

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

JAKE GAEDTKE



American landscape painter Jake Gaedtke has traveled the country, sketching and painting field studies from the coasts to the deserts to the mountains. He uses these plein air works to create paintings in his studio that capture the wonders of the natural world, such as "Sky's the Limit," 2020. Oil on canvas; 24 inches by 18 inches.

FINE ART

SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE

Art of Landscape Painting

How Jake Gaedtke captures America's great outdoors

LORRAINE FERRIER

Montana-based landscape painter Jake Gaedtke's first art museum visit astounded him, leaving him with a lifelong impression and a dream to fulfill. He can't recall the paintings, but he can remember their impact on his second-grade self as if it were yesterday. Walking with his class around the Detroit Institute of Art, a group of large vertical figure paintings stopped him in his tracks. "My mouth must have been wide open looking at these paintings," he said by telephone. To an awe-struck young Gaedtke, it seemed like those paintings were 10-foot tall. "I'd love to make those paintings," he thought, as he tried to imag-

ine what it would be like to be able to. He was so taken aback by the art that he lost track of time—and his classmates.

From that visit, he knew had to be an artist.

His parents encouraged and supported him in pursuing his dream. At that time, Gaedtke loved drawing, and he recalls spending many an afternoon drawing with a friend and learning a lot from self-taught artist John Gnagy's television series "Learn to Draw." The show aired at dinnertime, and Gaedtke's mom allowed him to eat in the living room to watch the 15-minute show. His brothers weren't impressed, but his mom insisted:

“

The beauty I saw in the outdoors just seemed so compelling to me. ... I really wanted to express that.

Jake Gaedtke, landscape painter

Continued on Page 4



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POETRY

'The Hound of Heaven'

by Francis Thompson,
Poet of Grace

JEFF MINICK

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

So begins "The Hound of Heaven." The narrator of this poem is a fugitive, a man on the run—not from the law but from God. The hound of heaven is, of course, God himself. This attempted evasion is the simple premise of "The Hound of Heaven."

Though Francis Thompson wrote and published other verse and prose during his lifetime, it is "The Hound of Heaven" for which he is remembered. It brought him to the attention of the public, and won the praise of several writers.

Following Thompson's death, for instance, G.K. Chesterton said of him, "With Francis Thompson we lose the greatest poetic energy since Browning." J.R.R. Tolkien was an admirer, and American playwright Eugene O'Neill memorized "The Hound of Heaven" in his youth. For decades, it was a classroom staple in Catholic schools.

Both Thompson and his poems have lost some of their luster among the literati of our own time. His intricate language and his religious themes may repel some modern readers. The length of some of his works—"The Hound of Heaven" runs to 182 lines—may also constitute a barrier, particularly when it comes to placement in anthologies. Neither the Sixth Edition of "Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama" nor the Second Edition of "Prentice Hall Literature: The English Tradition" (both of which sit on my bookshelves) contains the poem.

Oddly, however, given his once sterling reputation, neither of these literary surveys makes any mention of the poet whatsoever.

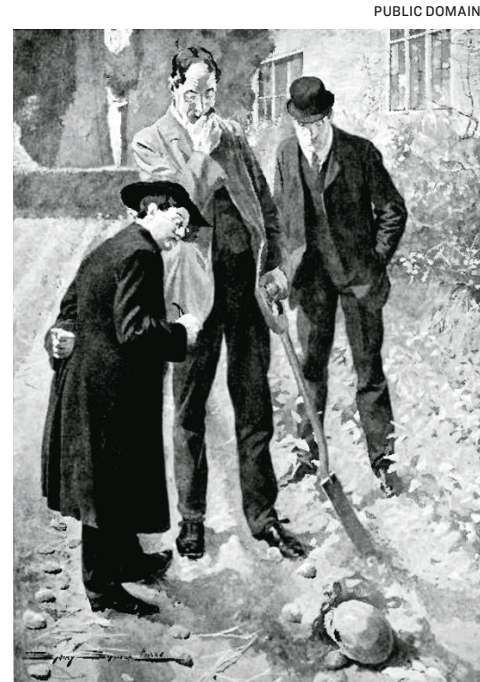
Hard Times and Rescuers

Francis Thompson (1859–1907) was born in Lancashire, England, the son of a doctor and a book-loving mother. After receiving his education at Ushaw, a Catholic school where he was known as somewhat shy and reclusive, a lover of literature who avoided games, he entered Owens College to follow in his father's footsteps and study medicine. Though he spent six years there, Thompson disliked his studies, and after failing to pass his final exams, he dropped out. In 1885, he headed to London, determined to become a writer.

In that city of strangers, bad luck and his own lack of worldliness plagued him. Like many others of his time, he became addicted to laudanum, perhaps originally taking this form of opium as a relief from a nervous condition. For three years, he lived hand-to-mouth, destitute and often homeless, working odd jobs like selling matches or hailing cabs, so shabbily dressed at one point that a public library closed its doors to him.

But he did write. In 1887, he sent three poems to Wilfrid Meynell, editor of a Catholic magazine called Merry England. Thompson's accompanying letter begins: "Dear Sir,—In enclosing the accompanying article for your inspection, I must ask pardon for the soiled state of the manuscript. It is due, not to slovenliness, but to the strange places and circumstances under which it was written." Meynell published one of the poems, "The Passion of Mary," finally tracked down the poet, and gained his confidence and friendship.

Eventually, Meynell and his wife, Alice, who was a poet and mother of eight, took Thompson into their home for a time. Though he later found lodgings



G.K. Chesterton used the hunter and hunted motif in his Father Brown stories. Illustration by Sydney Seymour Lucas for "The Innocence of Father Brown."

of his own, he remained a frequent visitor in the Meynell household. For the rest of his life, the Meynells and some of their friends watched after Thompson, encouraging him, supervising his health, and tending to him when the tuberculosis that afflicted him left him prostrate and dying. As an article in the Catholic Encyclopedia tells us, "He was never again friendless or without food, clothing, shelter, or fire."

It was after meeting Wilfrid Meynell that Thompson wrote "The Hound of Heaven."

Fox and Hound

Near the beginning of the poem, God pursues the fugitive soul with "unhurrying chase,/ And unperturbed pace,/ Deliberate speed, majestic instancy," then says, "All things betray thee, / Who betrayest Me."

This sense of holy calm and deliberation, maintained throughout the poem, stands in stark contrast to the pursued, who frantically seeks pleasure, refuge, and love without God. Yet time and again the Hound of Heaven appears, reminding him that "Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me." At the end, having caught the man whose "heart is as a broken fount," God tells him "Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fleest Me!" The poem ends, "Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest, / I am He Whom thou seekest! / Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me." ("Dravest" is an archaic past tense form of drive.)

In Thompson's poem, this omniscient being, all-powerful and all-loving, knows his quarry, the soul, better than the soul knows itself. He comes to bring peace to the world-weary man and to fill the empty places of his heart.

Other writers have used similar images of hunter and hunted to portray God. In "The Innocence of Father Brown," for example, G.K. Chesterton has Father Brown say of a thief: "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

In Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited," a young woman, Cordelia, quotes this line, and Waugh underscores its importance to his novel by naming Part III "A Twitch Upon the Thread." As scholar of English literature Annesley Anderson writes in her essay on "Brideshead" and the role of grace in the lives of its characters, "no one on this thread is ever far from God, or from each other, and that God's grace is what surrounds and makes sense of the whole world."

Thompson would undoubtedly have said the same about his "Hound of Heaven."

Kindnesses Repaid

The tender mercies of others rescued



"The Hound of Heaven" is Francis Thompson's most famous poem. "A Limier Briquet Hound," by Rosa Bonheur. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Francis Thompson from the London streets where he lived, suffered, and nearly died. Without the attentions and affections of the Meynell family, the poet might have ended his days unknown and unsung, relegated to a bed of earth in potter's field.

