

WEEK 26, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES  
ARTS &  
CULTURE

INDRIK/SHUTTERSTOCK



"Perseus With the Head of Medusa," 1554, by Benvenuto Cellini. Loggia de Lanzi, Piazza della Signoria, Florence, Italy.

*Perseus*  
and the Gorgon of Today...4



# What Our Readers Say:

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THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION



Would Tom Wolfe's works be published today? Wolfe lecturing at Fordham University in New York on Feb. 15, 2005.

LITERATURE

WITH ENOUGH COURAGE:

# Writers in the Age of the Cybermob

JEFF MINICK

“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

George Orwell, best known for his novels “Animal Farm” and “1984,” is often cited as the author of those words, but he may have never written or spoken them. Yet whatever their origin, they remain true.

We are living right now in a time of universal deceit, and telling the truth is becoming harder for writers, journalists, celebrities, sports figures, and the rest of us.

Over the years, I have often wondered how writers in dictatorships could express the lies of their masters and still look in the mirror the next day. For every Solzhenitsyn, for every Pasternak, for all those Russian poets executed or imprisoned for their political beliefs, scores of other Soviet writers produced novels, short stories, poems, and essays that echoed the party line and which are now long forgotten, regarded as the work of political hacks and propagandists.

**Mobs and Fanaticism**

At this moment in our own history, Americans are undergoing a censorship never before seen in their country. We don’t dispatch artists and writers with whom we disagree to concentration camps or put a bullet into the back of their heads. No—we simply declare them politically incorrect, sic the electronic mob on them, and cast them into obscurity and darkness. Some of them grovel and beg forgiveness, like political prisoners in China, North Korea, or other communist countries. Others simply retreat from the public square, never to be heard from again.

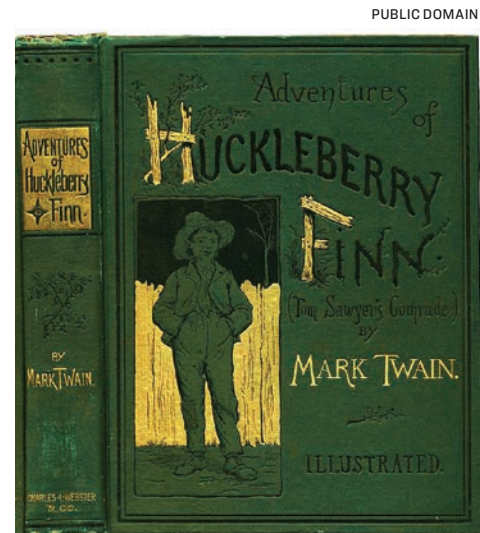
Our newsrooms are under assault by this same PC crowd. In just the past few weeks, an editor at The Philadelphia Inquirer, Stan Wischnowski, lost his job for printing a headline “Buildings Matter, Too,” which many of his staff saw as an insult to “Black Lives Matter.” Almost simultaneously, an editor at The New York Times, James Bennet, resigned after he published an editorial by Republican Senator Tom Cotton calling for military action against looters and rioters. His own staff attacked him, claiming they now felt “unsafe.”

We see these same “cancel culture” assaults on television. “Cops,” a show so popular that it has run for 30 years, is now gone, apparently a victim of the “police bad” mentality. Other shows about the police are under review. Some radicals are even calling for the cancel-

lation of “Paw Patrol,” a cartoon beloved by the younger set, including some of my grandchildren.

**Literary Wars**

Nor is our literary heritage safe from the PC marauders. Mark Twain’s “Huckleberry Finn” and Booth Tarkington’s “Penrod” for their depictions of African Americans, the “Little House” books for their portrait of American Indians, and other works from the past all have been criticized or bowdlerized for failing to meet our modern standards of political correctness.



Although Mark Twain's masterpiece satirizes the bigoted whites of his era, today the book is considered racist. The “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” 1884, by Mark Twain.

There is even a new movement—“decolonizing your home library”—urging us to give up the classical writers we love—Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Hemingway—for non-Western writers from the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East. For over 40 years, we’ve seen in our universities and public schools the playing out of the chant “Hey Hey, Ho Ho, Western Civ has got to go.” Decolonizing your home library simply takes that demand one step further.

Given all these circumstances, can truth still find a home in our journalism and literature?

**Would These 2 Guys Make the Cut?**

Tom Wolfe was a brilliant satirist. In his essays and in novels like “The Bonfire of the Vanities,” he poked fun at liberal pretensions, the politics of race, and a culture caught up in causes and hysteria. Our situation in 2020 begs for a writer of equal talent and insight to lampoon the left—members of Congress kneeling in silence while wearing stoles of Kente cloths, whites washing the feet of blacks

as atonement for their sins, the looting of black stores by those protesting the death of a black man, and much more. But would such a book, even one written by someone as brilliant at parody as Wolfe, find a publisher?

John Kennedy Toole posthumously won a Pulitzer Prize for “A Confederacy of Dunces,” which is set in New Orleans. One claim to fame for the novel is Toole’s use of dialect, including that of Louisiana blacks. Would a white man reproducing black speech, however brilliantly, be able to publish such a book today?

**Censorship and Debate in Other Times**

Many writers have lived and worked with censorship. Shakespeare wrote his plays in an age when royal authorities kept a close eye on the stage, alert to subversion of the crown and to the promotion of Catholicism, then outlawed in England. In the 19th century, cultural standards forbade mainstream writers from addressing too intimately the topic of sex or reproducing some of the obscenities now common in today’s literature.

One great difference between these earlier proscriptions and the atmosphere prevailing today is technology. Here’s an example: In 1967, William Styron’s “The Confessions of Nat Turner,” his story of an 1831 slave revolt in Virginia, was published, became a bestseller, and won the Pulitzer Prize. Styron’s use of a black man as his main character caused a major storm in the literary world, with some black writers accusing Styron of what we would today now call “cultural appropriation.” The novel even led to the publication of 1987’s “William Styron’s Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond,” essays highly critical of the book.

Despite the controversy this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel roused, the exchanges during this debate were for the most part marked by civility. The slower technology of that time forced the participants in that debate to put their thoughts to paper and then find a newspaper or a publisher to bring those ideas to the public.

That is no longer the case.

**Our literary heritage is not safe from the PC marauders.**

**Resisting the Cyberswarm**

In our digital world, an online mob can form quicker than you can say “cancel culture.” With words as their brickbats and obscenities as their torches, they hunt down their victims, savaging their reputations, forcing them to cancel their Twitter or Facebook accounts, shaming them into silence or abject apologies.

