

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

PD-US



The man for all seasons. A portrait of Sir Thomas More, 1527, by Hans Holbein the Younger. Oil on oak wood, 29.4 inches by 23.7 inches. The Frick Collection.

FILM

## 'An Angel's Wit'

A look at the movie  
'A Man for All Seasons'

JEFF MINICK

Finding a movie that explores and celebrates the power of human reason is difficult.

Movies, after all, tell stories, and stories by their very nature require action. For every movie in which a hero conquers his problems by means of reason and deliberation, we can think of a thousand in which the protagonist is an action hero—a thinking hero, yes, but nonetheless a person who defeats the bad guys with both brains and brawn.

Yet one film does give its viewers insights into a man struggling with his conscience while trying his best to reason his way out of the traps prepared by his adversaries. Playwright and screenwriter Robert Bolt's "A Man for All Seasons" tells

the story of Sir Thomas More's struggles to preserve his faith and his life against King Henry VIII's demands for loyalty and submission.

More (Paul Scofield), who is a leading European intellectual, the author of "Utopia," a personal friend of King Henry, and once his Lord Chancellor, finds himself in deep trouble when Henry wishes to divorce his barren queen, Catherine of Aragon, and marry his lover, the beautiful Anne Boleyn. When the pope refuses to annul the marriage to Catherine, Henry severs his ties with Rome, establishes himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England, and commands his subjects to recognize the legitimacy of his union with Anne.

And here More draws a line in the sand.

Continued on Page 4

# 2022 NTD 8<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CHINESE VOCAL COMPETITION



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Japanese silk-weaver Sonoko Sasaki spins silk floss into yarn to make raw silk using the traditional tsumugi-ori weaving technique. "Sonoko Sasaki, from 'The Ateliers of Wonders Series, 2020,'" by photographer Rinko Kawauchi.

### FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP

## Cherishing Japan's 'Living National Treasure' Tradition

LORRAINE FERRIER

Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi has captured a serene and timeless scene as silk-weaver Sonoko Sasaki kneels while she spins silk floss into yarn on her spinning wheel. Sonoko's traditional kimono and spinning wheel hark back to the past, yet she makes her raw silk, known as "pon-gee," today.

Sonoko uses traditional methods. She makes dyes from leaves and grasses to color her yarn, and then she uses the tsumugi-ori weaving technique that utilizes discarded silkworm cocoons to make her cloth.

Sonoko is one of the 12 Japanese artisans that Rinko photographed at work in their ateliers for her photography series "The Ateliers of Wonders, 2020." The 12 artisans are Living National Treasures, a lifetime honor awarded to artisans by the Japanese government since World War II to protect and preserve the country's traditions. There are only 116 award recipients, each one gets an annual stipend, and artisans can only make the list once someone listed dies.

### A Peek Into Traditional Japanese Craftsmanship

Rinko's photographs highlight Japan's rich, ancient traditions. Her insightful images capture weavers, ceramicists, textile dyers, kimono makers, cabinetmakers, and a doll maker at work.

In one photograph, bamboo artist Noboru Fujinuma crouches on the ground with one hand resting on a bamboo plant. He looks like a doctor taking his patient's pulse. But instead of listening for heartbeats, Noboru looks at each bamboo plant's diameter, curvature, and the distance between each node to find the right plant for each object he makes. He can look at hundreds of bamboo plants before finding the right one for weaving or braiding into an object, using an 8th-century Tang Dynasty (Chinese) technique.

Rinko also photographed Komao Hayashi, who creates toso dolls using 17th-century techniques. He carves the doll's body from paulownia wood, a light-weight hardwood with a higher strength-to-weight ratio than balsa wood. He then mixes paulownia sawdust with different wheat starches to create toso, a modeling media that hardens when dried. Komao shapes the doll's body by applying layers of toso to the wooden body. When it has dried, Komao carves the doll's features into the toso. He uses washi paper or crushed seashell powder called "gofun" to mimic skin. And then he dresses the doll in either fabric or washi paper.

According to the "Handbook for the Appreciation of Japanese Traditional Crafts," dolls have been part of Japanese culture

for centuries. The early 11th-century Japanese masterpiece "The Tale of Genji" tells of children playing with dolls. Dollmaking thrived in Japan's Edo period (1603-1867), and every aspect of Japanese culture is reflected in the dolls.

Komao's toso dolls take their poses, gestures, and expressions from traditional Japanese performing arts such as Noh theater; kyomai, a Kyoto-style dance based on the Kyoto court; or kyogen, the comic interludes used between acts of Noh theater performances, to name a few.

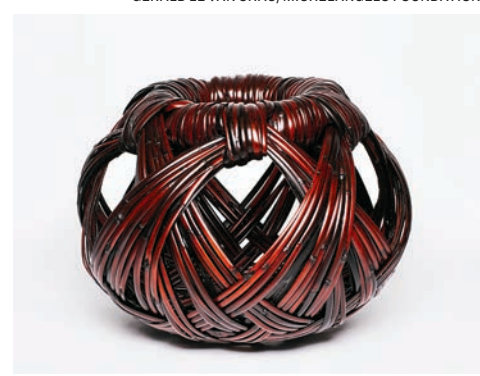
Visitors to Venice, Italy, can see Rinko's photographs in "The Ateliers of Wonders" exhibition in the Renaissance-style Cypress Cloister of the Giorgio Cini Foundation. Objects made by the 12 Japanese artisans are also onsite in the "12 Stone Garden" exhibition nearby, which is curated by Naoto Fukasawa and Tokugo Uchida. The works include kimonos, a lacquered harp, a bamboo flower basket, Bizen ware or Imbe ware that comes from Japan's Okayama prefecture (formerly Bizen) and is one of the country's six ancient pottery styles, and intarsia wooden boxes (boxes with inlays of wood or other materi-

RINKO KAWAUCHI/MICHELANGELO FOUNDATION



Japanese bamboo artist Noboru Fujinuma looks for the perfect bamboo plant to weave or braid into an object. "Noboru Fujinuma, from 'The Ateliers of Wonders Series, 2020,'" by photographer Rinko Kawauchi.

GERALD LE VAN CHAU/MICHELANGELO FOUNDATION

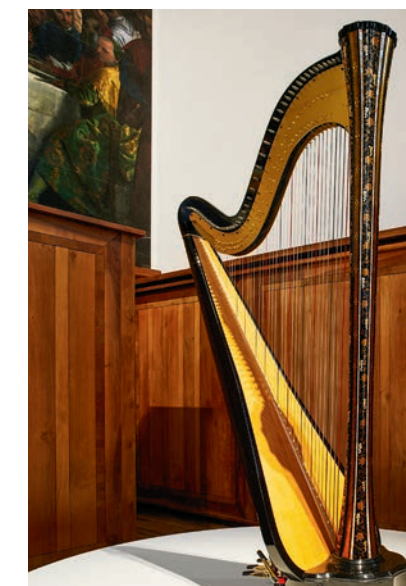


"Spring Tide," by Noboru Fujinuma. Bamboo flower basket; 15 3/4 inches by 21 5/8 inches by 28 inches. Part of the "12 Stone Garden" exhibition at "Homo Faber Event, 2022" in Venice.



