

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM, TAIPEI



The long lifespan of the chrysanthemum represents living a life full of vitality.

FINE ARTS

The 'Four Gentlemen' and Their Poetic Inscriptions

Four plants inspire artists and poets of ancient China

MIKE CAI

Nature serves as our greatest artistic muse. It stirs feelings and emotions in us and was a source of inspiration for ancient Chinese artists. Four plants—the plum blossom, the orchid, the bamboo, and the chrysanthemum—were known as the “Four Gentlemen” or “Junzi” in ancient China.

Ancient Chinese artists depicted this flora to evoke intellectual thought and spirituality rather than simply portray the beauty of the natural world. Each of these plants personified the ideal qualities of a gentleman in ancient China. The artists combined their painting with calligraphy and poetry, known together as the “Three Perfections.”

Plum Blossoms

The ancient Chinese praised the plum blossom for its ability to bloom vibrantly through the winter snow. While most other plants hibernate in the fall, the plum blossom prepares itself to bloom before other flowers and is seen as a harbinger of spring. This plant isn't particularly eye-catching, but it is considered a symbol of inner beauty and strength while under adversity.

Wang Mian (1279–1368) was a Yuan Dynasty painter known for his ink plum paintings. His paintings incorporated a calligraphic inscription over a flowering plum branch. In his poem “Plum,” he wrote:

“A plum tree by my family's inkstone washing pond,
blossoming flowers bloom with light pale ink,
don't let people praise its color,
sweet aroma fills the air between heaven and earth.”

Here, Wang praises the virtues of the plum blossom. It does not use bright colors to seek praise or please people; it wishes only to leave a subtle fragrance in the world. The petals are made with light dabs of ink to convey inner purity. Although it is not striking on the outside, the plum blossom is shown with a splendid and dignified inner life.

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(Left) "Ink Plum" by Wang Mian. Handscroll: ink on paper; 12.6 inches by 20 inches.



(Right) "Plum Blossoms in Ink," 1335, by Wang Mian. Hanging scroll: Ink wash on paper; 26.7 inches by 10.2 inches.



"Manual of Ink Bamboo, A Light Breeze Among 500 Stalks," 1350, by Wu Zhen. Album leaf: Ink on paper, 15.9 inches by 20.5 inches.



"Manual of Ink Bamboo, Playfully Rendered in Snow" (20th in series), 1350, by Wu Zhen. Album leaf: Ink on paper; 18.9 inches by 20.5 inches.



"Manual of Ink Bamboo, Light Shadows Cast Over Green Moss," 1350, by Wu Zhen. Album leaf: Ink on paper, 15.9 inches by 20.5 inches.

FINE ARTS

The 'Four Gentlemen' and Their Poetic Inscriptions

Four plants inspire artists and poets of ancient China

Continued from Page 1

This plant is much like the artist. Wang grew up in a poor family, but he studied hard to make a name for himself in poetry and painting. He was not able to pass a civil service exam that would guarantee a steady income, and he later rejected several other civil appointments. Retiring to the mountains where he made his living by painting, Wang built a plum blossom retreat and planted a thousand plum trees around it. He compared himself to the plum blossom, as being someone who triumphs over harsh conditions and doesn't seek fame.

Orchid
The orchid is delicate and fragile. Its flowers bloom with elegance and grace in the spring, and its blossoms are exquisite yet never overbearing. They often grow in hidden and secluded places emanating a faint, delicate fragrance. With these characteristics, the orchid embodies simplicity, solitude, humility, and nobility.

A solitary orchid floats against an empty background in Zheng Sixiao's drawing "Ink Orchid." Simple, spare brushstrokes depict the orchid leaves; the ink strokes create symmetry, dividing the painting into a balanced composition. Zheng's poem accompanies the painting:

*"I've always bowed my head and asked Emperor Xi,
What are you doing in this township?
Before starting to paint the nares open,
And the sky is full of antique fragrances."*

The piece was created in response to the Mongolian army's conquering the Southern Song Empire. Being loyal to the Song, Zheng rejected Mongol rule by signing the painting as "Southern-facing old man" who never faced the Northern Mongolian court.

