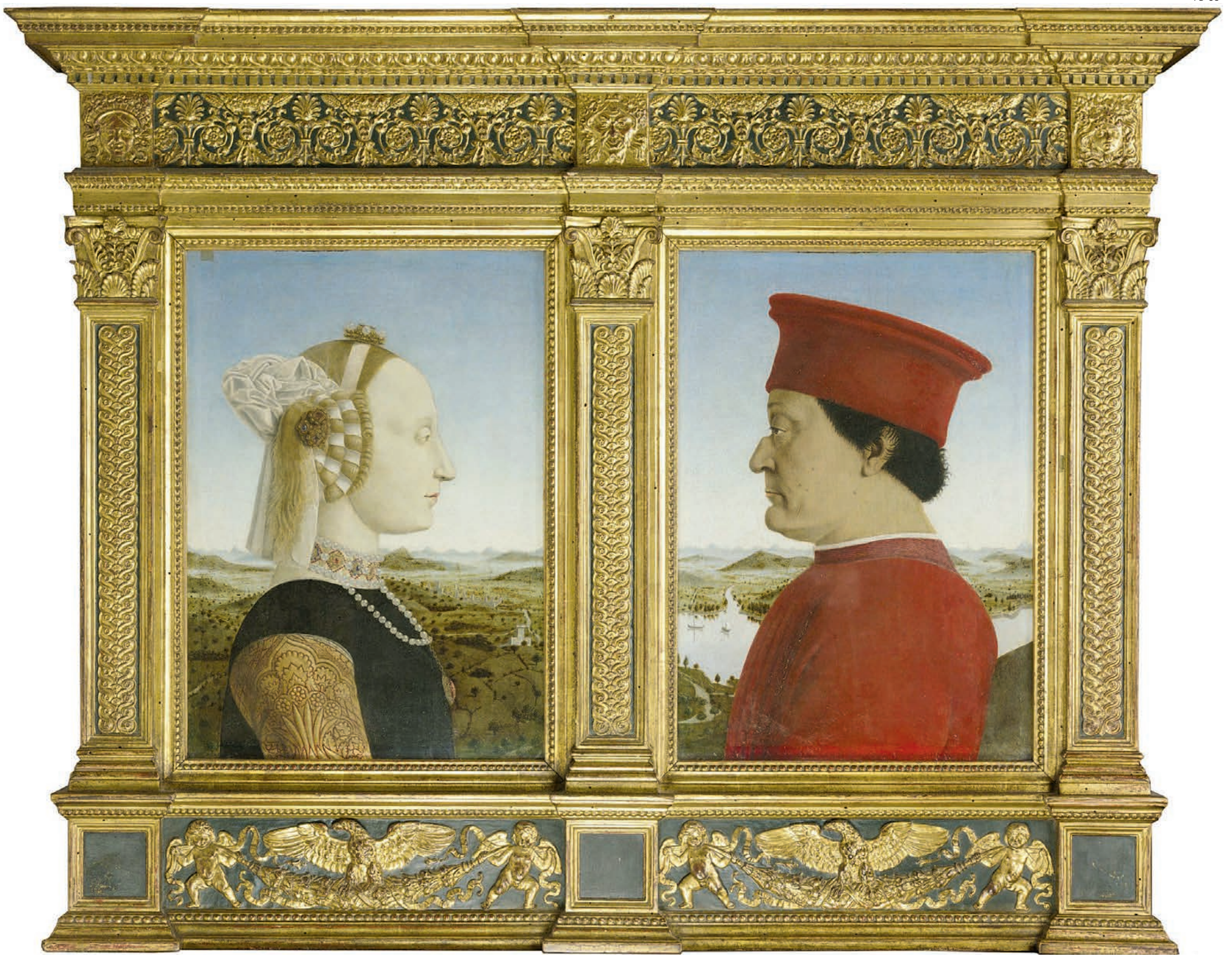


THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PD-US



Portrait of Battista Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro, circa 1472–1473, by Piero della Francesca. Oil on wood; 19 inches by 13 inches per panel. Uffizi Galleries.

FINE ARTS

Delving Into an Incomparable Work of Renaissance Portraiture

MICHELLE MARDER KAMHI

The double portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza by Piero della Francesca in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, is an intriguing masterpiece by one of the greatest painters of the Italian Renaissance.

Most familiar to art lovers are its superb profile portraits of two notable early Renaissance personages. But it also comprises, on the back of the portrait panels, uniquely captivating allegorical scenes, representing each of them in a triumphal procession, above a simulated parapet bearing a Latin inscription.

Though now displayed in a rigid modern frame, the work was originally designed as a portable folding diptych (two-panel painting), hinged to fold with the allegorical scenes on the outside. Thus it was no doubt intended for intimate personal reflection rather than for public display.

Despite the diptych's artistic quality and distinctive content, no documents have as yet shed light on its genesis. Since Federico was a highly erudite patron of the arts, and Piero is known to have spent time in Urbino during the period leading up to the likely date of the diptych, it has generally been assumed that Federico commissioned the

work himself.

In-depth consideration of the work's imagery and inscriptions in the light of key biographical information about the subjects casts serious doubt on that long-standing assumption, however.

It also suggests a much more interesting origin, as I will point out below.

First, a little about the couple represented in the diptych.

Who Were These People?

Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482) and Battista Sforza (1446–1472) were the count and countess of Urbino, a hill town in the Marches region of eastern Central Italy. The Uffizi Gallery website erroneously refers to them as the “duke and duchess of Urbino.” Since Battista died two years before Federico (often spelled Federigo) was elevated to the dukedom, she never became duchess of Urbino.

Federico was the greatest of all the Renaissance “condottieri” (commanders for hire)—not for his military prowess alone but for his creation of a ducal court second to none in

cultural development and refinement. Baldassare Castiglione's classic “Book of the Courtier” dubbed him “the light of Italy.”

Battista—Federico's second wife—was a scion of the powerful Sforza dynasty centered in Milan. Classically educated and schooled in the formal duties of court life from

an early age, she was a remarkably fit consort for Federico, though 24 years his junior. Not yet 14 when they married, she bore him no fewer than seven children and capably managed their domain during his frequent absences in the pursuit of military campaigns.

Piero's Depiction

Both Federico and Battista were widely praised in their day for their virtuous qualities and their benevolence as rulers. Piero's depiction of them amply reflects such nobility of character, showing them in dignified profile high above a landscape backdrop suggestive of their domain.

Continued on Page 4

Both Federico and Battista were widely praised in their day.



Medal of Federico da Montefeltro, 1468, by Clemente da Urbino. SAIKO/CC BY-SA 3.0

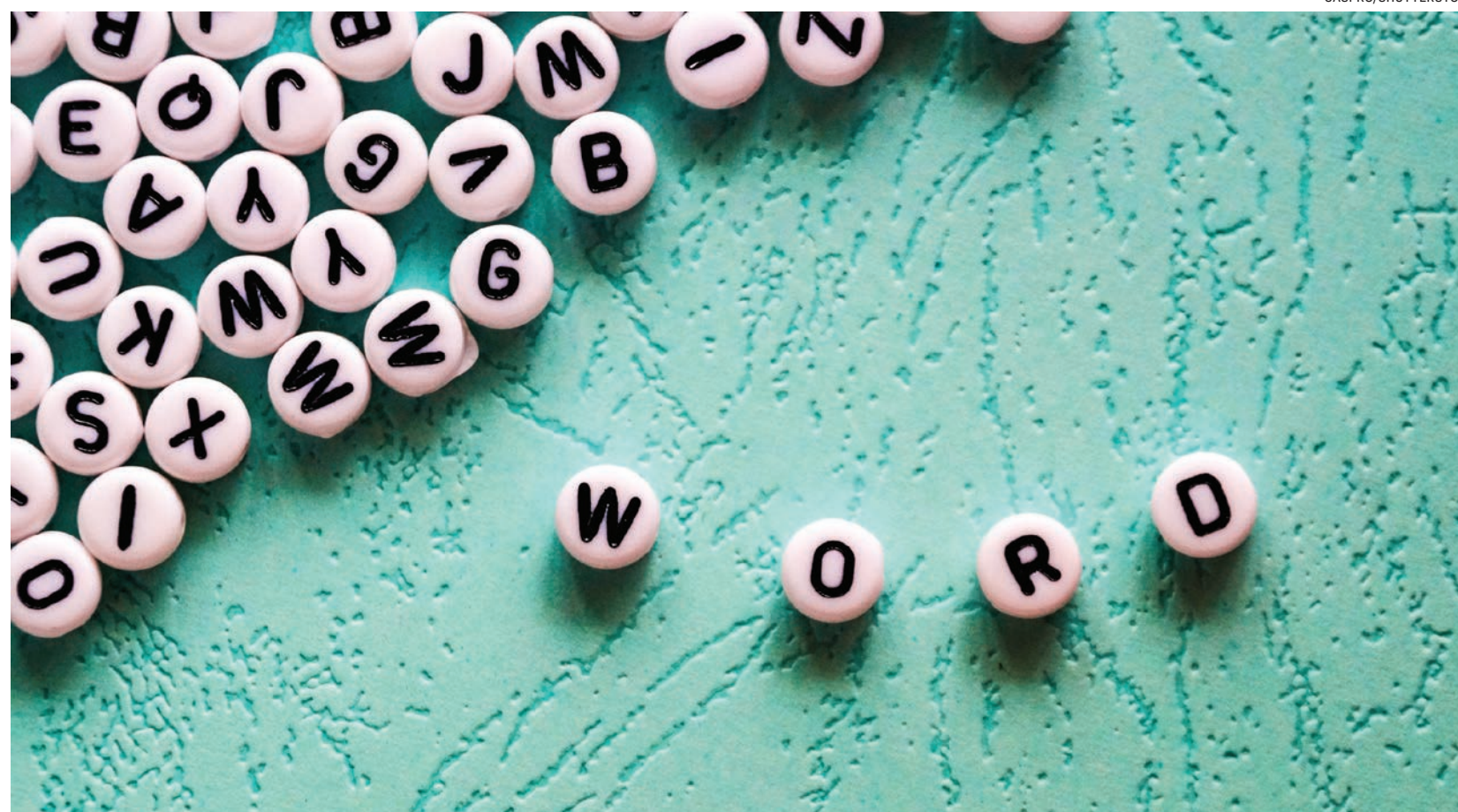
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Take a break from the news and enjoy some word play.

