

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

LITERATURE

Forgotten Heroines

Fictional Females From Long Ago

JEFF MINICK

So I'm shuffling around online, looking for some inspiration to write about literary heroines, fictional females who inspire readers, particularly women who practice the virtues and exhibit courage in the face of danger, when a link to "The 10 Best Literary Heroines" popped up.

Here, the editors at AbeBooks.com had asked this question of their readers: "If you could be any literary character, who would you be and why?" Many of the responses advocated for female characters—no surprise there, as more women than men read fiction—and there were brief comments on such protagonists as Scout Finch in "To Kill a Mockingbird" and Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone With the Wind." Here, too, were some young lionesses of literature—Hermione Granger from the "Harry Potter" series, Nancy Drew, and Anne of Green Gables—along with the elderly sleuth Miss Marple.

As I read through this list, these questions occurred: What about much older literary heroines? Have we forgotten the noble females found in ancient poetry and plays? Are we unaware of the high regard for female courage, fidelity, passion, independence, and intelligence expressed by writers of bygone ages?

Misapprehensions

Perhaps our shortsightedness derives from our view of women before our modern age as being oppressed and subservient to men. Today's feminists, for example, might consider the women of ancient Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance as male chattel, objects possessed and controlled by husbands and fathers, valued only for their dowries and the children they might bring into the world.

Have we forgotten the noble females found in ancient poetry and plays?

There is some truth to these beliefs. With rare exceptions, women in the past generally possessed fewer rights than men, excluded in most instances from the political arena and limited by law and custom from engagement in cultural affairs.

Yet the greater truth is that throughout recorded history, women have wielded tremendous power as wives and mothers. Just like today, they interacted with fathers, husbands, and sons, expressed their opinions, and by force of their intellect, charm, and affection swayed the opinions of the men in their lives. As historian Will Durant and his wife, researcher and writer Ariel Durant, wrote of the ancient Romans in "The Story of Civilization": "Since the greater urgency of the male supplies women with charms more potent than any law, her status in Rome must not be judged from her legal disabilities."

We see this exercise of female power in many past ages. Even a cursory study of Roman history reveals females like Fulvia (the wife of Mark Antony) and Livia Drusilla (the wife of Emperor Augustus) exerting enormous influence on their husbands.

In the Middle Ages, queens like Eleanor of Aquitaine, saints like Joan of Arc, and female religious orders affected the politics and culture of their time.

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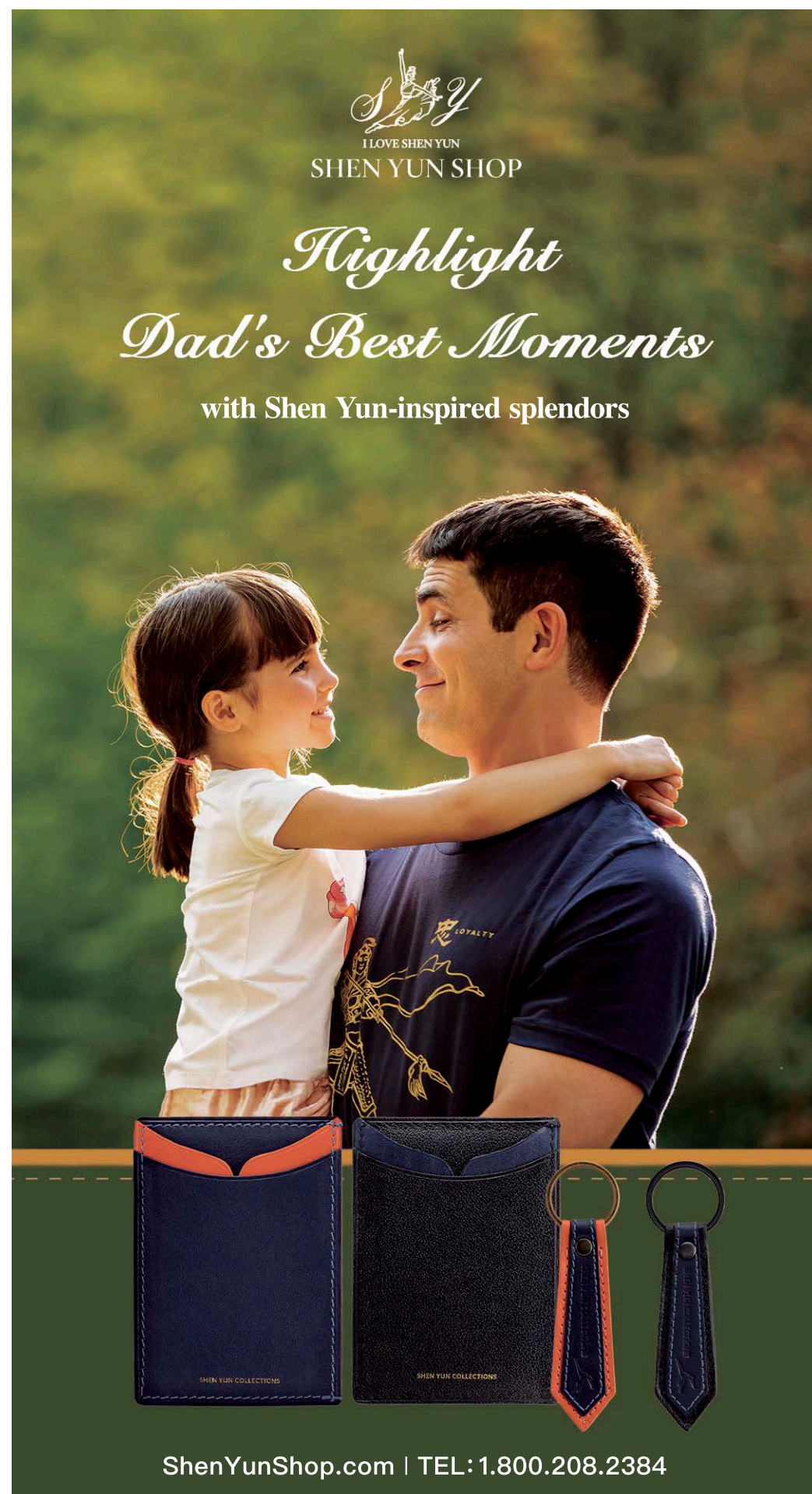
Portrait of Margaret Roper, from a 1593 reproduction of a now-lost Hans Holbein portrait of all the women in Thomas More's family.



Penelope is known for keeping suitors at bay while she faithfully awaits the return of her husband, Odysseus, from the Trojan War. Detail of "Penelope," 1864, by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope. Sotheby's November 2017.



Ismene (L) tries to convince her sister, Antigone, to forego the decision to unlawfully bury their brother. "Antigone and Ismene" an 1892 illustration by Emil Teschendorff from "Character Sketches of Romance, Fiction and the Drama" by Ebenezer Cobham Brewer.



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(L-R) New Zealand's Teddy Tahu Rhodes as Emile De Becque, with Jamal Sydney Bednarz as Jerome, Ayanda Dladla as Ngana, and Australia's Lisa McCune as Nellie Forbush for the Lincoln Center Theater production of "South Pacific" at the Sydney Opera House in 2012.

MUSICAL THEATER

The West Versus Prejudice: Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'South Pacific'

KENNETH LAFAVE

"You've got to be taught to be afraid/ Of people whose eyes are oddly made/ And people whose skin is a different shade/ You've got to be carefully taught," sings Lt. Cable in "South Pacific," objecting bitterly to the prejudice that has kept him from committing to the Tonkinese woman he loves.

In 1950, a year after "South Pacific" opened on Broadway, the censors in South Africa demanded that Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II remove those lyrics from a Johannesburg staging of the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical. The famed songwriting team refused, shutting down the production entirely. Lt. Cable's sentiment was central to the show's premise that the Western, middle-class values of individual worth and responsibility applied to everyone, not just to white people. It was a profoundly antiracist statement and remains one today.

