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The Qipao
A stylish embodiment
of Chinese tradition
and grace... **8**





An Ancient Chinese Story

The Mountain Deity and His Guard Wolf

ANONYMOUS

Long ago, Phoenix Mountain in Shandong Province was home to a secluded spiritual follower and his guard wolf. Through his Buddhist cultivation, the spiritual follower had already become a mountain deity. The two lived in a stone house inside a large cave in the mountain. The mountain deity was deeply fond of his wolf.

Every day, the mountain deity watched over the mountain and read Buddhist scriptures, while his guard wolf paid careful attention to him as he worshipped the Buddha and chanted the scriptures.

The wolf knew it could not undertake spiritual cultivation because it did not have a human body. However, it still memorized the scriptures by heart and was determined not to kill any more humans but rather to do good deeds. It did so in hopes of earning enough "de" (virtue) to obtain a human body in its next life, so that it would have the opportunity to cultivate and attain Buddhahood.

The Temple Host and the Cub

One morning, the hungry wolf asked the mountain deity for food. The mountain deity said: "Go to the dried river at noon today. There will be something for you to eat."

The wolf went to the dried river at noon and saw a blind man walking with a bamboo pole. In its hunger, it ran over and pushed the blind man to the ground.

The blind man pleaded with the wolf, saying: "Please be kind to me. I have an elderly mother at home waiting for me to bring her food. If you eat me, my poor mother will die of hunger. Please don't eat me."

Upon hearing that, the wolf could not bear to eat the blind man. It turned away and went to a nearby village. After a great deal of effort, it found a few chicken bones. Then it went back to the cave, still hungry.

Two weeks later, the wolf was extremely hungry again. It again went to the mountain deity to ask for food. The mountain

deity told his wolf, "Go to that dried river again at noon today. You will find food there."

It was snowing and freezing at noon. The wolf went to the dried river and saw an old lady carrying a baby in her arms. In its hunger, it ran over, pushed the old lady down, and snatched the baby in its mouth.

The wolf was just starting to run away when the old lady knelt down on the ground and pleaded: "Please be kind. He is the only grandson in my family. If you eat him, our family lineage will cease. Please don't eat him."

After hearing the old lady's plea, the wolf no longer had an appetite. It put the baby down and went to a nearby village to look for food. Snow blanketed everything, and it hunted for a long time without finding any food. Hungry and cold, the wolf dragged its tired body back to the cave.

After that, the weak wolf did not go out anymore and soon died of hunger.



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The wolf was determined not to kill any more humans but rather to do good deeds.

Please Be Kind

low wolf cub in a litter of cubs on Phoenix Mountain. It started out growing well on its mother's milk. However, when its mother stopped nursing, it had great difficulty getting enough food to eat, since it had a clear idea of its previous life and did not want to kill. So the cub mainly ate leftovers from the other cubs and often went hungry.

Cultivating Buddhahood

The cub knew that people left food and fruit at Phoenix Temple, and it frequently went to the temple to find food and fruit to eat.

One day, while the cub was at the temple stealing fruit, the host of Phoenix Temple entered the hall. Upon seeing the cub, the host exclaimed in surprise: "Buddha Amitabha!" and welcomed the cub, saying, "Good, good, very good!"

The yellow cub looked at the host and

knew right away that he was the guard wolf in their previous lives.

The mountain deity had become a wolf, and the wolf had become the temple host.

Feeling great shame, the cub ran out of the temple to the other side of the mountain. It no longer wanted to live. Its only wish was to have a human body again so that it could cultivate Buddhahood.

Thus, the cub rammed itself into a big rock, bounced off the rock, and fell to its death in the valley.

This story illustrates how precious a human body is for a spiritual cultivator. Lifetime after lifetime, many people aspire to attain Buddhahood, but few succeed.

Translated by Dora Li into English, this story is reprinted with permission from the book "Treasured Tales of China," Vol. 1, available on Amazon.



Odysseus's next ordeal starts on the island of Aeolus. An etching from "The Contest of the Seasons," depicting the Rock of Aeolus, 1652, by Stefano della Bella. Bequest of Phyllis Massar, 2011, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ODYSSEUS AND THE ENNEAGRAM

FINDING THE TRUE SELF Part 4

The Sin of Gluttony

JAMES SALE

In this multipart series, "Finding the True Self," we will discuss nine types of personal challenges or disorders: the deadly sin of Sloth, as represented by the Lotus-Eaters, and the deadly sin of Lust (for power), as exemplified by the Cyclops.

These personality types, Eight and Nine on the Enneagram typology, which we discussed in Part 1, have within them a central flaw that requires specific and differing actions to overcome.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that as Odysseus escapes—by the skin of his teeth—from the island of the Cyclops, his next challenge in meeting the Seven personality type is different yet again, and requires even more ingenuity and resourcefulness.