LITERATURE

Words and Play: The Delights of Language

JEFF MINICK

Like spices in our recipes, language can live up to our senses. In his blurb to Willard R. Espy's "An Almanac of Words at Play," writer and once long-time host of television's "Masterpiece Theater" Alistair Cooke tells readers: "To Willard Espy, the English language is what football is to Joe Namath, a golf ball to Arnold Palmer, the male of the species to Zza Zza Gabor: a wonderful object to manipulate, to flog, to coax and have a barrel of fun with."

Though "Words at Play" is regrettably out of print, in his marvelous comedic collection Espy created "a three ring circus of words: words clowning; words walking tightropes; words venturing their heads into the mouths of lions; words cleaning up after the elephants." As Espy also pointed out in his Introduction, his was a "lifelong passion for words."

Whatever our political alliances, most of us would agree that America today is sailing through rough seas and dire straits. The apparently never-ending pandemic, our squabbles over the efficacy of the vaccine, the rise in the cost of gasoline and groceries, the debacle in Afghanistan: Each day brings us more bad news. Grim and glum are two adjectives that may describe our journey at the moment.

Every once in a while, however, we just need a break from all this unhappiness. Let me suggest going to a three-ring circus of language.

Come on. My treat. I'll even throw in bags of popcorn and Cracker Jacks stuffed with words.

Our Wonderful Wealth of Words

English is a language rich in words. It grew from a combination of Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and French, has constantly adopted words from other languages like the Spanish "taco" and the Indian "shampoo," and for decades has taken under its wing all sorts of terms from the world of technology, like "Internet" and

"Google." Depending on which source we investigate online, we possess between 500,000 and a million words at our command.

Yet most English-speaking adults have an average vocabulary range of 20,000-35,000 words, a limitation that in many ways makes perfect sense. His friends will understand the man who says "I love my evening glass of wine," but were he to say "I love my vespertine glass of wine," they might wonder about his sanity or his health. The woman who tells her sister that her love for the novels of Jane Austen is "sempiternal" may receive in response a cocked eyebrow and a puzzled frown.

Language is about communication, and so teachers of composition, editors, and others usually recommend the straight-up delivery of vocabulary and sentences. Whether we're writing a high school essay or an online blog, we bring short, familiar words to the batter's box if we wish to attract readers and avoid sounding pretentious.

The Sheer Fun of Language

Yet a long or idiosyncratic English locution can gladden our hearts and tickle our funny bones.

To blast someone as a malapert, for example—that is, as brazen or impudently bold—is a wonder to the tongue and ear, though perhaps incomprehensible to the person so addressed. To mention that a hot-tempered woman is a virago may bring approving nods at a party with no one understanding what the word means.

Suppose you are out for drinks with friends when a political discussion arises. The conversation turns heated, but then you suddenly throw cold water over these fires by saying, "I think everything is the fault of our kakistocracy." The fiery flames turn to embers, and finally someone asks, "What's that supposed to mean?" "Oh, that," you say. "Well, a kakistocracy means government by the worst of our citizens. The least competent."



Throw out an unknown word in a heated moment and see if that doesn't break the tension.

ment, or dress up with more ostentation than fashion. When Lady Festering makes her ceremonial entry at the charity ball, wearing her Christmas Tree Dress, you whisper to your companion: "I'm told she goes to a professional bedizener."

Rugose: Corrugated with wrinkles. "Ah, Mrs. Sandalbath, there must be many a woman half your age with a complexion not nearly as rugose as yours."

Pomposity: A Thumb's Down

Of course, we can also poke fun at those who deck out the language in fancy dress. Bureaucrats and school administrators, for instance, often issue memoranda that seem like gobbledygook to most readers. Richard Mitchell, founder of "The Underground Grammarian," would, 40 years ago, take these bombastic authorities to task for passages such as this one about a "certain St. Mary Littell":

"To facilitate the process, St. Mary utilized the Hoover Grid which begins with the recognition of purposes and values, leading to goals, objectives, and finally to implementation. The first and most important step is at the myth level where the renewal of ideals, hopes, dreams and traditions takes place. It is the level of identity and purpose for being."

Most of us reading these words have no idea of their meaning.

In their book "Heidegger and a Hippo Walk Through Those Pearly Gates: Using Philosophy (and Jokes) to Explore Life, Death, the Afterlife, and Everything in Between," Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein end with this jest about the philosopher and his highfalutin language, which points to this same problem of incomprehension:

So Heidegger and a hippo stroll up to the Pearly Gates and St. Peter says, "Listen, we've only got room for one more today. So whoever of the two of you gives me the best answer to the question, 'What is the meaning of life?' gets to come in."

And Heidegger says, "To think Being itself explicitly requires disregarding being to the extent that it is only grounded and interpreted in terms of beings and for beings, as in all metaphysics."

But before the hippo can grunt one word, St. Peter says to him, "Today's your lucky day, Hippo!"

In the Gymnasium of Jest and Joy

A few months ago, I subscribed to the "Word



Willard Espy's book contains a three-ring circus of words. Advertisement for the Barnum & Bailey Circus, 1900, Library of Congress.

So much of culture and art depend on thoughts expressed in writing and speech, from the novels of Charles Dickens to the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, from the nursery rhymes we recite to our little ones to the Gettysburg Address.

of the Day" from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Company. Every morning a "Word of the Day" notification appears in my email. I rarely open that email right away but instead wait until later, when discouraged by the news of the world or by some happenstance in my own life, I need to take a break. I enter that site, that gymnasium of language, and read all about the word of the day, its meaning, usage, and history, and often play one of the games the site offers. The 10 minutes or so I spend there playing around with words help restore my spirits and whet my taste for our language.

On that same site are many reminders of the origins of our language. Today's word of the day, for example, was "cryptic," and the short history of the word tells me that it derives from the ancient Greek "kryptein," meaning "to conceal or cover." The authors then give other related words and their meanings.

Most of us are so accustomed to language, to everything from ordinary conversations with friends to advertisements and television shows, that we forget the miracle of our native tongue and of language in general. We forget that so much of culture and art depend on thoughts expressed in writing and speech, from the novels of Charles Dickens to the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, from the nursery rhymes we recite to our little ones to the Gettysburg Address.

And sometimes we may also forget how language can provide a playground for the delight of our imaginations. My dad delivered one of the first jokes I can recollect hearing, one that depended on word play: "Have you heard of the upside down man?" he asked me. When I shook my head, he said, "His nose runs and his feet smell."

Sure, it was a corny joke, old as the hills. But that upside down man, and that upside down language, first made me aware of the circus of words and the fun that could be had there.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooled 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.

