro).

Shadow’s on the trail of an arsonist who doubles as a serial killer, using fire as his weapon of choice. He’s murdering victims in the Chicago area by rigging rooms to produce deadly, explosive backdrafts, using the (fictitious) chemical substance trylichlorate as a trigger. And you may ask yourself, “What is, in fact... a backdraft?”

The actual phenomenon of a backdraft might be as interesting as a review of “Backdraft,” so here’s my paraphrasing of commentary about backdrafts I found on Quora:

It’s important that firefighters learn to identify flashover and backdraft signs. A backdraft can occur when a room or building is closed up and heat can’t escape, but the fuel still smolders. After most of the oxygen has been used up, heat continues to build without generating flames.

A fire without sufficient oxygen tries to suck in oxygen in order to sustain itself; we will sometimes see smoke being drawn in, along with the air, under doors and windows. The windows will also show signs of excessive heat, like brown stains and cracking. Less effective burning generates more carbon and soot in the form of very dark brown or black smoke, depending on the amount of oxygen it can draw in.

So, as firefighters, we look for these signs of high heat and incomplete combustion; evaluating smoke color and density. Opening a door and introducing oxygen into this situation will cause the heated fuel to detonate because of the force it generates within a tightly sealed environment; all of the superheated fuel ignites instantaneously. So, we try to avoid ventilating through horizontal openings, such as windows and door. Either can result in an explosive backdraft.

‘The Highwaymen’

Director  
John Lee Hancock

Starring  
Kevin Costner, Woody Harrelson, Kathy Bates, John Carroll Lynch, William Sadler, Emily Brobst, Edward Bossert

MPAA Rating  
R

Running Time  
2 hours, 12 minutes

Release Date  
March 15, 2019

★★★★★

Maney Gault (Woody Harrelson, L) and Frank Hamer (Kevin Costner) are the lawmen who pursued Bonnie and Clyde, in “The Highwaymen.”



Anyway, Brian at one point allows himself to get discouraged, quits the fire department, and starts working for Shadow.

Who Done It?

Brian’s big brother Stephen might be a suspect. At one point, Shadow and Brian go to visit Ronald Bartel (Donald Sutherland), a notorious pyromaniac who’s up for parole. Shadow makes sure Bartel stays safe in jail. He also wants to ply Bartel for clues.

Sutherland has tremendous fun playing this creep, a sort of firebug version of Hannibal Lecter of “The Silence of the Lambs,” who’s got a sly, sadistic sense of humor. He wants “quid pro quo”; He’ll dole out tips and insights into the psychology of an arson killer in return for insights into the tortured soul of Brian, who was there when his famous firefighter father was killed by what appeared to be a backdraft. Ronald likes people’s pain. He wants to burn the whole world. He also delights in the fact that he was the one who gave Shadow his nickname, managing to set him on fire with phosphorus that burned so incandescently it burned up ex-firefighter Donald Rimgale’s shadow.

‘Backdraft’ goes on quite a bit about fire as a living, breathing entity.

All in All

Other characters include Axe (Scott Glenn), a longtime fellow firefighter who was the best friend of Brian and Stephen’s dad; another rookie, played by Jason Gedrick; J.T. Walsh as a corrupt alderman; and Jennifer Jason Leigh as a high school flame of Brian’s, who now works for the alderman.

“Backdraft” goes on quite a bit about fire as a living, breathing entity (Bartel refers to it as “The Beast”) actually tipping over slightly into the horror genre with the scream-like sound effects that accompany backdrafts, and also the creepy warning signs of smoke that emerges from under doors and sucking back out of sight, octopus-like. The many fire scenes are spectacular. “Backdraft” was a fun thrill ride of its time; smoking-hot, old-school Hollywood entertainment at its best.

What do we learn? After watching you may find, especially if you’re a city dweller, that you’ll be less exasperated and resentful when you get hit with the full force of a hook-and-ladder truck barreling down the block, sirens shrieking and air horn blaring “GAAAGGGHHHHHH GAGGGGGH-HHHH!!!!!!” You’ll respect America’s firefighters more.

who nabbed Al Capone in 1987’s “The Untouchables;” Harrelson played bounty hunter Carson Wells in 2007’s “No Country for Old Men,” not to mention his “True Detective” series with Matthew McConaughey.

Harrelson’s Gault often ponders whether their present mission falls within the purview of old men (but not without his trademark eye-twinkle), while Costner is an old-fashioned, steely, Wyatt Earp-type lawman-undo-death.

There are many well-written exchanges between Hamer and Gault over evolving lawman ethics, the curse of taking a life, and throughout, damning commentary on the media turning killers into cult heroes. There’s a lot of “shame on you’s” to reporters offering cash for interviews. Have a look at “The Highwaymen” and then 2014’s “Nightcrawler” to compare and contrast the giant gap between old and new journalism ethics. Old is better.

