# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARISES CULTURE

Rockwell

**LITERATURE** 

# A Literary Thanksgiving: 3 Stories, 3 Children's Books, and a Compendium

**JEFF MINICK** 

harles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," Robert May's "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," which later became a song most of us recognize, and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" by Dr. Seuss—these and other stories are now classics of the Christmas season.

As for Thanksgiving, well, that beloved holiday definitely plays literary second-string to the Yuletide season. Most likely, if someone asked us to name any novel or short story written about that fourth Thursday in November, we'd furrow our brow, shrug, and Complement your Thanksgiving feast with good stories. Norman Rockwell's illustration "Freedom From Want," appearing in the March 6, 1943, issue of The Saturday Evening Post, has become emblematic of our Thanksgiving celebration. National Archives and Records Administration.

say "I don't know." Even the Thanksgiving poem, later made into a song, "Over the River and Through the Wood," is often mistaken for a piece about Christmas, probably because it mentions a sleigh and snow.

Wishing to find some fiction about Thanksgiving, I recently ransacked my public library for novels and short stories about this holiday. I found more than 20 picture books for youngsters with the word "Thanksgiving" in the title (some of which were quite good), a couple of contemporary romance novels set around Turkey Day, and four books about the history of Thanksgiving and its traditions, one of which we'll consider later.

But no classic tales about our quintessen-

tial American holiday.

On arriving home, I opened my laptop and searched for "classic Thanksgiving short stories." Here I finally struck ... well, I won't call it gold. Or even silver.

But I did find some old, worthy stories by known authors that shared some common themes.

#### **Helping the Downtrodden**

Several of these tales centered on the poor and those who brought them gifts and comfort on Thanksgiving Day.

Continued on Page 4



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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# Elijah and Critical Race Theory: The Rhyming of History

JAMES SALE

t was King Solomon, the reputed writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, who observed that there was nothing new under the sun; and so there seems not to be. Perhaps more accurately, Mark Twain expressed it this way: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." Some sort of echo chamber exists whereby the events of the past repeat themselves in new guises. The guises conceal what the real issue (or issues) is about, usually by creating a new term or language that sounds exciting and fresh but really is as stale as old, moldy toast.

The only people likely to spot these strange reoccurrences are those who have studied one of a number of disciplines: namely history, mythology, theology, literature, and a few others. In general, these disciplines are what used to be called "the humanities."

It is in the humanities that, one way or another, we come to master language and the patterns of human experience. What that means is that we learn to think. And we get to understand the distinctive patterns of human thought and activities.

This is the general point. But what is the specific example to which I am referring when I say that history rhymes?

#### **Marxism by Another Name**

Perhaps, as one looks back on 2020, the biggest event that has impacted lives after the pandemic is Critical Race Theory. Its influence seems to grow apace with every passing year.

While it's very important that theories are generated, and if these theories animadvert on how others are treated—and in particular how everyone is entitled to respect, opportunity, and achievement—then that is good. However, not all theories are good, much less equal. What did Karl Marx's theories, for all their talk of social justice and equality, actually lead to? They led to mass extermination, in fact, in the USSR, China, and wherever communism held sway.

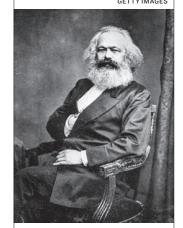
But secondly, as with King Solomon (and nothing new under the sun), we see old heresies—that is, theories—resurfacing in new guises. It's rather like COVID-19: There is the original virus, but then variants pop up, and some are more deadly than the original.

A theory is usually thought to be a system of ideas intended to explain something, to account for reality or some portion of reality. With Marx, as English cultural critic Theodore Dalrymple in City Journal observes, it is different: "Marx's eschatology, lacking all common sense, all knowledge of human nature, rested on abstractions that were to him more real than the actual people around him." In other words, the whole theory rests not even on ideas but on abstractions entirely devoid of common sense and empirical testing.

So what am I driving at? This: Critical Race Theory is very much like (rhymes with) Marxism, and is not remotely helpful in achieving any meaningful goals—goals like peoples in a given society living together in harmony, for example. Instead, I see a strange rhyming with the Marxist projects of the 20th century as well as its more recent ventures.

Taking the knee is essentially a negation of one's freedom.

ROGER VIOLLET COLLECTIO



The followers of Karl Marx bowed to one idea and interpreted events from that perspective alone. Photo circa 1875.

Communism has always led to mass killings. A visitor at the Memorial Stupa to Choeung Ek Killing Fields, with thousands of skulls of those killed during the Pol Pot regime, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.





"Prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb," 1550–1560, by Daniele da Volterra. Collection of Pannocchieschi d'Elci, Siena, Italy.

In essence, all perverse philosophies lead to perverse actions. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "The ancestor of every action is a thought." Marx spent a lot of his life in the British Museum Reading Room; hardly, one might think, a prelude for creating the Stalinist gulags, yet one followed the other. Similarly, at the other extreme, with Nietzsche we end up with admirers who are Nazis, the "supermen." And "value judgments are a precondition for action," said Jordan B. Peterson—how right he is.

I have not enough space here to do a detailed critique of Critical Race Theory, and besides it's already been done by experts such as Daniel A. Farber and Suzanna Sherry. But we can look at one small perverse action that derives from the theory.

#### Taking a Knee to Baal

You may remember in Kings I, chapter 19, the incredible adventures of Elijah, the prophet of Israel. He had slain the false

prophets of Baal, and then ran in fear for his life; indeed, despaired of his life and requested God to take it. Then he'd hidden in a cave on Mount Horeb and told God, with a hint of self-pity: "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thy altars and killed the prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Only he is left, he opines to God. All the good people have been killed. All dead, except him.

What is God's response to this? Several

What is God's response to this? Several things, but concluding with this remarkable statement: "Yet I will leave 7000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." Clearly, Elijah hadn't anticipated that! The trouble with being overly conscious of one's virtue is that it may lead to virtue signaling, a state wherein one thinks that one is the only virtuous person!

But there we have it. The bowing the knee to Baal is significant. And it can be compared, without too much of a stretch, with today's "taking the knee." Taking or bowing the knee has never been an act of mere solidarity. It has always been primarily a sign of worship, or secondly an act of deference before an emperor or king.

Dominic Raab, the UK's former foreign secretary (the British equivalent of the United State's Anthony J. Blinken at the time of writing this), commented in a radio interview in June 2020 that the taking the knee gesture "feels to me like a symbol of subjugation and subordination, rather than one of liberation and emancipation." He went on to suggest that the idea may have originated in the TV series "Game of Thrones."