But "South Pacific" then and "South Pacific" now must be two different shows, because a high school in New Jersey recently nixed a production following complaints that the show contained "ethnic stereotypes." To understand this shift in perspective, the difference between "South Pacific" 1949 and "South Pacific" 2021 is worth examining.

Overcoming Prejudice

The musical takes place in the early months of World War II in the Pacific theater, on an unnamed island where Seabees and nurses wait for the war to start. The Japanese are only an island away, but engagement is limited and the real shooting hasn't begun.

One of the nurses, a self-described "littie hick" from Arkansas named Nellie Forbush, is in love with French-born island plantation owner Emile De Becque, while her friend, Marine Lt. Cable, finds himself falling in love with a beautiful young Tonkinese girl, Liat.

Cable, a Princeton graduate from a wealthy Philadelphia family, balks at marrying Liat because he realizes that she would never be accepted by his family. And when Nellie finds out that De Becque has children from a previous liaison with a Tonkinese woman, she too runs from the relationship. As the story progresses, both Nellie and Cable face their prejudices and overcome them.

And yet, cancel culture and its precursor, political correctness, find this unacceptable. The pointing out of so-called stereotypes in "South Pacific" began with the 2001 TV film, a remake of the original 1958 movie version. It cut the second-act song "Happy Talk," apparently for the political incorrectness of putting pidgin English in the mouth of a Tonkinese woman nicknamed Bloody Mary.

Bloody Mary is a large, loud, rambunctious Tonkinese woman who is

always thinking about how to get what she wants, saying things such as "You like?" and selling things "Fo' dollah." The thing about stereotypes is that they are simply abstractions from general observation. In some sense they pervade all art, perhaps especially theater. Full staff is the stereotype of a jolly-but-dull Elizabethan fat man. Willie Loman is a sort of archetypal failed businessman. Even the Seabees in "South Pacific" are stereotypes. Certainly, not every Seabee in World War II wolf-whistled nurses.

Love Over Politics

Produced at the height of America's climb to the status of major world power, "South Pacific" reveals what it means to encounter a new culture and people, and how middle-class Western values can serve to undo the inborn animus that comes with being born into a given race or culture. It does not preach politics but makes its point through stories about love, and along the way gives us bursts of unforgettable lyricism such as "Some Enchanted Evening," "A Wonderful Guy," "Younger Than Springtime," and "This Nearly Was Mine."

Cancel culture tries to shape human experience from politics, while Western culture shapes its politics from human experience. A politically correct "South Pacific" would hammer at the idea of the West imposing its values on the occupied Tonkinese. Fortunately, the authors of the show knew something deeper: The bloody and horrifying adventure of international war thrusts the expanding power into the unwanted position of encountering a foreign culture. It can hardly be expected to drop its own cultural beliefs and habits for those of the people it encounters.

The point missed by cancel culture is simply this: These two young Americans, one a simple "cock-eyed optimist" and the other an Ivy League military officer, both have the intellectual ammo necessary for that overcoming; namely, both are armed with the classical liberal principle of individual worth and responsibility. It takes them a while to bring that principle up from the subconscious and into full view, and in one case the delay is tragic, but they both make a leap away from the prejudices they've been taught.

At one point in the show's dialogue, De Becque asks a U.S. Naval officer, "I know you are against the Japanese, but what are you for?" Cable's and Nellie's moral progress is the answer to his question.

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).

Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Last Supper': Christ in the Epicenter of the Story

JANI ALLAN

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.
—Leonardo da Vinci

Once saw Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper." Then, it was still possible to wander into the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Church and Dominican Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy, and see the mural.

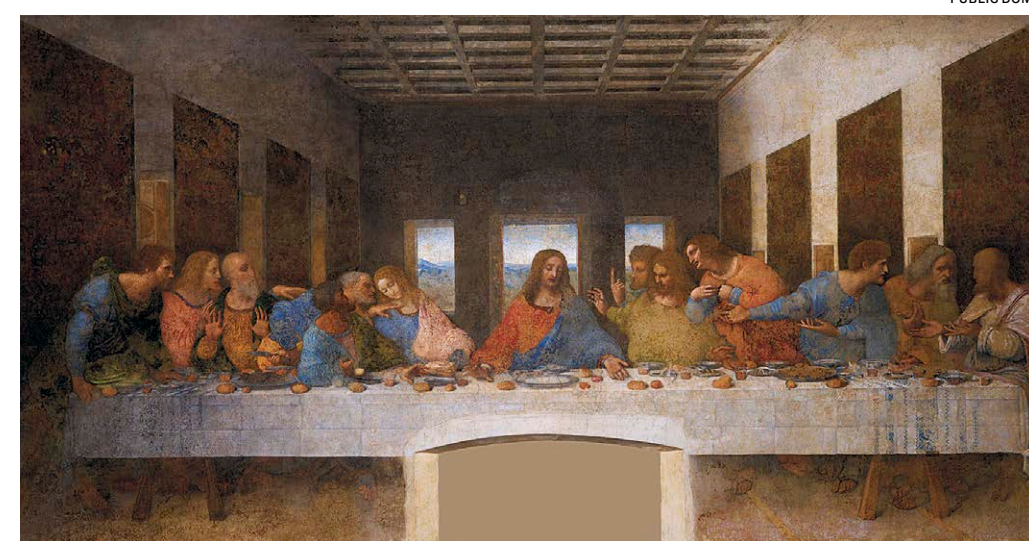
What do I remember? The silence. The profound mystery. To weep at such majesty would be sentimental. As Leonardo himself said, "Tears come from the heart and not from the brain." Leonardo painted the most dramatic moment in time, without drama. All is contained within the strictures of mathematical perspective.

These days, the room in which "The Last Supper" stands is hermetically sealed. One has to go through two sets of doors to enter, and everything closes promptly after one enters. The 15-minute time period for observation and picture-taking is strict. One cannot take a video of the painting.

Da Vinci's "Last Supper" is a huge painting, about 29 feet wide and 15 feet high. It was made "with tempera and oil on a gypsum preparation instead of the technique commonly used in the fresco period," according to the Milan Museum. Leonardo was experimenting with his own pigments to seal the painting to the wall before the plaster dried, but it began to deteriorate even during his lifetime.

The wall on which the masterpiece was painted was subject to humidity that hastened its deterioration. In the 17th century, a door was punched in the painting, and 200 years later, Napoleon's soldiers used the refectory as a stable.

In August 1943, a bomb hit the convent and destroyed a large section. It is miraculous that the painting still exists.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

The painting is dense with symbolism.

The restored masterpiece "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci.

The Painting That Speaks Silently

The "Ultima Cena" is Christ's final meal with his apostles (a Passover Seder) remembered for two events. One sets out the parameters of the first Eucharist. The other is when Christ says that one of his disciples will betray him.

As 16th-century art historian Giorgio Vasari wrote in his famous "Lives of the Artists": "Leonardo imagined and has succeeded in expressing the desire that has entered the minds of the apostles to know who is betraying their Master. So, in the face of each one may be seen love, fear, indignation or grief at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; and this excites no less astonishment than the obstinate hatred and treachery to be seen in Judas."

The composition is pure sacred geometry. It has been simplified and pared of all unnecessary details. It is anchored by an equilateral triangle formed by Christ's body. He sits below an arching pediment. The light suggests a halo.

The three windows symbolize the Holy Trinity. The four windows along the wall on each side are important in the classical tradition as they represent Plato's Four Virtues. But all the perspective lines bring us to Christ. In the distance is a

verdant landscape. We are left wondering whether it is heaven on earth.

Christ is the epicenter of the narrative. He is the still, eternal center of it all. Within the chaos, there is the eternal.

The apostles are monumental, almost as if too large for the table, too large for the space they occupy. They are in four groups. During the 15th century, Florentine painters, unlike artists before them, believed that the motions of the mind would be apparent in facial expressions and bodily gestures.

