

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

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## CRAFTSMANSHIP

## Patiently 'Painting' With Thread

Hand embroidery artist  
Susannah Weiland's  
wonders of art

## LORRAINE FERRIER

London's the last place you'd think of when looking at hand embroidery artist Susannah Weiland's homeware designs. Hummingbirds hover between orchids and angel trumpet flowers, peacocks pose among pagodas and park benches, and brightly colored frogs leap between lily pads and giant lotuses.

Hummingbirds aside, Weiland's first homeware collection, "The Botanical Collection," features flora and fauna found in London's Kew Gardens, one of two royal botanical gardens.

Weiland's fabric and wallpaper hold more surprises: Patience and months of handwork are behind each digitally printed design. Her pencil drawings form the repeat patterns, and her paint-

"Bushy Woodpeckers," 2021, by Susannah Weiland. Pencil drawing printed onto cotton-silk fabric and hand embroidered with matte, silk, and metallic fine machine embroidery threads. Framed: 12.2 inches by 17.1 inches.



**I stitch like I would paint.**

Susannah Weiland,  
hand embroidery  
artist

erly hand embroidery adds the touches of color that together create a distinctive modern style, much like French toile.

Weiland's pencil drawings are the keystones of her collections. Printed on fabric and embellished with her embroidery, they make unique, striking artworks. Last year, Weiland's mixed-media work (or "thread painting") called "Hyde Park Parakeets" was accepted in the prestigious Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition 2021, and it sold on the first day.

Weiland captures the character of each bird or animal she creates. But more than that, she captures scenes of quintessential London that only locals and London-philes can understand.

Continued on Page 4



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## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# How to Be Civilized: Anton Chekhov's 8-Step Program

JEFF MINICK

8. They cultivate their aesthetic sensibilities.

"As your brother and intimate, I assure you that I understand you and sympathize with you from the bottom of my heart. I know all your good qualities like the back of my hand."

In 1886, Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) wrote those words in a letter to his older brother, Nikolai (1858-1889). Regarded today as a master of the short story and a skilled playwright, the young Chekhov penned this letter out of concern for his brother's alcoholism and his failure to develop his artistic and literary gifts.

The letter reflects Chekhov's own talents for writing. He manages to be brusque, honest, humorous, caring, affectionate, and stern. He writes, for example:

"You often complain to me that people 'don't understand' you. But even Goethe and Newton made no such complaints. Christ did, true, but he was talking about his doctrine, not his ego. People understand you all too well. If you don't understand yourself, then it's nobody else's fault."

Surely, we've all heard some friend or family member make a similar complaint.

While urging Nikolai to "smash [his] vodka bottle, lie down on the sofa and pick up a book"—he recommends Turgenev—Chekhov claims that the heart of Nikolai's malaise and lack of success is his "extreme lack of culture." He then lists eight marks of a civilized person, along with some examples.

### The Eight Foundations

Chekhov suggests to Nikolai that if he attempts to become more cultured, his insecurities and bad habits might disappear. This proposed cure for alcoholism may strike us today as unusual and doomed to failure, but when we reflect on Chekhov's points regarding how civilized people behave, we discover some truths. Here are the first sentences verbatim, including the numbers, of his eight-point description of civilized people.

1. They respect the individual and are therefore always indulgent, gentle, polite, and compliant.
2. Their compassion extends beyond beggars and cats.
3. They respect the property of others and therefore pay their debts.
4. They are candid and fear lies like the plague.
5. They do not belittle themselves merely to arouse sympathy.
6. They are not preoccupied with vain things.
7. If they have talent, they respect it.

### Explanations

With the exception of #3, Chekhov expounds on these revelations regarding the civilized. When he speaks of "aesthetic sensibilities," for example, he extends his definition beyond the arts to acts of daily living. Of the civilized, he writes: "They cannot stand to fall asleep fully dressed, see a slit in the wall teeming with bedbugs, breathe the rotten air, walk on a spittle-laden floor, or eat off a kerosene stove. They try their best to tame and ennoble their sexual instinct..."

By "vain things," Chekhov means cavorting with celebrities, boasting of famous acquaintances, and being ostentatious in speech and manner. Regarding those who "belittle themselves merely to arouse sympathy," he tells Nikolai that one should avoid playing on the heartstrings of others by whining or complaining, that this "is vulgar, false, and out-of-date."

In #4, his stricture on truth-telling, Chekhov comments that civilized people "know how to keep their mouths shut, and they do not force uninvited confidences on people. Out of respect for the ears of others they are more often silent than not."

Chekhov's paragraph on compassion reminds Nikolai and the rest of us that concern for the welfare of others goes beyond the sentimental, that it's more than just some fleeting emotion and instead demands obligation and response. "If for instance, Pyotr knows that his father and mother are turning gray and losing sleep over seeing their Pyotr so rarely (and seeing him drunk when he does turn up), then he rushes home to them and sends his vodka to the devil." True compassion, Chekhov seems to say, means dumping our obsession with the self and focusing on others.