Taking the knee is essentially a negation of one's freedom because one is putting a principle on a godlike pedestal beyond one's reason. And this is where we come back to the need for real teachings in history, mythology, theology, literature, and so on, to begin the process of inoculating the young—especially, the young—against simplistic ideas or ideals dressed up in fancy titles like "Critical Race Theory." The theory is actually a golden calf to be worshiped.

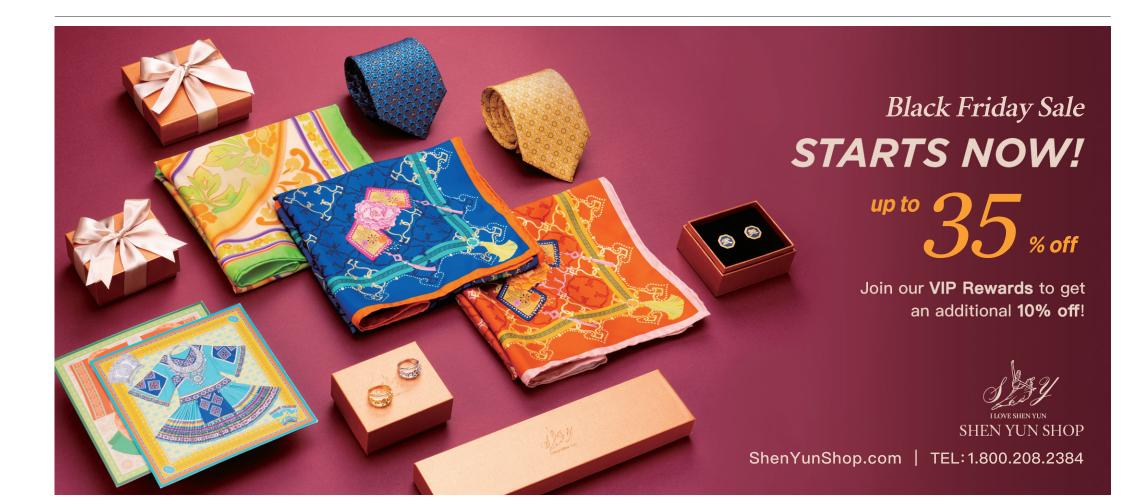
When we talk here about inoculating, we are referring to developing the ability to think effectively, which is what a real humanities education provides.

If we were to turn our critical thinking on Western culture, then we could say that over the last 70 years or so, the West has been worshiping its own golden calf: namely, Mammon or money. This worship, too, restricts rather than enables freedom—all false gods do this.

However, in the West there is still plenty of choice. We don't have to bow the knee to Mammon in the way that, say, North Koreans have to bow the knee to their political god. But once a bow-the-knee culture starts, who knows how far it will spread?

We are free people, and like Elijah and 7,000 other Israelites, we must resist this false worship. By their fruits you will know them, said one great leader, and we can easily see the "fruits" of Critical Race Theory.

The biblical quotes are all from the New American Standard Bible.



James Sale has had

over 50 books pub-

lished, most recently

for Top Performing

Teams" (Routledge,

2021). He won first

prize in The Society of

Classical Poets' 2017

annual competition,

York in 2019. His most

recent poetry collec-

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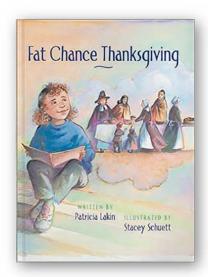
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(Right) Thanksgiving has always been about sharing, and that's just what these stories present "The First Thanksgiving 1621," circa 1932, by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris. Private Collection. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



In this book for children, a girl inspired by the Pilgrims decides to have a real Thanksgiving feast.

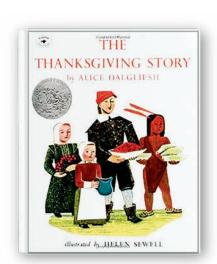
### 'Fat Chance Thanksgiving'

**Author** Patricia Lakin

**Publisher** 

Albert Whitman & Company, 2001

**Pages** 



"The Thanksgiving Story" is an award-winning children's book that tells the story of the very first Thanksgiving.

#### 'The Thanksgiving Story'

**Author** Alice Dalgliesh Atheneum Books, 1954

**Pages** 



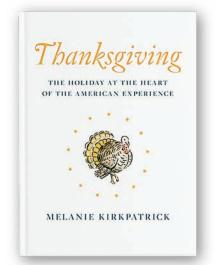
In "The Memory Cupboard," a girl learns to see beyond a mishap to the value of memories and special relationships.

#### 'The Memory Cupboard: A Thanksgiving Story'

**Author** Charlotte Herman

**Publisher** 

Albert Whitman & Company, 2003 **Pages** 



Melanie Kirkpatrick's book gives us all things Thanksgiving.

'Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience'

**Author** Melanie Kirkpatrick **Publisher** Encounter Books, 2016



**LITERATURE** 

# A Literary Thanksgiving: 3 Stories, 3 Children's Books, and a Compendium

Continued from Page 1

"The Night Before Thanksgiving" by Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909) features the frail and elderly Mary Ann Robb, who lives alone in a small house that she's on the verge of losing. Though she has spent her younger years helping her neighbors when she could, they've now largely abandoned her, encouraging her to go to the poor house where she might receive better care.

But not everyone has forgotten her. On the night before Thanksgiving, when she's out of food and with only enough firewood to last the night, John Harris comes knocking on the door. This orphaned boy whom she had once welcomed into her home has returned from the Dakotas, bringing her gifts and food, and the promise that with his newly acquired wealth, he'll be able to provide for her and keep her in her house. "And you're going to have everything you need to make you comfortable long's you live, Mother Robb!"

"She looked at him again and nodded, but she did not even try to speak. There was a good hot supper ready, and a happy guest had come: It was the night before Thanksgiving."

### **Turnabout**

In "Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen," William Sydney Porter (1862–1910), who wrote under the pen name O. Henry, reversed the situation found in Jewett's story. Here we meet the down-and-out Stuffy Pete and the Old Gentleman, who for years has annually treated Pete to a Thanksgiving dinner in a restaurant while refraining himself from partaking of the food.

On this particular occasion, Stuffy Pete has already stuffed himself with turkey and fixings, the recipient of charity provided by two elderly women who always feed one poor person on this special day. When the Old Gentleman arrives, Stuffy Pete is so overloaded from his feast that



writer Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett.