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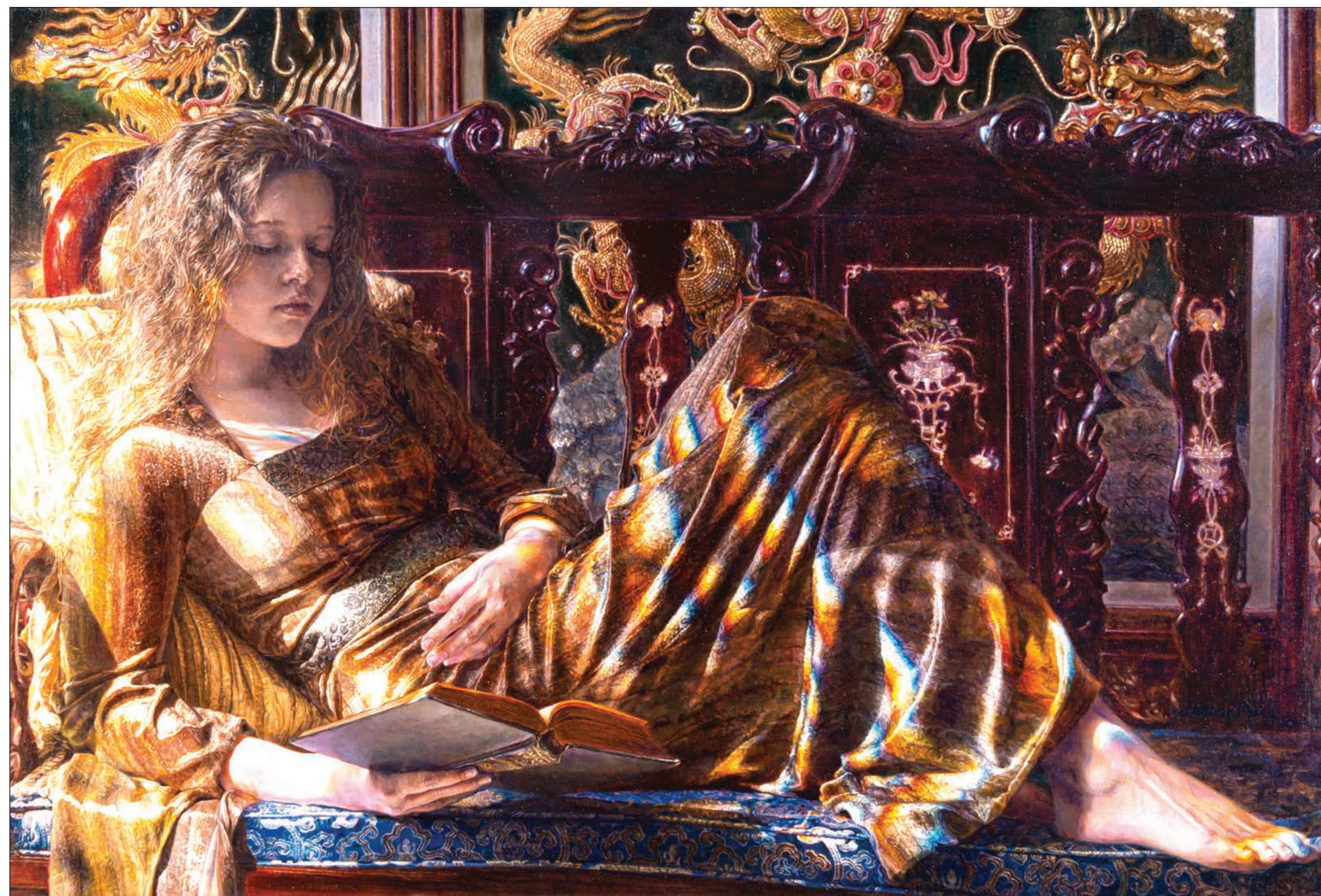
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(Right) Circa 1791 reconstruction by Jean-Guil-laume Moitte of “The Triumph of Titus” panel from the Arch of Titus, Rome, first century. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

(Far right) It is possible that Lorenzo de’ Medici commissioned the portraits. Bronzini and his workshop, 15th century. The Uffizi Gal-eries.



FINE ARTS

Delving Into an Incomparable Work of Renaissance Portraiture

Continued from Page 1

Comparison with other portraits of Federico, both earlier and later, reveals the extent to which Piero idealized and refined the battered warrior’s features to suggest dignity and probity. A telling contrast is the homely countenance shown in a medal by Clemente da Urbino dated 1468. Though probably a few years earlier than the Piero portrait, it lacks the vigor of the later depiction.

Less is known about Battista’s actual appearance. But a striking aspect of Piero’s depiction of her is her extreme pallor compared to Federico’s sanguine complexion. While it may simply be due to conceptions of feminine beauty in that era, it has also been interpreted as indicating that she was no longer living

Piero’s luminous pictorial triumphs contain elements from both the classical and the Petrarchan traditions.

when the portrait was painted.

Significantly, the pairing of such profile portraits with allegorical scenes on their reverse is unique among extant paintings. It was characteristic of commemorative medals dating back to antiquity, however, and thus endows the work with a decidedly monumental quality.

The Allegorical Triumphs

The allegorical scenes on the back of the portraits are especially rich, both stylistically and iconographically, and their meaning is enhanced by Latin inscriptions on the simulated architectural parapets below them.

Their iconography draws on a long and complex tradition harking back to Roman triumphs in celebration of major military victories.

That tradition had been greatly enriched by a series of allegorical poems penned in the 14th century by the early Italian poet Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch). In contrast to the Roman military triumphs, Petrarch’s “Triumphs” were allegories of philosophic and moral abstractions: Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity.

Piero’s luminous pictorial triumphs contain elements from both the classical and the Petrarchan traditions. Federico’s triumphal car is drawn by a team of white horses, as was customary for victorious commanders in antiquity. Like them, he is also crowned by a winged personification of Victory.

In addition, Federico is accompanied by four allegorical figures, seated at the front of his car.

They differ from those of Petrarch, however, instead representing the four cardinal virtues of the Catholic faith, which also had roots in ancient Greek philosophy. They were Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance—attributes especially relevant to leadership.

In contrast, Battista’s triumph represents the three theological virtues, which were generally regarded as especially relevant to the feminine sphere. They are Faith, Hope, and Charity. Most important here is the figure of Charity, who sits at the forefront of the car holding a pelican.

That attribute has particular significance, as it was not generally employed in secular contexts. Because the pelican was believed to pierce its breast to feed its young with its own blood, it had come to symbolize Christ’s sacrifice for mankind. As we shall see, it bore poignant relevance to Battista.

Next to Charity is the personification of Faith, holding a chalice and a cross. Standing behind Battista and facing toward the viewer is the figure of Hope. The other standing figure, garbed in gray with her back turned to us, may represent a nun of the Clarissan order, with which Battista had close personal ties.

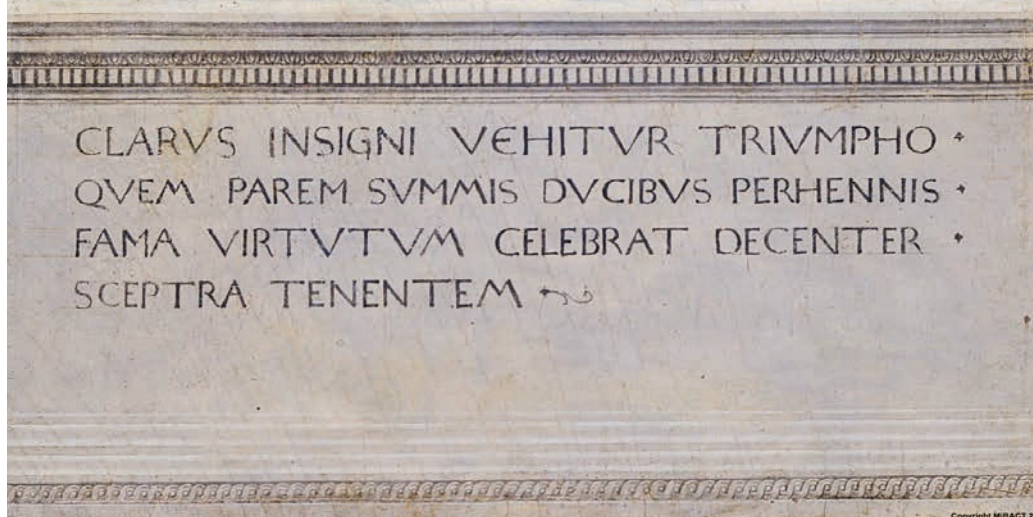
As in Petrarch’s “Triumph of Chastity,” Battista’s triumphal car is drawn by unicorns, emblematic of Chastity, further suggesting her virtuous character.

The Latin Inscriptions

Important clues to the date and genesis of the diptych are offered by the prominent transcriptions below the triumphal scenes. Federico’s inscription clearly alludes, in the present tense, to his greatness as a commander. Rendered in English it reads:

The famous one is drawn in glorious triumph
Whom, equal to the supreme age-old
captains,
The fame of his excellence fitly celebrates,
As he holds his scepter.

In contrast, Battista’s inscription begins by referring to her in the past tense.



She who retained modesty in good fortune
Now flies through all the mouths of men
Adorned with the praise of her great husband’s deeds.

Moreover, the phrase “flies through all the mouths of men” echoes lines that the Latin poet Ennius had penned as his epitaph:

Let no one honor me with tears or on my ashes weep. Why?
I fly living through the mouths of men.

Made famous by the more eminent Latin writer Cicero—who quoted them in his philosophic meditations on death—the epitaph of Ennius was taken to mean that the fame of a virtuous person extends beyond death.