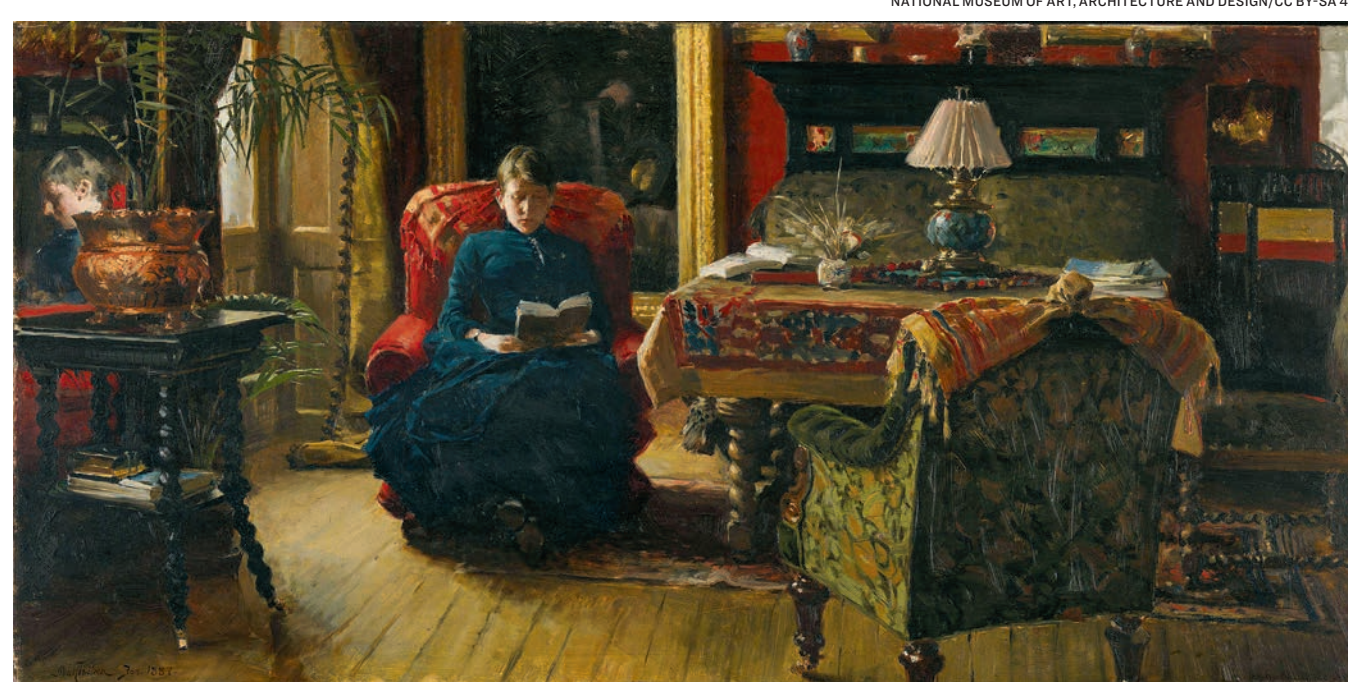
### Universal Foundations

Many items in Chekhov's list are as old as Western civilization itself. The citizens of the Roman Republic would have nodded in agreement at his warning against vulgarity and flamboyance. Medieval knights would have understood completely the idea of respecting talent, that "they sacrifice comfort, wine, women, and vanity" in order to preserve their skills and follow their calling.

Renaissance courtiers, America's Founders, Victorian ladies and gentlemen: the customs of these people varied widely, but the bedrock of civility upon which those customs rested can be found in Chekhov's precepts. And like the codes followed by our distant ancestors, Chekhov's observations on what constitutes civilized behavior go beyond a knowledge of poetry, painting, or music, or some cursory practice of etiquette.



A portrait of Anton Chekhov, 1898, by Osip Braz. State Tretyakov Gallery.



A civilized person cultivates aesthetics. An untitled painting, 1887, by Paul Fischer. National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, in Oslo, Norway.



"The Last Drop," circa 1629, by Judith Leyster. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

No—as he tells his brother: "If you want to be civilized and not fall below the level of the milieu you belong to, it is not enough to read The Pickwick Papers and memorize a soliloquy from Faust... You must work at it constantly, day and night. You must never stop reading, studying in depth, exercising your will. Every hour is precious."

To "work at it constantly, day and night"—meaning to daily repair and maintain a civilized life—is a profound insight, one that is often overlooked not only in our rapidly changing times but also throughout history. The ancient Romans, for instance, provide an excellent example of a people whose ancient and wise foundations for survival and success, such as strong families and the rigors and duties of citizenship, were sapped over time, and the Empire crumbled and died.

Closer to our own time is World War I, a disaster with repercussions that reverberate even today, a catastrophe in part because leaders at that time did not work day and night to maintain civilization. Instead of considering the possible effects of such a war on European culture at large, monarchs and politicians focused instead on the narrower interests of their countries. The result was a conflict that forever changed both Europe and the world.

### Lessons and Questions

Unfortunately, Nikolai failed to heed the warnings and encouragements of his

brother's letter. He died three years later from tuberculosis and his addiction to vodka. Anton Chekhov also died of tuberculosis at a relatively young age, but not before giving the world a satchel-full of short stories, plays, and comedic sketches.

If we consider Nikolai's life and death—his talents as a painter, his battle with the bottle, his days spent as a tramp on the streets of Moscow—we begin to see even more clearly the wisdom in Chekhov's letter. In part because of his addiction, Nikolai either could not or would not follow his brother's suggestions, leading to his failure as an artist and an early death.

Chekhov's thoughts on what it means to live as a civilized person can also act as a mirror for us, with the reflection in that glass raising certain questions.

Are we, for instance, indulgent, gentle, and polite to others? Is our compassion real or contrived—or do we withhold it for special occasions and familiar recipients? Do we pay off our debts? Are we truthful or do we deal in lies? Do we play the victim card, seeking sympathy from others? Do we respect our talents by working hard to preserve and improve them? Do we cultivate aesthetic sensibilities in how we choose to live?

And what if we ask similar questions of our culture at large? Based on Chekhov's platform, are we a civilized people? Or will we be, like Nikolai, the agents of our own destruction?



"A Wounded Danish Soldier," 1865, by Statens Museum for Kunst, in Copenhagen, Denmark.

## Concern for the welfare of others goes beyond the sentimental.

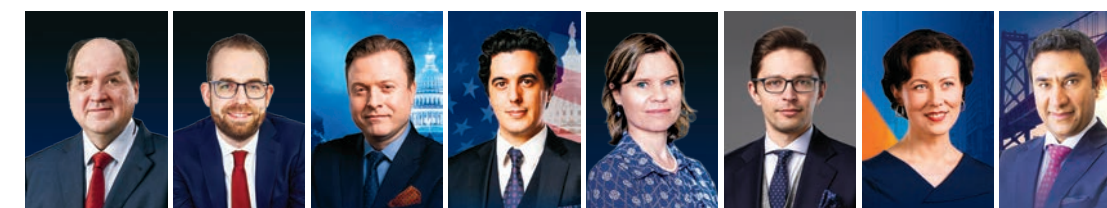
Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooled students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

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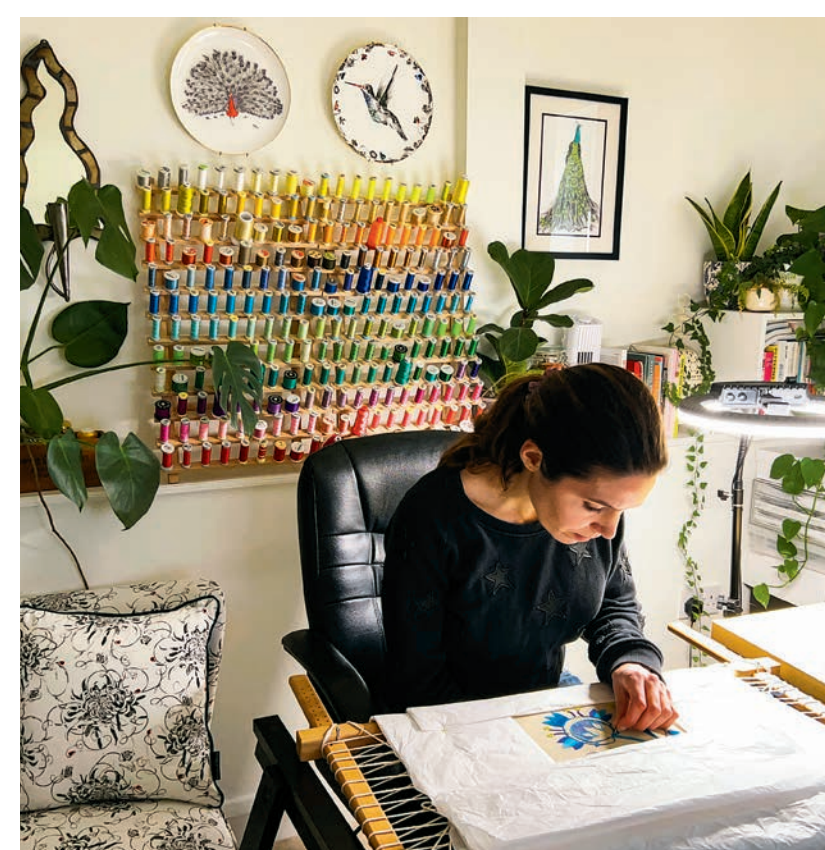




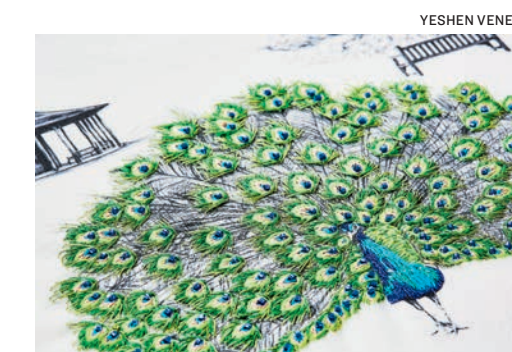
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"Hyde Park Parakeets," 2021, by Susannah Weiland. Pencil drawing printed onto cotton-silk fabric and hand embroidered with matte, silk, and metallic fine machine embroidery threads. Framed: 18.1 inches by 13.4 inches.