Hamer and Gault are cut-and-dried, but what’s tragic about Bonnie and Clyde was revealed by my looking up a poem written by Bonnie and then reflecting on how the paths of good and evil can turn on a dime. Here’s an excerpt. I recommend reading the whole thing.

The Story of Bonnie and Clyde

... They call them cold-blooded killers; They say they are heartless and mean; But I say this with pride, That I once knew Clyde When he was honest and up-right and clean.

But the laws fooled around, Kept taking him down And locking him up in a cell, Till he said to me, “I’ll never be free, So I’ll meet a few of them in hell.”





The Hudson River School believed that nature was a manifestation of the Creator.

(Left) “The Voyage of Life: Childhood,” 1842, by Thomas Cole. Oil on canvas; 52.8 inches by 76.8 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

(Above) A detail from “The Voyage of Life: Childhood” clearly showing, at the boat’s prow, the carving of an angel holding an hourglass.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

# The Voyage of Divine Faith

## ‘The Voyage of Life’ Series

ERIC BESS

Our lives can be fascinating. We are born into a world preset with culture, tradition, language, and so on; and through sensual experience, we learn how to survive and, for some of us, thrive. However, many of us sense that there is something beyond mere sensuous experience—something we must believe without evidence, something we believe by way of faith.

Thomas Cole’s four-painting series “The Voyage of Life” caused me to reflect on how we might treat faith throughout our lives.

### Thomas Cole’s ‘The Voyage of Life’

Thomas Cole was an American painter considered to be the father of the “Hudson River School,” which sought to romanticize landscape painting. The Hudson River School believed that nature was a manifestation of the Creator, and the school looked to nature to gain an understanding of the divine.

In “The Voyage of Life,” Cole depicts four stages of life: Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age. Examining each step separately along with the overarch-

ing theme of life’s voyage may provide insight into the importance of faith.

### Childhood

In “The Voyage of Life: Childhood,” Cole depicts an environment that appears to be the onset of spring. The sun rises off to the right side of the composition, letting us know that a new day is born.

As the sun rises, a baby boy enters the world on a boat guided from behind by

an angel. The boat cruises on the river of life, and this river will serve as an undercurrent for the rest of the boy’s life. Beautiful flowers and lush greenery adorn the foyer of the world’s entrance as if to welcome the baby and angel.

The boat has been crafted with the images of angels, and at the bow of the boat, an angel holds an hourglass toward the sky, letting us know that the boy’s time is limited.

### Youth

Cole’s second painting in the series depicts the attributes of youth. The environment is almost one of paradise. Clean, calm water carries the young man toward an otherworldly structure in the distance. Even the arrangement of the trees seems to encourage the young man’s journey, helping to guide our eyes from the young man to the castle in the sky.

The young man continues his trip down the river of life on the same boat, except that this time the angel who initially accompanied him into the world no longer rides the boat with him. Instead, the angel stands on the shore. With his back to the angel, the young man guides the boat on his own now and reaches toward



The angel is no longer in the boat during the youthful part of man’s life. A detail from “The Voyage of Life: Youth.”



“The Voyage of Life: Youth.”

the structure in the distance.

### Manhood

Having gone off on his own as a young man, the man, now an adult, finds himself amid turmoil. The river is no longer calm, and the environment is no longer green and inviting. Instead, jagged rocks jut from the crashing waters and close in on the man, who can no longer guide his boat. The sun appears to be setting in the distance.

The angel is no longer on earth with the man but is instead illuminated within the dark clouds at the top left of the composition. The man still has his back to the angel. He holds his hands in prayer not toward the angel behind him but toward the dark, gloomy faces in the clouds in front of him.

### Old Age

As an older man, our now white-haired voyager leaves behind the previously jagged and turbulent terrain. The front of his boat no longer displays the angel that holds the hourglass, but for the first time, he has turned toward the angel who has always been with him and watching him. The angel gestures ahead toward the light in the sky.

The dark and gloomy clouds separate to reveal the light of heaven, and an angel appears in the distance to receive the older man. The man stretches out his arms in awe of heaven’s glory.

### Faith in the Divine

Cole has provided us with an archetypal depiction of our life’s journey. For me, however, the greatest lesson to take from these paintings is the importance of not just any faith, but of faith in the divine.

In my reflecting upon the importance of divine faith, several things in these paintings stick out for me.

First is the angel’s placement in relation to the man throughout his journey. Initially, the angel guides the baby into the world, and the baby begins his fated journey—a journey of fate represented by the boat and the river that the boy will never leave. Thus, the baby is fated to ride this boat on this river. And unable to guide himself, the baby represents a certain degree of innocence.