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.

he can barely move from his park bench, but he gamely follows his benefactor to the restaurant and downs another gargantuan meal while the Old Gentleman looks on with satisfaction. Within a few minutes of leaving the establishment, Pete crashes to the sidewalk, and his indigestion sends him to the hospital.

Unbeknownst to Pete, the Old Gentleman is also admitted to the hospital, half dead from starvation as a result of his own poverty.

As in most of his stories, we can find entertainment and pleasure not only in O. Henry's surprise endings to his stories, but also in his prose. Here's a sample from the opening paragraph:

"There is one day that is ours. There is one day when all we Americans who are not self-made go back to the old home to eat saleratus biscuits and marvel how much nearer to the porch the old pump looks than it used to. Bless the day."

#### A Good Deed Rewarded

"Bert's Thanksgiving" by J.T. Trowbridge (1827–1916) also ends with a twist.

Young newsboy Bert Hampton is trying to sell his papers on Thanksgiving Day when he meets an old man who seems hungry and poor but buys one of his papers. The boy "was a generous little fellow, and any kindness shown him, no matter how trifling, made his heart overflow," and so he invites the stranger to dine with him in a restaurant.

During their meal of chicken soup followed by squash pie, Bert reveals that his father has recently died, leaving the family penniless. His mother is working as a nurse in hopes of someday buying a home, and his two sisters are "boarded at a good place" and still in school. But given their situation, Bert has left school to earn money and try to help his mother.

At the end of the meal, the old man writes out an address on a scrap of paper and invites Bert to come and see him

### Several tales centered on the poor and those who brought them gifts and comfort on Thanksgiving Day.

soon, telling him he knows a few people in business. When in the next week Bert pays him a visit, the boy discovers that Mr. Crooker, his dinner companion, is actually a well-to-do real estate mogul. He gives Bert a job in the office, with the idea of someday turning the business over to him, and after meeting Bert's mother, this lonely old man offers her a house if she will make it a home not just for her family but will allow him to live there as well.

When first meeting Mr. Crooker in his office, Bert stammers, "I—I thought you was a poor man."

"I am a poor man," said Mr. Crooker, locking his safe. "Money doesn't make a man rich. I've money enough. I own houses in the city. They give me something to think of, and so keep me alive. I had truer

riches once, but I lost them long ago." Crooker's words "I am a poor man ... Money doesn't make a man rich" lie at the heart of "Bert's Thanksgiving."

#### **Lit Picks for the Younger Set**

The above stories are relatively short and ideal for a family read-aloud, but the little ones may have trouble following them. Here are three picture books suitable for the K-3 gang.

Alice Dalgliesh's "The Thanksgiving Story" won a Caldecott Honor and is an excellent account of the first Thanksgiving. We follow the Hopkins family as they sail on the Mayflower to presentday Massachusetts and with the help of an Indian tribe survive as a colony.

"Fat Chance Thanksgiving" tells the story of Carla, an inner-city girl whose apartment house is destroyed by a fire. The book she saves from the flames, "A Pilgrim Thanksgiving," inspires her to face tribulations as did the Pilgrims. When they move into another apartment, Carla organizes the tenants to throw a Thanksgiving feast in the building's lobby. From all sorts of ethnic backgrounds, they bring fried okra, arroz con pollo, Irish stew, lasagna, and

other dishes to this meal, but even more they share all-American camaraderie.

In Charlotte Herman's "The Memory Cupboard: A Thanksgiving Story," young Katie and her parents travel to Grandma's house for Thanksgiving. While Katie's admiring a gravy boat treasured by her grandmother, it slips from her fingers and smashes into pieces on the floor. Katie breaks into tears, but wise old Grandma escorts her to what she calls her memory cupboard, where she keeps other broken objects with special meaning for her. She tells Katie a few stories about these possessions, and then says: "Sometimes, no matter how careful we are, things we're fond of get broken. But things are just things. People are more important, especially granddaughters."

### **Time for Some Festivity**

Finally, if you're looking for a potpourri of all things Thanksgiving, try Melanie Kirkpatrick's "Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience." Here are chapters devoted to the first Thanksgiving, to Massachusetts before the arrival of the Pilgrims, to the wild enthusiasm more than a century ago for Thanksgiving Day football games—"In 1893, about one hundred twenty thousand athletes played in five thousand Thanksgiving games across the country...."—and all manner of anecdotes about this unique holiday.

At the end of her book, Kirkpatrick includes a chapter on old-fashioned recipes and menus as well as "Readings for Thanksgiving Day," a chapter rich in letters, speeches, and books from times past. Some of these Thanksgiving ruminations are ideal for sharing with your guests before carving up that turkey.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving. As we celebrate, let's pause to count our blessings for friends and family. And if we add a bit of literary spice to this menu of gratitude and food, we'll only improve the flavor of this feast.



"Lamentation With Saints," by Plautilla Nelli. Oil on canvas; 113.3 inches by 75.5 inches. Museum of San Marco. Restored in 2006 by the American not-for-profit organization Advancing Women Artists.

#### **LEADING BY EXAMPLE**

# How Painter Sister Plautilla Nelli Persevered Against the Odds

#### LORRAINE FERRIER

Great artists converse with our hearts without uttering a word. They animate the greatest and most tragic moments in life, from battlefields that appear gut-wrenchingly real to divine jubilations that make our souls sing. But seldom do we celebrate the way these artists lived in the world: how they overcame challenges, how they stayed true to their values, or how they treated their fellow man. Yet these stories are as inspiring as the artworks these artists made.

Italian Sister Plautilla Nelli (1524-1588) persevered against the odds to become a sought-after devotional painter. She created her paintings in the confines of a convent workshop, which meant that she was limited

in her artistic experiences. Nelli overcame these challenges. For example, as a nun she couldn't study anatomy. In addition, apart from her own hair, she may not have been able to closely study other examples of hair that would be hidden under habits.

In his 1568 publication, "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects," the art historian and artist Giorgio Vasari noted that Nelli "had no great practice in her art." What he meant was that women were unable to apprentice in a workshop alongside a master. Nelli could not have learned to study, draw, and copy living and natural objects as men did.

### [Plautilla Nelli] has executed some works with such diligence that she has caused the craftsmen to marvel.

Giorgio Vasari, art historian

Nelli worked with what she had. As Vasari attested to in his "Lives," she taught herself art through the first book of meditations on the rules of drawing by Alessandro Allori and M. Agnolo Bronzino, and simply through copying great art.

Nelli was surrounded by remarkable devotional works. Besides the great art inside the convent, she had inherited 500 of Fra Bartolomeo's drawings. Bartolomeo was a preeminent devotional painter who followed in the tradition of the celebrated, pious painter Fra Angelico. Bartolomeo also owned a collection of wooden models that the sisters at the convent may have also inherited.