Hand embroidery artist Susannah Weiland uses crewel wool to stitch some Jacobean crewelwork on linen twill, in her studio in Richmond, London. Weiland is studying Jacobean crewelwork as part of her QEST Finnis Scott Foundation scholarship to study technical hand embroidery at the Royal School of Needlework.



Closeup of a hand-embroidered peacock in Susannah Weiland's "Green Kew Peacocks" design.



"Green Kew Peacocks" wallpaper, 2021, by Susannah Weiland. Pencil drawing and colored hand embroidery digitally printed onto wallpaper.

## CRAFTSMANSHIP

## Patiently 'Painting' With Thread

Hand embroidery artist Susannah Weiland's wonders of art

*Continued from Page 1*

For instance, her bold green "Hyde Park Parakeets" cuts striking embroideries and is to be admired, yet Britons know ring-necked parakeets as invasive nonnatives that have been reducing British wildlife.

**Fashioning Handmade Homeware**  
Weiland loves to create by hand whether in fabric or on paper. She's been lucky enough to have studied graphic design when the emphasis was on hand draw-



"Greenwich Rabbit and Mouse," 2021, by Susannah Weiland. Pencil drawing printed onto cotton-silk fabric and hand embroidered with matte, silk, and metallic fine machine embroidery threads. Framed: 15 inches by 14.2 inches.

ing, moving to computer design only in the third year of her degree.

After graduating, Weiland worked in fashion for 20 years, creating graphics and women's wear print designs on the computer. But she felt that something was missing. She was keen to draw by hand again, rather than be on the computer all the time. During that time, she took evening classes to find out what she'd love to create. In one class, she learned machine embroidery and loved the hand-stitching element of the course.

She set out to discover how to combine her love of drawing and hand embroidery to create unique artworks.

About six years ago, while freelancing, Weiland began developing her first homeware collection. She made her pencil drawings into repeat patterns on the computer and had them digitally printed

onto cotton-silk fabric. She then added color by embroidering parts of the design.

"The color that I'm adding is to highlight the beauty in the animals and the wildlife," she said by telephone. Weiland had tried many types of thread but found the fineness of machine embroidery thread and its range of metallic sheens ideal for the fine details in her creations.

She spent time exploring different styles before she created her signature monochrome pencil repeats peppered with exquisite touches of painterly color. She uses machine embroidery threads in matte, silk, and metallic sheens, and embellishments such as seed beads and sequins, depending on her design.

Each embroidered artwork is then incorporated into a repeat pattern and used with other motifs that she then gets digitally printed for fabrics, wallpaper, and other homeware products.

For her Kew Gardens peacock design, for instance, she embroidered two different colorways—a peacock with its characteristic blue-green hues and a fun version using pinks and purples. She also uses her printed fabric to create one-of-a-kind cushions with motifs such as peacocks, hummingbirds, and chrysanthemums embellished with beads and hand embroidery.

### Patience, a Needlework Virtue

Weiland embroiders in stages, laboring long and hard at each motif. She enjoys the intensive process but needs sanity breaks to stop, reflect, and rest her eyes. "It's good to take a break and then come back to it, and then you notice things that you want to change or you want to add in," she said.

(Above) "Richmond Young Deer," 2021, by Susannah Weiland. Pencil drawing printed onto cotton-silk fabric and hand embroidered with matte, silk, and metallic fine machine embroidery threads. Framed: 13.2 inches by 15.7 inches.

Weiland often photographs her work at the beginning and end of her day since, working at a slow pace and on such a small scale, she can easily lose sight of her progress.

Weiland loves how hand sewing sets its own pace. There's no way of doing it fast.

Apart from bringing her joy and business, Weiland's hand embroidery has also benefited her in other ways. "I've become very patient; you can't do this kind of work quickly, so you have to just take your time and just enjoy it," she said.

### Weiland may run through these parks but her artworks are careful, not quick, observations.

She finds it quite a calming and relaxing way to work as opposed to working in a fast fashion, when everything is quick.

Weiland's current embroidery style looks like brushstrokes, with short and long stitches that create tone, volume, and realistic artworks. "I stitch like I would paint," she explained.

### Sewing Park Life

Weiland's art is often an extension of her day-to-day life. Her latest collection, "Royal Park Life," features wildlife from six royal parks, many of which are near her home in Richmond, southwest London. She regularly runs in parks, and it seemed natural for her to develop her new "Royal Park Life" collection by combining

activities she enjoyed.

She started taking photographs for the collection at the end of 2019. Although she has taken professional shots in the parks, it's often when she's out running that she'll happen upon the perfect scene for an artwork, so she always brings her iPhone with her.

Weiland completed all 28 drawings for the collection in 2020, when the UK went into lockdown. She created a much larger collection than she planned, since being in lockdown meant she had more time on her hands. In 2021, she completed all the embroidery; now she's in the process of exhibiting the works.

Weiland may run through these parks but her artworks are careful, not quick, observations. She sees, draws, and sews each piece of flora and fauna with awe and care. Each scene Weiland creates makes you almost tiptoe and hold your breath so as not to disturb the subjects. In one piece, a quirky jackdaw is about to fly off; in another work, a bunny stands on its hind legs listening for danger; and in another, a rabbit and a mouse look deep in conversation, about what is anyone's guess.

Weiland lives close to Richmond Park, a national nature reserve that's home to 630 red and fallow deer. Naturally, she's created art: The deer can be seen sitting on the grass, searching for food, or startled as if we've just disturbed them. Weiland's delicate deer pencil drawings make the perfect ground for the subtle shades of deer fur.

### Future Embroidery

In addition to exhibiting her "Royal Park Life" embroidered artworks, Weiland is adding new colorways to her existing fabric and wallpaper designs. She's also studying at the Royal School of Needlework, having won a QEST (Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust) scholarship to study traditional stitches. She's just completed the first module in Jacobean crewelwork, a traditional style that requires a certain number of different stitches. She'll study four modules in all, including silk shading, basic goldwork, and blackwork or canvas stitch. In future collections, Weiland will use the new stitches she's learned and include more background pencil drawings.

At the end of the year, she plans to create fabric and wallpaper prints from the "Royal Park Life" artworks, adding some of the parks' iconic motifs, like Greenwich Park's maritime architecture or Richmond Park's deer (descendants of Henry VIII's deer herd). Her aim is to create prints that identify each of the parks.