The angel, however, is behind the baby; that is, the baby is unable to experience the angel directly: He cannot experience the angel by way of his senses. The baby experiences only what is in front of him, and what is always in front of him—at least up to the very end—is the angel holding the hourglass on the front of the boat. Thus, the baby is also fated always to be aware of, or at least have a sense of, the limitations of his allotted time to live.

As the baby grows into a young adult and a man, he cannot see that the angel is always with him. Belief in the angel requires faith. The youth especially does not seem to put his faith in the angel but in other things. Guiding the boat himself, he is more concerned with the otherworldly, ideal building that he can see ahead of him. He even seems to look beyond the hourglass set at the front of his boat.

What the youth can’t foresee is the consequences of his actions. Completely ignoring the angel to pursue the building in the distance ultimately leads to the next stage of his life, which is one of turmoil. It’s as if the young man trades the potential for faith in the angel for faith in idealized imaginings based on his experiences with the world.

Is it the case that the castle in the sky may represent our desire for material gains? Does ignoring faith in the divine in order to focus on materialism lead to turmoil?

The painting of the youth is the only one in which the boy guides the boat himself, with his hand on the tiller. Does the destructive consequence of his pursuit suggest that it is ignorant to attempt to take control of our own lives instead of allowing ourselves to be guided by the divine?

The results of focusing too much on sensuous experience can often teach us that there is more to life than what’s in front of us. Cole had this to say about the period of Manhood:

“Trouble is characteristic of the period of manhood. In childhood, there is no carking care; in youth, no despairing thought. It is only when experience has taught us the realities of the world, that we lift from our eyes the golden veil of early life; that we feel deep and abiding sorrow.”

The man, in his sorrow, prays, but to what does he pray? The angel is still behind him, but he prays toward the faces in the dark clouds above him as if to ask them to stop his suffering. He fails to see that the dark faces are part of the



dark environment he must now endure. The only thing separate from the gloomy atmosphere is the illuminated angel in the sky, an angel to whom he still has his back turned.

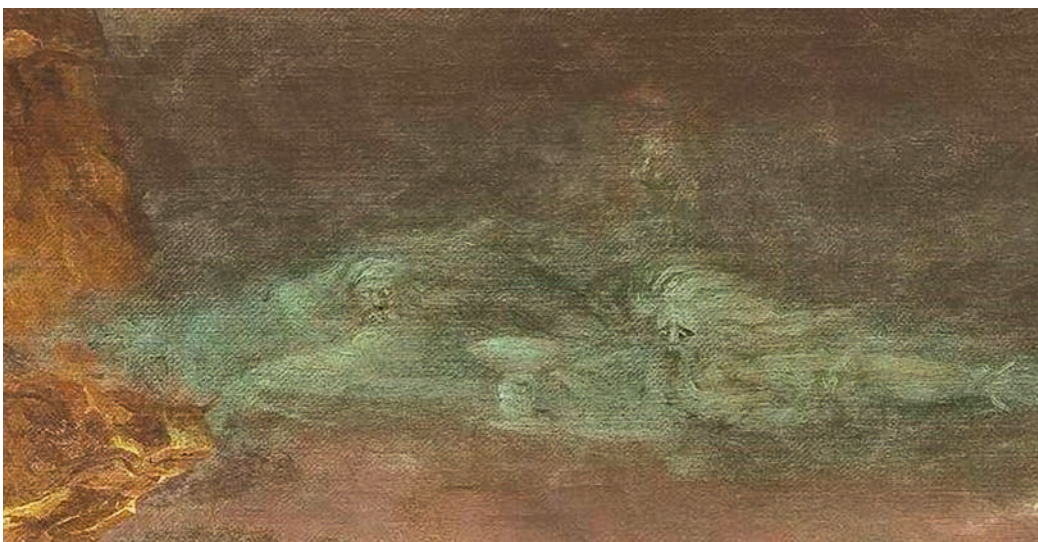
However, the man may be praying to the Creator while looking at the dark faces in the clouds, which would suggest the power of his faith: Despite looking at what is in front of him, he believes in what transcends him. His power of faith might also explain why the angel, hidden until now, is revealed in the next painting.

Interestingly enough, faith is exercised twice but for opposite things. The youth initially puts his faith in the castle in the sky. He leaves everything behind to pursue what the castle appears to promise. It’s only later, after he’s made to endure hardship, that he puts his faith in the divine.

Faith eventually reveals the truth of both: Faith in materialism and idealism produces destruction and turmoil, whereas faith in the divine provides the brilliance of eternity represented by the light of heaven and the missing hourglass from the front of his boat.