As a reminder, Sevens are joyful, optimistic, and often inspiring people, who seek positive experiences and are always propelling themselves forward to find the next one.

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A NEWSPAPER GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD READ

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HISTORY

Climbing Mount Durant

The rewards of reading 'The Story of Civilization'

JEFF MINICK

Eleven volumes in all. Total length: approximately 22 inches. Width per volume: 6 3/4 inches. Height per volume: 10 inches. Weight of volumes combined: 36.6 pounds. Number of pages: 8,945. Number of words: somewhere around 4,000,000. Such are the dimensions of Will and Ariel Durant's "The Story of Civilization," published between 1935 and 1975.

For 20 years, "The Story of Civilization" sat on my shelves. Three times I boxed up this Himalaya of History and moved it with my other belongings to a new home. When I was teaching history to homeschooled students, I might open one of these volumes to seek out a pertinent person or event, and take some notes for class, but otherwise there they squatted, forlorn and ignored, good only for decoration and for gathering dust.

In December of 2017, due to a variety of circumstances, I decided to tackle Mount Durant. For my New Year's resolution, I vowed to read my way through this massive work within one year's time. I decided to approach the books as I would a novel—it is, after all, the "story" of civilization—rather than as a textbook, and would set aside half an hour or so every day and climb the mountain.

I should add that while I can be the soul of determination in my daily work and my commitments to others, I generally fail at keeping special resolutions. I have broken Lenten vows on the same day as making them. I have composed resolutions on New Year's Eve and cast them aside before the next morning's sunlight brightened the window.

For 20 years, 'The Story of Civilization' sat on my shelves.

The most amusing of these broken promises occurred one evening in March when my youngest son, then a teenager, asked me what I had given up for Lent. "I'm trying to stop complaining," I said. "But it's hard. I mean, really tough. I'm not sure I can do it."

He burst out laughing. "I think you just broke your vow."

He was right. I was complaining about complaining.

Tackling "The Story of Civilization" ended differently. Before the year was out, I had finished the last page of the last volume. For once, I had fulfilled a New Year's resolution.

The Pleasures Within
And that planting of the flag on Mount Durant brought rewards.

First was the pleasure I found in Durant's prose. (After Volume VI, his wife Ariel shares credit along with Will as co-author.) Like Churchill and some other writers of that generation, Durant is a stylistic descendant of Edward Gibbon. His formal, rolling sentences and his command of the English language might put off some readers, but I found his prose enveloping and entertaining.

In part, the entertainment came via another of Durant's charms, namely his epigrammatic wit. Here are just two examples from the volume "The Age of Louis XIV":

She had an attentive husband but a bewitching voice; Racine eluded the one and surrendered to the other.

Durant writes here of an actress, Marie Champmesle, who became Racine's mistress for a time.

In the portraits that have come down to us these ladies seem a bit ponderous, overflowing their corsages; but apparently the men of that time liked an adipose warmth in their amours.

Though Will and Ariel leaned left in their politics, they brought history into print as they believed it had occurred, not as they wished it to be. Such was his success that Will Durant's friends and readers complained they could not tell whether he was a liberal or conservative, a confusion that apparently pleased Durant. Here, for

example, is a judgment from "Our Oriental Heritage" that must have produced much head-scratching among Durant's progressive crowd:

The intellectual classes abandon the ancient theology and—after some hesitations—the moral code allied with it; literature and philosophy become anticlerical. The movement of liberation rises to an exuberant worship of reason, and falls to a paralyzing disillusionment with every dogma and every idea. Conduct, deprived of its religious supports, deteriorates into epicurean chaos; and life itself, shorn of consoling faith, becomes a burden alike to conscious poverty and to weary wealth. In the end a society and its religion tend to fall together, like body and soul, in a harmonious death. Meanwhile among the oppressed another myth arises, gives new form to human hope, new courage to human effort, and after centuries of chaos builds another civilization.

Finally, a daily dose of history reminded me of one of the many gifts of Clio, the muse of history: perspective.

In 2018, Donald Trump was

our president, and what some observers called Trump Derangement Syndrome (TDS) had reached its peak. In Washington, commentators and politicians waged a war of hysteria and accusations rarely witnessed in our national politics. Not even the Watergate scandal had seen such a heavy barrage of bitter boast. Other commentators inflated issues like toxic masculinity and environmental ruin into crises of the first magnitude.

According to some, we were living on the brink of disaster and in the worst of times. Really?

