## THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS® CULTURE



of Er" tells a story of souls being judged. Detail of the Archangel St. Michael weighing souls, from the altarpiece of the "Last Judgment," 1446-1452, by Rogier van der Weyden. Salle Saint-Louis in the Louvre.

Plato's "Myth

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## What Plato's 'Myth of Er' Tells Us Today

A reminder that we choose our fates

#### JAMES SALE

Plato is justly famous as one of the world's greatest philosophers. Indeed, 20th-century philosopher A.N. Whitehead once commented that all Western philosophy is but "a series of footnotes to Plato."

At the end of his book "Republic," Plato recounts the curious myth of Er. "Myth" here has its ancient Greek meaning of "account" rather than our contemporary understanding of it as something false or of its being a traditional story involving supernatural beings, heroes, gods, quests, and the like.

As it happens, this myth—account—of Er does involve supernatural beings! But this is not an ancient Greek myth as story; it is a philosopher's account of how reality might be structured.

For these reasons, that it is not a traditional myth (and so does not feature in most compendiums of Greek myths) and that it has been written by a philosopher (remember, Plato wanted to ban the poets as too subversive), I am wary of according it too much status or credibility.

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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## The Gifts of a Slave: St. Patrick, Ireland, and Western Civilization

**JEFF MINICK** 

shamrock worn on the shirt or blouse. A mug of green beer. Traditional Irish music mingling with the laughter and shouts in a pub. Parades and pageants with Irish step dancing, leprechauns, and spectators decked out in green clothing.

The celebration of Saint Patrick's Day is long entwined with the American past. The first such celebration in the New World occurred on March 17, 1601, in St. Augustine, Florida, possibly inspired by an Irish priest living in that outpost of Spain. Boston featured a St. Pat's parade in 1737, with New York following suit in 1762. With the flood of immigrants to America from the Irish famine in the middle of the next century, the celebrations grew in size. Home to many of these immigrants, today Savannah sports the South's largest celebration of this holiday. Since 1962, Chicago has dyed its river green to mark this annual event.

On March 17, everyone becomes an honorary son or daughter of Erin, welcome to join in the festivities and raise a glass of Guinness.

Which brings a question: Do these partygoers know who St. Patrick was or why they are celebrating the anniversary of his death? More importantly, do they understand the impact of this priest and bishop on Western culture?

Turn down that music in the pub, ask the revelers at the bar that first question, and you'll likely hear that Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland. Some may bring up the shamrock, now the national plant of Ireland, and claim that Patrick used it to teach the doctrine of

These are fine legends, but that is all they are: legends. The reality is much more powerful and exciting.

#### Slave and Priest

To begin, Patrick wasn't Irish, but British. As we learn from his "Confession," a spiritual memoir and defense of his work written much later in his life, Patrick was born into a wealthy family in educated, he was raised as a Christian, though as a youth he wasn't particularly religious, and was 16 years old when Irish raiders attacked the estate where he lived. Bound and hauled off with others that night, he was taken to Ireland and made a slave.

For the next six years, Patrick herded sheep, alone much of the time and often hungry and cold. As time passed and he dreamed of home, he began to recover his faith. He prayed incessantly, fasted, and came to believe that God was communicating with him. According to his "Confession," one night a voice in a dream told Patrick that a ship awaited him and the time had come to make

Patrick walked for days, arrived at the coast, joined the crew of a ship, and returned to Britain. After another long trek, he rejoined his family, who "besought me that now at last, having suffered so many hardships, I should not leave them and go elsewhere." But the hardened young man of faith who returned home was worlds away from the boy seized by the slavers, and Patrick declared his intentions of entering the religious life. And not only did he wish to study for the priesthood, but the voice in his dreams also told him to return to Ireland and to bring the people to Christ.

Little is known about the next decade



A police band marches in the St. Patrick's Day Parade down Fifth Avenue in New York on March 17, 2022.



Brigid of Kildare followed in the footsteps of

or so of his life. That he underwent training, becoming first a deacon and then a priest and bishop, is a given, but as Philip Freeman points out in his biography "St. Patrick of Ireland," we can't be sure of where, what, or with whom he studied.

#### The Mission

What we do know is that Patrick returned to Ireland and became a bishop with a twofold mission: to minister to the tiny Christian community in that land and to bring as many of the Irish as possible to Christianity. He brought several advantages to this work. His enslavement had given him the ability to speak the language of the people and understand their ways, and he possessed a knack for incorporating their symbols and some of their customs into the faith. They honored their gods with fire, for instance, and so Patrick celebrated Easter with bonfires. To the cross he added a circle representing the sun, revered by the Irish, and so created the Celtic cross.

For years after his reentry into Ireland, Patrick roamed the countryside with a band of helpers and followers, building Christian communities and churches, founding monasteries, ordaining priests, dealing with various kings and warlords, and preaching the Gospels. His "Confession" recounts some of these undertakings, but above the late fourth century. Reasonably well- all reveals the depths of his spiritual life. His famous and beautiful "Breastplate" prayer reinforces this impression of fervent and sincere holiness.

Like so much of his life, the date and year of his death is debated, though March 17, A.D. 461, is accepted by most scholars. He is said to have been buried on the Hill of Down, Ireland.

Though the faithful credited Patrick with many miracles, including restoring the dead to life, his greatest miracles came in the centuries following his death. Because of his personal example and unceasing ministry, he left behind a flourishing religious faith that claimed the devotion of the Irish people and would eventually unite them, ending the wars between tribes and kings, and giving them the ability over many centuries to endure all manner of oppression and wars. Moreover, they became such passionate believers and scholars that they not only changed the culture of their island but also spread learning and the faith throughout parts of Europe.

Following in Patrick's footsteps were priests, men and women who took vows and entered monasteries or convents, and saints. Brigid of Kildare, for instance, took vows of chastity and, with the help of a hermit priest, founded a church and a monastery. She was credited with performing many miracles, tending to the poor and the sick, and serving others whenever she could. Today, she is the patroness saint of Ireland.

Inspired by the accounts of martyrs n Rome, but absent any active persecution of Christians, other men and women sought "green martyrdom," which consisted of practices of extreme penance so well described in Thomas Cahill's book "How the Irish Saved Civilization." They sought out remote places to live as hermits or in tiny communities, suffering privation on earth in the belief that it would prepare them for heaven.

Brendan, a founder of several monasteries, found a special way to practice this green martyrdom. Along with a few followers, he sailed into the ocean in a

curragh, a small boat framed out in wood and covered with greased and sewn ox hides. Whether he and his men really set foot in lands as far away as Iceland or New England remains debatable, but in the mid-1970s Tim Severin and a crew of craftsmen and sailors demonstrated that to build such a craft and sail it across the Atlantic was possible. Today, Brendan is the patron saint of mariners.

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 11, 2023

#### **Helping to Preserve Civilization**

Like these "green martyrs," a number of monks departed Ireland to serve as missionaries to parts of Europe, regarding this exile as their own form of selfsacrifice. As Patrick had done in Ireland, they spread the faith, learning, and monasteries to various parts of Europe. In his comprehensive article "Hearts and Minds Aflame for Christ—Irish Monks: A Model For Making All Things New in the 21st Century," Daryl McCarthy discusses the immense value of the education carried by these monastics to places such as Germany, Gaul, and Scotland, as well as the aestheticism and devotion that so impressed the people they met.