With acres of parks in London (and tropical, temperate, arid, and alpine climates in Kew Gardens alone) Weiland has worlds of embroidery art just a run away.

To find out more about Susannah Weiland and Susannah Weiland Collections, visit [SusannahWeiland.co.uk](http://SusannahWeiland.co.uk)



"St. James Quirky Bird," 2021, by Susannah Weiland. Pencil drawing printed onto cotton-silk fabric and hand embroidered with sequins, seed beads, and matte, silk, and metallic fine machine embroidery threads.



THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



Who is to blame for technological woes: the experiment or the scientist? "An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump," 1768, by Joseph Wright 'of Derby.' The National Gallery, London.

## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## Myths for Our Times:

## Frankenstein and the Age of Technology

JAMES SALE

We have plenty of modern myths to help explain what is going on in the world today. Perhaps the greatest of all is the one written at the dawn of the modern world, just preceding the Industrial Revolution beginning in Britain in the 19th century. That rapid scientific development established Britain as the world's No. 1 power for nearly a century until the end of World War II. The myth is Frankenstein.

Myths epitomize the depths of ancient thinking but in symbolic, imaginative, and narrative forms that speak for all time. Invariably, they bridge the gap between what is visible—our world now—and what is invisible: the emotional, psychological, and even spiritual reality where a different order of being has precedence.

Before saying a few words about this modern myth, we perhaps need to be explicit about the biggest challenge of our period, the period that is the Technological Age. We have had the Industrial Revolution in the West, but now we have the Information Age, as it's called, but it is all underpinned by technology. Technology has brought us nuclear weapons, spying gear and software, and fertilizer that poisons the earth; the list goes on and on.

So, what about Frankenstein? There is something odd about the Frankenstein myth. There is an almost universal misunderstanding of who Frankenstein is. Ask the average person on the street who Frankenstein is, and the answer will be: a monster who was dead, electrified, and came alive.

But no, Frankenstein is not the monster. The monster is the scientist and its creator, Victor Frankenstein. In fact, Mary Shelley never gives the monster a name, although at some point it refers to itself as Adam (so we have a reference to the even older story from Genesis).

## Who Is the Monster?

Why does nearly everyone mistake the monster for the master? One element of the answer is this: The confusion arises because at some deep psychological or spiritual level there is a transference of blame. Without going into the intricacies of the plot, which lead the monster to becoming a murderer (following the murder by Victor Frankenstein of the bride-to-be of "Adam," the new "Eve"), I am saying that this transference of blame is what society wants. The object becomes the guilty party, not the subject who creates it. Put even more simply, society does not want to blame science and technology for the monstrosities because it, or key sections

of it, relishes the power and the benefits that science and technology bring.

Thus, we opine: Aren't nuclear weapons awful? Isn't biological and chemical warfare inhuman and inhumane? Why not ban dreadful pesticides that pollute the earth? And so on. But who are creating these things? Why blame the product (the object) when the creator (the subject) has invested it with all its destructive properties?

In short, we exculpate the scientists and the technocrats, and in this way, we authorize their further "advances" into technologies that are potentially ruinous for mankind and the planet. And we ironically call it "progress."

## 2 Myths

And here we come to a critical distinction between the Frankenstein myth and the original Promethean one on which it is based, for it is important to note the subtitle of the novel: "or, The Modern Prometheus." What Mary Shelley wrote is a retelling of an older Greek myth.

In the Promethean myth, Prometheus was a good Titan who loved humanity and who expressly gave them the secret of fire—the very basis of technology and civilization—against the expressed wish of Zeus, the king of the gods. There are different variants of the story, but in essence for this crime against Zeus, Prometheus was chained to a rock and an eagle came to eat his liver, which regenerated overnight (as he was immortal)—every day.

In other words, the release of the technology (fire, leading to metalwork, leading to weapons) creates a form of eternal torture. And we see in this transgression of the great god's will residues of an even older one: Adam and Eve transgressing, and their offspring, through Cain, also becoming technologically astute, for his descendant Tubal-Cain forged all kinds of tools out of metal.

But the thing about the old myth is that it ends happily, for in most accounts, Prometheus is reconciled with Zeus and released. The tales of the Promethean myths have different endings, but for whatever the reason, all's well that ends well. What Prometheus did is validated by Zeus's final acceptance. I would reason this to mean that, therefore, there is validation of fire for man and of technology generally.

However, the Frankenstein myth does not end this way.

## A Bleak Ending

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, technology was seen as an unmitigated blessing. But at the beginning of the 19th century, Mary Shelley saw things differently. Her Victor Frankenstein, realizing the enormity

We exculpate the scientists and the technocrats, and in this way, we authorize their further 'advances.'



Victor Frankenstein becoming disgusted at his monstrous creation. Illustration from the frontispiece of the 1831 edition of "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley. Published by Colburn and Bentley, London, 1831.



MARIE-LAN NGUYEN/CC BY SA 2.5

A mural by Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse of Prometheus (C), handing fire to man. Prometheus is known for creating man and giving him the gift of fire.

of what he has done in transgressing human bounds and attempting to be a god by creating life, now pursues his creation.

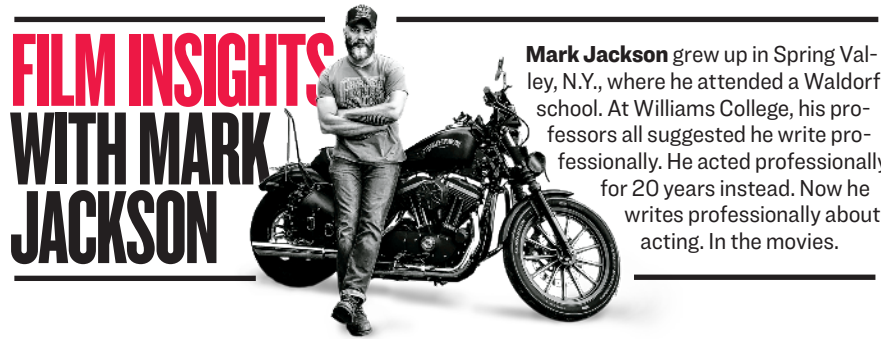
He follows "Adam" to the Arctic. In a final confrontation, Victor is killed and his creation wanders off into the icy wasteland seeking his own death. Does he find it? We don't know. We do know that the very environment in which they encounter each other is reminiscent of somewhere else.

The icy wastes and frozen cold of the Arctic remind us, yes, of Dante's "Inferno," or Hell. The lowest depths are not hot but absolutely frozen, and the inhabitants—the most damned of all—are stuck immovable in the ice. How fitting, then, that Mary Shelley places her final confrontation in the ice. Prometheus had his liver eaten every day; the liver for the Greeks was the seat of the emotions, and those in Hell are similarly deprived of all human emotions as they suffer for their crimes.

Which myth fits us today, then? Will technology prove a boon to humanity, and all end happily ever after? Or will we end up in the icy wastes following some kind of devastation? To answer this question, I think we need to consider another potent Greek myth that tells us even more about the modern, human condition.

This myth is very short, is much less well-known than either Prometheus or Frankenstein; indeed, I suspect that most readers will never have heard of this character. Its central villain, however, merits an appearance in Dante's "Inferno," and Part 2 of this article will introduce him.

