

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## The Chrysanthemum

*Symbol of Strength and Resilience*

NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

CORA WANG

As the chill of autumn sets in, trees begin to lose their vibrancy, and plants begin to wilt. However, one particular flower prevails—the chrysanthemum. While its surroundings fade away, defeated by the frigid winds, this resilient flower starts to bloom. Since ancient times, the chrysanthemum has been admired by Chinese scholars and literati, inspiring countless poems, stories, and artworks. Besides praising it for its beauty, they celebrated it as a symbol of vitality and tenacity.

### Humble Origins

One of the earliest instances of the chrysanthemum being referenced in poetry is in Qu Yuan's famous poem "Li Sao," composed during the Warring States period. In it, he writes: "Dew from magnolia leaves I drank at dawn, / At eve for food were aster petals borne."

Aster refers to the Asteraceae family of flowering plants, to which the chrysanthemum belongs. Chrysanthemums were commonly used for medicine. In just a few lines, Qu Yuan conveys that what matters isn't one's wealth, but rather the purity of one's heart.

As the poem suggests, the chrysanthemum was a relatively unremarkable flower, frequently used by the common people. In the "Compendium of Materia Medica," a Chinese herbology volume written in the Ming Dynasty, numerous species of chrysanthemums were documented. One may wonder how such an ordinary plant acquired such cultural significance.

The chrysanthemum's escalation in status didn't occur until the Jin Dynasty, when it was brought to prominence by the poet Tao Yuanming. Much of his poetry described his simple life of seclusion in the countryside. He often drew inspiration from the beauty and serenity of nature, with the chrysanthemum being a frequent motif. In one of his most famous poems, "Drinking: No. 5," he wrote: "I pluck chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge, / and gaze afar towards the southern mountains."

Yuanming's poetry often evoked in readers a yearning for the simplicity of a pastoral lifestyle,

away from the bustle of city life. As a result, the chrysanthemum became a symbol of seclusion and a life free of materialism.

### A Righteous Heart

This characterization of the chrysanthemum can further be seen in literature, such as in the story "Yuchu Xinzhi." Written in the Qing Dynasty, it tells the tale of a scholar named Gao Chan. He was viewed as peculiar by his fellow intellectuals, as he had no desire for fame or wealth, and was often at odds with the Confucian scholars prevalent at the time. Gao Chan kept a low profile, but he was known by those close to him for his kindness and righteousness. He was always seeking self-improvement and frequently carried out good deeds in secret.

Gao Chan felt disillusioned by the fickleness of the world around him and longed for the freedom of the countryside. Thus, he decided to leave the tumult of the city and moved with his family to the mountains. For years, he lived a simple yet fulfilling existence amid nature. All was well, until one day a flood suddenly destroyed his home. Once again, he was forced to consider the volatility of life.

After some deliberation, Gao Chan realized that living a peaceful, idyllic lifestyle didn't necessarily mean he had to retreat completely from society. Therefore, he moved back to the city, found an empty plot of land downtown, and built a new home. In his garden, he planted 500 chrysanthemum bulbs. Once autumn came around, his garden was in full bloom. Its beauty and sweet fragrance attracted visitors from all over the city.

Gao Chan opened the doors of his garden to the public, hoping to share his tranquil oasis with others. However, he chose to stay in the background, unknown to visitors.

*Continued on Page 4*



This elegant chrysanthemum painting is one of Zou Yigui's most celebrated pieces. It depicts vibrant clusters of chrysanthemums amid lush green leaves and was painted with the "mogu" technique.



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THE EPOCH TIMES  
TRUTH AND TRADITION

## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

### THE CLOCKS ARE STRIKING 13

# Culture in an Age of Deceit

JEFF MINICK

More than at any other time in our history, we live in an age of fraud and mendacity.

Here's just one example. Despite many health officials decrying the practice as useless, our mayors and governors have decreed citizens must wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Most of us, even those who despise the masks as demeaning and inhumane, slip on the masks when required.

But do they work? Here's a test. Slip on your mask, put on a pair of glasses, and exhale several times. That fog on the spectacles is air, and possibly viruses, escaping from your mask.

Other experts—academics, counselors, doctors—tell us we can choose to be male or female, or some other gender we fancy, without regard to biology or sex chromosomes. Whatever happened to "You can't fool Mother Nature"?

Our politicians and the pundits of our mainstream television media so infrequently tell the truth that many Americans are tuning out, looking to online sources for news, and feeling more and more like citizens of Soviet Russia reeking between the lines of Pravda to read out some real news of the day.

So what effect does this barrage of chicanery and euphemism have on our culture?

#### Masking Reality

Euphemism long ago entered the language, a useful device to soften reality. "Passed away" instead of died, for example, is a common expression used to lessen the blow of a death.

In recent years, however, some euphemisms seek to camouflage truth. Some military reports tell of "collateral damage," which is a softer way of saying "dead civilians," "pro-choice" sounds less harsh than pro-abortion, and "senior citizens" is now the usual substitute for "old people" in public communication.

In our present age of political correctness, these attempts to conceal meaning and intention behind a mask of deceptive words continue apace, raising a question: What effects does this corrosion have on our language and, consequently, on our culture?

#### The Media and Language

Recently, the Associated Press declared that writers should no longer use the word "riot" to describe the ongoing burning and looting undergone by some of our cities in the last five months, suggesting that we instead use "unrest" as a "milder" description.

So what then is a riot? Is the word to be banished from the English language? And what word shall we substitute for "rioters"? Will we see statements possibly like this: Those engaged in unrest burned cars in the parking lot, smashed

the windows of a nearby WalMart, beat four employees, and stole \$10,000 worth of goods?

Then there is the Black Lives Matter movement. A Martian who reads a bit about our culture might believe BLM aims to reduce inner-city violence in places like Chicago, where black-on-black violence weekly produces dead and wounded tolls worthy of a battlefield. But no—BLM with its Marxist agenda makes reference to blacks killed by the police, apparently meaning that some black lives, those killed by cops, matter more than others.

Many in the media have encouraged Black Lives Matter, in part because of the nobility of that title.

In 2018, writer Kevin Baker, in *The Atlantic*, called for a "truth and reconciliation commission" in the wake of Trump's presidential victory. Sounds noble, yes? Who would oppose truth and reconciliation? Unfortunately, Baker then spends the rest of his article slamming Trump, his staff, and his supporters (there's reconciliation for you), claiming "the right lies pervasively and it lies well." He makes no mention of the lies of the left.

This "truth and reconciliation commission" sounds more like a kangaroo court during the Maoist Cultural Revolution than an attempt at peace.

#### Revisiting '1984'

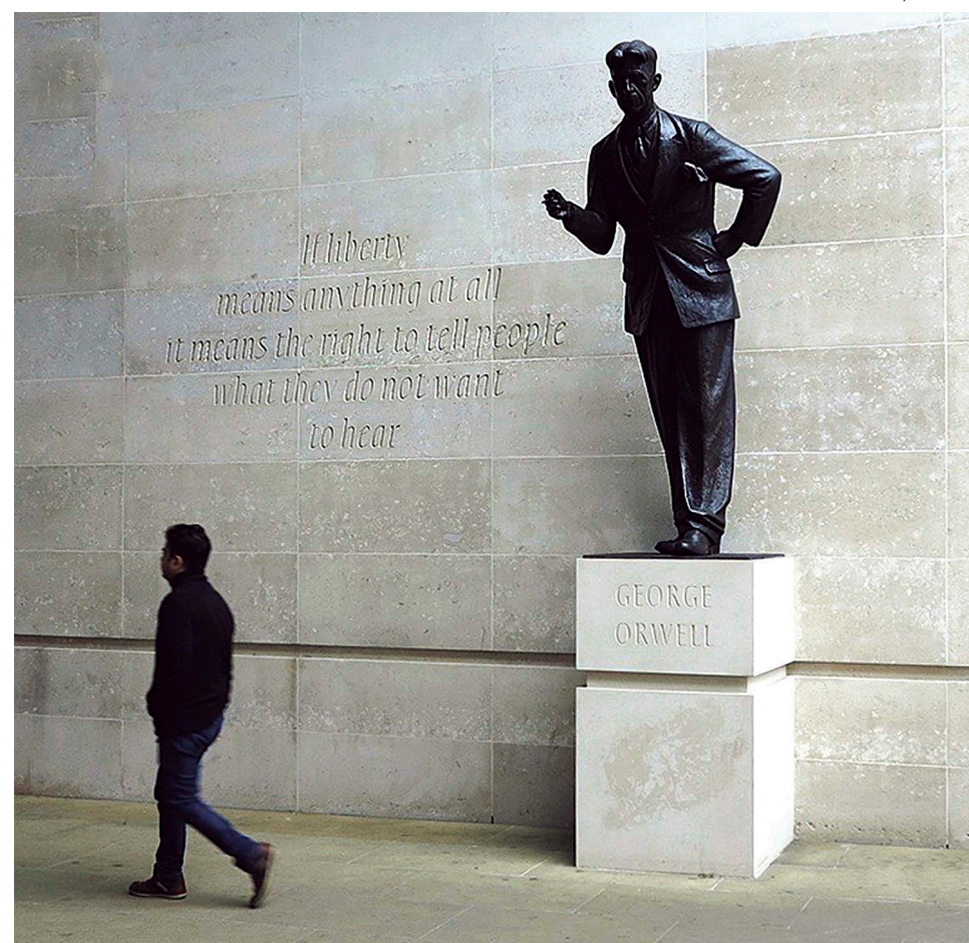
In his novel "1984," George Orwell introduced the world to the concept of Newspeak: "War Is Peace," "Freedom Is Slavery," and "Ignorance Is Strength"—all slogans concocted by the Ministry of Truth.