Award-winning Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi's exhibition "The Ateliers of Wonders, 2020" is now on display in the Cypress Cloister, as part of "Homo Faber Event 2022" at the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice, Italy.

ALESSANDRA CHEMOLLO/MICHELANGELO FOUNDATION

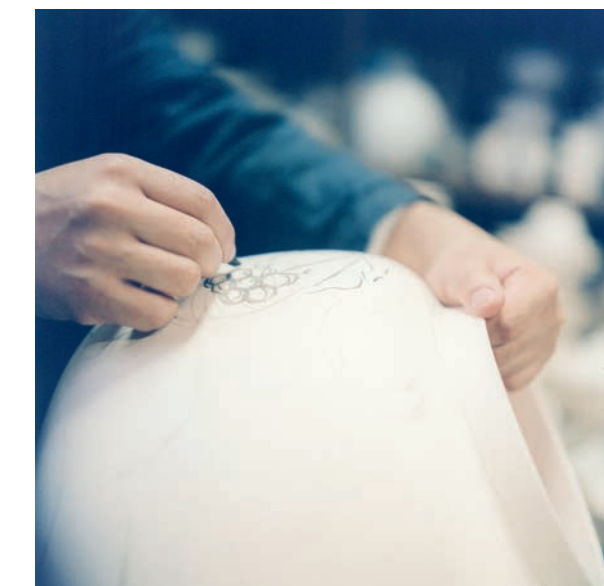


"Journey to the West," by Kazumi Murose. Maki-e lacquer ware with inlay decoration. Maki-e is an 8th-century decorative technique whereby artists spray or sprinkle metallic powder onto wet lacquer to create their designs. Part of the "12 Stone Garden" exhibition at "Homo Faber Event, 2022," in Venice.



"Lady Enjoying the Moon-Viewing Party in the Court," by Komao Hayashi. Toso, a modeling media made from paulownia sawdust and different wheat starches, over a wooden core, and paper. Part of the "12 Stone Garden" exhibition at "Homo Faber Event, 2022," in Venice.

RINKO KAWAUCHI/MICHELANGELO FOUNDATION



Japanese ceramicist Imaemon Imaizumi XIV draws a design on a piece of porcelain. Imaemon is the 14th generation of his family to inherit the secret to his family's traditional overglaze. "Imaemon Imaizumi XIV, from 'The Ateliers of Wonders Series, 2020,'" by photographer Rinko Kawauchi.

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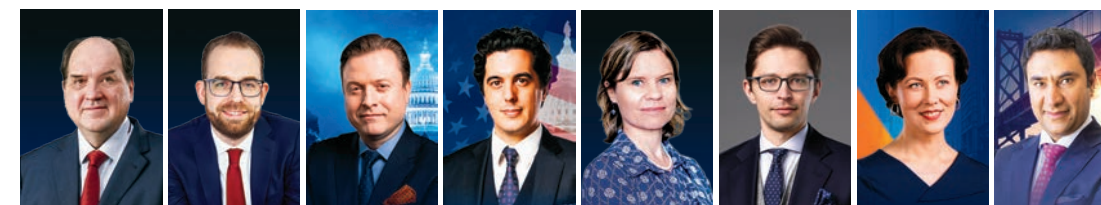
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Thomas More was canonized by the Catholic Church. St. Thomas More on the stained glass in London's St. Lawrence Jewry Church by Christopher Webb.

FILM

## 'An Angel's Wit'

A look at the movie 'A Man for All Seasons'

Continued from Page 1

### Looking to the Law

In the film, as in life, More's friends and family counsel him and eventually beg him to concede Henry's position and approve his marriage. Sir Thomas, however, finds himself torn between his Catholic faith, which has condemned the divorce, and his fealty to the king. Surrounded as well by political enemies eager to break him, he seeks refuge and sustenance from these battles in the bastion of wit, reason, and law. Here, he discusses his dilemma with his son-in-law, William Roper (Corin Redgrave):

William Roper: So, now you give the Devil the benefit of law!

Sir Thomas More: Yes! What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?



A pendant painting of the real William Roper, the son-in-law of Thomas More, by Hans Holbein the Younger. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

