WEEK 40, 2021

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

SMALLBONES/CC BY-SA 3.0 (STATUE); ILOLAB/SHUTTERSTOCK (BACKGROUND)

HISTORY

Fame, Obscurity, Controversy:

Moses Ezekiel, Cadet and Sculptor

PUBLIC DOMAIN

American sculptor Moses Jacob Ezekiel lived and worked in Rome for the majority of his career, yet he created sculptures dedicated to America and to the Confederacy. The photo is from Hilary A. Herbert's "History of the Arlington Confederate Monument."

Moses Ezekiel was one of the most famous American sculptors of his day.

"Religious Liberty," outside Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History, is one of Moses Ezekiel's first commissioned works. The 25-foot-tall marble statue was created in 1876 for the Centennial Exposition.

JEFF MINICK

The place: New Market, Virginia; the date: May 15, 1864.

Under the command of General John C. Breckinridge, 257 cadets from the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and other Confederate troops charge across a rain-soaked, newly plowed field against General Franz Sigel's Union forces. Many of the cadets lose their shoes in the muck, rendering that ground the "Field of Lost Shoes." With a loss of 10 dead and 45 wounded, this battalion, most of them teenagers, sweep aside their enemies, capture some artillery pieces, and help win the day for the South.

Among the cadets is a descendent of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Garland Jefferson, who is mortally wounded in the chest during this assault. After the battle, his best friend and roommate, also in the battle, seeks him out, commandeers a wagon, transports him to a private residence, and spends the next two days caring for his dying comrade, often holding him in his arms and reading to him from the Bible.

Jefferson's caretaker was Moses Ezekiel (1844–1917), the first Jewish cadet to gain admission to the institute. The son of a Richmond merchant, he was an ardent lover of Virginia who took such pride in his participation at the Battle of New Market that his grave in Arlington National Cemetery bears this simple inscription: "Moses J. Ezekiel, Sergeant of Company C, Battalion of Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute."

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JAY YUAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

(Above) Thoreau saw God in the beauty of nature. Walden Pond in Concord, Mass., is featured in his writings. **(Below right)** Title page from the first edition of Henry David Thoreau's "Walden.".

TRUTH TELLERS

Henry David Thoreau and the 'Essential Truth'

RAYMOND BEEGLE

Great poets and seers do not write for classrooms or scholars; they write for other people, other souls. I call to witness Leo Tolstoy, who dropped out of school; Virginia Woolf, who was not allowed to go to school; and Charles Dickens, who was expelled from school.

Although Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) did indeed graduate from Harvard, he thought so little of it that he refused to pay the six dollars required to receive his diploma.

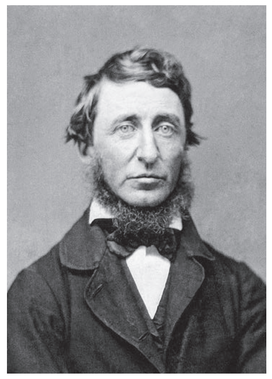
Like Tolstoy and Woolf, he wrote his most intimate thoughts—some of them never intended to be known to the world—in his journals and diaries. His "Walden" diary (1845–47), conceived with publication in mind, is slightly more self-conscious than the rest of the two-million-word document begun in 1837, when the author was just 20.

The complete opus reveals the soul of the man, and a beautiful soul it was. There were hints of its beauty in his outward appearance. A Harvard schoolmate of Thoreau's, later to be known as the Rev. John Weiss, remembers his "grey-blue eyes [that] seemed to rove down the path just in advance of his feet." He also remarked, "We remember him as looking very much like some Egyptian sculpture of faces, large-featured, but brooding, immobile …" "The Life of Henry David Thoreau."

Behind those grey-blue eyes were thoughts like, "What if we feel yearnings which no breast answers? I walk alone." Of course, he was far from alone as he was close to God and nature, his two lifelong companions that never failed to support and fill him with wonder. He preferred their company to the company of mortals who interrupted his communion with them.

The complete opus reveals the soul of the man, and a beautiful soul it was.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



A portrait photograph of Henry David Thoreau by Benjamin D. Maxham. National Portrait Gallery, Washington.

High Expectations

Although Thoreau might have loved mankind collectively, his encounters with individuals were seldom felicitous. He was left bored, disappointed, and disillusioned with them. Their very presence disallowed his own higher world with its higher thoughts and sensibilities:

> "There sits one by the shore who wishes to go with me, but I cannot think of it. He thinks I could merely take him into my boat and then not mind him. He does not realize that I should by the same act take him into my mind where there is no room for him. … I know very well that I should never reach that expansion of the river with him aboard with his terrene qualities."

The institutions of mankind, its governments, courts, and churches evoked his displeasure as well. When, in 1856, the threat of war loomed between the United States and Great Britain, he wrote: "Both nations are ready to take a desperate step, to forget the interests of civilization and Christianity and fly at each other's throats. When I see an individual thus beside himself, ready to shoot or be shot, I think he is a candidate for bedlam."

He felt that God was too often absent from churches. "For the majority of mankind, religion is a habit, or, more precisely, tradition is their religion." The stark contrast between God's law and man's law—the law of his time, for example—that a man could be bought and sold, caused him great anguish:

> "Massachusetts … deliberately and forcibly restored an innocent man, Anthony Burns, to slavery. … The sight of that political organization called Massachusetts is to me morally covered with scoriae and volcanic cinders such as Milton imagined. If there is any hell more unprincipled than our rulers and our people, I feel curious to visit it."

Thoreau himself chose the laws of God rather than man's, hid runaway slaves in his own home, provided money and clothes for them, and arranged paths of escape. "Just put a fugitive slave, who has taken the name of Henry Williams, into the cars for Canada," he wrote.