In "Sister Songs," Thompson pays homage to the kindness of the Meynell family, in particular to their two young daughters, Sylvia (Madeline) and Monica. The innocence of the Meynell children and the love they showed to Thompson provided the inspiration for much of the poetry written in those productive years while living in the care and keeping of this generous family.

In this same volume of verse, Thompson also expresses his gratitude to another "sister," a prostitute who ob-

served him in his rags and hunger, pitied him, and brought him to her quarters. There she restored him to a semblance of health. The exact nature of their relationship remains unknown, as does the name of the woman herself. Everard Meynell, the son of Wilfrid and Alice, relates an incident that left him with the impression that Thompson and his benefactor lived as innocents, close friends, and confidants, two sparrows of the streets come together for comfort. When Thompson told this woman of Wilfrid Meynell's interest in his writing, she explained to him that she would be an impediment in his new life. Soon afterward, he arrived at their rooms to find that she had vanished, never again to be seen. In "Sister Songs," he writes:

This omniscient being knows his quarry, the soul, better than the soul knows itself.

And of her own scant pittance did she give,
That I might eat and live:
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.

A Memorial Made of Words

In the opening of "Francis Thompson: A Reflection on the Poetic Vocation," now regrettably out of print, Frank Morris relates of Thompson's death that "it was reported by his nun-nurses that the poet had repeatedly spoken the words, 'My withered dreams, my withered dreams.'"

Those words come from Thompson's verse "The Poppy," dedicated to Monica Meynell. The last stanza reads:

Love! I fall into the claws of Time:
But lasts within a leavèd rhyme
All that the world of me esteems—
My withered dreams, my withered dreams.

We cannot know what Thompson may have meant with these dying words, though we can discern why he is so little read today. His verse is often obscure, its lines laden with unfamiliar or archaic words. Read aloud, the haunting beauty of his verse comes alive, but most of us take our poetry in silence. The God who inhabits these poems sometimes seems farther away from us than he did to readers a century ago. Consequently, Thompson's poems may appear to some like a half-completed bridge, stretching from the Victorian era back to the metaphysical poets like John Donne, but lacking the girders and pilings to reach the shore of our own century.

And yet there are his poems, only a finger touch away on our electronic devices, standing as a memorial to the man and to the God in whom he believed.

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.

TRUTH and TRADITION

In Our Own Words



“With diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.”

Petr Svab
Reporter

The World Through a Journalist's Eyes

Dear Epoch VIP,

Thank you for your continuing support—we are at your service.

My name is Petr Svab and I've been covering politics, courts, police, immigration, economy, and other topics during my 16 years at The Epoch Times.

It is my pleasure to work for a newspaper that stands for values I can wholeheartedly endorse and fittingly summed up in our motto of Truth and Tradition.

I believe that truth is the living world, and an infinite journey of exploration. The more topics I tackle, the more issues I delve into, the more I realize how complex, multifaceted, and enormous the world truly is. We can never dream of grasping it all, but, with diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.

Moreover, I've found, a journalist can open doors closed to others, give readers the facts of the story, the context that enlightens them, as well as the insights of the participants.

I remember walking the streets of West Baltimore a few years ago. My plan was just to interview some local business owners to see what the city was doing about some of its issues—from piles of trash and abandoned houses to homelessness and crime.

Within five minutes of my arrival, a man on the street noticed me and started to shout: "Guy with a camera! There's a guy with a camera here!" A group of young men further up the street took notice as I approached.

"Are you a cop?" asked one of them. He was a young man with wide eyes that looked like they'd already seen more than their share.

I introduced myself and my business of the day, handing the gentleman my card. The young man's expression softened as he realized I was here to report on a story—the story of his home.

As it turned out, the young man was not only ready to share with me his insights on the local issues, but also to offer advice on where to find what I was looking for. We parted ways with a handshake.

In all my experience talking directly to the people

involved in various events, **the truth seldom (if ever) favors partisan narratives—it's much more colorful: sometimes humorous, other times tragic.**

Consider the story, for example, of Trayvon Martin. According to some, an innocent child killed by a racist man. According to others, a thug killed in self-defense. But after filmmaker Joel Gilbert retraced Martin's last moments, weeks, and months, it turned out neither narrative was quite true. Gilbert told a story of a young man whose life was falling apart and ultimately plunged into a tragedy that nobody wanted.

So if that's truth, what is tradition, then? For me, it is the lessons of history. It's the distilled universal wisdom collected by our ancestors over millennia—the timeless lessons of the enlightened, the sages, and the saints. This treasure chest of the past is where we can turn to help us better understand the truth at present.

My work is to safeguard this treasure, let it live through the pages of The Epoch Times and the hearts of our readers.

While it may seem the foundations of the civilization itself are now under attack, I truly believe our readers will be best equipped to withstand the storm—through clarity and peace of heart. For whatever the future holds, I believe the path will be less treacherous for those who walk it steadily, making choices informed both by truth and tradition.

What I pledge to you is yet more meticulous research, analysis, and fact-finding. I'll do the digging for you, while letting you make up your own mind. Furthermore, I'll also hone my wit to give you an ever-better read along the way.

Yes, we strive to be an influential media in the world, but **I believe that our true success is measured in minds sharpened, hearts uplifted, and lives improved.**

Once again, thank you for joining us on this journey. We do live in truly epochal times, wouldn't you say?

In Truth and Tradition,

Petr Svab
The Epoch Times

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"Flowing Stillness," 2019, by Jake Gaedtke. Oil on canvas; 16 inches by 20 inches.



This year, Jake Gaedtke won first place in the Landscape category of the 16th Art Renewal Center Salon Competition with his 2021 painting "Midnight Shadows." Oil on linen; 26 inches by 32 inches.

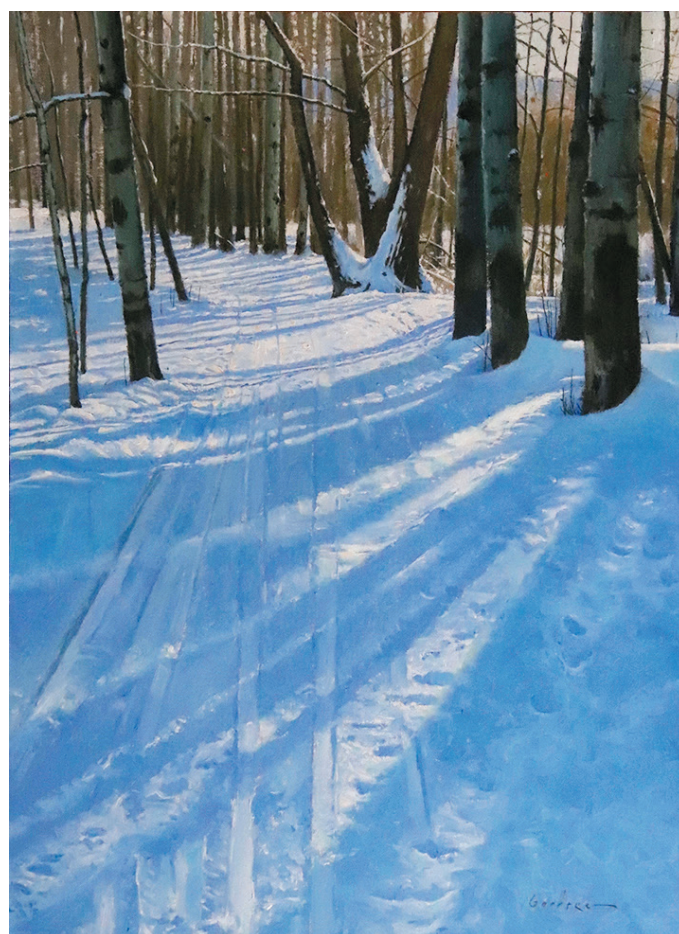
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Art of Landscape Painting



Landscape painter Jake Gaedtke painting in the Grand Canyon.