This is especially evident in "The Last Supper." The apostles are propelled into motion by "animal spirits" conveyed through their bodies from their "sensus communis"—where our senses come together—the very seat of the soul.

Leonardo used the body to represent the soul. In his words: "Make the motions of your figures appropriate to the mental conditions of these figures."

Therefore, the painting is dense with symbolism.

Peter has a knife in his hand, foreshadowing that he will sever the ear of a soldier as he tries to protect Christ. Judas clutches a purse that contains the reward for identifying Christ to the authorities. Thomas points upward, and that finger

foreshadows his plunging it into Christ's wound.

The table is a barrier that separates the spiritual realm from the earthly.

The painting has vertical and horizontal lines, from the outlines of the windows, which are akin to a musical staff. Giovanni Pala, a musician, mathematician, and scholar, posits that the position of the bread rolls and their relation to the apostles' hands form a musical script. When played left to right, it is mere noise. But since Leonardo often wrote in a mirror-script, if we play the notes backward, from right to left, they sound like a Renaissance dirge.

Leonardo da Vinci has been called one of the greatest minds that ever lived. Painter, sculptor, inventor, scientist, mathematician, anatomist, astronomer, engineer, musician, philosopher, writer: He was gifted in so many ways that his genius was his master. His ego appears to have been subsumed completely by an almost fervent need to discover and unravel the mystery of life. He was a ceaseless explorer of all knowledge.

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Jani Allan is a journalist, columnist, writer, and broadcaster.

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



I rely on The Epoch Times newspaper for factual and unbiased news coverage.

LARRY ELDER
Best-selling author, attorney, and talk show host



It's our favorite paper. It's the first one we read. Thank you so much for your reporting of the news.

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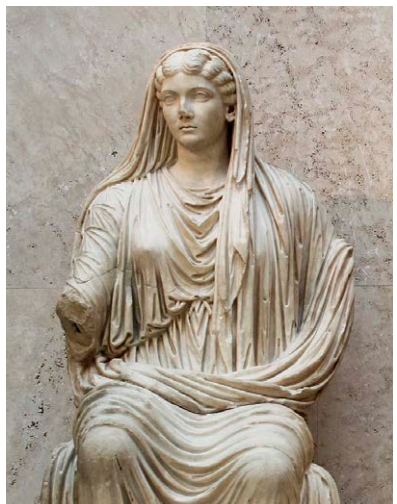


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PUBLIC DOMAIN



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LITERATURE

Forgotten Heroines

Fictional Females From Long Ago

Continued from Page 1

The Renaissance and Baroque periods featured several prominent female artists, Queen Elizabeth I ruled England with an iron hand, and women like Margaret Roper, who was Thomas More's daughter, were famed for their erudition and literary talents.

And writers down through history have celebrated the nature, virtues, and accomplishments of strong women in their poetry, plays, and prose.

The Heroic and Loving Sister

Most of us are familiar with Homer's Penelope, the patient and loyal wife of Odysseus who in the "Odyssey" contrives to put off her suitors by using various tricks while hoping for the safe return of her husband. For the ancients, Penelope was a model of fidelity and wifely virtue.

Perhaps fewer of us know about "Antigone," Sophocles's play depicting the destruction of the house of Creon. This play pays honor to Antigone and her fidelity to her brother and to the gods. After Antigone's

brother Polynices dies fighting to regain his right to rule Thebes, the new king, Creon, orders his body to remain unburied and unmourned, thus preventing, according to the Greeks, the dead man's soul from entering the afterlife.

Antigone disobeys this edict and performs the burial rites by sprinkling her brother's body with dust. When she is apprehended for breaking the king's law, she courageously admits her crime to the king, telling him that divine law supersedes his earthly power.

Creon orders that Antigone be walled up alive in a cave. To avoid a slow death, Antigone hangs herself, and Creon's son, who is in love with her, also takes his own life, as does his grieving mother, Creon's wife. By his unjust law and the courage of Antigone, Creon's destruction is complete.

In her act of her defiance, in her verbal sparring with Creon, and even when the pilgrims lead her away to her death, Antigone passionately defends her burial of Polynices as a righteous act. As she exits the stage, she says: "Behold me, lords, the last of your kings' house—what doom is mine, and at whose hands, and for what cause—that I

duly performed the dues of piety!"

In this young woman, we have as gallant a soul as any in Greek literature.

The Passionate Queen

In the "Aeneid," Virgil creates one of the fullest ancient literary portraits of a woman in ancient literature. When we first meet Dido, queen of Carthage, she is a childless widow immersed in building this city, overseeing the construction of temples and squares—a powerful monarch loved and respected by her people.

When she falls in love with the wanderer and Trojan prince Aeneas, Dido neglects some of her duties as queen, but worse, Aeneas leaves her at the behest of the gods to fulfill his destiny. Brokenhearted and bitter, the queen climbs onto a funeral pyre and dies by her own hand.

Some today might find Dido weak or hysterical in this extreme reaction, but for me she rouses great sympathy. She truly loves Aeneas, thinks they are married—he denies it—and is emotionally shattered as he continues his preparations to desert her. "Ah, merciless Love," Virgil comments, "is there any length to which you cannot force the human heart to go?"

"Merciless Love" brings this queen to her doom, as it has done to countless other men and women down through the ages.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

Bold-faced, gap-toothed, five times married, a traveler to places as faraway as Jerusalem and Rome, and wearing a hat as broad as a shield, this bawdy, adventurous woman is Geoffrey Chaucer's Wife of Bath, one of the pilgrims in "The Canterbury Tales." She knows how to laugh and chatter, and all the tricks of love.

The Wife of Bath may seem an odd choice to include in a discussion of female vir-

"Antigone Buries Polynices," 1825, by Sébastien Norblin, Paris, National School of Fine Arts.

In these and other fictional females from the past, we moderns can still discover role models displaying all manner of virtues.

due, and certainly she undertakes no deeds equal to those of an Antigone or Dido. Yet Chaucer's brief description of her physical appearance, and later of her thoughts about marriage and male-female relations in the tale she tells, mocks the idea that all medieval wives were abused servants. The Wife of Bath is witty, clearly educated—and coquettish.

The story she tells to her fellow pilgrims further demolishes some of our preconceptions about medieval women. Charged with a heinous crime, a young knight has one year to return to King Arthur's court and correctly answer the question: What do women want most in the world? If he returns with the correct answer, the queen promises to spare his life. If he fails, he will die.

The tale is too long for retelling here, but the young knight eventually finds an old woman who promises him that she has the answer: that all women want husbands or lovers they can command. When he gives this answer to the court, the queen and her ladies applaud, and the knight escapes death, but he must now marry the ugly, old woman. After they are wed and together in bed, she asks the knight whether he would prefer marrying someone like her who was always loyal, or a beauty who was a flirt and unfaithful. Unable to make up his mind, the knight asks her to choose for him. Because he gives the power of choice to her and so the power to command him, she is transformed into a woman who is both good and beautiful.

Both in her life and in her story, the Wife of Bath displays wit, wisdom, and a love for life and romance. She is in every way a modern woman worthy of respect.

The Past Still Speaks to the Present

Many other writers from the past created

admirable female characters. In "Twelfth Night," for example, Shakespeare creates the shipwrecked and penniless Viola, who disguises herself as a young man and enters into the service of a duke, thereby rescuing herself through the use of her wits and her courage.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" paints a portrait of valiant dignity in Hester Prynne, socially ostracized for bearing a child out of wedlock, and whose stoicism and "head held high" attitude allow her to overcome her broken reputation.

