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

he 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.

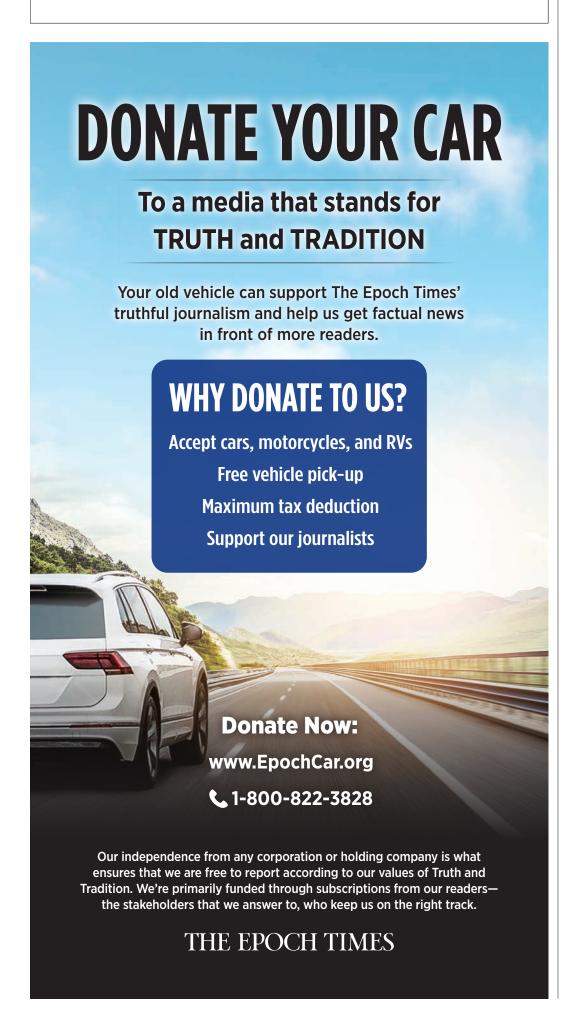
Continued on Page 4

Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

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INSPIRED





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

inston 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

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," oped 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 rotund, 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 workingclass 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 fic-

tion, 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

'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 ence 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 discov-

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 writ-

ing: the simple but skillfully constructed

ers the spiritual truths he was seeking.

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

tion 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 influence of Maugham on others. 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.

sentences, the aphorisms, the explora- 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

Gabriel García Márquez, George Orwell, James Michener, and Evelyn Waugh all admired his work, with Waugh describing him as "the only living studiomaster 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 Here are just a few of his observations, 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

PUBLIC DOMAIN

W. SOMERSET

MAUGHAM

The Razor's

"The Razor's Edge"

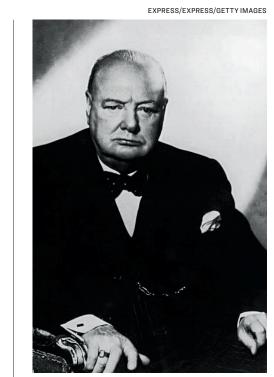
reflective phase in

the author's life.

by Somerset

Maugham

presented a



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

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-eved 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.*





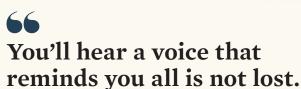
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SACRED ART

Giotto's Frescoes Foretell Scientific Breakthroughs



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 tent 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

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

The wondrous

of Assisi seemed

impossible.

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. disappeared as if it had never existed.

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

Scientists have come to understand that every-

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." After this kindness, it is said that the spring We have that amazing accomplishment depicted in Giotto's fresco of the miracle of the spring.

Giotto's Billboards

Giotto's frescoes were the two companions reacting actions performed billboards of his day, telling all who passed by that expressions of amaze- by the holy man believing in the divine could reveal the secrets of creation. His frescoes show to be scientifically that Francis first believed something could happen, and then it happened. Water springs from rock, and

thing at the most microscopic level is made birds listen to a human talking 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 Aleteia. 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 Manifold Riches story of King Midas and his golden touch. Yet Midas's love for his daughter does not

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.