God and Nature

God's law and the laws of nature were to him kindred, inseparably linked, just, and perfect. "I love nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him," he wrote. "In her midst, I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, … I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this."

God revealed in the beauty of nature was the foundation of his faith. The beauty, the logic and symmetry of a snowflake, for example, was as powerful as any vision of any saint or seer: "A divinity must have stirred within them before the crystals did thus shoot and set. … The same law that shapes the earth-star shapes the snow-stars."

The beauty of nature's songs enchanted him. "When I hear a bird singing, I cannot think of any words that will imitate it." And the meaning of their song? "The music of all creatures has to do with their loves, even the toads and frogs. Is it not the same with man?"

Although Thoreau knew much of science, he harbored a healthy skepticism toward scientists and their institutions. He rejected an invitation from the Association for the Advancement of Science to share his ideas. "They do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law," he wrote. "How absurd, that though I probably stand as near to nature as any of them, … a true account of my relation to nature would excite their ridicule only! If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly."

He believed that "All the phenomena of nature need to be seen from the point of view of wonder and awe." He also remarked, "Men are probably nearer to the essential truth in their superstitions than in their science."

"The essential truth" is perhaps Thoreau's favorite name for God. "Higher light" is another name he used. "It is by obeying the suggestions of a higher light within you that you escape from yourself and travel totally new paths."

Thoreau's path was not a long one, just 43 years. When someone asked him, just before his death, whether he had made his peace with God, he replied, "I didn't know we had ever quarreled."

Raymond Beegle has performed as a collaborative pianist in the major concert halls of the United States, Europe, and South America; has written for The Opera Quarterly, Classical Voice, Fanfare Magazine, Classic Record Collector (UK), and The New York Observer. Beegle has served on the faculty of The State University of New York–Stony Brook, the Music Academy of the West, and the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He has taught in the chamber music division of the Manhattan School of Music for the past 28 years.

JAMES KIRKIKIS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Walden Pond Conservation Area has marked the site of Henry David Thoreau's hut in Concord, Mass.

ALIZADA STUDIOS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The reconstructed cabin of Henry David Thoreau in Walden Woods.

BESTBUDBRIAN/CC BY-SA 3.0

1

PUBLIC DOMAIN

2

PUBLIC DOMAIN

3

THE OLD MAJOR/SHUTTERSTOCK

4

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1. Moses Ezekiel's statue of President Jefferson, 1910, in front of the Rotunda at the University of Virginia. It is a smaller replica of the statue in Louisville, Ky., created two years earlier.

2. Depiction of cadets from the Virginia Military Institute at the Battle of New Market (1864) during the American Civil War. Engraving by H.C. Edwards from the 1903 American history textbook "A School History of the United States."

3. Moses Ezekiel's "Virginia Mourning Her Dead" memorializes the Virginia Military Institute cadets killed at the Battle of New Market defending Virginia.

4. Stonewall Jackson statue at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) by sculptor Moses Ezekiel, who graduated there in 1866. The VMI Board of Visitors relocated the statue to the Virginia Museum of the Civil War and New Market Battlefield State Historical Park.

5. Moses Ezekiel's Confederate Memorial, which the sculptor called "New South," in Arlington National Cemetery.

HISTORY

Fame, Obscurity, Controversy:

Moses Ezekiel, Cadet and Sculptor

TIM1965/CC BY-SA 3.0

Perhaps an odd epitaph for so famous an artist. The grave of sculptor Moses Ezekiel on the north side of the Confederate monument at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va.

Continued from ***Page 1***

It's an unusual epitaph, given that Moses Ezekiel was one of the most famous American sculptors of his day.

Fame and Obscurity

After the war ended, Ezekiel returned to finish his degree at VMI. During that time, Robert E. Lee, the former Confederate general serving as president of VMI's neighbor Washington College, befriended Ezekiel, recognized his talents, and encouraged him to pursue his art.

Ezekiel heeded that advice, studied anatomy for a brief time at the Medical College of Virginia, won an award that permitted him to continue his studies first in Germany and then in Rome, and never looked back, becoming a lifelong resident of Rome. By the end of his life, he had finished over 200 sculptures and won numerous awards, including the Michel Beer Prix de Rome and the Gold Medal of the Royal Society of Palermo. Italian King Victor Emmanuel bestowed on him various titles and a knighthood.

His studio in Rome became nearly as renowned as his sculptures, evoking such descriptions as this one by Samson Oppenheim, editor of The American Jewish Year Book:

"Perhaps the most characteristic of his creations was the celebrated studio. ... Here in the vaulted thermae built in the days of Diocletian he had gathered together treasures from many lands and ages. Ancient marbles and alabasters, bronzes, costly metals and relics beautified with precious stones, medieval parchments and church ornaments, oriental ivories, velvets and silks hung on all sides, in alluring contrast to the latter-day furniture and the twentieth century grand piano, proclaiming the broad sympathies and the catholic tastes of this citizen of the world."

Though he became the only renowned sculptor to fight in the Civil War and the first famous Jewish-American sculptor, Ezekiel's reputation faded after his death. This demise in his status is commonly attributed to his traditional approach to art.

As Susan Eisenfeld writes in her online article "Moses Ezekiel: Hidden In Plain Sight, "In death, the art world ignored and forgot him because he never innovated; he emulated the classical style of the previous masters, focusing on the full human figure and historical and allegorical subjects, even when the time for that style had come and gone."

Unknown but Not Forgotten

Moses Ezekiel may be unfamiliar to most of us—not even many Civil War buffs know of his artistic fame—but every day, thousands of people view his art.

By the end of his life, Moses Ezekiel had finished over 200 sculptures and won numerous awards.