The clear implication of Battista’s inscription, therefore, is that she was no longer living when the diptych was created.

Who Commissioned This Remarkable Work?

In his 2014 biography of Piero della Francesca, James R. Banker argues (based in part on the Latin transcriptions) that the diptych was painted “soon after Battista’s death,” and that it was commissioned by Federico “to memorialize his wife and their marriage.” While I agree about the date, I have

“Triumphs of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza,” circa 1473–1475, by Piero della Francesca. Oil on wood; 19 inches by 13 inches per panel. The Uffizi Galleries.

The allegorical scenes on the back of the portraits are especially rich, both stylistically and iconographically.

long believed that Federico’s commissioning the diptych would have been incompatible with the tragic circumstances surrounding Battista’s death. Let me summarize the main events here.

When Battista died, in early July 1472, Federico had just returned home following his most celebrated military campaign. On behalf of the Medici rulers of Florence, he had suppressed a rebellion by the city of Volterra, a mineral-rich Florentine tributary. In gratitude, the city of Florence had granted him the rare tribute of a live triumph, to which Piero’s pictorial triumph may well allude.

Equally important, in January of that year Battista had at last given birth to the couple’s only son and heir, Guidobaldo—after 11 years of marriage, during which she had borne at least six daughters. The death of his young wife so soon after that joyous event inspired intense mourning on Federico’s part, and an outpouring of sympathy throughout Italy.

To compound the tragedy, it was reported that Battista had prayed for a son and heir worthy of her noble husband, offering her own life in return—a pledge she had now fulfilled. The pelican of Charity in her triumphal scene is a likely allusion to that sacrifice.

Given that sorrowful context, I argued decades ago in a thesis on the diptych that the verses inscribed under the triumphs “strike a jarring note.”

The proud vaunt of Federico’s in-

scription seems inappropriate to his grief. And the meager praise of his beloved countess, whose fame is said to derive not so much from her own virtue as from the deeds of her famous husband, is an ungenerous ... final tribute; one would think that the paintings were more a monument to Federico than a commemoration of his consort. Surely this is not the most fitting memorial a bereaved husband could devise for a wife who was eulogized by all Italy.

Consequently, I proposed that the diptych had been commissioned for Federico, not by him—as both a tribute to him and a consolation for his great loss.

As I further suggested, it is tempting to think that the donor of such a splendid gift might have been none other than the eminent patron of the arts Lorenzo de’ Medici—who would have had particular reason to honor Federico, given the crucial victory at Volterra.

This article is based on Michelle Marder Kamhi’s art history master’s thesis, which can be read in full at [TinyURL.com/v7t329da](https://www.tinyurl.com/v7t329da). For more about her work, see [mmkamhi.com](https://www.mmkamhi.com).

Michelle Marder Kamhi is co-editor of [Aristos](https://www.aristos.com), an online review of the arts. Her most recent book is “[Bucking the Art-world Tide: Reflections on Art, Pseudo Art, Art Education & Theory](https://www.aristos.com).”



This Italian 15th-century painting shows an allegory of Charity, one of the three virtues associated with femininity. A pelican is featured feeding its young with its own blood. Purchase, Bequest of Mary Cushing Fosburgh and Gift of Rodman Wanamaker, by exchange, 1982. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



A 1726 piano by Bartolomeo Cristofori, in the Museum of Musical Instruments in Leipzig, Germany.

Centuries of music can be played on the 88 keys of the instrument invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori.

Of Pianos, Hope, and the Future

KENNETH LAFAVE

Where there is a piano, there is hope.

There is hope because where there is a piano, someone nearby knows how to play it and is capable of teaching others to play.

And this activity—taking and giving piano lessons—will save the world.

Hyperbole? Of course. But truth-based. Piano lessons are instruction in how to coordinate the senses of touch, sight, and hearing; how to discern incorrect results and correct them; how to cultivate a sense of beauty; and all of this while exploring one’s own potential for creativity.

The piano student holds the history of music in one hand and its possible future in the other. Centuries of music can be played on the 88 keys of the instrument invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori on the cusp of the 18th century. Cristofori’s invention was named the “soft-loud” (“piano-

forte,” later shortened to “piano”) for its ability to play at different volume levels, contrasted with the earlier harpsichord.

New Expressivity

The piano’s complex array of strings, hammers, and dampers allowed more expressivity from the player than had ever been available on previous keyboards, and this birthed centuries of masterworks by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, and others whose output would have been tragically reduced without Cristofori’s innovation. The present-day student has access to their repertoire and that of pre-piano keyboard composers such as J.S. Bach, but the piano’s range (its lowest and highest notes lie outside the range of the symphony orchestra) and the complexity made possible by 10 trained fingers also means that the pianist may play arrangements of symphonies and operas, or at the more recent end of things, movies scores and pop songs.

I teach 20-plus (the exact number fluctuates) of the estimated 5 million people who take piano lessons in the United States. This latter number includes young beginners, adult beginners, intermediate and advanced students, and even a few aspiring concert pianists. The percentage of those 5 million who will enjoy careers playing piano in concert halls or theaters and lounges is infinitesimal, though a slightly larger number might end up accompanying their church choirs or themselves teaching piano.

On Your Own

So, what is the point of studying piano, as opposed to other instruments or even other physical disciplines such as martial arts or team sports? Of all the Western instruments, the piano is the one most capable of producing music on its own. Bowed string instruments enjoy a tradition of unaccompanied scores, many of them indispensable (think of the Bach cello suites), but they are for the most part meant for ensemble performance. A violinist may spend hours mastering the Bach Chaconne for her instrument, but she will spend many more hours performing with a piano accompanist or as part of a string quartet.

The typical pianist spends far more time alone than in collaboration. Learning to play a piece of music on the piano means making decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions. “Does that tempo really fit the feeling of the piece?” “Where is the peak of that melodic arc, and how can I bring it out?” “Should I bring out the middle voice on the repeat?” “How does Chopin’s love of opera affect the shape of his phrases, and how can I convey that?” “How should I play the return of the fugue in Beethoven’s Op. 110 sonata?”

Piano students are taught to think for themselves. The relationship with the teacher is important, of course, for the teacher is a mentor who has walked the landscapes of classical music and knows where the rough terrain is. But the central relationship is that between the student and the work studied and interpreted. And the only agent making final decisions about that rubato or this trill is the student, and the student alone. Piano lessons are lessons in individualism, in the best sense: the making of informed decisions and the shouldering of responsibility for those decisions.

The Sabotage of Collectivism

That’s why there is hope wherever there

are pianos and piano lessons, no matter in what unlikely locale. You can find them right now, for instance, to the tune of an estimated 30 million students in ... China.

While Communist China began its “Cultural Revolution” by destroying pianos (and violins and all other vestiges of European-style music-making), it made a U-turn in the late 1970s, beginning a renaissance of Western music-making that has issued in a plethora of superstar pianists.

Big mistake for them. Good news for the world. Collectivism may be the official CCP line, but every day tens of millions of Chinese practice individualism at the piano along with their Mozart and Chopin. As Plato wrote, “Rhythm and harmony find their way to the innermost parts of the soul.” Once there, no state can dislodge it.

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’s the author of three books, including “[Experiencing Film Music](https://www.aristos.com)” (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).



A portrait of Bartolomeo Cristofori, inventor of the piano, circa 1726.

FILMS

‘State Fair’ 1933 Versus 1945; The Good Old Days Versus Good Intentions

TIFFANY BRANNAN

Summer's end is celebrated around the rural United States with state fairs, where farmers gather for fun, food, and blue ribbons. This tradition was the setting for Phil Stong's bestselling 1932 novel, simply called "State Fair." It would inspire three film adaptations.

The story follows an Iowa farm family, the Frakes, as they go to the state fair. The father, Abel, is obsessed with seeing his prize Hampshire boar win the blue ribbon, while the mother hopes to take first place with her pickles and mincemeat.

Meanwhile, their grown children, Wayne and Margie, are going to the fair without their steady sweethearts, in search of a change and some fun. At the fair, the parents win their coveted prizes, but the young folks both find unexpected romance with worldlier people.

Margie falls in love with an experienced newspaperman who is much more exciting than her fiancé back home, while Wayne falls for a sophisticated girl whom he thinks is as serious as he is. Both Frake children must decide what they really want out of life.

Twentieth Century-Fox made the novel into a film in 1933. Starring Janet Gaynor as the daughter, Will Rogers as her father, and Lew Ayres as newspaperman Pat Gilbert, this movie earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture.

In 1945, 20th Century-Fox updated the story as a Rogers and Hammerstein musical, their only score originally written for a film. Starring Jeanne Crain as Margie, Dick Haymes as her brother, and Dana Andrews as Pat Gilbert, this film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Score, with its ballad "It Might as Well Be Spring" winning Best Song. The musical version was remade in 1962 with Pat Boone, Ann-Margret, and Bobby Darin in the leading roles, but the story and setting were changed.

