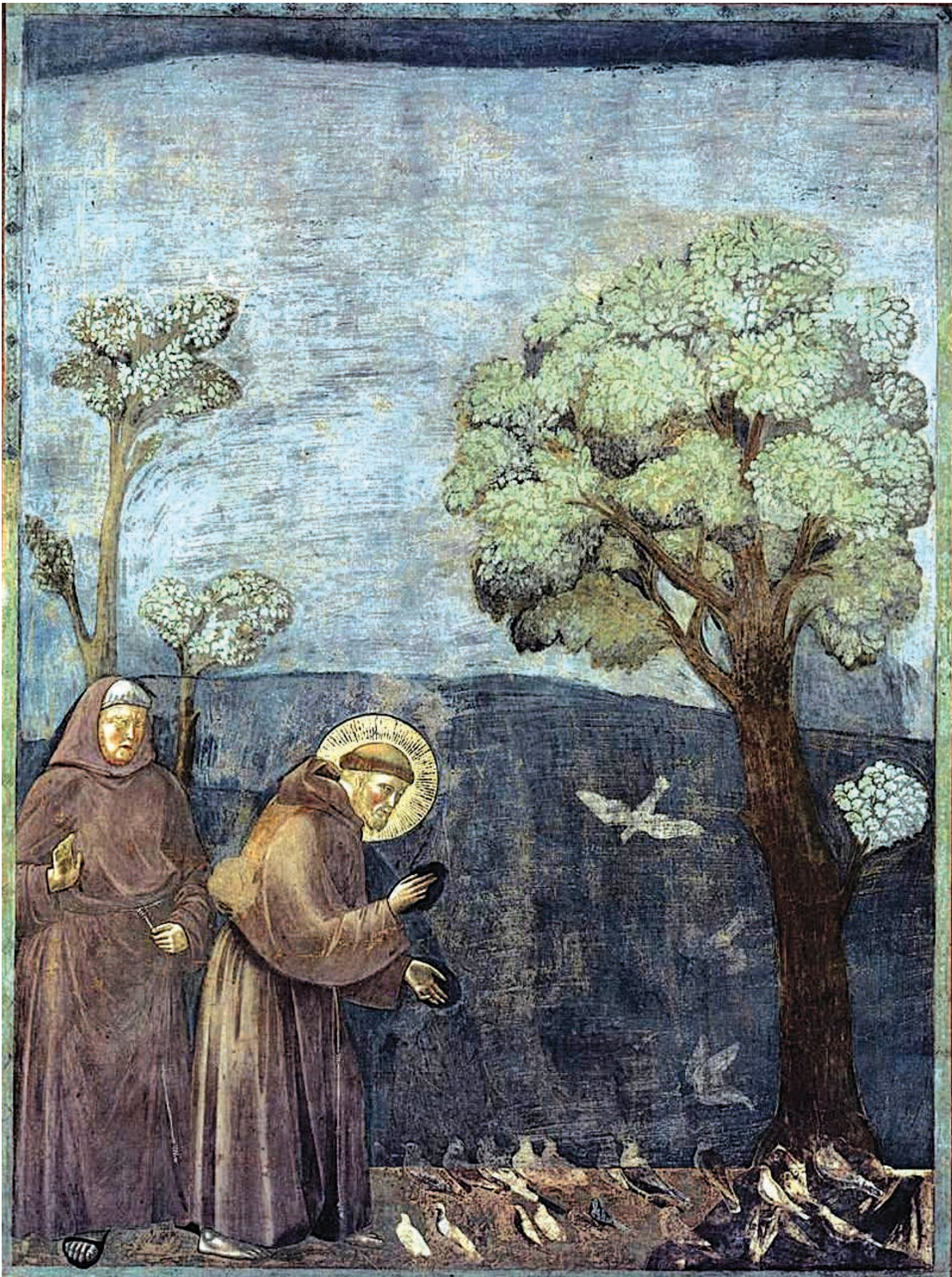


THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE



"Legend of St. Francis - Sermon to the Birds" by Giotto di Bondone. Fresco; Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Assisi, Italy.