Outside Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History is "Religious Liberty," one of Ezekiel's first commissioned works and the first American sculpture devoted to this topic. The woman representing liberty wears 13 stars in her crown, one for each of the original colonies, and holds a copy of the Constitution. Originally commissioned for the 1876 Centennial Exposition, "Religious Liberty" today stands near the Liberty Bell in the city's Independence National Historic Park.

Many years later, the Charleston, West Virginia, United Daughters of the Confederacy commissioned Ezekiel to create a statue of Stonewall Jackson, who was born in that state when it was still part of Virginia. Today, the statue stands in front of the Capitol Building in Charleston. Here, we see a stalwart Jackson with his sword pointed at the ground in his left hand, binoculars clenched in his right, and with the buttoned tunic and riding boots reinforcing the nickname Jackson earned at the Battle of First Manassas: "Stonewall."

Ezekiel's statue of Thomas Jefferson, which may be found today in front of the University of Virginia's Rotunda, shows the author of the Declaration of Independence standing atop a replica of the Liberty Bell. Adorning the bell are representative figures of Liberty, Justice, Equality, and the Brotherhood of Man. To honor Jefferson's deep belief in religious liberty, Ezekiel has Equality holding a tablet titled "Religious Freedom" with the names of various deities—God, Jehovah, Brahma, Atma, Ra, Allah, Zeus.

For his beloved VMI, Ezekiel created two monuments: "Virginia Mourning Her Dead" and another statue of Stonewall Jackson, who taught at the institute for some years before the Civil War and whose name has long been associated with that college.

Dedicated in 1903, "Virginia Mourning Her Dead" honors the cadets who fell at New Market and contains the remains of six of them in a copper box in the monument's base. The woeful figure bent in grief is the goddess Virtus, who appears on the Virginia state flag crushing tyranny along with the words "Sic Semper Tyrannis," or "Thus always to tyrants."

Though this statue remains on the institute's grounds, the Jackson statue met a less kindly fate. In the wake of the destruction or removal of Confederate statues in the last few years, the authorities at VMI determined to dismantle the statue and place it on the New Market battlefield.

The Confederate Memorial

Ezekiel's Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery, which he called "New South," has come under attack as well. In the wake of the 2017 riot in Charlottesville, Virginia, that centered on the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, 22 descendants of the Ezekiel family issued a statement demanding that the "New South" monument be removed from Arlington and put "in a museum that makes clear its oppressive history." Incidentally, Ezekiel's remains and those of three other Confederates lie buried at the base of this statue.

The Arlington Cemetery online site describes the statue in this way:

"The elaborately designed monument offers a nostalgic, mythologized vision of the Confederacy, including highly sanitized depictions of slavery. Standing on a 32-foot-tall pedestal, a bronze, classical female figure, crowned with olive leaves, represents the American South. She holds a laurel wreath, a plow stock and a pruning hook, with a Biblical inscription at her feet: 'They have beat their swords into plough-shares and their spears into pruning hooks.' The monument's pedestal features 14 shields, engraved with the coats of arms of the 13 Confederate states plus the border state of Maryland (which neither seceded from the Union nor joined the Confederacy). Thirty-two life-sized figures depict mythical gods alongside Southern soldiers and civilians."

The article then adds that the statue also depicts two slaves.

So far, the Confederate Memorial remains in place.

Where Are We Today?

Moses Ezekiel and his sculptures not only reveal his cultural biases and interests but also act as a mirror for us.

First, what does the criticism about his lack of "innovation" and his traditional approach to his work say about our world of art? If we examine his statuary with its precision, realism, and story line, should we necessarily regard his respect for the old masters as a sign of failure or a lack of creativity? Many people, including some critics, still prefer representational to abstract art, which means that they might more favorably judge his creations. And should his focus on "historical and allegorical subjects" condemn his art to the wastebasket, or does that shift from such subjects indicate our own culture's movement away from the fundamentals of Western civilization?

Ezekiel's art presents us with another problem today. For his entire life, he remained an ardent advocate for Virginia and the cause of the South. In his studio in Rome, he displayed a Confederate battle flag, and his family had owned some slaves. Moreover, he clearly intended for some of his sculptures to honor Virginia and the Confederacy.

But what are we to make of a man like Moses Ezekiel, who once said of slavery: "It was an evil we inherited and wanted to get rid of. ... Our struggle was simply a constitutional one based upon ... state's rights and especially on free trade and no tariff." Was he sincere—many Southerners at that time offered the same line of causation—or was he glossing over slavery as the reason for the war?

Whatever the case, Moses Ezekiel was blind to the ramifications of his beliefs and what the future might make of them. But I wonder: Are we equally as blind to our own present, too certain of our moral superiority over our ancestors to examine and consider the nuances of history and to identify as well the faults and failings of the age in which we live?

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.

POETRY

100 Days of Dante: What's the Big Deal?

JAMES SALE

Gratifyingly, as we have now passed (Sept. 13 and 14) the anniversary of the death of Dante Alighieri 700 years ago (1321), there has been a massive upsurge in interest and promotion of his work, especially of "The Divine Comedy," arguably the world's greatest poem.

This is really good news. In the UK, for example, we find the artist Mark Burden publishing a series of fascinating art pieces representing each of the 34 cantos of Dante's "Inferno." Burden's short YouTube video is well worth a watch.

The Art Quarterly magazine has a major feature by professor Gervase Rosser of Oxford University on Dante and refers us to two major exhibitions: "Dante: The Invention of Celebrity" at the Ashmolean Museum; and "'The Divine Comedy': from Manuscript to Manga" at Oxford's Bodleian Libraries.

Also, my own English Cantos website has attracted well over 20 poets, professors, translators, artists (many from America), and even a sculptor—the great Tim Schmalz from Canada has allowed us to promote his astonishing figures—to contribute to celebrating Dante.