"Guiding Light," 2023, by Jake Gaedtke. Oil on linen; 27 inches by 20 inches.

Continued from Page 1

"Your brother is learning, leave him be." Gaedtke found Gnagy's short step-by-step instructions invaluable, such as how to use circles, squares, and triangles to create forms.

During his high school years, Gaedtke made great progress in his art. His art teacher, a young hippie and barely out of college, taught classes in drawing, painting, and art history with such enthusiasm and passion that Gaedtke couldn't help but be inspired. He liked that his teacher didn't emphasize one art era. He taught everything from classical art up to the then-recent pop art. "And that had a huge, huge, influence on me when I was in high school, and really he tried to just stoke those fires [in] me to really want to be an artist," Gaedtke said.

At around 16 years old, he passed the entry test for the "Famous Artists Course for Talented Young People," a two-year commercial art and illustration correspondence course, founded by members of the New York Society of Illustrators, principally Albert Dorne and Norman Rockwell. It cost \$500. "I thought, 'Oh my gosh! We can't afford that.' But my dad found a way," Gaedtke said. His art skills grew from the illustrators' lessons and their feedback on his assignments, bringing him closer to his dream of becoming an artist.

Staying True to Realist Art

Compared to his high school years, Gaedtke found college disappointing. In the early 1970s, he studied fine art at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, leaving after a year to enlist in the Air Force. Gaedtke spent four years serving his country, and then studied art at the University of Southern Colorado-Pueblo (now Colorado State University). In both instances, the college art departments focused on modern art. Lecturers didn't teach the skills of drawing and painting; instead, they encouraged students to express themselves. Modern art and abstract art never appealed to him: "I wanted to learn to be a real artist."

After leaving college, he settled in the mountains of Colorado and mainly focused on figure paintings. His passion for realist painting remained strong, and for decades he continued to paint and develop his art practice alone, taking art courses here and there. One of those classes forever changed his art.

The Quest to Capture Landscapes

Throughout his life, Gaedtke has had a heartfelt appreciation for the great outdoors, embarking on many hiking, fishing, and camping adventures. He'd always wanted to capture the land on canvas. "The beauty I saw in the outdoors just seemed so compelling to me. ... I really wanted to express that, but I didn't know where to start or how to do it," he said.

He signed up for workshops at the local art academy, one of which was the plein air painting class of the landscape artist Jay Moore. "I just immediately fell in love with it," he said. When he first started plein air painting, he struggled with it. He'd get so frustrated that he'd throw his paintings like Frisbees against the rocks. "I never thought I'd get it. But you stick with it, and eventually things start to make sense."

In 2002, Gaedtke started Moore's new mentorship program for aspiring professional landscape artists. It was fast-paced and grueling. "He was trying to put me through the paces of what it takes to be a professional, how hard you have to work," he said.

Moore trained him in how to paint landscapes and also in the reality of being a professional artist—how you'd have to work every day on both the business and the painting. Every two weeks, Gaedtke had an assignment on any number of subjects including drawing, painting, and art history, or business and mental awareness. Every day, Gaedtke spent between 12 and 14 hours completing each one.

One of the challenges of painting outdoors, Gaedtke explained, is that there's so much to see in a landscape that it becomes overwhelming. Moore taught him how to find the focal point for the painting by breaking the scene down into

simplistic forms and shapes, and learning the values (the darks and lights) in the scene's composition. Moore first limited Gaedtke's palette to black, white, and gray, using values to describe the forms.

Once Gaedtke understood the values, Moore directed him to introduce color and taught him how to mix landscape colors. This methodical process of learning to paint in monochrome and then in color is similar to how the old masters learned figure painting in their academy apprenticeships.

And of course, understanding nature was of utmost importance. Gaedtke spent a lot of time outside observing sunlight, how the light behaved in nature, and how to express it in paint. From then on, he became a landscape artist with a particular love for painting water, snow, and nocturnal scenes.

Calm Snow From Sunlight to Moonlight

Although mountain winters can be ferocious, Gaedtke finds the season calming. "I don't think anything soothes me like a beautiful snowy day with no wind," he said. Needless to say, Gaedtke loves painting snow. One of his favorite paintings, "Midnight Shadows" recently won first place in the Landscape category of the 16th International Art Renewal Center Salon Competition. He loves how, in the moonlit hours, the trail walkers' footprints and the cross-country skiers' tracks in the crisp snow reveal the busy day.

“I want the viewer to walk into the painting, like they're actually there—and they want to be there.”

Jake Gaedtke, landscape painter

Gaedtke stumbled across the scene during an afternoon dog walk on the Sourdough Trail near his home in Bozeman, Montana. He saw how the aspen trees cast incredible shadows, creating abstract shapes across the snow-covered trail. Stopping dead in his tracks, he instantly visualized a painting, not of the sunlit scene before him but a moonlit one.

He tied up his dog and took a few compositional photographs of the scene. "The photograph helps you with drawing shapes and such, but when it comes to color and values you can't rely on them that much. You really have to use your plein air references for more accuracy in that regard," Gaedtke explained.

Having painted over 100 plein air evening paintings, Gaedtke understands night color and how the evening light falls. He applied that knowledge when converting the daylight scene to night for "Midnight Shadows."

He first made a small version of the painting, solving problems with the colors and composition, before confidently painting the larger work. Painting at his easel, Gaedtke makes hundreds of decisions, such as what type of brushstroke to use and what colors to mix, to name a couple. He likens the process to a constant dialogue between himself and the painting. He'll often step back from the piece, asking what it needs next.

Walking his dog on the same trail, some 20 yards from the scene of "Midnight Shadows," Gaedtke happened upon another scene—the subject of his painting "Guiding Light." "Through the shadows, through the darkness, you've got these little spots of light that guide you right through that trail and that path," he said. Although, again, he could see that it would make a great nocturnal scene, he wanted to create something different. So for "Guiding Light," he painted a daytime scene in a vertical composition, focusing on the cottonwood, which guides the viewer into the painting.

"I want the viewer to walk into the painting, like they're actually there—and they want to be there, quietly feeling the crunch of the snow under him or her," he said.

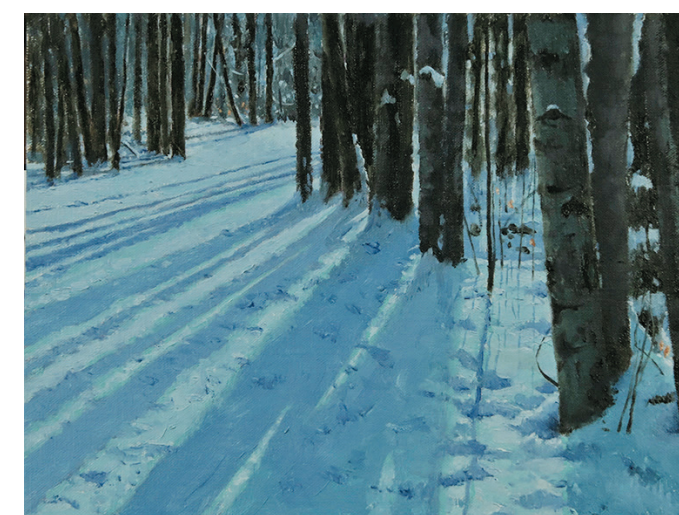
Fulfilling Dreams

Gaedtke has fulfilled his dream to be an artist, creating fine paintings. As a second grader, he couldn't imagine how he'd be able to create them. But through sheer hard work, constant curiosity, and love for his art, he sought out the right people to learn from.