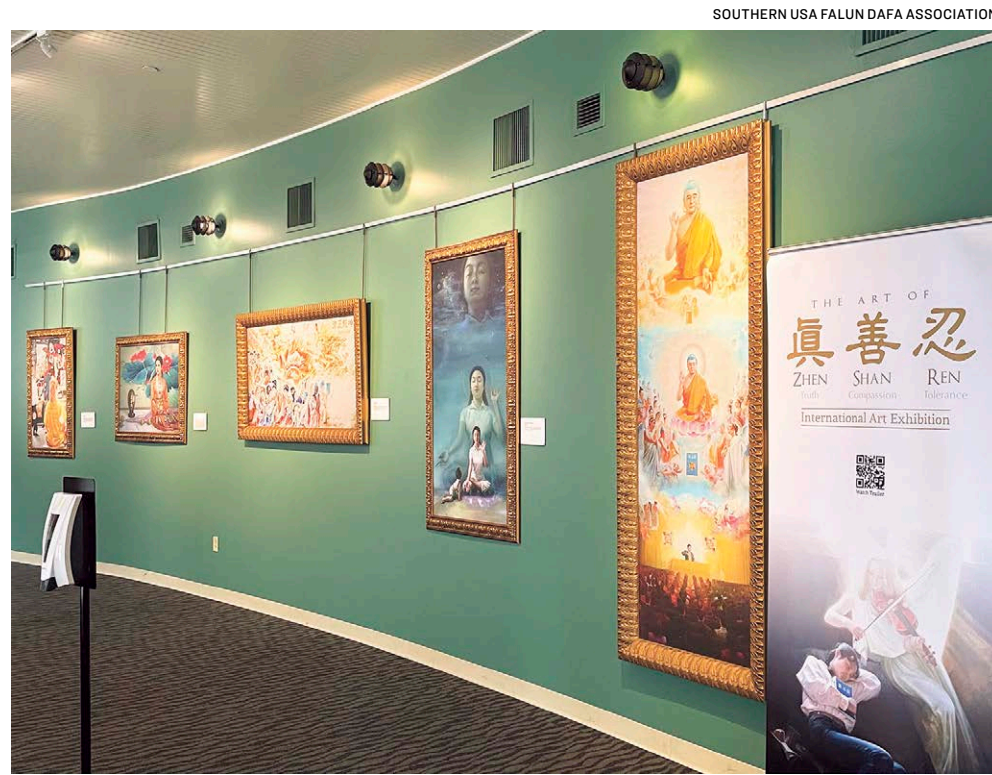
In these and other fictional females from the past, we moderns can still discover role models displaying all manner of virtues. For the actress slammed by the cancel culture crew for some innocent comment on social media, Hester Prynne might serve as an exemplar of grace under fire. The college sophomore under attack for her religious views might find solace and inspiration in Antigone.

"Something old, something new" are the beginning words of the rhyme telling a bride what to wear for good luck on her wedding day. Perhaps we should apply that same formula to our take on women in literature. Let's remember the new—the Scout Finches and Scarlett O'Haras—but let's not forget those inspirational women from literature written long ago.

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 non-fiction, "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.



(Left) Visitors view paintings in "The Art of Zhen Shan Ren International Art Exhibition" at the Gallery @ Courtyard in Plano, Texas. (Right) Many of the paintings in "The Art of Zhen Shan Ren International Art Exhibition" show the beauty of living a spiritual life.



Sacred Art Helps Texans See Truth and Beauty

'The Art of Zhen Shan Ren' comes to Plano, Texas

LORRAINE FERRIER

Beautiful paintings in "The Art of Zhen Shan Ren International Art Exhibition" warn Texas residents of the real danger of unwittingly becoming involved in murder. Paintings conveying pure beauty and evil hang side by side in the exhibition at the Gallery @ Courtyard in Plano, Texas. The 22 paintings, by internationally acclaimed artists, show both the profound beauty of the Chinese spiritual discipline of Falun Gong and the pure evil of the torture and forced organ harvesting carried out by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on Falun Gong practitioners just for practicing their faith.

Each painting is imbued with the artist's selfless intention to be a better person.

All the artists featured in the exhibition practice Falun Gong, a faith that believes that "Zhen, Shan, Ren" (Truthfulness, Compassion, Tolerance) are the fundamental characteristics of the universe. Along with study and five meditative exercises, Falun Gong practitioners strive to align themselves with those three fundamental characteristics.

Many of the paintings on display allow viewers to peek into the artists' personal spiritual practice, their experiences while practicing, and their visions of heaven. Some of the paintings explore the universal themes of good is rewarded and evil punished, and of devout resilience in the face of adversity. And each painting is im-

bued with the artist's selfless intention to be a better person.

"Art can hasten either the elevation or degeneration of people's moral standards. [Good artwork] can broaden people's mind ... making them nobler people," Zhang Kunlun, one of the artists involved in the exhibition, told NTD, a sister media outlet of The Epoch Times. He went on to say: "If an artist wants to produce good artwork, the artist must first be a good person, a person with a higher moral standard than others. When one creates art, one must continuously purify oneself."

Buddhas, Daos, and Gods, overflowing with divine grace and mercy, fill heavenly realms in some paintings. And the depths of hell are shown in others, although not for the sake of showing demons. Evil is only shown as part of a complete story. Hence, good is rewarded and evil is punished.

Some of the paintings show the persecution of Falun Gong adherents in China. Since July 20, 1999, on the orders of former CCP leader Jiang Zemin, the communist regime has systematically tortured practitioners to force them into renouncing their faith. Rape, torture, and forced labor are some of the methods the communist regime uses to this day. Yet the practitioners in some of the paintings undergoing such persecution exude a peaceful inner strength and a tenacious spirit—strangely, even a kind of serenity as they uphold their faith.

And then there are paintings that present what has been called "a new form of evil on this planet" by one prominent human rights lawyer: forced organ harvesting.

"The art is really profound. It's a profound expression of the horrors of communist China's forced organ harvesting. ... It's a very, very powerful exhibit," Texas State Rep. Matt Shaheen said at NTD at the opening of the Plano exhibition. Shaheen serves the citizens of District 66 in the Texas House of Representatives, representing West Plano

and Far North Dallas.

On viewing the paintings, retired professor of economics Lydia Ortega said to NTD: "Bring tissues, OK. Because this exhibition will get to your heart. And that's how paintings and artwork goes—it goes to the heart of you, when you see what people are expressing and recognize the truth of it."

A Sickening Trade

Each year, thousands of desperately sick people from around the world travel to China in the hope of getting an organ transplant. In most countries, an organ donation match takes a considerable amount of time to arrange, but in China a match can be found in as little as two weeks. This is because the CCP forcibly takes these organs from prisoners of conscience. Falun Gong practitioners are believed to be the main victims of this state-sanctioned organ harvesting.

Texans may be more aware of communist China's human rights tragedy since June 7, when Texas officially and unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the Chinese regime's systematic killing of prisoners of conscience for their organs. The resolution warns Texas citizens that if they travel to China for organ transplant surgery, they may be "unwittingly becoming involved in murder in the form of forced organ harvesting."

Shaheen, the lead sponsor of the resolution, told NTD: "It's really important that the state of Texas take a stand as far as condemning the practice by the Chinese government and the forced organ harvesting of practitioners of Falun Gong and really a lot of faiths and religions that are practiced in China."

Falun Gong practitioner Adam Yao was at the Plano exhibition opening. He gave the final speech of the opening presentation, sharing how he was one of those who underwent terrifying torture while illegally detained in a Chinese prison. He feels fortunate to be one of the few who escaped (from the hospital he was sent to for injuries while in prison) to seek asylum in America. "But there remain numerous fellow practitioners who are still under persecution and face the threat of having their organs harvested," he said.

"The Art of Zhen Shan Ren International Art Exhibition," runs until July 2, at the Gallery @ Courtyard in Plano, Texas. From July 8 until July 22, the exhibition will be on display at James H. "Sloppy" Floyd Veterans Memorial Building in Atlanta.

Eva Fu and NTD contributed to this article.



Visitors to the exhibition in Plano, Texas, can observe the serenity of Falun Gong practitioners faced with religious persecution.



In the oil painting "Organ Crimes," artist Xiqiang Dong depicts the forcible seizure of organs from a Falun Gong practitioner in China, while still alive.