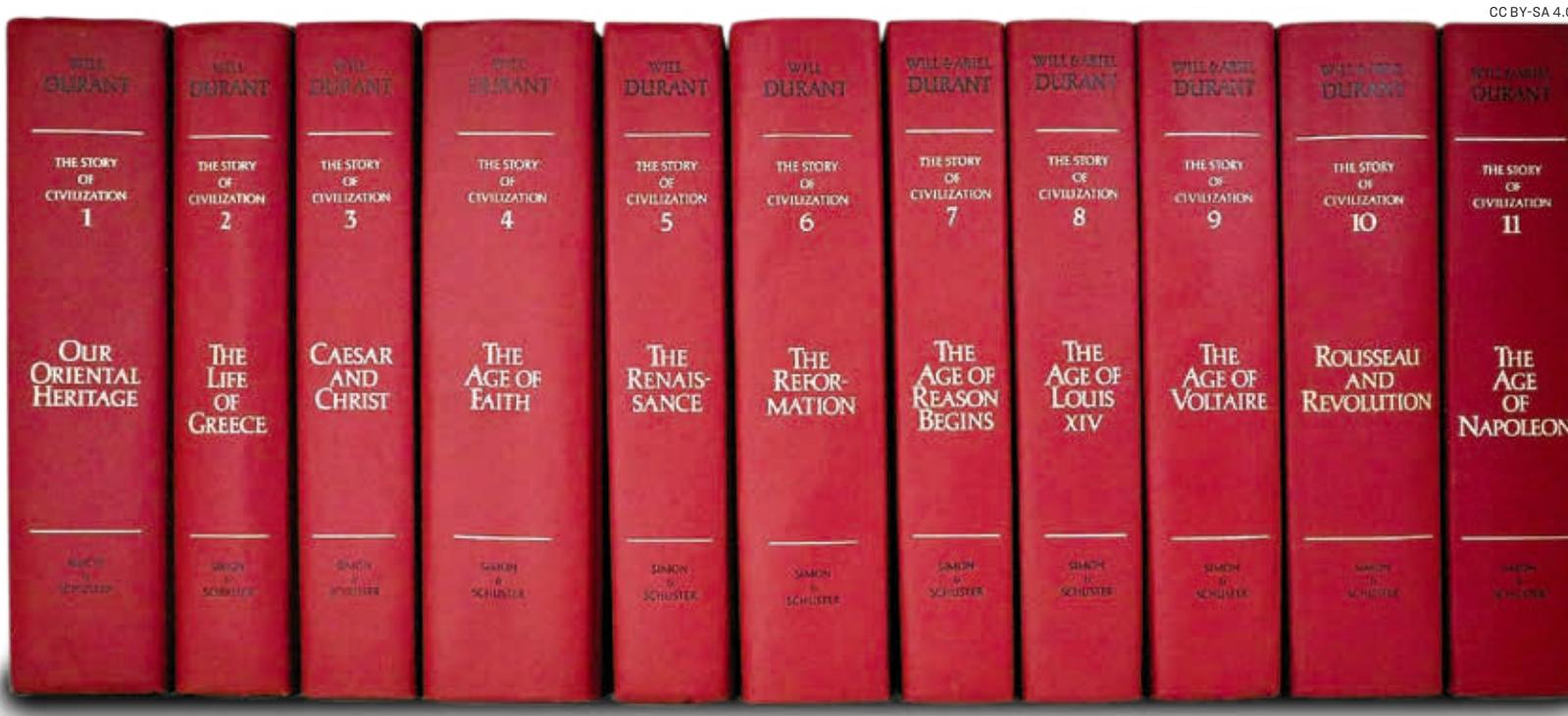
"The Story of Civilization" is crammed with real debacles and horrendous catastrophes. Here we can visit Germany during the Thirty Years War, when hundreds of thousands of civilians were murdered or raped, when starvation was so rampant that "In Alsace hanged offenders were torn from the gallows to be eagerly devoured." We can shamble through the streets of Paris or London in the early 18th century, when the bulk of the population lived in dire poverty, diseases now eradicated or treatable bore off citizens by the battalions, the water was often non-potable, and the streets were a stew of mud, horse dung, and garbage.

My takeaway from "The Story of Civilization": When we neglect the past, we are prisoners of the present and the playthings of the future. When we delve into the triumphs and calamities of our ancestors, we deepen our humanity and bring perspective to our present difficulties.

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, North Carolina. Today he lives and writes in Front Royal, Virginia. See [jeffminick.com](#) to follow his blog.



Will Durant's humor comes across when describing the times of Louis XIV. Portrait of Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigault.



(Top)
The 11-volume set of Will and Ariel Durant's "The Story of Civilization."

(Above)
History reminds us that times have been a lot worse than they are now. "Soldiers Plundering a Farm During the Thirty Years' War" by Sebastian Vrancx.

(Right)
Will and Ariel Durant in the 1950s.
Will Durant Foundation.



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ODYSSEUS AND THE ENNEAGRAM

FINDING THE TRUE SELF Part 4

The Sin of Gluttony

Continued from Page 3

But their deadly sin is Gluttony, or excess, and at their worst, they can be irresponsible and shallow.

