### THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS© CULTURE

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# The Many Meanings of Marriage: Centuries-Old Wisdom

A pair of geese take shelter among reeds during adverse weather. During the end of the Song Dynasty, this kind of painting symbolized the couple who suffered together and still loved each other.

ANN LIN

o that they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. —Matthew 19:6

Since biblical times, we've been searching for our other halves, wanting to ride into the sunset with our one true love, and marrying the love of our life. But marriage traditions through the ages have ranged from joyous to somber. Some ancient wedding traditions emphasized the challenges that awaited newlyweds and the loss of moving away from their families. If one word could capture the universal ideal of marriage success, it's probably "harmony," beginning with the story of our first ancestors.

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." —Genesis 2:18

According to the Hebrew Bible, all of humankind descended from Adam and Eve. God felt that Adam needed a partner and created Eve by taking her from Adam's rib. Thus, the first couple in the world was formed.

Eve was born to nurture and accompany Adam, and in exchange, Adam vowed to protect and provide for her. They were two sides of the same coin—born of the same body, and through God's blessed union, once again brought together as one in order to be fruitful.

#### If one word could capture the universal ideal of marriage success, it's probably 'harmony.'

The True Meaning of Marriage
In ancient China, it was said that
unmarried men and women were
incomplete. Only after they found
their other half and were wedded
were they considered whole. According to the "Yili Zhushu," a text
from the pre-Han Dynasty, "father
and son, man and wife, [and] brothers are one body as well." This passage illustrates the importance that
was placed on marriage in ancient
China. While brothers and fathers
and sons are bonded by blood,
husbands and wives are connected

only by love and loyalty. In "The Book of Rites," Confucius says, "From the distinction between man and woman came the righteousness between husband and wife." Similar to biblical beliefs, people in ancient China thought that men and women had different responsibilities. The husband was expected to provide for his wife and family, while the wife was supposed to take care of household duties. This exchange of responsibilities resulted in a mutual understanding and respect, which the ancients referred to as "righteousness."

Marriage was an important foundation of society in ancient China, and often played an important role in clan organization and politics.



Continued on Page 4

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### What People Are Saying



I read The Epoch Times daily.
I still like hard papers [...] and
I still like to grab that paper in
my hand, but I get more printed
versions of stories than ever
before. You guys have done an
amazing job, and really—I think
there's such a void in media,
especially newspapers. They
slant so solidly one way that
there are very few papers that
I can really feel that I can rely on,
and The Epoch Times is one.

SEAN HANNITY
Talk show host



The Epoch Times is a great place where you can understand traditional values in a way and in a tone and through content that is accessible. It's smart.

CARRIE SHEFFIELD
Columnist and broadcaster



I congratulate you and The Epoch Times for the work you are doing, especially with regard to keeping the menace of the communist threat in front of us.

**DR. SEBASTIAN GORKA**Military and intelligence analyst and former deputy assistant to the president



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TRUTH AND TRADITION  $\equiv$ 

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

# Not Just For Kids: Children's Literature and the Rest of Us

JEFF MINICK

any years ago, I hired a young man, Kevin, to help out part-time during the summer in my bookshop on Waynesville, North Carolina's Main Street. Kevin was about six feet tall, a bulky kid who was a rising senior in high school and an outstanding student with a great sense of humor.

One afternoon, I left the store and walked down the street to make a deposit at the bank. When I returned, Kevin stood in the back of the store weeping like a child. "Hey, man, what's wrong?" I asked, hurrying toward him and thinking someone must have died.

Kevin held up a children's book and said through his tears, "We've sold so many of these. I just wanted to see what all the excitement was about."

The book was Robert Munsch's "Love You Forever," the touching story of a mother's love for her son and the return of that love when the son cares for his mother in her final years. Like so many other readers, including me, this toughminded, funny kid broke down as he read this story of care and affection.

As we get older, we tend to put away the books we've read as children and adolescents, and only retrieve those stories when we wish to share them with out own children. If we remain readers as adults—and I hope we all do—we instead pick up some history or biography that interests us, a bestselling novel, a cookbook, or a manual on gardening or home decoration. We read for pleasure and edification, and leave behind the stories so dear to us as children and teenagers.

**Becoming Real** 

Which is unfortunate.

As both a parent and a teacher, I explored books unfamiliar to me, or returned to stories I scarcely remembered from my childhood. Either I passed them by in my younger years, or they made little impression on me.

One such story I read to my kids was Margery Williams's "The Velveteen Rabbit," and we listened to the Meryl Streep recording as well. Had I read this classic story in elementary school? I have no idea. But as an adult, the passage below hit me like a left hook:

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but RE-ALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.
"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he
was always truthful. "When you are Real
you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

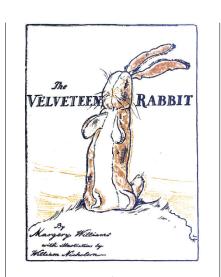
Readers may laugh, but even as I copied this passage into this article my eyes misted up. As an old guy, I'm loose in the joints, very shabby, and yet "these things don't matter at all."

Age Brings Depth

When I mentioned to others that I was writing this article, several people told me they had reread childhood classics as adults and had gained a more profound understanding of these stories.

One of my sons, for example, a Harry Potter fan as a teenager who when he finished the final volume felt as if he'd "said goodbye to a close friend," revisited the series last year and found deeper meaning, including religious insights, in this story of Hogwarts Castle with its cast of heroes and villains.

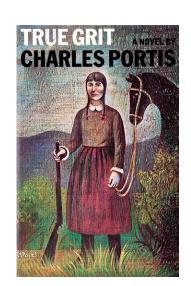
I knew that editor and writer Annie Holmquist of Intellectual Takeout has a passion for such literature, and so wrote to her asking if she reread old childhood favorites. She replied:



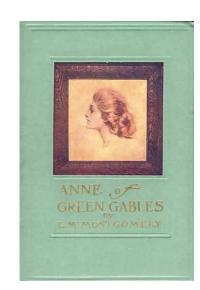
Margery Williams's "The Velveteen Rabbit" was published in 1922.



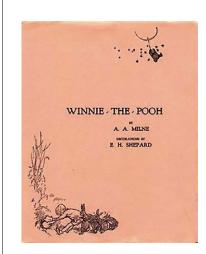
Robert Munsch's "Love You Forever" has made grown men crv.



The first-edition dust jacket of the 1968 novel "True Grit" by Charles Portis.



The cover of "Anne of Green Gables" by Lucy Maud Montgomery, published in 1908.



The front-cover art for the book "Winnie-the-Pooh" written by A.A. Milne and

illustrated by E.H. Shepard.



"Well, 'Anne of Green Gables' and the subsequent books in that series have been ones that I have picked up countless times. The 'All-of-a-Kind Family' series is another one that I still enjoy as an adult. I actually picked up a Marguerite de Angeli book over the weekend that I hadn't read in ages ('Thee, Hannah!').

"I've enjoyed reading some of the Moffat stories by Eleanor Estes. I especially like the humor in these latter books—from my point of view, the humor is such that it would be missed by a child, because it is written through a child's eyes and shows how they take something very seriously that an adult would be guffawing at behind his hand while trying to keep a straight face.