King Midas possessed more gold than most prevent him from craving more gold. When his lovely daughter into a golden statue.

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

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

Seeing her father's distress, Marygold rushes to comfort him. Touched by her love, Midas bends down and kisses her, turning

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

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 untouchable 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 Magnfico 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 t 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 (IDSVA).

Rangers

teammates

carry Nolan

the field in

1991 after

his seventh

in "Facing

Ryan off

A Tribute to the Sages

Raphael's frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura

JAMES BARESEL

aphael's feelings were undoubtedly mixed as he received his first commission from the powerful patron of the arts ▶ Pope Julius II. At 25 years of age, Raffaello Sanzio was known throughout Italy as a rapidly rising star artist. Now, he had been chosen to fresco four rooms in the Apostolic Palace, the pope's official residence. It was a high honor and sure to solidify his professional status.

Yet more prestigious frescoes, paintings of pigment mixed with wet plaster, were being simultaneously painted a few hundred yards away in the Sistine Chapel. Paradoxically, Raphael was in the shadow of a more established artist and had less experience for the job. Though still a rising painter, Raphael was already an accomplished one. His rival was already at the top of the artistic world as a sculptor but had never painted a major work.

Nobody knew what the secretive Michelangelo had planned for the Sistine ceiling. Raphael was determined to surpass whatever it might be. To do so, he turned his attention to the room now named for the law court that used it in later times, the Stanza della Segnatura (Signature Room).

One of the frescoes became one of the most definitive works of the High Renaissance.

Room of the Segnatura

In Raphael's day, the Stanza della Segnatura was Pope Julius's library. That made it perfect for displaying artistic virtuosity while symbolizing Renaissance ideals: a synthesis of ancient ideals with Christian faith. The room could be devoted to "the true, the good, and the beautiful" manifested in art and learning, faith and reason, and upright living.

On the north wall, "The Parnassus" celebrated literature. Homer, Virgil, and Dante the greatest epic poets of Greece, Rome, and ters join them on all sides.

three cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, and temperance are depicted in human form together with the theological virtues as cherubs. The fourth cardinal virtue, justice, was painted on the ceiling above. At the bottom left and right, respectively, are Emperor Justinian and Pope Gregory IX with their codes of civil and canon law.

The west wall's "Disputation of the Holy Sacrament" symbolizes Christian belief and theological scholarship with numerous biblical figures, saints, and popes surrounding an altar.

'The School of Athens'

Each of these paintings would have solidified Raphael's reputation. But the fresco on the fourth wall became one of the most definitive works of the High Renaissance: "The School of Athens" (1509–1511).

At the center of that work stand Plato and



Stanza della Segnatura (Signature Room) Raphael Rooms, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City.

ers: Socrates, the mathematicians Euclid and Pythagoras, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, and many others.

The scene mixes history and symbolism, as a tribute to great minds of the past. Many figures in the fresco capture the spirit of ancient intellectual life. Plato did start a school in Athens. For 300 years, it was a center of intellectual life for the entire Mediterranean world. Aristotle was his student and friend. Many other figures depicted in the painting either studied Christian Europe—are placed together as a at Plato's school, were associated with it trio. Dozens of writers and fictional charac- later in history, or were contemporaries of its founder as well.

logical Virtues," qualities the ancients shared phael's models, who were eminent figures of tory to the other artist-models. Leonardo da also had full confidence in their own abilwith Christians. At the top of this work, the his own day. Using them implied that they Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael had the ity to stand beside them. were grounded in classical tradition and worthy successors of the ancients.

> Use of artistic patrons was standard practice and was not pure flattery. Many patrons' devotion to Renaissance humanism was deep and genuine. Their financial support made the work of the geniuses possible. But their presence in "The School of Athens" is notably subtle. The only one we know who was included was Duke Federico II of Mantua, and he modeled for a minor character in the painting whose identity is unknown. Pope Julius II ordinarily would have been included as patron of the work. But since he served as a model for Pope Gregory IX in "The Disputation of the Blessed Sacrament," it was possible to leave him out.

