

WEEK 27, 2019

THE EPOCH TIMES
**ARTS &
TRADITION**



Stele of Nabonidus. Nabonidus, considered the first archaeologist, was the father of Ennigaldi-Nanna, who is considered the first curator. The king is here seen praying to the sun, moon, and Venus.

Ennigaldi-Nanna
Curator of the World's First Museum...4

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TRUTH AND TRADITION



“The Wedding Register,” 1920, Edmund Blair Leighton. A gift from Lady Lennard, 1948; Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.

Mr. Denny asks for permission to introduce his friend, Mr. Wickham. An illustration for “Pride and Prejudice” by C. E. Brock, 1895.



The right match: Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, in an 1894 illustration by Hugh Thomson for “Pride and Prejudice.”

LITERATURE

Luckily Ever After?

Is marital happiness in ‘Pride and Prejudice’ a matter of chance or character?

SUSANNAH PEARCE

not think to look beyond her pretty face!

Finding a spouse has long been among the most commonplace activities and yet, at the same time, shrouded in mystery. “How did you two meet?” is a question often asked of couples. “How did they end up together?!” is one we may have wondered about others.

Achieving marital happiness has almost become an industry. It is not surprising that it is the central concern in Jane Austen’s pinnacle work, “Pride and Prejudice.” In an early scene, Austen gives us a conversation between the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet and her good friend, Charlotte Lucas. Charlotte states, “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. ... It is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”

It just so happens that Charlotte ends up passing her life with the most ridiculous and innocently self-centered character in the book: Mr. Collins. Somehow, we’re not sure if we should pity her or think it serves her right.

Is Marital Happiness a Matter of Chance?

I would say yes—and no. There may be a generous portion of chance involved in meeting and engaging the affections of a marriage partner, but there is much that a wise person can do to reduce the chance of marital strife. The foremost being to select a virtuous person of good character.

Young ladies during England’s Regency period could only do so much to put themselves in the way of a good husband. The plot and theme of “Pride and Prejudice” largely center on the project of marrying well, set forth in the delightful first sentence of the book: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

With five grown daughters and their estate entailed away to a distant male relation, Mrs. Bennet’s preoccupation with marrying off her daughters is somewhat understandable. She is of great hope, however, because her daughters are widely considered beautiful, and she herself raised her own social level by catching a gentleman by means of her good looks. It is lucky for her that she was not relying on her character and that Mr. Bennet did

Can’t Buy Me Love

Austen reveals that looks, accomplishments, social level, parentage, and circle of acquaintance are all factors in the courting game. But fortune, or lack thereof, seems to be the primary consideration for most of the characters in securing a spouse. With little to offer financially, a young woman must hope that her other attributes and a portion of good luck will fill the gap.

It’s not only women this affects, either. As Colonel Fitzwilliam, a younger son of an earl, admits, “Younger sons cannot marry where they like. ... there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money.”

With all this concern about marrying up financially, where does the question of actual happiness come in? It comes up in the conversation with Elizabeth in which

Charlotte expresses her opinion that happiness in marriage is a matter of chance, insisting that, “If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation.”

On the other hand, Elizabeth is vehement that the character of the person must be determined in order to make a good choice.

The character of the spouses is at the core of marital happiness. Elizabeth has her convictions tested throughout the story, being presented three suitors whose characters she must decipher. Is it mere chance or careful investigation into the inner content of the person that guides her choice and determines Elizabeth’s future felicity?

Enter Shakespeare

The question of chance and character among suitors brings to mind the test of caskets to win fair Portia’s hand in Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice.” The casket of gold, bearing the inscription “Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire,” drew the vain, but yielded not Portia’s hand. Rather it contained a skull of death and the message, “All that glisters is not gold. / Often have you heard that told. / Many a man his life hath sold

/ But my outside to behold.”

The casket of silver offered this clue: “Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.” Inside it, the disappointed suitor found a jester’s face, showing that it is the fool who picks what he thinks he deserves.

The third casket is lackluster lead, bearing the warning, “Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.” In choosing this humble casket, the suitor found himself worthy to be Portia’s groom.