The Island of Aeolus

From the island of the Cyclops, Odysseus and his crew arrive at the Aeolian island. Aeolus, the king, is "beloved by the gods who never die." His island, with its huge ramparts of "indestructible bronze" on sheer rock cliffs shooting up from sea to sky, is a "great floating island." Its location, therefore, is not fixed, for it floats wherever its king wishes it to go.

Still, it is mighty impressive and seemingly indestructible. It can maneuver itself because the king has been given control of all the winds by Zeus himself.

Aeolus had six sons and six daughters, and the daughters were married to his sons, and they, along with he and his wife, feasted continually: "All day long the halls breathe the savor of roasted meats," and there is the sound of the "low moan of blowing pipes."

Indeed, the world of the Seven is a kind of perpetual paradise with a harmony and completeness totally unlike the Cyclop's island.

Additionally, unlike the Cyclops who are isolated and hostile, Aeolus is curious, generous, and open. He cannot wait to entertain Odysseus, to hear his tale, and to help him.

What could be wrong with all this? Why is this a problem, and how does it adversely affect Odysseus? First, we might be slightly taken aback by the incestuous nature of the six sons marrying the six daughters: an incest that suggests a closed system, which does not allow for any outsider to truly interfere or disturb their reveling.

Also, we might reflect that after Odysseus escapes from the Cyclops, the monster prays to his father, the sea god Poseidon. The prayer puts our hero at odds with the element of water, or in some way the subconscious and its emotions with all their turbulence that Odysseus has to overcome—indeed, that each of us has to overcome in our own lives.

But now, Odysseus meets the wind—the element of air, completely

An etching of the cavern of Aeolus, a cave with wind gods blowing on either side of Aeolus, who sits enthroned at center. Set design from "Il Pomo D'Oro," 1668, by Mathäus Küsel. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

and they can even see "men tending fires." The soul is virtually home and dry.

Interestingly, the element of wind has aided them in getting so far, but now specks of fire appear. Fire often represents new being coming into existence, as in the Phoenix rising from the burning ashes. The Greek Heraclitus imagined the cosmos as being mainly composed of a "fiery ether" and that the soul too was similarly constituted.

Odysseus is so close to being rejoined with his wife, Penelope, his true soul, and thus becoming integrated, and a "new" man. So close.

Odysseus as a Seven

But, Odysseus is also tired; he has worked amazingly hard. He falls

asleep. Tiredness is the reason given for his sleep, or perhaps more accurately, complete exhaustion. But part of this weariness is not just from the exertions he has made, but also from the fact that there was "no letup, never trusting the ropes to any other mate."

This is a form of workaholism. Odysseus, in following the advice of Aeolus, has taken on the Seven's characteristics—the bad ones. The mind drives the body, but the emotions are no longer in sync; it's a sure-fire sign of imminent disintegration. This is really a Seven at the end of his tether. He has relied on big ideas and his own resourcefulness to the exclusion of all else and all others, and this proves his undoing.

The mind can only take us so far, for if the emotional springs from which we derive our energy are depleted, we are doomed to fail.

And so, as he sleeps, gluttony reasserts itself. His men, or crew "members," get to thinking that Odysseus is withholding treasure from them in the magic sack that controls—holds back—the adverse winds.

As soon as they open it—woosh!—a violent storm breaks out, which drives them all the way back to Aeolia. They have achieved nothing, in other words.

Odysseus must then go back, cap in hand, to Aeolus to ask for his help a second time. However, this time

Aeolus is no longer the warm and welcoming friend. On the contrary, he thinks Odysseus is cursed by the gods and demands that he leave.

This reaction is classic Seven behavior: Aeolus has moved on; consistency of approach or attitude is of no concern to him. Like the winds themselves, he blows the way he wants at any given moment.

Yes, Sevens can provide a vision of the way home, and it can be very compelling, but the practicalities are not so important to them, and by the time things have worked out badly, Sevens have moved on to the next thing. (Sound like the careers of certain visionary entrepreneurs

and corporate leaders? Well, there are a lot of them out there!)

Thus, Odysseus is forced to leave Aeolia with nothing, and all he has for his labor is the initial excitement and feasting, and then mere empty wind.

The Seven's eternal optimism and intellectual visions easily prove a trap for the unwary, and even for the man of many stratagems, Odysseus himself.

Don't Take Shortcuts

This personality's challenge, then, is not so overtly threatening as encountering an Eight, and it requires not so much a decisive act of will (as with the Lotus-Eaters), but rather

an ability to see beyond appearances, and a reluctance to overcommit to bright ideas that promise a shortcut.

Sevens are ideas people, and following their exact advice might get one permanently lost in an ocean of effort that ends up nowhere. Ask before investing in a Seven's idea: What are the possible downsides?