"I think that's one of the things I really enjoy about children's books as an adult— I pick up on all the hidden meanings that completely went over my head as a child. I also find that some of these books have wonderful nuggets of truth that speak to

If you loved one of your children's books, why not reread it?

Such literary works can bestow wisdom and solace on adults as well. my heart in ways that they never would have as a child."

**Plain and Simple Truths** 

Like "The Velveteen Rabbit," several of the books I taught to classes of 7th- and 8th-grade homeschoolers were also strangers to me. Mildred Taylor's "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry," Jeanne Birdsall's "The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy," and Lois Lenski's "Indian Captive: The Story of Mary Jemison" provided as much or more pleasure for me as an adult as they might have in my youth. I also admired these stories and others for the virtues and truths they offered young readers.

One such novel that I particularly enjoyed teaching was Charles Portis's "True Grit," the coming-of-age story of a teenage girl who hires a U.S. Marshal and a Texas Ranger to help her track down her father's killer. This novel is a crossover book, ap-

propriate for both teens and adults, but though I'd seen the John Wayne film based on the story, and the 2010 version with Jeff Bridges as Marshal Rooster Cogburn, I'd never read the book until I selected it for my students, a choice based on the recommendation of a parent.

Two qualities in "True Grit" particularly attracted me. The first was Portis's command of the English language, his straight-shooting descriptions and dialogue that are so different from much of contemporary English literature. The second was the character Mattie, the admirable young girl who unerringly thinks and speaks the truth.

Like so many books for young people with such characters, "True Grit" celebrates a hero with grit, bravado, a sense of justice, and a clear-cut sense of values.

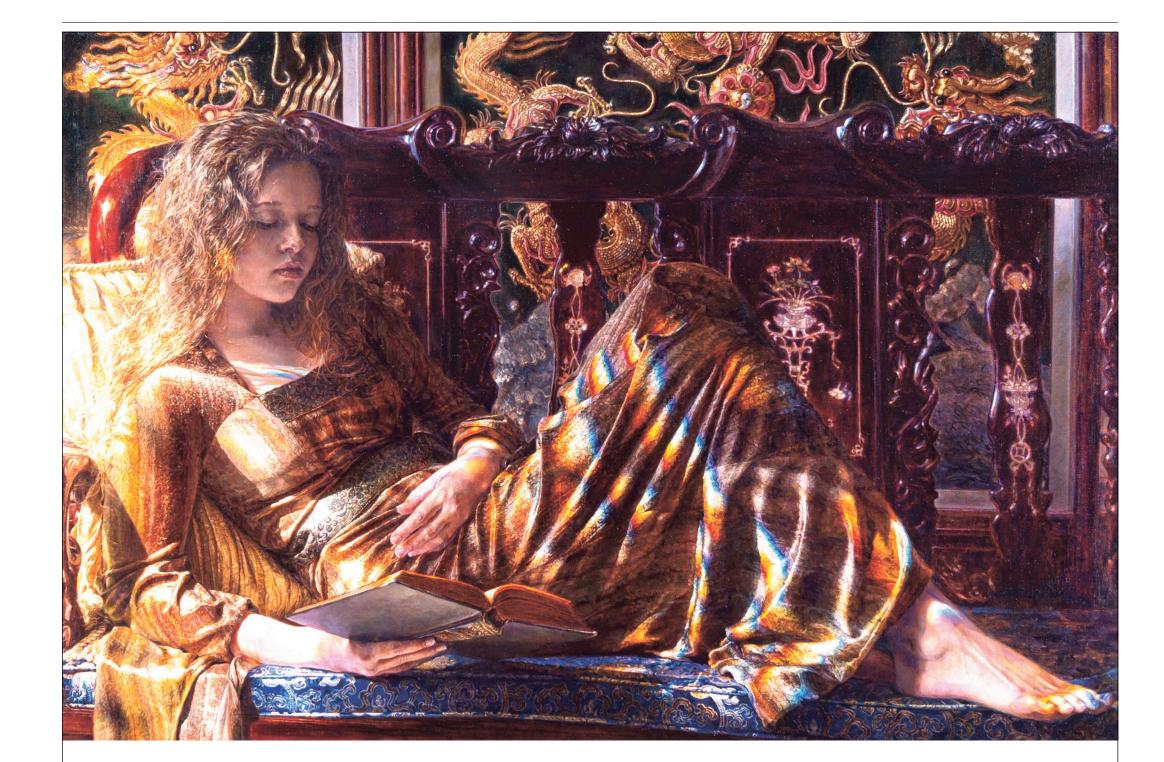
#### Treasures for All of Us

Recently in The Epoch Times I reviewed "Pollyanna," another children's classic new to me. Here I found a refreshing innocence absent from my normal literary fare, a belief in goodness and in searching out reasons to be happy in life. Given the pandemic and other troubling events of the last year, Pollyanna's "glad game" was a wonderful reminder to seek the good in each day.

Reading an old chestnut from our childhood, or even opening such a classic for the first time—"Treasure Island," "The Jungle Book," "Winnie-the-Pooh"—can bring us the same unforeseen gifts I found in "Pollyanna." They may be aimed at a younger audience, but such literary works can bestow wisdom and solace on adults as well

So pour yourself a cup of cocoa, grab a chocolate chip cookie, open up a copy of some book like "Charlotte's Web," and let the magic begin.

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. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick. com to follow his blog.



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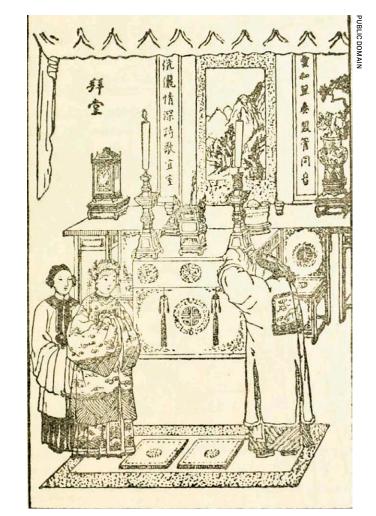




There are three versions of the "Up the River During Qingming" handscroll painting, made in the Qing, Song, and Ming dynasties, depicting a groom going to the bride's home to escort her to their wedding. Here is the Ming Dynasty version, and below center, the Qing

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# The Many Meanings of Marriage: Centuries-Old Wisdom



A newly wedded couple pays their respects in the wedding chapel. The three-step procedure involves first paying respect to the heavens, then to the groom's parents, and finally to one another, sealing their status as husband and wife.

Continued from Page 1

But the main purpose of marriage was to raise children to become upstanding members of society and pass down each family's heritage. As "The Book of Rites" says: "The ceremony of marriage was intended to be a bond of love between two [(families of different]) surnames, with a view, in its retrospective character, to secure the services in the ancestral temple, and in its prospective character, to secure the continuance of the family line."

#### **Ancient Rituals**

Due to the sacred nature of the marriage bond in ancient China, there were strict rules of etiquette surrounding it. For a marriage to be considered valid, it must be approved by the couple's parents. A marriage wasn't only a union between the couple—it was a union between their two families. In fact, the parents often acted as matchmakers. Arranged marriages were very common.