Dante is an antidote to so much lax and irreverent thinking today.

But the big—and more overtly educational—push is in the United States. The St. Austin Review has devoted its entire September–October edition to a "Homage to Dante." Hillsdale College in Michigan has recently given free access to 10 lectures on Dante. These talks, mostly by professor Stephen Smith, are amazingly insightful and useful. I am myself working through them and attempting to digest all their profound insights!

PD-US

100 Days of Dante celebrates the master poet. An allegorical portrait of Dante Alighieri, late 16th century, by an unknown master. National Gallery of Art.

100 Days of Dante

However, perhaps the most impressive Dante contribution of all is coming from the 100 Days of Dante collaborative project. This collaboration is between Baylor University, the University of Dallas, Gonzaga University, Torrey Honors College of Biola University, Templeton Honors College at Eastern University, and Whitworth University. Quite a formidable team, then.

Their aim is to educate and inform readers about Dante, and there are two things about how they are doing this that I particularly like. The first is that the whole text of "The Divine Comedy" is available on their website, in the original Italian as well as in an English translation. That's extremely helpful.

However, it is the second feature that is at the heart of what they are achieving. They are creating a series of videos (the ones I have seen so far all between 12 and 16 minutes long) exploring the literary, theological, and spiritual significance of Dante's work, canto by canto—100 in total—and with a whole bunch of different speakers and experts. New videos are released on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This is really producing an ultrarich brew of ideas and insights.

Anyone genuinely interested in literature and poetry will find these clips massively informative and useful. But of course in studying Dante, we need to move beyond, as they do, the simple idea that poetry can be studied in some sort of ideas-vacuum, in which religious and spiritual concepts are removed in order to sanitize the product and not upset those who seem to have a problem with a worldview different from their own.

Thus, the opening Canto 1 introduction by Professor Emeritus Ralph Wood makes several important points. First, poetry has the "permanent power to transform us." Secondly, and really pertinently, if Virgil is leading Dante out of Hell, who in our times is "leading us out of the abyss"? And third, and germane to the Epoch Times' mission, "without fair and just government, the people's moral and religious life will be compromised."

Studying Dante is a mechanism for helping us to understand what "fair and just" might mean today, despite the fact that the poem is over 700 years old. Incredible, right?

These video clips do not seem to me to be overtly evangelical in their flavor; yet, at the same time, they are exploring Dante's conceptions of Christianity and Catholicism, warts and all. And here the subtlety comes in. For as Fred Saunders says in his account of Canto 3, there are two Dantes to be aware of in "The Divine Comedy." There is Dante the poet, who writes the poem, and so knows everything about and in it. And there is Dante the pilgrim, the character Dante depicts in the poem, who seems a lot of the time quite clueless about what is going on or why it is going on.

But as professor Saunders observes, Dante the poet—who knows everything—is the ideal teacher, whereas Dante the pilgrim, who knows very little, is the ideal student. The setup of the journey, then, is a kind of catechism for us the reader: As Dante the pilgrim continually fails to understand what is going on, he has to ask Dante the poet (through other characters such as Virgil) questions. We, the readers, then, are schooled in the meaning of the poem. Truly, a fabulous setup both for our entertainment and our learning!

And why go to all this trouble? Because Dante is an antidote to so much lax and irreverent thinking today. As professor William Franke expresses it in his book "Dante's Interpretive Journey":

"In effect, Dante employs poetry as a way of gaining a hearing for the Logos."

The word "Logos" here is critical, for it does not simply allude to John's Gospel, Christ, or Christianity generally; it does more than that. It refers to order and meaning throughout the whole cosmos, while disorder and meaninglessness are the "abyss" (to use professor Ralph Wood's word) of our time.

Dante can help lead us out of this, which is why I strongly recommend you tune in to the 100 Days of Dante. It really is powerful stuff.

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

A Peek Into the Heritage of Aristotelian Thought

'Aristotle: From Antiquity to the Modern Era,' an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society

LORRAINE FERRIER

"All teaching and all intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge," Aristotle said.

Since 335 B.C., when the Greek philosopher Aristotle founded the Lyceum in Athens, Greece, people around the world have ardently studied the many facets of his knowledge: from science, logic, metaphysics, and ethics to politics.

Aristotle's influence is explored in the recently opened exhibition "Aristotle: From Antiquity to the Modern Era" at the New-York Historical Society Museum & Library. Over 30 rare books and manuscripts are on display—some for the first time—from the collection of Martin J. Gross.

The manuscripts from the early modern period in Europe (1500–1800) are in multiple languages, including Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, demonstrating just how important Aristotle was in defining the world's intellectual traditions.

"This exhibition is a celebration of the importance of scholarship and learning. ... The works demonstrate how knowledge is passed down through the centuries and [is] built upon by each new generation," New-York Historical Society CEO and president Louise Mirrer said in a press release.

COURTESY OF MARTIN J. GROSS

"Aristotle. Opera Omnia," (Vol. 1, "Posterior Analytics"), 1495–98, published by Aldus Pius Manutius of Venice. Five volumes, in Greek.

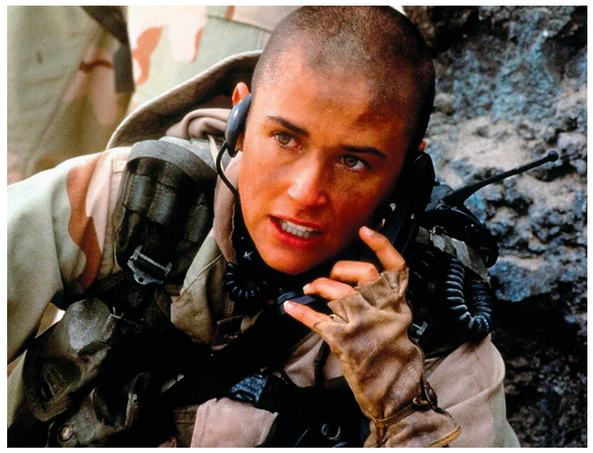
Spreading Ancient Wisdom

During the Renaissance, the 15th-century classical scholar and notable printer and publisher Aldus Pius Manutius made the entire known Greek and Roman corpuses, in its original languages, widely available to the Western world. Manutius also included works not previously known in Europe, as he had studied with Byzantine scholars and had greater access to Greek works that they brought with them from Constantinople (now Istanbul).