"She, beginning little by little to draw and to imitate in colors pictures and paintings by excellent masters, has executed some works with such diligence, that she has caused the craftsmen to marvel," Vasari wrote.

Indeed, they did marvel. Nelli's art was highly regarded by noblemen, who believed that her paintings held a mystical quality. Her paintings, Vasari wrote, were "in the houses of gentlemen throughout Florence."

What would make a conquered ruling family bow before its enemy? "The Family of Darius Before Alexander," circa 1660, by Charles Le Brun. Palace of Versailles.

# How Alexander the Great Became Great, Part 2

3 surprising qualities of a legendary conqueror

#### **EVAN MANTYK**

Whether fictional or factual, there are many day may remember is only one ridiculously insignificant possibility for how Alexander the Great died. ("A mosquito did it!")

Therefore, it is instructive to turn our attention to the earliest historical source on Alexander the Great, Diodorus Siculus (90– 30 B.C.), who was a Greek historian writing centuries before all other surviving sources. From Diodorus, we can reliably find those defining characteristics that truly present to us the story of Alexander the Great.

#### **Brotherhood**

Alexander seemed to have an incredible sense of connection with his soldiers—call it fellowship, camaraderie, leading from the front, down-to-earthness, or perhaps brotherhood along the lines of Shakespeare's "band of brothers" in "Henry V."

At any rate, Alexander perfectly imagined himself as just another soldier in the field, without an ounce of snobby elitism over his men and their views. For instance, when Alexander was preparing to enter Asia and begin his massive conquest of the Persian Empire, his advisers stopped him and advised him to first produce an heir in case he died. However, he refused on the basis of his men's perspective. Diodorus writes:

"[They] advised him to produce an heir first and then to turn his hand to so ambitious an enterprise, but Alexander was eager for action and opposed to any postponement, and spoke against them. It would be a disgrace, he pointed out, for one who had been appointed by Greece to command the war, and who had inherited his father's invincible forces, to sit the birth of children."

This brotherhood also meant that when it came time for battle, Alexander often rushed to the front line. He displayed exactly the bravery that he would hope his lowest of soldiers to display. There are multiple examples of this, but one particular incident stands himself surrounded on all sides by enemies. own and made sure that she and Darius's

his reach, but flung javelins and shot arrows as they had enjoyed before. Diodorus records: at him from a distance. He was staggering unsplendid flourishes in the tapestry of the his- der the weight of their blows when the Mace- "[Alexander] decked her with her royal jew- in charge of the arts. They inspired dance, in a mass, but both broke and the soldiers ander earned this attribute. On their own, tumbled back upon the ground. Thus the they take us down that path of bizarre and king [Alexander] was left alone.... As the Indipointless triviality, such that all a student to- ans thronged about him, he with stood their attack undismayed. He protected himself on the right by a tree which grew close by the wall and on the left by the wall itself and kept the Indians off, displaying such courage as you would expect from a king who had his record of achievement. He was eager to make this, if it were the last feat of his life, a supremely glorious one. He took many blows upon the helmet, not a few upon the shield. Eventually he was struck by an arrow below the breast and fell upon one knee, overborne

### Through the modern lens, it seems an oxymoron to praise a conqueror for good manners.

The wound was indeed a serious one, but Alexander was rescued and later recovered. It was this kind of just-one-of-the-guys attitude that commanded the absolute loyalty of his men as they ventured deep into lands they had only heard of in stories and legends.

#### **Good Manners** Through the modern lens, it seems an oxy-

moron to praise a conqueror for good manners. However, for all of recorded history, war and military conflicts have been a simple fact of human life. Then, since war is a given, those who display uncommonly abundant chivalry, courtesy, refinement of conduct, at home celebrating a marriage and awaiting and what we would today call good manners in war are what we should celebrate. This is the case with Alexander the Great.

Alexander's chief rival was the Persian Emperor Darius III. Once Alexander defeated Darius, he came into possession of all of Darius's immediate family while Darius himselffled. Alexander might have executed out in which Alexander was the first to scale them, imprisoned them, exiled them, or rethe wall of an Indian city that his forces were duced them to commoners. On the contrary, besieging. Once he entered the city, he found he treated Darius's mother as if she were his

"The Indians did not dare to come within wife were treated with the exact same status after one of the Muses."

tory of Alexander the Great. However, they donians raised two ladders and swarmed up elry and restored her to her previous dignity, music, and poetry. (In fact, the word "music" with its proper honors. He made over to her all her former retinue of servants which she had been given by Darius and added more in addition not less in number than the preceding. He promised to provide for the marriage of the daughters even more generously than Darius had promised and to bring up the boy as his own and to show him royal honor. ... As to the wife of Darius, he said that he would see that her dignity should be so maintained that she would experience nothing inconsistent with her former happiness. He added many other assurances of consideration and generosity, so that the women broke out into uncontrolled weeping, so great was their un-

Speaking of this episode, Diodorus leaves us with his own commentary: "In general I would say that of many good deeds done by Alexander there is none that is greater or more worthy of record and mention in history than this."

And Alexander was so true to his word in taking care of Darius's mother that she looked at him as a son and was horrified when he died so young. This saddened her so much that she refused to eat and died five days after he died.

Lastly, when Alexander did find Darius, he treated his corpse honorably and gave it a royal funeral. This was the proper way for Alexander to treat his fellow royalty. Or as we might say today, it was the decent and classy thing to do.

Finally, the third defining characteristic of Alexander's greatness was his faith. This might variously be called piety, or belief in the divine and the supernatural. At any rate, Alexander was always shown to pay due respect to the ancient Greek gods as well as the Egyptian god Ammon, and to pay attention to omens—that is, signs from heaven communicated through priests, prophets, and natural phenomena.

For instance, before his great conquest of the Persian Empire was to begin, "He made lavish sacrifices to the gods at Dium in Macedonia and held the dramatic contests in honor of Zeus and the Muses. ... He celebrated the festival for nine days, naming each day

The Muses were daughters of Zeus, the Greek god of the sky, and were goddesses

When Alexander reached the limits of his vast campaign in India, beyond the Persian border, he again paid his respects: "He first erected altars of the twelve gods each fifty cubits high."

When he escaped drowning in a river, he again recognized that his life was in the hands of the gods and related his own fate to that of the half-god Achilles from Greek mythology. Diodorus writes: "Thus narrowly escaping, he sacrificed to the gods as having come through mortal danger, reflecting that he, like Achilles, had done battle with a river."