The courting process began with a matchmaker introducing the two people. It was considered improper for unmarried men and women to become closely acquainted with each other outside of formal matchmaking procedures. Once a match was made, the family needed to report news of the marriage to the monarch. A feast was then organized, and the entire village came together to celebrate the union of the

Similar to biblical beliefs. people in ancient China thought that men and women had different responsibilities.



A white jade gourd ladle from the Mogul Empire. In ancient times, the bride and groom would drink from a gourd ladle, symbolizing that they would share the burden of any difficulties that might lie ahead.



the "six rites," which originated in classical times. Since the Western Zhou Dynasty, it was mainly practiced among the elite. But in the Tang Dynasty, it spread widely among the common people. In order for a couple to be considered properly married, the rites had to be performed in order.

The first step was for the man to propose with an accompanying gift. If the lady's family chose to accept the proposal, they could proceed to the second rite, which was "inquiring into the lady's name and birthday." This was done to make sure the couple didn't have any blood relatives. Third was "the intimation of the approving divination," which ensured that the union would be a balanced match. The fourth rite involved the husband making offerings to the lady's family, and the fifth was inquiring about the date of the wedding. Finally, the six rites conclude with the groom and bride meeting in person.

Nowadays, wedding ceremonies are seen as 

#### A Solemn Affair

celebrations and are often treated like a big party. However, during certain periods and places, such as China's Zhou Dynasty, they were solemn, serious affairs. As "The Book of Rites" recounts: "At the marriage ceremony, they did not employ music, having reference to the feeling of solitariness and darkness [natural to the separation from parents].... There was no congratulation on marriage; of us will find our one perfect match and it indicates how [one generation of] men succeeds to another." This sentiment was

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start of their new life as husband and wife, the two drank together from a calabash, or gourd. The gourd was broken into two pieces, and each half was filled with wine. A string was used to tie the two halves together, conveying that though the couple used to be apart, fate had brought them together. The gourd and wine typically have a bitter taste, which signified future hardships the couple would face. A common tradition throughout China was for

of the Western Zhou Dynasty, which had

no music, words of congratulation, food,

After the wedding ceremony, the bride's

family wasn't allowed to light candles

for three nights, so as to show their sad-

ness over their daughter's parting. At the

groom's home, music, singing, and danc-

ing was banned for three days to dem-

onstrate that he was a serious man who

could handle the responsibility of raising

There were also many traditions that

took place during the couple's first night under the same roof. To symbolize the

or drinks.

a family.

the husband and wife to each cut off a lock of hair and tie them together to symbolize unity and an eternal bond. While the marriage process has changed

drastically over the centuries, a person's wedding day remains one of life's most important moments. Now that the world has placed so much emphasis on the individual and has splintered into thousands of subcultures, finding two people who both agree on the meaning and function of marriage is becoming rare. But the hope remains universal that, God willing, each walk arm in arm for the rest of our lives.

**FINE ARTS** 

# A Golden Engagement

Petrus Christus, a Northern Renaissance master

#### **LORRAINE FERRIER**

In the painting "A Goldsmith in His Shop," a finely dressed couple are eagerly purchasing a wedding ring. The man tenderly wraps his arm around his fiancée, while she happily gestures to the goldsmith who is weighing a ring on a set of scales. The goldsmith, dressed in a rich-red robe, concentrates on his customer's request as he prepares the ring for sale.

On the right side of the painting is a wall full of the goldsmith's tools and the fruits of his trade. Each one is meticulously rendered. Elegant pewterware pitchers are displayed on the top shelf. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) website, these were created for the city's aldermen, who would offer them to important guests. The bottom shelf displays an open purse of seed pearls, and on a cloth are many precious gems alongside a selection of rings displayed much like we'd see them in a shop today. On the bottom shelf, behind the gems, are some of the goldsmith's raw materials: from left to right, crystal, porphyry (a rock contain-

ing large crystals), and coral. Some of the items in the painting look a little out of place, but they're there to indicate the virtues of the couple's pending matrimony. For instance, in the foreground, on the left side of the wooden bench with its wonderfully detailed grain, a discarded red girdle (like a belt) is near the woman. It is rendered as if to enter into the viewer's space. The girdle traditionally symbolizes chastity and a readiness to serve, both seen as the contemporary ide-

als of a traditional marriage. On the far right side of the workbench, a convex mirror reflects the outside world where, standing in front of a row of buildings, two falconers seem to peer into the goldsmith's and greed. It's a symbolic warning be Italian." of the vices that have no place in the

bounds of a happy marriage. Some scholars believe that the painting is a portrait of the Bruges goldsmith Willem van Vleuten, who worked for the duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good. In 1449, the year the painting was completed, the duke commissioned van Vleuten to create a gift for his great-niece, Mary of Guelders, to celebrate her marriage to James II, the king of

Scotland. Researchers further reinforced the possibility that the painting is a portrait, as the artist, Petrus Chris-

appearance several times in his underdrawing, indicating that he was creating someone's likeness rather than an imaginary figure.

#### **Petrus Christus**

great Flemish painters Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden. Born around 1420 in the Flemish town of Baerle, now in Belgium, Christus worked in Bruges (in the region of Flanders), which at that time was the leading center of Netherlandish art. For over 20 years, after van Eyck

Christus was a contemporary of the

died in 1441 and before Hans Memling came to Bruges around 1465, Christus was the leading artist in Bruges.

Some sources believe that Christus studied in van Eyck's studio, even finishing some of his master's works when he died in 1441. His meticulously detailed paintings certainly mirror van Eyck's fastidious paintings, but the brightness that van Eyck brought to his figures isn't quite seen in Christus's works.

Nonetheless, Christus made important contributions to Northern Renaissance art. It is believed that he helped spread the Northern Renaissance style of painting to Italy. The pioneering style was defined by van Eyck's use of layer upon layer of translucent glazes, resulting in the exceptional blending and detailing on his canvas.

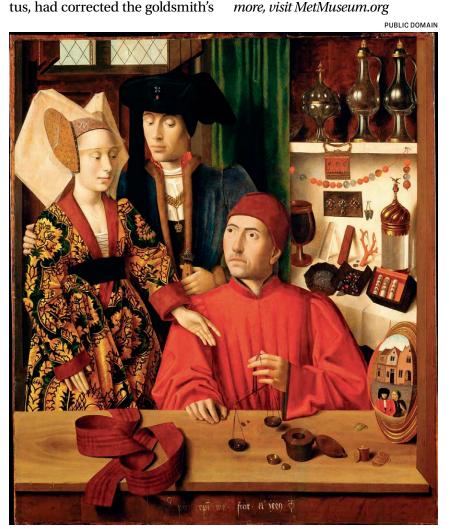
It's not known if Christus traveled to Italy himself, but his paintings certainly did. According to The Met's website, nearly half of his known paintings were commissioned by Italians, have an Italian or Spanish provenance, or were known by Italian artists such as Anthony of Messina, who was highly influenced by Christus's work.