A Greek Mythical Masterpiece

Around 430 B.C., the preeminent Athenian sculptor Pheidias, who created the statue of Athena for the Parthenon, created the gigantic Zeus.

Pheidias's Zeus is as mythical as Zeus himself. The original statue no longer exists, and the design was only replicated on coins or described in ancient texts.

Long considered his masterpiece, Pheidias's Zeus was opulent. The god sat on a huge gold, ebony, ivory, and precious stone throne that was adorned with painted figures. Zeus had ivory flesh and a glass robe, gilded and carved with lilies and animals. He held the goddess of victory, Nike, in his right hand and a scepter inlaid with countless metals and topped with an eagle (Zeus's companion and messenger) in his left hand.

Greenough's 'Washington' Greenough wasn't only inspired by "Zeus."

He depicted his Washington statue with myriad symbols of the ancient world to imbue nationalistic pride.

According to the Smithsonian website, on Washington's throne the Greek god Apollo in his chariot symbolizes the American enlightenment, and Hercules's fending off the snake and protecting his brother Iphicles indicates the courage of the American people.

And then directly from America's history, Christopher Columbus and a Native American represent the meeting of the new and old worlds.

Inscribed in Latin, on the back of the throne: "Horatio Greenough created this image as a great example of liberty and one which will not endure without liberty itself."

To find out more about the George Washington statue by Horatio Greenough, visit <https://ept.ms/WashingtonStatue>



(L-R) Jesse Eisenberg, Dakota Fanning, and Peter Sarsgaard play eco-terrorists in "Night Moves."

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.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Trying to Make Some Front-Page Eco-Terrorism News

MARK JACKSON

Pre-rap Nuyorican (New York-born Puerto Rican) poet Gil Scott Heron said in 1971, "The Revolution will not be televised." The fact that current "revolutions" arrive largely via social media rather than mainstream media prove Heron a minor urban prophet. What he didn't see coming was that all that revolution was going to end up putting America on the brink of communism.

Kelly Reichardt's 2013 eco-terrorist thriller, "Night Moves," takes a look at some eco-revolutionary issues and terrorist tactics, and raises some questions. It's almost a blueprint for young eco-terrorists everywhere, and the message is: Think small.

What Shall We Blow Up? Redheaded Dena (Dakota Fanning) and



'Night Moves'

Director Kelly Reichardt

Starring Jesse Eisenberg, Dakota Fanning, Peter Sarsgaard

Rated R

Running Time 1 hour, 52 minutes

Release Date May 30, 2014

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

(Left) Josh (Jesse Eisenberg) suspects Dena (Dakota Fanning) of cavorting in to the stressful aftermath of their badly planned act of terrorism; (below) (L-R) Dakota Fanning, Jesse Eisenberg, and Peter Sarsgaard play characters up to no good in "Night Moves."



Josh (Jesse Eisenberg) works his side gig at an organic farm.

sensitive Josh (Jesse Eisenberg) nose around the massive, hydroelectric Green Peter Dam sluice gate in Oregon. She notes that there are no fish ladders. Dena's a Connecticut-to-Pacific-Northwest refugee Trust-afarian (a trust-fund kid who can afford to hang out on a Costa Rican beach, surf, smoke weed, wear blond dreadlocks, and pretend to be a Rastafarian—or run off and join the eco-terrorist movement, or Antifa, and so on). She works at a nature spa with waffling sauna steam and Indian flute music.

Josh is hired help at an organic farm. He's a specific type of shrilly, moralizing, hypersensitive modern soft male; he puts bird nests back in trees with much agonizing, society-blaming, and verbal virtue-signaling. He also says (of the dam), "It's killing all the salmon, so we can run our iPods."

Then, Josh and Dena attend a documentary screening. In the Q&A, the filmmaker hails a green revolution. "What do you think we should do?" asks a student. The filmmaker replies, "One big thing is not good. Lots of little things are good."

Oklahoma City Redux

But our two eco-warriors are clearly already up to something big. They meet up with Harmon, Josh's activist buddy (Peter Sarsgaard at his edgy best in full-beard mode). Harmon is an ex-Marine and apparently an explosives expert. The dam keeps coming up in conversations.

Dena trust-fund bankrolls a \$10,000 used speedboat. They trade 20-something Pacific Northwest eco-hippie revolutionary gossip: "Last I heard, Randy was squatting in Eagle Creek." Dena waxed academic, stating that once the marine biodiversity goes, everything goes. They talk about the hydro dam: "Twenty-nine golf courses have sprung up in the high plains desert. Where's the water coming from?"

Harmon speaks in the unctuous, sensual way of Gaia activists (with prior arrests). He paints the dam as a woman: "All that water pushing up against her walls, she wants to let go, but we need to help her." There's a pattern of anthropomorphizing man-made objects and being suspicious of them having ill intent toward nature.

It turns out that Harmon's stockpiled a thousand pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. They need 500 more to have some fun fireworks festivities. Problem is, if you order any amount over 10 pounds, this controlled substance sends up red flags to law enforcement.

Dena goes in the feed store, lays down an Oscar-worthy eco-improv, bamboozles the desk clerk, and bags bomb ingredients. They head home to jettison the boat seats and "stuff the turkey."

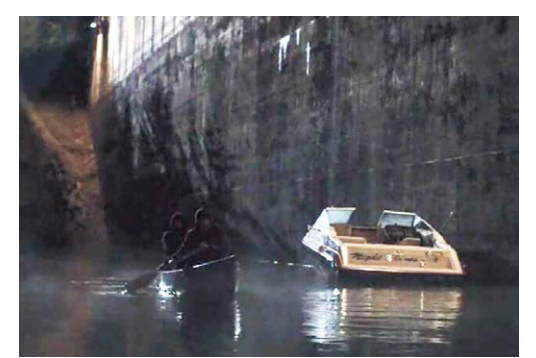
It's camping time, or rather, hanging around the campground picnic table looking like you're camping, until night falls. Under cover of darkness, they take off across the camp lake. Pulling alongside the dam, Dena anchors the boat to it with an explosive, powder-actuated drill. Harmon wires the boat-bomb. Just as they're about to high-tail it out of there, a car pulls up on the far bank. Dena says, "That's not a good spot." Will everyone make it out alive?

The local papers run the dam story; farmers talk. Dena breaks the agreed radio silence, wanting to know if Josh has seen a website for a missing Oregon airplane mechanic who was camping out on the river that night. All his friends, children, and mother are posting.

Dena's got hives. She's looking dangerously close to spilling the beans. Harmon thinks jail doesn't sound too good. It's life, plus 300 years.

Overview

This subject matter was pretty cutting-



(Top) Dakota Fanning as Dena; (middle) the eco-terrorists leaving the scene of a soon-to-be boat-bomb crime; and (above) The sluice gate of Oregon's Green Peter hydroelectric dam in "Night Moves."

edge in 2013. Mark Ruffalo, Sean Lennon, and Yoko Ono were all protesting fracking. Things fall apart, the center does not hold, and that giant sucking sound is planet Earth's vanishing resources. Therefore, this should be gripping and dramatic stuff, but mostly it isn't.

Generally, the film is too slow-moving. The music's melancholy, echoey, like lake ripples, with sad piano chords. It's appropriate, but it would have been nice to counter the overcast Oregon landscapes with some crackling dramatic tension. Sarsgaard brings that, Fanning a bit less so, Eisenberg not at all.

Unfortunately, while Eisenberg looks the part of a disgruntled eco-subversive, he possesses no deep-dug, tree-hugger taproot of dramatic power to be convincingly attention-grabbing—he just looks mildly disturbed. Sighs a bit. You just don't care enough about him one way or another.

Director Kelly Reichardt's films tend to simply focus on characters living in the margins of society.

The film does bring up a good point. Sometimes, those caring about road-kill deer enough to dynamite a dam are self-righteous and zealous to the point of strangely lacking compassion for fellow humans.