So what can we do? How can writers or, for that matter, any of us on social media battle back when pummeled by this mob?

We find one answer in Mark Twain’s “Huckleberry Finn.” Here, a Colonel Sherburn kills the town drunk, Boggs, for vilifying and threatening him. Twain casts Sherburn in an unsympathetic light, an arrogant man who shoots down Boggs as casually as he might swat a fly on a windowpane.

Yet when a mob comes to Sherburn’s house to lynch him, he steps onto the porch roof armed with a gun and mocks them, telling them that they lack the “grit” to attack him in broad daylight, that they were the sort who could kill a man only from behind or at night when wearing masks. The mob disperses, leaving Sherburn triumphant and untouched. This scene was unnecessary for plot development in “Huckleberry Finn,” but it may indicate Twain’s disdain for the lynch mobs common in his time.

Today’s cybermob uses the anonymity of the internet for their masks. And those who face this mob, whether writers or journalists or anyone else, can either buckle and be ruined, or take a stand knowing that they may still be ruined.

In the movie “Gone With the Wind,” another recent victim of cancel culture, Rhett Butler says, “With enough courage, you can do without a reputation.”

Better the courage to stand on our feet than a reputation that keeps us on our knees.

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. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

Colonel Sherburn confronts an angry mob. From the 1885 edition of the “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.”



“Discovery of Nat Turner”: wood engraving illustrating Benjamin Phipps’s capture of Nat Turner, who led a slave rebellion, in 1831. The image was found in the Encyclopedia Virginia.



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"Perseus Armed by Mercury (Hermes) and Minerva (Athena)" by Paris Bordone. Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Ala.

#### TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# PERSEUS AND THE GORGON OF TODAY

## What do the myths tell us about this chronic sin, vice, or problem of fear that we have?



"Minerva (Athena) Giving Her Shield to Perseus," 1697, by René-Antoine Houasse. Palace of Versailles.

#### JAMES SALE

As we know, there are seven deadly sins: anger, pride, envy, avarice, gluttony, lust, and sloth. But since about the 1950s, an eighth sin has come to dominate the thinking of psychologists, philosophers, and personal development gurus. Indeed, thousands of books have been written on the topic, and we are wrestling with the issue even today as I write this. The pages of *The Epoch Times* are full of it as an underlying issue.

President F.D. Roosevelt presciently identified it and wrote about it in his first Inaugural Address in 1933. He said, "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." There it is: fear.

#### Our Obsession With Fear

Perhaps the book that most expresses our obsession with the topic is Susan Jeffers's famous "Feel the Fear, and Do It Anyway." This 1987 book is one of the key manifestos of the personal development movement. In fact, we learn from her bio that the author "has helped millions of people all over the world to overcome their fears." Job done, then. No more fear. Well, as David Brooks observed, "The existence of more and more self-help books is proof that they rarely work." The point of fear and why it is so toxic is that it is alleged to be the root cause of many other psychological problems, including indecision, procrastination, anxiety, anger, and more generally a profound form of irrationality. In a fear state we cannot, as it were, think straight, and so we make suboptimal, weak, poor, or bad choices.

This is why the personal development movement especially dislikes fear; fear prevents us from realizing our full potential as human beings—it holds us back. Hence the subtitle of the Jeffers book: "Do It Anyway," and so realize who you really are despite the fear. (We note in passing how mainstream this advice has become, with Nike's "Just Do It" slogan exactly striking the contemporary note that enables it to sell and shift millions of units!)

"Andromeda Liberated by Perseus," circa 1510–1515, by Piero di Cosimo. Uffizi Gallery.



But if self-help books don't always work, what do the myths tell us about this chronic sin, vice, or problem that we have? Is there a specific myth that addresses fear head-on? I think there is: the story of Perseus and the Gorgon Medusa.

#### Herakles's Great-Grandfather

Perseus is one of the greatest Greek heroes; he was the great-grandfather of the most famous of them all, Herakles. But unlike Herakles and most of the others, Perseus is an intriguingly bland sort of hero. We learn little about his inner psyche, and remarkably, unlike most of the other heroes, once he falls in love with the beautiful Andromeda and marries her, he stays in love. Compare his fidelity with, say, Odysseus, who loved Penelope, but ... along the way ... Circe, et al. Perseus, a real, regular guy then; except ... his destiny is to be a hero.

As an awkward young man, trying to advance in the world, Perseus tries to get an invitation to the king's social event of the year. A horse is the admission fee, but rashly, Perseus offers to provide the head of the monster Medusa. Actually, as with many young men, he has no idea how he would go about getting that head, or even where it is located, and how he would overcome the formidable obstacle of Medusa herself resisting his efforts to decapitate her! But the king accepts the offer because he has designs on Perseus's mother—and who wants a protective, big teenager lolling around?

Medusa (Queen), on the other hand, is one of three Gorgons. Her sisters, Stheno (Strength) and Euryale (Wide-Jump) are immortal, but Medusa is not. However, the terrifying aspect of Medusa is not just her dire appearance, including snakes for hair, but the fact that one glance at her petrifies organic matter into stone. The etymology of "petrify" here is, of course, directly relevant: When we are petrified, we mean we are terrified—fearful—to such an extent that we are immobilized. The word "petrify" comes from the Greek word meaning stone or rock.

Here we touch on the modern conception of fear, that it causes one of the three F's: fight, flight, or freeze. Clearly, the freeze is the worst state of all since it paralyzes all action, literally petrifying us. As J.G. Ballard observed in his novel "The Drowned World," "Nothing endures for so long as fear," and being a rock perfectly captures that desperate, seemingly eternal state.