Odysseus leaves Aeolia. "Six whole days we rowed, six nights, nonstop. On the seventh day we raised the Laestrygonian land." After six days, they reach the

Six personality type—the topic of Part 5 in this series. It proves to be, perhaps, even more terrifying than encountering the Cyclops.

This multipart series, "Finding the True Self," will now appear every week.

James Sale is a poet and businessman whose company, Motivation Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. James will be appearing in New York to do talks and poetry readings for The Society of Classical Poets on June 17, 2019, at Bryant Park and The Princeton Club. To meet James and for more information, go to http://bit.ly/Poetry_and_Culture



The winds have escaped and returned Odysseus's ship to Aeolia. An etching of "Ulysses and Aeolus in the Cave of the Winds." Circa 1600–1605, by Stradanus. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.



"Aeolus Giving the Winds to Odysseus," by Isaac Moillon (1614–1673). Design for a tapestry. Musée de Tessé.



▲ A mosaic depicting Aeolus in Volubilis, Morocco.

► An etching of Aeolus giving Odysseus the bag of winds, circa 1632, by Theodor van Thulden. From "The Labors of Ulysses." Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.



V L Y SSE aborde en Eolie, & sy raffrechit durant quelque temps, apres lequel Eole Roy de cette Ille le remet dans son nauire, & luy fait present d'un cuir de bœuf, où il enferme les vents. Cette fable est un exemple de la générosité des grands Princes, qui ne pensent faire d'avantage pour leurs semblables, que de leur donner librement les choses qui dépendent de leur Empire.

15 T.V.T.

The Seven's eternal optimism and intellectual visions easily prove a trap for the unwary.



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CRAFTSMANSHIP

THE QIPAO

A stylish embodiment of Chinese tradition and grace

FENZHI ZHANG

The qipao's sleek and elegant form is an image widely associated with Chinese style and aesthetic. And beyond that, this traditional dress serves as a physical record of the historic and cultural changes during China's 20th century. The qipao represents a rich cultural heritage and a sophisticated, intricate artistic custom.

The Birth of an Iconic Garment

The origins of the qipao lie in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), when China was under the rule of the Manchus, an ethnic group that brought their own distinctive customs and clothing to the imperial court. For women, this was a long dress with a straight, relaxed fit that flared slightly at

A qipao's adornments, which consist of traditional Chinese elements, are especially exquisite.



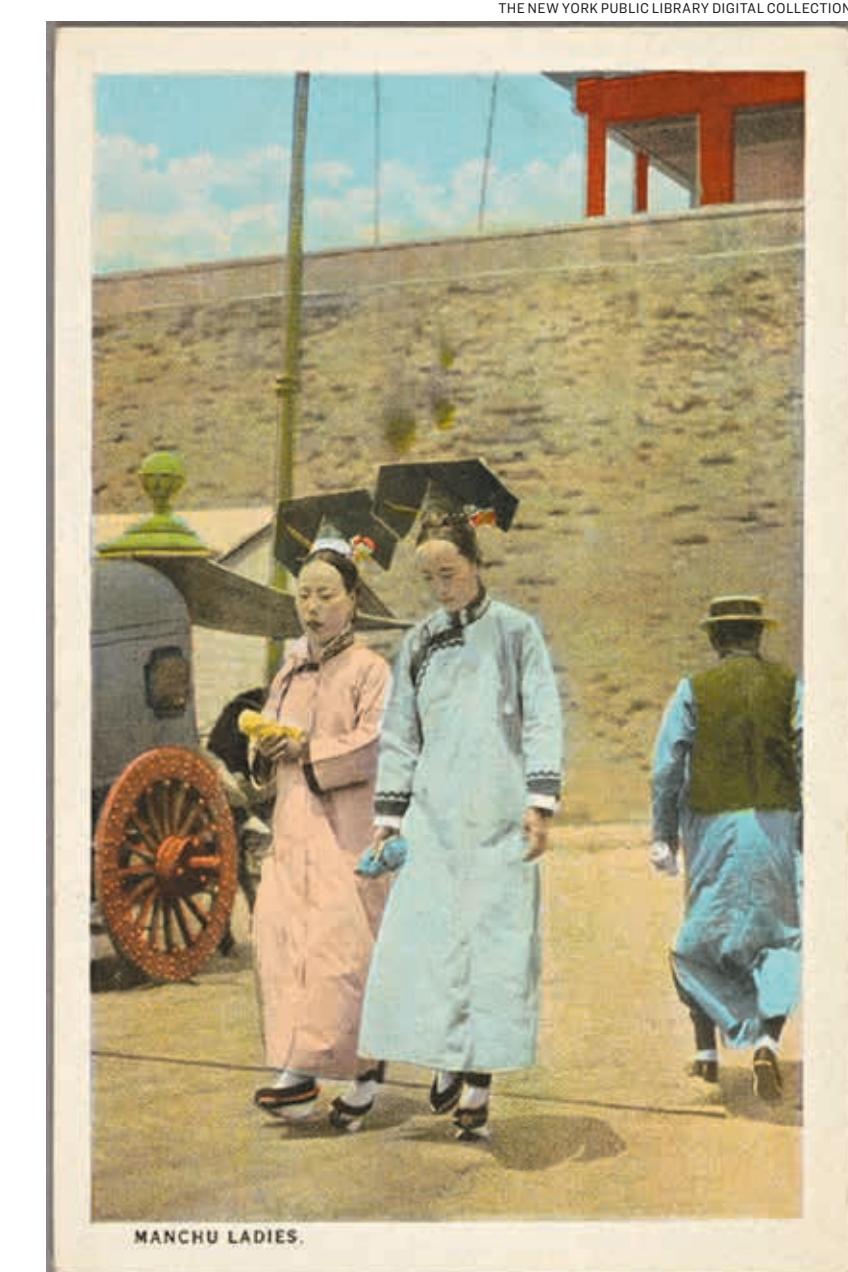
(Above) The last imperial couple of China, the emperor Puyi with the empress Wan Rong. Wan Rong, who received a Western-style embroidered qipao, is wearing a short-sleeve embroidered qipao. Rumor says she asked her personal tailor to redesign the traditional Qing Dynasty qipao using Western techniques.