"Night Moves" clearly shows the dangers of youthful idealists trying their hand at revolution. When walking the walk results in a foot getting blown off by an improvised explosive device, there's immediate PTSD and the realization that one is not a real warrior. The movie spotlights the overly passionate, not-well-thought-through, roiling fanaticism that pervades much of modern revolution.

But is it perhaps also something else? Is it a call out for real eco-warriors to man up? One gets the distinct feeling that the filmmakers support anti-corporation and pro-environment ideology. The Oregon area in which the film is set is rife with organic farming communities, and 1960s-style back-to-the-land and off-the-grid neo-hippies, anarchists, radicals, and activists. Was "Night Moves" a subversive call to arms?

Unlikely. Reichardt's films tend to simply focus on characters living in the margins of society, in search of a better quality of life and place in the world. She is interested in characters, in her own words for a New York Times Magazine article, "who don't have a net, who if you sneezed on them, their world would fall apart."

In the end, "Night Moves" teaches our revolutionary-minded youth not to go big and hurt humans while trying to make some (as Bob Seger said) "front-page drive-in news." It warns to not be Timothy McVeigh. It advises to go small. And what's that mean? It's probably as simple as, instead of blowing dams, just "be the change you want to see in the world."

SHEN YUN

The Show the Chinese Communist Party Doesn't Want You to See

CATHERINE YANG

There's little that scares the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) more than the growing popularity of traditional culture—embodied in the brilliant sights and sounds of Shen Yun Performing Arts.

It makes sense. New York-based Shen Yun's mission is to revive 5,000 years of Chinese civilization, an ancient culture centered around harmony between heaven, earth, and humankind—a culture said to be passed down from the divine. This is everything the CCP has been working to destroy since the Party's inception.

"Absolutely, this is blacklisted. This is the biggest threat to the Chinese Communist Party," said Jared Madsen, one of Shen Yun's emcees. "If people believe there's something beyond the Chinese Communist Party, they believe there's something higher ... that's a major threat to the Chinese Communist Party."

As such, the CCP has done everything from slashing Shen Yun's tour bus tires to hiring hordes of internet trolls to skew perception of the company on social media, to having Chinese consulates write letters to local officials saying that their letting Shen Yun perform in their areas would damage relations with China, to calling up theaters themselves (or through hired proxies) to demand Shen Yun be canceled. The interference goes back over a decade and has been well documented, and actually often backfires.

These measures may sound extreme, because Shen Yun is not even a political show. It's a performance of classical Chinese dance, of ethnic and folk dances from China's 50-some minority groups, of bel canto solos, and of an orchestra blending Eastern and Western traditions. And audiences step out of the theater aglow, uplifted by the performance, and happy to have learned the truth about the authentic culture of China, something little known in the West precisely because the Party has tried to erase it.

"Fundamentally, the Chinese Communist Party is an atheist regime. Shen Yun reflects 5,000 years of Chinese culture, and Chinese culture is rooted in divine thought—all different types of divine thought: Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—that goes directly against the atheist principles of communism," Madsen said.

The CCP is afraid because Shen Yun shows China before communism.

What Is Traditional Culture?

One of the methods the CCP has used in trying to discredit Shen Yun is to create its own performing arts troupes, sending them all around the world.

"They created all these companies ... that they sent to the US. Now, have you heard of any of these?" Madsen said. "No, because they weren't very good. Why? Because no one wants to see communist propaganda." In more recent years, the Party's method has evolved, and they talk often of promoting "traditional culture" and having major arts organizations emphasize "classical" dance in ways that turn out to be just lip service.

"When they do talk about traditional Chinese culture, they use it to try to promote communism. I mean here, we see right through it, like 'this is propaganda, and nobody wants to watch this,'" Madsen said.

It's worth understanding that all major organizations in China are state-run. Huang Peng, a violinist and vocalist with Shen Yun, explained how being an artist in China and in America has been like night and day.

Huang once had a prestigious career as a violinist. He studied the instrument under his father from childhood and successfully auditioned into a well-known philharmonic orchestra.



A performance by Shen Yun Performing Arts classical Chinese dancers.

The CCP is afraid because Shen Yun shows China before communism.

But then in 1999, the CCP began a persecutory campaign against Falun Gong, with official orders to ruin the livelihoods and reputations of those who would not give it up. Peng was one of an estimated 100 million people in China who followed this spiritual practice that teaches truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance. He was also one of several million who would not give up his faith, and he tried to tell his colleagues and those around him about the truth of Falun Gong: that it is good, teaches people to be kind, and that the CCP was circulating blatantly false and slanderous information about the practice.

Huang was telling his fellow musicians about Falun Gong one day when a supervisor reported him to the police, who then ransacked his home and detained him for 24 hours where they kept him awake. Meanwhile, they also illegally arrested his mother for no reason other than to coerce him into writing and signing a testimony not only stating he would give up his faith, but denigrating it as well.

Huang refused, and he was fired. His first thought was to seek work in another city, with a fresh start, but at the airport he learned that he had been blacklisted and was once again detained. Except this time, Huang was put in a "transformation class," shorthand for brainwashing, and he didn't see the outside world for the next two months.

Much has been documented about the CCP's brutal torture and organ harvesting of groups of its own citizens, like spiritual believers of Falun Gong. But Huang's torture was mental; he was put under 24-hour surveillance, made to watch brainwashing films, and threatened in myriad ways. Under the intense pressure, he signed the testimony. "After returning home, it felt like there was a knife in my heart," Huang said. He did what he most wanted not to do, and the mental persecution had stolen his integrity.

He spent the next few years constantly on the run. Not letting his regret weigh him down, he taught himself how to make and produce fliers that had information about the truth of Falun Gong, and taught others how to do the same, putting himself at risk for another illegal arrest. Huang had to give up his art, and it devastated him and his father both, but his faith was more important.

Then in 2008 he heard about Shen Yun, and in 2014 he was able to leave the country and successfully auditioned to be a part of the performing arts company he had looked up to.

"In mainland China, the state won't

allow people who practice Falun Gong to perform on stage. But here, we have freedom of belief. I think this is so important, as an artist," he said.

But why Shen Yun? "Shen Yun's mission is to revive China's 5,000 years of traditional culture," he said. "It is a divinely inspired culture and a divine message. And it is a message of kindness, which can move people's hearts."

The Truth Wins Out

Shen Yun was formed by a group of artists—some who left China, some who came by way of other parts of the world—who came together in New York in order to do what they couldn't in their home country.

And despite the CCP's long arm of influence, despite its making use of the entire state apparatus to discredit the company, Shen Yun has become a worldwide phenomenon.

"I remember there was one night, I believe in 2009, when we had three companies, and I got a phone call," Madsen said. "All three shows were sold out. That was the point. From that moment forward, we usually sold out every show." Today, Shen Yun has seven companies that simultaneously tour the world, giving hundreds of performances in over 100 cities globally. It's the only performing arts group of its kind, dedicated not just to preserving but also to reviving traditional Chinese culture. Audience members often express intrigue, piqued by the many rave reviews, and want to see what the "world's premier classical Chinese dance company" looks like in action.

Audiences leave having all expectations filled and more, because Shen Yun is unique among performing arts companies as well, choreographing over a dozen new dances every season with a full-scale production that rivals top opera houses' most lavish pieces.

"The production value is incredibly high," Madsen said. "That alone, this is a show you can really get immersed in." But while the one-of-a-kind costumes, and orchestra, and digital backdrops dazzle, he thinks there is something deeper that the audiences leave with.

"There's this constant human pursuit of something greater, something bigger, something better—not just that, something deeper, something higher. All of that. It all comes together," he said. "And our show really brings that out and brings that to life."

"It really goes beyond a cultural show. It's these deep values and deep principles," he said.

Interviews provided by NTD.

The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts. For more information please visit ShenYunPerformingArts.org

FILM

3 Films for 4th of July: Classic Movies That Celebrate America

TIFFANY BRANNAN

The classic films from the Golden Age of Hollywood are noted for their glamour, black-and-white cinematography, and wholesomeness. Movies made during the 1930s to the '50s share another feature: patriotism. The flag-waving was not just restricted to propaganda movies made during World War II. From the mid-1930s onward, films took every opportunity to promote the virtues of the United States of America.