The orchid embodies someone of noble character, such as Emperor Xi, a legendary king and ancestor of ancient Chinese civilization. It is depicted without roots and seems to be displaced from the soil. When asked why that is, Zheng said, "Don't you know that the land was stolen by the barbarians?" The "antique fragrance" suggests a wistful nostalgia for the motherland.

Seeing himself as the rootless orchid, the artist conveyed that he was without a home after the fall of the Song Empire. Yet he remained a patriot with noble integrity, without anger or hatred. The question he posed in the poem heightens his sadness, as he felt out-of-place.

Bamboo
Bamboo was admired by the ancient Chinese for centuries. The bamboo stalk stands straight and tall, representing up-

rightness and integrity. Yet the inside of the stalk is hollow, symbolizing endurance and tolerance. Although the bamboo grows straight, it bends and sways in the wind. It is strong and agile, making it a symbol of resiliency—of being able to recover quickly from difficulty.

Wu Zhen's (1280–1354) Yuan Dynasty pictorial series, "Manual of Ink Bamboo," features paintings depicting bamboo in different poses and stages: from tender shoots to old stalks, some upright and strong, some supple and bending down. The bamboo is also portrayed reacting to wind, rain, and snow, showing its adaptability. Each painting includes an inscription that describes the virtues that the bamboo plant symbolizes, rather than its actual features.

In this poem, Wu wrote:

*"When the trees shake and drop their leaves,
This gentleman remains particularly green.
With moral integrity and its mind more modest still,
It cherishes solitude to keep its nature intact."*

Here, Wu personifies the bamboo as a gentleman who maintains his moral integrity in the face of adversity. Wu expresses admiration for bamboo's resiliency and modesty. Despite external pressure, this plant still preserves its true nature.

In another poem, he wrote:

Each of these plants personified the ideal qualities of a gentleman in ancient China.

*"The bamboo stands upright in the frost,
Its shadows are slim and graceful under the moonlight.
If you understand the principle of self-effacement,
Then what matters will still weigh on your mind?"*

Wu invokes self-cultivation in this poem. Bamboo likes to grow in lofty mountains away from the world; it is content and carefree in its reclusiveness and uninterested in worldly affairs. It does not seek attention and is indifferent to fame and gain. By letting go of such desires, one will be at peace with oneself.

Chrysanthemum
Praised for its exquisite beauty, the chrysanthemum was a favorite flower of the ancient Chinese. Its blossoms thrive in

the chilly autumn air while other flowers start to wilt. It doesn't compete with other flowers, yet it outlasts them all, giving it an enduring elegance. The long lifespan of the flower represents living a life full of vitality.

The chrysanthemum was beloved by Tao Yuanming (A.D. 365–427), a well-known poet during the Six Dynasties period. Although Tao appreciated the autumnal beauty of chrysanthemums, he liked their therapeutic properties even more, as he would mix its petals in wine to make a longevity potion. In his fifth poem, "Drinking Wine," he wrote:

*"I built my house near where others dwell,
And yet there is no clamor of carriages and horses.
You ask of me, "How can this be so?"
When the heart is far, the place of itself is distant.
I pluck chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge,
And gaze afar towards the southern mountains.
The mountain air is fine at the evening of the day
And flying birds return homeward together.
Within these things there is a hint of Truth,
But when I start to tell it, I cannot find the words."*

This poem expresses the poet's contentment in a rural setting. Tao served as a government official when he was young to support his parents. When he saw the government's corruption, he withdrew from civil service and retreated to a pastoral life, surrounded by the beauty of the natural world.

The "hint of Truth" that Tao speaks of in the poem is the fleeting nature of life. Riches and influence don't go with us when we die. Tao tells us that life is ephemeral, and desolation sets in at old age. He expresses the truth of living a simple life free of worldly desires, while picking chrysanthemums near the mountains.

Even a place full of people and commotion will feel distant when the heart is unshackled from the world. Integrating emotion and reason, Tao's poem conveys that his tranquil state of mind is in harmony with nature, yet he "cannot find the words" to express this contentment.