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, "Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams" (Routledge, 2021). He has been nominated for the 2022 poetry Pushcart Prize, 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 EnglishCantos.home.blog



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.

## Tough-Guy Priest Sacrifices All for Faith

MARK JACKSON

"Father Stu" is a faith-based biopic starring Mark Wahlberg about the life and times of priest Stuart Long. Father Long's irrepressible, can-do energy helped him battle numerous physical setbacks, so he could continue to serve humankind however he was able.

Now, generally speaking, Wahlberg is at his best when he's in physically menacing, sullen, sarcastic alpha mode, such as ex-Marine sniper Bob Lee Swagger in "Shooter." When he tries to gin up energy for a higher gear of, say, motor-mouthed cheeriness, it's never a good idea. It's a wonder his agent and/or manager never said, "Do not do roles where you have to talk fast." Maybe they have. Not that it matters. Wahlberg generally makes bank at the box office.

That said, the life of Stuart Long is interesting in and of itself, and while the movie doesn't register high on the entertainment scale, it touches on issues of faith and religion so that those who are interested in such things will have a few bones to gnaw thoughtfully upon. And to his credit, Wahlberg does have a couple of short, dramatic scenes that are astoundingly potent.

## Youth

The movie opens with young Stuart, who's growing up in Montana, doing a living room rendition of The King in his socks and underwear for his dad, Bill (Mel Gibson). He gets shot down in that shockingly blunt way paternal alcoholic narcissists have that makes you want to collect the lot of them in shipping containers and offload the entire species to the bottom of the ocean.

With his hopes of becoming the next Elvis thus forever dashed, Stu turns instead to his physical prowess and becomes a boxer. But Stu's pugilistic career is eventually derailed by medical issues. Not really that disappointing, as portrayed in the film, since Stu clearly wasn't making it and was going to have to hang up the gloves soon anyway.

Stu's a highly enthusiastic if naive fellow, a bit like the character of Toad in "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride"; he's always off on the next adventure with much pep and optimism, impervious to warnings and talk of common sense. "Isn't it a little late to try that?" inquires Stu's mom (Aussie actress Jacki Weaver, a dead-ringer lookalike of American actress Sally Struthers), regarding Stu's subsequent aspirations to become a movie star. Nope. Off Stu goes to Hollywood. There will be no blue-collar career for this man, he insists. Of course, showbiz being the most insanely difficult career path in the world, he ends up selling meat in a grocery store.

While ambitious and outgoing, Stu's attempts to do showbiz networking from behind the poultry counter are dimly inadequate, but he does manage to land a mop commercial. One day, in walks an attractive customer (Teresa Ruiz). Stu's all over her like white on rice; he won't leave her alone. Wahlberg doesn't really have the debonair leading-man charm required to pull off this sort of thing. Or perhaps there just wasn't enough chemistry happening with Ruiz, and so it's not believable that she, Carmen, the prototypical good Catho-

Mel Gibson's presence is still able to burn a hole in the silver screen.



Stuart Long (Mark Wahlberg) soon to have an accident leading to a vision of St. Mary.

## 'Father Stu'

Director: Rosalind Ross

Starring: Mark Wahlberg, Mel Gibson, Jacki Weaver, Teresa Ruiz, Malcolm McDowell

MPAA Rating: R

Release Date: April 8, 2022

Running Time: 1 hour, 52 minutes

★★★★☆ for thought-provoking content

★★★★☆ for execution



Stuart Long (Mark Wahlberg), in "Father Stu."



Stu Long (Mark Wahlberg), sitting in on one of Carmen's classes on Ash Wednesday.

lic girl, finally succumbs to Stu's mega-cheesy, stalker-ish behavior and that they end up in a relationship.

Here's a good line, though: When her strict Mexican father tells Stu that he better be prepared to crawl on his hands and knees to cater to his daughter's comfort or there's going to be a problem, Stu quips "Good thing I just bought a carpet then!" Dad's slow on the uptake, but when he gets it, Stu's his boy.

## Path to the Priesthood

Naturally, Stu, in his attempts to woo Carmen, has to go to church and pretend to like it. But church grows on him. And (talk about your rude awakenings) in the aftermath and carnage of a horrendous motorcycle accident, St. Mary comes to Stu in a vision. He suddenly decides to become a priest. But such a path calls for sacrifice, and one such sacrifice is Carmen.

This is also not particularly believable, as portrayed. What eventually allows the biographical truth of this to hit home for us is Stu's mother berating Carmen for introducing Stu to the church: "This is not somebody who does anything in half-measures!" But overall, we don't get to experience, with him, the huge sacrifice required for the full-on, daunting, weighty vow of celibacy of the Catholic priesthood. Especially since Carmen has sinned drastically to get Stu interested in the idea of marriage. And he was, of course, subsequently definitely interested.

And again, while there is no deep, lengthy devotion in the film for portraying the profound loss needed to gain spiritual advancement (on par with, say, "The Song of Bernadette"), when Stu gets blindsided by yet another medical ailment, his turning to God in desperation in a dark night of the soul is a truly powerful, exceptionally well-acted scene. Overall, though, the flavor is less "The Robe" and has more in common, tone-wise, with something like the comedy "Sister Act."

The whole section about Stu and his slow assimilation of religion is handled comedi-

cally, since comedy relies in most instances on juxtaposed extremes. In this case, it's Stu's prodigious potty-mouth butted up against his newly embraced ecclesiastical surroundings, and then later, his newly acquired zealotry going up against his dad's own potty-mouthed atheism.

## To Sum Up

The film is mostly undramatic, and the plotting and pacing allow enough gaps in the necessary cohesive tension of good storytelling to allow tedium to gather. However, the casting of Mel Gibson is interesting.

Gibson destroyed his showbiz career with an alleged drunken, anti-Semitic rant and a later racist rant (not to mention a few homophobic scenes in his movies), going on a decade ago. He is, however, also a member of a strict, fundamentalist brand of Catholicism and it's rumored that it was the ultra-conservative outlook thereof that was the real problem the largely Jewish mover-shaker Hollywood community had with him. Wahlberg and Gibson's Catholicism sync up seamlessly, since there's a line that's pointedly derogatory regarding Jews at the crucifixion, which echoes Gibson's own, self-directed "The Passion of the Christ."

To be fair, Gibson is very good. That's because he's still the same Mel Gibson who used to rule the box office like few other movie stars. Even when playing a loutish dad who shows us exactly where Stu's shortcomings come from, Gibson's presence is still able to burn a hole in the silver screen.

Besides Gibson, the best thing "Father Stu" has going for it is the fact that Stu wears his heart on his sleeve, is the salt of the earth, and is a priest of the people. Favorite scene: Stu and a rather effeminate colleague lead a prison Mass for the predominantly black inmate congregation. His colleague of the cloth immediately puts his foot in his mouth, racially speaking. It's about to get contentious when Stu, with his boxer street cred, just gets real. Everyone calms down, and some pithy spiritual talk is able to happen. This sort of thing is the genuine Mark Wahlberg acting power-alley.