To make a deliberate statement, Raphael used other artists as models for the work's philosophers and intellectuals. In the Middle Ages, artists had been viewed as workmen Aristotle, framed by arches and statues. Suranalogous to builders, stonemasons, and carrounding them is a plethora of ancient thinkpenters. Renaissance artists insisted their

work was analogous to such higher pursuits as poetry and philosophy.

No less a figure than Leonardo da Vinci was the model for Plato. Other artistmodels included Raphael's teacher Bramante and his good friend Timoteo Viti. In a particularly touching tribute to Raphael's rival, whom he admired greatly, Michelangelo was included front and center as Heraclitus.

He reserved the figure of the ancient world's greatest artist, Apelles, as his selfportrait. This may have signified only a desire to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious who were fully conscious of their depenpredecessor. Bold self-assertion would not, dence on lessons learned from the giants same respect for Apelles as we have for those Three Greats of the Renaissance. If Raphael intended to imply that he was a new Apelles, he would also have been implying that only a new Apelles could rise above his greatest

has contributed to periodicals as varied as Fine Art Connoisseur, Military History, Claremont Review of Books, and New Eastern Europe.

Renaissance artists saw no conflict

between intense competition and pro-

found mutual respect. Striving to outdo

men whose genius they admired spurred

them on—bringing art to greater and

The paintings of the Stanza della Seg-

natura were not just one of the greatest

products of that rivalry but also the su-

preme artistic celebration of it. Leonardo

da Vinci and Michelangelo would have

recognized in them the spirit they shared

with their creator. It was the spirit of men

of the past and of their own age, yet who

James Baresel is a freelance writer who

greater heights.



"The Cardinal and Theological Virtues," 1511, by Raphael.



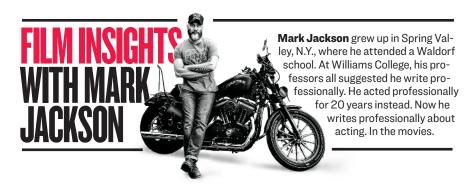
"The School of Athens," 1509–1511, by Raphael.



"The Parnassus," 1511, by Raphael.



"Disputation of the Holy Sacrament," 1509, by Raphael.



Baseball's Greatest of All Time Pitcher

MARK JACKSON

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 42 2022

The fastest baseball pitch in history was clocked at a mind-boggling 105.1 miles per hour, according to the Guinness Book of World Records. It was hurled in 2010, by Cuban pitcher Aroldis Chapman in a game against the San Diego Padres.

However, the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) pitcher to ever play the game of baseball, Nolan Ryan, threw a consistent, blistering, 100.8 mph heater for an astounding 27 years, back in the 1970s before the advent of today's advanced training methodologies, nutrition, sophisticated strength training, sports medicine, and steroids. Ryan single-handedly put the category of power pitcher on the map.

The man is a legend, a folk hero, and "Facing Ryan" tells his story via the players who faced him in his nearly three decades' worth of pitcher-batter Wild West shootouts. Out on the mound, Nolan Ryan was the most intimidating sheriff in town.

'Facing Nolan'

Bradley Jackson's documentary "Facing Nolan" tells the story of this tall-drink-of-water Texan from a small town, who married his high school sweetheart, Ruth, in 1967, and followed his dream of playing Major League Baseball (MLB), as well as his other dream of being a rancher. Nolan pitched for four MLB teams over a 27-year career, operated his cattle ranch during the off-season, and set absolutely ridiculous records for no-hitters and strikeouts that remain untouched to the present day.

And then, after he'd laid down the warrior sword and taken up the elder staff, he held executive positions with two of his former teams more than a decade after his retirement from the game.

American Folk Hero

Like all mythological characters, espe-Bill, tales of their mighty deeds start snowballing and end up outrageous and cartoon-ish centuries later, and so "Facing Nolan" nips certain elements of the "Ryan Express" mythos in the bud.