Much of this American pride came from the moguls and producers themselves, many of whom were not born in the United States but proudly claimed it as their home. They expressed their love for the USA through movies that showed immigrants finding the American dream. Three such movies are "Let Freedom Ring" from 1939, "Yankee Doodle Dandy" from 1942, and "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" from 1945.

These movies show that Americans, although they still have problems, had the potential for a better life here than anywhere else.

The Stories

'Let Freedom Ring'

"Let Freedom Ring," also called "Song of the Plains," tells the story of the railroad's expansion to a small Western town in 1868. With it comes racketeer Jim Knox (Edward Arnold), who quickly takes control of the court, the sheriff, and the local newspaper as his railroad workers flood Clover City. He thinks he also can claim the heart of lovely young restaurateur Maggie Adams (Virginia Bruce), but she is disgusted by his tyrannical takeover of the town.

Maggie believes that her sweetheart, Steve Logan (Nelson Eddy), will return from Harvard and aid the small rebellion led by his father (Lionel Barrymore). However, she is heartbroken when he returns and appears to support Mr. Knox. Little does she know that he and his boyhood friend, The Mackerel (Charles Butterworth), are secretly scheming to defeat Knox through the power of the press.

'Yankee Doodle Dandy'

"Yankee Doodle Dandy" is a semifictional biopic about musical playwright George M. Cohan. The film begins when an older Cohan (James Cagney) opens his show "I'd Rather Be Right Than Be President." Afterward, he receives a special invitation to meet President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

While talking with the president, Cohan recounts his whole life and career, beginning with his birth on the Fourth of July to vaudevillian parents. He remembers how his family performed all over America as The Four Cohans. His childhood experience as a song and dance man eventually leads to his becoming a famous songwriter. Even as he reviews his long musical career, he doesn't realize what a big influence his work has had on the nation.

'A Tree Grow in Brooklyn'

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," set in the early 1910s, centers on the life of a second-generation immigrant couple and their two children. The mother, Katie Nolan (Dorothy McGuire), works hard as a scrubwoman because her husband, Johnny (James Dunn), is an alcoholic, seldom-working singing waiter.

While their son, Neeley (Ted Donaldson), is content helping the family's income through earning pennies, his older sister, Francie (Peggy Ann Garner), is a dreamer like her father. She loves reading and imagining beautiful things. When she tells her beloved father that she wants to go to the public school in a wealthy neighborhood, he falsifies her address to give her the opportunity for a better education. While Francie dreams of becoming a writer, her mother faces more grim financial prospects, since she is expecting a third child.

Patriotic Values

All three of these films feature first- or second-generation US immigrants. The Cohans of "Yankee Doodle Dandy" are Irish. Johnny Nolan in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is also Irish, while Katie's parents are Austrian. In "Let Freedom Ring," the railroad workers are European immigrants of many nationalities.



Edward Arnold plays the ruthless racketeer Jim Knox in "Let Freedom Ring." This photo appeared in the New York Sunday News in 1941.



Nelson Eddy, here in a 1935 publicity photo, plays the hero Steve Logan in "Let Freedom Ring."

The importance of reading is further highlighted in 'Let Freedom Ring,' in which a printing press is the main weapon in Clover City's fight for liberty.



A promotional shot of James Cagney from the early 1930s.

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All three films illustrate how immigrants appreciate America's equal opportunity for self-improvement. Katie's mother, Grandma Rommely (Ferike Boros), tells her grandchildren that in America everyone has the opportunity to become better than his or her parents. Similarly, Steve Logan knows that Knox's hired immigrants can become loyal, proud Americans by learning the country's values and its promise of equal opportunities.

George Cohan is a living example of this promise, since his rise from obscurity to fame shows that anyone can succeed in America through hard work and determination. When speaking to President Roosevelt, Cohan says: "I wouldn't worry about this country, if I were you. We got this thing licked. Where else in the world can a plain guy like me come in and talk things over with the head man?" All these films emphasize the American rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

As a musical, "Yankee Doodle Dandy" contains many patriotic songs. George M. Cohan penned many famous Americana tunes, most notably the World War I song "Over There" and "You're a Grand Old Flag," as well as, of course, the song of the show's title. These songs are presented in musical reviews full of military uniforms, stars, stripes, historic vignettes, and lots of flags beaming red, white, and blue—vibrant enough to be seen in black-and-white!

"Let Freedom Ring" also includes some patriotically inspiring music, including the timeless "My Country 'Tis of Thee," plus an original song about America's unique liberty, "Where Else but Here," delivered by Nelson Eddy's operatic voice.

Two of these films delve deeper into how American liberty is bred and preserved. In "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," Grandma Rommely tells her grandchildren why it is important for them to read classic literature. Although uneducated, she has great wisdom about why the United States is special: "In that old country [Austria], a child can rise no higher than his father's state. But here, in this place, each one is free to go as far as he's good to make of himself. This way, the child can be better than the parent, and this is the true way things grow better. And this has to do something with the learning, which is here free to all people."

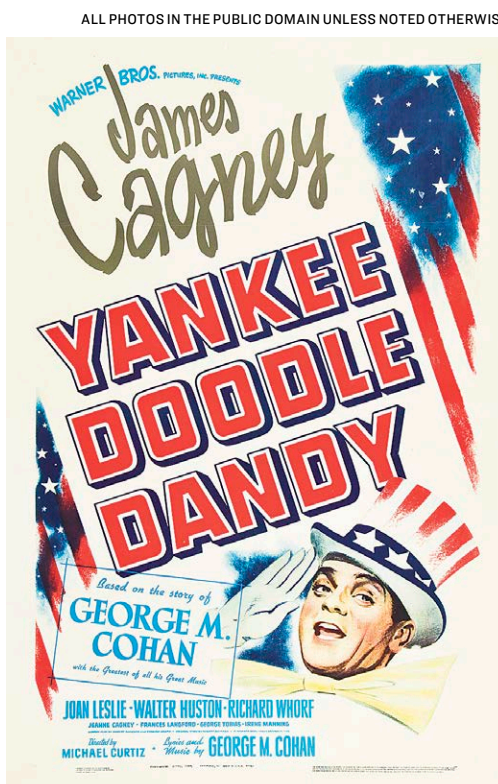
The importance of reading is further highlighted in "Let Freedom Ring," in which a printing press is the main weapon in Clover City's fight for liberty. Steve refers to print type as "the artillery of freedom" and says that he has tried to "hit [deceived people] over the head with a newspaper."

The Clover City Bugle is not an unbiased, honest publication, since the publisher (Raymond Walburn) answers to Jim Knox in exchange for money. Fortunately, Steve takes control of the Bugle and begins printing the truth. He explains the power of the press: "The financiers can rob the poor of justice, but as long as there's one decent newspaper left, and one man to print it, and one horse to peddle it, the United States of America is sitting pretty!"

God Bless America

Although fireworks displays, picnics, and parades are traditional ways of celebrating American Independence Day, it is far too easy to forget what we're really celebrating. These three films are perfect reminders for this occasion, although in different ways. "Let Freedom Ring" shows that patriots have always had to fight to protect American freedom from tyrants who would exploit citizens and immigrants alike. "Yankee Doodle Dandy" reminds us what a vital part patriotic entertainment plays in maintaining American values. And through the Nolan family, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" highlights the struggles and joys of countless Americans who strive to maintain decency, kindness, and generosity while giving their children a bright future.

These classic films' nostalgia further adds to their heartwarming charm as they honor traditional Americanism. "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is a serious drama, but the two musicals don't skimp on powerful emotions. Both have poignant and tearful moments as well as inspiring ones. You won't regret adding one or all of these old movies to your Independence Day celebration.



The poster for 1942's "Yankee Doodle Dandy," a musical with many patriotic songs.