"Father Stu" is clearly intended to be inspirational; Christian audiences and church groups will appreciate it deeply. However, it must be said that there's a good reason for the R-rating: Stu, prior to wearing the collar, might as well have been a sailor regarding the volume of his cursing. Even in the seminary, he wafts about an aural cloud of expletive-laden blasphemy. This is, of course, a big part of the movie's sincerity and one that makes both Mark Wahlberg and Mel Gibson perfect casting choices; this is manly-man priest territory.

Gibson (and probably also the rapper formerly known as Marky Mark) likes to curse a lot, and go to church a lot. I've personally always appreciated non-pious priests with a slight edge of blaspheming irreverence and a healthy sense of humor; it's been my experience that these are the guys with the biggest hearts. But so maybe don't take kids under the age of 12.



Stuart Long (Mark Wahlberg) is a fish out of water when he starts going to church for the sole purpose of winning Carmen's approval.



Father Stu (Mark Wahlberg) after having gained weight due to a debilitating disease.

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"The White Horse," 1819, by John Constable. Oil on canvas; 51 3/4 inches by 74 1/8 inches. The Frick Collection.

## FINE ARTS

# Constable's Clouds

The artist goes 'skying' in his own backyard

YVONNE MARCOTTE

Cumulus, stratus, cirrus, nimbus.

Objects with these strange names affect our lives in many ways. Like a bucket overfilled with water, they pour out rain and snow; with the wind as their partner, they whip up tornadoes and hurricanes; in a pile of styles and sizes, they dress up a clear sky. Like a mother's arms, they encircle the land with protection and love. We call them clouds. Artists show us the beauty of clouds in their works of art. John Constable's (1776–1837) heart lay in a lifelong study of clouds, and he painted them with almost scientific accuracy. He called his study "skying."

### Tools and Techniques for the Outdoors

Constable painted clouds and the natural world he saw in the Suffolk region of England. He usually painted outside to capture clouds of all shapes and under all conditions, and his tools and techniques prepared him for this task.

When he painted out of doors, he carried with him four palettes, a wooden sketching box with brushes, a chalk holder, a palette knife, and pigments in glass phials; the phials were used before paint tubes were available. He packed a lump of white gypsum, which he used for drawing as well as roughening the paper.

Constable glued three pieces of paper together and primed this card with a colored "ground," which made it somewhat water-resistant. To catch ever-changing scenes of light and movement, Constable often mixed the colors right on the surface of the paper, rather than mixing on the palette and then transferring the paint.

Constable painted more than 50 oil sketches of cloud formations. For his outdoor work, he used an impasto technique (broad and naturalistic brushstrokes) to catch the swiftly changing weather. He favored natural tones to match the true colors of the landscape, unlike past conventions that used "coffee" colors in landscape painting.



"Study of a Cloudy Sky," 1825, by John Constable. Oil on paper on millboard; 10 3/8 inches by 13 inches. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.



"Cloud Study," 1822, by John Constable. Presented anonymously, 1952, Tate.

To remind himself of the scene, Constable often made notes on the back of his sketches, such as: "Very lovely evening—looking Eastward—cliffs & light off a dark grey sky—effect—background—very white and golden light."

### Oil Sketches Capture Movement and Light

The artist made sketches of weather changes throughout the day. In his oil sketch of cirrus clouds, he made the wind visible as it whisks the clouds around. The background shows various shades of blue shifting to gray. There are streaks of clouds, not enough for rain but enough to rouse the bigger clouds above.

Some of the larger cloud formations are touched with gray at their base to indicate the beginning of a rain cloud. In the lower register, Constable showed touches of light for more distant clouds. A lot is happening in the sky with only a cluster of whiteness.

His "Cloud Study" gives us a tumultuous sky and not the usual perception of "cloudy." It appears active with a great mix of colors: white, gray, blue, and even touches of gold where the sun might be shining through.

In his oil sketch "Brighton Beach," Constable managed to show the buildup of a storm. Wind-swept cloud formations have now coalesced into rumbling behemoths. The billowing grayness packs a skyful of rain. Very soon, the rain clouds will completely block the last of the light sky. Some smaller gray clouds reflect the last light before the storm. The base of the sketch supports in tones of brown.

In another oil sketch made at Brighton Beach, titled "Rainstorm Over the Sea" (1822), dark gray rain drops heavily to the water from a cloud higher than what is seen. Clouds on the left are blue-black with rain about to crash down. This is a localized rainfall, as seen by the light clouds in the background. These dark clouds will drop heavy rain but it will end soon.

In "Cumulus Clouds Over a Landscape," the storm has passed as quickly as it arrived.

Dark clouds move away as the storm passes into the upper left of the sketch, as larger cumulus clouds fill the skyline. To the right, the light of a setting (or rising) sun dots the clouds that are swiftly moved along by its companion, the wind.

## Constable painted more than 50 oil sketches of cloud formations.

### 'Six-Footers'

Constable made his oil sketches of the stratosphere not as an end in themselves, but to prepare for the actual work of large landscape paintings. He did a series of full-size landscape paintings, known as "six-footers," of places in Suffolk. On these paintings, his firmament shines.

"The White Horse" was the first of these large works. According to contemporary artist Charles Robert Leslie, it was "on many accounts the most important picture Constable ever painted because it provided him the financial freedom to paint what he wanted." In 1819, it earned him a place in England's Royal Academy of the Arts.

The composition does not draw our attention to the animal in the lower left of the painting, but to the magnificent clouds that cover the land. The scene shows a barge carrying a horse to the opposite shore, but the viewer sees a magnificent cloud-filled sky as the main event. Great activity is happening above the tranquil river. The trees seem to have been touched by the activity in the sky and are beginning to move and respond to the white clouds above. The blue sky struggles to remain free of the robust and rumbling cloud cover, which is dappled in gray, pink, and soft white.

### Beloved Landscapes

Constable's seemingly simple scenes have become highly valued. In November 2021,



"Brighton Beach," 1824, by John Constable. Oil on paper; 4 3/4 inches by 11 11/16 inches. Victoria and Albert Museum.



"Cumulus Clouds Over a Landscape," 1822, by John Constable. Oil on paper laid on canvas laid on board. National Trust, Fenton House.

ArtNews reported that a painting, called "The Glebe Farm," which was once considered a Constable copy, has been verified as an original. It sold last year in Cincinnati for \$54,000; the landscape is to be auctioned at Sotheby's with a low estimate of \$4.03 million!

A gallery exhibit "Creating Constable" recently closed in the Suffolk region, where the artist lived. Since the exhibition coincided with the 200th anniversary of the completion of the famed landscape "The Hay Wain," London's National Gallery loaned it to the gallery for the exhibition.

### Clouds of One's Own

Landscape artists enable people to muse, consider, and reflect on the world. Many who view Constable's landscape paintings look at their own backyards and feel bathed in serenity and happiness.

But some even feel uplifted when simply appreciating the beautiful cloud formations that they see when they take a walk. Blogger Michelle Monet says: "Whenever I go outside now, especially this time of year, I seem to be drawn to looking at cloud formations. It feels otherworldly, spiritual, freeing, magical? Maybe it makes me feel connected to the Universe. I don't know. I just think clouds are FUN! Clouds make me feel happy and calm!"