The casket test appears to be a game of chance, but is in reality a sifter of character designed by Portia’s father.

Chance or Character?

Elizabeth is pursued by three men. Hand-

some Wickham flirts with her, drawing her in to a false image of himself. Slowly, she apprehends his true character and is revolted by him. Elizabeth’s superficial youngest sister, Lydia, with visions of red-coated officers dancing in her head, falls for the glistening Wickham, bringing near ruin to her family.

The unctuous Mr. Collins makes Elizabeth an offer of marriage that is completely focused on his reasons for desiring marriage and why he has chosen her. For him, it is simply a matter of what he deserves, without consideration of her desserts or desires. Him, she flatly refuses.

But Charlotte, in keeping with her beliefs about marriage, put herself in the way of this wife-seeking buffoon, fulfilling the silver casket’s inscription, getting as much as they each deserve.

Charlotte’s own reflections on her situation may excuse her self-inflicted life sentence. “Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it.”

Elizabeth’s third contestant in the game of love is the misunderstood and brooding Mr. Darcy. It is only through the gradual unveiling of his character that she comes to see that he, who at first seemed lackluster lead, is the one willing to “give and hazard all he hath” for her love, and thus he wins her heart—and hand.

Lucky in Love

Having the good luck of being the object of Mr. Darcy’s persistent love and the guarantee of his excellent character, Elizabeth’s chance of happiness in marriage is likely to beat the odds given by Charlotte. By observing his character through tests that circumstances provide, she knows him to be good and virtuous to his core.

While spouses may change over time in superficial ways, the essentials remain constant. A virtuous man, generally remains so. While one may hope for the conversion of a scoundrel or a fool, it is not worth banking on.

It is no surprise that ‘Pride and Prejudice’ has remained a favorite for over two centuries.

Satisfaction Ever After

It is no surprise that “Pride and Prejudice” has remained a favorite for over two centuries. It provides not just a happily-ever-after ending, but several. And even more satisfying endings, if not entirely happy in each case. Almost everyone got what they hoped for in marriage.

Elizabeth and Jane both enter marriage with handsome men of good character—in possession of large fortunes. Mrs. Bennet is over the moon with three daughters married. And she will very likely get her wish that the remaining two daughters will benefit from being “thrown in the path of other rich men.”

Lydia and Charlotte found just the sort of marital situation they sought, and each seems satisfied.

To crown these happy resolutions, Austen allows us to gloat over the two “well-bred” characters who remain utterly unsatisfied. The bossy and snobbish Lady Catherine De Burgh and the arrogant mean-girl Caroline Bingley are left to sulk over unlikely Elizabeth’s achievement in engaging Mr. Darcy’s love while all their designs on him for their own purposes have come to naught. It warms the heart.

Susannah Pearce holds a master’s degree in theology and writes from her home in South Carolina.

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TRUTH and TRADITION

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TRUTH AND TRADITION

FILM REVIEW

A Sobering Account of a Real-Life Tragedy in Russia's Post-Soviet History

BELGA PRODUCTIONS



(L-R) Kristof Coenen, Matthias Schoenaerts, and Chris Pascal play characters trapped aboard the stricken Russian nuclear-powered submarine, in "The Command."

IAN KANE

Russia. Year 2000. It's summer, but you wouldn't know it from the dreary northern landscape that greets us as the new disaster film "The Command" opens up. Although outside it may be frigid, the houses in a small, Russian naval town on the coast of the Barents Sea are warm.

One such home belongs to submariner Mikhail Averin (Matthias Schoenaerts, "The Mustang") and his pregnant wife, Tanya (Léa Seydoux, "Zoe"). We witness scenes of familial love as the two lovebirds chase their young son around the house, and Mikhail shows the boy how to hold his breath underwater for long periods of time.

The year 2000 also marks nearly a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when economic woes had engulfed Mother Russia. It's against this backdrop that we are introduced to the other members of the Kursk's crew.

Funds are so tight that the navy isn't able to pay the men their proper wages. As a result, Mikhail has to pawn his special mariner's watch in order to be able to afford enough champagne and vodka for his best friend's wedding. The wedding itself functions as an excellent plot device to show the strong sense of brotherhood among the men.