The hard-scrabble life of Irish immigrants is captured in the 1945 film "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn."



A poster for "Let Freedom Ring" (1939).

Tiffany Brannan is a 19-year-old opera singer, Hollywood history/vintage beauty copywriter, film reviewer, fashion historian, travel writer, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by re-instating the Motion Picture Production Code.



A promotional still that appeared in "New Movies," from the National Board of Review Magazine, featuring Peggy Ann Garner and Ted Donaldson in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn."

INSPIRATION AND POPCORN

A Masterpiece as Joyful as It Is Deeply Touching

IAN KANE

Comedies that feature sensitive topics such as the Holocaust used to be more common. When done right, filmmakers with their hearts in the right place (and the talent to pull it off) have always known that comedy is a great way to not only break down barriers between people but also provoke discussion and draw attention to important historical events and causes.

But lately, these types of films have become scarcer. The only one that comes to mind in recent times that successfully merges the seemingly strange bedfellows of comedy and horrific tragedy is 2019's "Jojo Rabbit"—about a member of the Hitler Youth who discovers that his mother is hiding a Jewish girl in their attic.

But a 1997 film covered some of the same ground but in an ingeniously different way. "Life Is Beautiful" was written by, directed by, and stars Roberto Benigni. It deftly combines a brilliant comedic tone with the brutal nightmare visited upon Jews as they were systematically rounded up and sent to Nazi death camps.

Before and at the Camp

The film begins in 1939, with the wildly imaginative Guido Orefice (Benigni) and his bosom buddy Ferruccio (Sergio Bini Buscic) traveling to Tuscany in their native Italy. The two are from the countryside and want to move to a big city for better opportunities. Guido plans to work as a waiter in his well-to-do uncle's swanky hotel until he can afford to open a bookstore.

Almost immediately, Guido meets (or rather catches) the woman who will become his main romantic interest, Dora (Nicoletta Braschi), as she falls out of a barn after being stung by a wasp. The entire first act of the film revolves around Guido's frequent run-ins with Dora and displays his buffoon-like humor that wraps around a

deceptively perceptive mind. We also get glimpses of fascist Italy and the upper-crust society that embraces it.

One of the upper-crusters is none other than Dora's fiancé, Amico (Claudio Alfonsi). An ethically compromised sycophant, Amico coincidentally denies Guido a loan that would have allowed him to open a bookstore.

Dora eventually falls for Guido's infectious personality, as well as his consistent and sincere affection for her—something she can't find with Amico. Guido sweeps her away and the two marry.

The film's second act begins years later. Guido and Dora are now married and living a happy and tranquil family life in Tuscany with their charming young son Giosué (Giorgio Cantarini). But we soon discover that things are far from idyllic.

Although Guido has realized his dream of owning a bookstore, the Nazis have moved into the city and increasingly harass and intimidate the Jews. Our hero is Jewish.

Two officious-looking men arrive at the bookstore and instruct Guido to accompany them to visit the Prefect, a high administrative officer. Later, when Guido returns to his store to close up, he sees the words "JEWISH STORE" scrawled across the building.

Things go from bad to worse when the Nazis begin rounding up the city's Jews, including Guido and Giosué. In one of the film's most powerful scenes, Dora returns home one afternoon and finds everything in disarray. She takes a few steps back in shock and quickly deduces that her husband and son have been swept away in the roundups.

Guido and Giosué are next seen in a line leading to a boxcar heading to a concentration camp. When little Giosué begins asking questions about the train, Guido deftly gives false answers; he fabricates that the two are going on an exclusive trip and lucky to have the last two tickets.

As the train departs, Dora arrives and



(Above) "Life Is Beautiful" starts as a tale of merry courtship and happy family life, starring (L-R) Roberto Benigni, Nicoletta Braschi, and Giorgio Cantarini.

(Left) Giosué (Giorgio Cantarini, L) and his father, Guido (Roberto Benigni), in a Nazi death camp.

insists that she be let on one of the boxcars as well. But when the train arrives at the camp, Guido and Dora see each other only briefly before being separated into areas by gender.

Managing to hide his son from the Nazis, Guido expands on the illusion that he's created for the boy to shield him from the cruelty of their surroundings. He tells Giosué that they're involved in one big, elaborate game and that they can win only if Giosué follows the rules—and thus, earns points. Once they reach 1,000 points, they'll win.

I won't spoil the rest of the film. Let's just say it's filled with a mixture of laughter and tears—but ultimately an uplifting tale of boundless, familial love, as well as selflessness and self-sacrifice in the face of unrelenting evil.

Watching Guido slave away during brutal forced labor inspired me to research more about the Nazi concentration camps, Benito Mussolini's Italy, and other facets of that place and time. Maybe it was the sort of thought-provoking research that the filmmakers of "Life Is Beautiful" intended.

With outstanding performances by its core cast of Benigni, Braschi, and Cantarini, the entire supporting cast, and some incredibly careful handling of touchy subject matter, it's no wonder this film is considered a masterpiece.

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

'Life Is Beautiful (La Vita è Bella)'

Director
Roberto Benigni

Starring
Roberto Benigni, Nicoletta Braschi, Giorgio Cantarini

Running Time
1 hour, 56 minutes

Rated
PG-13

Release Date
1997

★★★★★

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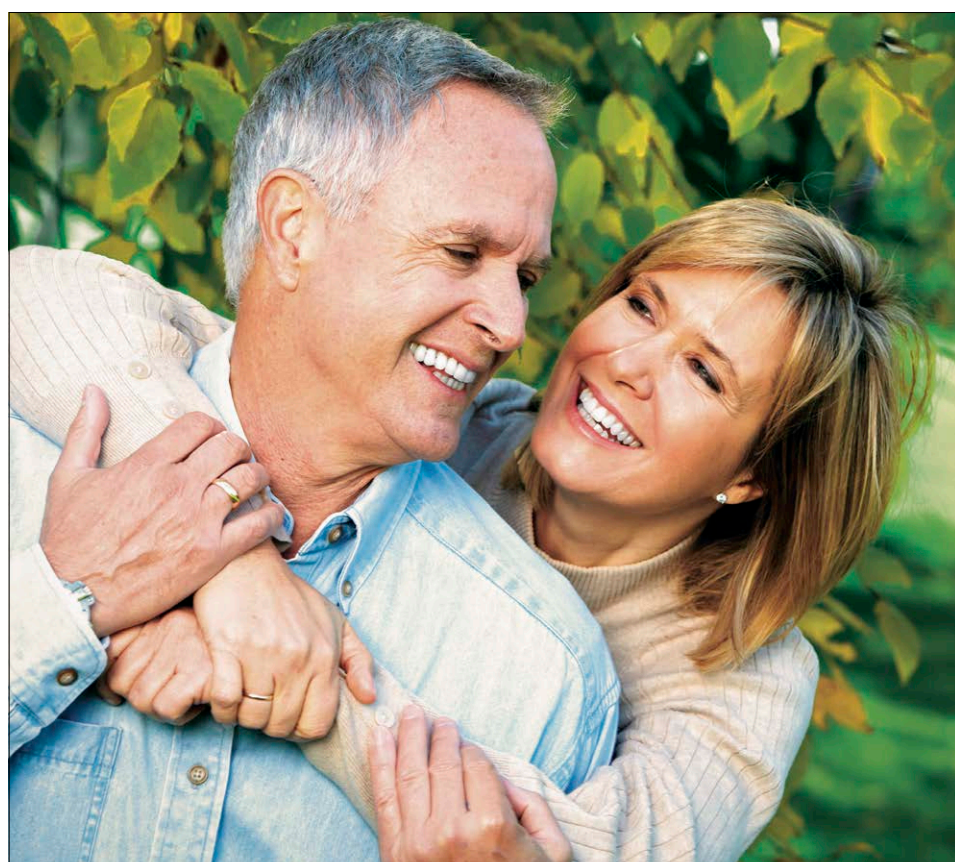
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