For the purpose of this article, we'll focus on the first two film adaptations.

Two Films, One Story

As usual, the films included some changes from the novel's original plot, although the storylines remained impressively similar. The biggest difference is the characterization of the girl Wayne meets at the fair. Her name remains Emily, and she meets Wayne at the ring toss stand.

The 1933 Emily's characterization remains very close to the book. In the book, Emily is the loose daughter of a stock show manager, who spends her time betting, drinking, and having fun. In the 1933 film, she (Sally Eilers) is a trapeze artist at the fair.

In both the book and first film, Emily gives Wayne (Norman Foster) his first taste of alcohol—during Prohibition, mind you—and seduces him into an illicit affair. He eventually proposes, having assumed all along that they would marry, but she refuses since they come from different, incompatible worlds.

The most shocking scene in the Pre-Code "State Fair" is not included in modern prints, since it was removed when the film was rereleased in 1935. In this scene, Wayne and Emily could be heard talking off-screen while the camera focused on her discarded negligee, depicting the affair blatantly. Even without that scene, one would have to be pretty young and naïve



Theatrical release poster for the 1933 film "State Fair."

to not understand exactly what's happening. The first scene in Emily's apartment shows the lady taking her stockings off in a mirror reflection, coming out in nothing but a flimsy wrapper sans undergarments. Wayne's lie to his parents that he has been staying with a male friend leads to some awkwardly suggestive lines.

The biggest change from the novel to the first film adaptation was the removal of Margie's illicit affair with Pat Gilbert, although some believe it is still implied. She and Pat fall passionately in love, but she begins looking at reality when he alludes to past indiscretions. He asks her to marry him, but she doubts that she could fit into the cosmopolitan life he envisions for himself. As in the novel, they part ways at the end of the fair. However, while the book saw both Margie and Wayne marry their original sweethearts upon returning home, Margie flies to Pat's arms in the 1933 film when he telephones and meets her the next day, having realized that she can't live without him.

In the 1945 film, Emily (Vivian Blaine) was changed to the lead singer with the big band playing at the fair. The illicit affair was removed, and the much more sincere Emily turns down Wayne's proposal because she is already unhappily married.

The Good Old Days?

Watching the 1933 "State Fair" destroys the theory that all movies were clean and de-

cent in "the good old days." Before the mid-1930s, the only rule about film content was that there were no rules. Although some silent films contained questionable content, it wasn't until the advent of talking pictures in the late 1920s that movies began to realize their full potential for prurience. These early talkies are called "Pre-Code" films.

In 1934, after around six years of mostly talkie shenanigans, the lawless fun ended. On July 15, the Production Code Administration (PCA) was formed, with former newspaperman Joseph I. Breen as its incorruptible leader.

This West Coast branch of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America was not the organization's first attempt at enforcing the Motion Picture Production Code, commonly called the Hays Code. It was more like its last attempt! After being unsuccessfully enforced by the Studio Relations Committee (SRC) since its in-name-only adoption in 1930, the Code looked like another impractical "noble experiment."

However, the PCA succeeded because it had two things that the SRC had lacked: the authority to reject a film and a strong leader, Joseph Breen. With this system, filmmakers needed a PCA Seal of Approval to distribute their films in the United States, and they had to cooperate with Joe Breen to get a seal. It worked, resulting in 20 years of wonderfully decent films.

The 1933 "State Fair" is a great example of the darkness that characterized Pre-Code films. I'm not talking about cinematographic techniques. This movie's undeniably dark aspect was equally oppressive on the restored Amazon Video recording as on the grainy YouTube upload I first watched. This darkness comes from the cynical views voiced by the characters. Pat declares that most pursuits in life are futile, depressingly quoting Schopenhauer's writings that happiness is only a relief from pain.

Pat echoes the dour shopkeeper from the film's opening. While the 1945 storekeeper (Percy Kilbride) is a comical "gloomy Gus," his predecessor's (Frank Craven) pessimistic prediction that something bad would happen at the fair if Abel won the blue ribbon ends up coming true, as in the book. This film leaves you with the depressing thought that love, happiness, and accomplishments are all basically futile, since they all end too soon.

Hope in Hard Times

The biggest difference between the Pre-Code film and its Code remake is not in the costumes, dialogue, or even the scenarios. It lies in the feeling and mood of the films. While the Technicolor and cheerful songs make the 1945 film bright and comforting, what had become integral to American films after 10 years of PCA self-regulation is the film's uplifting, inspiring quality. Even if you can't explain why, movies like the musical "State Fair" make you feel good.

You could say that the 1933 film presents a realistic view of Iowan farm folks, while the 1945 film presents an idealized view of rural Americana. I think the truth lies somewhere between the two. During the Code's enforcement, movies focused on the good, upstanding elements of reality and human nature, depicting the opposite with delicacy for contrast in order to provide important lessons.

Films from basically every other cinematic era have exaggerated the bad by focusing on life's grim, sordid elements. By depicting immoral behavior, Pre-Code films falsely implied that traditional morality was extinct. Choosing to highlight the brighter side of human nature in films makes them no less true but is certainly more beneficial to those who watch them.

True, the Great Depression was a very hard time for the United States. So, for that matter, was World War II. In 2021, we know what it's like to live through a hard time. From your experience, do you feel better after being reminded that everything in life is hopeless or from seeing something beautiful and cheerful?

In honor of state fair season, why not attend both cinematic "state fairs" and decide whether you prefer a moodily "realistic" view of Depression Era farm people or a musical portrait of wartime Americana? Either way, don't miss the "State Fair!"

Even if you can't explain why, movies like the 1945 musical 'State Fair' make you feel good.



Sally Eilers played Emily in the 1933 version, and is pictured here in Photoplay magazine.

Tiffany Brannan is a 20-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 reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.



Dick Haymes, here in a publicity shot for CBS Television, appeared as Wayne Frake in the 1945 version of "State Fair."



Jeanne Crain, pictured here in 1954, plays Margie in 1945's "State Fair."



Teddy KGB (John Malkovich, L) and Mike McDermott (Matt Damon) square off, in "Rounders."



Teddy KGB (John Malkovich) is unaware that he's displaying his poker "tell," in "Rounders."

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.

It's Most Definitely 'Good Will Hunting II'

MARK JACKSON

When "Rounders" hit theaters 23 years ago on Sept. 11th, four years before that date became notorious, it looked like "Good Will Hunting II." Matt Damon was fresh off his Oscar win for "Good Will Hunting," about a blue-collar MIT-custodian genius, and now here came a story about a poker genius whose dad happened to be a college custodian.

Damon, who attended Harvard, had a knack for portraying salt-of-the-earth geniuses. But it would be remiss not to note that while both "Good Will Hunting" and "Rounders" are hidden-genius Hero's Journey tales, "Rounders" is also a glorification of what is essentially a gambling addict's relapse.

I mean, think about it. You're in law school, then you exhibit a whole movie's worth of addiction behavior, then you quit law school, and you leave town with the following quote: "First prize at the World Series of Poker is a million bucks. Does it have my name on it? I don't know. But I'm gonna find out."

What else would you call that? Then again, is it just a gambling addiction? Or is it also destiny? And what's the difference? We'll get to that in a minute.

More History

Damon's co-star Edward Norton was a hot commodity, having been nominated in 1996 for his film debut, "Primal Fear." Gretchen Mol (who plays Damon's character's love interest) was hot too; she'd just graced the cover of Vanity Fair, which queried, "Is she Hollywood's next 'It' Girl?"

The street-smart, seamy backroom milieu of "Rounders" was rife with 1970s sports references: "Worm and I fell into our old routine like Clyde Frazier and Earl The Pearl Monroe." "You look like Duane Bobick after a round with Norton," and "To celebrate Mike's Ali-like return to the ring, I'll sit with 'all for a while." It also sported a gritty backup cast of character actors like John Turturro and Michael Rispoli (later of "The Sopranos") who could make such lines ring with street-cred authority.

Not to mention John Malkovich's character, Teddy KGB, whose cartoonish Russian accent is so immensely over-the-top and fun to mimic, I still hear it quoted occasionally: "He beeyit me! Strraight up! Pay heeyim ... pay dat man heeze mahh-nee."

Though "Rounders" topped the box office on its opening weekend with \$8.5 million, it ended up making \$22.9 million, compared to the \$225.9 million by "Good Will Hunting." But like the proverbial cream rising to the top, "Rounders" has quietly become somewhat of a classic.

"Rounders" may also have been obliquely responsible for the early 2000s' popularity boom of No-Limit Texas Hold'em (the main game played in the movie). There were TV tournament broadcasts and shows like "Celebrity Poker Showdown"; it was all the rage.

Finding one's true calling can sometimes become a form of addiction.



Mike McDermott (Matt Damon) and Jo (Gretchen Mol) discuss their relationship, in "Rounders."