SACRED ART

Giotto's Frescoes Foretell Scientific Breakthroughs

Renaissance art gives divine direction to human knowledge

YVONNE MARCOTTE

The Middle Ages were coming to an end. Its art presented holy beings in a golden, heavenly realm. The Renaissance then burst onto the scene, and it was time for great art to appear on earth, followed by exciting discoveries in science.

Renaissance artists depicted spiritual figures, but they placed them in natural settings and earthly places. One artist led

the way: Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337) created paintings that, like highway signs telling what's ahead, connected with common people and encouraged them to believe in God and respect nature. He painted scenes of miraculous events that showed the power of faith and how belief can accomplish the seemingly impossible.

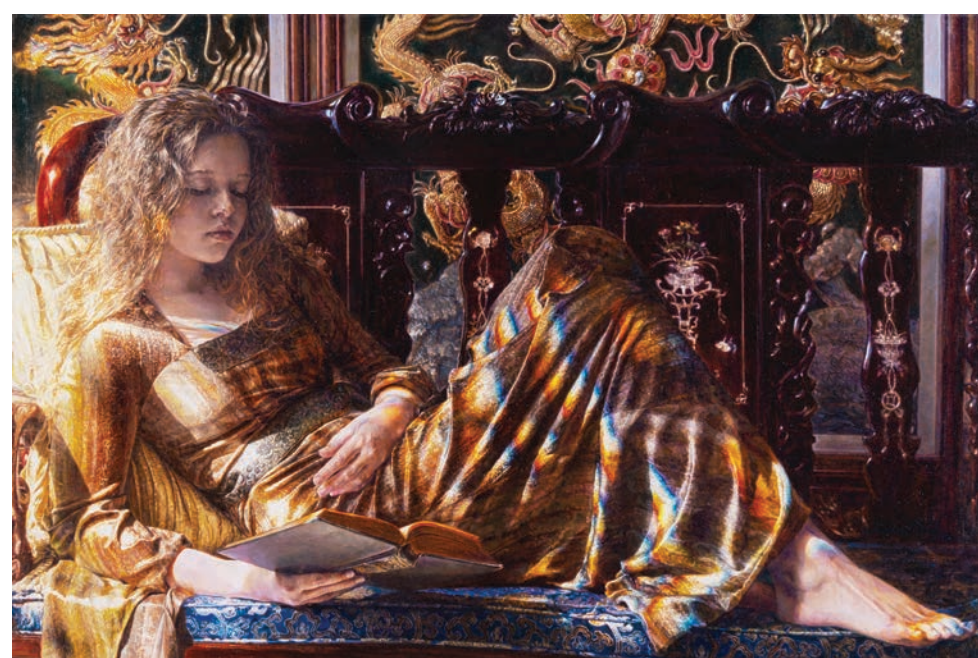
Natural settings had rarely been expressed in Western paintings before. But they are shown prominently in Giotto's

Giotto's fresco tells the story of St. Francis speaking to birds about God.

paintings of St. Francis, the poor man from Assisi, who had passed away only 20 years before Giotto was born.

The wondrous actions performed by the holy man of Assisi seemed to be scientifically impossible, but they provided believers with many great spiritual lessons. People who saw the frescoes began to understand that our natural environment was indeed a gift from heaven.

Continued on Page 4



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

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Naomi Watts and Edward Norton star in the 2006 film version of Somerset Maugham's "The Painted Veil," in which a couple mends their marriage.

LITERATURE

A Master's Touch: The Literary Legacy of Somerset Maugham

JEFF MINICK

Winston Churchill and Somerset Maugham were born in the same year, 1874, and both died in 1965.

Each had one foot in the Victorian age and the other in the era of automobiles, flight, motion pictures, and the Cold War. Despite their travels and cosmopolitan backgrounds, both remained distinctly English in their demeanor and speech.

Churchill's parents, Jennie and Randolph, rarely showed their son affection, though later Jennie did prove instrumental in furthering Winston's career. Maugham's parents died before he turned 11, and the uncle and aunt with whom he then lived, though they offered him care, lacked the loving nature of his parents.

Both men were on the short side, about 5 feet, 6 inches tall. And both suffered from speech impediments. Churchill had a slight lisp. Even in the 1930s, he sought coaching in pronouncing the letter "s," and Maugham in his adolescence developed a stutter that never entirely left him.