Art historian E.H. Gombrich explains the difference between Northern and Italian Renaissance art in his book "The Story of Art":

"It is a fair guess to say that any work which excels in the representation of the beautiful surface of things, of flowers, jewels or fabric, will be by a Northern artist, most probably by an artist from the Netherlands; while a painting with bold outlines, clear shop. The mirror indicates vanity, perspective and a sure mastery of and the falconers represent pride the beautiful human body, will

> Christus mastered single-point perspective in his later paintings, perhaps by replicating perspective in Italian art owned by his patrons, according to The Met's website. Some sources believe that his painting "The Virgin Enthroned With Saints Jerome and Francis," at Frankfurt's Städel Museum, is the earliest example of single-point perspective in Northern Renaissance art.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York owns five of the approximately thirty Petrus Christus paintings known to exist. To find out



"A Goldsmith in His Shop," 1449, by Petrus Christus. Oil on oak panel; 39 3/8 inches by 33 3/4 inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975; Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Week 20, 2021 THE EPOCH TIMES

**LITERATURE** 

# The First Queen of Mystery: Mary Roberts Rinehart

#### **BENJAMIN WELTON**

(1876–1958) almost wound up dead just like one of her own characters. On the morning of June 21, 1947, a disgruntled cook named Blas Reyes pointed a loaded gun at Rinehart and pulled the trigger. The only thing that saved the famous mystery writer was the age of the bullets; the filthy and ancient cartridges did not fire. The gun dropped

ary Roberts Rinehart

to the floor. The household servants rushed to save Rinehart. Her personal maid, Margaret Muckian, and her chauffeur, Ted Falkenstrom, tried to subdue Reyes. They only succeeded after Reyes tried another method to dispatch his employer—the mad and likely drunk Reyes placed two kitchen knives in his hands and took a swipe at Rinehart. Once pinned to the floor, Reyes was escorted out of the house by Howard MacFarland, the police captain of Bar Harbor, Maine. The next day, the would-be assassin took his own life in his jail cell. Rinehart paid for the Reyes's funeral and burial.

#### Although she was called 'America's Agatha Christie' for a time, Rinehart's popularity once overshadowed her British peer.

Breast cancer had earlier tried to take Rinehart's life too, and in 1947 (the same year as the close call with murder), she told the "Ladies' Home Journal" about her decision to undergo a dangerous mastectomy. Rinehart was nothing if not a survivor.

#### Tragedy and Triumph

This harrowing story was but one tale in the tragic and triumphant life of Rinehart. Born Mary Ella Roberts in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania (today part of Pittsburgh), she grew up in a family beset by financial and emotional difficulties. Her father committed suicide when she was just 19. This forced her to get serious about maturity and money matters. Rinehart graduated from the Pittsburgh Training School for Nurses. While working as a nurse, she met and married Stanley Rinehart, a physician. This marriage produced three children.

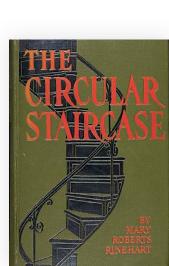
Following a stock market crash in the early 20th century, Rinehart turned to writing to improve the young family's finances. She proved to be a maestro of the short story form and regularly appeared in The Saturday Evening Post.

However, in 1907, Rinehart landed upon the genre and the form that would make her a household name in the English-speaking world: the mystery novel.

#### 'The Circular Staircase'

Rinehart's debut effort, "The Circular Staircase," remains one of the most popular mystery novels ever written. The novel focuses on a wealthy widow named Rachel Innes, who is described as an adventurous woman: a globe trotter, a donator to causes, and a one-time socialist supporter.

Innes and her personal maid rent a mansion outside of Pittsburgh for the summer. Little does the pair know that their summer house will become a den of intrigue and murder thanks to a mysterious criminal. Outside of the mansion's walls, jewel thefts, a bank heist, and cold-blooded murder



"The Circular Staircase" was first serialized in 1907 and then released as a book in 1908.

Rinehart's 1930 novel

'The Door" is credited with

creating the phrase "the

butler did it," although that

line does not appear in the

"The Bat Whispers" is

Roland West's second

adaptation of "The

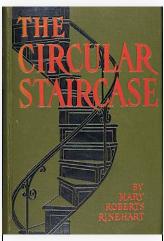
Circular Staircase,'

which added exciting

innovations in sound and

cinematography. A lobby

card for the film.



have rocked the small town, and before long Innes's summer retreat is targeted.

"The Circular Staircase" features a narration style, called "had I but known," that came to define Rinehart's later work. "The Circular Staircase," for example, has the murderer hiding in plain sight all along.

Rinehart's first novel created a pop-culture sensation. After its initial publication, "The Circular Staircase" was recast as the Broadway play "The Bat" in 1920. Rinehart and collaborator Avery Hopwood turned the Gothic mystery into a pulp-style yarn with the inclusion of a masked and blackclothed master criminal called the Bat. Rachel Innes was turned into Cornelia Van Gorder, a tough woman always shadowed by her skittish nurse, Lizzie Allen. Director Roland West turned the play into a major cussed at all, Rinehart notion picture in 1926.

West was not done with the source material, either. A master of macabre storytelling, he returned to "The Bat" again in 1930 with the release of "The Bat Whispers." The story remained the same, but West's second adaptation added sound and experimental

cinematography. Cinematographers Ray June and Robert H. Planck shot the film in both 35 mm and 65 mm, plus West, June, and Planck utilized the then innovative technique of panning to give "The Bat Whispers" an incredible sense of excitement. One of the cinemagoers who fell in love with the movie was Bob Kane, the future creator of Batman. Kane wrote in his 1989 autobiography, "Batman and Me," that the idea of a caped crusader disguised as a bat came from "The Bat Whispers."

Rinehart's influence is much greater than her connection to Batman, however. Although called "America's Agatha Christie" for a time, Rinehart's popularity once overshadowed her British peer, and few can dispute that she wrote long before Christie and clearly influenced the Brit-

> Rinehart's 1930 novel "The Door" is also credited with creating the phrase "the butler did it," although that exact wording does not appear in the novel. Rinehart sold mil-

> ish grande dame of mystery

lions of books—some standalone novels and some featuring recurring characters like Cornelia Van Gorder, the nurse-detective Hilda Adams (aka Miss Pinkerton), and the international adventurer Letitia "Tish" Carberry.

All characters bore traces of Rinehart's real life: She lived alone after her husband's death in 1932 as a rich widow, she was a former nurse, and, during World War I, she worked as a war correspondent for The Saturday Evening Post. In this position, the poor girl from Pittsburgh lived in Belgium and interviewed luminaries like King Albert I of Belgium and Winston Churchill. In other ways, Rinehart's life mirrored her



Rinehart's Legacy Rinehart is little remembered today. Her legacy pales in comparison to Christie's larger shadow. If dis-

mystery stories. In truth, she was a master of plotting who weaved intricate mysteries that thrilled generations of readers. Her novels and short stories also showcase an all-American mystery mix of "scientific" crimefighting, the manor-house

aesthetic more common in British novels, and the hard-boiled accoutrements of the style made famous by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Rinehart's novels feature corruption and violence, but they are also romantic and humorous fantasies set in familiar worlds.

Rinehart deserves new appreciation as not just a great and important writer, but also as a survivor who defeated a murderous cook and breast cancer.

Benjamin Welton is a freelance writer based in New England.



Rinehart's debut effort, "The Circular Staircase," remains one of the most popular mystery novels ever written. In 1915, it appeared as a silent movie.