One such instance of this is the fondly told tale about how Ryan developed his 100 mph fastball as a paperboy, wanging copies of The Houston Post from his bike onto subscribers' doorsteps in and around his childhood home in Alvin, Texas. Right-hander Ryan explains that it was n't from a bike; it was from his dad's car, and he had to toss the papers with his left hand. So *poof*—there goes that myth.

Ryan was no overnight sensation. One interviewee claims that during Nolan's minor league days, his lack of control was very similar to that of "Nuke" LaLoosh in "Bull Durham" accidentally beaning the team mascot in the head, and such. Ryan admits that he was so disgusted by this (during his time with the New York Mets) that he considered quitting the game in 1971.

Ryan's savvy, immensely stoic, level-headed, and driven wife Ruth knew better. The Ryan grandchildren claim their "Nannamoo" is the most competitive person in the entire family and counterbalances Ryan's laid-back, off-field personality. Critical to Ryan's success, Ruth encouraged him through the ups and downs of his career, all while raising their three children. In her mid 70s, she's as strikingly beautiful as she was the day he married her and is one of the best examples of the phrase "Behind every great man there is a great woman."

From Mets to Angels

Ryan began his professional baseball life with the New York Mets in 1966, and even though he was a part of the team that won the 1969 World Series, he was inconsistent and had very little personal success.

It was when he was traded to the California Angels in 1972 and finally got a world-class pitching coach that he started to morph into the Hall-of-Fame, legendary pitcher he is known as today. In California, he threw four of his no-hitters and set the modern-era single season strikeout record at 383.

Angels to Astros to Rangers

Ryan signed with the Houston Astros in 1980. Finally back in his home state, he became the face of the franchise and the first professional athlete to earn a onemillion-dollar salary. His astounding records continued to pile up.

After leaving the Astros at the age of 42, Ryan signed as a free agent with the Texas Rangers in 1989—the same time George W. Bush, one of the film's interviewees, was part owner and CEO.

At the end of his career (1989 to 1993), Ryan went on to pitch his heretofore unimaginable sixth and seventh no-hitters, a feat that will never again be repeated. He retired after his strikeout number reached a ridiculous 5,714. To put that in proper perspective, another legendary pitcher, Randy Johnson, says: "I'm second to him in strikeouts, and he's got a thousand more strikeouts than me."

Ryan holds an astonishing 51 MLB records and is curiously the best pitcher never to win a Cy Young Award, which is given annually to the top pitchers in the cially ones like Paul Bunyan and Pecos American and National Leagues. That's clearly some kind of twisted politics situation, but it's never discussed.

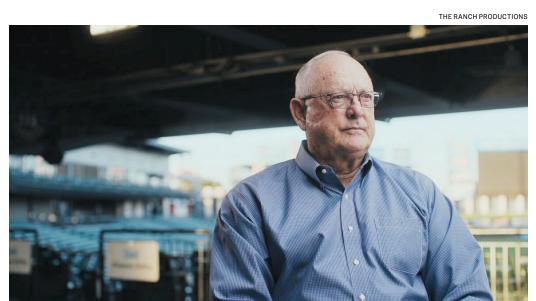
Talking Heads

The film unfolds in highlight-reel fashion, and Ryan's four decades of thrilling athleticism are underscored by plentiful anecdotes from a wealth of all-star interviewees, as well as the extensive Ryan family themselves.

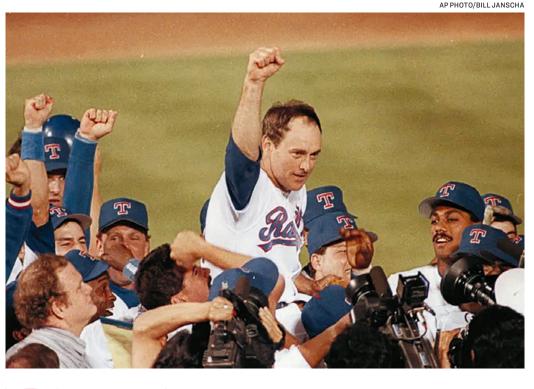
Players describe the electrifying, sizzlingbacon sound, and one-of-a-kind "SMACK!!" of Ryan's fastball ripping through the strike zone and tenderizing catchers' hands straight through their heavy mitts.