One of the most intriguing objects in the exhibition is Manutius's edition of the works of Aristotle, which he published in Greek. The entire five volumes are on display and contain the commentary of three different readers, who have filled every available space with copious scholarly annotations. Each note is a response to Aristotle, allowing us to observe the transmission and different interpretations of his teachings centuries later.

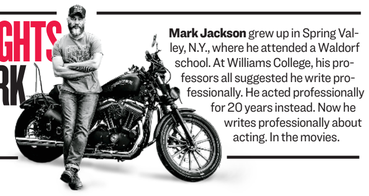
The exhibition "Aristotle: From Antiquity to the Modern Era," is curated by Michael Ryan, the Sue Ann Weinberg Director Emeritus of the Patricia D. Klingenstein Library at the New-York Historical Society Museum & Library, and runs until Jan. 2. 2022. To find out more, visit NYHistory.org

ALL PHOTOS BY BUENA VISTA PICTURES



Basic Underwater Demolition (BUD/S) candidate Jordan O'Neil (Demi Moore), in "G.I. Jane."

Jordan O'Neil (Demi Moore) is combat ready.



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.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Can Women Be Navy SEALS?

MARK JACKSON

"Navy SEALS" (starring Charlie Sheen) came out in 1990 and kicked off America's current SEAL infatuation. Active-duty SEALS apparently enjoy quoting "Navy SEALS" dialogue while on operations. When rescued local non-combatants (in, say, Afghanistan) thank them, SEALS like to say something like, "There's no reason to thank us because we don't exist. You never saw us. This never happened."

When "G.I. Jane," starring Demi Moore came out in 1997, none of the scads of literature about SEALS and SEAL training was out there yet. SEAL warriors like Chris Kyle, Jocko Willink, and David Goggins weren't yet household names, and so I thought "G.I. Jane" was big fun. There was cool stuff happening, even though everybody at the time was pretty sure no woman could ever pass SEAL bootcamp (BUD/S; Basic Underwater Demolition/SEALS), notoriously the most brutal military training in the world.

Now, after having read pretty much every last book about SEALS, watched all the SEAL movies, and followed Willink and Goggins on Instagram—and then rewatched "G.I. Jane," it was like a camera lens finally coming into focus: It's one of the most ridiculous military movies ever made.

Moore's character, Jordan, is supposed to be the first woman ever to undergo Basic Underwater Demolition (BUD/S) training.

Yes, Women Can Compete!

Apparently a woman has now passed BUD/S. According to SOAA (Special Operations Association of America):

"Has there ever been a female Navy SEAL? While the U.S. Navy has yet to have a female join their ranks as a Navy SEAL, they did recently have the first female to ever pass the grueling and demanding U.S. Navy SEAL officer training course. ... Originally, Navy SEALs were just one of two communities that were required by law to not allow women to join. The other is Navy SWCC (Special warfare combatant-craft crewmen). However, that is not the case today."

I'm not surprised. Woman who are on the cutting edge, involved in things that were previously considered male-only endeavors, can pretty much do everything men do. Lynn Hill free-climbing The Nose, solo, on El Capitan in Yosemite valley, before any man could do it, comes to mind (along with her tongue-in-cheek exclamation after exiting the 3,000 foot climb: "It goes, boys!") And have you seen those top-level CrossFit women? Arnold Schwarzenegger didn't have abs to rival theirs at the height of his bodybuilding career. I jest of course. But only slightly.

It is, however, safe to say no woman on earth can compete with 6 feet 9 inches, 400-pound Hafthor Julius Bjornsson, the world's strongest man, who recently broke a 1,000-year-old Viking record by carrying a 1,433-pound log on his back for five steps. In the legend the record comes from, the Viking Orm Storolfsson broke his back on the fourth step. You know why no woman can compete with that? Because no man can either. And very few elephants.

Jordan O'Neil (Demi Moore) undergoing brutal SERE training (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape).

'G.I. Jane'

Director
Ridley Scott

Starring
Demi Moore, Viggo Mortensen, Anne Bancroft, Jason Beghe, Jim Caviezel

Running Time
2 hours, 5 minutes

MPAA Rating
R

Release Date
Aug. 22, 1997

★★☆☆☆

The Story

"G.I. Jane" mostly comes off as a 1997 recruitment advertisement made by Ridley Scott ("Alien," "Blade Runner," "Thelma & Louise") for the Navy, with the intent to show exactly just how tough U.S. Navy Seal training is. The Scott boys must have had some kind of deal with the Navy because Ridley's brother Tony made "Top Gun."

Moore's character Jordan is supposed to be the first woman ever to undergo BUD/S. She's singled out for abuse by D.H. Lawrence-quoting Master Chief John James Urgayle (Viggo Mortensen).

The question is never whether Jordan will make it, it's how, and what kinds of fetishized punishment audiences can watch her endure on the wet, sandy beach-run to self-actualization. It's basically an essay in eroticized brutality and masochism, and if not for its faux feminist credentials, it would have probably been roundly denounced as misogynist.

Predictably, Moore's character not only finishes her training, but earns the respect and trust of her prejudiced male compatriots.