(Right) Two Manchurian women in Qing Dynasty-style qipaos.

the hem. This dress was the first ancestor of the qipao.

Over time, these Manchu-style dresses were influenced by elements of Han fashion. And in the 20th century, as Western learning grew in popularity in post-imperial China, the qipao began to move away from its long and relaxed fit. At the request of wealthy, educated, and fashion-forward young women, private Chinese tailors began to apply Western tailoring techniques, such as chest and waist darts and shoulder seams, to the loose-fitting qipao, giving it a flattering fitted silhouette.

As tailors continued to incorporate more elements of Western fashion into the qipao throughout the 1930s, the dress began to settle into the style we are familiar with today.



MANCHE LADIES.



Anna May Wong, the first Asian-American Hollywood actress, in a qipao featuring a contrasting border on the lapel, collar, sleeves, slit, and hem.

A Fashion Phenomenon
In the 30+ years of the Republic of China (1912–1949), ideas were freely exchanged between East and West. This led to a blending of tradition and modernity and the emergence of many talented scholars and great artists.

This dynamic period was documented in *The Young Companion*, one of the most widely distributed and most influential Chinese magazines at the time. In the spring of 1926, *The Young Companion* was first published in the international and fashion-forward city of Shanghai. The covers of *The Young Companion*, which often featured female actresses and celebrities wearing various styles of qipao, witnessed the ebb and flow of changing Chinese tastes and fashion ideals.



(Left) Indonesian actress Aminah Cendrakasih in 1959. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the qipao was popularized by celebrities all around the world. Tati Photo Studios, Jakarta.

(Below) Six of China's seven most renowned female singers of the 1940s. At this point, the qipao featured a wide range of different styles and patterns.



(Left) The cover of the December 1934 issue of *The Young Companion* featuring actress Ruan Lingyu in an ankle-length, green-and-yellow checkered qipao with a high collar, short sleeves, and a rolled border. The border, a feature unique to the qipao, followed the dress along its collar, sleeves, slit, and hem, and, as it was difficult to make, it marked a qipao's quality.



Meticulous Detail

From measuring and sewing to decoration and embellishment, hand-making a qipao takes care and attention to detail. In particular, the qipao's adornments, which consist of traditional Chinese elements, are especially exquisite and visually stunning, giving the dress a unique grace and charm.

The fasteners that adorn qipao are unique to Chinese apparel and are known for their complex construction, elegant design, and ease of use. Handmade fasteners add refinement and grace to a qipao.

Another unique feature of the qipao is its various styles of borders, which follow the qipao around its collar, sleeves, slit, and hem. Some of the most popular styles are the contrasting border and rolled border, which is shaped like a thin round cord.

The surface of the qipao is embellished with exquisite, hand-sewn embroidery of different natural images. They can be displayed all along the dress, as a small detail, or even within a contrasting border.

Adorned with such intricate details, the qipao is a beautiful and enduring classic, uniting Western fashion techniques with a traditional Chinese aesthetic.

Written by Fenzhi Zhang and translated into English by Jenny Zhi, this article is republished with permission from *Elite Lifestyle Magazine*.



Traditional Chinese embroidery often graces the qipao.



Modern versions of the qipao grace the runway during the Heaven Gaia show of Paris Fashion Week in October 2016. Designer Ying Xiong's elaborate designs spotlighted traditional Chinese culture.