I’m left asking how we might have the baby turn toward that which guides his journey? How might we encourage righteous faith in the divine from the onset so that the divine reveals itself early, and the voyage of life is no longer one thrown between the “sorrow” of material pursuits and faith but is one that becomes a journey of faith?

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



(Top) “The Voyage of Life: Manhood.”

(Above) A close-up of the faces in the dark clouds, in a detail from “The Voyage of Life: Manhood.”

“  
Trouble is  
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Thomas Cole, artist

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(Bottom) “The Voyage of Life: Old Age.”

(Below) Time is no longer limited for those in old age with faith, in a detail from “The Voyage of Life: Old Age.”



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POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

John Ford’s Excellent Nautical Adventure

IAN KANE

The sea can offer many things. Whether for civilians or those enlisted in military service, shipping off to ports of call can be an adventure, with long voyages to distant, exotic locales. For others, it can be a means to escape problems or burdens on the home front.

One thing that separates military naval personnel from civilian mariners, besides the obvious differences in discipline, is that when a naval ship pulls into a port, sailors might get a little leave time, and then they have to report back to their ship. But when it comes to civilian crews, personnel can pull into port, get their pay for services rendered, and disappear.

Directed by John Ford during the height of his career, “The Long Voyage Home” tells the tale of one civilian ship and crew—in this case, the crew of an English tramp freighter, the Glencairn. This movie is based on four one-act plays by playwright Eugene O’Neill: “Bound East for Cardiff,” “In the Zone,” “The Long Voyage Home,” and “The Moon of the Caribbees.”

The film opens with the Glencairn and its crew as they travel through the Carib-

bean Islands. The ship is to pick up some important cargo from the West Indies and transport it back to England as World War II looms on the horizon. On board the aging freighter is a disparate, international cadre of deckhands, including Ole Olsen (John Wayne affecting a decent Swedish accent), a Swedish country bumpkin; Axel (John Qualen), Ole’s fellow Scandinavian and friend; Driscoll (Thomas Mitchell), a hard-drinking and fighting Irishman; Smitty (Ian Hunter), a constantly ruminating Englishman; and Donkeyman (Arthur Shields), the ship’s resident philosopher.

During the first act, we see that the men, however different, have formed strong bonds. The ship’s captain seems to realize that this particular crew can be rowdy at times and, as such, had forbidden them from going ashore. But when Driscoll (the crew’s de facto leader) arranges to have a small boatload of native ladies, exotic foods, and liquor board the ship—the captain eases up and allows his men to have a little fun.

However, the crew sees an inch and takes a nautical mile. Soon, they proceed to swill as much booze as they can get their hands on, crudely engage the women, and become more and more belligerent as the night goes on. Not surprisingly, the festivities devolve into a mass drunken brawl where many of the men take to slugging their friends just for the fun of it.

But we also get the first inkling as to how much Ole is protected by the crew: When he reaches for a bottle, Axel chides him for even considering a drink from it.

To many of the men, Ole represents innocence. Although the Swede is tall and strong, he’s also gentle and naïve. And although he’s simple-minded, the crew accepts Ole because of his straightforwardness and dependability. For example, when Driscoll returns from some fisticuffs with some of the locals (after sneaking off-



Ole (John Wayne, L) and his pal Axel (John Qualen), along with the rest of the crew, take care of one another, in “The Long Voyage Home.”

Ever-pensive Smitty (Ian Hunter, L) is consoled by the sage crew-hand Donkeyman (Arthur Shields).



To many of the men, Ole represents innocence.

ship), Ole straightens out some of the pugilistic Irishman’s injured fingers. Another time, Ole carries a drunken Smitty safely back to their quarters, where he deposits the Englishman into his bunk.

Eventually, the men make it to England. Although they’ve agreed to get Ole safely back home to his family in Sweden, they can’t resist the allure of having one final party at a local bar. Once again, as the other men proceed to get drunk and rowdy, they make sure not to allow Ole to drink in order to protect him from becoming drunks like them. But when several scurrilous figures enact devious machinations around Ole, the crew’s guardianship is put to the test.

Although I’ve heard that this film had a gloomy tone, I didn’t find much of that at all. Besides the brooding Englishman Smitty, the characters seemed to be living like anyone would when far away from home—sometimes homesick, but other times full of a lust for life and adventure.

If one thing is underscored in the film, it is the men’s real sense of camaraderie and companionship. By the end of “The Long Voyage Home,” it is evident that these disparate characters looked out for one another no matter the circumstances, and that’s a tremendously positive message.

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

‘The Long Voyage Home’

Director  
John Ford  
Starring  
John Wayne, Thomas Mitchell, Ian Hunter  
Not Rated  
Running Time:  
1 hour, 45 minutes  
Release Date  
Oct. 8, 1940

★★★★☆



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