The Main Issue

The age-old question is should women serve in the military in combatant roles? They definitely already do in Israel and in war-torn African countries, the latter of which I dismiss because they employ child soldiers, and women and children traditionally really ought not to be fighting in wars, which was always a man's job.

But there are highly competent female fighter-jet pilots. And even hardcore Navy SEALS say they cannot understand the moxie and cool-headedness needed to pull off an insane, pitch-black, night-time, flying-by-instruments-only, aircraft carrier-landing, in 30-foot waves, in a thunderstorm, which pilots call "a night in the barrel." But women can do that now.

What I also find convincing about the topic is that there are two former Delta Force operators who have become action-thriller authors. Both of them have a female character written into the story that's every bit as good as the men on the team, with the added specialty that in operations that call for more spy than warrior, the women can do their hair, put on lipstick, wear little black dresses, catch the enemy off guard, and put them in compromising situations. If these guys didn't think women can operate at the level men can, their books wouldn't be as believable as they are. On the other hand, people tend to be attracted to the outrageous; maybe these guys are just selling books.

Let's say for a minute that combat is a good thing for women to do. At one point Demi Moore famously snarls a certain anatomical curse beloved of men. Wellll ... but, you know, Jordan—you don't actually have one of those. It's one thing when a woman is able to compete in the macho, male-dominated world of spec ops military, but when aping the worst of male behavior is seen as empowering, then you know that the well-intended aspects of feminism got discombobulated somewhere along the way.

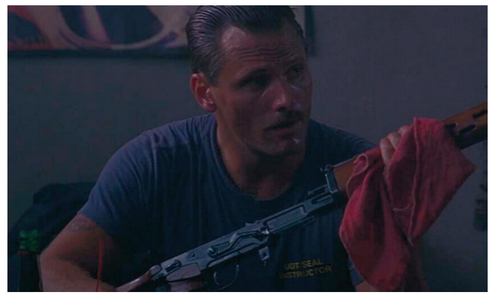
Here's the real problem: Men fighting in wars might get PTSD from seeing their male comrades' heads getting blown off in a fire fight, but the sight of a woman getting similarly killed automatically adds, for all alphas with a chivalrous gene, the burden of not having defended her well enough. In fact, Mortensen's character in the movie, has the following quote:

"The Israelis tried it—women in combat. Seems men couldn't used to the sight of woman getting blown open. They'd linger over the wounded females, obviously trying to save those who couldn't be saved, often to the detriment of the mission."

What it boils down to is this: Rape and pillage happen in war. If a SEAL gets caught by the Taliban, he's going to get his head chopped off. If a female SEAL were to get caught by the Taliban, all sorts of unspeakable evils would immediately occur—and be videotaped—and then she'd get her head chopped off. And all of it would go on the internet. Ultimately, it's this undefendable vulnerability that shouldn't be allowed to go downrange, in military vernacular. A video like that could give an entire country PTSD.

So—can women be SEALS? Yes. Should they be SEALS? It's still up for debate.

Texas Senator Lillian DeHaven (Anne Bancroft) aims to integrate women fully into all occupations of the Navy.



Viggo Mortensen plays U.S. Navy SEAL Master Chief John James Urgayle.

REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Holding On to Eternal Virtues: 'Farewell'

ERIC BESS

ALL IMAGES PD-US

Change is a fact of life. Sometimes we hurt ourselves by trying to keep things the same forever. We hurt ourselves when we cannot let go of and accept the inevitability of change. It doesn't mean that there aren't some things that don't change; some things are eternal.

In 1913, the English painter Arthur Hacker created "Farewell." Sotheby's website suggests that it was painted as if it was "almost in anticipation of the First World War, with the irrevocable changes that it caused."

"Farewell" is a simple painting, but its mystery and the mood it invokes causes me to ask certain questions, which may be relevant for us today.

Arthur Hacker's 'Farewell'

Hacker painted two female figures in a dark setting. The woman on the left is almost completely obscured by background shadows, whereas the woman on the right is more fully illuminated.

The woman on the left wears a light-colored dress, and the woman on the right wears a darker one. The two women hold each other's hands but appear to be at the very moment when they let go of each other. They are not facing each other but are turned away from one another, and their heads are bowed in sadness.

Do we have the courage to search the shadows for the woman in white?

On the ground by their feet is a passionflower. The passionflower is not traditionally symbolic of emotional passion but of the passion of Christ, that is, for his compassion and self-sacrifice for the betterment of human beings.

Behind the two women, blue-green light shines through between the trees in a few places. The tree in the center, however, has a snake coiled around it. In the shadows, this snake is only perceptible upon close examination.

Letting Go of the Wrong Things

What wisdom might we gather from this simple image? Why are the two women dressed differently? Why does the passionflower rest at their feet? And why is a snake coiled around the tree in the background?

The time period in which this painting was completed can provide some context. The beginning of the 20th century witnessed an ideological shift in Western civilization. With the advent of Marxism and Darwinism, the West experienced a change from the long-held virtues of compassion and self-sacrifice to materialism and natural selection.

To me, this shift from virtue to materialism is what Hacker's painting depicts. The woman to the left wears a light-colored dress. Her dress may even be white and may only appear off-white because of the shadows. White is often the color traditionally symbolic of virtue and purity.

It also appears that the woman in white is putting in more effort than the woman in dark garb: Though she turns away, the woman in white has both of her hands on her counterpart's single hand, which hangs palm-down in the center of the composition, as if she were the one who has dropped the passionflower. The woman in white, because of her virtue, does not want to let go of the other woman until there is no hope.

(Top) "Farewell," 1913, by Arthur Hacker. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.

(Above) In this detail of the painting, the snake, though barely visible, can be seen by a glimmer of light on its skin.