In his Appendix to "1984," Orwell quotes from the Declaration of Independence the famous passage beginning "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." and then writes: "It would have been quite impossible to render this into Newspeak while keeping to the sense of the original. The nearest one could come to doing so would be to swallow the whole passage up in the single word crimethink."

Today, Newspeak and crimethink have led us to such outlandish ideas as university safe spaces, cancel culture, and limitations on free speech.

In his explanation of Newspeak, Orwell introduces the idea of doublethink, which involves the ability "to tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies—all this is indispensably necessary to exercise doublethink... Ultimately, it is by means of doublethink that the Party has been able—and may, for all we know, continue to be able for thousands of years—to arrest the course of history." Are we teetering on the cliff of double-

NORMAN MCBEATH/CC-BY-4.0



A statue of George Orwell, located outside Broadcasting House, the BBC's headquarters in London.

think? Are we imprisoning or banishing our culture because of crimethink? Will the "safe spaces" of some of our universities, the self-censorship of campus conservatives, and "cancel culture," meaning the end of history as we know it, soon be common throughout our land?

#### Hope

Recently, I spoke with a 19-year-old Epoch Times reader from Montana. Maddie had written me an email of more than 2,000 words addressing her concerns about America and her belief that we need to place more value on the family and on faith if we are to save this country. In her letter, she wrote about the "clear lack of honesty" and "overarching theme of conformity and acceptance" in our society.

During our subsequent telephone conversation, Maddie at one point asked, "I know this sounds trite, but do you have hope for America?"

I replied, "Yes, I do. Because of people like you, Maddie, and because of my own children, and other young people I know. I'm an old guy, but you young people are the future. You are my hope."

Maddie and others understand that corrupted language walks hand in hand with corrupted morality and a corrupt culture. Like the masks we wear today that hide us one from the other in the public square, bankrupt words hide the truth from us.

The novel "1984" begins with the line "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." In this season of elections and pandemic, our clocks are striking 13 as well.

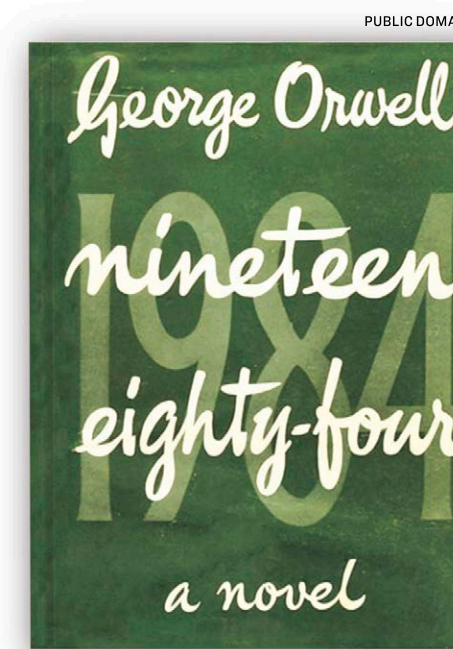
But Maddie and so many other young people I know give me hope that truthful language will prevail. Their eyes and ears are open, they are aware of the machinations of the word-shapers pushing for Newspeak and doublethink, and with courage and resolution they may restore clarity and truth to our language.

Words matter. Fight for them, young people. Fight the good fight.

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.



The Associated Press recently stated that we should use a euphemism instead of the word "riot" to describe the terror in our cities nationwide. "The Riot" by Philip Hoyoll. Private Collection.



The first-edition front cover of the novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four."



Today it feels like most news we read is propaganda. A 1934 delegate at the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) holds the Soviet mouthpiece: Pravda newspaper.

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## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## The Chrysanthemum

## Symbol of Strength and Resilience

Continued from Page 1

Guests remained unaware of the mysterious owner's true identity, and referred to the garden by two words on the sign near the door—"Hua Yin," meaning "hidden in the flowers." This story demonstrates the upstanding character of Gao Chan. His love for chrysanthemums contributed to the flower's becoming a symbol of righteousness as well as a sign of seclusion and simplicity.

## Grace and Purity

In Chinese art, the plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum are known as the "Four Gentlemen." They are the most common subjects of traditional ink-wash paintings. Artists were attracted to them not only for their beauty but also because they symbolized upright-ness, purity, and perseverance. Throughout the Qing Dynasty, the chrysanthemum, in particular, served as the muse for many talented painters.

One of the most famous artists of the Qing Dynasty is Yun Shouping. He is regarded as one of the "Six Masters" of the Qing period, and his works were known for their vibrancy and expressiveness.

He repopularized the "mogu"—also known as "boneless"—painting technique. This skill is particularly difficult to master, as there are no outlines, and brush strokes are made directly in either ink or color. Though it is challenging, the resulting artworks are exceptionally beautiful, as the technique captures the essence of a scene or object.

Another famous Qing Dynasty painter is Zou Yigui, who started out as a follower of Shouping's style. He was an artist for the imperial family and was known for his meticulous eye for detail, especially in his stunning flower paintings. In his book "Xiao Shan Hua Pu," he explains the methods and techniques needed to improve one's landscape and flower compositions. According to Yigui, being a good artist is not just about having skills. One must truly understand and be in tune with one's subject. This means not only appreciating the beauty of the flowers, but genuinely feeling the essence of nature on a deep level.

One of Yigui's most celebrated chrysanthemum paintings is currently on display at the National Palace Museum in Taiwan. It depicts vibrant clusters of chrysanthemums blooming amid lush green leaves, and was painted using the mogu method. By painting each petal with a soft gradient effect, Yigui gives the flowers a vivid, three-dimensional feel. Looking at the painting, one is filled with a sense of peace and comfort.

As the autumn leaves start changing color, and cold winds have a sharper bite, the aromatic scent of the chrysanthemum will once again fill the air. With thousands of years of rich cultural history, the chrysanthemum is much more than just another pretty flower.

This autumn, take a page from the books of the ancient Chinese literati: Brew yourself a cup of chrysanthemum tea, sit by a window with a view of the changing landscape, and enjoy some traditional poetry.

This article was written by Cora Wang and translated by Angela Feng into English. It is republished with permission from *Elite Magazine*.



In this exquisite chrysanthemum painting, Yun Shouping uses a gradient effect on each petal, giving the flowers a vivid, lifelike feel.



In this black-and-white ink-wash painting, the chrysanthemum takes on a more solemn, sophisticated feel. It is depicted alongside citruses and melons, which symbolize virtue and literary talent.