#### **MARK JACKSON**

The art of acting, and especially shapeshifting, or character acting, is largely misunderstood and underappreciated by nonactors. Which is no surprise; theater is the most misunderstood of all the arts. The seven classical arts are architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, theater, and poetry.

We know immediately that a musical instrument is hard to master, because it's external to us. When we watch Itzhak Perlman play violin or Jimi Hendrix play electric guitar, we say, "Wow, that's looks hard. I could never do that." We see world-class ballet and say, "That's obviously extremely difficult. No way." Same thing for Michelangelo's most well-known sculpture, "David" (also his architectural masterpiece the Piazza del Campidoglio), Leonardo da Vinci's painting "Mona Lisa," Handel's "Messiah," and Shakespeare's "Hamlet." Those are all hard to create.

But when we see an actor act ... it looks easy. It's supposed to look easy. And so many people feel, deep down, that they could do that. The problem starts with the fact that the instruments of the actor—the physical body and the voice—are, well, as John Lennon put it: "Everybody's got one." We all have these instruments. They're built-in. Which makes most people think, "How hard could it be?"

#### Plenty Hard

There's a reason that acting conservatories like Juilliard and the Yale School of Drama exist: It takes practice. The greatest stage actor of all time, Laurence Olivier, said acting takes 20 years to master. Or 10,000 hours, as author Malcolm Gladwell says, is the universal time it takes to master anything, in his book "Outliers." The level of talent can shorten or lengthen that time, but either way—it takes a good, long effort. Screen legend Clint Eastwood maintains that the uninitiated think acting means, "Don't just stand there—do something!" Eastwood spoke about how fiendishly difficult it is to learn to become simple. He said it takes years to learn, and that when it comes to acting, that well-known phrase is reversed: "Don't just do something—stand there."

But you also have to be able to just stand there ... and still be interesting, since the cardinal rule in theater is to never be boring. Standing still, doing nothing, and still being interesting has to do with charisma, which is a talent. It can't be taught. There are different forms of it. People who are drop-dead gorgeous have a certain charisma, for example. That kind of beauty is godlike; it's inherently fascinating. Which is why looks are not a big deal in the industry; it's a standard tool of the trade like height in basketball—people want to watch it, it's bankable. Sit in on any top-flight New York or L.A. acting class and you'll be floored by the sheer amount of physical beauty in one room. For everyone else in there, it's just another day at the office.

#### The true definition of acting: disappearing so thoroughly into a role that the actor becomes unrecognizable to even friends and family.

the ability to achieve extreme inner stillness. Which can be enhanced by learning to meditate. People can't stop watching that because they can't figure out what the actor will do next. Why? Because the actor himself or herself, in that state, doesn't know-shouldn't know-what's going to happen next.

#### **Laser Focus**

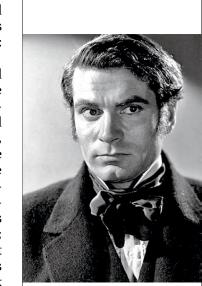
Acting has been called "the ability to be private in public."

in our underwear. That's easy. But put that same regular person onstage in front of a big audience or in front of a camera and movie crew (still in their underwear) with many memorized lines to speak, and also blocking (choreographed directions on the stage or movie set), that need to be synced, timing-wise, with other actors, stage lighting, sound effects, and so on. Maybe throw in that the character must cry real tears while on the phone looking out the window



(Above) Two of modern acting's top character actors (who also happen to belong to the category of leading man and woman, a rare occurrence): Daniel Day-Lewis, winner of the Best Actor award for "Lincoln," and presenter Meryl Streep pose in the press room during the Oscars on Feb. 24, 2013.

(Right) Jon Heder completely changed his appearance to play the pathetic nerd Napoleon, here looking very sharp, in "Napoleon Dynamite."



Sir Laurence Olivier, considered by some to be the best actor of the 20th century, as Heathcliff.

Beautiful Charlize Theron was

Cannes Film Festival in 2016

unrecognizable in her star-

ring role in "Monster." Here

she is at the 69th annual

(and maybe they're also naked now, with people scrutinizing their body). And hit all the consonants enough to make speech intelligible to people in the back row (while standing with his or her back to the audience or microphone) while not sounding beginning of this paragraph will freak out and completely forget how to walk and talk.

The ability to laser-focus the mind for extended periods of time is key for a variety of reasons, one which is that an audience will naturally vibrate and respond on a subconscious level to whatever is happening onstage. Which means that if your mind falters on that high wire that is the stage, and you look down and see the ground waaaay down there with no safety net—or as in this extended example, you realize that you are literally naked in front of a thousand people and become self-conscious—the entire audience will immediately become self-conscious and feel embarrassed for you.

Otherwise, when the actor maintains a clear mind and focuses on "doing the doings," which means focusing on actions (as opposed to trying to feel feelings—that's why they're called actors and not feelers), the audience subconsciously thinks it's at the zoo, seeing a species of human in its natural habitat, doing things that are universal to humans. Then, in the best instances, theater creates life-solving gifts that the audience members can take home with them, and improve and heal their lives with.

And it's not a one-way street. The audi-



well, and a skilled actor must pick up on the energy and wants and needs of an audience, directing the subconscious to make new choices and emphasize news things each night to suit the personality of each audience. The collective of an audience is stilted. (And don't forget the cardio fitness it a palpable personality to an actor. This is takes to handle all that and not get winded.) especially the case when doing comedies; That non-trained civilian I mentioned at the each audience will require slightly different timing on jokes to produce a laugh. This kind of timing is part of why it takes 10,000 hours to master. An actor has to fail, embarrassingly, over and over until the reactions to the audience become second nature.

> That gives you a bit of an idea of what's involved in the stage actor's craft and command of the acting instruments of body and voice. As Laurence Olivier said, all the great Shakespearean lead roles are athletic events. It's extremely challenging to not hyperventilate while doing the balcony speech from "Romeo and Juliet" in a stage whisper that carries to the back row.

#### **But What About ...**

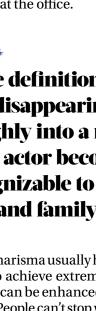
The standard argument that attempts to counter the fact that acting and theater belong to the list of the seven great classical arts, and supports the idea that anybody can do it, is: "But what about those people they just take off a street corner with no prior experience and they're brilliant?"

Most of that is showbiz publicity spin. Woody Harrelson was declared an overnight success when he landed the television comedy hit "Cheers." The publicity machine didn't tell you that he'd been in New York 10 years prior, studying and auditioning. This myth feeds the American showbiz dream: Anybody can do it.

Laurence Olivier did say, though, about acting and showbiz: "You either know everything about this business, or you know nothing about this business." Pure talent (especially when combined with beauty) can gain traction in showbiz. People want to watch that. Which is why a talent scout was able to snag the young Matt Dillon, who was lounging around a junior high hallway, cutting class.

A skilled director can, using a variety of tricks and techniques (some of which can definitely be labeled as abusive) get believable, realistic, and naturalistic performances out of untrained actors and nonactors. But that's the movies, where you can do a hundred takes and eventually get one right. That's not theater. That's not a pro.