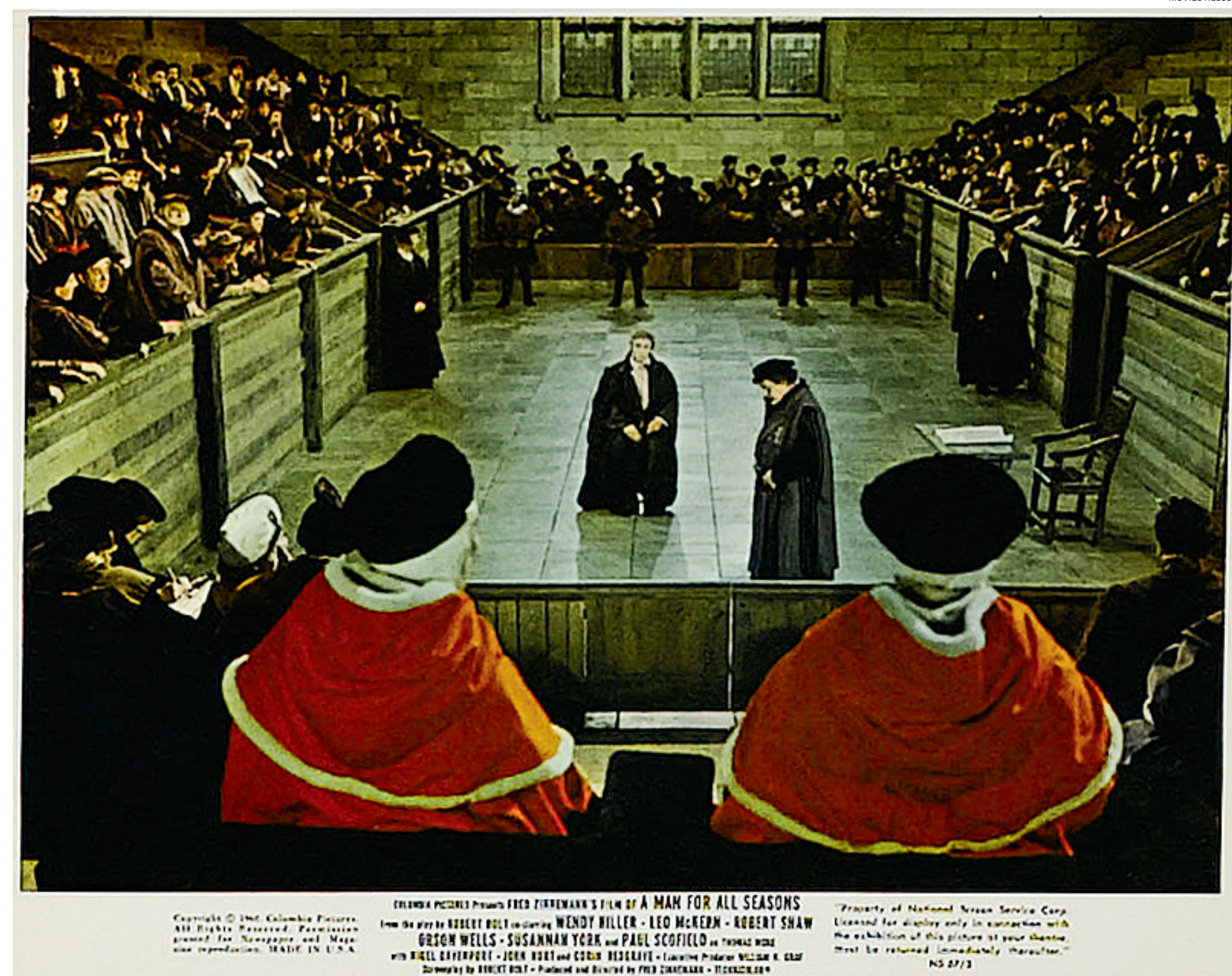
PUBLIC DOMAIN

William Roper: Yes, I'd cut down every law in England to do that!

Sir Thomas More: Oh? And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned 'round on you, where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws, from coast to coast, Man's laws, not God's! And if you cut them down—and you're just the man to do it—do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my safety's sake!

### In the Tangle of the Mind

Having cut his ties with Rome, Henry decrees that his subjects must take an oath of loyalty to him as king and as head of the English Church. In a conversation with Margaret (Susannah York), his beloved daughter and a learned scholar in



A publicity still of the final courtroom scene and climax of "A Man for All Seasons."

her own right—the Dutch philosopher and theologian Erasmus, a family friend, dubbed her "the flower of all the learned matrons of England"—More lays out his response to the king's declaration:

Sir Thomas More: Listen, Meg, God made the angels to show Him splendor, as He made animals for innocence and plants for their simplicity. But Man He made to serve Him wittily, in the tangle of his mind. If He suffers us to come to such a case that there is no escaping, then we may stand to our tackle as best we can, and, yes, Meg, then we can clamor like champions, if we have the spittle for it. But it's God's part, not our own, to bring ourselves to such a pass. Our natural business lies in escaping. If I can take the oath, I will.

And More proceeds to do just as he says, to try and find some legal or ethical way out of the deadly fix in which he finds himself.

### Few other movies so wittingly present the case for logic, thought, and conviction.

#### No Exit

Yet each day brings more demands and pressures from the king and his minions. Soon Sir Thomas realizes that he is trapped: His conscience will not allow him to acquiesce and recognize the king's actions as legitimate, and there is no escaping the consequences. After he is arrested, imprisoned, and comes to trial, a kangaroo court convicts him of treason.

When asked "Have you anything to say?" More replies: "I am the king's true subject, and I pray for him and all the realm. I do none harm. I say none harm. I think none harm. And if this is not enough to keep a man alive, then in good faith I long not to live."

That wish is granted. Thomas More is found guilty of treason and beheaded, an act that makes him a martyr in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Eventually, that same Church will declare him a saint.

#### The Spine to Stand Alone

Few other movies so wittingly present the case for logic, thought, and conviction as weapons against an opponent. More does not try to raise an army, lead a rebellion, escape his enemies, or evade the issue. Instead, he uses his mind like a rapier, parrying and warding off blow after blow until he is at last cornered and defeated.

Each one who confronts him about his decisions—Margaret, his wife Alice, the Duke of Norfolk, William Roper, his enemies Thomas Cromwell and Richard



Paul Scofield (L) as Sir Thomas More and Robert Shaw as King Henry VIII in the 1966 film "A Man for All Seasons."

Rich—reveals another side of More, illuminating his powers of reason and persuasion. Here, for instance, More is discussing his situation with his friend, the Duke of Norfolk (Nigel Davenport). The duke, a bluff, hard-nosed Englishman who prefers action to words, can't understand why More refuses to join the king and the vast majority of the clergy and nobility who stand with him:

The Duke of Norfolk: Oh, confound all this. I'm not a scholar, I don't know whether the marriage was lawful or not, but dammit, Thomas, look at these names! Why can't you do as I did and come with us, for fellowship?

Sir Thomas More: And when we die, and you are sent to heaven for doing your con-



Richard Rich (John Hurt), a former protégé, betrays More for his own profit.



Thomas More (Paul Scofield) speaking to his daughter Margaret (Susannah York), in a publicity shot for the film.

science, and I am sent to hell for not doing mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?

#### Lessons

Bolt took the title for his play and later for the movie from a description of Thomas More written in 1520 by Robert Whittington.

"More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. He is a man of many excellent virtues; I know not this fellow. For where is the man (in whom is so many goodly virtues) of that gentleness, lowliness, and affability, and as time requires, a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes and sometime of steadfast gravity—a man for all seasons."

In the film, actor Paul Scofield brilliantly gives us this man. As More, Scofield goes from piety to laughter in a heartbeat, is tough as nails on himself while showing gentleness and compassion for his grief-stricken wife and daughter. The character also demands wit in the worst of circumstances, as when More discovers during his trial that Richard Rich (John Hurt), a former protégé, has betrayed him in order to become the attorney general for Wales. "For Wales?" More says. "Why, Richard, it profits a man nothing to give up his soul for the whole world... But for Wales?"

In another scene depicting human frailty, More's jailor hushes his visitors—Margaret, Alice, and William—from his cell and then tells More: "You must understand my position, sir. I'm just a plain simple man. I just want to keep out of trouble."

That excuse and Richard Rich's lust for power, wealth, and pleasure have echoed throughout the corridors of history. They are as old as the Bible and as new as yesterday's headlines.

"A Man for all Seasons" gives us a man, a hero in spirit and intellect, who died steadfast in his defense of the law, honor, truth, and his God. He refused to take the easy path and paid for that decision with his life.

We shall always need men and women like Robert Bolt's Sir Thomas More, human beings who can see the long haul of history as well as the short race of current trends and events, who have a firm grasp of right and wrong, and who refuse to join with others in a bad cause for the sake of fellowship or to sell their souls for earthly honors.