Perhaps the most telling is when Alexander visited a temple of Ammon and sincerely questioned his own purpose in life, whether he was meant to conquer the world and if he had successfully punished those who were behind his father's assassination:

"When Alexander was conducted by the priests into the temple and had revered the god for a while, the one who held the position of prophet, an elderly man, came to him and said, 'Rejoice, son; take this form of address as from the god also.' [Alexander] replied, 'I accept, father; for the future I shall be called your son. But tell me if you grant me the rule of the whole earth.' The priest now entered the sacred enclosure and as the bearers now lifted the god and were moved according to certain prescribed sounds of the voice, the prophet cried that of a certainty the god had granted him his request, and Alexander spoke again: 'The last, O spirit, of my questions now answer; have I punished all those who were the murderers of my father or have some escaped me?""

We see from this that Alexander put his complete trust in a prophet with whom he was unacquainted. It suggests a great deal of humility and piety from someone who is, at this point, the king of the world.

The final chapters of Alexander's life further illuminate faith and his other virtues. That will be looked at next time.

Evan Mantyk is an English teacher in New York and President of the Society of



# Chef-Turned-Farmer Raises the Bar on Growing Food

#### **MARK JACKSON**

Some folks live to eat. Others eat to live. I'm not a foodie, but after listening to a a true artist in every regard. foodie client's enthusiastic descriptions of his gustatory creations for almost 20 years, I learned to appreciate what goes into gourmet-level food prep. What 20 years of recipe cheerleading did for my cooking appreciation, "The Soul of a Farmer"—a tiny gem of a farming documentary—did for my appreciation of food growing, in

This little film is a labor of love by Peabody Award-winning director Roger Sherman as well as a bow in gratitude to farming. It's inspiring to see someone as passionately in love with their job as the It's All About the Soil titular farmer Patty Gentry is. It's a calling for her. We should all be so lucky.

I give it 5 out of 5 stars because Gentry grows 5-star vegetables at her 3-acre Early Girl Farm in Brookhaven, Long Island, and it's clear that in her previous career as a chef, if she hadn't already achieved a 5-star Michelin rating—she would have eventually nailed it. She has the fire, the inspiration, dedication, integrity, talent, ambition, and deep reserves of willpower.

#### Farm Appreciation

Actually, I'd already appreciated farming. Here's why: Those who attended Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf schools in the late 1960s (with a parent on the faculty) were privy to spiritual esoterica that had long been considered the secret of secrets. Like, say, reincarnation and chakras. In 2021, you see chakras adorning the yoga attire of suburban housewives.

The same goes for Steiner's invention of biodynamic farming. In the '60s, it was about it. Now, you'll see at least two bio-Union Square farmers market. That's all to say, I was wondering if Patty Gentry was going to mention biodynamic farming at any point during the film. Yes she does. Biodynamic farming is about farmers learning to work in conjunction with the fairies. Yes. Fairies. Faeries. More on

### **Early Girl Farm**

The landlady of this farmlet is none other than movie star and activist Isabella Rossellini, daughter of the legendary Ingrid Bergman, who speaks to the perfectionist standards of her tenant, relating that Farmer Gentry encourages Rossellini to feed the farm's excess (garbage) to her various animals. Rossellini happily complies, but not without foraging through it herself first. She knows that Patty throws out produce that's not 100 percent perfect in every regard, namely fresh, flavorful, and visually aesthetic—veggies most farmers would sell in a heartbeat.

Basically, the documentary deconstructs any naive romantic notions we might have had about organic farm-to-table food. It confirms what we suspected all along: that the lovely smelling, fresh produce bought directly from organic and biodynamic farmers driving down from rustic upstate farms in cozy-looking loaded pickup trucks to urban farmers markets is the result of work, writ large. Bone-wearying, butt-busting, backbreaking work.

"To make a healthy living, all you need is three acres," says Gentry cheerily. However, it took her 10 long years to be able to make that claim. After a two-decade career as a chef, Gentry started providing farm-to-table produce to local Long Island restaurants, such as Beth's Café in Quogue, via a farm stand. Only recently has she been able to make a financial breakthrough.

And even now, Gentry continues to live more of a classic starving-artist type of existence. If it weren't for her partner providing financial support, as Gentry says, level cooking wisdom. As she says: "The "I would probably still be farming, but I would most likely be living out of the back are happy to try anything. This week I had

of my truck." Small wonder that Rossellini calls Patty "the Picasso of vegetables." Make no mistake about it: Patty Gentry is

We watch her and her minimalist, all-female work crew bust their humps like plow horses, sunup to sundown, 24/7, growing juicy, crunchy, blissfully fragrant, workof-art-colorful vegetables for her gourmet chef clients. She tailors, customizes, and aligns her vegetal offerings with lists of clients' menus that she keeps in her head. What's captivating is that, at one point, she claims that the staggering amount of work actually energizes her. That's something that never gets old to witness.

Just like potters live for finding good sources of clay, farmers live to discover ways to improve their soil—how to get more of that ideal, loamy, black, earthworm heaven that exponentially increases veggie yield. As Patty says, the soil tells a story through the plant. "It takes guts to let the plants speak to you. In modern agricultural practices, these plants are never allowed to tell their story. They're being doused with pesticides and herbicides—we don't want to hear from them. And consequently we're being served a product that is dangerous for us, and vacuous of any nutrients."

As director Sherman relates in his own review of his movie: "It is the way she deals with the many setbacks Patty faces that makes her story so captivating. Early in the film, she tells us that to improve her soil, she spread 15 tons of basalt [volcanic rock dust] on her three acres, 'by hand.' But it didn't help.'

The biodynamic reference comes esoteric, but Waldorf students knew all when Patty tells the story of trying to dynamic farm stands at New York City's a biodynamic farmer if she could buy some of his tincture. He wouldn't sell her any. He told her that it wasn't a fight—the bugs arrive to tell the farmer that they've still got work to do. This is where "The Soul of a Farmer" covers the same ground (and just as delightfully) as "The Biggest Little Farm" in terms of revealing the exquisite wisdom of nature. Both films are about neophyte farmers learning by trial and error.

She names her various plants, which, like children, have different personalities and nutrition needs. She also keeps in her head what can only be described as a taste version of a photographic memory or perfect pitch, which sets the zenith taste standard she'd like to consistently cultivate. Talk about raw talent—that's like a farmer version of Mozart's renowned ability to hear some other composer's brand new concerto and go home and play it flawlessly on the piano.