Having dropped the passionflower, the woman in the dark gown is also saying farewell to traditional virtue. She no longer holds the flower, and instead, she seems to grasp her own clothing. Pulling the fabric around her arm creates a tension between her and the woman in white, for her arm appears as if it will fling forward as soon as the woman in white lets go of her hand. This tension reasserts the contrast between absolute materialism and virtue.

To me, since the tension on her dress is caused by the woman on the right herself, this tension also suggests that people who adopt ideologies of absolute materialism and natural selection end up causing themselves stress.

In the Christian tradition, the snake is symbolic of temptation. The snake is sneaky and obscures itself in the shadows, but its presence suggests that it is in some way manipulating the situation.

I believe the snake to be symbolic of material temptation, to which the woman in dark dress has succumbed. The woman in white represents traditional virtues such as compassion and self-sacrifice and has tried her best to plead with the other woman to take these virtues seriously. The woman in the dark dress, however, has been tempted by the snake in the background, and so, instead, she says farewell to the woman in white—to virtue—and opts instead for material possessions.

The woman in white, recognizing that her cause is lost, retreats into the shadows, and the woman in the dark gown—despite having in her hand what she desires—is still unhappy.

Indeed, change is a fact of life, and we can cause ourselves a lot of pain by trying to prevent it. Sometimes we need to say farewell to things in our lives.

Then, there are some things that don't change. There are some beneficial things—like compassion—that are unchanging, that is, eternal. There's no reason for us to say farewell to things that are beneficial and eternal.

Today, we might ask ourselves: Do we have the courage to search the shadows for the woman in white and again find the traditional virtues of compassion and self-sacrifice?

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

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

GOLDEN AGE FILMS

A Historical Drama About the Perseverance of Faith

IAN KANE

In the last few years, I've come to appreciate the work of celebrated director John Ford. Although, as a child, I'd watched some of his more famous films, such as 1939's "Stagecoach" and 1948's "Fort Apache," I didn't really appreciate them at the time. Widely known for his fantastic Westerns, Ford also filmed other subject matter, such as the Civil War in 1959's "The Horse Soldiers" and his 1945 World War II masterpiece "They Were Expendable." But being a devout Catholic, he also made a film involving a narrative about a priest—1947's "The Fugitive."

Based on the opening shots of "The Fugitive," if you didn't know about its plot, you'd probably assume you were about to watch a Ford Western: A stranger is seen wandering around places with Spanish Colonial architecture and then riding a horse through a small, dusty village that could be anywhere south of the border.

In fact, 'The Fugitive" is deliberately set in an anonymous Latin American country, yet it looks suspiciously like Mexico. It's anonymous because although it's about a Catholic priest who is attempting to escape a totalitarian government, and although the film was shot in and around Mexico City, the Mexican government didn't want to be portrayed as anti-Catholic.

'The Fugitive' is about sticking to one's convictions even when surrounded by powerful, malevolent forces.

Henry Fonda stars as the nameless, fugitive priest-on-the-run. He rides up to a church and enters it in the traditional Catholic manner (bowing, sign of the cross, and so on). Suddenly, he notices a local woman (Dolores del Rio) holding her baby. She's standing against one of the walls. Suspicious, she asks him why he's there. His reply is simple: "I belong here."

He reveals that he is hiding out from the police—this church used to be his. After he gains her trust, he rings the church bells, announcing to the village that the place is back in business.

Meanwhile, a scurrilous character known as "El Gringo" (Ward Bond) is seen packing up his ill-gotten gains (loads of cash) and disembarking a ship. In a hilarious scene, he walks by his own likeness on a Wanted poster. He stops, notices it, and adds a "1" in front of the $5,000 reward—signifying to himself that he's worth more.

After the priest baptizes the village children, the locals hide him, lest the iron-fisted local police find and kill him—he's the last Catholic priest in their area. To drive this point home, when the chief of police (Leo Carrillo, looking very Jackie Gleason-ish) pulls out an old photo of the priest that he intends to use for a new Wanted poster, his vicious lieutenant (Pedro Armendáriz) exclaims: "They all look alike to me. ... I've shot him a dozen times!"

The lieutenant devises a devilishly clever plan: If the villagers won't give up the priest, he'll start kidnapping and killing them, one by one. And, in response, the priest, in a desperate bid to leave the country, begins a long journey to a port city where he intends to board a ship and return to the United States.

Along the way, he meets a homeless-looking character who presents himself as an ally who can help him to his destination. From there, the holy fugitive stumbles from one dangerous situation to the next.

The film is based on author Graham Greene's 1940 novel, "The Power and the Glory," in which a highly flawed Catholic priest seeks salvation for his sins. Like the book, the movie takes place during a political period that parallels the one in Mexico called "The Maximato" (1928–1934), during which its government embraced extreme anticlerical and anti-Catholic pogroms.

Film historian Seth Fein points out that the film suggests "communism was no longer the fight of the people against injustice, but was the new fascism."

Mexican Talent

Henry Fonda plays the fugitive priest well enough, shifting from morose to caring and back to morose again. His eyes register a certain resignation, as if he's a doomed soul trying to help as many folks as he can on his way out.

Actors and actresses from Mexico's Golden Era of Cinema light up the screen. The beautiful Dolores del Rio and Pedro Armendáriz were superb thespians who could hold their own against any of America or Great Britain's finest.

But what really amazed me was the maestro behind the camera—cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa. About three or four minutes into the film, I said to myself: "Wait a minute, I've seen this type of light and shadow cinematography before." When I learned that Figueroa traveled from his native Mexico to the United States to study with legendary cinematographer Gregg Toland, I wasn't surprised. After all, Toland pioneered the chiaroscuro method of filmmaking in which light and dark are used to create dramatic contrasts. This film is certainly a visual feast.