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](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Rugged Woman Inhabits the Kentucky Hills

ANITA L. SHERMAN

It's 1953. Honey Mary-Angeline Lovett, the daughter of the beloved book woman of Troublesome Creek, finds herself alone.

She carries the heritage of her mother, Cussy Mary Lovett, who delivered books to rural families some 17 years earlier under an initiative created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt: the Kentucky Pack Horse Librarian Project.

She also carries the stigma of being blue-skinned. Successfully hiding for years in the "hollers," her parents are taken away to prison for their unlawful marriage and found guilty of miscegenation. At 16, the threat of confinement, perhaps in a reform institute, looms over her as well.

On the run and at the mercy of the rugged Kentucky hills and those who inhabit them, Honey has to use all her survival skills to stay free.

A consummate lover of books, she picks up where her mother left off, taking on routes through Appalachia to bring the written word to isolated individuals and families.

Able to support herself, earning a paycheck and staying clear of the law, Honey treads a treacherous trail full of threats and triumphs. The more she is on her own, the more she wants to stay on her own in a world dominated by archaic laws and narrow thinking.

Along her journey, Honey emerges as a new kind of heroine in her fierce, remarkable, soulful, and inspiring determination.

There are others.

## Women Friends

Set against the historical context of the mid-1950s in rural Kentucky where women were just beginning to pioneer jobs formerly held only by men, Honey befriends and defends her newfound women friends—her soul sisters.

Pearl Grant climbs to new heights as a fire tower lookout; braving the elements, isolation, and often the contempt of her peers, Pearl becomes a steadfast friend. Bonnie Powell descends to the bowels of the earth as a coal miner; supporting her young son after her husband's death, Bonnie's tough demeanor masks a gentle heart. Guyla Belle, the victim of abuse and an unhappy marriage, yearns for the knowledge that books will give her.

Amara Ballard, is a nurse with the Frontier Nursing Service. She assists with medical needs, a critical aide to the few doctors in the area. Another, Loretta 'Retta' Adams, is old with poor eyesight. She's a longtime friend of Honey's mother, and Honey finds a temporary haven in her care.

Where are the men? They are certainly interwoven throughout these women's



COURTESY OF BLUE RIDGE COUNTRY

lives, but they aren't all rascals. A few are downright bad eggs but there are enough decent, caring, and upright gentlemen to make up for their reckless spirits. Again, Richardson is masterful in presenting an accurate portrait of the era.

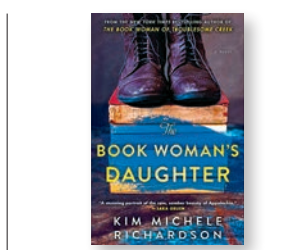
One endearing fellow is Devil John Smith. Honey's mother encountered him as a moonshiner who didn't take kindly to his wife and children spending their days reading rather than working. Cussy managed to cleverly bridge the gap between his stubbornness and his family's thirst for knowledge. With Honey, he is ever present and protective—a surrogate father of sorts—and a firmly entrenched believer in books.

Author Kim Michele Richardson, who lives in Kentucky, has reached deep into her state's history to create charismatic and unforgettable characters. While fictional, the backdrop of the Pack Horse librarians, blue-skinned people, and women pioneering in men's roles is real.

The realities of that era are brought brilliantly to life through her use of language, setting, and character development. Richardson understands the harshness of the Kentucky hills. She also has reverence for their mystery when she describes the "ancient breaths of the forests."

## Standalone or Sequel

"The Book Woman's Daughter" can be read



"The Book Woman's Daughter" is Richardson's fifth novel.

## 'The Bookwoman's Daughter'

**Author**  
Kim Michele Richardson  
**Publisher**  
Sourcebooks Landmark  
**Date**  
May 3, 2022  
**Hardcover**  
352 pages

as a standalone work or as a sequel to "The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek," which was reviewed in The Epoch Times in 2021.

Readers won't be disappointed. Richardson's descriptions will have you feeling the drizzly, cold rain, seeing the mist rise against an early morning sun, and tasting the comfort of a homemade biscuit.

Richardson's Kentucky roots run deep. She is also a consummate researcher and one who is passionate about the people of her state. She spares no details in addressing acute poverty and the sting of intolerance. She likewise celebrates the lush environment, good hearts, and the power of reinvention, redemption, and radiance.

The pages ring out with indomitable, strong voices from a time and place in history that was harsh and often soul-crushing. Yet hope prevails, tragedies turn to triumphs, and the human spirit soars from darkness to the light.

*Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. Anita can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com*

Pack Horse Librarians: Averaging 100 to 120 miles each week, the Pack Horse Librarians of Eastern Kentucky delivered books to families in Appalachia during the Great Depression.

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Breakdown on the Breakdown of Journalism

DUSTIN BASS

As the years have progressed in the 21st century, fewer and fewer Americans trust the media. According to the latest Gallup poll on the subject, only 36 percent of Americans do. There is plenty of reason for that, but the question is how did the media, or journalism, plummet to its current position. Batya Ungar-Sargon, the deputy opinion editor at Newsweek, has written a new book titled "Bad News: How Woke Media Is Undermining Democracy" that discusses the very reasons.

The author begins by introducing the reader to the early American forms of journalism with focuses on Benjamin Day and Joseph Pulitzer (Pulitzer, in particular), and the newspapers created specifically for the working class. The goal of these "penny papers" was to keep the masses informed, as subscribing to publications like The New York Times was too expensive. Sargon expresses in the book how media outlets, for the longest time, were used to keep the powerful in check. The prime era was during the Progressive Era (from the 1890s to World War I), when journalists were often called "muckrakers."

## The Path of Good Intentions

The well-known adage that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" proves fitting for the journalism industry. Sargon references Walter Lippman, the influential journalist, author, and theorist, and his theory of the ideal journalist. She discusses how the eventual practice of that theory transformed a

working-class industry into an elitist industry and one completely disconnected from those they are supposed to represent.

According to the book, "[Walter] Lippman wanted a fleet of highly educated men to be responsible for news gathering, men on whom large amounts of money and effort would be expended to train them in the 'peculiar honor' of being journalists. 'Do our schools of journalism, the few we have, make this kind of training their object, or are they trade-schools designed to fit men for higher salaries in the existing structure?' Lippman asked, wondering whether it might be a good idea to make a diploma from a journalism school a necessary condition for the practice of reporting."

## Journalism students are taught to hold traditional values, those held by a majority of Americans, in contempt.

Journalists are now required to hold a degree to break into the industry, and if one wants to be considered for a position at outlets like The New York Times, The Washington Post, and TIME magazine, a degree from a prestigious university like, say, Columbia is a must. Lippman's path of education to create experts has inadvertently, although rather inevitably, resulted in the creation of elites.