More significantly, these two men—one who would become England's greatest prime minister, the other one of its bestselling and most popular authors—shared a love for the English language. Their prose styles and literary interests differ. Churchill is famous for the round, rolling sentences found in his histories and speeches, whereas in his novels and stories Maugham was noted for his trenchant clarity.

In "The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill Alone 1932-1940," biographer William Manchester noted of Churchill that "the only modern novelist whose skills he admires" was Somerset Maugham.

A Life in Brief

Like some other writers of our literature—I am thinking here of Joseph Conrad—English was for Maugham a second language, with French his first, as he spent his boyhood in Paris where his father handled legal affairs at the British Embassy.

Back in England and living with his uncle, he attended The King's School, Canterbury, and studied in Heidelberg, Germany, where he became proficient in that language. Then he floundered for a bit until, mostly to please his uncle, he began studying medicine in 1892 in Lambeth, England.

All this time, however, Maugham never lost his desire to become a writer. His work in Lambeth, particularly in obstetrics, introduced him to the poor, who made up the bulk of his patients, and to suffering.

From this experience came the novel "Lisa of Lambeth," a tale of a working-class woman, which first brought him the attention of the literary set. He burnished that reputation with successful plays, all the while writing novels as well.

Published in 1915, "Of Human Bondage" cemented his reputation as a writer of fiction, bringing him acclaim and money.

During World War I, Maugham served for a time in the British Secret Service. In 1928, after years of traveling the globe

(many of the places he visited became the settings for his novels and short stories), Maugham bought the Villa Mauresque on the Cote d'Azur, which became his permanent residence. After his death, his remains were interred on the grounds of The King's School in Canterbury.

"The Razor's Edge": A Second Encounter

Years ago, I tumbled into Maugham's phase of his autobiographical meditation on life and writing—reading his novels "Cakes and Ale," "Of Human Bondage," "The Moon and Sixpence," and "The Razor's Edge," as well as several of his short stories, and the literary memoir "The Summing Up." Having stumbled across references to it in several books and online sites, I recently decided to revisit "The Razor's Edge."

Though I'd forgotten many of the details of this novel, such as the fact that Maugham appears as himself as the narrator, the general plot had remained with me, especially the role played by Larry Darrell. Following a harrowing experience as a pilot in the First World War, Darrell returns to Chicago a changed man, suffering from what we today would call post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Rather than join his group of wealthy friends in their quest to increase their fortunes and find material happiness, Darrell decides to move to Paris and live as a bohemian and a seeker of truth, though he avoids so fancy a term.

His friends and his fiancée, Isabel, who later breaks their engagement, are mystified by what they regard as his wasted ambitions and talents. Many of these same friends find their dreams and lifestyles shattered by the Great Depression.

Meanwhile, after years of travel, reading, and doing odd jobs, Darrell finally discovers the spiritual truths he was seeking.

After closing "The Razor's Edge," I found, as I had before, that the greatest pleasure I received from the novel came less from the plot and characters, though these were interesting enough, and more from the power of the writing: the simple but skillfully constructed



A portrait of Somerset Maugham, 1934, by Carl Van Vechten. Library of Congress.

sentences, the aphorisms, the exploration of human nature. Otherwise, my stopover left little impact.

But one story inspired by Maugham did once move me profoundly.

At the Movies

Besides "The Razor's Edge," several of Maugham's tales—"Of Human Bondage," "Theatre," and "Rain," among others—became films.

About 15 years ago, a friend and his wife invited me to join them at Asheville's Fine Arts Theater to watch the movie "The Painted Veil," based on Maugham's novel by the same name. I knew nothing of the plot and arrived with no expectations.

The film tells the story of a young, idealistic doctor, Walter, who is newly married to Kitty and who travels to Shanghai to study infectious diseases. After Kitty has an affair (her lover refuses to leave his wife), she avoids scandal and a divorce by accompanying Walter to a village suffering a cholera epidemic. Slowly, the estranged couple, while helping the sick and the children each in their own way, repair their damaged marriage.