#### Maintaining the Fragile Cosmos

At this point, we need to keep in mind a few extra facts about this story. First, Perseus is the son of Zeus, begotten in a shower of gold upon Danae. Thus, he has pedigree and a destiny to continue Zeus's work (which Zeus assumed upon becoming lord of all when he dethroned his father, Kronus). This work is no less than maintaining the fragile stability of the cosmos, its order, structure, purpose,

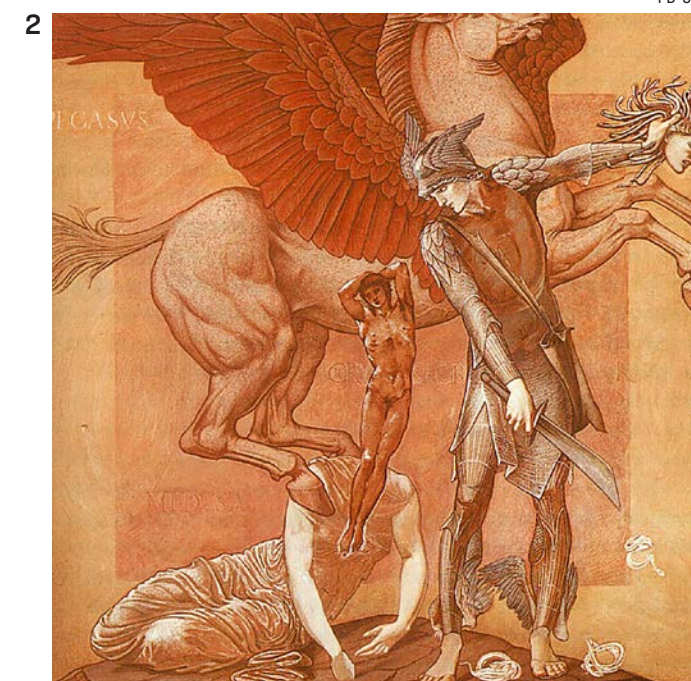


And if we think about it, the ability to turn all living matter into mineral form, as Medusa does, undermines the cosmos and would ultimately lead to its extinction, for all living creatures would be stone. Thus, it is necessary to the divine order that Medusa be destroyed.

Hence, Perseus is befriended by two of the most powerful Olympians, favorite children of Zeus: the goddess of wisdom, Athena; and the messenger god, the god of liminal spaces, Hermes. Through them, Perseus is shown the way and ultimately equipped with five necessary weapons: Hades's cap of invisibility; the winged sandals of Hermes, a special bag (kibisis) that can contain the severed head (without turning to stone itself), an adamant blade that can cut anything, and a shield that can be polished into a mirror.

So it is that Perseus becomes a "master over terror." But consider the preparation necessary: First, the cause is right and the gods are behind him, for then doubt cannot assail him, which is the bridgehead to fear.

Then he moves with lightning speed (winged sandals), and becomes invisible (cap of Hades) as opposed to proclaiming his movements. He knows the nature of his enemy and avoids collateral damage (the kibisis), and has a weapon (adamantine blade) effective enough to cut through the enemy. And these are why, of course,



the goddess Athena is so important: It is she who advises Perseus, for she is wisdom and part of wisdom is foresight.

It is worth mentioning that despite the support of the great gods Ares, Apollo, and Aphrodite, Troy fell because, for one thing, Athena was against them; she gives Odysseus the strategic idea of the Trojan Horse, which proves fateful.

#### Confronting Fear

Medusa represents a kind of terror that not only clouds the mind but also the vision: One cannot look on her without being overcome.

In one sense, the myth of Perseus is a myth of maturation. To become adults, we have to face the darkest aspects of our existence and not fall under the spell of its petrifying negativity. And to do this, we need the final weapon: the reflecting shield. We have to look, we have to see, which means to understand, but to do so in a way in which we do not partake of its reality.

If we remember the Garden of Eden problem: The eating of the fruit of good and evil meant not just that Adam and Eve "knew" good and evil, but that they became evil as a direct experiential result of the eating. So here, to directly look at the physical thing—Medusa herself—would be to incorporate what she represents into one's own being: to become terror or fear

itself. At that point, the heart stops and one becomes stone.

However, the shield reflects an image, and through it one can see an inversion of reality—like studying a photograph of an atrocity; knowing it's not real means we are not completely caught up in its horror. In this way, Perseus can move in on fear and destroy her with one blow.

Thus, dealing with fear requires foresight, preparation, and decisive action. The final action, of course, is what we now might call "reframing" the fear. The shield reframes what we are seeing, and in this way enables us to deal with it.

#### Taming Horses

Two small but significant extra points emerge from this story. The first is that the death of Medusa immediately unleashes two living horses from her blood, Chrysaor (sometimes depicted as a man) and Pegasus. The latter is the most famous—and winged—horse in history. And that might give us pause for thought.

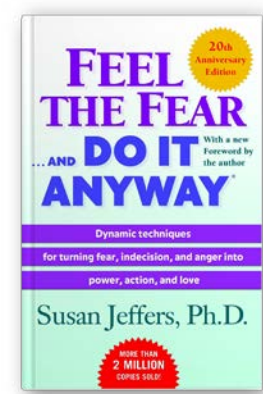
The king wanted a horse as the price of admission to his party, it was a horse that led to Troy's destruction, and now a winged horse appears. Poseidon, god of the sea and earthquakes, and all turbulent and disturbing emotions (for water represents emotion), was also god of horses. He is the father of Medusa!

What we are witnessing is the symbolism by which horses have always represented transcendence for human beings: Through horses, we can go beyond our own limits of speed and strength.

Poseidon gifted horses to humans, but Athena gifted the bridle to enable us to contain them effectively. Here, with the release of Pegasus, we have the ultimate in going beyond. Once we have defeated our fear, our terror, we too can fly—become heroes and heroines.

Second, in the aftermath of this, Athena attaches Medusa's head to her own battle shield going into war. She did this, of course, to terrify her enemies. Here, we have godlike intelligence unaffected by fear and terror and using it strategically against those who oppose her.

To be like Athena in the midst of war and chaos is perhaps truly to have godlike powers. At this point, we would not be fearing fear; we would be turning fear into an ally.



Susan Jeffers's bestseller that became one of the manifestos for making fear the eighth deadly sin.

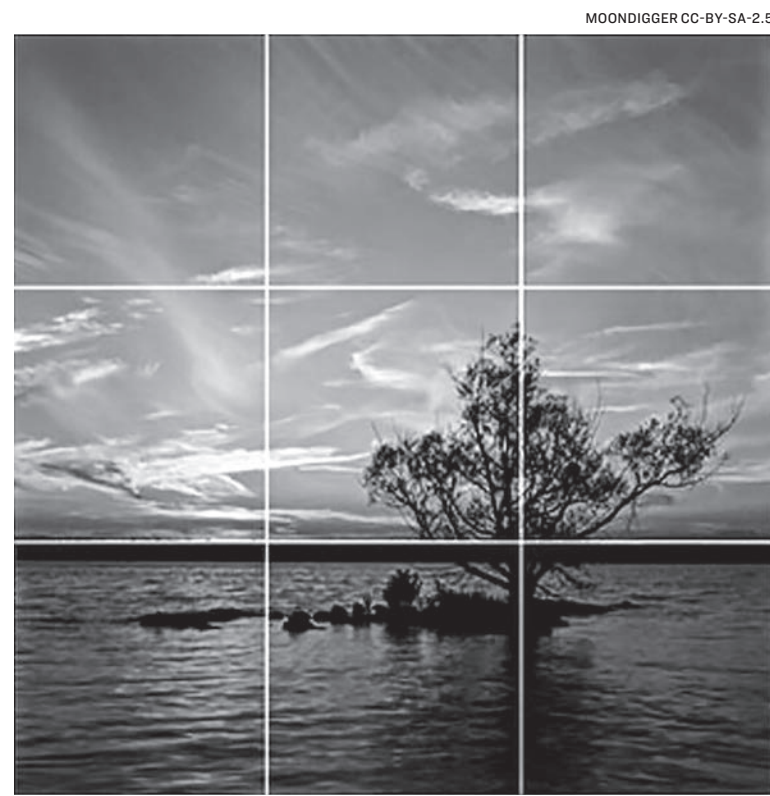
1. "Perseus on Pegasus Hastening to the Rescue of Andromeda," 1895–96, by Frederic Leighton. New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, U.K.
2. "The Birth of Pegasus and Chrysaor," between circa 1878 and circa 1885, by Edward Burne-Jones. Southampton City Art Gallery, U.K.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in *The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition* and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.