Sargon goes so far as to suggest that the journalists of today—those working within the largest and most powerful outlets—actually hold the average citizen in disdain. From the author's point of view, the elitism doesn't start when writers enter through the doors of The Washington Post or The New Yorker, but rather when they enter the classrooms of prestigious universities.

The book further breaks down how students, eager to make it into the field of that "peculiar honor," are taught to hold tradition-

al values, those held by a majority of Americans, in contempt. The results, as aforementioned, can hardly be viewed as anything other than inevitable.

## How Journalists Have Turned to Race-Baiting

One of the cruxes of Sargon's book is how liberals in the media have turned to utilizing race, class, and gender as constant talking points. She notes that one can hardly read an article in a major newspaper or magazine without encountering some form of claim of "oppression." According to the author, the media has become obsessed with race and continues to use it to drive a wedge between groups of people. As she writes in her book, "Is it any wonder so many Americans hate the media?"

One group that does not hate the media, Sargon suggests in the book, is white Democrats. In fact, Sargon makes the case that outlets like The New York Times write specifically for this group. One statistic, of which the author provides many, stands out: The readership of The New York Times is 92 percent Democrat. She references this outlet quite often, primarily because it started out as a publication for the wealthy and has been, for a very long time, the nation's paper of record. But this targeted readership is not just white Democrats but also wealthy ones.

Sargon writes: "The abandonment of objectivity in favor of a woke moral panic isn't really about representing black people but about pandering to white readers. It is they who are clicking on stories calling for defunding the police—a view rejected by 81 percent of black respondents to a Gallup poll. It is they who answer the clarion call of open borders. It is white liberals for whom hundreds and

hundreds of articles about white supremacy and slavery are written."

For this reason, Sargon writes that Donald Trump, despite his crassness or perhaps because of it, connected with the average American. Americans in general, especially the working class, have become just as deaf to the elites in New York's and Washington's media outlets as those elites have become to the average citizen.

For this very reason, Sargon is hopeful that the current with which journalism has been flowing will soon shift in the direction

that journalists like Pulitzer and Day had been working.

One could easily call this book a surmise on the demise of journalism. To many Americans, perhaps 64 percent of them, journalism is dead. Whether that statement is true or not, Sargon's study of the industry's century-plus decline will provide an in-depth view on how the noble profession arrived at its current sad state.

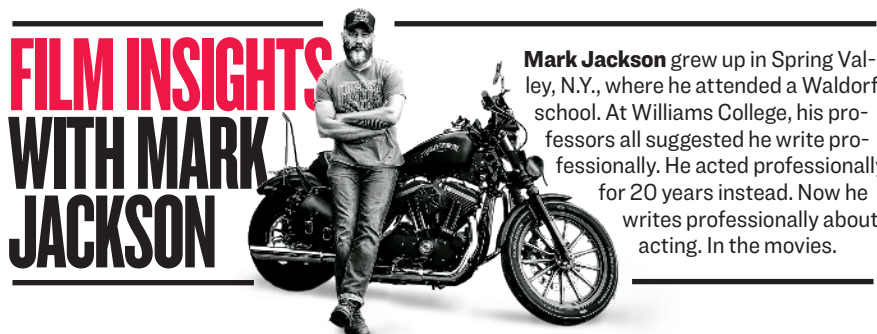
*Dustin Bass is the host of Epoch TV's "About the Book: A Show about New Books With the Authors Who Wrote Them." He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.*

## 'Bad News: How Woke Media Is Undermining Democracy'

**Author**  
Batya Ungar-Sargon  
**Publisher**  
Encounter Books  
**Date**  
Oct. 26, 2021  
**Hardcover**  
234 pages



At one time, some newspapers were created specifically for the working class.



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.

# When Spies Mix Business With Love

MARK JACKSON

Leading man Chris Pine's on fire this month, with "The Contractor" and "All the Old Knives" currently in theaters. In "Contractor" he's a soldier, and in "Knives" he's a spy. Too bad he didn't have two more movies out, playing a tinker and a tailor; that would be a neat haul.

## What Happens

Eight years ago, the terrible airline hijacking of Royal Jordanian flight 127 in Vienna by Islamic terrorists from Chechnya killed more than 100 passengers and crew members aboard a grounded jetliner.

The movie opens with the CIA just having learned from one of the former terrorists that the attack was due to a mole in the Viennese station, who sabotaged the rescue attempts. Since the entire affair had naturally resulted in a major political embarrassment for the United States' top intelligence agency at the time, the matter needs resolving.

Henry Pelham (Pine) is brought in by Vienna station boss Victor Wallinger (Laurence Fishburne), who sends him to investigate two of his former colleagues. If this was "Apocalypse Now," Pelham would be encouraged (if his interrogation does indeed turn up an office mole) to "terminate with extreme prejudice."

However, one of the upcoming interrogations happens to be Celia Harrison

**The film's effectively a tragic romance, and it succeeds as such.**

## 'All the Old Knives'

**Director:**  
Janus Metz Pedersen  
**Starring:**  
Chris Pine, Thandie Newton, Laurence Fishburne, Jonathon Pryce  
**MPAA Rating:**  
R  
**Release Date:**  
April 8, 2022  
**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 41 minutes  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★



STEFANIA ROSINI/AMAZON STUDIOS

(Thandie Newton), Henry's not-so-secret former lover and his CIA colleague and fellow operative. Their relationship was destroyed in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack. The boss calls into question Henry's ability to tie up this particular loose end, should it come to that.

## Flying Around, Doing Interviews

There are many flashbacks, coinciding with a bunch of current jet-setting: London, Moscow, Washington, Vienna, and Carmel, California. But first up, Henry confronts his former superior, Bill Compton (Jonathan Pryce), in a London pub. Compton's aghast to have his loyalty and integrity called on the carpet, but while his story appears to check out, it also raises a red flag or two.

Then, in California, Henry and Celia chat about old times over a leisurely four-course meal at an upscale, cliff-top wine restaurant in Carmel by the Sea. Their reminiscing is reminiscent of Dan Fogelberg's "Same Old Lang Syne".

"We drank a toast to innocence  
We drank a toast to now  
And tried to reach beyond the emptiness  
But neither one knew how  
"She said she'd married her an architect  
Who kept her warm and safe and dry  
She would've liked to say she loved the man  
But she didn't like to lie."

But when all is said and done, what's at stake is not a reunion but a deadly investigation, and things gradually get more measured and calculated. It's always impressive, the memory for details and subtleties that former spies are still in command of. But one eventually begins to wonder, who's investigating who here?