Pete Rose, George Brett, Dave Winfield, Rod Carew, Cal Ripken Jr., and other world-class players who batted against him describe Ryan, in assorted ways, as "the most intimidating pitcher in the history of the game." One player recalls Ryan himself casually admitting, "Once I cross that white line, I don't even like myself."

One particularly fun reminiscence features Ryan, sitting next to legendary switchhitter Pete Rose at some honorary baseball gathering, recounting how Rose dared him to throw a particular kind of pitch, claiming that if Ryan did so, he'd "bounce it off your blanking forehead." Ryan threw that pitch, nearly got smacked in the throat, and Rose



Nolan Ryan as he appears in the documentary on his life.



In California, **Ryan threw** four of his no-hitters and set the modern-era single season strikeout record at 383. ran to first base pointing at Ryan the whole time: "See? See?"

Not Exclusively for Baseball Fans Even viewers without a love for, or in-depth

knowledge of, baseball will be engrossed and entertained by Jackson's celebratory film. Does it sometimes border on hagiography? Not really. The man was simply so good that nothing but superlatives can be used to describe his life, not to mention that witnessing him with his family, a classic alpha-turned-benign patriarchal grandfather, is very heartwarming.

Like soft-spoken Texan Ryan himself, "Facing Nolan" is just direct and to the point. The highlights and statistics speak for themselves. America's tastes in sports may have shifted over the decades from the more easygoing ballpark to the dramatic, violent gridiron, and what used to be "America's favorite pastime" is currently more football than baseball, but "Facing Nolan" hearkens back to a wonderful chapter of American sports history.

"Facing Nolan" first premiered for one night only on March 12, 2022, through Fathom Events, ending the day as the No. 1 movie in Texas and the No. 7 movie in North America.

"Facing Nolan" can currently be streamed on Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, Netflix, and Vudu.

'Facing Nolan'

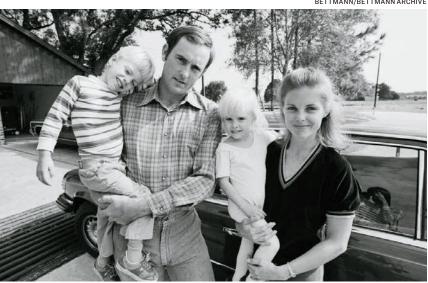
Documentary **Bradley Jackson**

Appearing: Craig Biggio, George Brett, George W. Bush, Rod Carew, Roger Clemens, Randy Galloway, Rob Goldman, Randy Johnson, John McClain, Iván Rodriguez, Cal Ripken Jr., Pete Rose, Nolan Ryan, Ruth Ryan, Reid Ryan,

MPAA Rating:

Running Time: 1 hour, 42 minutes **Release Date:** March 12, 2022





Nolan Ryan Ruth, with their son Reese and daughter Wendy at their home in Alvin, Texas,

appeared for

one day only

and is now



Ryan at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, which houses his plaque

Jingxiong, a Changchun

native and a multiple

award-

winning

book artist,

basis of the

animation

in "Eternal

Spring."



"Daniel in the Lions' Den," circa 1614–1616, by Peter Paul Rubens. Oil on canvas, 88 1/4 inches by 130 1/8 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Finding Freedom in God's Law: 'Daniel in the Lions' Den'

ERIC BESS

aniel was a devout Jew during the time of King Darius's reign. Darius, the king of Persia around the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., was friendly toward the Jews and even played an important role in the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Babylonians destroyed it.

give him more power as an administrator, which inflamed the jealousy of other administrators in the area. As a result, the other administrators wanted to defame Daniel, but they could not find fault with his character.