As we know by now, the most fulfilling types of work are done in service of something greater than ourselves. How's this for inspiring: "Every time I plant a seed, I relive a dish I've eaten. I think of each person [restaurant chefs and member of the CSA as I cut their vegetables."

#### Things Get a Bit Easier

As she approached 50, Patty realized that she no longer had, as she put it, "the energy to waste energy." Realizing that something had to change, she implemented a series of infrastructure improvements and streamlined her entire farming approach, the most effective aspect of which is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA provides local families with weekly shares of produce. Everyone buys a share in the farm and pays in advance, which is not the case with restaurants.

We see a festive gathering with tents, and Patty addressing CSA members on the microphone while Isabella Rossellini is out parking cars. Members with children in tow walk about the farm, selecting their own herbs, while Patty dispenses master-CSA is so joyful and feels effortless. People



**Patty** Gentry is a community healer: healing the land, the plants, and the people.

a ton of long beans on the chefs' list but no one bought them. So, I have enough to give each CSA member almost a pound of these magnificent beans."

Backbreaking work still energizes Patty, but the constant financial struggle depletes her. Can CSA rescue Early Girl Farm? It'd be a tragedy if it didn't. In director Sherman's own words:

"What separates Patty from most other farmers, I believe, is that she is sustained by the poetic magic of farming. Every Saturday at daybreak, she writes a heartfelt, lyrical letter to her CSA members. Reading a portion of one letter, which ends the film, she begins, 'I want you to know we think about you all week and anticipate with joy your arrival at the farm on Saturday mornings. ...' She describes the wonderful bounty they're soon to receive, sharing ideas of how to cook—and think about-her vegetables. This week's hopeful sign-off: 'Like a rose under the April snow, Patty.'

"As in all of my social-issues films, I was attracted to Patty Gentry's story because it represents a crucial issue in America today: the survival of small independent farmers. At a time when organic, sustainable, farming has become so valued, delivering on that promise is increasingly challenged. In a cinema verité style, Patty

shows us how difficult farming is and how much she loves it. She's smart, engaging, articulate, self-deprecating,

"I believe Patty's story will move people. It will open their eyes to the struggles of small American farmers, and how crucial they are to sustain-

Roger Sherman funded the film entirely by himself.

ing our environment."

Farmer Patty Gentry's perfect heirloom

tomatoes.

'The Soul of a Farmer

**Documentary** 

Roger Sherman

**Running Time:** 

**Release Date:** 

Oct. 19, 2021

32 minutes

Director:

### Village Doctor

My feeling about Patty Gentry is that she's got more than a little of the Village Doctor of old about her. She's a community healer: healing the land, the plants, and the people. Souls like this usually continue to expand on their wisdom and improve situations they come in contact with.

I'd love to see a follow-up film, "The Spirit of a Farmer," which chronicles Patty's eventual, inevitable, deeper forays into biodynamic farming and working in conjunction with her garden fairies to produce even more magical food. Think magical is too strong a word? Check out the story of Findhorn, the farm in Scotland where the farmers figured out how to talk to the fairies who, demonstrating what they were capable of, grew Volkswagon-bug-sized cabbages and telephone-pole-sized carrots. Well maybe not quite that big, but still—huge.

As Paul Simon sang, "These are the days of miracles and wonder." A woman like Patty Gentry is someone to watch. Times are strange now; most likely they'll get stranger. Local farming will become more and more important in days to come. "The Soul of a Farmer," currently stream-

ing on Apple TV, iTunes, and Vimeo.



**Patty Gentry** and director Sherman, who funded the film.

Rossellini (L)

greenhouse

at Early Girl

Soul of a

"The Thankful Poor," 1894, by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Oil on canvas; 35.5 inches by 44.2 inches. Private Collection.

**REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART** 

# Practicing Gratitude: Henry Ossawa Tanner's 'The Thankful Poor'

hanksgiving is here, and I've been thinking deeply about what it means to be thankful. What does it mean to have gratitude, and for what should we be grateful? Sometimes, holidays like Thanksgiving can be stressful. For instance, some of us might have to host and cook for our families. Others might have no one to spend Thanksgiving with. Still others may want to avoid divisive political conversations, which some family members instigate at gatherings.

Thanksgiving, however, can be different. The holiday can remind us that there is always something for which we can be

#### 'The Thankful Poor'

Henry Ossawa Tanner, one of the first worldrenowned African American artists of the 19th century, painted "The Thankful Poor." The painting suggests a way of living in the world with gratitude.

Two figures, an older man and a young boy, sit at a kitchen table and prepare to Poor," which brings attention to the fact that eat. Despite the meager amount of food

heads in thankful prayer though the boy's pose is less formal than the older man's. Their empty plates await the food once their prayer is complete.

### The painting suggests a way of living in the world with gratitude.

Behind the older man, a single window shines light on the scene. Because of his positioning, the older man's face is shrouded in shadow, but the young boy's face is illuminated with yellow light.

#### A Grateful Life

Tanner's painting reminds me of how important it is to be grateful even when there's a lack of abundance. The man and boy are practicing gratitude by way of their prayer despite their paltry servings.

Tanner called his painting "The Thankful even those of us who have little can still find

Sometimes, people tell me how grateful they are for the hardships they experience. and that it is up to him to carry the practice Their hardships, they tell me, have helped them become the people they are now. Of course, having the foresight to practice gratitude while experiencing hardship is easier said than done, but we definitely come to learn life lessons through hard times.

It's also important to note that the man and boy are praying. They are showing their gratitude to God. Despite their small lot, they are thankful to God, which suggests that they believe God knows what is best

Their prayer also suggests that what they receive through God sustains them beyond the food on their table. Their belief in God makes them richer than they seem.

Finally, I can't help but sense the connection between the older man and young boy. I assume that the older man is the boy's father or grandfather. Either way, the older man has a presence that suggests that he is leading the young boy; he is teaching the boy how to be grateful to God no matter how little one has, that is, to live a life of gratitude and to be grateful to be alive. Despite the

on the kitchen table, they both bow their things for which we can be thankful. boy's less formal pose, the light shining on his face suggests that he is the focal point of gratitude forward.

This Thanksgiving, "The Thankful Poor" reminds me to be grateful for the people close to me, but it also reminds me to be grateful to be alive. Most of all, it reminds me to give thanks to God and to live in such a way that the people around me are also encouraged to look for reasons to give

Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart," we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see how our historical creations might inspire within us our own innate

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

# The Stories Behind the Traditional Hymns of Thanksgiving

**MICHAEL KUREK** 

With the Thanksgiving holiday approaching, some nowadays may be thinking of pumpkin pie, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, or football. But houses of worship honor the day or week with a longstanding and fairly standard repertoire of hymns.