(Left) The design principle of the rule of thirds may make for pretty pictures, but it doesn't help create great art. (Right) A grid superimposed on the photo of a tree in the river clearly shows how the tree sits on intersecting lines.



## FINE ARTS

## Rediscovering Timeless Renaissance Design Philosophies

Classical art principles transform a filmmaker's craft

J.H. WHITE

A couple of years ago in Vancouver, Canada, I was working with Mathias Magnason, an award-winning Swedish director and filmmaker based in New York. He was interviewing a luxury show's lead designer at one of his projects, a home under construction. Magnason told the cameraman to set up the shot. The cameraman did so, and then walked off to plan the next shot.

Magnason reviewed the frame, and as politely as possible tried to hide his grimace. I asked him what was wrong.

He said something to the tune of, "A lot of cameramen today, they haven't studied the ancient principles."

Of course, not being a filmmaker myself, I couldn't see any problems. The lighting and composition of the shot looked great to me. Though the foreground and interviewee looked good, Magnason pointed out the two-by-fours from the construction in the blurred-out background that were lightly slicing through the interviewee's head behind him.

He explained "figure-ground relationship," a principle in classical painting that was used by the maestros of the Renaissance, such as Michelangelo and da Vinci. At its most basic level, you want to create a clean space around the subject matter.

For example, if it's a close-up of a face, you don't want things running through the shape of the face in the background, Mag-

nason explained to me in a phone interview.

"I've had some really serious arguments with other photographers about these concepts," Magnason says. "The crazy thing is that they don't teach these things in film school."

While film schools do emphasize lighting, for example, Magnason believes they miss 50 percent of the shot—how all the elements behind the character create the shot.

"When you see the Renaissance paintings, it's not just the light; it's the placement of objects, and it's what's going on in the background, the relationship between everything in the frame," he says. "It's not just how the light falls onto the face or shape of the person."

Magnason emphasizes that he is by no means a master at these Renaissance art principles. He began to explore these concepts after an editor ripped into his direction and composition during the shooting of a TV series on culture.

"I thought my shots were quite nice, according to what I had learned from film school," he recalls. He thought the lighting was "very juicy for television." The editor disagreed; she said, for example, that the face needs to be the lightest part of the image.

"Really? Where did you get that from?" Magnason asked.

"From painting," she replied. She had studied classical painting before going into TV.

Magnason admits that her critique was hard to hear, but he began to research classical painting techniques online and discovered the book "Canon of Design: Mastering Artistic Composition" by Tavis Leaf Glover. Glover also has an informative website loaded with articles and videos illustrating these ancient principles of visual art that apply to painting, drawing, sculpture, and now film.



"Laocoon & His Sons" is a Greek sculpture that exemplifies the principle of dynamic symmetry.

"[Her critique] opened a door for me," Magnason says. "This is a whole other world. I was so happy, actually. If you really spend time and dive into these concepts, when you create a shot, there will be much more depth and harmony."

### The Rule of Thirds Is a Dead End

One of Glover's most popular videos on YouTube is called "The Rule of Thirds - 10 Myths [Powerful Techniques]." His video description reads, "The rule of thirds is a horrible tool for us to use when mastering composition is our goal."

The Rule of Thirds (ROT) is a guideline for composing visual media, such as photos, paintings, and films. The image is divided into nine equal parts by two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced

vertical lines. Important compositional elements should be placed on these lines or their four points of intersection. It's such an industry standard for film that the camera equipment comes with a ROT grid to place over the image to help compose the shot.

Glover describes ROT as "flawed" and "lazy," on his website. While the principle can work for very simple shots, it breaks down when adding complexity and additional compositional points of interest. For example, what if there are multiple people? How do you position their arms, legs, clothing, bodies, or gaze?

"It's like a tool set. With the Rule of Thirds, you have a hammer, a nail, a handsaw, a little drill, and you're super happy," Magnason explains. "But when you get to these theories [he learned from Glover], you have the equipment to build the Eiffel Tower."

Glover instead promotes the compositional theory of "dynamic symmetry." Simply put, it's a grid system for visual art to help its composition. Diagonals, verticals, and horizontal patterns can be used to create a sense of rhythm and unity throughout the image, regardless of the visual medium, be it painting, sculpture, or film. Glover learned many of these design philosophies from artist and teacher Myron Barnstone, though the concepts themselves are as old as creation itself.

"[Man] discovered there was order in everything he examined: plant forms, the intervals between the bones in your hands and all of your skeleton, the proportions of your face," Barnstone said in an online lecture available through subscription. "So [men] built their temples, the effigies of their gods, and the altars, the costumes of their priests, and all of their rituals around ratios that were found in nature."

While dynamic symmetry can be as complex and intricate as the layered biology of living organisms, it can also be simplified to its building blocks. In Glover's YouTube video "Dynamic Symmetry - How to Keep it Simple in the Beginning [Great Tips]," he warns in the description: "Baby steps are the key to understanding and applying dynamic symmetry to your photography, painting, sculpting, and cinematography. It can be used in any visual art, but we must start slowly. Otherwise, we're likely to get overwhelmed, frustrated, and dispose of the value it provides."

In this video, Glover breaks down dynamic symmetry to its simplest line: the "Baroque diagonal." It's the diagonal line going from the bottom left to the top right corner. If you're shooting film, you can position a beach and ocean along this diagonal, for example, which gives a harmonious, pleasing feel since we read from left to right.