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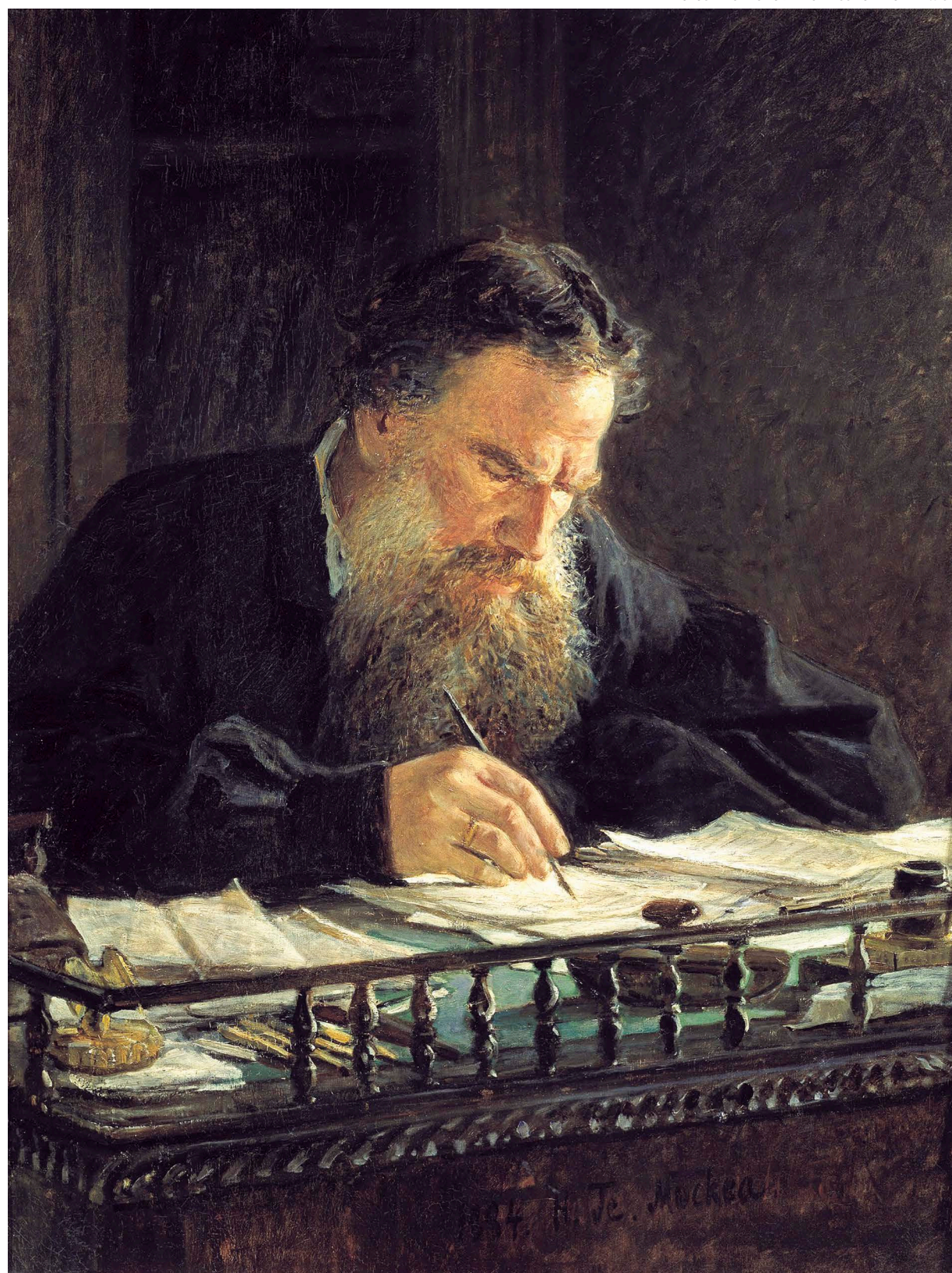
In this central panel of an ink-wash landscape painting, artist Du Jin portrays poet Tao Yuanming strolling through the mountains and admiring the chrysanthemum blossoms. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



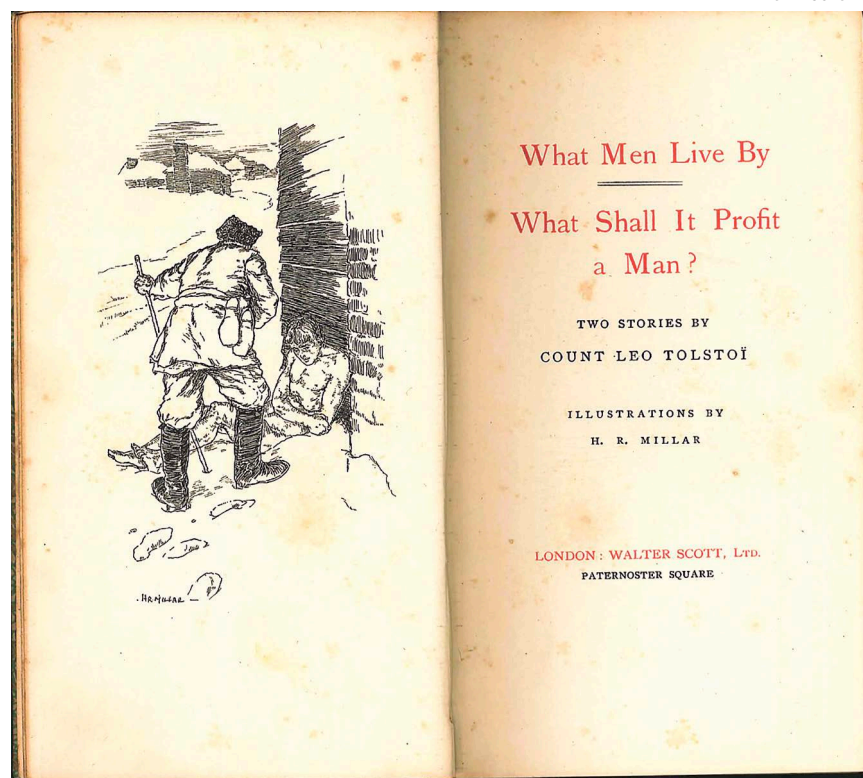
Qian Weicheng was one of the leading landscape and flower painters of the 18th century. In this vibrant and detailed painting, he illustrates five different types of chrysanthemums.



Zou Yigui impeccably captures the soothing feminine essence of the chrysanthemum in this painting through his use of gentle brush strokes and soft pastel colors.

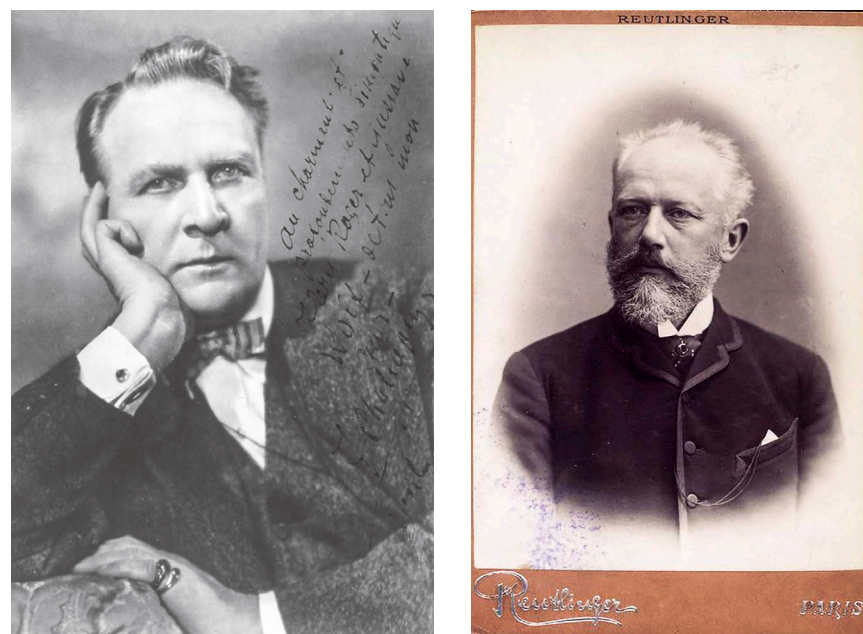


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INSIDE-OUTSIDE

An illustration by H.R. Millar for the 1885–1889 edition of Tolstoy's "What Men Live By," Walter Scott Publishers.



(Above left) A publicity shot of the great Russian basso Feodor Chaliapin. (Above right) Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, circa 1888. (Left) Portrait of Leo Tolstoy, 1882, by Nikolai Ge.

## TRUTH TELLERS

# Leo Tolstoy, in Love With Truth

RAYMOND BEEGLE

“The hero of my tale, whom I love with all the power of my soul, who is, was, and will ever be beautiful ... is truth.” So wrote Tolstoy at the beginning of his creative life. On his deathbed, his last, unfinished sentence began with the word “Truth.”