The "Four Gentlemen"—the plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum—showered insights and beautiful thoughts on ancient artists and poets to inspire their paintings and poems, for the world to enjoy.

Mike Cai is a graduate of the New York Fei Tian Academy of the Arts and the University of California–Berkeley.



"Ink Orchid," 1306, by Zheng Sixiao. Handscroll: Ink on paper; 10.1 inches by 16.7 inches.



(Left) "Manual of Ink Bamboo, Bamboo Hanging From a Precipice," 1350, by Wu Zhen. Album leaf: Ink on paper; 18.9 inches by 20.5 inches.

(Right) "Orchids," second quarter of the 13th century, by Ma Lin. Album leaf: Ink and color on silk; 10 7/16 inches x 8 7/8 inches.



ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN



The Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Portrait of Tommaso di Folco Portinari" and "Portrait of Maria Portinari" once flanked a central panel of the Virgin and Child. That original panel is now lost. This image is a hypothetical reconstruction of how Hans Memling's triptych may have looked, using as a model his "Virgin and Child" owned by The National Gallery, London. Reconstruction design by Timothy Newbery with Evan Read.

FINE ARTS

Meeting Tommaso

Appreciating Hans Memling and Portrait Painting

LORRAINE FERRIER

Years ago, I was one of those people you'd see rushing past the rows of old master portraits in a museum or art gallery on my way to see a more exciting genre such as history painting. I admired the portrait artists' skills yet, frankly, I found little joy in viewing important people long-dead and often long-forgotten.

Hans Memling's "Portrait of Tommaso di Folco Portinari," at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, highlights well why I now love old master portraits, and why we should all make friends with them.

Full of grace, of course, Portinari holds a gentle gaze in his portrait, pursing his lips a little to concentrate as he holds his hands together in prayer. His dark clothing blends into the background, creating a striking—almost modern—image that brings our attention to Portinari's piety.

But the Portinari we see is not as Memling intended. As oil paint ages, it becomes transparent, so darker colors tend to become darker. Memling painted Portinari's clothes in a burgundy-like color, but over the centuries, the paint has turned almost plum-black. Time has taken the details of Portinari's rich, velvet costume, too.

Odd though it may seem, I'm drawn to this portrait because it has been stripped of those period details. It makes sense that we're naturally drawn to things we easily recognize. When I see Portinari's portrait today, I'm face-to-face with a man whom I know nothing about. There's no indication of his health or status, yet Memling's expert observational skills and brushwork show Portinari's heartfelt faith. That transcends time.

Portinari's Commission

In the 15th century, wealthy Europeans



"Portrait of an Old Man," circa 1475, by Hans Memling. Oil on wood; 10 inches by 7 1/4 inches. Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



flocked to Bruges, in Flanders, when the Duke of Burgundy (Philip the Good) set up one of his courts there. An Italian, Tommaso Portinari, managed the Medici bank in the city.

Portinari's portrait is part of a devotional triptych (a three-panel painting) that he is believed to have commissioned for his wedding. The central triptych panel would have been of the Virgin and Child. Experts believe that the central panel for the Portinari triptych is now lost; it is presumed to have a dark background, which was traditionally used in Burgundian court portraiture, as seen in the couple's portraits. The Met made a hypothetical mockup of how the triptych might have looked using Memling's "Virgin and Child" painting held at The National Gallery, London. The right panel is of Portinari's wife, Maria, in prayer, which can also be seen along with her husband's portrait at The Met.

In her portrait, Maria wears a gold ring set with two gems (maybe a ruby and an emerald) on her ring finger signifying her marriage to Tommaso. He wears a similar gold ring set with one stone, perhaps an emerald, on his little finger. Ring-wearing became popular in the Middle Ages. Royals and nobles wore rings made of gold and silver set with precious stones that showed the wearers' wealth and love for beauty. People in the Middle Ages wore the stones as talismans. For instance, they thought ru-

bies could improve health, combat lust, and promote harmony and righteous thoughts; emeralds could increase wealth, and cure epilepsy and eye problems.