The Cloud Appreciation Society (yes, there is one) held an exhibition of Constable's cloud studies in 2016. Its website states: "Constable, who represented clouds as one of Nature's best gifts to humanity, would no doubt concur with this rule of the Cloud Appreciation Society: 'Look up, marvel at the ephemeral beauty, and always remember to live life with your head in the clouds!'"

We don't need to travel the world to find the perfect cloud. English artist John Constable preferred to paint landscapes near his home in the Suffolk region of England. "I should paint my own places best," he wrote to his friend John Fisher in 1821. Constable's sketches and paintings show how clouds nourish our minds, bodies, and spirits—and we can find them in our own backyards.

## FILM REVIEW

JOE BENDEL

According to legend, the Miao people's mythical King Chiyou was defeated by the Yellow Emperor, who as the crypto-historical Huangdi, supposedly established Han supremacy throughout China.

Even if you had not heard it before, you will hear it many times throughout this documentary. The unspoken message to the Miao is clear: They are a conquered people. They will also be an exploited people when a local Chinese Communist Party (CCP) official turns a 100-year-old local A-Hmao-speaking Christian choir into a novelty act in New York-based Chinese filmmaker Chen Dongnan's documentary "Singing in the Wilderness."

For years, the Miao people in the southern Yunnan village of Little Well have eked out a hardscrabble subsistence living as farmers. Their main solace comes when they raise their voices to celebrate God during Christian services.

Regionally, their acclaim is such that the local Party propaganda boss, Zhang, decides to co-opt them. Initially, he builds them into an ethno-sociological curiosity for Han tourists, very much like the patronizing and culturally insensitive Xinjiang tourism sites the CCP points to when it tries to deflect charges of cultural genocide waged against the Uyghurs.

### Excising the Soul

However, boss Zhang's plans go further when he decides to take the act nationally. Suddenly, they praise to God are gone. Instead, they are singing ABBA's "Mamma Mia" on a "China's Got Talent"-style show. It is no exaggeration to say that the Party does its best to excise the community's soul. Chen literally shows it happening. There is no talking-head commentary to explain the events that unfold to the audience, because none is needed.

This is dramatically reflected in Ping, a mildly "liberated" young woman in her 20s, and Sheng, a shepherd who aspires to preach. Both have an ardent Christian faith that will be profoundly challenged when they are forced to leave the choir after unhappily marrying.

Viewers can also see how Long, the choir-

**'Singing in the Wilderness' is a vital and timely documentary.**



Over time, the singing no longer comes from the heart.

### 'Singing in the Wilderness'

#### Documentary

**Director:** Chen Dongnan

**Running Time:** 1 hour, 34 minutes

**Release Date:** April 24, 2022

★★★★☆

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THESSALONIKI FILM FESTIVAL

master, is bullied into compliance and silence by Zhang and the Beijing experts who made the chorus into a secular chorale group. Simultaneously, shady developers swoop in with big plans to turn Little Well into a Xinjiang-style tourist attraction, but their promises quickly turn to dust.

### Han Supremacy

"Singing in the Wilderness" is a vital and timely documentary, because what it records happening in Yunnan is already being perpetrated on a much greater scale in Xinjiang and Tibet. It exposes the Han chauvinism that has led to an Apartheid-like system for the Uyghurs, who are denied the right of movement enjoyed by ethnic Han Chinese in their own homeland. "Han Supremacy" ought to be a familiar term in news reports. Chen's film captures the mindset in action.

Yet, throughout the film, she is scrupulously honest and fair in the way she documents her subjects. Each shot is always long enough to give full context, without interruptions or voiceovers. Nobody tells the audience what to think, but we can clearly and keenly see how every Little Well villager feels.

### Communist Shame

Perhaps the greatest shame of Zhang's

schemes is musical. The truth is, the Little Well choir is genuinely stirring when they are allowed to do what they do best, praising the Lord. Their rendition of "How Great Thou Art" will lift your spirits, precisely because it is so simple and heartfelt. Yet, it is their honest faith that makes them a threat to the CCP.

It is also clear throughout Chen's documentary that the Party has other tactics besides outright censorship that are often more insidious. Arguably, by corrupting, perverting, and subverting the Little Well choir, Zhang and his fellow Party members did more damage to their spiritual unity and conviction than if they had explicitly opposed them. Indeed, the evidence is right there in the film.

Regardless, just in cinematic terms, "Singing in the Wilderness" is pretty compelling stuff. It captures some very real personal drama, involving serious issues of faith, art, and real estate.

Very highly recommended, it screens on April 24 at the Museum of Modern Art and April 26 at the Walter Reade Theater, as part of this year's New Directors/New Films.

*Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit [JBSpins.blogspot.com](https://www.jbspins.blogspot.com)*

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Clash of Decisions About Entering World War I

DUSTIN BASS

World War I continues to be studied on the merits of how it changed the global landscape: geographically, religiously, and economically. Not to mention how the peace that followed led to the most devastating war the world had ever witnessed, only 20 years after the most devastating war the world had ever witnessed.

These studies are necessary for countless reasons, but Neil Lanctot has indulged readers—from World War I enthusiasts to geopolitical strategists to those concerned with the world's current military crisis in Eastern Europe—with a different study. It's a study of how three of America's most influential leaders felt about getting involved in The Great War.

In his new book, "The Approaching Storm: Roosevelt, Wilson, Addams, and Their Clash Over America's Future," Lanctot follows The Great War from our side of the Atlantic Ocean and how it was viewed by President Woodrow Wilson, former president Theodore Roosevelt, and suffragist and pacifist Jane Addams. Lanctot chose these three not only because they were three of the most influential voices in America at the time but also because of how they differed, whether slightly or emphatically, with each other.

Lanctot does a masterful job of showing how Roosevelt and Addams started their relationship on the same page as part of the Progressive Party, how Wilson and Roosevelt could not be further apart (and their disdain for each other is made quite obvious), how Addams eventually became a supporter of the Wilson camp only to eventually be disillusioned when America entered the war, and how Roosevelt, for a short spell, was supportive of Wilson when the president asked Congress to declare war on Germany. Addams's disillusionment and Roosevelt's

support, however, does not come about until the end of the book, which follows those three years starting from the summer of 1914 to the spring of 1917.

### The Big 3

Wilson is shown as a rather tragic figure, who truly desired to keep America out of the war. His continuous trials brought on by German submarine warfare, often unrestricted, made this military holdout very difficult, though not impossible. He is also shown as being distracted by personal concerns, especially as the war begins, with the death of his wife, Ellen, and during his period of infatuation with Edith Bolling Galt, his eventual second wife.

His reliance on Col. Edward House, who was never an official part of the government, remains an anomaly in governmental affairs, as House continued to play the go-between with America and the belligerent nations. House played the unofficial role of Secretary of State, which actually undermined the real secretary.

Wilson's desire, and House's as well, to be the ultimate peace-broker between the European nations guided many of his decisions, if not, as shown in the book, also clouded their making. Lanctot demonstrates that regardless of this leader often being distracted, he had influence over his own party, and much of the country backed him by keeping the country out of war while benefiting from the war economy.