Continued on Page 10



But stage charisma usually has to do with

We can all walk around our apartments

# The True Victory of Holy Devotion 'The Martyrdom of St. Denis'

**ERIC BESS** 

came across a painting by the 19-century French academic painter Léon Bonnat titled "The Martyrdom of St. Denis." At my first glance, this painting was a gruesome representation of a beheading. As I looked longer, however, I became morally inspired.

#### Who Was Saint Denis?

As legend has it, Saint Denis (Dionysius) was converted to Christianity under the Apostle Paul. After Paul's death, Pope Clement I sent Dionysius with several other bishops to Gaul to convert pagans to Christianity. However, the bishops were arrested in France by the Roman emperor, who was set on persecuting Christians.

Soldiers were instructed to take the captured bishops and behead them on the slopes of Montmartre. The soldiers followed the orders and decapitated the prisoners in their custody.

#### The angel carries a palm branch and laurel crown, which represent Saint Denis's victory over death.

When they got to Dionysius, however, his faith was so great and so deep that he stayed alive after he was beheaded. Dionysius picked up his severed head, which continued to recite psalms, and walked for two miles to his final resting place.

#### 'The Martyrdom of St. Denis'

Saint Denis is shown in the middle of the lower half of the composition. He has just been beheaded. But instead of lying on the ground lifeless, he bends over to pick his head up from the ground. A halo surrounds his head, and light shines where his head

The executioner is shown to the right of Saint Denis. He has dropped his bloodied ax and leans back in surprise. Another figure behind Saint Denis throws his hands

The executioner has had a busy day: On the bloodied steps lie two decapitated bodies at the right and left edges of the composition. A second decapitated head, at the bottom right of the design, has a halo around it, suggesting that it most likely belonged to one of the bishops.

An angel coming down on a cloud can be seen at the top right. The angel carries a palm branch and laurel crown, which represent Saint Denis's victory over death.

#### The True Victory of Holy Devotion

First, I find it necessary to ask, What does the head represent? The head can represent consciousness, wisdom, ego, intelligence, rationality, and so on. Having the saint's

**LITERATURE** 

**KENNETH LAFAVE** 

A "bard," goes the standard definition, is a

"declaimer of heroic or epic verse." Once a

tradition in every culture (think Homer),

the bard has all but disappeared. The last

to write in English was a rotund, bespec-

and deserving of greater recognition today.

G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936) enjoyed

witty and incisive columns in the Illus-

trated London News that he was primarily

known, along with some fiction, in par-

ticular the Father Brown detective stories.

pen several volumes of Catholic apologet-

ics, including an urgent plea for religious

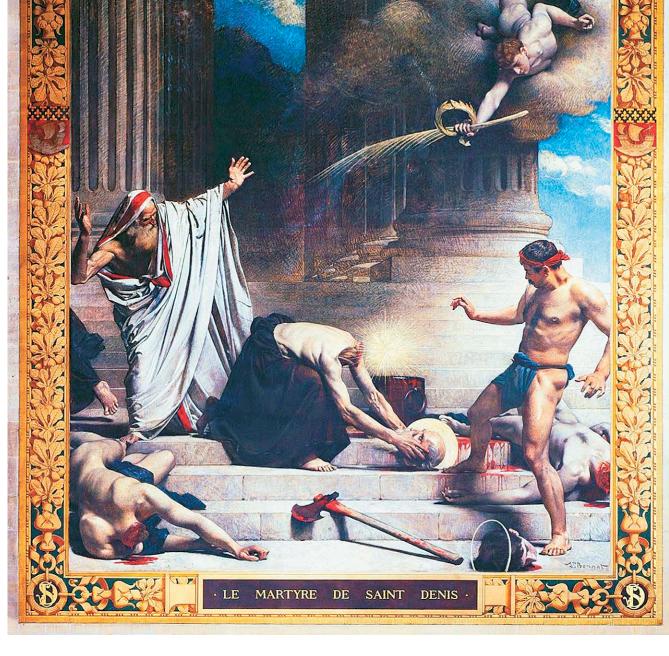
"Orthodoxy," and perhaps the finest lay

consideration of Saint Thomas Aquinas

He also wrote verse. Chesterton's poetry

ever written in English.

**Insights and Legends** 



The Martyrdom of Saint Denis," circa 1880, by Léon Bonnat. Panthéon, Paris, France.

head separated from his body suggests that the things his head represents are also separated from his body.

What, then, does the body represent? The

body is often associated with carnal desires and pleasures. The mind tries to control the body, but often the body distracts the mind. Is it the case that this depiction of Saint Denis may provide us with the moral lesson nat the mind must separate itself from the carnal distractions of the body? Is this what is necessary to lead a holy life?

Let's take a closer look at the head itself. There are two decapitated heads: Saint-Denis's and another's at the bottom right. The head at the bottom right is grayer in color, making it look more lifeless, and it has a thin halo. In contrast, Saint-Denis's head has more color and even looks at his body, and the halo around his head is completely filled with golden light.

The fullness of the halo likely represents a greater dedication to the holy life; otherwise, why paint the two halos and heads differently? If this is the case, then a greater commitment to the holy life provides life where there would otherwise be death.

The Last Bard: G.K. Chesterton

As the legend says, even after decapitation Saint Denis's head recited divine words. His devotion completely influenced his consciousness, wisdom, ego, intelligence, rationality, and so on. He was so committed to holiness while alive that his dedication continued after his head was separated from his body.

Interestingly enough, his dedication to the holy life also seems to influence his body. Bonnat depicts the moment that Saint Denis's body reaches down to pick up his head. A light shines where his head once was. How does his body know where

Is it his devotion to the divine that harmonizes and somehow connects his body and mind, the two things that, above, we suggest are separate? And does the light that shines where his head used to be represent his devotion? Does this light guide his spirit, his soul?

Is it this type of devotion that brings true victory, represented by the angel? Saint Denis could have fought back, argued, and pleaded for his life. None of these would have guaranteed him success.

In reciting the psalms, he is genuinely focused on God, and death doesn't concern him. He is unafraid of death, and this fearlessness in God is what brings him true victory.

The result of Saint Denis's holy devotion astonishes his executioner. How might we use our faith to astonish those who wish

representations and symbols the meanings of which can be lost to our modern *minds. In our series "Reaching Within:* What Traditional Art Offers the Heart," we interpret visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We do not assume to provide absolute answers to questions generations have wrestled with, but hope that our questions will inspire a reflective journey toward our becoming more authentic, compassionate, and courageous human beings.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

**FILM** 



THE EPOCH TIMES Week 20, 2021

Audrey Hepburn with her 1954 Oscar for Best Actress in "Roman Holiday."



American costume designer Edith Head (R) holds her Oscar as actor Marla English models the ballgown that Head designed for Audrey Hepburn to wear in "Roman Holiday."



Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in 1953's "Roman Holiday." Hepburn is in the simple outfit that she wears three different ways in the film.



Audrey Hepburn as the princess in her most roval costume of "Roman Holiday."

of the Best Costume Design award. Edith Head was credited as the costume final scene.

Miss Head later said that Givenchy con-

clarified that he created the famous black

Audrey Hepburn's Oscar-Winning Fashion:

#### cocktail dress.

Some stars had such timeless styles that their iconic looks have endured decades after their death. One such star is Audrey Hepburn, whose admired and imitated style began on the silver screen.