Maria wears a stunning necklace and a burgundy velvet dress edged with fur. Memling superbly mimicked the different textures, such as her transparent chiffon-like veil. He also painted Maria's every facial detail, from her faint under-eye circles and wrinkles to her eyelashes and eyebrow hairs.

Memling's Portinari triptych was made for devotion, but a different example of his portrait work can be found in a diptych (two-panel painting): The Met's "Portrait of an Old Man," and "Portrait of an Old Woman" at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Both of these graceful portraits, that were once side-by-side in a diptych (two-panel painting), were painted to show a couple at the end of their lives. The old couple's fine lines and wrinkles may be deeper than those of their younger counterparts, but Memling echoed the same dignity in them all. In the diptych, he captured the old woman's meekness and the old man's warm expression full of wisdom that only age can bring.

Sought-After Portrait Painter

Memling's ability to create realistic yet solemn, moving portraits made him the most sought-after portrait painter in Bruges after the leading Bruges painter, Petrus Christus, died. Memling mainly created religious paintings (from private devotional pieces to large religious panels) and then portraits, especially of Italians living in Bruges.

Memling was born in Germany, and not too much is known about his training, although it's thought that he learned from Rogier van der Weyden. Memling was the first artist to introduce landscape scenes into his portraits. The Met's "Portrait of a Young Man" is a great example of this.

In Bruges, with patrons such as the Portinari family, Memling became wealthy. His art influenced artists in Italy, particularly in Venice where it's thought that his art inspired Venetian artist Giovanni Bellini.

Memling saw people. Meeting his portrait of Tommaso reminds me to see the people in these portraits rather than the period itself. Perhaps Tommaso can introduce others to the joy of old master portraits, too.



"Portrait of a Young Man," circa 1472–75, by Hans Memling. Oil on oak panel; 15 1/8 inches by 10 3/4 inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Memling's expert observational skills and brushwork show Portinari's heartfelt faith. That transcends time.

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

'Strategy' and the Press

MARK JACKSON

"Truth" is a newsroom thriller about the crack team of reporters who tracked the paper trail that determined whether George W. Bush shirked his Vietnam War military duties or not. It also depicts how much journalism has lost its bite since 1970s superstar Robert Redford played Watergate superstar reporter Bob Woodward in "All the President's Men" 46 years ago. Here, Redford plays super-anchor Dan Rather.

The Heart of the Matter

It begins with a CBS "60 Minutes" episode, where award-winning producer Mary Mapes (Cate Blanchett) has host Dan Rather (Redford) talk about the military records of Bush the Younger, (nicknamed, to differentiate him from his father, for his middle initial).

Dubya, during the Vietnam draft, had landed an exceedingly sweet assignment in the Texas Air National Guard, apparently reserved for the privileged pups of powerful political pops. But junior, regardless, apparently couldn't handle the light duty.

He played hooky, blew off mandatory testing without comeuppance, went AWOL, and ultimately got out early, there by avoiding combat. How? As Will Ferrell doing a Dubya impression might have put it—with... "strategy" [strə-tee-jôr-ee]. In other words, he had strings pulled for him. Or so it's claimed.

Mapes puts together a world-class team of journalists: Topher Grace's brilliant, hypercommitted, feathering-the-edge-of-conspiracy reporter; Dennis Quaid's avuncular, former-military tough guy; and Elisabeth Moss's moral-compass ethics expert.

What follows is a first-rate journalism clinic that moves at a riveting clip as the investigative team, with much quipping, take to their respective wheelhouses and build the case, à la trail-sniffing, educated-guessing, lead-following, phone-calling, on-and-off-the-record reporting, and so on. A long string of cold calls all end with

the person on the other end of the line stating vehemently, "No strings were pulled!"

Uh-Oh ...

But once the story breaks, the whole enterprise gets immediately lit up by the blogosphere's razor-sharp minds and acerbic tongues, some of whom, naturally, have political agendas. The team got sloppy due to deadlines, put all their money on a key-evidence memo that happens to be a faxed copy with no original, which right-wing bloggers and Rupert Murdoch's media machine have a field day claiming is fake. This questionable memo also came from a source who refused to be named (Stacy Keach).