Over the next 400 years, Irish monks were the backbone of education in Europe. "No land ever sent out such impassioned teachers of learning," wrote Irish historian Alice Green in 1911, "and Charles the Great and his successors set them at the head of the chief schools throughout Europe." These Irish monks are also renowned today for the manuscripts they preserved during the upheavals after the fall of the Roman Empire and the beautiful curvilinear art that decorates some of these ancient tomes.

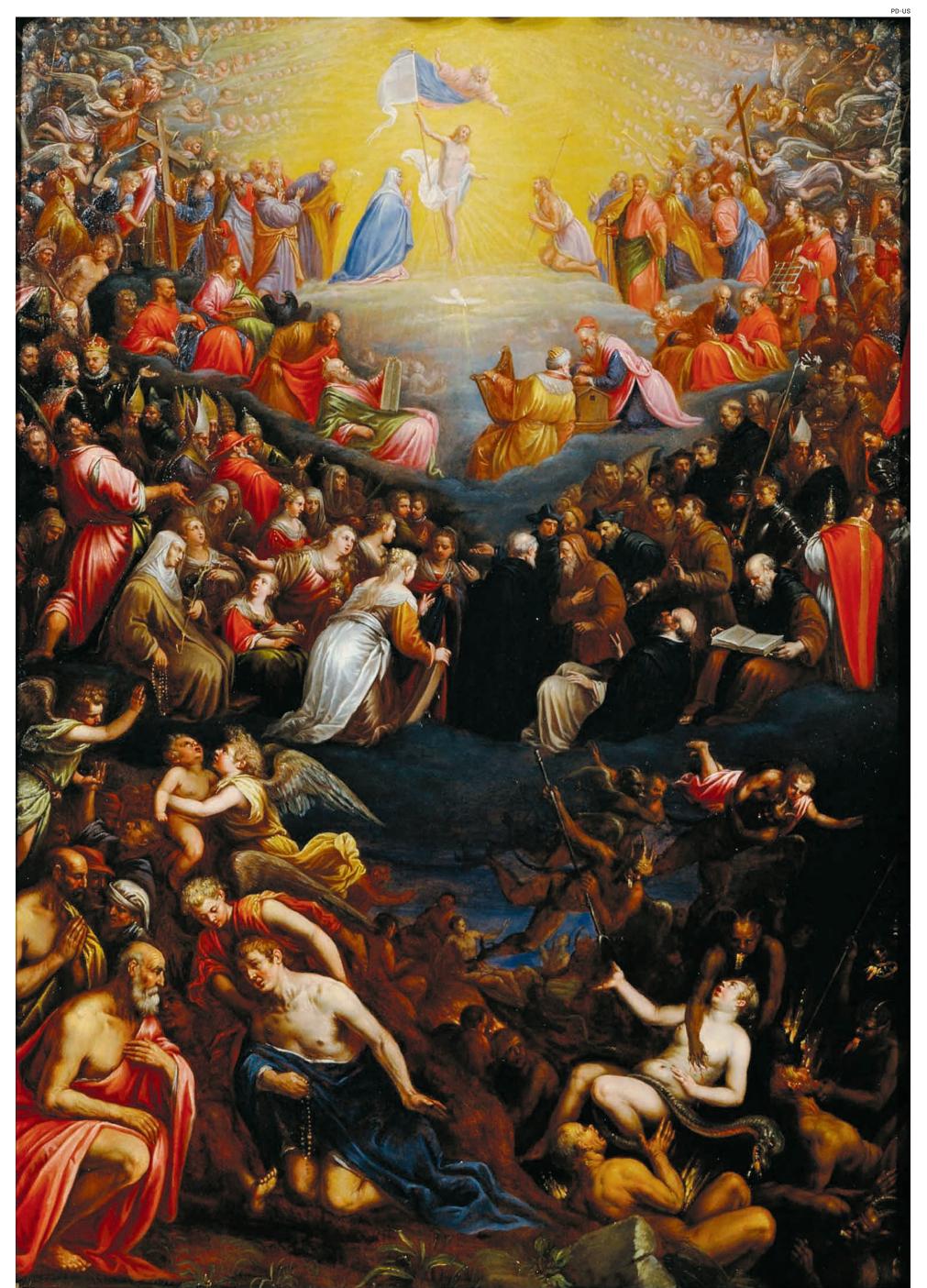
When we raise our glasses this St. Patrick's Day, let's remember to offer a toast to the man who gave such valuable treasures to our civilization and our culture.

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.



Stained-glass image of St. Patrick at a Catholic Church in Junction City, Ohio.





Nearly all faiths tell of a last judgment. "The Last Judgment," circa 1595, by Leandro Bassano. National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## What Plato's 'Myth of Er' Tells Us Today

Continued from Page 1

But then again, it comes from one of the profound ancients, and I, for one, respect

What is the myth of Er and how is it helpful today?

#### The Myth of Er

Er was a man who died in battle, and with others who had also died, he was led to the afterlife. There, he came to a wonderful place where there were judges who decided where one was to go in the afterlife. There were two doors (one entrance, one exit) to heaven, and two doors (again, entrance and exit) into the earth. Good souls were directed into the heavens, and bad ones were sent down into the earth. The hero, Er, was not sent to either place but was told to remain where he was so that he could see the whole process and report back to the living what occurred after death.

What did occur? Those who went to heaven came back all clean and happy, reporting indescribable sights of beauty; those coming back from the earth were dirty and miserable. In fact, the latter had had to spend a thousand years atoning 10 times over for every sin they'd done.

Furthermore, there were some individuals—tyrants, murderers, and those guilty of other grossest of sins—who were not allowed back at all; their souls were continually flayed.

But for those who could return, their journey at that point had only been stage one. After seven more days, they all gathered in a meadow with Necessity, her daughters (the Fates), and the Sirens.

Here, a lottery takes place where it is clear that what is chosen by each individual is their own responsibility. In essence (quite a philosophical point from a philosopher), the choice they make needs to show that they have learned from their experiences, both in their physical life and what has happened to them so far in the afterlife.

At this point, they can choose to be reincarnated as another human or even as an animal. Before doing so, they drink the waters of forgetfulness and so start their new life with a clean slate. However, the fact is, the soul goes back to life because the soul is immortal.

Er does not drink these waters, and so he is able (on the 10th day and in dramatic fashion) to wake up on the funeral pyre that is about to dispatch his remains and to return to life to explain what really happens after death.

So why is this relevant or important today? Isn't it just idle speculation, albeit of a philosophic bent?

#### **Our Souls Are Immortal**

I think there are four reasons why this story is important. The first and, possibly the most important of all is that the great philosopher Plato seems to agree with the wisdom of the ages, namely that there is an immortal soul.

The soul is something that all cultures of the past knew and reverenced, be it the Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Norse, and Celtic cultures, not to mention the big religions of today, including Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and even Buddhism. I mention Buddhism last because of its own notions of reincarnation that partially tally with Plato's version.

Keep in mind that reincarnation can be, in its way, a form of experiencing hell, for as Er observes, not all those who choose their new life choose wisely.

In the materialist world we live in now, this can seem antiquated and irrelevant, but the weight of this testimony is huge. To ignore it, we'd have to dismiss all ancient as well as current religious peoples as primitive ignoramuses, and exude an arrogance of such staggering proportions that only the Greek word "hubris" really gets to the root of the sin.

And that leads us to the second point.