The following morning, the crew sets out into the icy waters of the Barents. A couple of the crew members are in the torpedo bay, tending to some of the munitions, when one of them detects some unusual heat signatures. A hydrogen leak is emanating from one of the torpedoes.

Captain Averin relays this information to his superiors, but it's too late. Not only does the first torpedo explode, but also the entire torpedo bay becomes engulfed in flames, which detonates the rest of the Kursk's payload, instantly killing most of the crew.

The vessel sinks in relatively shallow waters (around 350 feet), and as the front of

the nuclear-powered submarine hits the sea floor, the remaining crew scramble toward the raised, still-dry aft compartments. They successfully seal this last safe zone off, but for how long? The water levels are rising and the pumps aren't working properly. Not only that, but their precious air supply is running thin as well.

The Rescue Efforts

Back at headquarters, the crew's superiors detect rather quickly the anomalous sonic dispersions caused by the explosions and immediately dispatch a full rescue detachment. However, it takes over 16 hours to locate the Kursk.

What's more, when their rescue submersible attempts to latch onto the submarine's top hatch, its dilapidated equipment is unsuited for the critical task at hand.

The British are quick to offer their own naval aid to the Russian naval brass. After lots of balking on the Russians' part, the Brit team eventually receives a reluctant go-ahead and is finally allowed onto the site of the unfolding disaster. Colin Firth plays British Commodore David Russell, who heads the Brits' rescue effort.

The Russians' main concern seems to be not wanting the Kursk—one of the most advanced nuclear submarines in the world—to fall into foreign hands. But that's just part of the picture.

During that period of time, the Russians had been feeling rather crestfallen as a nation. To these proud people, the fall of the USSR represented a kind of fall from the world's stage. One of the last vestiges of projecting power, at least to the outside world, was the Russians' facade of maintaining a peerless military. As a result, pride sometimes outstripped common sense, and in many cases, proper safety measures.

The Kursk itself had not come into the world easily. It had been built during the collapse of the USSR. Its construction was finally completed in 1994, and it was launched to little fanfare. Nevertheless, the Kursk represented the apex of Russian technology. It was able to remain submerged for up to 120 days at a time and could break through Arctic ice if need be. It was an absolute beast. Meanwhile, many of the older Russian navy ships and submarines were sold off as scrap metal or repurposed for civilian duties.

Film Keeps You Glued to the Screen (and Spoiler Alert)

The film's acting is pretty decent across the board, particularly Schoenaerts's as the Kursk's

beleaguered captain. But Colin Firth turns in an exceptional performance as the intrepid British commodore who becomes increasingly frustrated by the Russian navy's balking brass. He captures the film's moments of glee and hopefulness when the Kursk's crew members are heard by rescue crews, banging on the interior of the sub's hull. He also broods in abject frustration and deep despair when it eventually becomes clear that the crew is doomed.

Ultimately, "The Command" is a tense film that is hard to watch in places. However, Thomas Vinterberg's skills as a director must be commended in keeping eyes glued to screen.

A special nod should also go to Oscar-winning cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle ("Slumdog Millionaire," "127 Hours") whose cogent shots manage to capture the dreary, claustrophobic conditions in the Kursk perfectly.

A True Story

The real tragedy lies in actual history itself. Only 27 at the time, Lt. Capt. Dmitry Kolesnikov, the real-life commander of the Kursk, apparently foresaw his own death. According to The New York Times report on the event:

"And the captain's widow, Olga Kolesnikova, her face covered with tears, said her husband had a premonition of death before leaving on the Kursk's last voyage and left his dog tags, a crucifix, and a poem as a remembrance.

"The couple had married only this year. "And when the time comes to die,' he wrote in the poem, 'though I chase such thoughts away, I want time to whisper one thing: My darling, I love you.'"

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

'The Command' (originally titled 'Kursk')

Director
Thomas Vinterberg

Starring
Matthias Schoenaerts, Colin Firth, Léa Seydoux

Running Time
1 hour, 57 minutes

Rated
PG-13

Release Date
June 21

★★★★★



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