**TIFFANY BRANNAN** 

Hepburn's first two American films were "Roman Holiday" (1953) and "Sabrina" (1954). These movies were successful on all levels, becoming box office hits, earning critics' acclaim, and garnering recognition at major awards ceremonies. "Roman Holiday" was nominated for ten Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and it won three. One of its wins was Best Actress for newcomer Audrey.

"Sabrina" was nominated for six Oscars, including a second Best Actress nod for Audrey Hepburn, and it won one award. For both films, the Academy recognized not only Miss Hepburn's great acting talent but also her influential, unique style. Both films won Best Costume Design, Blackand-White, which was an obvious tribute to Audrey's gowns.

#### Fashion at the Oscars

The Best Costume Design category was created in 1948, 20 years into the Academy Awards' existence. It was originally divided into two subcategories: Color Films and Black-and-White Films. The award was reduced to one category in 1957 and 1958 before being split again for the next several years, combining for good in 1967. When these two Paramount productions won Best Costume Design, they were in the black-and-white subcategory of the still separated award.

Period pieces often win Oscars for Best Costume Design because their historical settings provide the opportunity for elaborate and unusual attire. However, when the Best Costume Design awards were separated into two categories based on color versus black-and-white, costumes from films with modern settings could better

Since Technicolor film was still more expensive in the 1950s, studios often opted to save it for lavish musicals and dramatic historical pieces, in which vibrant colors would be more effective. Thus, most contemporary stories were filmed in blackand-white and dominated that subcategory

designer for both "Roman Holiday" and "Sabrina." However, it has since been for most of the film but styles it in different tion was more than aesthetic. By highlightrevealed that she doesn't deserve all the credit for Audrey Hepburn's costumes in

Hubert de Givenchy, who became Hepburn's personal designer and friend, created her three most iconic outfits in this movie. She visited his Parisian atelier before filming began. When young Givenchy heard that Miss Hepburn was coming to see him, he assumed it was Katharine Hepburn. Although he was too busy to design original costumes for the then-unknown Audrey, she chose three items from his new collection for the film.

tributed some design ideas, which she per-

#### At the Oscars

'Roman Holiday' and 'Sabrina'

"Roman Holiday" competed at the 1954 Academy Awards ceremony, which was the second time the Oscars were nationally televised. Gene Tierney presented the awards for Best Costume Design. Instead of just listing the nominees, that category was presented as a mini fashion show to the strains of Jerome Kern's "Lovely to Look At." A different up-and-coming actress, including the then-unknown Kim Novak, modeled a dress from each of the nominated films.

This charming idea was not repeated the next year, when Bob Hope and Jane Wyman presented the Black-and-White award from Hollywood and Nina Foch

announced the Color award in New York. At both ceremonies, Edith Head strode up to the stage in her ballgown and signature blue-tinted glasses, which enabled costumers to discern how colors would look in black-and-white.

#### Refreshingly, fashions from the late 1930s through the mid-1950s focused on modest and traditional beauty, which was attractive while remaining wholesome.

In films with current settings, Costume Design awards were usually based on women's fashion, since male costumes rarely deviated from standard suits.

In "Roman Holiday," Audrey Hepburn wears six outfits plus a nightgown, robe, and oversized pajamas. However, three outfits are seen only for a few seconds during the opening montage of Princess Ann's European travels. Her most memorable costume is a ballgown that she wears at the embassy, looking very royal indeed. She wears a lovely white ensemble in the

Surprisingly, she wears her simplest outfit ways. It comprises a long-sleeved white blouse with a tie at the neck and a full skirt with a wide belt. When exploring Rome the next day, she cuffs up the sleeves to her elbows and doffs the white tie, leaving the collar open. She eventually cuffs the sleeves up to her shoulders and adds a colorful neck scarf. She also trades her *Tiffany Brannan is a 19-year-old opera* formal black shoes for Roman sandals. Add the famous pixie cut that she gets at the beginning of her day in Rome, and you have the perfect ensemble for a Roman holiday à la Audrey Hepburn!

In "Sabrina," Audrey's character again undergoes an appearance transformation,

fected. However, after her death, Givenchy complete with a short but still feminine haircut. At the film's beginning, Sabrina Fairchild wears simple clothes and a ponytail, as a chauffeur's (John Williams)

However, she comes back from cooking school in Paris with not only recipes but also a glamorous new look, including Givenchy's three designs. When she returns from Paris, she is wearing a dark gray suit with a pencil skirt, a white turban hat, and her signature kitten heels. The French

poodle is an optional accessory! When the man she secretly loves, David Larrabee (William Holden), invites her to his parents' party, she wears a stunning white strapless gown with a train like a peacock's tail.

The most popular style from this film was the black cocktail dress Sabrina wears when going out with Linus Larrabee (Humphrey Bogart), David's older brother. It has a full skirt and a fitted, sleeveless bodice; she wears it with a crown-like cap and black shoes. This dress's high neckline became so iconic that the style was called a Sabrina neckline after this film.

Full-figured actresses were popular in the 1950s, but petite starlet Audrey Hepburn demonstrated that the feminine fashions of the era were flattering on slender forms, too. Most importantly, 1950s styles complemented the female form without exploiting it. Full skirts and wide belts accentuated a feminine figure without being revealing.

Refreshingly, fashions from the late 1930s through the mid-1950s focused on modest and traditional beauty, which was attractive while remaining wholesome.

#### 'Seal of Approval' Glamour

American films released during 1934-1954, when the Motion Picture Production Code operated, ensured that all films were acceptable for everyone, and one of the standards was for decent costumes. Outfits from movies with a Production Code Administration Seal of Approval were guaranteed to be decent as well as

No one is a better example of modesty's attractiveness than Audrey Hepburn. She never wore low necklines, yet she is considered one of the most beautiful, fashionable women of all time. Instead, elegant styles complemented her lithe figure.

Beautiful, modest costumes are just one of the reasons why Code films are so uplifting traditional femininity and masculinity, costumes from the Joseph Breen Era of Hollywood added to the positive depiction of traditional societal, romantic, and marital roles, which are so endearing in these movies. Here's to "sealed" glamour!

singer, Hollywood history/vintage beauty copywriter, travel writer, film blogger, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Produc-

For more arts and culture articles, visit TheEpochTimes

with a wreath.)

And he sees across a weary land a straggling road in Spain, Up which a lean and foolish knight for-

tion Code.

ever rides in vain, And he smiles, but not as Sultans smile, and settles back the blade... (But Don John of Austria rides home from the Crusade.)"

The "lean and foolish knight" is Don John transformed into Don Quixote. The West may wane, yet it lives on in the story of its struggle, even when disguised as the bardic satire of tilting at windmills. While

the story lives, the West owns a heartbeat. The only remaining threat would be the erasure of that story, via the banning of books, the toppling of statues, and the censorship of ideas.

And surely, no one would do that.