These beloved songs, found in the hymnals of most Christian denominations around the world, can be categorized into three basic types. There are those that simply list the things for which we are thankful, those that admonish us to have a thankful attitude, and those that focus more on faith and God's benevolence.

**Counting a Catalog of Blessings** 

While the second and third categories, of course, give us many examples, like "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," "We Gather Together," "Great Is They Faithfulness," and "Faith of Our Fathers," let's look at five songs all from the first category.

'For the Beauty of the Earth'

English businessman William Chatterton Dix (1837–1898) wrote this hymn's tune, also used in the Christmas song "As With Gladness, Men of Old." It was composed five years before the words to "For the Beauty" were written by classics scholar Folliott S. Pierpoint (1835–1917).

Pierpoint was deeply inspired by his own surroundings: the beautiful environs of Bath, England. He was only 29 in 1864 when he wrote the piece there, so far away from the raging American Civil War. Though Pierpoint wrote many hymns and poems, this is the only one for which he is remembered today.

The charm of this hymn lies in its simple enumeration of the elements of natural creation, such as the sun, moon, trees, and flowers. It goes on to list the love of family and friends, and "gentle thoughts and mild." The punchline is in the simple refrain "Christ, our Lord, to thee we raise/ This our hymn of grateful praise."

#### 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'

If you do not recognize this title from the song, you may know it as the title of the second of the beloved books by author and veterinarian James Herriot, or the television shows based on them.

In this case, the words came before the tune, as a poem by Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895), the wife of the Anglican Bishop of Ireland, William Alexander. She was having trouble engaging a group of children in learning the Apostles' Creed and wrote a series of simple poems for the children to relate to phrases in that prayer. This one elaborated the phrase "the Father

are going poorly, list in your mind all the things that have gone right, big and small, and it will cheer you up.

When things

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 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



Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Other poems in her collection of 1848 later became the lyrics for the songs "Once in Royal David's City" and "There Is a Green Hill Far Away." She gave the profits from this popular collection to a school for the deaf, among her several charitable works. In 1887, English church organist William Henry Monk (1823–1889) wrote the tune to which this hymn is sung today. He was

even more famously known as the com-

'All Creatures of Our God and King'

poser of the tune for "Abide With Me."

St. Francis of Assisi is well-known for his love of animals and nature. It was one or two years before his death in 1226 when he wrote his famous poem of praise and joy, "Canticle of the Sun." Ironically, he was suffering greatly from various illnesses and periods of blindness. Written in the Umbrian dialect of Italian, the poem extols all of God's gifts of creation, including "brother sun" and "sister moon."

An Anglican clergyman named William Draper (1855–1933) translated the poem into English and then took some liberty in paraphrasing parts of it for the lyrics of this hymn, for which he also wrote the tune.

Many will recall the funny scene in the pilot episode of the British comedy "Mr. Bean," when Mr. Bean (Rowan Atkinson) is in a church service attempting to sing this song without a hymnal. He cannot remember any of the words other than the chorus's threefold repetition of "Alleluia," which he practically screams each time it come around, to compensate for not being able to sing the verses.

'This Is My Father's World' Davenport Babcock (1858–1901) was a true (1909). He was self-employed as an itineroutdoorsman who had been a champion baseball pitcher and accomplished varsity swimmer at Syracuse University. While pastoring a church in Lockport, New York, he always took a robust morning walk to the top of the Niagara Escarpment, where there was a scenic view of Lake Ontario. Each time, he would tell his wife "I am going out to see my Father's world," and on one of these walks he was moved to write down the words to this song about "rocks

and trees, skies and seas."

These lyrics remain his only poetic legacy, but an important one. He met his tragic death by suicide at age 41 in Naples, Italy, on his return trip from a visit to the Holy Land. He had come down with Brucellosis. This virulent disease, acquired from infected milk or meat, can cause a maniacal fever accompanied by extreme depression, thought to be the cause of his suicide.

Babcock's wife had his poetry published soon after. Then in 1915 a close friend of his, Franklin L. Sheppard, adapted to Babcock's words a traditional English melody that he remembered from his childhood, and an enduring hymn was born.

#### 'Count Your Blessings'

This still-popular gospel song does not so much provide a list of blessings, like the songs above, as to tell us to list our own. It offers a bit of practical advice that even nonreligious people can get behind: When things are going poorly, list in your mind all the things that have gone right, big and small, and it will cheer you up. In the song, it goes: "Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God hath done."

The writer of these lyrics was an American, Johnson Oatman Jr. (1856–1922). He was ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church in his youth, but he spent most of his professional life in business. It appears, though, that he must have spent all of his remaining time writing the words to over 3,000 gospel songs, including this one, his most famous.

Edwin Othello Excell (1851-1921), who wrote the tune for "Count Your Blessings," is best known for his still-definitive hymnal arrangement of "Amazing Grace" ate promoter, singer, and publisher of over 2,000 gospel songs that he composed or

Though we don't know for sure, it is not inconceivable that the song "Count Your Blessings" was familiar to Irving Berlin's doctor, who gave Berlin those words of advice as a cure for insomnia. In 1952, Berlin wrote his last hit, "Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)," sung by Bing Crosby in the 1954 movie "White Christmas."



Anglo-Irish hymnwriter and poet Cecil Frances Alexander



English businessman William Chatterton Dix wrote hymns and carols.



William Henry Monk, in the 1880s, composed tunes for well-remembered hymns.





A photograph of American clergyman Maltbie Davenport Babcock from The Critic.





British hymnwriter William Henry Draper.



American composer E.O. Excell wrote the tune for "Count Your Blessings," but is better known for his arrangement of "Amazing Grace."



WHAT GOOD IS POETRY?

The Deliverance of John Donne's 'Death, Be Not Proud'

John Donne after Isaac Oliver (possibly late 17th century, based on a work of 1616). Oil on canvas. National Portrait Gallery, London.

#### **SEAN FITZPATRICK**

As autumn falls in the flashing splendor and fading light of a dying season, we are invited, with the inevitability of the seasons, to face an inevitable fact: We, too, must die. No matter how commonplace this truth, it is still brutal in its brevity. How one understands it, however, makes all the difference—and good poetry is a good start for understanding anything.

And a haughty, triumphant poem it is, John Donne's 1633 sonnet "Death, Be Not Proud," to speak thus to Death:

Death, be not proud, though some have Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;

For those whom thou think'st thou dost

shalt die.