Movies such as 'Truth' tend to be highly politically charged and have complicated backgrounds.

Which of course sets off frenzied backtracking and fact checking, with irate bosses breathing down the team's collective neck. But, ultimately, the whole endeavor hinged on their having put all their eggs in one basket, and then the handle broke. Sneaking an internet peek, Mapes is emotionally bludgeoned by cries of "Gut the witch!"

At the Top of Her Game

The "Let's nail Bush" and the ensuing "Now let's get the nail out of our own foot" parts are the overt storyline, but the movie is actually, really about Mary Mapes—mother, wife, and intense hunter-killer investigative reporter. She'd blown the Abu Ghraib scandal sky-high, was at the top of her game, and had a great deal to lose.

Since the screenplay (written by top-notch, first-time director James Vanderbilt) is based on Mapes's book, the story

speaking style, and gravel-voiced delivery appealed only to those who appreciate confessional singer-songwriters of downbeat ballads.

He released two albums in the late '60s and by the turn of the decade he had seen his already meager popularity peak, yet remained flush thanks to songwriting royalties and high-profile personal life.

Unlike the vastly inferior 2008 documentary "Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man," the filmmakers (via new interviews and archival footage of Cohen) went into great detail regarding his private life and financial difficulties. This material goes far in putting his artistic creations in a much more illuminating context.

The Song Almost Left for Dead

When Cohen delivered his seventh album—"Various Positions" (which included "Hallelujah")—to Columbia Records in 1984, it was rejected without clear reason by then CEO Walter Yetnikoff. A champion of megastars such as Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, and Billy Joel, Yetnikoff perhaps wasn't aware (or didn't care) that Cohen was always going to have limited appeal and sales, and he passed on the album.

It was only after the small Passport label released "Various Positions" to strong sales and reception in Europe did Columbia do so in the winter of 1985.

A mix of spiritual awakening and romantic longing structured as a Gospel hymn, "Hallelujah" was unlike anything Cohen had done before or since. The first version from the album was distilled down from 80 draft verses with multiple biblical references, including to Samson and Delilah ("she cut your hair"), and King David and Bathsheba ("you saw her bathing on the roof; her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you").

The single stalled at No. 59 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, yet it made the top five in multiple European countries, including No. 1 in France.

Cohen's dark, rambling narratives,



The crack team working on the story: (L-R) Lucy Scott (Elisabeth Moss), Josh Howard (David Lyons), Mike Smith (Topher Grace), Mary Murphy (Natalie Saleeba), Tom (Adam Saunders), Lt. Col. Roger Charles (Dennis Quaid), and Mary Mapes (Cate Blanchett), in "Truth."

is naturally skewed to her take on things. One could also argue that, seeing as how the movie masthead is known tree-hugger Robert Redford (said with respect and affection), there might be a somewhat liberal interpretation of the turn of events.

Mapes and Rather are shown, if somewhat glibly, to have an ersatz father-daughter relationship, as Mapes's actual father was a ruthless physical and verbal abuser. One of the film's most powerful scenes is when the normally fire-breathing Mapes gears up to lambaste her bullying dad on the phone for publicly dragging her name through the mud, accusing her of radical feminism, only to revert instantaneously to her covering, tiny inner child. It's heart-breaking, and really should have resulted in an Oscar nomination for Blanchett.

Toward the end, there's a CBS-ordered, let's-cover-our-behinds legal panel: Mapes and her lawyer staring down an entire law firm of lethal, honey-tongued litigators. The ensuing one-woman, collective pile driving of this intimidating predator pack is highly satisfying.