Magnason explains that shooting video and film has its own unique set of challenges since the setting, environment, and sunlight actively change throughout the day and you're under constant time pressure. So, he's just tried to master a few of these Renaissance techniques that Glover teaches.

"It's made my shooting so much more interesting because now the possibilities are endless. Before it was very, very limited," Magnason says. "If people don't want to learn about it, that's up to them. I just want to get better at what I'm doing."

J.H. White is an arts, culture, and men's fashion journalist living in New York.



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.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

## Renamed 'The Supernatural'

MARK JACKSON

When "The Natural" opened in 1984, I thought it was the best baseball movie ever made. Thirty-six years later (after countless "Bull Durham" reruns), I find "The Natural" falls far short of that original designation, but it's still got merit.

More of a fable than a story, it's a hero's journey tale that harks back to the old-fashioned American nostalgia of baseball-loving boys and the baseball stars they worship. It lauds the qualities of honor, benevolence, forbearance, and forgiveness, and the redemption, later in life, of youthful talent hijacked by the succubi of temptation.

### The Hero-to-Be

Robert Redford took an acting break, during which time he won an Oscar for directing 1980's "Ordinary People," and also founded the now-legendary Sundance Institute. Four years later, he played Roy Hobbs, a baseball prodigy.

We first meet Roy in the 1920s, being coached and mentored by his dad (father-son games of "catch" are the bedrock of baseball movies in particular and American father-son relations in general) on a Hallmark-level idyllic Midwestern farm.

Then, dad dies, and lo, a lightning bolt destroyeth the tree under which dad died. It's a sign from above, destiny writ large. And young Roy, seeing the writing on the wall, commemorates the momentousness of all that by fashioning his very own baseball bat from that selfsame lightning-struck tree. He wood-burns the name "Wonder Boy" into it, embellishing it with a lightning bolt. In 1920, there was no such thing as baseball, especially when it came to baseball.

**More of a fable than a story, it's a hero's journey tale that harks back to the old-fashioned American nostalgia of baseball-loving boys.**

### Leaving the Village

In his early 20s, Roy leaves home, as well as his girl-next-door first love Iris Gaines (Glenn Close), and heads to the big city (Chicago) to try out for the majors. This is the answering call to the adventure phase.

He faces three tests, coming at him from the dark side of the world he hopes to conquer: 1) a predatory sports writer named Max Mercy (Robert Duvall), 2) a giant-ego'd baseball star, "The Whammer" Joe Don Baker (a role clearly modeled after "The Sultan of Swat" Babe Ruth), and 3) Harriet Bird (Barbara Hershey), a funereally garbed, literal femme fatale.

### Falling Off the Cliff

Harriet, after seeing Roy strike out The Whammer in an alpha-male pitching versus batting baseball joust at a local carnival, comes after him seductively but with a jealousy-wrought psychopathic intent to maim his greatness.

She inadvertently fires wide of the mark but nevertheless leaves Roy with an irre-



Glenn Close plays the good woman who acts as part of Roy Hobbs's redemption.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRISTAR PICTURES, INC. UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE



Robert Redford relied on his good looks to carry the role of baseball prodigy Roy Hobbs.



Robert Duvall plays Max Mercy, a sport writer.



Red Blow (Richard Farnsworth, L) and Pops (Wilford Brimley) as coach and manager of the New York Knights baseball team in "The Natural."

trievable silver bullet eating away the lining of his stomach for 16 years, during which he (sort of like an exceptionally good-looking, blond-haired Gollum) disappears out of all recorded history.

When Roy finally returns, middle-aged, to baseball, he's recruited by the New York Knights. They're a fictitious major league ball club in last place, managed by Pop Fisher (Wilford Brimley) and coached by Red Blow (Richard Farnsworth).

Red kinda looks like he could be Pop after a 40-day fast. He also looks and draws like an older Sam Elliott, while Pop yells a lot. These two quiet and loud stalwart men help guide Roy back up the mountain to find his baseball bliss.

And Roy needs that help because more pitfalls abound: this time in the form of the Judge (Robert Prosky), the Knights' endless-ly scheming co-owner, and Gus Sands (Daren McGavin), a wheeling-dealing bookie with another femme fatale on his arm.

These two are keen on maintaining the team's losing streak due to foul business practices, but Roy can't be bought, won't throw games, for he is upright and righteous in such matters. And so Gus, knowing Roy's weakness for women, sicks his "friend" Memo Paris (Kim Basinger as a platinum blond succubus version of the dark Harriet) on Roy to drain his energy. And Roy falls from grace again.

### Bringing the Gold Back to the Village

Most people on a hero's journey have to face risk and fear to find and nurture their good (God-given talent). Not Roy. Roy had the gift of baseball talent from birth. But in order for him to be able to employ that talent for the greater good, he has to evolve his heart and mind nature; he has to go from being

a shallow guy whose only ambition in life is to have people see him and say, "There goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was" to genuinely wanting to do good for others.

And so, although simplistic and more than a little of deus ex machina, Iris, representing the village compound, reappears in his life, standing like an inspiring, backlit angel in the stadium and sending him a note delivered via a bat boy, which reveals that her boy is Roy's son.

Now, Roy should have probably come to this conclusion a long time ago, but never mind. He's sufficiently inspired to go thwack that horsehide into the stadium lights, exploding them in a lovely melodramatic finale as he rounds the bases.

It looks quite heroic. It looks quite unreal. (It is actually possible to knock out stadium lights—I googled it.) It looks especially unreal when you add to the mix that his stomach is bleeding so badly that it seeps through his uniform. That's next-level heroism, because that would naturally mean death. Regarding this sort of thing, "The Natural" is anything but.

### Super Natural

"The Natural" is pure, unadulterated, old-fashioned hero worship, with a number of supernatural burnishings. All the more so when I noticed, after all these years of acclimating to movies where actors actually prepare as bodybuilders by lifting heavy and getting on "the juice" (steroids) to approximate professional athlete bodies—that Robert Redford's scantly muscled 1984 body is very man-on-the-street-ish, with no jock swagger.

Redford was coasting on his blond movie-star looks. Which was quite OK back then. But "The (super) Natural" is a movie now best shown to boys in grades 1 through 5.



REACHING WITHIN:  
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

# Finding Our Paradise Lost

ERIC BESS

As we come close to the middle of 2020, I'm left asking "What else will happen?" It's been an eventful year so far, to say the least. I've been thinking deeply about the events that have occurred this year, and I believe the time is ripe to reflect on ourselves and question what it means to be good human beings. I, myself, was encouraged to reflect when I came across the illustration by William Blake titled "The Casting of Rebel Angels Into Hell," based on John Milton's "Paradise Lost."