To express the truth about man's soul, to express those secrets that can't be expressed by ordinary words, was, in his view, the task and the sole purpose of art. “Art is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; art is a great matter. Only through the influence of art the peaceful cooperation of man will come about, and all violence will be set aside.”

It may surprise some readers to learn that of all art forms, the great Leo Tolstoy, the great man of letters, was most moved by music. His son, Serge, a composer, said that no man he had ever known was so deeply affected by music as his father. Notable people witnessed his reaction to music as well. The great Russian basso Feodor Chaliapin recalled that when he came to sing for Tolstoy, Sofia Tolstoya drew him aside saying: “It might be that when you sing, my husband will shed tears. Please try not to

notice, as he would feel terribly ashamed.” Tchaikovsky also noted in his diary: “Perhaps I have never in my life been so gratified and my creative ambition so touched as when L.N. Tolstoy, sitting beside me and listening to the andante of my First String Quartet, burst into tears.”

Tolstoy demanded truth from himself in his literary works: They must be born of urgent necessity, they must be simple, and they must be free of vanity. He convinced others of this. Tchaikovsky wrote to a friend: “Tolstoy persuaded me that any artist who works not from an inner urge but with a shrewd eye on effect [Tchaikovsky's italics] and who employs his talents with the idea of pleasing the public and pandering to it is not truly an artist.”

Tolstoy advised the young Leonid Andreyev that “simplicity is the necessary condition of the beautiful” and reproved the great and proud Bernard Shaw, telling him: “I see in your book a desire to surprise and astonish the reader by your great talent and intelligence. But it distracts the reader's attention from the subject, and focuses instead on your own brilliance.”

Art was a moral issue to Tolstoy. He considered plays, novels, paintings, operas, created solely for entertainment and for profit, to be counterfeit and unethical, virtu-

**As Tolstoy began to live his ideals, his spiritual life and worldview expanded.**

ally a form of prostitution. “As terrible as it is to say, most of the art of our time is prostitution: It can always be at hand according to the demands of the market. Like a prostitute it needs to be decorated. It answers only to profit. It corrupts, distracts, dissipates, and weakens one's spiritual powers,” he writes in “What Is Art.”

But what is this truth that Tolstoy loves so deeply and finds so beautiful? Ultimately, of course, it is a mystery, seen “through a glass, darkly,” but still, there is much to be seen, much to fill us with wonder. We find aspects of it in Tolstoy's fiction, in his essays, diaries, and letters.

For instance, we find that we know little: Pierre, the hero of “War and Peace,” remarks, “The one thing I know is that man can know no thing: and that is the height of wisdom.” We find that love is many faceted: Anna Karenina, before her tragic affair with Vronsky, when asked by jaded society friends “Well, Anna, what do you think of love?” replies, “There are as many kinds of love as there are human hearts.” We find an explanation for man's cruelty to his brother: Because of ignorance and coercion, we are blinded to the fact that every human life and every human soul is precious—holly beyond words—and we are violent to each other only out of ignorance or coercion.

Thoughts such as these were stated and restated in a succession of marvelous works—until the author's 50th year. Crisis came; it was a spiritual crisis. In his “Confession,” Tolstoy describes his profound struggle: “I desired with all my soul to be good. Every time I expressed the longings of my heart to be morally good I was met with contempt and ridicule but as soon as I gave way to low passions I was praised and encouraged. Ambition, love of power, gain, lechery, pride were held in high esteem, and I lived for them for years until my life came to a stop. Life seemed meaningless and I was drawn to suicide.”

Then came the realization that

all the truths he had so sincerely written about and believed in were no mere theories, no mere abstractions. He had to live them. They were indeed true, truer, more enduring than his own life or the lives of others, which pass away and are forgotten.

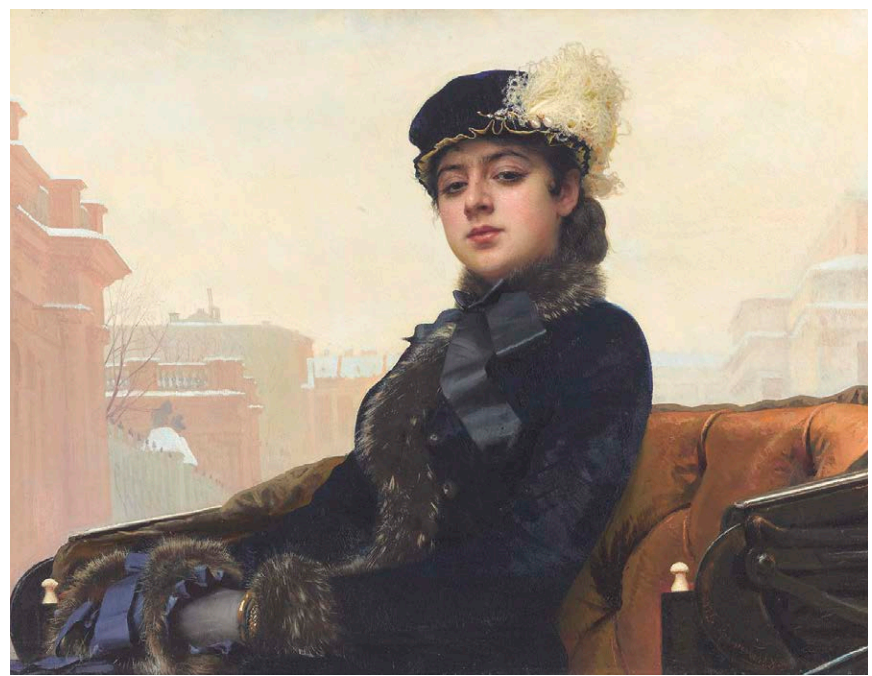
As he began to live his ideals, his spiritual life and worldview expanded. He stopped accepting money for his writing and wrote less fiction, turning to philosophical and religious subjects. The intellectual world did not approve. They did not approve of the marvelous essays “What Is to Be Done” or “The Kingdom of God Is Within You.” Turgenev wrote from Paris “My friend, return to literature! What fiction he did write was severely criticized, although his great novel “Resurrection” and the few short stories of this period are dazzling in their clarity and simplicity.

Truth always remained the hero of his tales. Well into his new life, Tolstoy published “What Men Live By,” written in the old folk tradition.

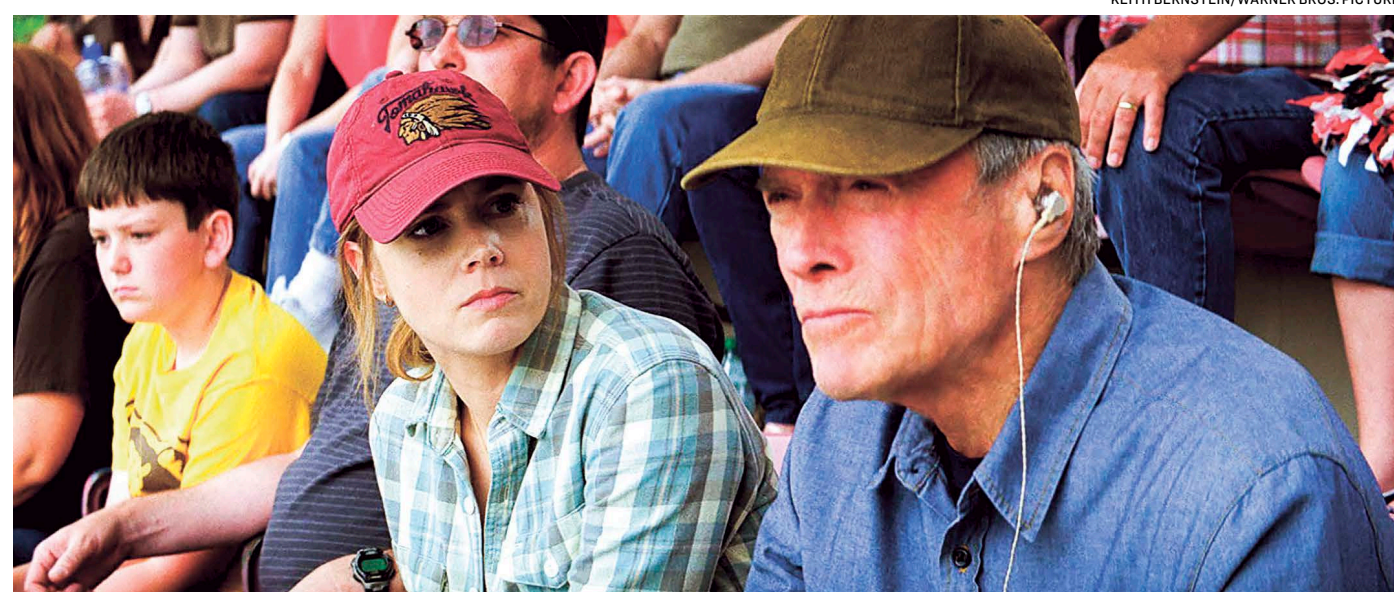
God sends an angel to a small Russian village to learn three truths about humankind. They are the truths that Tolstoy, in the course of his long life, came to own:

“What dwells in man”—“Love.”  
 “What is not given to man”—  
 “It is not given to man to know what tomorrow will require of him.”  
 “What men live by”—“God in our hearts.”