The movie had me wiping tears from my eyes in several places, especially the scene where Walter has contracted cholera and Kitty is at his side. "The Painted Veil" was one of the few movies I've ever seen where, as the credits rolled at the end, I thought to myself, "I want to make the world a better place."

Maugham's novel is apparently different from the movie, which is why I've never read it. I wanted instead to keep what the film gave me, which was still a gift from Mr. Maugham.

A Master of Technique

I've just reread "Writing Prose," an essay from my father's old college literature textbook taken from Maugham's literary autobiography, "The Summing Up." The story has it that Maugham once humorously remarked: "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." Although in this essay he doesn't specify three rules for writing novels, or for anything else for that matter, in the space of a few pages he does give readers wonderful advice for writing fiction and other prose pieces. Here are just a few of his observations,

all of them embroidered with that crisp clarity we associate with his writing.

When he returned to novels after a period of writing plays, Maugham observes: "By then I no longer had any ambition to be a stylist; I put aside all thought of fine writing. I wanted to write without any frills of language, in as bare and unaffected a manner as I could." Regarding some modern writers, he comments: "People often write obscurely because they have never taken the trouble to learn to write clearly."

Lucidity, simplicity, and euphony (the quality of being pleasing to the ear) are, Maugham explains, three key ingredients for good writing of any sort. He also contends that fine writing should give the effect of ease, of effortlessness on the part of the writer—which as he says, "For my part, if I get it at all, it is only by strenuous effort."

His recommendations are gifts to everyone, from students in a high school composition class to the most experienced of writers.

The Craftsman Is Still Read Today

Perhaps it is for this craft that Maugham's literary talents will best be remembered. In his Introduction to Maugham's "Collected Stories," writer Nicholas Shakespeare, who received the Somerset Maugham Prize in 1990 for his first novel, writes about the influence of Maugham on others.

Gabriel García Márquez, George Orwell, James Michener, and Evelyn Waugh all admired his work, with Waugh describing him as "the only living studio-master under whom one can study with profit." In "Earthly Powers," Anthony Burgess pays homage to Maugham, sometimes humorously so, by basing his narrator Toomey on Maugham and even having that character meet Maugham.

Unlike so many of today's writers of fiction, Maugham did not learn his craft and storytelling in workshops or by earning a master of Fine Arts degree. He learned it, as did most writers of his day, by studying the works of other authors and by noting carefully the peculiarities of human behavior. Many of his characters, for example, were inspired by people he'd known or met.

In his Introduction mentioned above, Nicholas Shakespeare first quotes Maugham, and then adds an after-

“I wanted to write without any frills of language, in as bare and unaffected a manner as I could.”

Somerset Maugham, writer



A portrait of Winston Churchill, circa 1942. He and Somerset Maugham were contemporaries during a tumultuous time of history.

thought: "To know a thing actually happened gives it a poignancy, touches a chord, which a piece of acknowledged fiction misses. Like many writers, he was not good at pure invention."

Maugham himself always maintained a clear-eyed critical view of his own work. "I know just where I stand," he once wrote. "In the very first row of the second-raters."

Perhaps. Yet even today his work continues to attract admirers—readers drawn to him, I suspect, not by his technique and his wit but by his storytelling and his insights into the heart. The comments offered by them on different online sites reflect their esteem for him.

And what writer could ask for more than that?

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

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SACRED ART

Giotto's Frescoes Foretell Scientific Breakthroughs

Giotto painted frescoes so that people could easily understand spiritual lessons for their daily lives.

Continued from Page 1

Accurate Observations

Giotto depicted the natural environment so accurately in his frescoes that they provide a clue to events in the past. The rocks that he painted were part of his local landscape: limestone, which is common in the region of Umbria. The fresco



"St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata," circa 1297–1299, by Giotto di Bondone. Louvre Museum.

of the stigmata of Francis in the Bardi Chapel of the Basilica di Santa Croce in Florence, Italy, shows Christ imprinting the wounds from his crucifixion onto Francis as he prayed on a rock. Giotto's frescoes point to some of Earth's geologic mysteries while portraying a miraculous event. In her article published by the European Geosciences Union, geologist and Renaissance scholar Ann C. Pizzarusso describes the painting from a scientist's perspective:

Giotto portrays Francis on a block of limestone which has been weathered and uplifted, as seen by its nearly vertical relief. A cleft in the side of the cliff, common to calcareous deposits, has opened. Giotto uses this rock, which has been sliced open, to imitate the wounds in St. Francis's hands and feet. The church in the foreground is made of the gray limestone found in the area and commonly used for construction. To the left of the church, grikes (solution fissures) and clints (limestone separated from adjacent sections by solution fissures) are starting to form.