For years, he has taught classes and taken private students under his wing in his studio. "It's great to share everything that you've learned and be able to pass it along to others."

He still refers back to the "Famous Artists Course for Talented Young Artists" materials and also uses them when he teaches classes and private students. He suggests that aspiring artists take workshops from artists they admire, rather than trendy artists—and for them to work hard, go after what they want to learn, and not get discouraged. For aspiring landscape painters, he tells them to paint in the great outdoors and learn directly from nature's truth.

To find out more about landscape painter Jake Gaedtke, visit Landscape-Art.com



A study for "Midnight Shadows," 2021, by Jake Gaedtke. Oil on canvas; 11 inches by 14 inches.



"Winter Tracks," 2020, by Jake Gaedtke. Oil on canvas; 14 inches by 28 inches.



"Narrow Passage," 2021, by Jake Gaedtke. Oil on canvas; 20 inches by 30 inches.

BOOK REVIEW

An Insightful and Intriguing Biography of a Most Unlikely Politician

DUSTIN BASS



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Grover Cleveland often gets categorized as a president of trivial significance. Trivial as in trivia. He is known as the only president to serve two nonconsecutive terms, the only president to get married inside the White House, and a president who underwent a secret and potentially life-saving surgery on a yacht. He was also the first elected Democratic president of the post-Abraham Lincoln era.

Troy Senik, in his biography “A Man of Iron: The Turbulent Life and Improbable Presidency of Grover Cleveland,” breaks down the very unlikely political path of the Gilded Age president and how, oxymoronically, virtue led him to the White House—twice.

Why Iron?

Senik presents a man who possessed an unbending sense of integrity. The author demonstrates how Cleveland’s character was formed and cast at an early age. It is difficult to say how much Cleveland believed in those virtues as a youth, but what cannot be contended is how he held on to them as he matured.

Though the author discusses Cleveland’s younger years, this biography is primarily about his political career. He was ushered into politics not out of personal desire or necessity, but out of necessity from his own party. The New York Democrats needed a man who was or, at least, appeared above reproach. For all intents and purposes, Cleveland was not made for politics. With his immovable stances on right and wrong, he seemed more cut out for the clergy. And perhaps that’s why he proved practically indispensable for a political party trying to maneuver back to the ultimate seat of power.

Cleveland was a Democrat, and yet he wasn’t. He stood on specific principles that he believed benefited citizens rather than politicians, even when those principles proved counter to his party’s wishes. Senik demonstrates how, during the earliest part of his political career as sheriff of Erie County, he could not be bribed by fellow party members, regardless of their request or their position. As Senik notes rather succinctly: “He was in a party, but never of it.”

Integrity as Political Detriment?

It is difficult to conceive anyone of the modern era rising through the political ranks who possessed such unwavering integrity. But the politics of the late 19th century, especially in New York, were just as corrupt as you would find today. There were political bosses, such as those of Tammany Hall; and corporate cronies, like railroad magnate Jay Gould, who pushed, prodded, and propounded their own agendas.

To acquiesce to political pressure would undoubtedly benefit the politician hoping to rise through the ranks. Cleveland, however, seemed rather careless with the bosses and magnates, so much so that one could call him naive, or at least politically aloof.

This aloofness can hardly be summed up better than Senik’s example of a legislative attempt to lower fares on New York City’s elevated railway system. Lowering the rates would have obviously benefited the average commuter and placed the aforementioned Gould at a loss financially. The bill had been passed nearly unanimously in the Statehouse, but as governor of New York, Cleveland believed the bill unconstitutional for “impairing the obligation of contracts.” He vetoed the popular bill and made his case so clearly that not only was the bill abandoned, but Cleveland was also praised by the press for the decision.

It is just one of many examples that Senik provides of Cleveland’s disinterest in the political game. There are also examples of his interest in both helping his fellow citizens and upholding the standards of the Constitution.

When Cleveland is elected to the highest office, his iron integrity does not diminish; if anything, it is strengthened. He practically viewed his political placement as a sentencing, noting to his friend Shan Bissell: “I look upon the four years next to come as a dreadful self-inflicted penance for the good of the country. I can see no pleasure in it and no satisfaction, only a hope that I may be of service to my people.”

He became a political hawk for obvious corruption as well as potential corruption. During his first term he vetoed twice as many bills as all of the presidents before him combined, and many of those vetoes concerned private pensions for military veterans. Cleveland tirelessly examined these bills, even at the cost of surveying other political matters,

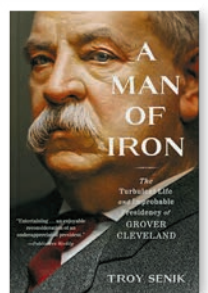
This biography is a worthy reminder of Cleveland’s greatness and goodness.



FOTORESEARCH/GETTY IMAGES

1. President Grover Cleveland was known for his integrity. New York gubernatorial portrait of Grover Cleveland, circa 1906, by Eastman Johnson.

2. A political cartoon with the caption “One after another, let the good work go on!” which appeared in Puck magazine, circa 1893.



A MAN OF IRON: THE TURBULENT LIFE AND IMPROBABLE PRESIDENCY OF GROVER CLEVELAND
By Troy Senik
Threshold Editions
Sept. 20, 2022
Hardcover
384 pages

3. An anti-Cleveland cartoon highlights the Halpin scandal. Library of Congress.

in order to ensure pensions weren’t provided unjustly. He was concerned that haphazardly providing pensions “invites applications without merit and encourages those who, for gain, urge honest men to become dishonest.”

Silver, Strikes, and Surgery

Senik dives into the details of Cleveland’s efforts during his two terms to stave off an economic depression, and his fight against the Free Silver Movement, of which William Jennings Bryan became the face. There were strikes, including the Pullman Strike, that required his involvement. Along with these issues were the demands to decrease Chinese immigration, the highly controversial issue of annexing Hawaii, and his secret surgery to remove a



PUBLIC DOMAIN

malignant mass on the roof of his mouth.

The author gives an honest presentation of Cleveland’s handling of all these issues, even questioning the motives or naiveté behind decisions. Before and after Cleveland arrived in office, the executive power ebbed and flowed from progressive to laissez-faire attitudes. In possibly no era was this more obvious than that which came immediately after him, from McKinley to Roosevelt.

His integrity was the deciding factor in his approach to social and political issues, and one can render a verdict that he was a naive president, a stubborn president, or as Senik points out in his afterword, a president who made his decisions based on his constitutional understanding and moral beliefs.

An Important Biography

“A Man of Iron” is an important biography for several reasons. It places Cleveland in a position to be viewed as he truly was—not as a politician but as a man. He was never a politician first; it could be argued that he was not a politician at all (in the vulgar sense of the word).

His arrival at the White House only 20 years after the Civil War is proof that the virtuous man can succeed in the midst of political polarization and retain that virtue. His election and reelection (he also won the popular vote in the 1888 election) is proof that people desire virtue (even if merely perceived virtue) from their leaders.

Senik’s writing moves quickly. He provides great insight into Cleveland. This biography is a worthy reminder of Cleveland’s greatness and goodness, and of what a politician can be if he holds the line to what is right and wrong. Readers love the story of a good man, even more so when the good man triumphs—doubly so when he triumphs twice.

Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of *The Sons of History* podcast.

FILM REVIEW

The Enigmatic Auteur in His Own Words

MICHAEL CLARK

For those largely unfamiliar with the films of Stanley Kubrick, director Gregory Monro’s one-hour, one-minute movie, narrated mainly by Kubrick, might be considered a cheat, which is understandable. For Kubrick devotees, it could be viewed as suspect. In actuality, it is not a cheat nor is it suspect.