#### We Will Be Judged

Conceding the immortality of the soul, there is also its judgment in the afterlife. If belief in the immortality of the soul is an unpopular notion in the West, then "judgment"-accountability-is even more unpopular and to be shunned.

We simply don't like to think that we are accountable for our actions, despite the fact that we all have a conscience. Until we



In the "Myth of Er," souls drank from the river of Lethe and forgot their past lives. Sculpture of "Lethe," 1908, by Wilhelm Wandschneider. Postcard collection

Conceding the **immortality** of the soul, there is also its judgment in the afterlife.

bury or cauterize our conscience, it warns us of wrongdoing through the emotions of guilt, shame, remorse, and other such feelings.

Rather, in the West, we seek to undermine judgment. This we do firstly and foremost by corrupting language. As New York Times columnist and author David Brooks puts it in his book "The Road to Character":

'When modern culture tries to replace sin with ideas like error or insensitivity, or tries to banish words like "virtue," "character," "evil," and "vice" altogether, that doesn't make life any less moral; it just means we have obscured the inescapable moral core of life with shallow language. ... Furthermore, the concept of sin is necessary because it is radically true."

#### The Basic Vocabulary of Morality

This leads to our third point about the importance of Er's myth: The story stresses the need for personal responsibility. Of course, if we no longer have the basic vocabulary of morality—words like "good" and "evil," for example—then taking responsibility becomes much more difficult for us. Writing long ago in the 1950s, Christian humanist Dorothy L. Sayers said:

"Our confidence in such faculties as will and judgment has been undermined, and in collapsing has taken with it a good deal of our interest in ourselves as responsible individuals."

#### **Choosing Our Fate**

Finally, the fourth point is a consequence of the third point: the importance of the choices that we make. These choices will determine everything, as in "everything" being our destiny, or our fate.

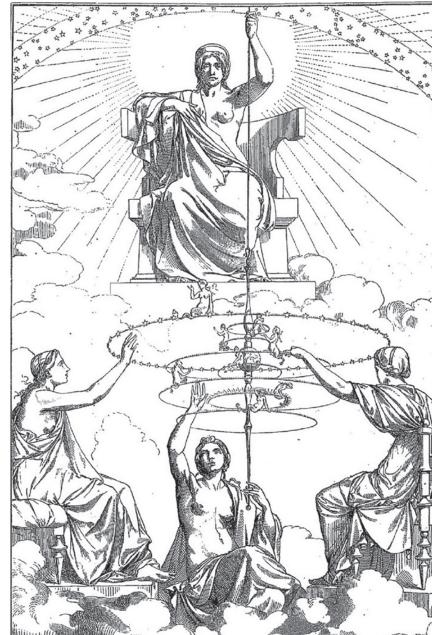
It is interesting that in the myth, the three Fates (daughters of Necessity personified here) are present at the drawing of the lots. As we say in the modern world, choices have consequences, but increasingly more and more people seem to want to ignore this fact. Writer and philosopher Ayn Rand had a wonderful aphorism that perfectly encapsulates the issue: "We can ignore reality, but we cannot ignore the consequences of ignoring reality."

Another way of expressing this truth is to say that life has meaning because life is moral. There is right and there is wrong, and the "Spindle of Necessity" (the universe) upholds this structure. This leads us straight back to point number two: There is a judgment.

This, surely, is a big antidote to much of our contemporary thinking and beliefs, irrespective of our specific religious de nomination: The soul is immortal. There is a judgment after death. (Although often in life too, for as the Buddhists say, "You will not be punished for your anger, you will be punished by your anger.")

We are responsible for our actions, and therefore the choices we make have eternal consequences. Believing these propositions elevates human life, for as Dante scholar Prue Shaw observed, "To act instinctively on desire is to be an animal." Morality is an antidote to that.

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, "Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams" (Routledge, 2021). He has been nominated for the 2022 poetry Pushcart Prize, won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is "HellWard." For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit EnglishCantos.home.blog



A modern illustration of a passage in the "Myth of Er," where Ananke, the personification of Necessity, is above the Moirai, the Fates. From "Original From Magasin Pittoresque," 1857, by Edmond Lechevallier-Chevignard.

A stout heart creates character, not size. "Portrait of a Dwarf," circa 1626, by Juan van der Hamen. The Prado Museum.



### Character Over Appearance: Rex Ellingwood Beach's Short Story, 'The Shyness of Shorty'

#### **KATE VIDIMOS**

In his short story "The Shyness of Shorty," Rex Ellingwood Beach proves that we must not be fooled by appearances. Beach tells of a dwarf, Shorty, who is continually mocked and judged by his peers for his appearance.

Shorty lives in the Old West. He is small in height with a large head and midsection, tiny legs, and an odd posture. Almost everyone laughs at him when they see a thorough thrashing, sending the cook him, especially his fellow workers at Bar X. away in pain.

#### A Laughing Stock

The other Bar X men regularly stop at Bailey's roadhouse. But today Shorty takes their place and arrives at the roadhouse, where he is greeted by the owner Bailey and his Chinese cook, Hot Joy. Upon seeing Shorty's dwarfish appearance, Bailey suppresses laughter and Hot Joy laughs shrilly.

Shorty falls on Hot Joy "with the rush and roar of a cannon ball" and gives him

Shorty then challenges Bailey's suppressed laughter: "Some of the Bar X boys took to absorbin' humour out of my shape when I first went to work, but they're sort of educated out of it now. I got an eye from one and a finger off of another; the last one donated an ear."

Yet despite his antagonistic actions and odd shape, when the newly wed Sheriff Ross Turney and his wife arrive at the roadhouse, Shorty proves to be shy. The sheriff's laughing angers Shorty, but he is touched when young Mrs. Turney treats him with respect. She does not seem to notice his dwarfism.

As he lies in bed that night at the roadhouse, Shorty's mind whirls. He is completely mesmerized by Mrs. Turney's kind recognition. He is so flustered that he heads out to get a strong drink.

#### **Small but Fierce**

As Shorty slowly gets drunk, things at

However people may judge us, we can rise above that and stand for goodness and truth.

the roadhouse slowly get worse. The Tremper gang, whom the sheriff seeks to arrest, arrives and Bailey proves to be in league with them.

Bailey and the Trempers capture the sheriff, while Shorty hides behind the bar. He hears that the ruthless men struck Mrs. Turney. He knows that he must do something.

Trying to stay upright and controlled, Shorty steps out from behind the bar with two pistols drawn. He yells "Han'sup!" Everyone is surprised. One of the Tremper boys quickly draws and shoots at Shorty, but Shorty is so short that the bullet whizzes past him.

Though Shorty is judged by his diminutive size, Beach shows that he does not let that prevent him from being brave. Shorty rises above taller men when courage counts. Beach shows that character matters more than looks.

However people may judge us, we can rise above that and stand for goodness and truth. As Henry Clay says in "The Papers of Henry Clay: Secretary of State 1827":

"Of all the properties which belong to honorable men, not one is so highly prized as that of character."

While most people tend to judge others by their looks, what's inside is what matters most, especially courage, of which Shorty possesses an abundance.

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.