Former music critic for the Arizona Republic and The Kansas City Star, Kenneth LaFave recently earned a doctorate in philosophy, art, and critical thought from the European Graduate School. He is the author of three books, including "Experiencing Film Music" (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).



off the coast of Greece that saw a Turkish fleet defeated by a tactically inferior force of Spaniards, Genoese, and Venetians. The hero, minor nobleman Don John of Austria, comes forward to lead the battle when kings and queens choose to stay safe

G.K. Chesteron

in their palaces. Chesterton introduces him with a riot of color and sound: "Torchlight crimson on the copper kettle-Then the tuckets, then the trumpets, then the cannon, and he comes. Don John laughing in the brave beard

> Spurning of his stirrups like the thrones of all the world,

> Holding his head up for a flag of all the

#### Victory and Loss ... and Victory While the poem, like the battle, concludes

in victory, there is an underlying sense of loss. The majority of Christian leaders have not even bothered to fight, as if they are indifferent to what belief they serve, provided their wealth goes untouched. The West may have repelled an invader, but the fabric of its culture is unraveling. And then ... hope appears in the most unlikely form. It is an oddity of history that Miguel de Cervantes fought in the battle of Lepanto. Chesterton gives him the last verse:

"Cervantes on his galley sets the sword back in the sheath (Don John of Austria rides homeward

less known than his tacled Londoner, widely known in his time fiction or his journalism, a fabled career in journalism. It was for and yet it is his poems, and in particular the Along the way, Chesterton also managed to bardic epics, conservatism in his book-length essay, that speak most boldly to

us today.

Chesterton's

poetry is today

is today less known than his fiction or his journalism, and yet it is his poems, and in particular the bardic epics, that speak most boldly to us today. The shorter poems address a variety of subjects, from the nature of the devil ("The Aristocrat") to the meaning of vanity ("Ecclesiastes") to the modesty

of Jesus's birth ("A Christmas Carol"). The language is clear and direct, though it sometimes surprises. For example, "Ecclesiastes" concludes with: "One thing is needful everything/ The rest is vanity of vanities." Thus in 11 words, Chesterton summarizes the Old Testament preacher with a philosophical insight that suggests

By contrast, the longer bardic poems, especially "The Ballad of the White Horse" and "Lepanto," demand a sacrifice of leisure, the willingness to exchange one's need to understand for a mighty view of history. A bard sings that strand of tradition known as legend. "It is the chief value of legend," Chesterton wrote, "to mix up the centuries while preserving the sentiment, to see all ages in a sort of splendid foreshortening. ...[I]t telescopes history."

The importance of Chesterton as bard is precisely this: that he links the modern world to the Christendom that preceded it. He will not let the past go, because he knows that the present is its issue. "Honor thy father and thy mother" is for him a cultural admonition as well as a filial one.

#### The Magic of Being Unforgettable

"The Ballad of the White Horse" was Chesterton's bardic masterpiece, nearly 2,700 lines of verse arranged in 4- to 6-line rhyming stanzas, recounting the battle fought by King Alfred the Great against Danish invaders. Novelist and screenwriter Graham Greene ("The Third Man") compared it favorably to T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," and it moved even the anti-Catholic journalist Christopher Hitchens to recognize Chesterton's "magic faculty of being unforgettable."

The shorter, more circumspect "Lepanto" seems almost written for our current condition. Its subject is the 1571 naval battle 10 ARTS & CULTURE

Week 20, 2021 THE EPOCH TIMES

### Acting Appreciation 101: 'Character Acting' Explained

Continued from Page 7

#### 'Playing Oneself' as Opposed to 'Character Acting'

One classic acting comment and myth that will never die is, "Oh he's just playing himself—anybody can do that." There are many different kinds of actors, and many different subcategories of talents and skills that come under the acting umbrella. Such as accents. Some actors can do them, some

can't. Most can. Same with impressions.

But there are essentially two different types of actors: personality actors and character actors. Jack Nicholson is a prime example of a personality actor. Jack is always Jack, whether he's a Marine Corps colonel, a psychotic writer, or a wannabe hippie hitching a ride on the back of a chopper. Jack does not do accents. Jack doesn't shape-shift. You always know it's Jack, and you'll watch Jack all day, because Jack's the epitome of charismatic. But what Jack does is not easy.

Every actor has what famous but reclusive New York acting coach Allen Savage calls the "power alley." Which is a baseball term. Each thespian has something they do exceptionally well, for which they tend to get cast repeatedly. Contrary to popular belief, a smart actor wants to get typecast, because an actor is a product. That's how you get work. Which is why it's called show business. Highly businesssavvy Arnold Schwarzenegger, when asked when he was going to get rid of his thick Austrian accent, said he wasn't going to because it had become his "signah-choo-uh." Arnold is very smart. Most Americans can now do a decent rendition of Arnold's accent.

#### **Character Actor Versus Leading Man**

In contrast to leading men and leading ladies, character actors as a showbiz and theatrical category are generally seen as less glamorous. A leading man or woman as a rule has the physical beauty needed to play the love interest; whereas a character actor typically does not. Some character actors are known for their unusual looks.

Yet many lead actors and actresses have

lead-role looks but character actor personalities. Which means a shy, retiring personality that is most comfortable when the actor can disappear and become unrecognizable in a role. Daniel Day-Lewis and Jared Leto are probably the best examples of this particular combo. Meryl Streep is the queen of this, but she's not exactly shy and retiring.

#### **Character Acting**

So what, then, is character acting? Some call it the quintessential acting experience; it's the true definition of acting—disappearing so thoroughly into a role that the actor becomes unrecognizable to even friends and family. It's to be able to believably play a role far removed from the comfort zone of the power alley.

The classical understanding is that one becomes a character, as in you somehow rise up and become one with the great role of Hamlet; you magically morph into someone else's soul. The modern view is that we have no other soul but our own, and our sensory organs produce responses in us that are uniquely ours. We all process the world differently. And so by putting ourselves in various situations we would never normally be in, such as wearing a humpback and walking with a limp à la Shakespeare's "Richard III," we are ourselves in that particular set of circumstances. Which is, in fact, a person no one



In this production, Antony Sher (L) plays Lear, and Graham Turner play's his fool. The Royal Shake-speare Company's production of "King Lear," directed by Gregory Doran, at the BAM Harvey Theater.

has ever seen before. Thus, you bring the character down to you.

The truth lies somewhere in between. One the best descriptions of the process is in the excellent book "Year of the King," by British theater acting great Antony Sher, about preparing for "King Lear." The Brit actors love to go to the zoo and pick out animals with similar character traits as the role they're going to play, as part of their character development.

Since Sher was playing the Fool, he picked the chimpanzee. Studied it for hours. He was happy to run into Michael Gambon (Dumbledore in the "Harry Potter" movies), who was playing Lear, sitting in deep contemplation in front of the gorilla cage. As Sher says, it "all goes into the pot." Sher was later delighted to discover that his Fool would emit high-pitched screams, swing from doorways, and waddle bowlegged across the stage with his hands high in the air. It's very much like giving birth.

To create a character like that and vocally project to the back row of the London Palladium theater, with its 2,286 seats, without a microphone, as it was done in classical theater ... that actually does look pretty hard.

WARNER BROS. PICTURES



Jack Nicholson in "The Bucket List." Nicholson almost always plays a role that hits his power alley.



Daniel Day-Lewis disappeared into his role as the 16th U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in the biopic "Lincoln."

Virtue of the Brush in a Time of Chaos

"When things are chaotic to the extreme, order must be restored."

- "The four books" by Zhu Xi



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