If there is anything to find fault with in these segments, it is the odd choice of framing on the part of Monro. The already iffy archival footage is made worse when Monro superimposes it onto mock antique cabinet TV sets, lending parts of the movie a sort of cheesy, access-cable quality.

To put this in perspective, another Kubrick documentary, the sublime “Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures,” with a running time of 141 minutes, contains less than five minutes of Kubrick commenting on his movies. There are a few on-set audio and video clips here and there and a couple of (nonfilm-related) home movies, but that’s it.

A filmmaker who granted scant few interviews, Kubrick (much in the same manner as Bob Dylan and Gretha Garbo) wished for his work to speak for itself. He didn’t like being asked to explain the meaning of his films or their artistic merits.

The Critic

While attending the 1968 world premiere of “2001: A Space Odyssey” in London, French film critic Michel Ciment contacted Kubrick’s PR people requesting stills for the film for use in the publication “Positif.” The next day, he received a call from Kubrick himself who didn’t want to talk about “2001” and instead questioned Ciment about French history in general and specifically Napoleon Bonaparte, the proposed subject of the director’s next production.

Due in part to the prohibitive cost of location filming and the box office failure of the similarly themed “Waterloo” (1970), most of Kubrick’s financiers backed out and the “Napoleon” project was permanently shelved.

Based on interviews of past collaborators, mostly actors, in “A Life in Pictures,” we learn that once a movie was completed, Kubrick cut all ties with them, something that threw many of them (Malcolm McDowell, in particular) for a loop, but this wasn’t the case with Ciment.

Over the next two decades, Ciment inter-

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

The Battle for Control of the World’s Power Grid

MICHAEL CLARK

Somewhat misleading, the 2019 film is not really a “director’s cut” as it is the only known incarnation to see wide release. The version shown at the 2017 Toronto Film Festival was edited by Weinstein, and the word from those who’ve seen both: The director’s cut is a far better take.

“Current” isn’t a reference to time but rather electricity and, specifically in its infancy stages, as a budding energy source in the United States. The “war” part is wholly accurate as it profiles two of America’s most prominent and iconic engineers and/or inventors, involves another who only recently received his proper historical due, as well as a blunt and blustery business magnate who used his riches like so many sticks and carrots.

Westinghouse Versus Edison

The film opens in 1880, long after the professional rivalry between George Westinghouse (Michael Shannon) and Thomas Edison (Benedict Cumberbatch) began. The pair had not so radically different ideas on how to power the nation and eventually the world. Edison was a champion of DC (direct current), a method that was “safer” but had distance limitations and came at a higher cost. Westinghouse believed in AC (alternate current) which had a much longer reach and was less expensive but was also perceived as being more “dangerous,” a theory Edison attempted to exploit at every turn.

Swift out of the gate and never allowing



JEREMY ZELNIK

Stanley Kubrick filming in “Kubrick by Kubrick.”

Kubrick wished for his work to speak for itself.

viewed Kubrick for each subsequent film (“A Clockwork Orange,” “Barry Lyndon,” “The Shining,” and “Full Metal Jacket”).

In the case of “Lyndon,” he was the only critic Kubrick spoke to, and it is the audio recordings of these meetings that make up the bulk of the audio heard in this film.

Unseen Interviews
Monro also deserves kudos for unearthing actor interviews, none of which were included in “A Life in Pictures.” In addition to the aforementioned McDowell (“A Clockwork Orange”), there’s Marisa Berenson (“Barry Lyndon”), R. Lee Ermye (“Full Metal Jacket”), Jack Nicholson (“The Shining”), and Sterling Hayden.

One of the very few performers to appear in more than one Kubrick film, Hayden (“The Killing,” “Dr. Strangelove”) appears on-screen with long unkempt hair and a matching beard with period garb that suggests “Grizzly Adams” after an all-night bender. Based on Hayden’s filmography, it was likely shot on or around the filming of his final feature appearance (“Venom,” 1981).

In the late 1970s, Kubrick purchased the rights to “Supertoys Last All Summer Long,” a short story written by Brian Aldiss. As late as 1985, Kubrick felt that the movie was still unfilmable because of technical limitations at the time. He eventually passed this project along to his late-in-life friend Steven Spielberg, who made it 16 years later with a new title: “A.I. Artificial Intelligence.”

The Last Hurrah
In one, if not the last, of the Kubrick-Ciment interviews, the former discusses his decades-long back-and-forth on whether or not to adapt the 1926 novella “Traumno-

velle,” also known as “Rhapsody: A Dream Novel,” by German writer Arthur Schnitzler. At first, one gets the impression that it might have remained unrealized, not unlike the “Napoleon” project and the abandoned Holocaust drama “Aryan Papers.” Eventually, Kubrick decided to adapt “Traumnovelle” with co-writer Frederic Raphael, and the result was “Eyes Wide Shut” (1999), Kubrick’s final film.

My biggest takeaway after watching “Kubrick by Kubrick” was the man’s surprisingly basic and simple approach to storytelling. At one point, he equates filmmaking to war, meaning that conflict is absolutely required if there is to be a story. He cites Milton’s “Paradise Lost” as a permanent influence on his work.

Kubrick identified humanity as being basically good while having a thin veneer that was easily penetrable and could cause people to behave irrationally, a theme that was woven into each and every one of his movies.

He was keenly aware of the human condition and remains one of the greatest filmmakers in the history of the medium.

Presented in English and frequent subtitled French.

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

'Kubrick by Kubrick'

Documentary

Director:
Gregory Monro

Running Time:
1 hour, 1 minute

MPAA Rating:
Not Rated

Release Date:
March 21, 2023

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

things to lag, director Alfonso Gomez-Rejon employs a quasi “docudrama” approach to the first act, which is actually great because he identifies a multitude of major and secondary characters by name and association. This effective but fleeting touch makes it so much easier for audiences to get acclimated and only lasts as long as needed.

The arguable “rock star” of his day, Edison is portrayed here as a workaholic visionary and not exactly the perfect family man. His full-time dedication to creativity took a toll, and to Gomez-Rejon’s and scribe Michael Mitnick’s credit, their warts-and-all rendering of Edison is refreshing. He was a Type-A fellow with a gargantuan ego whose razor-sharp wit could often turn cruel.

Perfectly cast as Westinghouse, Shannon brings his trademark laconic delivery and non-verbal skills to the proceedings to superb effect. Not nearly as animated or outwardly verbal as Edison, Westinghouse was also a better chess player and absorbed setbacks with measured detachment. He realized, far more so than Edison, that the two men were involved in a mini-marathon of sorts and, in a brilliantly worded line, would rather “take a honest hard hit than an easier, less damaging facsimile.”

Enter Tesla

Delivering brilliant supporting turns without the often showy “look at me” straining are Nicholas Hoult as the Serbian-born Nikola Tesla and a barely recognizable Matthew Macfadyen as J.P. Morgan. Looked down upon solely because he was an “immigrant” with forward-thinking fashion sense and an accent, the relatively poor Tesla partnered with both Edison and Westinghouse at various times.

A freelancer of the highest order, Morgan cared little about science or technology and often took long term gambles when it came to financing the feuding brilliant



101 STUDIOS

minds of the day. He seemed practically impenetrable to any kind of emotional manipulation, especially when it came to his bottom line.

Anyone interested in the history of the embryonic phase of the Industrial Revolution needs to see this movie. Clocking in at a blisteringly efficient 107 minutes, it has no fat or excess and its only sin could be a semi-repeated scene involving a Civil War-era Westinghouse subplot that delivers no payoff.

If we wish to know where we’re going, we need to know where we’ve been and “The Current War” will remind us of our mostly great past and the power of original thought, ingenuity, drive, sweat equity, and the power of persuasion.

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

Nikola Tesla (Nicholas Hoult) demonstrates his invention at the Chicago World’s Fair, in “The Current War.”