The Scaglia Rossa limestone depicted in the fresco was mined at the Mount Subasio quarry. Pizzarusso writes that Giotto's accurate depictions of local rock formations allow geologists to identify the rock type down to the exact place it can be found, compare past and present differences of strata and geological features, and then better pinpoint the rate of geological change in the region. This same rock type later gave clues to scientists who offered one well-accepted theory for the extinction of the dinosaurs.

Speaking With Birds

Most of us don't understand the language of birds. Their loud and complex buzzes, chirps, and trills mystify. It's a mystery to most of us how to interact with our winged friends.

Yet Francis of Assisi spoke to them. Giotto's fresco "Sermon to the Birds," tells the story of Francis speaking to these winged creatures about God and other spiritual truths. The scene depicts Francis and another friar coming toward a small flock on the ground as more fly down. The birds listen expectantly as the saint tells them about God. Francis blesses them and the birds fly off.

Giotto explained what's going on in this miraculous event pictorially, through the reaction of the other figure in the painting. A friar raises his hand with a surprised expression on his face: How could this happen?

The Learn Bird Watching website claims that birds do indeed interact with human beings, as recent scientific research suggests. "They also seem to be able to understand the tone and emotional content of human speech. This suggests that they are capable of understanding at least some aspects of human language."

People recognized Francis in his day for his humble demeanor and kind preaching; perhaps the birds also recognized the poor man of Assisi, because they listened to him. Learn Bird Watching states: "Birds have long been known to be able to recognize individual humans. Studies have shown that they can distinguish between different people's faces."

Giotto's painting shows the truth expressed in an internet meme by "muses from a mystic," which reads: "A compassionate heart knows that every little life matters."

Water From a Rock

Another of Giotto's frescoes, "The Miracle of the Spring" shows how water answers Francis's prayer. Out of compassion, Francis brings forth a spring from a rock



"Legend of St. Francis - Miracle of the Spring," circa 1297–1300, by Giotto di Bondone. Fresco; Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Assisi, Italy.

to give water to a man dying of thirst. As the story goes, Francis, who was with two monks, was approached by a farmer who was suffering from thirst and had collapsed. Giotto's painting shows that Francis pities the poor farmer and prays fervently. Then, water comes gushing out of the rock near the farmer. The farmer leans down to the rock and drinks from the miraculous spring, and he is saved. After this kindness, it is said that the spring disappeared as if it had never existed.

Again, to help the viewer understand what a miraculous event this was, Giotto showed Francis's two companions reacting to the miracle. With their expressions of amazement, they demonstrate how most people would react if they had witnessed this event.

Scientists have come to understand that everything at the most microscopic level is made mostly of water—even rocks, as strange as it may seem. Recent research has discovered that water can reside in and among the smallest particles of rock. Pizzarusso notes Giotto's accuracy in painting the scene with wave-like patterns formed by the erosion of stratified limestone. She writes: "Limestone is porous, and often springs will gush forth from the interior of the Earth."

Hydrologists use the name "groundwater" to refer to the water existing within the smallest elements of rock, and it offers a surprising but ready source of fresh water. According to an article by Donald DeYoung, professor of physics

at Grace College: "People sometimes assume well water comes from literal caves or underwater streams, but that is not the case. It flows straight out of the soil and rocks."

It may be difficult for most people to believe that most things are made of water. However, NASA explains that an earthquake releases water from rock, in what is termed "earthquake dewatering." We have that amazing accomplishment depicted in Giotto's fresco of the miracle of the spring.

The wondrous actions performed by the holy man of Assisi seemed to be scientifically impossible.

Giotto's Billboards
Giotto's frescoes were the billboards of his day, telling all who passed by that believing in the divine could reveal the secrets of creation. His frescoes show that Francis first believed something could happen, and then it happened. Water springs from rock, and then Francis talks to them. He did not have to see to believe; he believed and then witnessed miraculous events.