To discredit Daniel, the administrators came up with a manipulative scheme. They convinced King Darius to create a law stating that anyone who prayed to any unrecognized god would be thrown into a lions' den. The law would be enacted for 30 days and could not be altered after it was created. King Darius agreed. The administrators knew they could harm Daniel only if they attacked his relationship with God.

Daniel heard about the new law, but he didn't let it influence his actions at all. He continued to pray to God as he did before. The administrators went together to catch Daniel praying to God, and they reported to King Darius that Daniel had broken the new law. King Darius was distressed by this information, but there was nothing he could do to protect Daniel.

The administrators ordered Daniel into the lions' den and mocked him before locking

King Darius worried about Daniel all night, and at the first light, he ran to see if Daniel was harmed. Darius found him unharmed. He explained to the king that God had sent angels to close the mouths of the lions because he was innocent according to the law of God.

King Darius rejoiced and freed Daniel. Then he threw the administrators who caused trouble into the den, instead. The lions devoured them.

'Daniel in the Lions' Den' by Peter Paul Rubens

Peter Paul Rubens, considered one of the greatest painters in the Western canon of art history, painted during the Roman Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation. This was a time when the Church, in its struggle against Protestantism, celebrated early Christian martyrs so as to arouse the faithful from spiritual slumber.

Rubens, a devout Catholic, played his own role in the Counter-Reformation. Painting "Daniel in the Lions' Den" was one opportunity he took to inspire other Catholics by the spirit of the biblical martyrs.

Rubens painted Daniel as the lone human figure in the composition. He sits to the right, with his legs crossed and his hands clasped together in prayer. A subtle light shines from the left side of his head, and he looks up in awe at the den's opening.

Nine lions surround Daniel, but they don't seem interested in him. Some of the lions sleep, others rest, two seem to play, and one yawns. The least of their concerns seems to King Darius admired Daniel and sought to be Daniel, who, despite the human bones

The Righteousness of God's Law

On the surface, the story about Daniel and the lions' den simply represents the power of faith in God. Daniel kept his faith in God despite being attacked by those in positions of power. His faith brought about a miracle, saving him from a gruesome death. But there might be other meanings in this story as well.

First, let's begin by investigating two types of laws. The king is the most powerful and wealthiest person in the region. He has the power to create laws when he finds them agreeable and dismantle them when he finds them disagreeable.

Yet the administrators easily manipulated King Darius to create a new law with the sole purpose of hurting Daniel. The law, in fact, was founded on jealousy of the righteous, and built into this law was the decree that it was immutable. As a result, the king could not stop an innocent human being from being harmed. The law blocked the king from acting as a good person.

But there is another, higher law: the law

Although the king's law does not clearly appear in the painting, God's law does. The truth of God's law seems to be bound in compassion toward the righteous. Daniel's faith was strong; it was so strong that the king's law—a human law that attempted to obstruct the law of God—did not affect Daniel. Instead of following a human law, Daniel chose to follow the law of God. God's law was able to reach where the power and wealth of the king could not. And it kept Daniel—an

Instead of following a law of God.



A detail showing the remnants of previous prisoners of the den.



human law,

Daniel chose to follow the exemplar of righteous character—safe.

The Master of Animalistic Desire

Let's return to the painting to investigate a potential, second meaning.

The lions may represent our animalistic desires, that is, our desires of the flesh. These lions are like lurking temptations waiting to devour us the moment we are not steadfastly

By definition, prisoners are not free, and to die. The bones strewn across the den's floor relay to the painting's viewers the fate of previous prisoners.

If the lions do represent animalistic desires, then Daniel must make a choice. If he chooses the temptations that the lions represent, he will join their previous victims. If he chooses the law of God, however, he will transcend the world and be free no matter where he is.

Daniel looks up and out of the lions' den with awe. Has he kept his mind and heart on God and thus transcended the den that imprisons him? Does this mean that he is truly free despite being imprisoned?

The lions behave as if they aren't even aware of Daniel. Does temptation dissipate in the presence of a heart and mind that reflect on God, and is this the true source of his freedom?