## All in All

While on the surface of it, "All the Old Knives" is a thriller-who-dunit, there's very little James Bond-ness. The movie spends so much time examining the state of Henry and Celia's romance before, during, and after the incident that it's effectively a tragic romance, and it succeeds as such because of the potent chemistry between Pine and Newton. This is some of Newton's best work yet, and Pine has grown a world-wearyness in both "The Contractor" and "All the Old Knives" that is starting to nudge him toward Cary Grant territory.

Why their affair ended is the main topic of the film, and when the answer is finally revealed, it's really not so much shocking (it's maybe slightly shocking for non-spies) as it is tragic. What's truly shocking is the concept of how love could end up being responsible for a massive number of deaths. In a nutshell, "All the Old Knives" is a prime example of why it's never a good idea for fellow CIA agents to fall head over heels in love.

Celia Harrison (Thandie Newton) and Henry Pelham (Chris Pine) are CIA operatives and ex-lovers, in the secret-agent thriller "All the Old Knives."



SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

Kodi Smit-McPhee as Keda and his dog Alpha in 2018's "Alpha."

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Director Albert Hughes's 'Man's Best Friend' Origin Story

MICHAEL CLARK

Bearing a strong resemblance to "Quest for Fire," "The Revenant," "Jeremiah Johnson," "The Grey," the first chunk of "2001: A Space Odyssey," and maybe even a little bit of "The Lion King," "Alpha" deftly mixes the survival, coming-of-age, and shaggy dog genres to brilliant, mesmerizing effect.

Set 20,000 years ago during the Upper Paleolithic period in what is likely now Europe, "Alpha" is an intense, unflinching film that refuses to dull or soften its edges for the sake of commercial viability. By almost anyone's definition, it's an art film but also one completely lacking in pretense or any trace of egghead intellectualism that often turns off mainstream audiences. Far too many movies are crafted (or churned out, if you will) with a specific target demographic in mind with the hope of some spillover. "Alpha" doesn't have a clear demographic; it can literally be appreciated by anyone.

## Rite of Passage

The narrative kicks off with the adult and teen members of a tribe hunting for bison on a vast plain. Leader Tau (Johannes Haukur Johannesson) is also using this excursion as a rite of passage for his elder teen son Keda (Kodi Smit-McPhee, "Let Me In"), who is not quite ready to move on to

**High-quality and entertaining movies such as 'Alpha' don't come down the pike very often.**

## 'Alpha'

**Director:**  
Albert Hughes  
**Starring**  
Kodi Smit-McPhee, Johannes Haukur Johannesson, Natassia Malthe  
**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 36 minutes  
**MPAA Rating:**  
PG-13  
**Release Date:**  
Aug. 17, 2018  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

full-fledged manhood. Tentative and lacking a honed killer instinct, Keda winces at the sight of animal slaughter, and it is clear that Tau is going to stick to his tough-love mission to get his son over the hump.

All preconceived notions and game plans take a permanent powder when Keda becomes the target of a cornered bison and is tossed off a towering cliff. As he lands about halfway down on a thin shelf, it's assumed that he's dead, and a crestfallen Tau reluctantly returns to base camp with the rest of the hunters. This scene is repeated in condensed form at various angles for the remainder of the film.

For the most part, Keda is the only living human we see on screen, and he is put through a series of life-threatening scenarios that would break the will of most of us. Through baptisms of all sorts, he eventually becomes the man and warrior Tau had envisioned.

## A Harrowing First Meeting

One of Keda's first obstacles comes in the form of a pack of hungry wolves that chase him up a tree (a practical carbon copy of a passage in "Quest for Fire"). Just before climbing to safety, Keda severely injures one of the wolves who is also eventually left for dead by his traveling companions. After what appears to be days and under the threat of a band of hyenas, Keda climbs down and carries the wounded animal to safety in a remote cave.

For the next 45 or so minutes, Keda and the wolf he names Alpha (played by Chuck, a Czechoslovakian Wolfdog), after going through an often testy, love and hate, getting-to-know-you phase, face one threatening hurdle after another, dodging demise at every turn. The movie was billed with the phrase "how mankind first discovered man's best friend," and it is squarely on the mark. Rarely has a movie tagline been this honest, transparent, and accurate.

## The First Solo Feature From Albert Hughes

Penned by first-time screenwriter Daniele Sebastian Wiedenhaupt, "Alpha" was conceived and directed by Albert Hughes. Along with his twin brother, Allen, he created the mid-1990s game changers "Menace II Society" and "Dead Presidents" as well as the highly underrated Jack the Ripper horror and thriller "From Hell."

Though set in different centuries on different continents, these films share unfor-giving urban settings where life is fleeting and death is treated as a blasé matter of course.

At first blush, "Alpha" is far away from anything Hughes has made before, but it is also unfor-giving with danger arriving without notice, only this time taking place in unchartered ancient territory with mankind still in its infancy. As much a thriller as it is survivalist drama and, yes, buddy picture, "Alpha" will keep you riveted and in wrapped amazement every single second of its sturdy and economic 96 minutes. It also delivers an 11th-hour twist that, unless you're clairvoyant, will overwhelm you in a most positive and upbeat manner.

High-quality and entertaining movies such as "Alpha" don't come down the pike very often. It tells a story with minimum embellishment and makes the viewer earn its many rewards. While some of it may be too intense for some easily upset pre-teens (as the PG-13 MPAA rating properly indicates), "Alpha" really is something the whole family can enjoy.

## Other Recommended Titles

There are dozens of movies about humans bonding with canines, and while most of them come with the best of intentions, they're also cloying, often maudlin, and really not worth your time. In addition to "Alpha," there are a handful of other sleeper titles worth checking out. The tear-jerker "My Dog Skip" (2000), the remake of "Lassie" (2005), the animated "Bolt" (2008), the military-themed "Megan Leavey" (2017), and the sublime, impossible-to-categorize "The Art of Racing in the Rain" (2019) are all winners and highly recommended.

*Presented in an unknown, fictional language with English subtitles.*

*Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.*



Annalena Altarpiece, circa 1438–40, by Fra Angelico. Tempera and gold on wood; 70.8 inches by 79.5 inches. Museum of San Marco, Florence, Italy.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

## Gatherings of Holy Ones: 'Sacra Conversazione'

Paintings show us social media of the 15th century

YVONNE MARCOTTE

As the host opens the door, guests in jeans enter, slap palms with the host, call out "Hey!" and find a place to sit, or maybe head to the backyard grill. Social gatherings are casual affairs today. Most people don't attend formal functions often, much less with "important people."

To be invited to an event with important people might require more formality: suit and tie, nice dress, guests chatting in small groups, drinks and hors d'oeuvres attractively set to the side in a tastefully decorated room.

Taking this up a notch, consider what it would be like to attend a gathering with some of the greatest figures who ever lived, even divinities, and post a photo of it on social media.