Week 11, 2023 THE EPOCH TIMES

## Mozart's Opera about a Virtuous Emperor

**ARIANE TRIEBSWETTER** 

ome is burning. All seems lost. This is the end of Act I of "The Clemency of Titus" ("La Clemenza di Tito"), an opera about Titus, a virtuous emperor and a good ruler, shining a light for humanity in

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed this two-act opera in 1791 to commemorate the coronation of the king of Bohemia, Leopold II. And what better way to celebrate this event than to create a story about a compassionate ruler?

One of Mozart's last operas, "The Clemency of Titus" is an "opera seria," a formal opera set in classical times, focusing on complex human feelings and having a profound message.

This moving work explores the nature of power through forgiveness and reconciliation. Humanity's deepest emotions are explored through expressive solo arias and ensembles. A work of great musical beauty, it is a sublime study of human behavior in times of crisis.

#### **Great Mercy**

Set in ancient Rome, the opera tells the story of Titus, the emperor of Rome. He is beloved by all his people, except by Vitellia, the former emperor's daughter. She plans to take over the throne by plotting his assassination.

Filled with anger, Vitellia enlists Sesto, Titus's friend, to kill him. Blindly in love with her, Sesto accepts her treacherous scheme. In the aria "I go, but, my dearest" ("Parto, parto, ma tu, ben mio"), Sesto is conflicted between morality and love. He finally resolves to kill his friend for Vitellia's love. Sesto sets fire to the Capitol, hoping to trap Titus inside, and then flees.

Annio, a close friend, finds Sesto and tells him that Titus is alive. He convinces Sesto to admit his guilt, and Sesto does so, without mentioning Vitellia. Titus, learning this, struggles to sentence his friend.

Several times throughout the opera, the ruler claims that forgiveness is important to him, yet he is conflicted now. He questions Sesto privately, and Sesto tells him he should die for betraving him. Unaware of this confession, Vitellia admits her guilt in her remorseful final aria "No more flowers" ("Non più di fiori"), asking to spare

To the surprise of all, Titus pardons the conspirators and spares their lives, showing his great clemency. In a climate of regal and private betrayal, he chooses forgiveness rather than retribution, allow ing his subjects to become enlightened themselves. His ability to forgive and to set aside his own needs for the greater good in times of crisis make him an enlightened ruler, who is both moral and sensitive.

The central characters overcome their darkest instincts throughout the opera: Vitellia's jealousy, Sesto's divided loyalties, and Titus's desire for vengeance. At the end of the



Titus is completely selfless in both his political and private life, with the ability to forgive the unforgivable.

Mozart highlights the

virtue of mercy in his

opera, "The Clemency

of Titus." Posthumous

by Barbara Kraft

painting of Mozart, 1819,

opera, Vitellia renounces the throne, Sesto renounces his honor, and Titus shows clemency to serve the common good.

The opera closes with Titus's "I know everything, I forgive everyone, and I forget everything" ("tutto so, tutti assolvo, e tutto obblio").

#### **Enlightened Man and Ruler**

Sacrifice is a hallmark of the emperor's decisions. Titus renounces love in the name of friendship. He wants to marry Servilia, Sesto's sister, but she is already engaged to Annio. The young couple implores the ruler to reconsider, revealing their love to him, but Servilia says that i he insists, she will marry him.

Titus is touched by their honesty and re-



and claims that death is nothing compared to his friend's disdain. After an extended internal struggle, Titus

forgives all and, in his aria "If to the empire" ("Se all'impero"), shows that he prefers mercy over a vengeful heart. Titus is not only an enlightened ruler; he is also an enlightened man. He is completely

a throne" ("Ah, se fosse intorno al trono").

Once again, Titus sacrifices himself for the

good of others, and shows his enlightenment

Most importantly, Mozart prizes the virtue

of clemency in his opera, as well as the virtue

The ruler is so kind that Sesto says he is not

worthy of Titus's forgiveness, in his aria "Deh

per questo istante solo." Conflicting emotions

mark this aria, wherein Sesto begs Titus to

remember their friendship for just a moment

as both a man and a ruler.

Clemency

of Titus,"

Roman

emperor

achieves

through

greatness

mercy. "The

Vespasian,'

circa 1537,

by Giuilio

Romano.

Triumph of

Titus and

selfless in both his political and private life, with the ability to forgive the unforgivable. His humanity shines in an obscure world, and vengeance and betrayal are replaced with forgiveness and friendship. Enlightened decisions are a theme in

Mozart's music as characters try to find clarity in complex feelings. Values such as forgiveness and friendship prevail over dark plots and desires.

Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.

her mother. Her pale skin and garments

are a lighter, faded glow than her time

on earth. Every limb stretches toward

the light of the earth and her home. The

line of Persephone's figure points to the

encircling arms of her mother, ready to

embrace her. Head flung back, arms ex-

tended beseechingly, she is a daughter

Hermes, whom Zeus sent to deliver his

decision to Hades, now holds Persephone

securely as he brings her up from the land

of the dead. He wears a blue cloak and hat

with its signature red wings. He holds a

caduceus, the staff signifying that he is

Another Shot at the Heavyweight Championship Title, Naturally

#### **MARK JACKSON**

"Creed III," the ninth Rocky movie, falls both very far from the original Rocky tree and, simultaneously, right under it. Far, in the sense that Rocky himself—Sylvester Stallone, creator of the Rocky universe—is nowhere to be seen.

And far also because "Creed III" reverses the dominant premise of "Rocky," wherein the main protagonist (Rocky) was a barelyscraping-by, washed-up, underdog heavyweight boxer with a lot of heart. Here, Adonis Creed (son of Apollo Creed, the boxing champion who gave Rocky a title shot in the original) is retired, wealthy, and has become the one dispensing underdog opportunities.

Star Michael B. Jordan, who plays Adonis Creed in "Creed III," directs, and while not owning the "Creed" franchise rights, would now appear to be the most influential and impactful individual guiding it. And there will be more, since the whole Rocky-Creed kit and kaboodle has earned Hollywood \$1.7 billion.

Again, running contrary to the grittier, previous "Rocky" entries, "Creed III" paints a perfect-picture postcard of the domestic bliss and luxurious lifestyle of boxing's retired heavyweight champion of the world's bourgeois status. Adonis lives in a Los Angeles hilltop mansion, wears finely tailored suits, and has supercars sitting in the garage. He drops by his state-of-the-art gym to keep an eye on his stable of up-and-coming fighters.

#### The Antagonist

It all gets to be a bit cloying, but then Adonis's past comes back to haunt him. There's a ratty-looking boxer leaning against Creed's Rolls Royce outside the gym, whom he doesn't recognize. That's because this is his childhood bestie, ex-

'Creed III' reverses the dominant premise of 'Rocky.'

Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Val-

lev. N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his proessors all suggested he write prosionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he rites professionally about

acting. In the movies.

'Creed III' **Director:** 

Michael B. Jordan Starring: Michael B. Jordan, Jonathan Majors, Mila Davis-Kent, Phylicia Rashad, Tessa Thompson. Jose Benavidez, Wood

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 1 hour, 56 minutes Release Date: March 3, 2023



"Dame" Damian (Jonathan Majors, L), just released from prison, demands a shot at the world heavyweight championship from childhood friend Adonis Creed (Michael B. Jordan), in "Creed III."

con and failed Golden Gloves contender Damian "Dame" Anderson (played by Jonathan Majors, currently also starring in "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania"), who just got done with a long prison stint.

Damian starts off friendly and ingratiates himself with Adonis and wife Bianca. But he soon leverages the long-dormant guilt from the incident that sent Damian to jail (recapped in flashbacks) to manipulate his old friend.