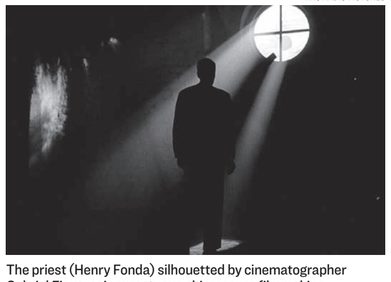
In the end, "The Fugitive" is a rousing film about sticking to one's convictions even when surrounded by powerful, malevolent forces. It also shows that faith lies deeply within us, and even the most flawed among us can seek eventual salvation and redemption. It's an ultimately uplifting cinematic experience.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

PUBLIC DOMAIN

The beautiful Dolores del Rio plays a faithful woman.

RKO RADIO PICTURES



The priest (Henry Fonda) silhouetted by cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa's sumptuous chiaroscuro filmmaking.

RKO RADIO PICTURES

'The Fugitive'

Director
John Ford

Starring
Henry Fonda, Dolores del Rio, Pedro Armendáriz

Running Time
1 hour, 44 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
Nov. 3, 1947

★★★★½

Director John Ford explores faith in a time of repression, in his film "The Fugitive."

GOLDEN-ERA FILMS

An Action-Packed Start to John Ford's Cavalry Trilogy

IAN KANE

ALL PHOTOS BY RKO RADIO PICTURES

Lt. Col. Owen Thursday (Henry Fonda, front L) and Capt. Kirby York (John Wayne, front R) don't exactly see eye-to-eye, in "Fort Apache."

Victor McLaglen is hilarious as the hard-drinking Sgt. Festus Mulcahy.

(L–R) Philadelphia (Shirley Temple), 2nd Lt. O'Rourke (John Agar), and Capt. York (John Wayne) star in the film.

I began my viewing of director John Ford's Cavalry Trilogy out of order—having watched 1949's "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon," the series' second film, first. So, I thought it only natural to go back to 1948's "Fort Apache," the movie considered by many critics to be the best of the trio. And after watching it, I can see why (although I haven't yet watched the third film in the series, 1950's "Rio Grande.")

The film begins at the titular Fort Apache, a small U.S. cavalry outpost on the fringes of the western frontier. Just after the American Civil War, Lt. Col. Owen Thursday (Henry Fonda) is assigned by U.S. Cavalry senior command to replace Capt. Sam Collingwood (George O'Brien), a post that Thursday disdains. Capt. Kirby York (John Wayne), knowledgeable about the Apache tribes, is under Thursday's command.

When Thursday arrives at the outpost, he, with all of the grace of a sledgehammer, reprimands the senior staff because of their relaxed standards of military dress and comportment. Between Thursday's glowering countenance and rigid interpretation of Army rules and regulations, it's clear that he's not there to win over any new friends.

In fact, the only apparent bright spot in the cantankerous cavalryman's life seems to be his daughter, Philadelphia (Shirley Temple). Although none of the men care for Thursday's leadership style, they do respect him because of his outstanding military record: He achieved the rank of general during the war.

During this era, the Irish were looked at disparagingly, and Thursday looks down his nose at the regiment's senior enlisted man, Sgt. Maj. Michael O'Rourke (Ward Bond). In every scene the two men share, there's a palpable ill will between them.

Things don't get any better when O'Rourke's son, 2nd Lt. Michael Shannon O'Rourke (John Agar), a fellow West Point graduate just like Thursday, begins to court Philadelphia.

Things reach a boiling point when the dashing young lieutenant takes Philadelphia for a ride out in the stunning landscape—the gorgeous Monument Valley—surrounding the outpost. The two would-be lovebirds encounter a couple of dead cavalrymen whose stagecoach was ambushed by local Apaches. When Thursday learns that his daughter's life has been imperiled, he practically goes ballistic.

Thursday barely contains his disdain for the young officer, and he forbids the youth from seeing his daughter again. For punishment, Thursday sends young O'Rourke out to retrieve the dead cavalrymen with little in the way of backup, much to the senior O'Rourke's displeasure.

Thursday is also dismissive of the Apaches' tribal customs and traditions, which may lead (no spoiler) to a tactical misstep in the future.

Will the snobby officer thaw out enough to allow 2nd Lt. O'Rourke to date his doted-over daughter? And will his fractious relationship with the rest of the regiment put them all in jeopardy?

Laughs and Action

Typical of John Ford's other celebrated Westerns, a transcendent sense of adventure out on the fringes of the western frontier permeates the film. There's also a good amount of action that plays out as Ford builds tension from one scene to the next, intermingled with some guffaw-inducing hijinks. For example, when hard-drinking Sgt. Festus Mulcahy (Victor McLaglen, in top form) attempts to break in some new cavalry recruits, he causes chaos. And later, when he and some other men including pal Sgt. Beaufort (Pedro Armendáriz) get drunk, they wind up behind bars in the outpost's stockade.

John Wayne does John Wayne and is so convincing as a cavalryman that he looks like he was born wearing the uniform. Likewise, Shirley Temple and John Agar have believable chemistry as young romantic interests. (Agar was married at the time to Temple.) The rest of the cast is equally solid, with many of Ford's stable of actors (Wayne, Bond, Armendáriz, and so on.). It's fun to watch these supertalented actors ham it up throughout.

"Fort Apache" is a fantastic beginning to Ford's Cavalry Trilogy and full of action and adventure. I only wish I'd seen it sooner. Now I'm looking forward to finally watching "Rio Grande."

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

'Fort Apache'

Director
John Ford

Starring
John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Shirley Temple, John Agar, Ward Bond

Running Time
2 hours, 8 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
March 27, 1948

★★★★½