### From Heaven to Earth

At the turn of the 15th century in Europe, artists made paintings on panels and hinged them so that they could be folded in order to be protected and stored. The most famous multipanel painting (called a polyptych) is the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck. The center panel shows Jesus as King of a heavenly kingdom, with panels on either side showing Mary his mother

and John the Baptist.

Artists wanted to show Jesus and the saints in heaven but in ways that also brought them closer to people. This technique evolved from formal courtly settings to domestic environments that made Mary, Jesus, and the saints more approachable. The paintings show figures gathered in one setting; saints, angels, and even those who paid for the work of art are shown with the guests of honor: Mary and the baby Jesus.

Fra Angelico (1400–1455), the artist monk of San Marco monastery in Florence, Italy, is considered the first artist to arrange a group of figures as a "sacra conversazione," or sacred conversation. In his Annalena Altarpiece, he brought figures together in the same space, as if at the court of a sovereign. The figures, of different historical periods, stand together respectfully on either side of the Virgin and Child.

To bring his figures together, he oriented them on a horizontal panel. Thus, the sacra conversazione technique brought about a big change to painting. Artists made less use of separate vertical panels and, instead, placed all the figures on one panel or canvas. Artists then began to use the horizontal format more frequently, which is the orientation that artists use most often today.

Fra Angelico painted several of these horizontal compositions. In addition,

whereas earlier painters presented Mary and the baby Jesus as much larger than surrounding figures, to show their importance, Fra Angelico painted them proportionately the same size as other figures, although the two remain central in his sacra conversazione compositions.

**Renaissance artists presented their version of social media using the compositional technique known as 'sacra conversazione,' or sacred conversation.**

The Annalena Altarpiece was commissioned by the convent of St. Vincent of Annalena and shows the Madonna and the baby Jesus seated at an angle on a simple raised throne. On Mary's left we see (from left to right) saints Peter Martyr, Damian, and Cosmas; on the right are (left to right) the saints John the Evangelist, Lawrence the first martyr, and Francis of Assisi.

At the bottom of the painting is the pre-

della, which is a series of panels arranged horizontally. A gold background hints that this is not a natural setting; there is a celestial feeling to the artwork. The figures, all with halos to indicate their holy status, are engaged in reading or interacting with each other, as if on a normal day in a heavenly court.

The artist introduced another innovation with St. Cosmas gesturing toward Mary and Jesus while looking at the viewer. "The Annalena Altarpiece would become the model for other Florentine altarpieces into the early 1500s," according to GrandCentralPark.org.

### Domestic Setting

This compositional technique caught on. Northern Renaissance painter Jan van Eyck, credited with inventing oil paint, used the sacra conversazione style to include an ordinary person in his painting. "The Virgin and Child With Canon van der Paele" shows Mary and the baby Jesus at the center, on a low throne surrounded by St. Donat on the left side of the painting, and on the right, the donor who paid for the painting, Canon van der Paele, flanked by St. George.

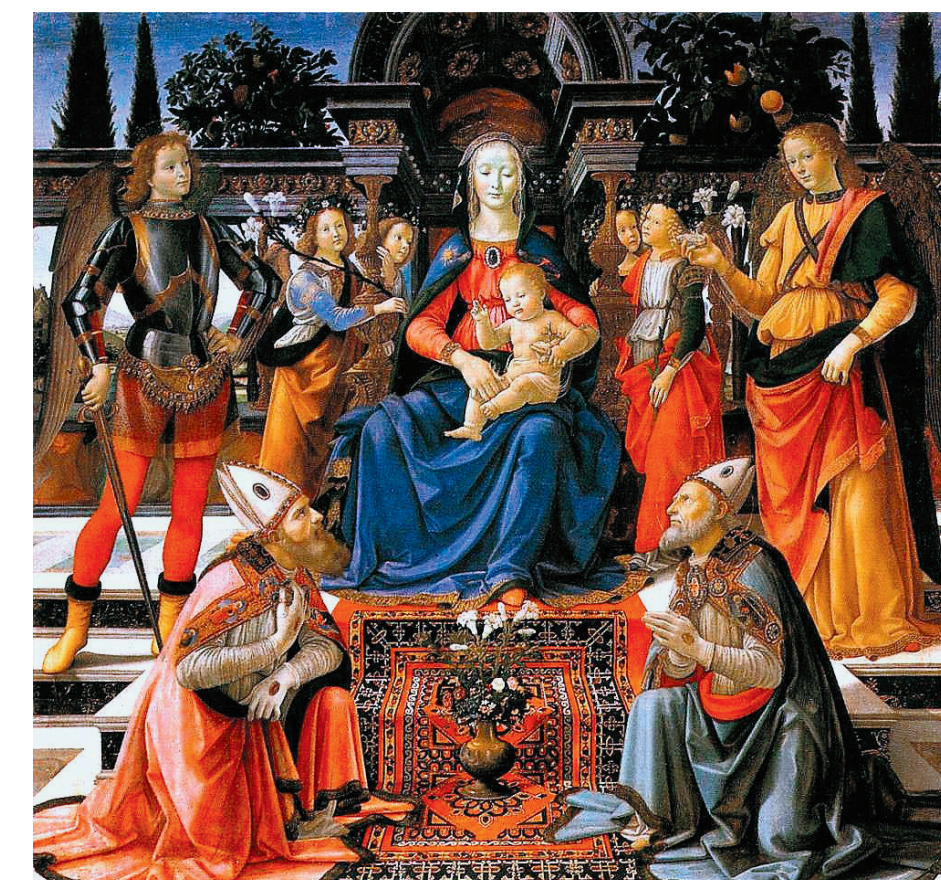
The wealthy clergyman was gravely ill and intended the painting as an altarpiece memorial for himself. Latin inscriptions on the original borders identify the saints, while van der Paele is known from historical re-



The Ghent Altarpiece, 1432, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on oak panels; 11.1 feet by 17 feet. St. Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium.



"The Virgin and Child With Canon van der Paele," 1434, by Jan van Eyck. Oil on panel; 49 inches by 62.9 inches. The Groeninge Museum, Bruges, Belgium.



"Sacred Conversation of the Ingesuiti," 1484–86, by Domenico Ghirlandaio. Tempera on wood; 74.8 inches by 78.7 inches. The Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

ords. St. George, helmet in hand, presents the donor to Mary. The figures wear rich finery: furs, silks, and brocades.

This informal grouping, as if in Mary's private quarters, shows Jesus as he plays with a bird while greeting his visitors. Van der Paele does not look directly at any of the heavenly figures, but stares into the middle distance, observing social and spiritual decorum. This is van Eyck's only horizontal painting and one of the earliest known sacra conversazione compositions of the Northern Renaissance.