'Rounders'

Director John Dahl

Starring Matt Damon, Edward Norton, John Malkovich, John Turturro, Gretchen Mol, Martin Landau, Famke Janssen, Michael Rispoli

Running Time 2 hours, 1 minute

MPAA Rating R

Release Date Sept. 11, 1998

★★★★★

The Story

The movie kicks off with Mike McDermott (Damon) gambling in the illegal underground poker club of Russian mafioso Teddy KGB (Malkovich), blowing his entire savings, and then swearing off gambling for good (yeah right).

Mike had been funding his law school studies with gambling earnings. To continue studying, he takes a part-time truck delivery job offered by his gambling partner and friend Joey Knish (Turturro). Mike goes straight for a time, trying to live a peaceful life with his girlfriend and fellow law student Jo (Mol).

Then, Mike's childhood buddy, Lester "Worm" Murphy (Norton), gets out of prison. Worm's still carrying a major debt he incurred before going to jail. Grama (Rispoli), Worm's former enforcer, has consolidated Worm's debt, which is continuing to accrue juice (interest). Grama gives Worm five days to pay it all back.

One of the hilarious running gags of the movie is Worm's perennially jovial (but entirely untrustworthy) knowing smirk, intuitive understanding of addiction psychology, and devil-on-the-shoulder uncanny timing for when to say the perfect thing to cause an instantaneous collapse of Mike's (pun intended) fragile house of cards no-gambling resolve.

Worm: "You know what always cheers me up when I'm feeling [low]?"

Mike: "What's that?"

Worm: "Rolled up aces over kings!"

Mike: "That right...?"

Worm: "Yeah, check-raising stupid tourists, and taking huge pots off of them. Playing all-night high-limit Hold'em at the Taj ... 'where the sand turns to gold.' Stacks, and towers of checks I can't even see over ..."

Mike: "Let's go."

Worm: "Don't tease me..."

Mike: "Let's play some (...) cards."

Worm: fist pump (as J. Geils Band's "Funk 49" kicks in on the soundtrack).

Mike jumps back in the game to help Worm clear his debt, which naturally results in his eventually losing interest in legal studies. Jo is not happy and, heeding Mike's best advice to her, dumps him. "I learned it from you Mike. You always told me this was the rule. You always one: Throw away your cards the moment you know they can't win."

Lots of blistering poker ensues, including a scene at a gambling resort where several denizens of the New York poker rounds scene find themselves all having unintentionally congregated at the same table. They surreptitiously gloat at the eager (but clueless) vacationers, not exactly helping each other—but not exactly hurting each other either. Mike sums this situation up with one of my favorite "Rounders" quotes: "It's like the nature channel... you don't see Piranhas eating each other, do you?"

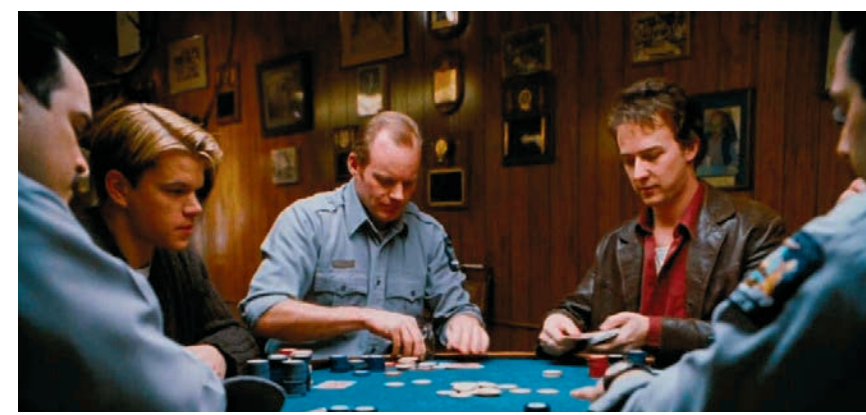
Eventually Worm goes too far, talking Mike into cheating in an upstate New York game with off-duty cops; and they end up getting caught, stomped, thrown out on their ears, and losing their entire roll. Mike finally recognizes Worm for the incorrigible, parasitic ne'er-do-well he is, and leaves him to find his own way home after Worm reveals his debt is ultimately owed to the very dangerous Teddy KGB.

Mike goes begging, hat in hand, to his law

mentor, professor Petrovsky (Martin Landau), gets loaned some money, and goes up against KGB one last time to save Worm, pay the professor back, win his freedom, and hopefully win back all the money he lost to KGB the first time. What do we call this? We call this extreme skill. And chutzpah. And a virulent gambling addiction.

Since the possibility of watching movies at home kicked off with the advent of VHS, movies that crash and burn on Rotten Tomatoes can slowly, by word of mouth, grow a fan club and eventually rake in lots of cash.

"Rounders" didn't start off as "Good Will Hunting II," but if you give it a watch, you'll discover that it's exactly what it is. I'll go so far as to say that it's seven more entertaining—I've seen "Good Will Hunting" twice. I've seen "Rounders" at least nine times.



(L-R) David Zayas, Matt Damon, Brian Donohue, Edward Norton, and Salvatore Cavaliere in a hustlers versus state troopers poker game in "Rounders."

FILM REVIEW

A Divine Painting Lost to an Opaque Art World

‘The Lost Leonardo’ sheds light on the machinations around the painting ‘Salvator Mundi’

LORRAINE FERRIER

“The great design of art is to restore the decays that happened to human nature by the Fall, by restoring order,” English critic John Dennis wrote in 1704.

Leonardo da Vinci’s “Salvator Mundi” painting, by its very title—Latin for “Savior of the World”—fulfills Dennis’s description of great art. In the painting, Christ is giving a blessing with his right hand, while holding in his left hand a nonreflective sphere that represents the universe. It’s a painting that has been copied widely, but the original was thought to have been long lost.

Interestingly, according to preminent art restorer Dianne Dwyer Modestini, no known records from Leonardo’s lifetime mention the painting, although he did render two studies of Christ as the Salvator Mundi.

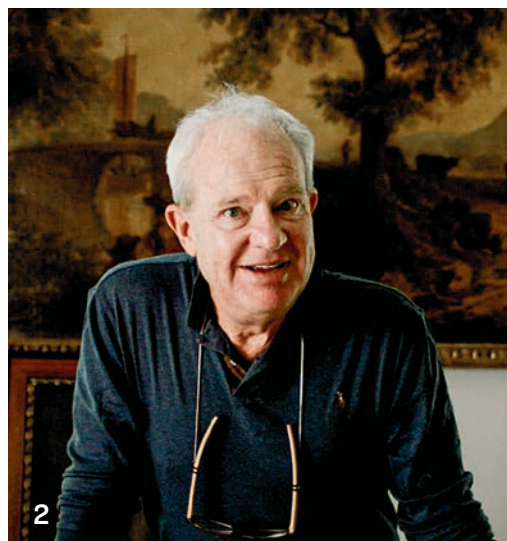
Sony Pictures Classics’ recently released documentary “The Lost Leonardo” charts the rediscovery of the celebrated painting from when the artwork was discovered to its restoration and attribution, the different expert opinions, and its subsequent sales.

“The Lost Leonardo” is one well-made, fascinating documentary that I never want to see again. If you love learning about the politics and business behind great art, this film is for you. But if you appreciate Leonardo and sacred art in and of itself, the film may disappoint: It exposes the murky world of art.

Dark Art

Led by Danish director Andreas Koefoed, the documentary team spent three years compiling intriguing expert interviews, which are deftly tied together to create a peek into the opaque art world.

Early on in the film, I realized that even though the focus of the documentary is the painting, the fervor around it isn’t so much about art but about human nature itself. And some of the human behavior around



1. Dianne Dwyer Modestini and Ashok Roy inspecting the Naples copy of “Salvator Mundi” in 2019.
2. “Sleeper hunter” Alexander Parish.
3. Restoring the crack of the cleaned “Salvator Mundi” in 2006.
4. World-renowned art restorer Dianne Dwyer Modestini.



ADAM JANDRUP/COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS/THE LOST LEONARDO

‘The Lost Leonardo’ is one well made, fascinating documentary that I never want to see again.

the rediscovery, marketing, and sale transactions of Leonardo da Vinci’s purported painting beautifully demonstrates how far humankind has fallen.

Oftentimes, it isn’t the pretty side of human nature that is on display. It is instead the “decays,” the greed for fame and money, and the underhanded dealings, depending on how you view business etiquette.

The film also highlights important issues in the art world. It demonstrates how the opinions of renowned art experts, auction houses, art galleries, and museums can be incredibly influential. It also hints at the agendas that may influence their decision making.

The Discovery

In the opening scenes of the film, art expert Alexander Parish is in what appears to be a storeroom full of artworks of all manner of



ROBERT SIMON/COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

sizes and shapes stacked against the walls. Parish is a “sleeper hunter,” an art detective if you like, who fastidiously studies artworks that are about to go “under the hammer.” Ultimately, he’s hoping to find a work by a more prominent artist than it is attributed to in the auction catalog.