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, Much pleasure; then from thee much

more must flow, And soonest our best men with thee do

Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery. Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,

And dost with poison, war, and sickness And poppy or charms can make us sleep

And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then? One short sleep past, we wake eternally And death shall be no more; Death, thou

Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou This poem raises a mocking toast to Death,

calling out his derivative weakness and subjugation as a pawn of malice and malady. It leaves Hades no grounds to swell in the scope of his dominion, despite his dominance. For death is nothing compared to the dominion that every man and woman can claim over it, who are empowered to conquer the mere sadness of death by the sheer significance of life.

As Odysseus learned when he journeyed to the House of the Dead, life is only significant because we die, but even in death there awaits a mighty company of heroes.

A passage from Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" echoes the sentiments of Donne's sonnet with a similar exultant condemnation of Death:

"Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for

this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!"

Even so, Death is too proud a presence for all too many of the living. What these conclude, with trembling, is the unbearable thought that they are in a sense dead long before they are called to die. They have mistaken life for nothing other than vanity, which is too tied to the artificial to be authentic. Even the most successful in life,

like Leo Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych, can see their life as a failure when they have to lose it. For these, physical life can prove a spiritual death instead of physical death bringing on spiritual life.

In the end, our attitude toward life should change through the acceptance of death and dying, even if that means running the gamut from terror to triumph. Though ignoring or denying death is not unusual, it is a delusion devised to ward off unpleasantries and only breeds superficiality, fear, and frustration.

Acceptance of death, on the other hand, allows for confidence, concord, and even contentment. Though death eclipses the concerns of life, love endures beyond life with a life of its own. "Death, Be Not Proud" is John Donne's challenge, rattling the *a number of journals, including Crisis* bony doors of death. It evokes the para- Magazine, Catholic Exchange, and the dox that living well is the best way to die *Imaginative Conservative*.

well—and that is a paradox that all souls should grapple with before they grapple with Death.

When autumn turns our thoughts toward the departed with questions regarding the purpose of life and what occurs after death, Donne's brave poem thunders with a confident optimism that is ours for the taking. It swells in the victory of a life well lived that must make Death shrink into the shadows of insignificance, leaving us to live on unscathed, even unto eternity.

Sean Fitzpatrick serves on the faculty of Gregory the Great Academy, a boarding school in Elmhurst, Pa., where he teaches humanities. His writings on education, literature, and culture have appeared in



**FILM REVIEW** 

# Real-Life Thriller About the CCP's Campaign Against Falun Gong

#### **IAN KANE**

Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, is an ancient, peaceful spiritual discipline from China that is practiced by a considerable number of people—not only the Chinese but also many other folk—worldwide. Falun Gong has graceful exercises and meditation for health, but unlike tai chi or other forms of qigong, it teaches people how to be kinder and to lead more virtuous lives.

Indeed, Falun Gong seeks to cultivate its practitioners' hearts in accordance with its core tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance. Since the time of its humble introduction in the early 1990s by a man named Li Hongzhi, it has always been a peaceful movement and quickly experienced a meteoric rise in popularity.

Directed by human rights maverick Leon Lee (who also directed 2014's "Human Harvest" about illegal organ harvesting), "Unsilenced" is a film that is based on the real-life events of two Chinese couples: Wang (Ting Wu) and Li (He Tao), and Jun (Shih Cheng-Hao) and Xia (Chen Ying-Yu).

The film begins in 1999. The couples are students at the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing. While Wang, Li, and Xia

practice Falun Gong at a local park, Jun is resistant to joining them because of past runins that his family has had with the Chinese regime. In other words, he wants to stay out of trouble. But Wang believes that the regime is fine with Falun Gong, and his revelations of the practice's numerous benefits convince Jun to join in.

As their group is practicing in the park, a limo carrying a couple of prominent Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members—Director Zhu (James Yi) and his boss, Secretary Yang (Tzu-Chiang Wang)—pulls up. The two believe that Falun Gong's exploding popularity is a direct threat to the CCP since, as Yang later points out, more people joining Falun Gong equals fewer members for the Party.

Film recordings of people practicing Falun Gong in parks are shown at a meeting of the CCP's higher-ups, which results in Yang's being tasked to come down hard on the nascent spiritual practice. Although as stone-faced as a psychopath, Yang dives into his mission with glee. He utilizes the full powers of the state (mainly the police and prison system) and encourages snitching (Stasi-like citizens tattling on each other) to round up proponents of Falun Gong and imprison them.

A brilliant engineering student, Wang is

'Unsilenced' plays like a **Tom Clancy** thriller.

#### 'Unsilenced'

**Director:** Leon Lee

Starring:

Sam Trammell, James Yi, Anastasia Lin

**Running Time:** 1 hour, 48 minutes

**Release Date:** Oct. 22, 2021

one of Tsinghua University's top students and a natural leader. When Wang, Li, Jun, and Xia show up at the next Falun Gong practice session, they discover that it's been disrupted by the authorities. Wang suggests that they lodge complaints at the local government office.

After the students show up at the office and peacefully file their complaints, they conclude that the authorities merely made a mistake in their disrupting the Falun Gong sessions. But later, as they watch a news broadcast, they realize that they walked into a trap—the regime, through the mass media, describes the complaint filers as a violent mob who have threatened the authorities. From there, the infamous and formidable CCP propaganda machine kicks into high gear.

Meanwhile, Daniel Davis (Sam Trammell), an intrepid newspaper journalist stationed in China, catches wind of the regime's sudden oppression of Falun Gong. Similar to Wang, he believes in seeking the truth (in his case through journalism) and begins to dig deeper into the matter. But as Daniel's investigations begin to uncover possible regime corruption, his new assistant Min Xu (Anastasia Lin) expresses her concern for him. She tells him that some things aren't worth risking one's personal safety for.

As the CCP's vigorous roundup of Falun Gong practitioners reaches a feverish pitch, its propaganda techniques reach levels of true absurdity, such as when they record convicts unassociated with Falun Gong posing as practitioners, in order to discredit it through media outlets. Through fear, intimidation, and media manipulation, things begin to look increasingly dire for Falun Gong.

Will both Daniel's investigations and Wang and his friends' faith in truth and justice (and of course Falun Gong) be enough to see them through all of the rampant corruption and political persecution?

One of the things that impressed me the most about this film is its pacing. Sometimes films that are based on real events can drag or be recounted in lackluster ways. Not so with "Unsilenced." It plays like a Tom Clancy thriller and engages the viewer to constantly anticipate its next scenes. It also encourages the curious to launch their own investigations into the rampant persecution of Falun Gong in China.

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

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