Interestingly, the king is not free to stop his law from being carried out, yet Daniel seems free despite being locked in a lions' den. Sometimes, our human laws permit things that may not befit righteous behavior. Does this illusion of freedom—that is, the idea that we're free when we give in to temptation simply because our laws allow it—obstruct us from being really free?

We can't be moral without being free, for moral action implies our innate ability to choose between what we believe to be right and wrong. Are we, like King Darius, creating laws that prevent us from being good to our fellow human beings? Must we, like Daniel, master our animalistic desires with the law of God if we wish to experience true freedom?

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

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

FILM REVIEW

An Ominous Warning Cry From the Far East

MICHAEL CLARK

On March 5, 2002, practitioners of the spiritual discipline Falun Gong hacked China's state-run television in order to broadcast videos exposing their persecution by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP condemned the act as a hijacking by "enemies of the state."

Combining slow-moving exercises and teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance, the spiritual discipline aims to help practitioners attain spiritual enlightenment. Falun Gong is as far removed from "enemies of the state" as one could possibly imagine.

For the first few years after Falun Gong was introduced to the public, the CCP even actively promoted it, due to its beneficial effects on public health. But the CCP suddenly changed tack in the late '90s, when the practice's membership grew to more than 70 million by the regime's estimates.

In July 1999, the CCP launched a fullblown suppression of the spiritual practice and instructed its propagandist television arm to begin airing highly negative, thoroughly false information about what the group stood for and its benign and peaceful mission

Just how far the CCP would go to quash Falun Gong is detailed in the first act of the animated documentary "Eternal Spring."

Nothing Lost in Translation

Determined to set the record straight, roughly a dozen Falun Gong practitioners began meeting in secret to determine the best possible way to do so. "Best" is subjective here, as all the participants knew going in that there would be no foolproof option, and all of them understood the possible dire consequences of their actions.

Their base of operations was in Changchun, the capital and largest city in the northeastern province of Jilin. The literal English translation of Changchun (长春) is "eternal spring."

One of the participants in the film project was Daxiong (born Guo Jingxiong), a Changchun native and a multiple awardwinning comic book artist whose work provides the basis of the film's animation, which was produced by animators Carl Beauchemin and Alex Smith.

In addition, Daxiong appears in the live-action portions, telling us of his own experience while also interviewing Jin Xuezhe, one of the surviving participants, who made it out of China and now lives in sponses in the form of illustrations, which entirely possible that it could also be con act as on-screen storyboard lead-ins to the animated portions of the film.

This highly unorthodox narrative choice might take a little getting used to, yet it's handled with seamless precision by two-time Canadian Screen Award-winning cinematographer John Tran ("Our Man in Tehran," "Borealis") and editor David Schmidt.

You know you're in for a treat with the five-minute opening title sequence, in which some of the participants are identified via pop-up headshot icons within a single uninterrupted shot, reminiscent of those displayed in Orson Welles's "Touch of Evil" and Robert Altman's "The Player."

There are also portions of the film that would usually be included as bonus fea-

Questions"), who also wrote and co-produced the documentary, has been working on the film for close to six years. Usually, it takes rearview-mirror reflec-

international archival news footage.

such as footage of Daxiong working alongside CGI technicians and offering advice

on tweaking images based on his own in-

the-flesh memories of the events, as well as

Canadian director Jason Loftus ("Ask No

tion and sometimes years of assessment to label any work of art a "masterpiece," yet "Eternal Spring" is exactly and immediately that.

While not the first nonfiction film to blend live action and animation, it's easily the most daring, moving, and creative movie of its kind ever made.

Accolades Aplenty

The industry awards and accolades for "Eternal Spring" are already beginning to pile up. Thus far, it has been nominated 15 times at 11 film festivals, winning a staggering 11 awards, including two each at the Hot Docs Canadian Festival, the Lighthouse International Festival, the Mammoth Lakes Festival, and the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival in Greece.

Last month, "Eternal Spring" was named Canada's official submission to the 2022-2023 Academy Awards ceremony in the South Korea. Daxiong transcribes Jin's re- Best International Feature category. It's sidered for the Best Animated and Best Documentary Feature categories, a feat matched only by "Flee" from 2021.