What might that manipulation consist of? A shot at the heavyweight championship title, naturally.

#### Overall

As a director, Michael B. Jordan has a tendency to italicize and boldface the emotional scenes in various ways. This, in addition to Stallone absence lends no Rocky-credence to this Creed-ence and makes "Creed III" nowhere nearly as fresh and endearing as Ryan Coogler's "Creed"—the original spinoff from the Rocky lineage.

The fight scenes are invigorating, except when they're superimposed on images meant to provide a meta-context and generate a Shakespearean tragic atmosphere: Is that Damian's bedbug-infested mattress I see behind him, instead of the arena crowd? Are those his prison bars taking the place of ring ropes? It's all a bit overreaching and has the unintended effect of being maudlin and sentimental.

The crowning achievement of "Creed III" is that both Jordan and Majors are seriously spectacular physical specimens, and the film might be best used as a substitute for when art models call in sick for drawing and anatomy classes at New York's Art Students League and the Chicago Art Institute. Instead, the professors can just show "Creed III" fight scenes, hit play, hit pause, say "This

will be a 15-minute sketch," hit play.

Much as he's also doing in "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," Jonathan Majors reigns here as the de facto champ of "Creed III," with a grounding worldweariness and gravitas that scene-steals from the comfy complacency of Jordan's Adonis. The meanness and cruelty of Major's Damian are often mitigated with eyes that tear up inexplicably, revealing the depth of his dark mystery and pain.

There are, of course, African-American cultural politics at play here that professors of those studies will eventually have a field day with. For example, much like the simplistic villain-versus-hero conflict in "Blank Panther" between antagonist Killmonger (played by Michael B. Jordan, directed by Ryan Coogler) and protagonist T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), director Michael B. Jordan here repeats a cliché. Instead of taking the opportunity to dig deeper into black male anger and pathos with Adonis and Dame, Jordan settles for the ghettoized, dog-eat-dog narrative that America is more familiar with.

Overall, except for the fight scenes, it's all tad boring, and since installment No. 10 really has no choice but to be titled "Dame" and if Stallone is out for good, it would seem that the Rocky universe, quality-wise at least, is set to implode. However, Jordan recently said:

Ithink there's always space for Sly, for Rocky, to come back. That's one of those amazing things about that character. It would make sense in any story line because it all stems from the world of Rocky. So any version of that, it would make sense.

So Rocky is now, again—and true to character—the underdog who might make a comeback into his own world that he created. Stay tuned.

**FILM** 

## A Hearty Slice of Americana

#### **MICHAEL CLARK**

In March 2020, multiple businesses and entire industries all over the globe were shuttered or put under severe operational restrictions due to COVID. These included but were not limited to airlines, automobile factories, restaurants, retail stores of all sorts, fitness clubs, salons, travel agencies, stage theaters, and brick-and-mortar movie theaters.

For other entities, the pandemic resulted in a marked uptick in new or previously barely used services, including liquor and food delivery. The online retail business also skyrocketed (due mostly to brick-and-mortar retail being partially or totally shut down).

The manufacturers of largely toothless protective and sanitation products (paper facial coverings, hand sanitizers, and "stay six feet apart" floor decals) also reaped heavy profits. There was also another unexpected beneficiary: drive-in movie theaters.

#### **Older Than You Might Expect**

Almost as old as the medium itself (the first venue opened in 1915 in Las Cruces, New Mexico), drive-ins had their heyday in the 1940s through the '60s, and have seen a slow drip in box office receipts over the following six decades. These entities were on life support during this time, yet never quite bought the farm.

Although drive-ins have popped up here and there in Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, they are regarded by most industry historians as a distinctly U.S. experience. Watching movies in cars with piped-in sound while dining on greasy, carb-heavy convenience foods is the utter definition of nostalgic Americana.

As with the nearly dozen profiles of drive-in

theater operations in eight states, "Back to the Drive-In" ("Drive-In") writer-director-producer-cinematographer-editor April Wright is as clearly head over heels in love with the drive-in experience and its unique place in American film history.

Unlike most of the chain brick-and-mortar exhibitors, drive-ins generally try to include something more than snacks and new titles to attract patrons. One of the more inventive examples of this is practiced in the Catskills, New York-based Greenville drive-in. Choosing to screen older, mostly cult-favorite titles, the Greenville offers concessions based on the content of the film. For instance, for the Coen brothers' comedy "The Big Lebowski," the owners (married couple Dwight Grimm and Leigh Van Swall) sold White Russian cocktails (the preferred drink of the Dude character played by Jeff Bridges) and cookies with "Dude" icing.

#### Optimistic drive-in owners and their employees refuse to give up.

#### Life Imitates Art

In Liberty Center, Ohio (near Toledo), owners Rod and Donna Saunders took a novel, "life imitates art" approach to their Field of Dreams venue, which opened in 2007. As Kevin Costner's character did with a baseball field in the film bearing the same name, the Rod and Donna's family transformed nearly their entire sizable backyard into a drive-in.

Neighboring cornfields are visible from their facility which, of course, adds a certain level of Midwest ambience to the "being there" experience. Business was great from the start and became so good that Rod and Donna added a second screen.

The various success stories in "Drive-In" are paired alongside those where merely staying open and remaining in the black is a daily

challenge. Over half of the profiled venues were built in the 1950s, and most of them are in perpetual states of disrepair. Something or other needs to be fixed or replaced—more often than anyone would like—and replacement parts are either no longer available or are simply cost prohibitive.

#### And Then, There's the Weather

The only remaining drive-in on Cape Cod, the Wellfleet, is still using the original screen (from 1957) and is one of the few operations still using window-mounted speaker boxes. Most theaters now broadcast the movie's audio signal on dedicated FM channels.

On the night of filming, the Wellfleet's ex-Marine owner John Vincent Jr., also president of the United Drive-in Theaters Association, is counting on 300 cars showing up, but as is frequently the case near any body of water, a thick fog has set in. This wouldn't be so bad if there were some wind to clear everything up, but this never materializes.

Based on titles of movies seen on multiple marquees—"The Boss Baby: Family Business" and "Space Jam: A New Legacy" the bulk of the filming for "Drive-In" took place during the summer of 2021, which was about the same time (most) studios were making ends meet with on-demand or streaming services.

Despite this unforeseen and unexpected competition, all of the profiled facilities enjoyed a boom (however brief) in business, mostly due to patrons simply wanting to get out of their houses.

One has to admire the tenacity and dedication required to stick with a business model that has been in decline for over a half-century. The marked spike in 2021 could be viewed by pessimists as merely a result of COVID, but the optimistic owners and their employees profiled here refuse to give up. Their collective "never throw in the towel"

mindset is truly inspirational. Originally from Washington, D.C.,

Michael Clark has provided film content

A STORY OF PASSION AND DETERMINATION

Drive-ins had their heyday in the 1940s through the '60s, as seen in the documentary "Back to the Drive Ins."

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

#### 'Back to the Drive-In'

**Documentary** Director April Wright **Running Time:** 1 hour, 45 minutes **MPAA Rating:** 

Release Date: March 14, 2023

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**TRADITIONAL CULTURE** 

## The Coming of Spring: Leighton's 'The Return of Persephone'

Light comments about interesting art

#### YVONNE MARCOTTE

The arrival of spring, especially after a hard winter, makes us all happy and hopeful for new life. The ancients believed that the gods were in charge of everything on earth and explained how they gave us the seasons. The Greeks explained the coming of spring and the changing seasons with the myth of Demeter, the goddess of nature, and her daughter, Persephone.