**John Milton and 'Paradise Lost'**  
John Milton was a 17th-century English author, whose greatest work is "Paradise Lost," an epic poem about the conflict between God and Satan and its effect on human beings. He wrote with the help of an assistant after going completely blind.

The second edition of "Paradise Lost" was published in 1674 and contained 12 books, which included prose arguments defending the ways of God at the beginning of each book. According to the Poetry Foundation website:

"In the first two books the aftermath of the War in Heaven is viewed, with Satan and his defeated legions of angels having been cast down into Hell, a place of incarceration where they are tormented by a tumultuous lake of liquid fire ... Book 6 describes the war in detail as the rival armies of good and evil angels clash ... God the Father empowers the Son to drive the evil angels from Heaven. Mounting his chariot, the Son, armed with thunderbolts, accelerates toward the evil angels and discharges his weaponry. To avoid the onrushing chariot and the wrathful Son, the evil angels, in effect, leap from the precipice of Heaven and plummet into Hell."

In hell, the fallen angels give arguments for how they should proceed against God and heaven. Beelzebub, a chief lieutenant of Satan, suggests "that the earth and its newly created inhabitants [human beings] should be assessed and then overcome by force or seduced by guile."

To get back at God, Satan takes this mission himself and leaves hell to revive "the possibility of victory on



"The Casting of the Rebel Angels Into Hell," from the Butts Set of Illustrations for "Paradise Lost," 1808, by William Blake. Watercolor, illustration. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

**John Milton was a 17th-century English author, whose greatest work is 'Paradise Lost.'**

the middle ground of earth." In other words, Satan, believing direct war with God would result in defeat, decides to fight for the souls of God's new creation: human beings.

**The Fall of the Rebel Angels**

William Blake was a religious 19th-century English author and artist who often had spiritual visions. As a mature artist, he illustrated spiritual stories from the Bible, and from works by Dante and Milton.

In 1808, Blake created a series of watercolor illustrations for Milton's "Paradise Lost," one of which is titled "The Casting of the Rebel Angels Into Hell." The piece illustrates the war between God and the rebel angels that's described in Book 6 of "Paradise Lost."

Blake, however, interpreted the war a little differently than Milton described it. Blake did not depict the Son shoot-

ing thunderbolts at the rebel angels from a chariot. Instead, he divided the composition into upper and lower halves.

The upper half contains the Son, who sits in a circle and aims an arrow at the rebel angels in the lower half. The Son is dressed in white—a color that denotes purity—and is surrounded by angels on both sides, who watch him draw back the arrow on his bow. A total of seven figures are in the upper half of the composition, and the number 7, in a biblical sense, represents "completeness and perfection," according to the website BibleStudy.

In the lower half of the composition, there are 13 heads, and "the number 13 is symbolic of rebellion and lawlessness" against God. These 13 heads represent the rebel angels whom the Son casts down into the fires of hell. For those whose faces can be seen, all

of them look frightened except one: the central figure, Satan, who looks intently below with his hands behind his head.

**Choosing Righteousness**

Milton tells a fascinating story about the battle between good and evil. By its mere presence, righteousness seems to frighten evil just as the righteousness of the Son caused the rebel angels to leap from the precipice of heaven in fear. Evil may momentarily scurry away, but it seems to use underhanded means to find its way back into an age-old war.

For Milton, evil finds its way back through manipulating God's new creation, the human being. With our hearts and minds, we human beings have the ability to choose righteousness or evil.

But what does it mean to be righteous? According to the symbolism in Blake's illustration, righteousness would align with purity, completeness, and perfection. Righteousness also expels evil from the kingdom of heaven. Thus, if we are to be righteous, we must—with our hearts and minds—choose to be pure, complete, and perfect in God, and only then will we expel the evil from our kingdom of heaven, for as Blake might say, the kingdom of God is within us.

And what does it mean to be evil? The symbolism in the lower half of the composition would suggest that evil aligns with rebellion and lawlessness against God, that is, against righteousness.

If the kingdom of God is within, then wouldn't rebellion and lawlessness against God really be rebellion and lawlessness against what we are innately, which, in this case, would be righteous? And what are the consequences for rebelling against the righteousness that we authentically are? We hurt ourselves by choosing the evil of inauthenticity.

And what are we choosing for ourselves, now? In what direction are our hearts and minds going as individuals, as families, as a nation? Will we resign ourselves to the lower half of the composition, justifying the evil of our actions because we want to follow a herd into a lake of liquid fire we can't see? Or will we align ourselves with righteousness and bring forth the kingdom of heaven that lays dormant within us all?

*Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.*

*Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).*

BOOK REVIEW: 'AMERICAN CRUSADE: OUR FIGHT TO STAY FREE'

## What's at Stake in America Now

We're in the midst of a war. No, it is not about COVID-19 per se, although that's extremely serious. It is not about the harm to our economy or the riots—both catastrophes, in and of themselves. Rather, it is the ongoing war by communism against America's soul.

Pete Hegseth's new book, "American Crusade: Our Fight to Stay Free," is the right book at just the right time. Hegseth, the co-host of "Fox & Friends Weekend" and a Fox News senior political analyst, reminds us that great republics such as America die when they forget who they are, become lazy and arrogant, or betray their founding ideals.

In dealing with these ideas, Hegseth redefines common terms that should allow all Americans to pause and then bypass preconceived notions. He defines the Declaration of Independence as America's soul, distinguished from the Constitution, which is America's body.

Hegseth calls the Constitution brilliant—the second most important political document ever written by man. It has checks and balances, coequal branches of government, and federalism. However, he makes the outstanding point that if the Constitution is not grounded in the principles of the Declaration of Independence, then the Constitution means nothing.

It is the Declaration of Independence that is the source of American beliefs. Without this valuable document, America is simply not America, even with a Constitution.

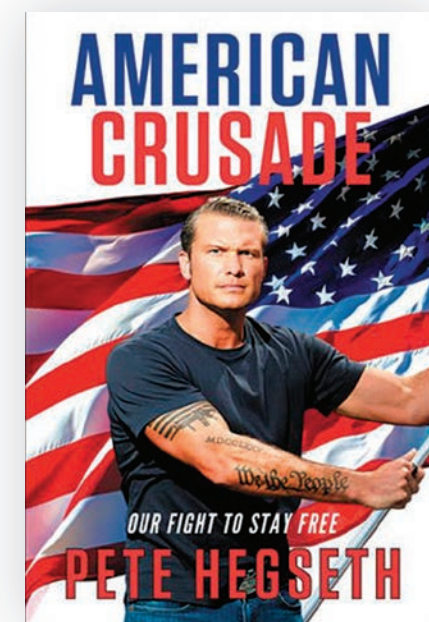
**He says that socialism runs counter to human nature: the drive to create value, build, take risks, and choose how to make a living.**

**Progressives Are Not Liberals**

Progressives, Hegseth believes, think the Constitution can "evolve" to fit their view of the world. But they know that the Declaration cannot, and does not, evolve. Understanding this point is vital to understanding America's politics.