This year has yielded a windfall crop of top-shelf documentary features, so much so that I'm going to be posting (for the first time in 27 years) two year-end Top 10 lists in December: one for live-action and another dedicated solely to documentaries. "Eternal Spring" currently sits at the number one position on the latter list and will attain the same position in my international and animated lists as well.

An Ominous Warning

To refer to "Eternal Spring" as a cautionary tale would be a purblind understatement tures on hard-copy home video releases, and a shortsighted, undervaluing minimi-

A masterpiece, **Eternal** Spring' is exactly and **immediately** that.



Promotional ad for "Eternal Spring," an award-winning documentary that uses animation, live action, and illustrations in a riveting story of how a small group in Changchun, China, hacked a local media to tell the truth about Falun Gong.

'Eternal Spring'

Documentary Director: Jason Loftus **Running Time:** 1 hour, 25 minutes **MPAA** Rating: Not Rated **Release Date:** Oct. 14, 2022

zation of its importance as both a work of art and treatise on the effects of an oppressive state-run entity on the human condition.

In the totalitarian view of the atheistespousing, intolerant CCP, anything that even remotely goes off-script, however docile and apolitical it might be, is deemed to be an eminent threat and needs to be eliminated with swift, unrelenting prejudice. Those who come to rule with iron fists exhibit their paranoia in much the same way as a high school bully. They prey on those who pose no risk to them, however negligible and passive.

Their "enemies" merely have a differing position as to how they view the world. If the CCP was truly confident that their way was the best, it would have no issues with Falun Gong. The spiritual practice wasn't and still isn't looking for a way to overthrow the CCP. All its adherents want is the right

to express their spiritual and moral beliefs. What is most disquieting about what happened in China just over 20 years ago is how little the world in general, and we as Americans, have learned from it. This same exact thing took place in April 1775 when a few handfuls of colonial patriots decided enough was enough.

Our free speech and religious rights are being slowly eroded and removed by an administration that promised unity, like a death by a thousand cuts.

We need to pay better attention to what went down two decades ago in the far away province of Jilin. It's getting closer and closer to reaching our own front doors.

Presented in subtitled Mandarin and infrequent English. For viewing and screening options, visit EternalSpringFilm.com

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



Jin Xuezhe, one of the surviving participants to make it out of China, now living in South Korea,



Director-writer and co-producer Jason Loftus (L) discusses production issues with Guo Jingxiong, whose drawings were the basis for the animated part of the film.



An animated scene from the award-winning documentary "Eternal Spring."



In an animated scene from the documentary, CCP agents capture one of the people who hacked Changchun's TV broadcast.

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 funloving 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



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

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

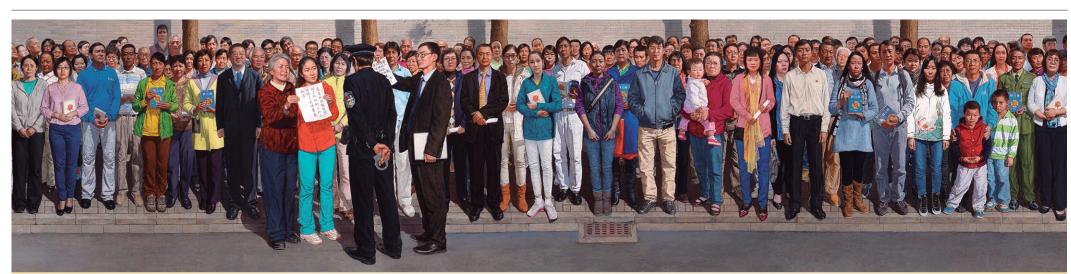
Starring:Gary Cooper, Dorothy
McGuire, Phyllis Love,
Anthony Perkins

MPAA Rating:

Running Time: 2 hours, 17 minutes Release Date:



Nov. 25, 1956



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The Birdwell family gathers around the organ: (L-R) Richard Ever 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."