Hades, who was god of the underworld, had taken Persephone to his realm to be his wife. Demeter mourned the loss of her daughter and so did the once-green earth. Nothing grew. The earth was dying without Persephone's joyful laughter. Zeus had to Zeus agreed to have Persephone return to

her mother so the world would not wither and die. Of course, Hades did not want this. The king of the gods made a pronouncement that pleased no one: Persephone would spend half the year on earth and half the year in the underworld.

Frederic Leighton's painting "The Return of Persephone" (circa 1890–91) gives us the Persephone returned to her mother so the world would not wither and die.

"The Return of Persephone," circa 1890–91, by Frederic Leighton. Oil on canvas; 80 inches by 60 inches.

moment Persephone rises from the depths of the dark realm and returns to her mother and the beautiful world above. Demeter stands at the entrance to the

underworld, arms outstretched for her

daughter. Her glowing auburn garments anticipate the growing season and harvest. The warm colors also reflect a mother's love as she awaits her daughter. The cloud-filled sky above Demeter reflects her glow, as does the entrance to the

underworld. She steps as close as she can to the entrance of the dark realm. A sprig of almond blossom at her feet foretells the changing of the seasons.

At the right, Persephone reaches for



Zeus's messenger. In the darkness at the bottom left, an underworld being watches with sinister curiosity.

who is coming home.

A Season to Celebrate Today, many cultures celebrate the coming of spring. The Japanese stroll among cherry trees, which blossom at this time, and hang yozakura (lanterns) from the blossoming trees. Spring in Australia occurs in September and residents celebrate for a month. They call their celebration Floriade, which means all things flowers. India's spring festival is one of riotous color and is sometimes called the "festival of love."

Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) met John Everett Millais and neoclassical artists Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix during his career. In 1860, he discovered the art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and its influence can be seen in the loving and idealistic aspects of this

May spring come soon!

## Abdiel and Lucifer on the Question of Freedom

#### **ERIC BESS**

hat is freedom? Is freedom the ability to do whatever we want whenever we want? Or is freedom directly connected to our ability to control ourselves? Does freedom occur when we can guarantee equal outcomes for all? Or does freedom have more to do with recognizing the supremacy of God's righteousness?

As we continue our series on John Milton's "Paradise Lost," we will explore the idea of freedom.

**Lucifer Proposes Equality and Freedom** As he talks with the archangel Raphael, Adam becomes interested in Heaven's war. Raphael uses this as an opportunity to warn Adam about the potential conse-

quences of his free will.

Raphael begins the story at the moment God informs the angels that his son, Jesus, will be their lord. The angels in Heaven were excited at this wonderful news: They celebrated, sang, and danced, and God enjoyed their jubilance.

Some of the angels, however, weren't pleased. One angel in particular, Lucifer, didn't take kindly to having to bow to another being he considered an equal. Lucifer rallied a bunch of his followers to come with him in secret to the northernmost place in Heaven. Here, he begins his outward defiance of God.

Upon a hill surrounded by golden towers and pyramids of diamonds, he sat on a throne and thanklessly complained that he and his followers, despite being some of the most powerful beings in Heaven, had to bow twice now—once to God and again to Jesus.

**Enslavement is** equated with narcissism.

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This only to consult how we may best With what may be devised of honours

Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile, Too much to one, but double how en-

Receive him coming to receive from us

To one and to his image now proclaimed? (Book V, Lines 779–784)

Lucifer's pride makes him unwilling to be subservient to anyone, even God. Milton shows that Lucifer's intentions are more nuanced. Here, Lucifer is going against God by promoting a specific type of equality and

Will ye submit your necks, and choose

The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves

PUBLIC DOMAIN



"This greeting on thy impious crest receive" (VI. 188), 1866, by Gustav Doré for John Milton's "Paradise Lost." Engraving

Natives and sons of Heav'n possessed

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 11, 2023

By none, and if not equal all, yet free,

Who can in reason then or right as-

Monarchy over such as live by right His equals, if in power and splendour

In freedom equal? (Book V, Lines 787–792, 794–797)

Lucifer suggests that not all may be equal in all aspects, but all are equally free, and anyone who tries to infringe upon this equality is a tyrant and must be resisted.

#### **Lucifer and Abdiel Debate**

**Equality and Freedom** It's at this point that an angel in the audience, Abdiel, protests Lucifer's blasphemous remarks. Abdiel wants to remind the angels that their subordination to God does not compromise their freedom:

All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n

By him created in their bright de-

Crowned them with glory, and to their glory named ...

nor by his reign obscured, But more illustrious made ...

His laws our laws, all honour to him

Returns our own. (Book V, Lines 837-839, 841–845)

Abdiel suggests that all of the angels in attendance, even Lucifer, were created by God with all of their glory, and the supreme power of God has never obscured their glory since their glory is God's expression. To oppress them would be, in essence, to oppress himself.

In other words, all of them are expressions of God's power, and the more powerful God is, the more powerful they are. The very power, equality, and freedom that Lucifer wants is already possessed through being close to God. He could get the elevation he seeks not by defying God, but by praising God.

Of course, Lucifer doesn't agree with this and says:

We know no time when we were not

Know none before us, self-begot, self-

By our own quick'ning power ... (Book V, Lines 859–861)

Lucifer's response is that none of them remembers that God created them. Instead, being the first to appear as if from 
Is their lack of courage an expression of their own power, their glory seems to their freedom? themselves. Thus, they don't need to pay **The Question of Freedom** homage to anything or anyone outside of themselves.

Upon seeing that none of the other angels are taking Abdiel's side, Lucifer's confidence grows, and he cockily tells Abdiel to run back to his new king so that he can continue to be a slave. The angels who follow Lucifer explode into applause and scowl at Abdiel as he leaves to return

God already knows all of Lucifer's plans and sees the whole resistance unfold, so all of God's angels are preparing for battle. God and his angels see Abdiel resist Lucifer, and they celebrate him when he returns. God says to him:

... Well hast thou fought

The better fight, who single has main-

Against revolted multitudes the cause Of truth, in word mightier than they

And for testimony of truth hast borne Universal reproach, far worse to bear Than violence: for this was all thy care To stand approved in sight of God,

though worlds Judged thee perverse ... (Book VI, Lines 29–37)

God tells Abdiel that this test was a difficult one. It's very difficult to pursue truth and care only for God's approval. Those angels who scowled at him were once his friends, and he had to take a lonely walk of shame through their looks of disapproval as he journeyed back to God.

God says that this kind of shunning can be even more difficult to endure than violence. But Abdiel passed the test, and the next test will be much easier because Abdiel will have God's whole army with

#### The First Blow

God's army is led by the archangels Mi-

chael and Gabriel to find Lucifer's army and thwart their rebellion. They find Lucifer planning a surprise attack. He's held high on a chariot in the middle of golden angels with golden shields. The two armies line up against each other

and await commands. Abdiel is filled with disgust at Lucifer's presenting himself as so grand despite how evil he has become. Lucifer gets off of his chariot and walks to the front of the line, where he's met by Abdiel. They exchange heated words, and Lucifer says:

At first I thought that liberty and Heav'n

To Heav'nly souls had been all one;

I see that most through sloth had rather serve, Minist'ring Spirits, trained up in feast

and song; Such hast thou armed, the minstrelsy

of Heav'n, Servility with freedom to contend. (Book VI, Lines 164–169)

Lucifer insults all of God's angels. He tells them that they confuse freedom with being able to sing and dance in praise of God, but this is merely a jester's performance, a minstrel show not to be confused with true freedom.