For Roosevelt, it is made quite clear that, had he had his way, America would most likely have been in the war sooner than 1917, or at least a declaration of war would have been requested much sooner. Roosevelt is displayed as a man who viewed the loss of American lives by the sinking of merchant ships and cruise liners, like the Lusitania, as an affront to American sovereignty. Perhaps it was; there was plenty of debate to go around during that time (and indeed it did go around).

Though there were plenty of pacifists in the new Progressive Party, Roosevelt, as its head, inevitably was at odds with party members. Lanctot shows that Roosevelt was at odds not simply with Wilson and the pacifists but also with his former party, the Republican Party. He indeed wished to run again for the 1916 election, but the split between the Republican and Progressive

parties sealed his decision not to run.

Roosevelt was firm on his stance of being prepared for war. The debate against and for war preparedness proved pivotal. As Roosevelt pushed and prodded for preparedness for what he considered the inevitable involvement of America, Addams refuted it, and Wilson was hesitant.

For Addams, the author shows an incredibly influential figure, despite this being years before the passage of the 20th Amendment instituting women suffrage. She was respected not only in the States but in Europe as well. Along with this respect for her intellectual abilities and her work in the suffrage movement, she was also despised by many who believed either that women should not be allowed to vote (this was not singularly a patriarchal perspective) or that pacifists were a danger to the nation, or both.

Her influence is evident in the fact that she often had the ear of many influential figures—in particular, Roosevelt and Wilson. She wished and worked for peace, and this work was often viewed skeptically, if not cynically, as "peace at all costs." Lanctot demonstrates her defiance of this accusation. Yet once the Germans reinstated unrestricted submarine warfare, and after the Zimmerman Telegram (the proposal for Germany for an alliance with Mexico against the United States) was uncovered, there was no halting preparedness and ultimately war. Lanctot does his diligence in showing that even some of Addams's colleagues and fellow pacifists jumped ship, so to speak, and joined the war cause.

### Tying the 3 Together

Lanctot has written an extensive work that is an enjoyable read. His book is a seamless narrative that moves from Wilson to Roosevelt to Addams, while also tying in figures like House, Henry Ford, the peace-movement leaders, foreign ambassadors,

Wilson's cabinet members, members of Congress, and journalists.

This study of what our leaders were considering during the months and years leading up to April 6, 1917, is a master class in political maneuvering. Lanctot demonstrates how these leaders formed alliances with groups and individuals, foreign and domestic; how they used letters, articles, and speeches to defend their views and dismantle the views of their opponents; how they utilized and used each other for their political and social purposes; and how being tied together by the thread of politics could never lead to binding unity.



Three important voices in a pre-war era are the subject of Neil Lanctot's book.

**'The Approaching Storm: Roosevelt, Wilson, Addams, and Their Clash Over America's Future'**

**Author** Neil Lanctot

**Publisher** Riverhead Books

**Date** Oct. 26, 2021

**Hardcover** 672 pages

### Worthy of the World War I Library

As aforementioned, there have been numerous studies about World War I: its causes and its results. This book is worthy of being placed among the many necessary studies on the war. Much like "The Guns of August" is a necessary study of the destructive power of modern hubris, "The Approaching Storm" is a necessary study about political maneuvering during a time of crisis.

Lanctot's book, though centered around the thoughts and views of American leaders, can provide insight to present and future politicians, and leaders across the globe on what can be expected from political enemies and allies alike.

"The Approaching Storm" shows that wanting to make the right decision doesn't necessarily mean that one ultimately makes the right decision. And even if one does make the right decision, there will be plenty of others, powerful and not so powerful, who believe strongly that it was the wrong choice. Such was the plight of Wilson, Roosevelt, and Addams in their views of each other.

*Dustin Bass is the host of Epoch TV's "About the Book: A Show about New Books With the Authors Who Wrote Them." He is an author and co-host of "The Sons of History" podcast.*



ZENITH PRODUCTIONS



Kevin Whately (L) and John Thaw star in 1987's "Inspector Morse."

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# 'Inspector Morse'

## An outstanding British TV crime drama

IAN KANE

Colin Dexter (1930–2017) was an award-winning British crime fiction author who had a long and bountiful career. Among Dexter's many writing accomplishments, his "Inspector Morse" crime series is perhaps the most notable and spawned a TV series (1987–2000) of the same name featuring the late, great actor John Thaw as the titular character.

From the outset of the show's beginnings in the late 1980s, it becomes evident that there's a lot more under its hood than any other TV-crime drama. Drawing from the rich cinematic sensibilities of the British, the characters are incredibly fleshed out and realistic.

Thaw's Morse is a complex, sometimes contradictory character who works for the Criminal Investigation Department of the Oxford Police as a chief inspector. Although he exhibits an appreciation of the

more cultured things in life, such as classical music and fine wines, he also loves fast cars and clever women, sometimes even hitting on a lady involved in the case he's handling. Morse tooling around in his red Jaguar lights up the screen.

Morse has been teamed up with Detective Sergeant Lewis (Kevin Whately), and the two sharply contrast one another. Lewis plays the more conventional, by-the-book type of lawman, while Morse often employs much more unconventional methods. However, both are basically good-hearted men who are interested in seeking out the truth and catching criminals for the betterment of society.

Part of what makes this series so endearing and fun to watch is simply seeing the somewhat cantankerous, cultured, and arrogant Morse travel in and around Oxford with his more straight-laced sidekick in Lewis. While Lewis is happily married, Morse is an older bachelor.

**The characters in this TV series are incredibly fleshed out and realistic.**

### 'Inspector Morse'

**Starring:**  
John Thaw, Kevin Whately, James Groux

**MPAA Rating:**  
TV-14

**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 40 minutes

**Release Date:**  
Jan. 6, 1987

★★★★★

Much of the dialogue between the two men involves Morse humorously berating Lewis on some matter or another, but also giving the latter credit when it's due. Lewis is obedient and cordial to a certain point but often manages to slide little quips back at Morse when his superior goes a little too far. Even though the series deals with serious crimes, there is quite a bit of mirthful back and forth between the cast to enjoy. And things do soften between Morse and Lewis as the series moves along.

What is also interesting about the show is that sometimes Morse simply gets things wrong and, therefore, the viewer can be thrown completely off as well. This clever filmmaking element is used only sparingly, and so viewers never quite know if they're getting set up for a surprise, which invites us to investigate every little clue much more carefully as we come along for the ride.

Morse is also quite a drinker, although he tries to justify his bad habit of dropping by local pubs during the course of his investigations. We hear him describe how drinking helps him discern things, yet we see how horribly alcohol can affect one's health (later he is hospitalized). In a prime example of art imitating life, Thaw was a heavy drinker and smoker in real life.

Cases revolve around some sort of heavy crime or another, but each episode is often packed with so many different characters that it's hard to tell whodunit until just before the ending credits begin to roll. Plotlines are often convoluted as well and, along with the different British accents, often compel one to go back to rewatch the entire episode. But these elements also invite viewers to rewatch older episodes as well.

"Inspector Morse" benefits from outstanding acting by not only Thaw and Whately but also other recurring characters, such as Morse's rotund direct superior, Chief Superintendent Strange (James Groux). Strange is often on hand to chew Morse out for investigative transgressions. Enhancing things further, an incredible immersive score and great cinematography make this a well-produced, fascinating crime drama.

*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](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*



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