Giotto's frescoes foretold scientific breakthroughs that would only be researched by scientists hundreds of years later. If we can clear our thinking, we will see and experience how the divine realm reveals heavenly secrets to science. "Giotto sought to embrace the message of St. Francis: that people could begin to see and experience the goodness, truth, and beauty of God already in this world," according to the website Aletheia. Miracles happen because people believe, and then they can experience a touch of the divine.

LITERATURE

What Many Men Desire: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Short Story 'The Golden Touch'

KATE VIDIMOS

For centuries, men have desired riches and, in particular, gold. Many have done everything possible to obtain this precious metal. Whatever motivates them, this desire has caused wars, feuds, deaths, and betrayals. In his short story "The Golden Touch," Nathaniel Hawthorne contemplated the dangers of gold and the consequences of an unquenchable desire for it by revisiting the story of King Midas and his golden touch. King Midas possessed more gold than most

kings, and he loved gold more than "anything else in the world." He sought it everywhere and hoarded it like legendary dragons. Eventually, "Midas gets to be so exceedingly unreasonable, that he can scarcely bear to see or touch any object that is not gold." The one and only thing Midas loves more than gold is his little daughter, Marygold. She means much more to him than anything.

Manifold Riches

Yet Midas's love for his daughter does not prevent him from craving more gold. When

a young stranger visits and asks Midas what he desires most, Midas exclaims: "I wish everything that I touch to be changed to gold!" The next morning, Midas finds that the stranger has gifted him with the golden touch. Everything he touches turns to gold: clothes, the bed, books, glasses, the stair railing, and roses in the garden.

Midas is overjoyed! Now nothing will be worthless in his eyes. Should he judge something worthless, he can instantly change it to gold.

Worth Her Weight in Gold

However, Midas's joyful view of his golden touch soon changes. While at breakfast, the potato, hotcake, and fish that he touches turn to gold and become inedible. He becomes frustrated and groans. How can he survive without food?

Seeing her father's distress, Marygold rushes to comfort him. Touched by her love, Midas bends down and kisses her, turning his lovely daughter into a golden statue.

In this moment, King Midas realizes too late "how infinitely a warm and tender heart, that loves him, exceeds in value all the wealth that can be piled up betwixt the earth and sky!" His blind, infatuated craze for gold has caused him to lose his only child.

Seeing Midas's true repentance, the young stranger revokes the golden touch and advises Midas to wash himself of his avarice and greed. Hawthorne's story tells what happened when Midas prizes gold and then again when he turns his life around.

What Many Men Desire

Hawthorne showed, as J.R.R. Tolkien said in "The Hobbit," that "if more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." Gold brings no joy.

When we seek after gold with an avaricious, unquenchable desire, then everything else around us becomes lifeless and worthless. Our hearts grow hard, loveless, and un-

able like solid, cold gold.

Hawthorne's story encourages us to see the beauty in everything, not just gold. We must look past the shining exterior to the beauty within. We must pursue that which is infinitely better than gold: love. Through love, we can attain higher virtues and graces that gold cannot buy.

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate from the liberal arts college at the University of Dallas, where she received her bachelor's degree in English. She plans on pursuing all forms of storytelling (specifically film) and is currently working on finishing and illustrating a children's book.

In the Nathaniel Hawthorne version of the Midas myth, Midas's daughter turns to a golden statue when he touches her. An illustration by Walter Crane for the 1893 edition of "A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Library of Congress.



"Michelangelo Showing Lorenzo il Magnifico the Head of a Faun," 1638–1642 by Ottavio Vannini. Fresco. Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy.

A Day in the Life: The Medici Academy

ERIC BESS

The Italian Renaissance was an exemplary period for the free exchange of ideas coupled with the pursuit of excellence. The discovery of classical Greek texts and works of art helped fuel a greater discussion around our purpose and potential as human beings.

The Medici Academy was an intellectual and artistic haven in Renaissance Italy. Also known as the "Platonic Academy" or "Florentine Academy," the Medici Academy was founded by Cosimo de Medici in the mid-15th century. The academy would often meet in the sculpture garden on the Piazza San Marco in Florence, owned by the Medici family.