Hegseth says that progressives are global citizens, not American patriots. The left has appropriated the word "liberal" and while some old-school liberals still exist, "they are a dying breed—literally and figuratively."

He believes that progressives don't care about fair elections; they want power any way they can get it. When



Pete Hegseth's new book calls for us to protect our freedoms.

progressives have power, Hegseth says, taxes must always be higher to support an ever-increasing number of governmental programs. In addition, he sees government as the god of progressives, with abortion representing the ultimate replacement of God's will by the government.

Progressives emphasize the needs of the group over the rights of the individuals, while capitalism is based on individual rights.

**The Distinction Between Globalization and Globalism**

For Hegseth, globalization is a technological reality. We make a reservation to fly to Israel with the click of an iPhone app. Globalism, on the other hand, is a scheme to eliminate national sovereignty in order to centralize control over the means of production. Hegseth goes on to say that simply put: Globalism is worldwide socialism.

Hegseth feels that American government contracts should be awarded only to companies that demonstrate pro-American economic patriotism. Some multinational corporations have grown so dominant that they have become more powerful than the countries in which they reside. Amazon, Apple, and Alphabet (Google) sign contracts with foreign governments—most especially China—that enable them to circumvent U.S. taxes and competition while enriching the most despotic regimes in the world.

**The Distinction Between a Democracy and a Republic**

Our founders rejected the idea of a pure democracy because democracies are governed by a simple majority rule. Whoever gets the most votes makes the rules—including abolish-

ing the very rights we assume are immutable. Our republic inherently guarantees an individual's rights, no matter the view of the majority, and no matter the impulses of those with government power.

**Progressive Views**

Other parts of the book cover topics that show progressive ideas as compared to traditional ways of looking at them. Here are just a few examples that seem timely:

**Gun Rights**

The Second Amendment grants Americans the privilege of owning and possessing firearms because an armed populace cannot be subjugated. Hegseth says that progressives want to take away gun rights, not for the sake of citizen safety but in order to control citizens. He says to look at Venezuela for confirmation that unarmed citizens are at the mercy of their government.

**Gender**

Traditionally, one's genitals or chromosomes determine one's gender. The progressive view, according to Hegseth, claims that gender is a choice; it's what he or she decides gender to be. Progressives think that laws and social norms therefore should conform to these decisions and that a person's biological sex is irrelevant. Hegseth calls out the progressives as a ridiculous "multiple-choice gender."

**Socialism**

Hegseth says the progressives favor socialism, which is exactly the opposite of traditional thought. With socialism, the rights of the individual are made secondary to the desires of the collective. Moreover, he says that socialism runs counter to human nature: the drive to create value, build, take risks, and choose how to make a living. At its best, a capitalist economy can raise wages, lower unemployment, and put American workers first, because this economic system unleashes the God-given human spirit.

**Fighting for Freedom**

Pete Hegseth's background as a warrior on the battlefield allows him to see how fragile freedom is. He concludes by saying that it is not the time for passivity but time for action by American Crusaders to promote the cause of freedom: "Without faith—without belief in a power and principles greater than oneself—life is selfish, small, and scary."

*Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired teacher with 45 years' experience teaching children. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at LWiegenfeld@aol.com*



Retired Marine Lt. Col. and author Michael Zacchea appears in a four-minute video explaining how the Metropolitan Museum of Art is helping him recover from post-traumatic stress syndrome.



"Washington Crossing the Delaware," 1851, by Emanuel Leutze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

## The Met Deserves a Hero's Welcome

The Metropolitan Museum of Art celebrates its 150th year anniversary

J.H. WHITE

On Christmas-day in seventy-six, Our ragged troops with bayonets fixed, For Trenton marched away. The Delaware see! the boats below! The light obscured by hail and snow! But no signs of dismay.

—"Battle of Trenton" by an anonymous 19th-century poet

"Washington Crossing the Delaware" hangs nobly in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. It illustrates General Washington's voyage in Durham boats across the Delaware River to the Battle of Trenton on the night of Christ's day of birth, Christmas 1776. This surprise attack was a major turning point in the Revolutionary War and became the general's most celebrated victory. A photograph of two groups admiring

"Washington Crossing the Delaware" welcomes you online to the exhibition "Making The Met, 1870-2020," the centerpiece of The Met's 150th-anniversary celebration. The photograph displays the museum's timeless appeal: The left half of the image in black and white shows a historical photo of a 19th-century or early 20th-century family; the right half in color shows a contemporary group of adults.

In the iconic painting, "Most of the men in this dramatic scene, engage in a turbulent contest, attempting to keep their boats moving forward against ice and wind. The disarray of soldiers serves as a foil for the tall and stalwart General Washington who gazes steadily toward the far shore. His concentration and his will seem to provide the very motivating force for the unlikely enterprise," the online audio guide explains. In fact, the courage, confidence, and

perseverance that Washington exudes in this painting seems appropriately reflective of The Met's own birth 150 years ago.

"When the Museum was founded by an intrepid group of New Yorkers in 1870, we had nothing besides our newly minted charter: not one piece of art, and no building to put it in," states the online post "On Our 150th Anniversary, We Reflect on The Met Community" by the museum president and CEO Daniel H. Weiss and director Max Hollein. "The founders believed that our burgeoning city should have a museum equal to the great collections of Europe. Thanks to their determination and early vision, today we are the world's largest art museum, spanning five thousand years of art history, and we welcome seven million visitors a year."

Built with a bold pioneering spirit, The Met has been a bastion of innovation, cultural preservation, and enrichment for 15 decades. For example, Bashford Dean, the founding curator of the Department of Arms and Armor, crafted a stronger, life-saving helmet for the U.S. War Department after a large number of serious head injuries occurred in World War I. More recently, after 9/11, in a touching display, the museum honored the New York City Fire Department and its fallen firefighters by exhibiting their sign-out boards.

"Through it all, art has provided us joy, comfort, and inspiration, and helped us to foster understanding and compas-

sion, enlightening the lives of our local and global audiences even in the most difficult of circumstances," Weiss and Hollein write.