Abdiel responds that serving God isn't the same as lacking freedom. True enslavement comes from making unwise decisions and following those who would rebel against God by being enthralled with themselves. Enslavement is equated with narcissism:

This is servitude,

To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebelled

Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,

Thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled. (Book VI, Lines 178–181)

At this moment, Abdiel throws the first strike, which lands on Lucifer's shield and pushes him back 10 paces. Here, Michael blows the trumpet, and the actual battle begins.

In his illustration "This greeting on thy impious crest receive," Gustave Doré depicts the moment that Abdiel lifts his sword to attack Lucifer. Lucifer looks as if he is going to draw his spear. The angels of God are around Abdiel and can be seen silhouetted in the background. Lucifer's angels, however, are slightly darker in value, and two at the bottom right corner shield themselves or turn their back to the oncoming onslaught.

All of this brings up the question of true

Between the lines, Milton seems to suggest a difference between free will and true freedom. Raphael begins the story as a warning to Adam about the potential consequences of free will: We reap what we sow, but we sow what we will. Here, freedom seems to be bound to what we reap; it's a consequence of how we employ our free will; freedom is our reward for sowing righteously.

Abdiel uses his free will to defy Lucifer and praise God, and he receives the type of praise Lucifer desperately wants.

Lucifer, however, is using free will to claim and fight for absolute equality with God irrespective of his place in the divine hierarchy. His divine rank is lower than God's and Jesus's, but he feels he should be treated like they are nonetheless: He wants power and praise to be equally distributed. Free will can be likened to equality of opportunity. Lucifer wants equality of outcome, and he plans to destroy everything that gets in his way.

In all of his self-praise, Lucifer fails to see that he's enslaved by his own pride, a pride that follows him everywhere as a hell he can't escape.

Gustave Doré was a prolific illustrator of the 19th century. He created images for some of the greatest classical literature of the Western world, including The Bible, "Paradise Lost," and "The Divine Comedy." In this series, we'll take a deep dive into the thoughts that inspired Doré and the imagery those thoughts provoked. For the first article in the series, visit "Illustrious Ideas and Illustrations: The Imagery of Gustave Doré."

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

## An American Hero: Medic Desmond Doss

#### **WALKER LARSON**

Nothing defines a society like the individuals we elevate, praise, and emulate. The pinnacle of a society's heritage consists of its pageant of heroes, passed from parents to children for centuries, perhaps millennia, because it embodies the values of the culture. It lights a fire in the hearts of each succeeding generation to be something more, to stand for something, to be not unworthy of their ancestors' achievements.

The Romans called it "pietas"—piety—"a respectful and faithful attachment to gods, country, and relatives, especially parents."

#### A Roman Hero

The paragon of piety in the Roman tradition is the character of Aeneas from Virgil's epic poem "The Aeneid." Aeneas flees the blistering, burning city of Troy when it is overrun by the Greeks, and brings with him his father (literally carried on his shoulders) along with the "lares" and "penates," the household gods, which in Roman religion included the hero-spirits of one's ancestors.

Part of this Roman piety showcased by Aeneas, then, is the preserving and honoring of those who have gone before. Aeneas, according to the legend, becomes the founder of Rome, but it is unthinkable that he would leave the household gods, his heritage, behind him. He brings them with him all the as Hacksaw Ridge. way to Latium, where Rome will eventually be established.

Aeneas both preserves the heroes of the past and becomes a hero himself in that he lives out the Roman ideal of piety.

#### **Desmond Doss consistently** shows up on lists of the greatest American World War II heroes.

#### An American Hero

Heroes embody our principles, as well as our vision for the future. This is one reason why literature and history are so important to a nation's culture: They preserve and maintain a consensus of what a society values and

Who today would the vast majority of and eventually all of Okinawa. Several days Americans agree were true heroes? World after his great act of heroism, Doss was War II American medic Desmond Doss wounded by a grenade and a sniper's bulmay be one. The Oscar-nominated 2016 let. Still, he thought of others over himself film "Hacksaw Ridge" was based on the life He insisted that his litter-bearers rescue a of Corporal Desmond Doss and received wounded comrade before they rescued him.

91 percent positive reviews from audiences according to the film review aggregate, Rotten Tomatoes.

A recipient of the Medal of Honor, Doss consistently shows up on lists of the greatest American World War II heroes. Clearly, many Americans regard him very highly. For those who don't already know his story, I will briefly recap it here.

Doss was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1919. His parents were William Doss, a carpenter, and Bertha Doss, a homemaker and shoe factory worker. Doss was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist, and he firmly embraced this reli-

gion. He married Dorothy Schutte in 1942, and the same year joined the U.S. Army, despite being offered a deferment. He registered as a conscientious objector,

Desmond T. Doss, here as a

young soldier, eventually was

a Medal of Honor recipient

for his actions as a U.S. Army

medic during World War II.

however, since he did not believe in using a gun or killing. He emphasized that he was really a "conscientious cooperator," since he was willing to go on the battlefield, wear the uniform, and so on, but not carry or use a weapon. In addition, he requested a weekly pass to attend church every Saturday.

Doss's peculiar beliefs along with his small frame made him an object of mockery and derision among his fellow soldiers. One even threatened, "Doss, as soon as we get into combat, I'll make sure you won't come back alive."

The officers also persecuted him and tried to get rid of him. They eventually attempted to court-martial him for refusing the direct order to carry a gun. These efforts were unsuccessful, however, and Doss declined to leave—and declined to hold a grudge.

#### **Hacksaw Ridge**

The full extent of Doss's true mettle was re-



Medic Desmond Doss on top of the Maeda Escarpment, May 4, 1945. U.S. Army.

vealed when he took part in the American attack on Okinawa in 1945. The Germans were surrendering at this time, but the Japanese fought on, trying to hold the island and its Maeda Escarpment in order to prevent an invasion of Japan itself. The soldiers referred to the Maeda Escarpment, a sheer rock face,

Doss's company secured the top of the ridge, but the Japanese launched a devastating counterattack. Officers ordered a retreat, and the Americans rushed back down the cliff. But not Doss.

Once again, Doss disobeyed an order for the sake of what he saw as a greater good. He remained behind, answering the calls for a medic from the many wounded men still on the battlefield (less than a third had made it back down the cliff).

Completely disregarding his own safety, amidst the choking dust and smoke, shock waves of explosions, and the hiss of bullets, Doss ran from one comrade to the next, treating their wounds, dragging them to safety, and lowering them down the cliff face. He even attempted to save some Japanese soldiers. In all, he rescued at least 75 men

on that day, May 5, 1945. The American troops captured the ridge,

> Doss survived the war, though he suffered from tuberculosis (likely as a result of the terrible conditions on the Pacific islands) for six years afterwards, and lived most of his life with only one lung. He died on March 23, 2006, aged 87.