Some of the most significant people of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries were associated with the academy and Medici family. The academy was where Marsilio Ficino, the first to translate Plato's texts into Latin, led discussions on Platonic philosophy and Christianity. The sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni taught lessons in classical art. Other notable figures included popes Leo X, Clement VII, Pius IV, and Leo XI, artists such as Michelangelo and Brunelleschi, as well as great thinkers such as Galileo.

What would it have been like to be a part of this academy? What would it have been like to witness some of the greatest artists and thinkers sharing the same space and discussing ideas for the future? Here, we will try to imagine a day at the Medici Academy.

A Day at the Medici Academy

It's the end of the 15th century. We've been at the Medici Academy for quite some time. What we've witnessed will be unable to be denied by the canons of history. We hope the future generations will find it in their hearts to recognize the wisdom in the construction of this academy and improve upon it.

As we sit among some of the students' artworks in the sculpture garden, we often see the young Michelangelo—who appears to be ordained by God—studying and creating works with unparalleled beauty. Here in the garden, he intently sculpts the head of a faun to show to Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Other young artists draw sketches of the recently found sculptures by the ancient Greeks. Bertoldo di Giovanni hopes that we can reproduce the grandeur of the art of the ancients by first copying them. Maybe in mimicking their approach, we will absorb those qualities that made their works of art divine. Other artists who have already gained renown in Italy and other parts of Europe often visit and converse with the young artists.

The academy is loosely organized. Since we are affiliated with the Medici family, we can show up and discuss the ideas of Plato, Plotinus, and Christianity freely. Though the Medici family has produced several popes, politics and church business are rarely discussed. We instead focus on notions such as truth, love, and friendship. The discussions can become intense but are always respectful. We are less interested in being "right" and more interested in asking questions to pursue greater truths than the ones we presume to know.

Today is especially significant since we celebrate Plato's birthday with a banquet. At the banquet, Marsilio Ficino gives a lecture on the notion of Platonic love and friendship. He speaks about the type of love that he interprets from the writings of Plato, a love that is absent of emotion and shares in the contemplation of God; this type of love shared with a friend is synonymous with divine love.

Ficino reiterates his point to the artists: The type of art they are creating is the type of art that points to heaven and shares in the contemplation of the divine. In this way, the artistic creations encouraged by our academy are artistic creations grounded in our understanding of Platonic love and friendship.

We all listen intently and are left inspired to write, create, produce, and hope according to the ideals of love, friendship, and God. Thus, the new forms of writing, painting, and sculpture will go beyond mere technique.

Every day, we wake up, and we hurry to our jobs or school. We become part of a routine that seems to encapsulate us. In this series, we will take a moment from our hectic, fast-paced world, step outside of our routine, and imagine what life may have been like across cultures and eras.

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

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Dealing With Violence, Not Just the Idea of It

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Gary Cooper's "High Noon" (1952) merely touched on themes of Quakerism, pacifism, and fatalism, and how they relate to state-sanctioned attack or defense. Another of his movies, "Friendly Persuasion" (1956), explores these more deeply, more lightheartedly and, uniquely, from a Quaker's perspective.

Jess Birdwell (Cooper) heads a Midwestern farming family of Quakers. His wife Eliza (Dorothy McGuire), adult daughter Mattie (Phyllis Love), adult son Josh (Anthony Perkins) and preteen son "Little" Jess (Richard Eyer) want nothing more than to continue the Indiana peace and quiet they've enjoyed all their lives. But America's 19th-century Civil War has other ideas.

As the war affects their home, it challenges in different ways how each family member responds to violence, not just the idea of it. It also tests and clarifies their understanding of courage and care.

Eliza's the sternest Quaker of the lot. Although her family teases her about her rectitude, they abide by her austerity: no fighting (let alone killing), no singing, no dancing, and no music. Not that she's incapable of having fun. She relishes dancing, but she suppresses those desires the most, while the other family members, shall we say, suppress them less.