Redford's Roles Show Journalism's Decline

Robert Redford appeared at a forum sponsored by The New York Times, coinciding approximately with the release date of "Truth." The Huffington Post's Stephen Schlesinger reported:

"Redford pointed out that when he played Bob Woodward in 'All the President's Men,' Woodward always had the backing of the Washington Post editor, Ben Bradlee, even when he made occasional mistakes during his Watergate investigation. This support enabled Woodward ... to track down the full details of the Watergate burglary, despite withering criti-



Leonard Cohen performing on stage.

was when Bob Dylan himself covered it twice during his 1988 tour. Dylan gave it more of a rock feel but kept the lyrics intact.

This was not the case in 1991 when Velvet Underground alumnus John Cale performed it on the Cohen tribute album "I'm Your Fan," and in 1994 when it was done by Jeff Buckley, whose rendition is the best known. Both men substituted parts of the original lyrics with their own, which would happen again with the 2001 Rufus Wainwright version that appeared on the "Shrek" soundtrack album. The movie itself used Cale's take, as did the TV shows "Scrubs" and "Cold Case."

'Hallelujah' was unlike anything Cohen had done before or since.

You might think this tinkering with his song would have upset or bothered Cohen, yet he never publicly voiced any objections, which kind of makes sense as he himself did the same thing when performing it live in the late '80s and early '90s.

What's Old Is New

An artist covering other artists' songs is nothing new. Many singers (Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Linda Ronstadt, the band Three Dog Night) have had phenomenal careers mostly recording covers and, in some cases, turning them into their own "signature" songs.

LISA TOMASETTI/SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

cism, leading to the downfall of President Richard Nixon."

He goes on to say that there was no such luck regarding Rather and Mapes's errors. The errors didn't actually detract from their story's essence, but their bosses at CBS nevertheless hung them out to dry. Dan Rather himself, also on the panel, said that the pressure on CBS came straight from the Bush administration.

Courage

Dan Rather gave his blessing to "Truth" as being an accurate portrayal, saying that while journalism's info-gathering process can often be a "crude art," it doesn't detract from the overall truth. Tracking down the dangerous but morally imperative truth, takes—as Dan Rather famously liked to conclude his news shows—"courage."

However, movies such as "Truth" tend to be highly politically charged and have complicated backgrounds. For more insights, read Minneapolis attorney Scott W. Johnson's article. Regarding "Rather-gate," it's likely the case that, when it came to the truth, multiple cases of strategy existed.

'Truth'**Director:** James Vanderbilt**Starring:** Cate Blanchett, Robert Redford, Topher Grace, Dennis Quaid, Elisabeth Moss, Bruce Greenwood, Stacy Keach, Dermot Mulroney**MPAA Rating:** R**Running Time:** 2 hours, 5 minutes**Release Date:** Oct. 16, 2015

★★★★★

But the situation with "Hallelujah" is an anomaly. It means something different to everyone who hears it or performs it. With over 300 recorded versions to date, it is second only to "Yesterday" by the Beatles (2,200) as the most covered pop song in music history.

In addition to including a slew of archival Cohen interviews, many for the first time seen in a feature, the filmmakers included recent sit-downs. Arguably the most captivating commentary comes from singer Judy Collins, who recorded Cohen's "Suzanne" in 1966, a year before he performed it on his debut album.

During an interview toward the end of his life, Cohen is asked if he had grown weary of performing, talking about, or explaining "Hallelujah." He doesn't offer a definite yes or no. But he does tilt his head (capped with a pork pie hat) slightly forward, and a slight sideways grin forms on his face.

Cohen created a landmark work of art that will long outlive all the memories of him or, for that matter, the rest of us.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

'Hallelujah': Leonard Cohen, a Journey, a Song'**Directors:** Daniel Geller, Dayna Goldfine**Documentary****Running Time:** 1 hour, 55 minutes**MPAA Rating:** PG-13**Release Date:** July 1, 2022

★★★★★

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Powerful 1958 Western Drama About Revenge and Redemption

IAN KANE

The outstanding actor Gregory Peck isn't usually associated with Westerns; he's typically viewed more as a man who starred in contemporary (at the time) dramas. But Peck's performances in Westerns often exemplified the best of the genre. After all, this is the same man who starred in films like "The Big Country (1958)" and "The Gunfighter (1950)." In director Henry King's 1958 Western, "The Bravados," Peck adds yet another notch to his imitable Western film résumé.