#### American Values

So, what universally admired aspects of the American character does Doss reveal to us? In the first place, courage. At our best, we are a bold and brave people, who know what our goal is, and aim straight for it, regardless of contradictions or obsta-

cles (even sheer cliff-faces). This trait grows, in part, out of our individualism. Individualism is a double-edged sword, but we see in Doss something of its best form: a quiet independence and rocksolid adherence to his principles and conscience. He knew when to disobey a lower law or expectation for the sake of something

Finally, Doss demonstrates the remarkable compassion and self-sacrifice valued by Americans. Care for the downtrodden, the sick, the wounded, when rightly directed, is among the best of traits of our culture. Doss gives an example of this kind of care, a care that doesn't hesitate to suffer on a personal level—pain or even death—for one's fellow

Walker Larson teaches literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife. He holds a Master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in The Hemingway Review, Intellectual Takeout, and his Substack, "TheHazelnut."

Samples of film

the Living Record of Our Memory."

deterioration in "Film,

**FILM REVIEW** 

### Saving Bits of Celluloid and Bringing Them Back to Life

#### **MICHAEL CLARK**

Divided into four distinct chapters, "Film, the Living Record of Our Memory" ("Living Record") delves into an overlooked and largely unknown area of movie history about which even many who consider themselves industry experts will discover they are woefully uniformed.

Wasting zero time, writer and director Inés Toharia presents images of multiple film cans being opened and revealing their content. Most of it is nothing but dust,  $something\,that\,happens\,to\,film\,stock\,left$ too long in hot and humid storage rooms. The bulk of these are silent films that went ignored so long—80 percent of all ever produced are forever lost.

#### **Sold for Scrap**

Then, there are "talkie" productions released from the late 1920s through the late 1940s that were purposefully sold off by various studios and melted down for their silver content. It was the mindset at the time that once a movie completed a theatrical run, it had exhausted its ability to generate revenue, and this "recycling" was just a way to wring out a few more bucks.

It didn't help matters that all of these movies were made from nitrate stock, a volatile and highly flammable substance that was discontinued in 1950.

Easily, the most disheartening portion of this opening salvo began in the 1940s when the Nazis, not content with conquering most of Eastern Europe, confiscated the artworks of these countries. When it became clear that they were going to lose the war, the Nazis began destroying the thousands of films in their possession. If not for the intervention of the Russians, they would have succeeded in full.

This segment dovetails nicely into another profiling of the early collectors—those who recognized the future cultural significance of the film medium. More pioneers and preservationists than hoarders, these benevolent individuals put great effort into saving any and all movies they could locate. One in particular, Cinémathèque Française founder Henri Langlois, was **Most silent** films have been long ignored and are now lost.

'Film, the Living **Record of Our** Memory'

**Documentary** Director:

Ines Toharia **Running Time:** One hour, 59 minutes **MPAA Rating:** 

Not Rated **Release Date:** Feb. 27. 2023





able to rescue two early German classics:

"Faust" (1926) and "Nosferatu" (1922).

#### **Revealing Home Movies**

Next, Toharia throws us a hard curveball by including a truncated and illuminating history of amateur or "home" movies and how they figure into the title of this film. In addition to things that those of a certain age associate with home movies (vacations at the beach, birthday celebrations), Toharia includes clips of those shot in post-Kristallnacht Vienna and a 1938 film of Depression-era field workers that are highly reminiscent of what would be seen in "The Grapes of Wrath" two years later.

Arguably, the most visceral portion of the entire production are the home movies of Japanese Americans getting off of overstuffed train cars and being led to internment camps. In America. It's not a good look to be sure. But as it is often said, those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.

The first portion of the third quarter of "Living Record" is dedicated to the ongoing and endless search for lost features and shorts not only in the United States and Europe but also in the Far East and Africa, alongside the bios of some of the early pioneers in those regions. It is truly inspirational and eye-opening stuff.

#### Talking Back to the Screen

In what is the most unique and lighthearted but revealing passage, Toharia profiles the "Mostly Lost" film festival. Held annually since 2007 at a branch of the Library of Congress in Culpeper, Virginia, it includes 150 invited scholars and movie buffs who are shown portions of recovered silent films and are called on to audibly identify clues contained within the mysterious frames. It's the only time that talking during a movie is encouraged.

Fittingly, the final 30 minutes concentrates on the global community of film restorers. Selfless, dedicated, and eminently patient, these professionals are charged with taking decimated, often unwatchable bits and pieces of celluloid and bringing them back to life, or as close to life as possible.

Because of their limited time and funds, they also have the arduous, unenviable task of choosing what to save and what must be left to wither away.

The most surprising aspect of the restoration segment is what's in store for the future of filmmaking in general and the manner in which it will be shot and eventually preserved. To make a comparison without giving too much away, it lends credence to people who prefer the sound of analog vinyl records over digital CDs.

Needless to say, "Living Record" is absolutely essential viewing for movie fans, scholars, students, historians, and anyone interested in how important it is to take care of the past.

Presented in English and subtitled Spanish, Italian, French, Catalan, and Arabic.

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

**TRUTH and TRADITION** In Our Own Words





I try to create a beautiful, uplifting, or thoughtful experience in order to reconnect us to our spirituality.

Sharon Kilarski Arts and Culture Editor

## The Best of the Human Experience

Dear Epoch VIP,

If you're at all like me, you know that it can be ugly out there. You read about it in the news, watch it on the screen, and maybe even see it out your window. And it seems worse lately–depressing. That's where The Epoch Times steps in.

**Ever since its creation, The Epoch Times has featured** an arts and culture section that acknowledges the importance of the truly beautiful—whether beautiful in a physical sense or a moral one, and we continue that mission today.

And as the Arts and Culture editor, the mission is at the center of how I run my section.

In keeping with our motto of Truth and Tradition, we aim to present the best and noblest that human culture has to offer. By exploring the best craftsmanship in the world, we acknowledge that diligence, hard work, and patience produce excellence. In reviewing films, we search for those that are actually good for the soul, or, conversely, we point out where they have failed in this regard. By looking to our heritage for historical, literary, and mythical figures, we seek those with outstanding character and virtues to offer as exemplars to emulate. And by looking to the classics in music, the performing arts, and fine arts, we find themes that emphasize dignity, uprightness, harmony, and purity to inspire us.

In a sense, traditional art, stemming from traditional culture and values, aims at the heart and can speak

to us in surprising ways—as though we are having a conversation with a dear and trusted friend.

And just as conversations with a friend will sometimes touch on pain, the traditional arts not only capture the breath of human experience but its depth as well, allowing us to recognize our sins and frailties, and transforming humanity's inevitable pain to give that pain meaning. It is the beauty of the classics that carry out this alchemy.

Most importantly, I believe that art has traditionally been a link to the sacred, as a way to remind us of purpose on earth. As the late philosopher Roger Scruton wrote, "True art is an appeal to our higher nature, an attempt to affirm that other kingdom in which moral and spiritual order prevails."

That our society today has forgotten this purpose is all the more reason that each week, as editor of Arts and Culture, I try to create a beautiful, uplifting, or thoughtful experience in order to reconnect us to our spirituality.

I'm continuing to find paintings, stories, and remarkable figures that astonish me and I hope they will affect you, dear reader, too. I hope you will enjoy the Arts and Culture section, and that it can help you step away for a moment from the violent, cynical, demonic, immodest, insulting, and tasteless. I hope our content leaves you

refreshed and anticipating the next issue.

In Truth and Tradition,

Sharon Kilarski The Epoch Times