Jess can't wait to shoot a rifle, sing a hymn, play the organ, and race horse-carriages. Mattie can't wait to be courted by a young man; as if in response, Union officer Gard Jordan (Peter Mark Richman) obliges. Josh can't wait to test his beliefs, if only to discover what they are. Little Jess can't wait to grow up and be a man who'll protect and provide for his family, just as he sees grown men do.

The family does all it can to avoid violence, but when it comes around, they surprise themselves and each other. Eliza whacks a rowdy "rebel" soldier who fancies her pet goose as a roast dinner. Jess hauls a "forbidden" organ home. Timid Josh enlists. Mattie doesn't shun her suitor who's riding to war; she kisses him goodbye. Little Jess is a

noisy witness to these transformations, while Gard's father, their Methodist neighbor Sam (Robert Middleton), teases Jess over his fun-loving ways and awkwardness around some Quaker-ish ways.

Both Sides Now

William Wyler took Jessamyn West's book "The Friendly Persuasion" seriously enough to both produce and direct the movie adaptation, but thankfully, not too literally. Sadly, some critics accuse his film of justifying or glorifying righteous violence. It probably does the opposite.

Yes, there's a bit of Wyler spoofing Quakers whenever the impish Little Jess lightens the seriousness that surrounds him. But Wyler's message remains profound. Some Quakers struggle to stick to a path they've chosen or one chosen for them by elders—some happily, others less so—and still others veer from it now and then. Yes, some stand by, while others die to protect them. One Union officer, limping from war wounds, scolds a sullen Quaker church congregation: "How many of you are hiding behind your church to save your skins?"

But Wyler isn't out to prove Quakers wrong and everyone else right. He's showing how both sides have their merits (and faults). It's just that each side sees too much of the other's faults (and too little of their merits).

Both sides show resolve, restraint, and even regret. The rebels gate-crashing the Birdwell farm don't exploit Eliza's hospitality beyond a point; history tells us what ransacking men are capable of doing in real life to helpless women and children. Sam takes up arms so Jess won't have to, but longs for a time when arms will be redundant. Josh impulsively volunteers to fight, but it's Gard who counsels him to talk it over with his folks before deciding.

Jess and his Quaker family aren't perfect, they're human: failing, but trying all the same to live their ideals and help those who fall short. Backed against a wall, many are capable of defending themselves or those they care about. And they acknowledge that, in an imperfect world with imperfect humans, you must fight to win peace or



The Birdwell family gathers around the organ: (L-R) Richard Eyer as Little Jess, Phyllis Love as Birdwell daughter Mattie, Gary Cooper as family patriarch Jess Birdwell, Dorothy McGuire as Birdwell matriarch Eliza, and Anthony Perkins as oldest son Josh in "Friendly Persuasion."

This Quaker family isn't perfect, they're human: failing, but trying to live their ideals.

stay fighting-fit to maintain it. Yet they're proud that they raise their fighting hands hesitatingly rather than hurriedly.

A Light Touch on Serious Subjects

This movie marks Perkins's debut in a major Hollywood role. He's perfect here as the tortured Josh, torn between love for his family and a duty to protect families like his. Some battles, he figures, aren't offensive. They protect peace-loving folk from looting, attack, or killing.

His desperate words to his mother capture that dilemma. He hates fighting and doesn't have a death wish: "I don't know if I could kill anyone if I tried. But I have to try, as long as other people have to."

Cooper as Jess comically mediates between his children's desire to enjoy life beyond Quaker country and respecting Eliza's wishes. Like others who must manage balancing acts, he falters. But unlike many others, he's soon back at it, not fretting about the outcome, just enjoying the process.

Scenes played for laughs don't come off as funnily as intended. But if Wyler's touch is too farcical or idealistic in this movie, he offers sufficient hints that things are about to get serious.

This laid-back film about a farming family has as many as three horse-carriage races. Watching them, if you suspect that Wyler's onto something bigger, you'd be right, for three years after this movie, he stunned the world with the biggest horse-carriage race of all—in his masterpiece, "Ben Hur."

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

'Friendly Persuasion'

Director:
William Wyler

Starring:
Gary Cooper, Dorothy McGuire, Phyllis Love, Anthony Perkins

MPAA Rating:
G

Running Time:
2 hours, 17 minutes

Release Date:
Nov. 25, 1956

★★★★★



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