It was Parish and art dealer Robert Simon who discovered the “Salvator Mundi,” the so-called lost Leonardo, in a New Orleans auction house in 2005. The pair bought the painting for just \$1,175. The face of Christ had been overpainted and restored. But both experts were interested in the parts of the painting that were untouched. Could those untouched parts of the painting be by Leonardo himself?

It’s almost unprecedented that an old master’s painting would surface in such a manner. There are fewer than 20 paintings attributed to Leonardo. It’s the kind



ADAM JANDRUP/COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

Reading literature can also make the mind feel like less of a wilderness.

The Dilemma of Modern Loneliness Even if we now enjoy the wilderness as a place of adventure and pleasure, the fear of loneliness persists. The problem has simply moved into our cities.

Many are trying to solve it by bringing people physically closer to their neighbors. Studies point to a spike in the number

of people who live alone and the breakdown of family and community structures.

Former British Prime Minister Theresa May had set her sights on “combating” loneliness and appointed a minister of loneliness to do just that. There is even a philanthropy called the “Campaign to End Loneliness.”

But the drive to cure loneliness oversimplifies its modern meaning.

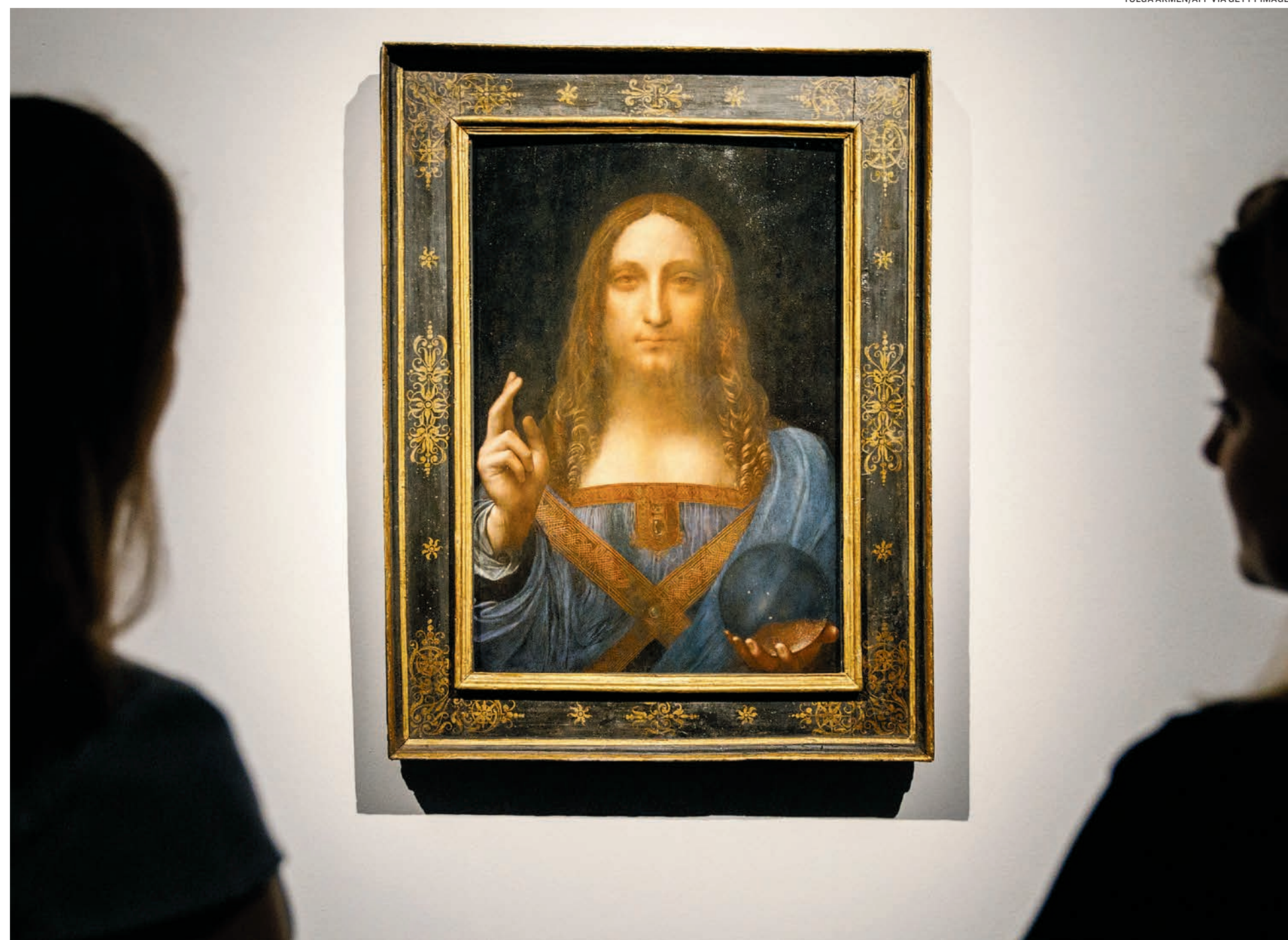
In the 17th century, when loneliness was usually relegated to the space outside the city, solving it was easy. It merely required a return to society.

However, loneliness has since moved inward—and has become much harder to cure. Because it’s taken up residence inside minds, even the minds of people living in bustling cities, it can’t always be solved by company.

Modern loneliness isn’t just about being physically removed from other people. Instead, it’s an emotional state of feeling apart from others—without necessarily being so.

Someone surrounded by people, or even accompanied by friends or a lover, can complain of feelings of loneliness. The wilderness is now inside of us.

Populating the Wilderness of the Mind The lack of an obvious cure to loneliness



TOLGA AKMEN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

of claim that puts professional reputations on the line.

The pair employed world-renowned art restorer Dianne Dwyer Modestini, and she confirmed their suspicions.

If you’re a regular follower of art or current affairs, you may recall that in 2017, the same painting, albeit in a vastly restored state, was sold at Christie’s New York—as Leonardo da Vinci’s “Salvator Mundi”—for a world record breaking \$450.3 million.

The rediscovery of Leonardo’s “Salvator Mundi” was, and continues to be, marred in controversy. Many experts still question whether the piece was painted by Leonardo or whether he was involved in its painting at all. “The Lost Leonardo” aims to show both sides of the story.

The Players

The film’s a whodunit of sorts, involving more twists and turns than a Dan Brown novel. You’ll question whether Leonardo painted it at all.

Those embroiled in the sale of the painting could be characters in Brown’s books too. There’s a Saudi prince, a Russian billionaire, a Swiss businessman, and even a former professional poker player. (Poker players close great business deals.)

Alongside the art experts, members of the intelligence community and investigative journalists all follow the sale of the painting with vigor.

The main institutions involved with the painting—the Louvre; Christie’s; Sotheby’s; The National Gallery, London; and Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Culture—all declined invitations to comment in the documentary.

A Can of Art World Worms

Attributing the painting to Leonardo opened the proverbial can of worms. “Whenever there’s a lot of money involved, the world becomes like a bunch of worms intertwined, [like] when you pick up a rock,” art critic and writer Kenny Schachter says in the film.

Expert opinions were (and are) divided about the attribution.

“Expectations are dangerous; you end up seeing what you want to see,” Leonardo da Vinci expert Martin Kemp from Oxford University says in the film. He says he made sure he kept an open mind when seeing the painting for the first time in 2008.

Kemp was among five experts invited by curator Luke Syson to informally view the “Salvator Mundi.” Syson worked for The National Gallery in London. Controversially, Syson unveiled the painting in the 2011 exhibition as an autographed Leonardo. You’ll have to watch the film to understand why the decision was controversial.

In the film, we hear how Parish and Simon failed to sell the painting to world-renowned art institutions. The Dallas Museum of Art tried to raise the asking price. Another institution that Parish and Simon approached was the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. Its former director Bernd Lindemann said in the film, “It’s not the role of museums to present a painting that is so heavily discussed.”

Eventually, Swiss businessman Yves Bouvier bought the painting on behalf of Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolov-

lev. Unbeknownst to Rybolovlev, Bouvier made a tidy \$44 million out of the sale. The plucky Bouvier is featured in the documentary and recounts how he’s now paying the price for being found out. Court cases are still active.

In 2017, Christie’s set about selling the painting that it marketed like a celebrity, with viewings in London, Hong Kong, San Francisco, and New York, much to Modestini’s opposition.

The result of the sale we know. Yet there are still many mysteries to the “Salvator Mundi” besides its attribution. It’s speculated that the Saudi kingdom bought the painting to increase tourism to the country. Another twist features the Saudi prince, the French president, and the Louvre.

It’s unknown where the painting is currently held. Some say it’s in one of the world’s free ports, a series of art storage vaults at airports where the wealthy store art in transit, tax free.