**Beautiful Yet Broken**

As one of its many captivating exhibits to celebrate this momentous year, The Met has produced a video series called "Met Stories," sharing some of its patrons' unexpected and compelling anecdotes. In episode five, "Catharsis," retired Marine Lt. Col. and author Michael Zacchea unveils how he has coped with the brutal realities of war that followed him home from the Middle East.

Deployed for the Iraq War in 2004, Zacchea was the first U.S. military adviser to train and lead an Iraqi army battalion into combat.

"I tried to meet them where they were in their own cultural terms," he says in the four-minute episode. "I built very profound friendships with the Iraqis, and I'm very, very aware that the relationships I built saved my life."

In the second battle of Fallujah, a rocket-propelled grenade impacted a rock wall right behind him, breaking his right shoulder. He also suffered traumatic brain injury and bled internally for weeks, even after he returned home to New York City.

"Sometimes I couldn't tell if I was in Iraq or in the United States; that's post-traumatic stress. I was really messed up. I was really lost and I needed a lot of

**The Met has produced a video series called 'Met Stories,' sharing some of its patrons' unexpected and compelling anecdotes.**

help," he says.

In college, one of his majors had been classical civilization, so Zacchea started revisiting the Greek and Roman works of the Met, seeking solace. There he learned a story about the great ancient Greek warrior Ajax who, upon returning home, killed 600 oxen, mistaking them for Trojans.

"Oh, now this is what I'm experiencing. You interpret all of your inputs as threats, and so you respond neurologically like you're in combat because that's what keeps you alive," he says. "I started coming to The Met to the classical section, and it started rebuilding me spiritually. This is a truth about the human experience of war and war trauma. I could come here and see mirrored in the broken statues, my own body. It's almost like I'm experiencing catharsis. The sculptures are beautiful, but they're still broken."

Like Washington's own resilient, courageous spirit sailing across the Delaware, The Met has long helped fortify its local, national, and international patrons through the timeless power of art, culture, and wisdom.

Now, brothers of the patriot bands, Let's sing deliverance from the hands Of arbitrary sway. And as our life is but a span, Let's touch the tankard while we can, In memory of that day. —"Battle of Trenton"

*J.H. White is an arts, culture, and men's fashion journalist living in New York.*



**POPCORN AND INSPIRATION:**  
FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

# An Unsettling, yet Ultimately Uplifting Drama

The life of Christy Brown

IAN KANE

“Go on, Christy ... Go on, make your mark,” says young Christy Brown’s mother. She encourages him to scribble something on a chalkboard with his left foot. She sees something in him that most others don’t, since they assume that he’s brain-damaged.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Although Christy (Daniel Day-Lewis) was born with cerebral palsy, he possesses a steel-trap mind that is brimming with creative energy. Growing up, Christy (the young version played by Hugh O’Conor) learns to paint with the only dexterous appendage he has—his left foot. However, when he tries to communicate with others, his words come out as unintelligible grunts and moans.

Directed by Jim Sheridan and premiering in the U.K. in 1989, “My Left Foot” details the real-life trials and tribulations of writer, poet, and painter Christy Brown. The film is a partly fictional biographical drama (along with well-timed bits of comedy here and there), adapted by Shane Connaughton and Jim Sheridan. It is based on Brown’s 1954 book, “My Left Foot.”

His hard-working, alcoholic father (Ray McAnally) largely ignores him as a child—at least initially. He feels ashamed of his son’s condition. Meanwhile, his stoutly built mother (Brenda Fricker) instinctively recognizes that there is some untapped potential within the lad, and she refuses the medical establishment’s advice to institutionalize him. (He later visits a clinic voluntarily.)

Despite Christy’s physical condition, the other boys in the Dublin-slum neighborhood fully embrace him as part of their hangout group. Christy’s mother even al-

lows the boys to cheerily wheel him around in his main source of transportation—a rickety wooden cart. She figures that getting him out of the house to socialize while he’s young will better prepare him for adulthood.

At a certain point, Christy’s father gets laid off from his job as a bricklayer. The family goes into belt-tightening mode, which includes eating porridge multiple times a day. Despite falling on hard times, Christy’s mother has stashed away some savings to eventually purchase a wheelchair for her beloved son.

## Daniel Day-Lewis gives a stellar performance as Christy Brown.

Later, as a young man, Christy becomes more reclusive. The reality that he is different from others weighs heavily on him, and he holes up in his deadbolt-locked bedroom in his parents’ home.

One day, Christy’s mother introduces him to Dr. Eileen Cole (Fiona Shaw), who invites him to come and stay at a clinic specializing in cerebral palsy. He accepts. There, Christy realizes that many of the other patients are in far worse shape. This gives him a sense of hope; he returns to his parents’ home with a renewed interest in his creative exploits.

However, he’s become smitten with Dr. Cole. She’s the only woman, outside of his family, who has shown a genuine interest in him. Not only does she eventually teach him to talk, but she also makes it possible for him to have an art exhibition that showcases his paintings. But will his feelings for



Daniel Day-Lewis won the 1990 Oscar for best actor for his portrayal of a brilliant man with cerebral palsy in “My Left Foot.”



Brenda Fricker, as the mother of Christy (Daniel Day-Lewis), also won an Oscar for best supporting actress for her portrayal.

her be reciprocated?

Christy’s mother notices an odd change in Christy’s voice; she becomes fearful that the hope she hears in it could spell potential pain for her son.

One thing that I am always wary of when watching films featuring those with disabilities or special needs are signs of emotional manipulation, or in the worst cases, downright exploitation. Admittedly, although there are some scenes early in the film that are tough to watch, it eventually becomes surprisingly enjoyable. There are even some hilarious scenes that made me chuckle.

This is due in no small part to Lewis’s stellar performance as Brown. The highly regarded actor manages to convey a wide array of emotions, despite (or perhaps because of) the limited communicative abilities of Christy.

Likewise, Fricker, an Irish character actor, is phenomenal as Brown’s doting mother. She brings an unusual earthiness to her performance as the resolute, yet sometimes vulnerable, backbone of the working-class Brown family.

“My Left Foot” is a deeply moving, uplifting celebration of the life of Christy Brown. It’s a very important film (that is never self-important) and one that everyone should see at some point in their lives.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

### ‘My Left Foot’

**Director**  
Jim Sheridan

**Starring**  
Daniel Day-Lewis, Brenda Fricker, Alison Whelan

**Running Time**  
1 hour, 43 minutes

**Rated**  
R

**Release Date**  
March 30, 1990 (USA)

★★★★★

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