Raymond BeeGLE has performed as a collaborative pianist in the major concert halls of the United States, Europe, and South America, has written for *The Opera Quarterly*, *Classical Voice*, *Fanfare Magazine*, *Classic Record Collector (UK)*, and *The New York Observer*, and has served on the faculty of *The State University of New York-Stony Brook*, *The Music Academy of the West*, and *The American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria*. He has taught in the chamber music division of *The Manhattan School of Music* for the past 28 years.



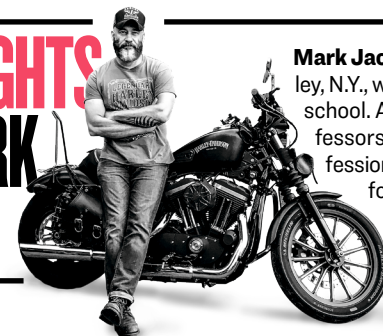
This portrait of unknown woman (or “The Stranger”), 1883, by Ivan Kramskoy, is often considered to have caught the essence of Tolstoy's heroine Anna Karenina. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.



KEITH BERNSTEIN/WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Old-fashioned baseball scouts, as talented as the players they hire, happen to be daughter (Amy Adams) and father (Clint Eastwood), in “Trouble With the Curve.”

## FILM INSIGHTS WITH 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.

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Old School Baseball Scouting Versus Sabermetrics

MARK JACKSON

“Trouble With the Curve,” produced by and also starring Clint Eastwood, in 2012, was a worthy newcomer to the pantheon of American baseball movies. Eastwood got back to doing what he'd done best for the past couple of decades—playing grouchy old men who've still got skills that shouldn't be bet against just yet. What skills might those be? Baseball scout skills. There's a prodigious amount of knowledge involved. Here's a good quote from a scout, such as the one Eastwood plays, which demonstrates the traditional art of scouting:

“The single biggest thing for me, and I write it down all the time, is handsy looseness to the swing. In other words, just that little whip in the bat with the hands instead of the strength. ... I've never

## “Trouble With the Curve”

Director Robert Lorenz

Starring Clint Eastwood, Amy Adams, Justin Timberlake, John Goodman

Rated PG-13

Running Time 1 hour, 51 minutes

Release Date Sept. 21, 2012

★★★★★

## REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

## A Real-Life Sports Fairy Tale

MARK JACKSON

“Moneyball,” starring Brad Pitt, is based on a true story about a paradigm shift in baseball and is a great example of how fairy tales really do exist. “Bull Durham” might still be No. 1 in baseball movies, but “Moneyball” might have to join the Top 5 baseball movies of all time.

Pitt's character, Billy Beane, had huge potential as a ballplayer but turned out to be a dismal disappointment in the big leagues. Then he made the move to manager and found his true talent.

In 2002, the Oakland A's had lost their star players to big-money offers from other teams, and Beane had to rebuild with a piddling budget.

In a trade meeting with another

team, he intuits a source of behind-the-scenes power emanating from an underling who turns out to be a Yale-educated visionary, Peter Brand (Jonah Hill) in a departure from Judd Apatow comedies; this role put him on the map permanently as a dramatic actor, and hunts him down. He grills him, senses sea-change potential, and hires him on the spot.

Espousing statistician (and baseball writer) Bill James's long-ignored “sabermetrics” theories, Brand uses statistical analysis to do two things for the Oakland A's: 1) find budget-friendly players, and 2) assemble a motley crew of overlooked and undervalued players who've each got a very specific and very special talent that goes unnoticed for various reasons.

The resulting Oakland A's team,

## “Moneyball”

Director Bennett Miller

Starring Brad Pitt, Jonah Hill, Robin Wright, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Chris Pratt

Rated PG-13

Running Time 2 hours, 13 minutes

Release Date Sept. 23, 2011

★★★★★

at first considered a laughing stock, goes on to do great things in “The Show” (Major League Baseball), tying long-standing records by the world's best-ever teams and generally standing the world of baseball on its head.

The movie is hilariously. The humor consists of uniformly understated and impeccably timed deadpan throwaways that—much like the ballplayers' talents—come in under the radar like smart bombs and leave the audience roaring.

## The Actual Fairy Tale

But the main appeal of “Moneyball” is that it's an archetypal story. There are many classic fairy tales that tell this particular story, the best example being “The Flying Ship” (a story from Andrew Lang's “The Yellow Fairy Book”).

Once upon a time, a young man sets out to seek his fortune. On his journey, he assembles a motley crew of misfits to help him find that fortune. He finds, for example, a man with his ear to the ground who can hear everything going on in the world. He recruits him. He says to another one: “Hello! What are you doing, hopping around on one leg?” The man replies: “I can't help it. I walk so fast that unless I tied up one leg I should be at the end of the earth in a bound.”

And so it goes. Each man has a particular supernatural skill that turns out to be perfectly matched to overcoming a particular problem. This is exactly how that Oak-

crickets and trucks on thruways.

Enter Johnny Flanagan (Justin Timberlake). Johnny, formerly known as “The Flame” when he pitched blazing 100 mph fastballs in the big leagues, blew out his rotator cuff early and now scouts for a living. Gus once scouted the young Flanagan.

The former Flame runs into Gus at a game, and one look at daughter Mickey fans Flanagan's flame into a forest fire. There is a courtship of highly rarified baseball trivia competitions.

All the congregated scouts are having themselves a look at above-mentioned high school batting powerhouse Bo Gentry (Joe Massingill), who's as prima-donna-annoying as he is talented.

Mickey helps her dad scout, displaying an eye and talent that reveals her to be an undeniable chip off the old block. Just from having recognized—from her motel room—the sound a world-class fastball makes when it hits the catcher's mitt, she unearths a prodigious pitching talent in Rigo Sanchez (Jay Galloway), the Latino kid who helps his mom run the motel.

**Theme wise, “Trouble With the Curve” is the exact opposite of “Moneyball.”**

Young Sanchez also sells peanuts at the high school games. Bat-tastic brat Bo rudely calls Rigo “Peanut Boy.”

However, the father-abandoning-daughter dysfunction eventually boils over and they go their separate ways.

## Our National Pastime

The baseball movie is an inherent piece of Americana, regardless of the era. The timeless “Crack!” of a wooden bat smacking horsehide, Ry Cooder-esque guitar musings on the soundtrack, the “Paff!” of big stadium lights shutting down after practice, and the inevitable showdown between a super batting talent up against a dangerous pitcher, or a super pitching talent up against a dangerous batter—these are some of our favorite American things, and “Trouble With the Curve” reminds us of that.

While 2011's “Moneyball” made a strong case for sabermetrics (statistical analysis measuring in-game activity) as being the future of the game, “Trouble With the Curve” makes just as strong a case for tried-and-true, in-the-field scouting as being the foundation that the house of baseball was built on, and therefore nondismantle-able. Make that: nondis-MickeyMantle-able.

**The main appeal of “Moneyball” is that it's an archetypal story.**

Baseball should be one of those things that remain about the journey: the human touch, wooden bats, the smell of a new-mown lawn, stadium lights glowing in the dusk, fireflies, hotdogs, Cracker Jacks, and everyone involved in the whole production highly invested and enjoying their jobs. Sure, a robot can assemble a Harley-Davidson quicker. But we should get back to caring less about wins and money ... ball.