'The Current War: Director's Cut'

Director:
Alfonso Gomez-Rejon

Starring:
Benedict Cumberbatch, Michael Shannon, Nicholas Hoult, Matthew Macfadyen

Running Time:
1 hour, 47 minutes

MPAA Rating:
PG-13

Release Date:
Oct. 25, 2019

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SACRED ART

Art With A Higher Purpose: 'The Ladder of Divine Ascent'

A Byzantine and Orthodox Christian treasure

LORRINE FERRIER

For centuries, Byzantine art acted like a compass, orienting the devout in their faith and, ultimately, guiding them to their salvation. The Byzantine artist painted in a specific style, a visual language if you like, that Orthodox Christians understood. "His role was akin to that of the priesthood and the exercise of his talent a kind of liturgy—liturgy in a sense almost sacramental—rather than a didactic function," as stated in "The Oxford Companion to Art."

Every part of Byzantine art brings the devout closer to God. "The arrangement of mosaics or paintings in a church, the choice of subjects, even the attitudes and expressions of the characters, were all determined according to a traditional scheme charged with theological meaning."

The artwork is based on St. John Climacus's Orthodox Christian text 'The Ladder of Divine Ascent.'

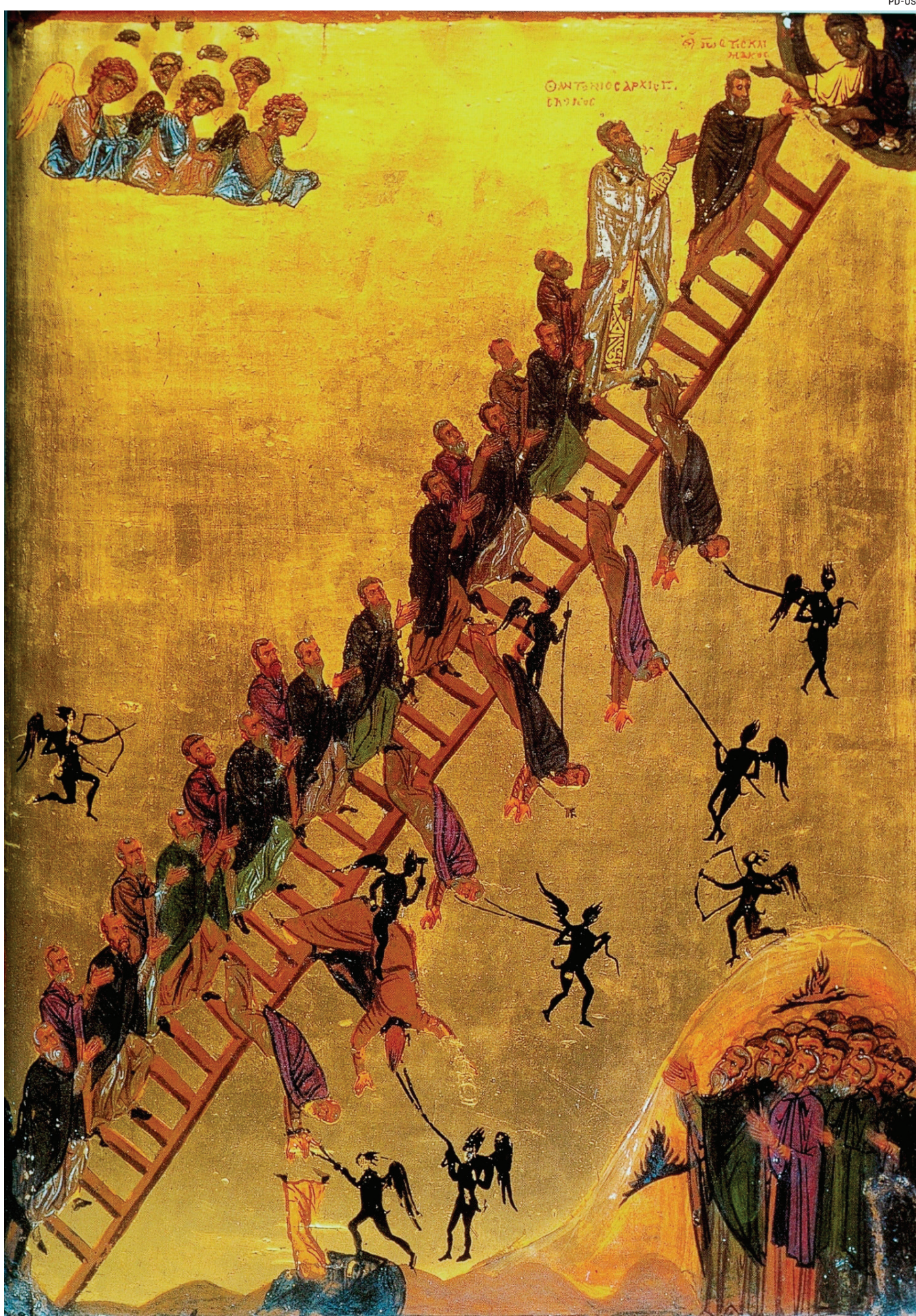
Art to Ascend By

In Saint Catherine's Monastery, at the base of Mount Sinai in Egypt, visitors can view a remarkable 12th-century icon that epitomizes Byzantine art: "The Ladder of Divine Ascent." Byzantine artists made the work to remind Orthodox monks of the constant vigilance needed to triumph over evil, and the righteousness required to reach heaven.

The artwork is based on St. John Climacus's Orthodox Christian text "The Ladder of Divine Ascent," which he wrote in about A.D. 600 as a guide for ascetics. The text describes the 30 stages of spiritual perfection as rungs on a ladder to salvation (theosis). St. John states in the ninth step: "The holy virtues are like Jacob's Ladder [in the Old Testament]. For the virtues, leading from one to another, bear him who chooses them to Heaven."

Orthodox Christians often read the text during the season of Great Lent, before Orthodox Easter, which falls on April 16 this year.

In the icon, a stream of monks, with their hands in prayer, climb the ladder to meet Christ in heaven. A group of monks on the ground watch on as some of their fellow monks succumb to the perils that can befall them as they embark on their arduous ascent. Angels in the heavens embody the virtues and encourage the monks, while a series of shadowy demons with animalistic tails try all manner of tricks to pull the monks off track. Some shoot arrows, while other demons lasso their targets. These demons also



symbolize that sins such as lust, wrath, and gluttony can even pull the devout from their sacred missions.

As they climb each rung, the monks must cultivate a specific virtue to overcome each vice. Evil remains close by even as the monks' trials become harder near heaven. One poor soul nears Christ but still sins, taking a demonic fall. The fallen enter the jaws of hell, frequently shown as a dragon

in these types of icons, represented in this work by a monstrous head swallowing one of the fallen monks.

Glory awaits the victorious monks, as Christ in heaven greets them with a blessing at the top of the ladder. They've conquered the earthly temptations and at the last step embody the supreme virtues of faith (pistis), hope (elpis), and the highest form of love, charity (agape).

"The Ladder of Divine Ascent," or "The Ladder of Paradise," 12th century, artist anonymous. St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt.

LITERATURE

Finding Paradise Through Selflessness

The Short Story for Children, 'The Selfish Giant'

KATE VIDIMOS

In a very selfish world, it can be difficult to be selfless. Selfishness, though appealing and advantageous in many ways, doesn't bring joy to us or those around us. Only selflessness brings true joy.

In Oscar Wilde's short story "The Selfish Giant," the Giant learns that selfishness creates a cold world, while selflessness can make anywhere paradise.

The Giant lives alone in a castle with the most beautiful garden. The garden has unparalleled flowers, the softest grass, and wonderful peach trees. Every day after school, the children come and play in the Giant's garden. They climb the trees, sing songs, and listen to the birds. They truly enjoy themselves in the garden.