“The Lost Leonardo” may just be a prophetic title for traditional art in our modern world. Great art does indeed, as Dennis says, guide us to human nature. Judging by the moneymaking surrounding Leonardo’s “Salvator Mundi,” we may have physically lost the painting (if it’s stuck in storage). But even more importantly, many of those in the film seem to have lost an understanding of the painting’s subject matter and why Leonardo would have painted it: to connect us to the divine and for us to become better people. I’d rather connect to this divine painting than see this well-made documentary about the murky art world again.

‘The Lost Leonardo’

Documentary

Director
Andreas Koefoed

Running Time
One hour, 40 minutes

MPAA Rating
PG-13

Release Date
Aug. 13, 2021

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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LITERATURE

A History of Loneliness

AMELIA WORSLEY

Is loneliness our modern malaise?

Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy says the most common pathology he saw during his years of service “was not heart disease or diabetes; it was loneliness.”

Chronic loneliness, some say, is like “smoking 15 cigarettes a day.” It “kills more people than obesity.”

Because loneliness is now considered a public health issue—and even an epidemic—people are exploring its causes and trying to find solutions.

While writing a book on the history of how poets wrote about loneliness in the Romantic Period, I discovered that loneliness is a relatively new concept and once had an easy cure. However, as the concept’s meaning has transformed, finding solutions has become harder.

Returning to the origins of the word—

and understanding how its meaning has changed through time—gives us a new way to think about modern loneliness and the ways in which we might address it.

The Dangers of Venturing Into ‘Lonelinesses’

Although loneliness may seem like a timeless, universal experience, it seems to have originated in the late 16th century, when it signaled the danger created by being too far from other people.

In early modern Britain, to stray too far from society was to surrender the protections it provided. Distant forests and mountains inspired fear, and a lonely space was a place in which you might meet someone who could do you harm, with no one else around to help.

In order to frighten their congregations out of sin, sermon writers asked people to imagine themselves in “lonelinesses”—places like hell, the grave, or the desert.

Yet well into the 17th century, the words “loneliness” and “lonely” rarely appeared in writing. In 1674, the naturalist John Ray compiled a glossary of infrequently used words. He included “loneliness” in his list, defining it as a term used to describe places and people “far from neighbours.” John Milton’s 1667 epic poem “Paradise

Lost” features one of the first lonely characters in all of British literature: Satan. On his journey to the Garden of Eden to tempt Eve, Satan treads “lonely steps” out of hell. But Milton isn’t writing about Satan’s feelings; instead, he’s emphasizing that he’s crossing into the ultimate wilderness, a space between hell and Eden where no angel has previously ventured.

Satan describes his loneliness in terms of vulnerability: “From them I go/ This uncouth errand sole, and one for all/ Myself expose, with lonely steps to tread/ Th’ unfounded deep.”

Reading literature can also make the mind feel like less of a wilderness.

The Dilemma of Modern Loneliness Even if we now enjoy the wilderness as a place of adventure and pleasure, the fear of loneliness persists. The problem has simply moved into our cities.

Many are trying to solve it by bringing people physically closer to their neighbors. Studies point to a spike in the number

is part of the reason why it is considered to be so dangerous today: The abstraction is frightening.

Counterintuitively, however, the secret to dealing with modern loneliness might lie not in trying to make it disappear but in finding ways to dwell within its abstractions, talk through its contradictions, and seek out others who feel the same way.

While it’s certainly important to pay attention to the structures that have led people (especially elderly, disabled, and other vulnerable people) to be physically isolated and therefore unwell, finding ways to destigmatize loneliness is also crucial.

Acknowledging that loneliness is a profoundly human and sometimes incurable experience rather than a mere pathology might allow people—especially lonely people—to find commonality.

In order to look at the “epidemic of loneliness” as more than just an “epidemic of isolation,” it’s important to consider why the spaces of different people’s minds might feel like wildernesses in the first place. Everyone experiences loneliness differently, and many find it difficult to describe. As the novelist Joseph Conrad wrote: “Who knows what true loneliness is—not the conventional word but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a

mask.” Learning about the range of ways others experience loneliness could help mitigate the kind of disorientation Conrad describes.

Reading literature can also make the mind feel like less of a wilderness. The books we read need not themselves be about loneliness, though there are lots of examples of these, from “Frankenstein” to “Invisible Man.” Reading allows readers to connect with characters who might also be lonely; but more importantly, it offers a way to make the mind feel as though it is populated.

Literature also offers examples of how to be lonely together. British Romantic poets often copied each other’s loneliness and found it productive and fulfilling.

There are opportunities for community in loneliness when we share it, whether in face-to-face interactions or through text. Though loneliness can be debilitating, it has come a long way from its origins as a synonym for isolation.

As the poet Ocean Vuong wrote, “loneliness is still time spent with the world.”

Amelia Worsley is an assistant professor of English at Amherst College in Massachusetts. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.



PG-US

The word lonely originally meant being alone in the wilderness and away from society. “Deep in the Forest,” circa 1900, by Nikolai Bodarevsky.

ALL PHOTOS BY METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

(L-R) "Jughead" Carson (Dan Dailey), Frank (John Wayne), and Minnie Wead (Maureen O'Hara), in "The Wings of Eagles."



INSPIRATION AND POPCORN

A Sentimental, Multi-faceted Character Study

IAN KANE

One of John Ford's more sentimental films, "The Wings of Eagles" is a biopic about Ford's friend and frequent filmmaking collaborator, Frank "Spig" Wead. Ford was inspired to make this 1957 film 10 years after Wead passed away, as a dedication to his friend.

The film is based on a 1944 short story by Wead, published in an issue of The American Magazine. The story was adapted for the big screen by screenwriters Frank Fenton and William Wister Haines.

The first act of the movie takes place right after World War I and details Wead's younger years as a reckless U.S. Navy junior officer. His life mainly consists of rowdy times with his drinking buddy "Jughead" Carson (Dan Dailey). During an impromptu bout of naughtiness that culminates with Wead flying a plane (which he isn't qualified to operate) into the backyard swimming pool during a senior officer's banquet, he narrowly avoids being court-martialed.

Unruffled, Wead drives home drunk from

the court-martial hearing with Carson and enters his one-bedroom cottage, which he and his wife, Minnie "Min" Wead (Maureen O'Hara), occupy with their infant son. Minnie is irate at his behavior, and we first see that Wead's priorities are more skewed toward partying than spending time with his family.

Things take a tragic turn when the couple's baby dies due to a high fever. After a grieving period, Wead becomes more serious about his military service. Rising out of the ashes like a phoenix, his newfound passion is to prove that combat aviation has a place in the Navy. He attends aviation training at the Aeronautic Station in Pensacola, Florida. After he successfully graduates, Minnie proudly pins his golden flight wings onto his uniform.

The Weads have a couple more children, two daughters, and their family life is relatively good despite the usual quibbles. Wead begins to heavily promote the concept of air racing in order to develop naval aviation as viable to the public, other military branches,

'The Wings of Eagles'

Director
John Ford

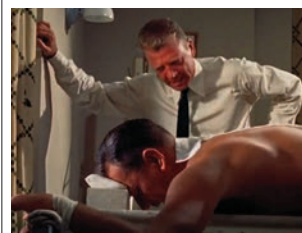
Starring
John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Dan Dailey

Running Time
1 hour, 50 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
Feb. 22, 1957

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Wead (John Wayne, front) succumbs to depression, and Carson (Dan Dailey) tries to bring him out of it.

and especially Congress (for funding).

Wead's push to legitimize naval air power places his Navy aviation team in direct conflict with the Army aviation team, and an intense rivalry develops between them. Racing and endurance competitions are organized, and the two teams compete against one another.

As Wead throws himself more and more into his mission of proving naval aviation prowess and breaking various air racing records, he spends long periods away from his family. When he does return, with a promotion to the fighter squadron commander, ill fortune strikes again: He tumbles down a dark stairway at home and breaks his neck, resulting in paralysis.

The film it switches between peppy humor and weighty drama rather effortlessly.

The paralysis leads to depression, which, in turn, has repercussions on his marriage. But Wead accepts the visits and encouragement of his Navy friends, particularly Carson. Throughout the years, with the constant help of Carson, Wead begins to recover somewhat physically. Carson also inspires him to follow another career.

As Mead begins the process of reconciling with his family, the attack on Pearl Harbor occurs. Will he continue to reunite with his family, or is the call to serve his country once again, too tempting?

One of the things I really enjoyed about this film is that it switches between peppy humor and weighty drama rather effortlessly. It also showcases John Wayne's wide acting range, since he plays a sensitive and thoughtful character—against type. (He even tears up in one scene.) O'Hara is compelling as usual, and she and Wayne fit well together. After all, they were frequently paired throughout their acting careers.

"The Wings of Eagles," then, is a rousing portrait of a complex man and an excellent tribute to one of the founders of naval aviation.

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

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