Brad Pitt (L), as the A's team manager, and Jonah Hill, as a Yale-educated economist, work together in redefining the A's success in the drama “Moneyball.”

MELINDA SUE GORDON/COLUMBIA TRISTAR MARKETING GROUP, INC.



"The Tower of Babel," 1563, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Museum of Art History, Vienna.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

## Dispersing Our Pride to Get Closer to Heaven 'The Tower of Babel'

ERIC BESS

I always think about what it means to be a good person, and I often ask myself what mindsets prevent us from being authentically good people. Pride is always a mindset that comes up.

Even our good deeds are sometimes fueled by a desire to show off. We behave "righteously" not on principle but for the praise of our peers; we act not for others but to sustain our pride.

A classic example of pride and hubris is the story of the Tower of Babel.

### The Tower of Babel

The story of the Tower of Babel is referenced in the book of Genesis and in the "Aggadah," the classical rabbinic literature of Judaism. These books tell of a time when people were unified under one language and settled on the plains of Babylon.

The Babylonians were led by Nimrod, a fearless and mighty conqueror, who made his people rebel against God. He wanted to build a city with a tower that reached heaven and served as a place of idol worship. The Babylonians wanted to make a name for themselves and stay unified and strong.

God came down to witness the building of the tower and concluded that nothing the Babylonians planned would be impossible for them if they remained unified under one language. So God decided to confuse their language and spread the people around the world. The building of the tower ceased.

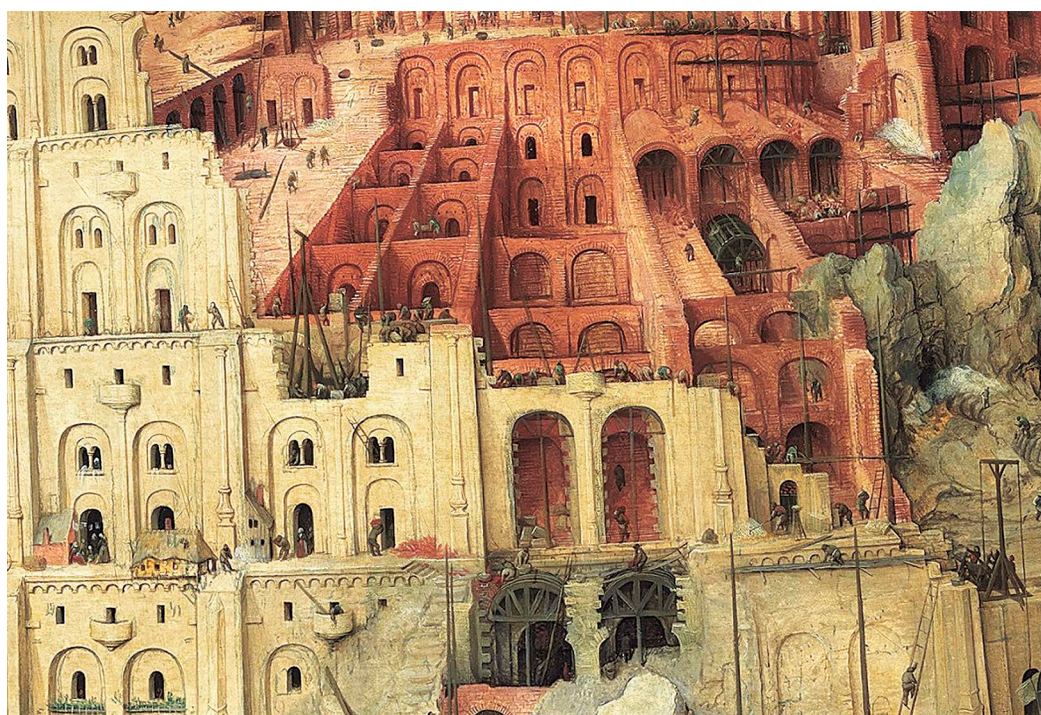
### Pieter Bruegel's Great Tower of Babel

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525–1569) was a Netherlandish artist of the Northern Renaissance during the 16th century. He was greatly influenced by the Northern Renaissance painter Hieronymus Bosch and created fantastical, multi-figural compositions with large landscapes.

In 1563, Bruegel painted "The Tower of Babel," one of his two representations of the tower; it is now located in Vienna.

The first thing we see is the tower. It's in mid-construction, and the soft yellows of its outer walls contrast well with the dark reds of its inner chambers as it stretches from its beginnings on earth, past the horizon line, and into the heavens.

Bruegel painted hundreds of small fig-



(Above) Detail of "The Tower of Babel" showing the workers. Museum of Art History, Vienna, Austria.



(Left) Detail of "The Tower of Babel" showing King Nimrod. Museum of Art History, Vienna, Austria.

ures helping to build the tower. They are all working together and scurrying about to complete the task.

All around the tower is the rest of the city. Bruegel has shown the contrast in size between the everyday person's dwelling and the enormity of the tower.

Our eyes are then led from the landscape down to the bottom left of the composition, where there is a row of dark bushes. In front of these bushes is a group of figures—our secondary focal point—one of which appears to be Nimrod.

Nimrod is dressed like a king, wearing a cloak on his back and royal crown on his head. Peasants kneel before him, while workers lift and carry large slabs to the

building site.

### Dispersing Our Pride

The question that immediately strikes me is, why does God disperse these people and confuse their language? We often think that there's wisdom in working together to complete a grand task, but it seems God thought otherwise in this case.

I think one reason might be that man has replaced God with himself. Bruegel depicted Nimrod as the one being worshiped instead of God, and Nimrod, as a mere human being—despite his successes at conquest—is unable to reach the heavens since God thwarts his prideful plans.

I think another reason God disperses

these people and confuses their language is because they are attempting, together, to create a heaven on earth, when maybe the journey to heaven is an individual and internal one.

Maybe their attempts are futile since their hearts and minds are not on God. Therefore, God does them a favor by dispersing them and confusing their language. In their new situation, they as individuals can once again turn inwardly toward God.

To me, the tower is a symbol of pride. I see it as a symbolic representation of our tendency to show off to those around us. We find ways, sometimes deceptively, to elevate ourselves above and beyond our peers so that we can be perceived as high and mighty: a false and doomed attempt to reach heaven on earth.

**All around the tower is the rest of the city. Bruegel has shown the contrast in size between the everyday person's dwelling and the enormity of the tower.**

Maybe there's more wisdom in attempting to reach heaven from within than through pursuits that fuel pride. Maybe we reach heaven not by building up our inner worth through the praise of others but by discarding and dispersing the outward desires and pride that may prevent us from obtaining the inner quietude in which God may speak, and we may hear him.

*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.*

### PERFORMING ARTS

## Casting Musicals: Big-Name Actors or Little-Known Talent?

The legacy of the ubiquitous Marni Nixon

MICHAEL KUREK

In recent years, we have seen a new trend in musicals that are made for television and film. That trend has been to cast a well-known actor in the lead, one not known for singing and dancing. Using high-profile actors would seem to deliver better ratings than using great but lesser-known Broadway singers.

As a fan of musicals, I have tuned in to watch these experiments, admittedly out of curiosity as to whether the star was really up to the task, and also due to the excitement and risk because some of these had their premieres on live TV. It was to me, predictably, that some of the actors sang and danced only passably, if that, leaving me to wish the producers had used real Broadway talent. But I was pleasantly surprised to learn that a few of these stars actually did get their start as singers and could manage better.

**It seemed that Marni Nixon was turning up everywhere, usually behind the scenes, but also on screen as Sister Sophia trying to solve a problem like Maria in 'The Sound of Music.'**

This new casting vogue, with all its mixed results, has included Glenn Close in the role of Nellie Forbush in a 2001 TV version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific." We saw country-pop star Carrie Underwood attempt the role of Maria in a 2013 TV version of "The Sound of Music." The list of actors in musicals on film goes on to include Ewan McGregor

and Nicole Kidman ("Moulin Rouge," 2001), Meryl Streep and Pierce Brosnan ("Mamma Mia," 2008), Hugh Jackman ("The Greatest Showman," 2017; with Anne Hathaway, "Les Misérables," 2012), Emma Watson and Dan Stevens ("Beauty and the Beast," 2017), Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling ("La La Land," 2016), and Emily Blunt ("Mary Poppins Returns," 2018).