Here, Peck fills the dusty, well-worn boots of rancher Jim Douglass. Douglass has been trailing four men who he's convinced raped and murdered his wife. After six months, he's tracked them down to the small town of Rio Arriba, where they've been jailed and are scheduled to hang the very next day for an unrelated murder. Needless to say, Douglass doesn't want to miss the show.

A deputy promptly stops Douglass just outside of town and tells him that his boss, Sheriff Eloy Sanchez (Herbert Rudley), isn't allowing anyone in town until the day after the hanging—except for the hangman, who is on his way. But Douglass's grim expression compels the deputy to guide him into town, but only if the rancher temporarily turns over his guns to the deputy.

When Douglass and his deputy escort arrive in town, the locals don't waste any time winding up the gossip mill. While some don't know what to make of Douglass—who usually answers questions with monosyllables (if at all)—others suspect he may be there to help break the four killers out of jail.

An old flame of Douglass's, Josefa Velarde (a young Joan Collins), happens to live in the town and tracks him down to the local watering hole. Just as Josefa thinks there may be a chance to rekindle their romance, he tells her that he married another woman after being with her, so she leaves in disappointment, not

knowing that he's actually a widow.

Sheriff Sanchez is sympathetic to Douglass, sensing that somehow the four outlaws hurt the rancher's life. Indeed, Douglass confides in Sheriff Sanchez that the four are responsible for his wife's murder. The sheriff lets Douglass inspect each of the murderers, and in a chilling scene, Douglass intimidates the killers one by one. The four are the gang's leader Bill Zachary (Stephen Boyd), Leandro Lujan (Henry Silva), Alfonso Parral (Lee Van Cleef), and Ed Taylor (Albert Salmi).

Later, Josefa senses Douglass's inner turmoil. Because of the horrific circumstances surrounding his wife's death, Douglass has lost his faith. But as a Catholic man in a Catholic town, he agrees to walk her to church, where all of the townsfolk have gathered for services.

But while everyone is attending church, the four outlaws escape and are once more on the run as fugitives from justice. When it is discovered that the criminals stole horses and escaped through a nearby pass, the town forms a posse in order to track them down on a "dead or alive" retrieval mission.

Douglass, who already has a good amount of experience tracking the fugitives under his dusty belt, decides to lead the posse. From there, gun smoke emits from the barrels of various pistols and rifles, and the body count begins to rise.

Just as with "The Gunfighter," this is one of Peck's finer performances. He is similarly understated yet carries a smoldering intensity that manifests itself in his piercing stare and no-nonsense demeanor. Peck's Douglass doesn't talk a lot—he doesn't have to. Indeed, he bristles with the quiet, barely-kept-in-check ferocity of a man on a do-or-die mission to avenge his wife's murder.

Joan Collins is great as always as Douglass's love interest—she pecks (no pun intended) away at his tough exterior as the posse gradually closes in on the main bad boys. Likewise, Andrew Duggan has



ALL PHOTOS BY TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Gregory Peck's character, Jim Douglass, doesn't talk a lot—he doesn't have to.

a small yet powerful role as the town's padre, who immediately recognizes Douglass's inner conflict—a good man who is slowly sinking into a cauldron of hatred.

"The Bravados" has many biblical references and could easily be considered a "Catholic Western" (Peck was Roman Catholic). It shows that sometimes even the best of us can lose our way if blinded by the thirst for vengeance. Ultimately, it's a tale of redemption with a surprise ending that I didn't see coming—but one that left me grinning from ear to ear.

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. You can check out his health blog at IanKaneHealthNut.com

Gregory Peck smolders as wronged rancher Jim Douglass, in "The Bravados."

'The Bravados'

Director:
Henry King

Starring:
Gregory Peck,
Joan Collins,
Stephen Boyd

Not Rated

Running Time:
1 hour, 38 minutes

Release Date:
June 25, 1958

★★★★☆



Dastardly outlaw Alfonso Parral (Lee Van Cleef) sets up an ambush.



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