Titian made several paintings using this horizontal composition and arranged his figures in an even more intimate setting. As if in a great lady's living quarters, the Virgin plays with her wriggling child as the guests arrive. Saints Dorothy and George approach to play with the baby. "In the relaxed and confident painting Titian brings the charms of the family circle to 'sacra conversazione,'" according to the Web Gallery of Art.

The saints appear as indulgent relatives of the playful child. A pulled-back green curtain appears often in these compositions, such as in Raphael's "Sistine Madonna," as if giving viewers a glimpse of heaven.

Botticelli used the technique in artworks such as the San Barnaba Altarpiece. As angels pull back a curtain, the figures around the Virgin and Child appear animated and with expressive faces on each.

Domenico Ghirlandaio's "Sacred Conversation of the Ingesuiti" shows the magnifi-

cent court of Mary and her child as they are surrounded by saints and angels. Archangels appear around Mary—Michael on the left and Raphael on the right—and kneeling below her are the saints Justus and Zenobius. The strong, sharp lines and rich, glowing colors hint at a heavenly realm, while fruit trees and evergreens in the background present a natural setting.

As patrons placed these more intimate paintings in their private residences and used them as objects of prayerful devotion, artists responded in turn. These paintings would be a significant source of income for Italian artists.

### How to Treat Each Other

Renaissance artists used sacra conversazione to inspire viewers to have uplifting interactions with others. These paintings can show us how to have a social gathering: a gracious setting with soft, beautiful music, and an attentive host who serves well-mannered guests with quiet dignity.

We are and have always been social creatures. In today's culture of waning formality, casual gatherings focus on eating and drinking and not much on talk about what's important or inspiring. But we might just want to brush up on what we learned about how to behave in polite company. Like the three angels visiting Abraham and Sarah or Jesus at the Last Supper in the Bible, we may never know if a celestial being is visiting us or who might be our host.



"Madonna and Child With Saints Dorothy and George," 1515–18, by Titian. Oil on panel; 33.8 inches by 51.1 inches. The Prado, Spain.



"Sistine Madonna," 1513–14, by Raphael. Oil on canvas; 104.3 inches by 77.1 inches. Old Masters Gallery, Dresden, Germany.

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## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Blake Lively Leaves Her Teen-Queen Past Behind

MICHAEL CLARK

"The Age of Adaline" is a strange hybrid of a movie. There's a hint of Nicholas Sparks, but it isn't at all sappy or set in North Carolina, and no one dies a tragic, premature death (and no, that's not a spoiler). It's not quite sci-fi, and there is no time travel but there is time defiance. There is humor but nothing you'll ever find in a standard issue rom-com.

The drama is sometimes heavy but never to point of being overreaching or strained. There is only a tad of traditional mystery, and its small serving goes a long way. By the nature of its plot, "The Age of Adaline" could be classified as a chick flick and any man asked by a woman to watch it would be a fool not to accept.

It's that kind of movie.

## Convincing Exposition

Languishing in production hell for close to five years, "Adaline" is what some might consider to be high-concept fluff, which is only half-right. Unlike the majority of sci-fi films, "Adaline" adheres strictly to its own set of established rules and never once strays from them. That alone makes it a worthy view for fans of that genre.

Some audience members might have issues with the spare "voice-of-God" narration that includes scientific sounding words and phrases that are actually just impressive gibberish but, thanks to convincing voice performer Hugh Ross, all of it is pretty, um, convincing.

The age of Adaline (Blake Lively) in "The Age of Adaline" is 29, and she has been 29 years old since the Prohibition Era. Given the amount of money spent annually on hair color, Botox, and other assorted age-defying chemicals, there are many women (and men, for that matter) the world over who would happily trade places with Adaline. In the perfectly executed first act, director Lee Toland Krieger and a committee of screenwriters make it clear that retaining the same youthful looks for eight decades comes with considerable drawbacks.

## Forever Young as a Curse

How long could anyone that never ages, particularly, a beautiful woman, stay in the same place for very long without raising suspicion? Starting in her late 40s, Adaline began changing her name and relocating every 10 years or so. This cloaked lifestyle has led to her keeping personal relationships, and romantic couplings, in particular, to a bare minimum, if not at all. The only person who knows her secret is her daughter Flemming (Ellen Burstyn) who now looks like her grandmother.

The second act finds Adaline back in her hometown of San Francisco working at a library where her only friend is a blind piano player. At a New Year's Eve party, the day before she turns 106, Adaline locks eyes with Ellis (Michiel Huisman, "Game of Thrones"), a beyond wealthy philanthropist who is determined to get her attention. His pursuit borders on obsession and this approach makes the already cautious Adaline become harder (but not impossible) to get. She makes him earn her trust, yet even then she never completely drops her guard. The final act takes place at the home of Ellis's parents (Harrison Ford as William and Kathy Baker as Kathy) where the full breadth of Adaline's past comes to a head.

## Try Not to Watch the Trailer

If you've already seen the lengthy trailer and think the studio might have revealed a major spoiler, you'd be partially correct, yet the filmmakers are able to throw us off and keep us guessing for the remainder of the running time. Unless you are clairvoyant, you will not be able to figure out the ending.

Going from offbeat art-house to high-end mainstream with lush production values that would have been at home in the '50s, Krieger approaches the material in much the same manner as Adaline lives her life. He and the writers never reveal more than they have to and about the only possible thing one could find any fault with is the omnipresent backing score.

The superlative, effortless acting from everyone with a speaking part also goes



**The only person who knows Adaline's secret is her daughter Flemming.**

far in keeping the story grounded and (for a sci-fi fantasy) eminently believable. For Lively, who achieved breakthrough fame in the "Gossip Girl" TV series and "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants" franchise while playing two very different teen archetypes, the role of Adaline signals her arrival as an A-list leading lady. In juggling aloof and aware, cool and warm, her rendering of Adaline is pitch perfect.

## Ford Is on Top of His Game

As for Ford, he has never been better. Not an actor generally recognized for his dramatic range, Ford displays levels of nuance and vulnerability previously unseen and often without the aid of dialogue. If he were ever worthy for a second Academy Award nomination for acting (following "Witness"), it should have been for this performance.

Audiences and critics always complain that Hollywood is incapable (or unwilling) of doing anything original and, 99 percent of the time, they're right. "The Age of Adaline" falls into that ultra-rare one percent territory. It is as smart and innovative as it is moving and unforgettable.

*Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.*

Ellen Burstyn (L) and Blake Lively in 2015's "The Age of Adaline."

## 'The Age of Adaline'

**Director:**  
Lee Toland Krieger

**Starring:**  
Blake Lively, Michiel Huisman, Harrison Ford, Kathy Baker, Ellen Burstyn

**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 53 minutes

**MPAA Rating:**  
PG-13

**Release Date:**  
April 24, 2015

★★★★☆



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