### A Solution From a Voice Out of the Past

In every case, I confess that my mind and my heart went back to the great unsung singer Marni Nixon (1930–2016). At first, she was uncredited as a "ghost singer" whose lovely voice was dubbed into several movie musicals when the star's singing was not deemed adequate, and they lip-synched to her vocal track (or she to their failed attempt). This eventually leaked out and became known by at least some people. I am old enough to remember having quite a letdown and no small feeling of betrayal when I learned that Natalie Wood's Maria in "West Side Story" and parts of her role in "Gypsy" were not sung by Natalie Wood but by Marni Nixon!

Then I found out that the same interloper had made an imposition out of the perfect Audrey Hepburn in "My Fair Lady," and Deborah Kerr in both "The King and I" and "An Affair to Remember"! That list went on to include Jeanne Crain in "Cheaper by the Dozen" and even Marilyn Monroe in parts of her famous number "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend," plus several more.

It seemed that Marni Nixon was turning up everywhere, usually behind the scenes, but also on-screen as Sister Sophia trying to solve a problem like Maria in "The Sound of Music." She sang the voices of the Singing Flowers in Disney's animated "Alice in Wonderland" and the Geese in "Mary Poppins." In all, she appeared on more than 50 soundtracks and



On the set of 1964's "My Fair Lady." The voice of Audrey Hepburn (first right) was dubbed over by Marni Nixon for much of the singing in the musical.

GABRIEL BOUYS/APPIA/GETTY IMAGES



Actress and singer Marni Nixon in Hollywood, Calif., in 2011.

also began to perform live roles in opera, live solo recitals, and as a soloist with The New York Philharmonic and other major orchestras. I remember doing a double take in college when the teacher put on a recording of Arnold Schoenberg's spooky, signature atonal work, "Pierrot Lunaire," and mentioned that it was recorded by, who else, Marni Nixon!

Nixon taught at the California Institute of the Arts and even hosted a children's television show in Seattle in the late 1970s and early '80s, for which she won four Emmy Awards. She won several other awards, the most prestigious being the 2011 George Peabody Award for Outstanding Contributions to

American music.

Nixon was known for having a personality as lovely as her voice, though she was not entirely lucky in love. Her first husband and father of her three children, Ernest Gold, was known for composing the classic theme for the movie "Exodus." She married twice more and began to battle breast cancer in 1985, eventually succumbing to the disease in New York on July 24, 2016, at the age of 86, having lived nothing less than a rich, fabulous life.

### Weighing the Merits of 2 Approaches

And so I must return to consider the merits, or perhaps the lesser of evils, in having a real actor with an average singing voice or having a great singer provide the voice for a "fake" performance by a more famous actor. Of course, the ideal situation would be to find people who can do both well, like Julie Andrews. Alas, there may simply be too few of those in existence.

Yet, there would seem to be any number of great singers on the live Broadway stage who do act well enough to star in nonmusical movies, if only they were allowed to build name recognition and star status in that, too. Kristin Chenoweth and Mandy Patinkin come to mind as two from the world of the stage who made the leap into

film and TV roles but also have the pipes to do musicals.

I will venture to speculate that the mediocre singing in some of the recent TV and film musicals would have been completely unacceptable to producers of the past. It might be that the public is less demanding of great singing now, or more used to hearing average singing. However, I doubt they would now accept the kind of overdubbing done by Marni Nixon, if they found out about it. Ironically, audiences of years gone by appear to have been more willing to suspend disbelief in that area, yet far more sophisticated than we in their expectation and discernment of great singing.

*American composer Michael Kurek is the author of the recently released book "The Sound of Beauty: A Composer on Music in the Spiritual Life" and the composer of the Billboard No. 1 classical album "The Sea Knows." The winner of numerous composition awards, including the prestigious Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has served on the Nominations Committee of the Recording Academy for the classical Grammy Awards. He is a professor emeritus of composition at Vanderbilt University. For more information and music, visit MichaelKurek.com*

## New Online Store Shines Spotlight on Award-Winning Oil Paintings

CATHERINE YANG

The NTD International Figure Painting Competition is unique among the art competitions of the world.

That it only judges representational styles is rare enough, but the competition also places focus on content and meaning, not just technique. The competition has a mission to promote traditional fine arts, and has as its central theme "pure truth, pure kindness, pure beauty."

The mission served as a beacon for the burgeoning movement of representational artists last fall with an exhibition of the 2019 competition finalists' works in New York City.

Now, for the first time, the works previously available only through private auction are for sale to the public. Both original paintings and reproductions of works by selected finalists can be found online at InspiredOriginal.org

All of the proceeds from the store will go toward the artists and the competition. The selection of works available is subject to change.

### From the Artists

The competition's mission and vision is one that artists from around

the world appreciate as well. From Switzerland to Brazil to China to New York, finalists arrived last fall to marvel at the finalist exhibition in New York, and more than one contest veteran remarked that the quality of the works was a cut above what is typically found in competitions.

Sandra Kuck, an artist for 50 years, has won many awards and participated more than once in the NTD International Figure Painting Competition. The finalists' work both impressed and inspired her.

"Really, I've been to a lot of shows, and this is one of the best," said Kuck. She said that as an artist, her style and works celebrate beauty, and in recent years there has been a renaissance in this field.

Her piece titled "Yin and Yang," painted in her characteristic romantic realism style, won the Technique Award at the NTD competition. But some classical-style works caught Kuck's eye during the exhibition, and she said that perhaps she would start to go in that direction. "Yin and Yang" is currently listed in the new store, with prints available as well.

When Brazilian artist Clodoaldo Martins learned about the competition, it inspired him twofold. He had

participated in top competitions locally in São Paulo, but was excited to compare his works side by side with the best of realistic artists internationally.

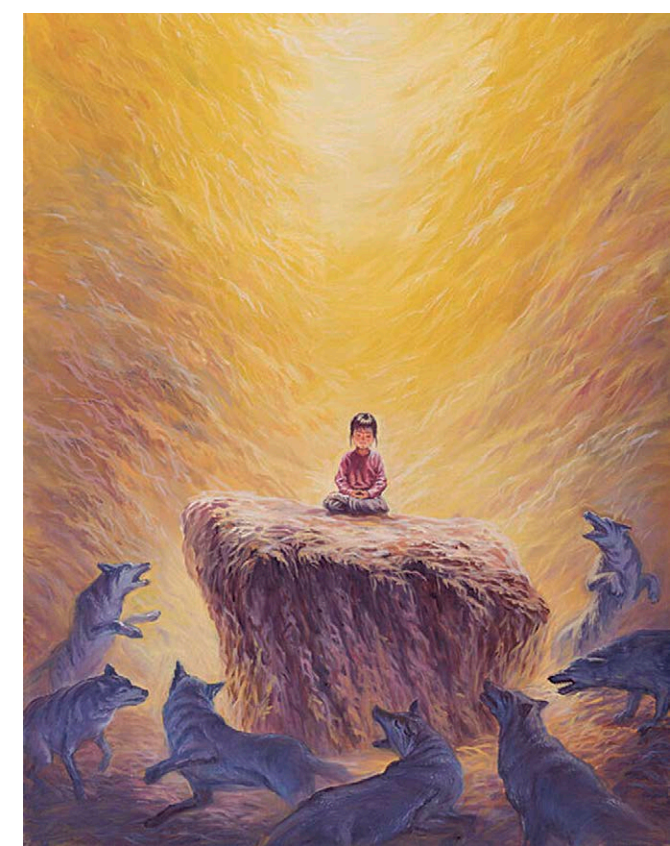
**The competition has a mission to promote traditional fine arts, and has as its central theme 'pure truth, pure kindness, pure beauty.'**

"I saw that the mission of NTD is to promote traditional art, which I think is very good. It is great that they can, through a competition, be able to promote traditional art," he said.

