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animals and Indians—mocks artificial hierarchies. “Wilderness,” Seelye concludes, “is more infectious than law and order, [drawing] upon deep, dark springs in the human psyche.”

Sargent's Dream

“John Singer Sargent’s ‘Gift’ and His Early Critics” by Trevor J. Fairbrother, in *Arts Magazine* (Feb. 1987), 23 East 26th St., New York, N.Y. 10010.

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), the most popular high society portraitist of the late 19th century, was no rebel. His technical brilliance, says Fairbrother, an *Arts Magazine* associate editor, combined with restrained experimentation to ensure Sargent’s rapid success.

In 1879, the prestigious Paris Salon awarded Sargent, then 23, a prize, passing over works by Manet and Renoir. His “progressive moderate” style was deemed “impressionistic without transgressing the limits set by the jurors.” To offset any unconventional aspects of his portraits, Sargent also submitted a series of “picturesque” crowd-pleasers featuring beautiful women in exotic settings.

Yet, over the next four years, Sargent’s experiments pushed Salon judges. Drawing inspiration for compositions from Velázquez, Goya, and Franz Hals, Sargent painted with a “marked flourish of the brush and



John Singer Sargent's 1903 painting, Mrs. Fiske Warren and her Daughter Rachel, displays the classic society portrait style that earned him high commissions. At this stage of his career, Sargent increasingly painted watercolors, which provided him with greater satisfaction than the more lucrative portraits in oil.

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palette knife" in the Impressionist manner. In 1882 his *El Jaleo*—a boldly asymmetrical scene of Spanish dancers with contorted faces painted in clear tribute to Goya—was seen by critics as a *tour de force*.

Sargent's 1884 portrait of Madame Pierre Gautreau proved more controversial. In the portrait, one fallen shoulder strap provocatively emphasizes the whiteness of the lady's powdered shoulders above her black, low-cut bodice. The show's critics, who had acclaimed Le Brun's *Bacchante* (a nude woman lolling on the grass in a mythical setting), dubbed this fallen shoulder strap of a known society matron "indecent." Against the advice of his friends, Sargent retouched the painting.

After moving to London, Sargent concentrated on painting studio portraits of British high society. By the 1910s, critics on both sides of the Atlantic had labeled him "merely a commercial portrait painter" whose great "manual dexterity [and] dazzling brushwork" served only to record "mundane elegance." Sargent himself may have agreed, for in his later years he increasingly devoted himself to experimenting with charcoal drawings and watercolor sketches.

Yet Sargent's 1917 uncommercial *Nude Study of Thomas E. McKeller* (McKeller was a young Negro model) shows all his old, "passionate manipulation of pigment" of earlier portraits in oils. And, far from banal, his paintings of society women—as Henry James noted—often manage to convey "the beauty that resides in exceeding fineness."

Heroes' Return

"Of Mermaids and Magnificence" by John R. Silber, in *Reason* (May 1987), 2716 Ocean Park Blvd., Ste. 1062, Santa Monica, Calif. 90405.

Marxists such as playwright Bertolt Brecht argue that heroism is an antique aristocratic emotion obsolete in the modern world. "Unhappy the land that needs heroes," Brecht wrote in his play *The Life of Galileo*.

Silber, president of Boston University, believes the study of heroes is as vital to modern education as it was to U.S. schools in the 19th century. Heroes are important because their all-consuming passions—the rage of Achilles, the nobility of Ivanhoe, the steadfastness of Horatio—can be used as models from which students can derive codes of conduct. By reading King David's lament on the death of his brother Jonathan ("Very pleasant hast thou been unto me/Thy love to me was wonderful"), students can learn how to grieve at the loss of a close friend or relative.

Heroic models need come not only from antiquity. Thomas Jefferson is heroic not just for his writing of the Declaration of Independence, but also for his delight in new ideas. Sam Houston inspires Americans not only for his courage at the Alamo, but also for his refusal to swear an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy—a decision that resulted in his impeachment in 1861 as governor of Texas.

Villains such as Iago, Tamerlane the Great, and Satan in *Paradise Lost* are incomplete heroes because of their self-centeredness and arrogance. Their grand passions, however perverse, differentiate villains from "antiheroes" such as T. S. Eliot's character J. Alfred Prufrock, who vows that while others can play Hamlet, he will merely be "an attendant lord,