Cold Selfishness

When the Giant returns from a seven-year visit to the Cornish ogre, he is very annoyed to find the children disturbing his garden: "My own garden is my own garden, any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." In selfish anger, the Giant builds a wall around his garden.

However, with the children gone from the garden, the flowers and trees refuse to bloom and the birds refuse to sing.

The Giant learns that his selfishness hurts not only himself, but the children as well.

While the rest of the world outside of the Giant's garden experiences Spring and Summer, Winter permanently sets in upon the garden. Spring refuses to visit because of the Giant's selfishness. The Snow and Frost arrive and soon invite Hail and the North Wind to join them.

Paradise Regained

The Giant is exceedingly disappointed and annoyed that Spring won't visit his garden. Yet, one special morning, the Giant wakes

and is overjoyed to see that Spring has returned to his garden! The little children have snuck into the garden through a hole in the wall and are playing among blossoming trees, green grass, and singing birds.

The Giant is touched by this beautiful scene. "How selfish I have been!" he says. "Now I know why the Spring would not come here."

Yet, the Giant is saddened to see that Winter still remains in a corner of the garden. There, a little boy walks around under an icy tree, crying because he's unable to reach the branches. Truly repentant of his selfish deeds, the Giant goes out to help the little boy.

Upon seeing the Giant, the children run away in terror, returning the garden to its icy state. The only child who doesn't run away is the little boy, who doesn't see the Giant through his tears.

The Giant lifts the boy and carefully places him in the tree. The tree immediately blooms, and birds begin singing. With utter gratitude and love, the little boy hugs the Giant's neck and kisses him. The Giant has found paradise.

Wilde shows us that, although the Giant thinks his selfishness benefits him, the Giant learns that his selfishness hurts not only him, but the children as well. He realizes that the Winter is the result of his own actions.

When we are selfish, keeping our gifts, talents, and possessions only for ourselves,



By simply helping a little boy climb a tree, the Giant obtains paradise. A 1902 illustration by Walter Crane

we bring frost and hail with us. We ruin the world around us. Yet, when we are selfless, sharing what we have, we can find paradise in our own garden.

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.



"Keats Listening to a Nightingale on Hampstead Heath," circa 1845, by Joseph Severn.

POETRY

A Call to Consciousness: John Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'

MARLENA FIGGE

So many things demand our attention in this fast-paced age that we're tempted to just passively watch rather than expend energy to actively observe, not just to see but to truly behold. John Keats confronted the temptation of this passivity in 1819 when he composed "Ode to a Nightingale," which would become one of the most famous poems in English literature.

Keats had just come inside from his garden in Hampstead after a few hours of listening to the nightingale's song. He carried a few scraps of paper scrawled over with the lines of the ode, a lyric poem written to praise its subject. Filled with grief over the recent death of his brother, he struggled against the urge to check out of reality and enjoy comfortable inactivity.

Keats presents us with a means of reconciling ourselves with a world of pains and sorrows.



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Instead, to appreciate the beauty around him, Keats fully engaged himself with the world. For most of us, birdsong would probably be a background noise, pleasant but hardly life-changing. For Keats, however, with his ability to not only see but behold, he turned the reality of a lovely birdsong into art.

His ode begins with a gaze turned inward as the speaker says, "A drowsy numbness pains/My sense." But he's roused to active contemplation of the world in spite of himself. Keats's nightingale commences its song in "full-throated ease," and the movement of the song prompts a movement within the listener.

We're drawn along with him into a reflection on mortality and the desperation for an escape from suffering. Keats presents us with a means of reconciling ourselves with a world of pains and sorrows, and he closes his poem with a question to leave the reader with a sense of freedom to act rather than just waiting for death.

Escape Plan

As much as we would love to enjoy eternal freedom, our activity sooner or later must draw to a close. Each organic motion signifies that a life is one step closer to its end. Not so with Keats's nightingale, which he views as a beautiful immortal being, free from mortal constraints. The speaker craves that same freedom, and he contemplates several ways to get it.

First, he turns to alcohol to sidestep the suffering in life. But no sooner has he settled upon drinking to "leave the world unseen" than his thoughts plummet once more to the world, where:

youth grows pale and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs.

The speaker then turns to poetry, hoping to fly to the nightingale's world "on the viewless wings of Poesy." For a moment, he believes himself to truly be in the faery land of the nightingale, but verses full of starlight and moonbeams clash with the reality that "here there is no light," and so the world of mortality bleeds through the pages of poetry.

At last, acknowledging that an exclusively joyful existence is impossible, Keats presents us with the principal dilemma of the poem: Would a painless oblivion be preferable to a life filled with both joy and sorrow? The speaker confesses that he has been "half in love with easy Death," but the drawback is that there's no enjoyment of beauty and freedom in oblivion. In this perception of death, we would simply cease to be, "to thy high requiem become a sod,"

insensible to pain and joy in what would be less than sleep.

The world of the nightingale grows increasingly distant. The bird soars out of reach until, finally, Keats gives us what G.K. Chesterton calls "the most potent piece of pure magic in English literature." Keats writes that the nightingale's song has "charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam/Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn," and with this, the nightingale's song fades. The speaker wakes from his reverie.

With this final depiction of the nightingale's world, Keats has so far distanced the bird from the world of humanity that it now seems a deity, an immortal being whose art not only charms different generations but also different worlds.

We're left face-to-face with our own world and our own mortality. Just as the nightingale has flown beyond the hearing of the speaker, so too the reader must now move beyond the bird's song. We can't remain stationary; we must embrace art so as to arrive at a new understanding of life.

Wake Up Call

Keats leaves the poem unresolved, closing with two questions at the departure of the nightingale:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

This isn't merely uncertainty at his state; it's a question of where to go from here.

He may not have found a way to rid life of suffering, but he can now prompt us to make a decision in favor of an active appreciation of beauty in life. Keats shows in the opening of the poem that perfect insensibility is no more possible for us than the nightingale's immortality. Even as he tries to block out all painful sensations, the speaker says:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk.

Life is inherently a movement and, if we can't escape suffering, we can allow beauty to move us so that, rather than passively waiting for death to come, we may approach it confidently, having engaged fully with the beauty life has to offer.

Marlena Figge received her M.A. in Italian Literature from Middlebury College in 2021 and graduated from the University of Dallas in 2020 with a B.A. in Italian and English. She currently has a teaching fellowship and teaches English at a high school in Italy.

BOOK REVIEW

A Remarkable Woman at a Remarkable Time

Cardinal Richelieu's niece takes her place in history

ANITA L. SHERMAN

I've reviewed several books in the past focused on inspiring and powerful women such as Florence Finch, a Filipina American who risked her life to help American prisoners of war in Manila during World War II, and Maryland's Virginia Hall who was a spy during that same war for the British and the Americans. And then there was the true story of Annie Wilkins who traveled on horseback across the United States in the 1950s. Finding and sharing these stories is not only eye-opening but uplifting.

Author Bronwen McShea introduces readers to another remarkable woman in "La Duchesse: The Life of Marie de Vignerot, Cardinal Richelieu's Forgotten Heiress Who Shaped the Fate of France." The life of Marie de Vignerot, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, has been brought to center stage in this meticulously researched narrative. She has been pulled from the pages of history and given new life, a life that reveals a woman of incredible fortitude, intelligence, devotion, and independence, who rises to prominence and uses her power in amazing ways.

From Rural Roots to Royalty

The year is 1620. The setting is the Loire Valley in France. It's here that readers will be introduced to a 16-year-old girl whose marriage was arranged to a 23-year-old nobleman whom she scarcely knew. Her angst was short-lived. By the time she turned 18, she was a widow.