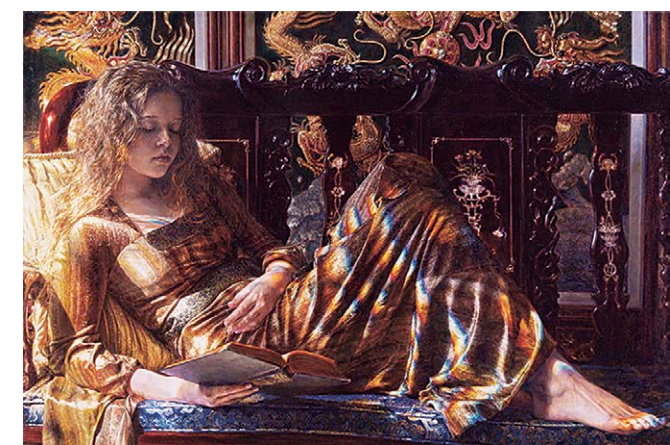
Secondly, he was moved by the themes of pure beauty, pure kindness, and pure compassion. Martins said that his works are usually filled with harsh light and a dramatic mood, but these competition themes inspired him to paint in a way he hadn't before.

In depicting innocence, Martins brought soft light, patience, and a sense of compassion into his work.

"I was thinking of repeating this type of theme that I used in this painting," he said.



"Unmoved" by Loc Duong.



"Yin and Yang" by Sandra Kuck.

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Big, Beautiful Western Epic Asks, What Makes a Big Man?

IAN KANE

As an unabashed fan of one of the greatest American film directors, William Wyler, as well as classic Westerns, I'm a little ashamed to have never seen "The Big Country" before. Wyler's Wild West opus directly preceded his sword and sandal historical epic "Ben-Hur," headlined by actor Charlton Heston. Here, however, Heston appears in one of the few supporting roles he played in his life, with the spotlight going to lead Gregory Peck.

The film opens in dramatic fashion, with a rousing title score by composer Jerome Moross. This is accompanied by beautiful cinematography by Franz F. Planer, and we see a stagecoach being drawn by horses through craggy canyons and over dusty, wind-swept prairies. These opening sequences really give a sense of the optimism that the post-war boom period of the 1950s (when the film was produced) encapsulated.

The stagecoach rides into a small town and rolls up to its depot. The tall, gentlemanly stranger, James McKay (Peck) emerges from the stagecoach and takes in his surroundings, and the scrappy inhabitants take in him as well. Dressed in a relatively clean three-piece suit and sporting a rounded derby hat, to say that McKay stands out like a sore thumb is a bit of an understatement.

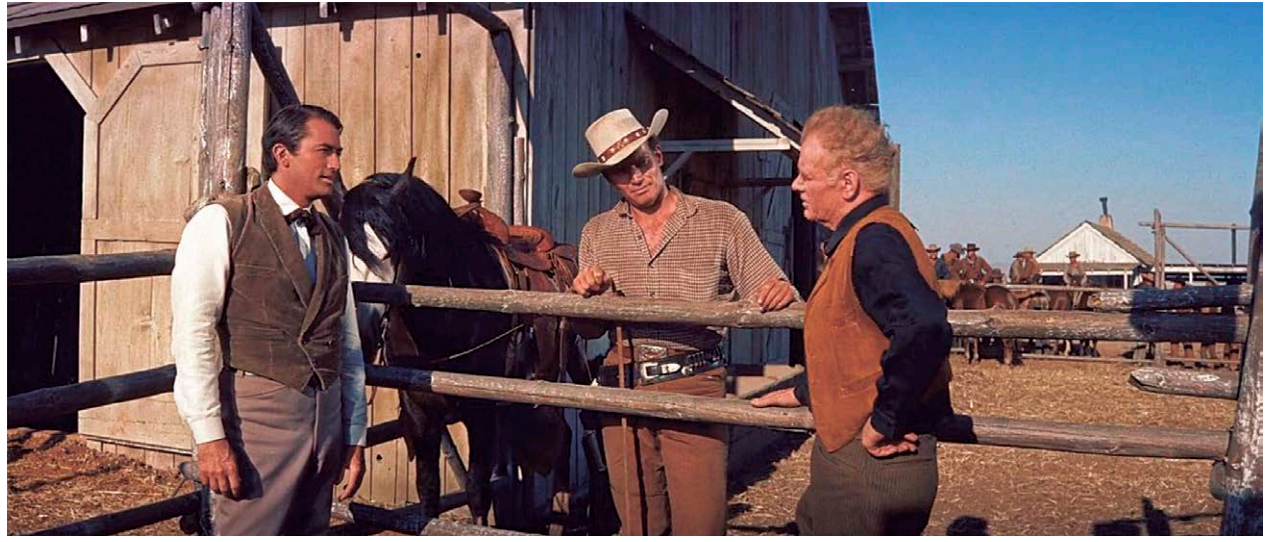
McKay is a retired sea captain who has traveled from "back East"

to the American West in order to meet his fiancée, Patricia Terrill (Carroll Baker), who lives on her father's enormous ranch. The Terrill ranch foreman, Steve Leech (Heston), shows up via horse and buggy to pick up McKay.

It becomes immediately apparent that Leech isn't fond of McKay. The foreman suggests to the new arrival that he not wear his duster hat "around here," explaining (in a condescending way) that "one of these wild cowboys might take it into his head to shoot it off ya."

**This film left me wanting to be magically transported back to director William Wyler's Wild West.**

After McKay meets up with wife-to-be Patricia, the couple are soon accosted by a scurrilous bunch known as the Hannasseys. Led by a troublemaking drunkard named Buck Hannassey (Chuck Connors), the men commence to roping McKay up just as one would a common herd animal. After some crude mocking and jeering, the men grow bored of their noncombative captive and untie him. With a parting remark, Buck declares to Patricia that McKay "ain't much of a man,"



In "The Big Country," James McKay (Gregory Peck, L) is considered a coward by ranch foreman Steve Leech (Charlton Heston, C) and ranch owner Maj. Henry Terrill (Charles Bickford), but nothing could be further from the truth.

before riding off with his cackling cohorts into clouds of dust.

Patricia's surprised McKay didn't fight back. He calmly responds that he didn't want to escalate something that wasn't that serious in the first place.

McKay meets the ranch's cattle baron (and Patricia's father), Henry Terrill (Charles Bickford). Apparently, Henry is a war veteran since everyone on the ranch refers to him as "the Major" and his immense ranch house is decorated with weapons galore.

During breakfast, McKay inadvertently touches a nerve when attempting to minimize his run-in with the Hannasseys the previous day—causing the Major to break from his cordiality and reveal his vehement hatred for them.

Leech walks in and interrupts their breakfast, reminding the Major about a morning hunting trip. McKay, sensing something's amiss, asks what the men are hunting. Leech's reply shocks him: They're going out to hunt for Hannasseys—to seek revenge for roughing up McKay.

As the Major and a large contingent of his men saddle up, something dawned on McKay. He briefly pleads with the Major not to escalate matters. When that doesn't work, he posits that the Major's conflict with the Hannasseys isn't

about what transpired the previous day, but rather a feud that already exists. In particular, the Major's personal vendetta against the Hannassey patriarch, Rufus (Burl Ives), which sinks even deeper than their dispute over water rights.

From that point on, McKay is largely considered by the locals to be cowardly, since he won't be cajoled into taking up arms against the Hannasseys. However, two people know better—schoolteacher Julie Maragon (Jean Simmons), who is Patricia's best friend, and the Terrills' ranch hand Ramón (Alfonso Bedoya). They rightly perceive that McKay's cool-headedness entails immense self-discipline and an unwillingness to stoop to unethical behavior.

But will his seemingly passive resolve be able to withstand the ever-escalating family feud when it begins to boil over?

### A Big Experience

I must say that this film left me wanting to be magically transported back to Wyler's Wild West—it was that immersive of a cinematic experience. Wyler's steadfast direction, coupled with the fantastic performances by its star-studded cast, elevates this film to something sublime. Although everyone performed

their roles convincingly, Ives's performance, in particular—as the head of the Hannassey clan—was peerless. His depiction of a rough-hewn, yet principled man is something for everyone to see, and the veteran actor steals every single scene he's in.

I saw a lot of Westerns growing up, but I'm actually glad that I didn't view "The Big Country" until I was older and able to appreciate it. It's a complex, multifaceted film that has a lot of moving parts, yet it never sags or breaks down under its own girthy, 2-hour, 46-minute runtime. That in itself is an incredible feat in filmmaking.

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

### 'The Big Country'

**Director**  
William Wyler

**Starring**  
Gregory Peck, Jean Simmons, Carroll Baker, Burl Ives, Charlton Heston

**Running Time**  
2 hours, 46 minutes

**Not Rated**

**Release Date**  
October 1958 (USA)

★★★★★



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