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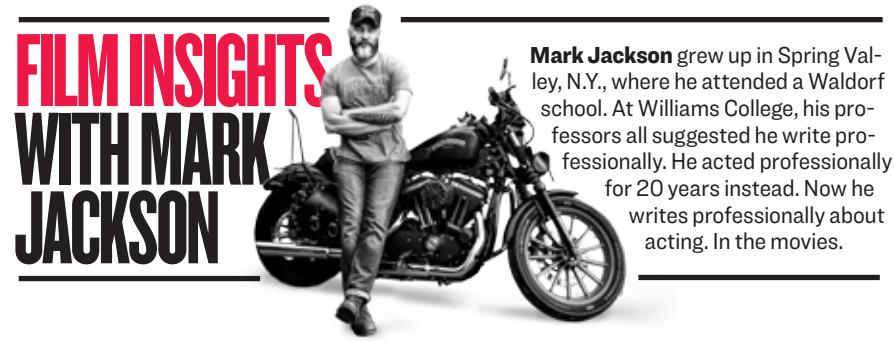


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'The Lord of the Rings' Fandom Will Not be Particularly Happy

▼ (L-R) Anthony Boyle, Tom Glynn-Carney, Patrick Gibson, and Nicholas Hoult in the film "Tolkien."



MARK JACKSON

Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

think bigger. Ultimately, Father Morgan frowns upon their budding romance, since Tolkien is, after all, his charge, and he wants only the best for him, including for Tolkien to be accepted to Oxford. The anguish of John and Edith's parting is the strongest thing in the movie. Conversely, so is their reuniting.

Four Friends, Four Hobbits It should come as no surprise that young Tolkien has four friends who form a fellowship. Which means lots of Hogwarts-type goofing off (of the posh, British, rugby-playing sort), including drinking, dares to ask a pub waitress on a date, standing up to strict dads, a la the character Cameron in "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," and so on.

A nice touch is of the alcohol-besotted Tolkien lying on the grass in an Oxford quad, spouting per his passionate love of philology, his made-up language.

And the next day, a chance encounter with Oxford's top linguistics professor (Derek Jacobi), who remarks he happened to hear some odd language in the middle of the night, floating up to his window, which contained traces of Finnish. Needless to say, John Ronald knows who he wants to study with.

Just Doesn't Cut It

So imagine my disappointment in finding that this new J.R.R. Tolkien biopic is rather boring. It basically recounts the youth of Tolkien (played by Harry Gilby) from around 12, to his Oxford studies, World War I trench warfare, and finally, family life (played by Nicholas Hoult).

Tolkien's father had died, and his mother (Laura Donnelly) was a woman of great courage, who instilled a sense of wonder in her son, and then died of diabetes. Father Francis Morgan (Colm Meaney) looks after the orphaned J.R.R. Tolkien, finally finding a home for him with the stodgy, wealthy Mrs. Faulkner (Pam Ferris).

Also living with (and playing piano for) Mrs. Faulkner is the fetching young Edith Bratt (Lily Collins). It's an immediate soul-mate situation, and Lily Collins pretty much steals the entire movie with her loveliness, which manifests as a rare, curious mind, a flirtatious sense of adventure, and the ability to gently goad John Ronald to challenge himself and

life that inspired his powerful imagery. It's admittedly a tall order, but just a WWI flamethrower being the source of the dragon Smaug in "The Hobbit," and some other fire sources as conjuring up a shadowy Balrog (fire demon) are a bit too thin.

The corpse-strewn WWI battlefields, pock-marked with giant pools of blood, definitely conjure up the desolation and dread of the land of Mordor, though. But a real top-tier movie would have provided exciting CGI to accompany the real-life sources.

It comes down to the fact that literary biopics are about a man or woman who basically sits in one place his or her whole life and types or scribbles. Words come into being and pass away in their minds, but on the surface of it, their day-to-day lives provide little in terms of fodder for dramatic storytelling. And so, in the end, it's all a bit too posh and stodgy and British (for American tastes, at least).

Hoult does a good job, and as mentioned, Lily Collins does a better job, and the legions of LOTR fans will definitely be seeing this and will thrill to the concept of witnessing the origin stories to all the mythological LOTR concepts. They won't really find what they're looking for.

What do I feel is the takeaway, as an LOTR fan? I don't feel "Tolkien" enhanced my lifelong devotion to the books in any way.

What LOTR did for me, on the other hand, through the repeated readings, was prepare me for a study of spiritual enlightenment. Because that's what "The Lord of the Rings" ultimately is: It's the premier enlightenment tale of our time. A furry-footed hobbit walks an ancient path of enlightenment, whereby he sheds all his karma and leaves Middle Earth, via the Grey Havens, for the Elvish equivalent of a Buddha paradise.

You think you know Tolkien? Can you write the language?