Her thoughts and plans at this time in her life were to join the nuns at the nearby Carmelite convent.

However, she had a very influential and powerful uncle: Cardinal Richelieu, who had other aspirations for his favorite niece. One



A portrait of Marie de Vignerot, circa 1633–40, by Philippe de Champaigne. Labirinto della Masone (Parma).

of those was for her to marry another aristocratic suitor of his choosing. He had several in mind: one who could advance and expand his ever-growing empire of influence with the church and the king.

Marie was devoted to Richelieu, and was also fiercely independent, intelligent, and a ready student. Under his tutelage, she was introduced to France's high society, and she learned quickly how to cultivate connections. She was politically astute, and often acted as an able informant when she learned of conspiracies against her uncle. He had a lot of enemies.

The world of the 17th-century French monarchy has its own unique and often strange terrain. McShea takes readers right there as if she were guiding you through each room of their palatial surroundings pointing out the who's who in each setting. There are many dukes, ladies, princes, and

would-be heirs to the throne.

Cardinal Richelieu was certainly not alone in terms of public scrutiny. Marie fell victim to vicious rumors about her relationship with her uncle. She stood strong and remained loyal, discreet, and steadfast in her duties and responsibilities, which continued to grow as her uncle placed more administrative tasks on her as well as exposing her to opportunities for her own enlightenment and growth.

Making Her Mark

She flourished and created regular gatherings for artists, poets, musicians, and writers. While a protégé herself, she cultivated others as the years passed, particularly identifying and promoting the talents of the children of family and friends.

The life of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon has been brought to center stage in this meticulously researched narrative.

Marie never married again and didn't have any children of her own. With Richelieu as prime minister, she had a unique vantage point to understand the synergy of public and private funds, and how institutions could be helped or hindered. Her authority was unrivaled, particularly for a woman at that time.

She became very ambitious about the good that she could do for the church and for France. She created convents for aspiring nuns. She helped those aspiring to the priesthood.

She was a literary patroness. She helped authors—men and women—to get their works published.

Eventually, her reach extended beyond France and Europe to Asia and the Americas.

She established a hospital for Native Americans in the Saint Lawrence River Valley in Quebec. They were suffering from a smallpox epidemic and other diseases.

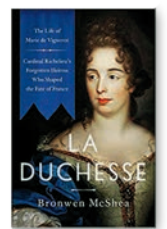
She held the key to many locked doors in the political life of France. She helped to shape foreign policy. She influenced culture and was particularly benevolent to the poor.

When Cardinal Richelieu died in 1642, his fortunes and holdings were vast. There were many waiting in the wings to lay claim to his wealth, but it's his niece, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and Peer of France, to whom he bequeathed everything, including priceless pieces of art and sculpture.

As she grieved his loss, she ascended to a position of even more prominence and power.

This book is long, a tome for sure. Readers will meet hundreds of characters through the pages, but at the center is a caring and complex woman whose compelling story is now being brought to life. McShea is Marie de Vignerot's champion. She stands by her side allowing her spirit to shine in this brilliant and well-written biography.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. She can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com



'LA DUCHESSE: THE LIFE OF MARIE DE VIGNEROT, CARDINAL RICHELIEU'S FORGOTTEN HEIRESS WHO SHAPED THE FATE OF FRANCE' By Bronwen McShea Pegasus Books March 7, 2023 Hardcover 480 pages

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Jon Voight's Teach-in on Learning and Living

by RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Director Martin Ritt's intimate film draws from "The Water is Wide," Georgia-born Pat Conroy's memoir about his experiences as a school teacher on the tiny island of Yamacraw, South Carolina.

Descendants of poor black slaves and their families inhabit Yamacraw. The island school is a shack, packed with illiterate black kids from ages 10 to 13 who have been cut off from the world since infancy. They struggle to pronounce English words and names, and end up calling Conroy "Conrack."

Conrack (Jon Voight) cares. You see it from the opening shot. Just out of bed in the early morning, eyes barely open, he stumbles through his room, feeding his fish in a tank, his bird in a cage, his plant near a window.

But his exuberance isn't prepared for sneering hostility from the black school principal, Mrs. Scott (Madge Sinclair). Her approach to teaching is through an iron hand, and she orders a bewildered Conrack to follow suit, an order that he gleefully defies. It doesn't help that he's a foreigner several times over: tall, white, young, blond, generous, and smiling.

On his first day, Conrack watches kids file in, unkempt, sullen, and famished perhaps from labor before and after school, running homes and caring for younger kids alongside parents or other adults. No less sullen, Mrs. Scott makes a point of introducing him merely as a replacement teacher, while reminding the kids that they're dimwitted and lazy and won't ever get ahead without what she sees as the drudgery of learning.

As Conrack takes charge of class, he's shocked. The kids are smart, eager, and willing to work at their learning. What's missing is teaching. Not quality teaching, but any teaching at all: reading, math, writing, speaking. Unfazed, he plunges in to teach far more than their impoverished curriculum will allow.

The kids brighten at his sincerity and his intent, never mind his methods, which are as unorthodox and comic as they are varied. Perched on a tree branch with apples in hand, he preaches Newton, Kepler, and the laws of gravity. Ball in hand, he coaches them to

Voight burns bright like a flame, radiating tenacity and tenderness.

'Conrack'

Director: Martin Ritt

Starring: Jon Voight, Madge Sinclair, Tina Andrews, Paul Winfield

MPAA Rating: PG

Running Time: 1 hour, 46 minutes

Release Date: March 27, 1974

★★★★☆



Conrack (Jon Voight) uses unconventional methods to teach, in "Conrack."

separate playing around from sport. When he discovers that few, if any, on the island know how to swim, he teaches the kids to master and enjoy swimming.

The kids lap it up: new lands, new people, new languages, entire worlds of the arts and sciences hidden from them until now. They soak in his sense of urgency, in learning and living as much as they can, and having fun while at it. They're transfixed as he reads lines from Robert Herrick's poem: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,/ Old Time is still a-flying;/ And this same flower that smiles today/ Tomorrow will be dying."

The Power of One

Even in sunset shots Voight burns bright like a flame, radiating tenacity and tenderness.

Ritt picks the rarest of rare true stories and brings it to life. He excels in using the character of 13-year-old Mary (Tina Andrews) to personalize the children. Scenes wherein she shares her ambitions and fears with Conrack are the most authentic. The other children remain one-dimensional, a hazy collective rather than distinct individuals with their own interiority. Ritt could have fleshed out a few more child-characters as sensitively as he did Mary's.

Sure, you can watch Ritt's film through the obvious prism of color and class. You'll see cynical adults, black and white, too steeped in harsh reality to naively dream that children can shape their own futures, free of society's shackles, if only they put their minds

to it. You'll also see Conrack as one of those adults swimming against this tide with the hopeful, heroic, even arrogant belief that things can—and will—change.

To cynics, Conrack's offbeat and often outdoor pedagogy is an affront to children, whose hope will be shaken out of them soon enough. Why bother filling their heads with exciting images and sounds of an equitable world they'll never see, never enter, never experience?

Yet Jon Voight is so personable that he persuades you to watch the film through Conrack's prism of possibilities. Conrack feels what any teacher feels standing before a classroom of students: near limitless freedom to open minds, elevate thoughts, and stir emotions. And near infinite power to do the opposite. A gift by any stretch.

Conrack responds to that gift with gratitude, honesty, humility, and responsibility. He isn't about changing the country with some grand social-reform movement. He's about changing it one child at a time. He isn't telling his visibly underprivileged students that the world's a cold, hard place that'll knock you down any chance it gets. He's saying to nurture in yourself the best heart, mind, and spirit that you can, and you'll at least give yourself a fighting chance.

That's more than most teachers manage. And it'll do.

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