And so it would have been satisfying to see more specific instances of the original sources from Tolkien's



1. Nicholas Hoult as "The Lord of the Rings" author J.R.R. Tolkien, in the film "Tolkien."

2. A flamethrower is inspiration for the dragon in "The Hobbit," Smaug, in "Tolkien."

3. Lily Collins as Tolkien's love interest.

4. Derek Jacobi (L) plays the mentor to the young Tolkien (Nicholas Hoult).

Biopic on Serial Killer Bundy Doesn't Shock

MARK JACKSON

Here's a bland movie about an extremely bad boy named Bundy that bagged a bunch of showbiz buzz, but didn't open big, because, although it stars "Baywatch" beefcake Zac Efron, it's almost blasphemously blah.

One of the main reasons is miscasting: Lead actor Zac Efron excels at hunky heartthrobs. He's got comedic chops, and after bulking up for the movie version of "Baywatch" (so he wouldn't disappear standing next to Dwayne Johnson), Efron pretty much put the bodybuilding world on notice that he could have a second career if he wanted to.

What Efron doesn't have is the underlying menace needed to play a foul creature like Ted Bundy, serial killer of upward of 30 women. Look-wise and intensity-wise, this would have been the perfect Jason Patric role were he a little younger.

So, in light of the fact that this was a meh movie, that doesn't mean there aren't fascinating things to talk about. There are wildly interesting theories about Bundy's background that don't come up in the movie. Like satanism.

First Things First

It's based on Elizabeth Kloepfer's memoir (her pen name is Elizabeth Kendall), "The Phantom Prince: My Life with Ted Bundy." And the movie title, "Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile" is a line said by drama-queen-y judge Edward Cowart (John Malkovich) while sentencing Ted Bundy to death by the electric chair in 1979.

Bundy was a slick, turtleneck-wearing law student, who picked up a single mom named Liz Kendall (Lily Collins, currently also starring in "Tolkien") in a Seattle bar.

They go to her house. She wakes up. He's not there. Neither is her kid. Panic! Oh, there he is in the kitchen wearing her apron, making breakfast. The kid is happily prattling, and he's waving a butcher knife around. That can't be good, right? It's almost out of Monty Python: "Howwww do you knowwww he is a serial killer!!!"

Ted and Liz find love, but the television keeps running stories about the kidnapping, rape, and mutilation of comely young women in numerous states. "Silver Dagger," a song made famous by Joan Baez in the 1960s, could have been describing Theodore Robert Bundy:

My daddy is a damn devil
He's got a chain five miles long
And on every link a heart does dangle
Of another maid he's loved and wronged.

Wronged? Wronged?? Try head-smashing with crowbars and head-removal with hacksaws. It needed to be said.



'Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil, and Vile'

Director

Joe Berlinger

Starring

Zac Efron, Lily Collins, Angela Sarafyan, James Hetfield, Dylan Baker, Kaya Scodelario, Haley Joel Osment, Terry Kinney, John Malkovich

Running Time

1 hour, 50 minutes

Rated

R

Release Date

May 3



Why It Should Have Been So Much Better

What's surprising is that director Joe Berlinger has long been an acclaimed documentary producer-director. He produced and directed "Conversations With a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes," which is a documentary series that started streaming on Netflix in January. A four-part series, it's apparently comprehensive. This movie would appear to be a condensed version of the series. But does he get the facts right? I'll come back to this.

Psychopathic serial killers are smart. They're chameleons, they walk among us, they have ice water in their veins, and they can tread the razor's edge of almost getting caught and yet hiding in plain sight. Which is why they're terrifying. It's a fascinating if morbid topic.

But even with this A-list cast, the film stagnates. Like a flaccid, third-rate documentary, it perfumes

tortly checks a bunch of boxes, but "riveting" is not one of them. The reason is that the movie focuses primarily on Ted's charm, and only at the end do we get a glimpse of the ghastliness of what he was really up to. The problem that director Berlinger must have had here is that mostly the facts and a little bit of drama is not enough to be interesting.

But, on the other hand, to have the movie play as a real-life version of a "Saw" movie would have been grotesquely, career-ruiningly exploitative. So, it's kind of damned if you do, damned if you don't.

The Deal With Satanism

There's stuff swirling around the internet that claims that Bundy was most likely a member of the infamous Bundy family, which happens to be on the list of illuminati families. Scoff if you wanna—it's pretty interesting. There are parallels drawn regarding Bundy's methods of killing, which are similar to those of other known serial killers, who all turn out to have been satanists. Charles Manson, anyone?

And then there's the fact that ... You know what? Go research for yourself. You won't be disappointed.

Here's a tip: There's an article by Katie Dowd that says the portrayal of Bundy's story here is just absolutely way off, meaning this movie is basically just sensationalism and whitewashing.

Ultimately, the best thing about the movie is the 10 seconds' worth of rock band Metallica's frontman, James Hetfield, playing a suspicious state trooper. Now that's good casting.



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