

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE



PUBLIC DOMAIN

In the Victorian era, the May Queen was usually dressed in white and crowned with flowers. "My Fair Lady," 1914, by Edmund Leighton.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Maypoles, Mary, Flowers, and Poets

The many enchantments of May

JEFF MINICK

*"May is pretty, May is mild,
Dances like a happy child;
Sing out, robin; spring out, flowers;
April went with all her showers
And the world is green again. ..."*

In many lands around the world, the fifth month of the calendar year signals the end of winter and heralds the arrival of summer. The trees sway in warm, sweet breezes, the lawns gown themselves in green, and the very air seems fresh as dawn all day.

And those opening lines to Annette Wynne's poem for children are but one tiny bud in the great garden of literature, the arts, and custom itself that salutes this month.

In his vibrant painting "Spring," for example, artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema re-creates a marble city of the Roman Empire and a blossom-decked parade led by musicians and girls in white dresses. They may be celebrating Floralia, the holiday for Flora—the goddess of flowers, vegetation, and fertility—which occurred in late April. The quiet dignity we find in the faces of these men, women, and children is offset by the heralds of the season: the colorful boughs and bouquets they are carrying.

We moderns have a connection to these ancients, for May derives its name from Maia Majesta, a Greco-Roman goddess of fertility and springtime.

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THE EPOCH TIMES



"David Victorious," circa 1435-40, by Donatello. Partly gilded bronze; 61 inches by 25 5/8 inches by 23 5/8 inches. The statue is one of the masterpieces in "Donatello: The Renaissance," an exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, Italy.

FINE ARTS

Celebrating Donatello: The Master's Master

The once-in-a-lifetime 'Donatello: The Renaissance' exhibition in Florence, Italy

LORRAINE FERRIER

centuries before it disappeared.

Craftsmen should trace the greatness of art to one man, according to 16th-century art historian Giorgio Vasari in his book "The Lives of the Most Celebrated Painters, Sculptors, and Architects." That man is the Italian sculptor and architect Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, whom we know as Donatello.

Donatello, along with his friends and peers—the painter Masaccio, the architect Filippo Brunelleschi, and architect Leon Battista Alberti—created the Renaissance style in Florence.

Donatello's work is still far-reaching. To put his prolific work into a comprehensive story is one thing, but to put on a show that encompasses his wide-ranging impact seems an impossibility. Yet the exhibition "Donatello: The Renaissance," at the Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, Italy, does just that.

Some 130 sculptures, paintings, and drawings lent from over 50 world-renowned museums and institutions are in the exhibition. There are some remarkable exhibits, such as the bronze doors from the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo Basilica, in Florence. It's the first time the doors have left the building.

There's much to discover in the show, but here are a few key works of art showing some of Donatello's innovations.

Drawings in Stone

The Victoria and Albert Museum's "Dudley Madonna" is one of the finest examples of Donatello's staccato technique. "Staccato" (Italian for "flattened out") is a low-relief sculpture with shallow carvings almost like a drawing.

Inspired by a woman carved on an ancient funerary stele, Donatello rendered the Virgin in her entirety on a plain, unframed background. It was the first time the Virgin's full figure had been made in marble for private devotion. Shown in profile view, she embraces the Christ child with a mother's love, but her gaze suggests that she knows of the sacrifice he will have to make as a man.

Figures in Clay

Pliny the Elder in his "Naturalis Historia" illustrated how the ancients once made terracotta artworks. Donatello and Brunelleschi, inspired by the medium, used terracotta to create figures.

Donatello tended to use terracotta to create madonnas for private devotion; some examples can be seen in the exhibition.

Such small-scale pieces differed from Donatello's terracotta statue of "Joshua" on the dome of Florence Cathedral. Over 16 feet tall, it was once the gold standard for all dome-buttress statues. Donatello was commissioned to create "Joshua" in place of his marble "David," which at less than 6 feet tall was deemed inadequate for the task. Exposed and beaten by the elements, "Joshua" stood on the dome for over two

A New Perspective
Donatello rendered a remarkable narrative scene in "The Feast of Herod" for the Baptistery in Siena. For the first time since 1427, the gilded bronze work has been removed from its baptismal font, along with the gilded bronze figures of "Hope" and "Faith," which have all been restored for the exhibition.

For "The Feast of Herod," Donatello used Brunelleschi's new rules of perspective to heighten the drama and tension of the scene, which plays out through a series of boxes much like a storyboard. The violence is tangible throughout, as Donatello's characters recoil in shock, horror, and disgust at seeing the head of John the Baptist. Donatello gave each person character, gestures, and emotion—a bold step at a time when the graceful, and two-dimensional idealized figures of the International Gothic style of art reigned supreme.

He also used perspective to ensure that his works were accurate from any viewing point. Set high atop a column 6 feet, 6 inches tall, Donatello's bronze "David Victorious" must have been a sight to behold. The statue's original column was lost long ago in the 16th century, but the exhibition curators have raised the work up high, although lower than the original, so visitors can see the piece from below as Donatello intended.

A Breath of Humanity

As the father of modern sculpture, Donatello carved the impossible: humanity itself. He made static lifelike sculptures that were alive with movement, vitality, and sensibility—something never before seen.

Donatello's innovative ideas ran across multiple media in stone, wood, marble, bronze, stucco, terracotta, ceramics, papier mâché, glass paste, and embossed copper. While he made new discoveries, giving artists exciting new ways to work, he always looked to the past for inspiration: from the ancient Greeks and Romans to artists of the late Middle Ages, such as Giotto.

Donatello's art impacted artists across Italy from the regions of Tuscany, Veneto, and the Marche to the cities of Rome and Naples, a feat that only Giotto achieved before him.

The "Donatello: The Renaissance" exhibition runs until July 31, at the Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, Italy. To find out more, visit PalazzoStrozzi.org

The exhibition is curated by Francesco Caglioti, professor of medieval art history at the Scuola Normale di Pisa.

The exhibition will also be shown at the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Each venue will show a slightly different version of the exhibition, with some loans differing.

BOOK REVIEW

Modern Superheroes Who Expose the Truth

LINDA WIEGENFELD

When I was young, my very favorite hero was Superman: Superman was good. I enjoyed the uplifting and patriotic stories of virtue triumphing over evil. Although Superman had a weakness (kryptonite), he never let this stop him from doing right. I adored his motto "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" and repeated it often.

Fast-forward to today. I have found a new, real-life hero to admire in the book "American Muckraker: Rethinking Journalism for the 21st Century" by James O'Keefe. Instead of struggling against some radioactive rock, the muckraker's task, while exposing the truth, is to struggle against corruption, censorship, and even physical intimidation. O'Keefe is one of these muckrakers who, like Superman, fights for good.

O'Keefe heads Project Veritas, which, on its website, says that it "investigates and exposes corruption, dishonesty, self-dealing, waste, fraud, and other misconduct in both public and private institutions to achieve a more ethical and transparent society." In his book, O'Keefe talks about his organization, himself, and other muckrakers.

I found the book quite uplifting and I believe that my readers will, too.

Real News, Gripping Stories

O'Keefe's book gives an accurate account of what is really happening in the news. The public is constantly exposed to fake news and the morally corrupt who lie. There are sophisticated efforts by the government and powerful interests to censor ideas. Deep analysis has given way to the superficial glance, which makes it difficult for the United States to remain a republic, since an environment of trust is needed to make educated choices.

But in this book, readers get the satisfaction of seeing corrupt people exposed. As the muckrakers' triumph over the darker side of humanity is quite the coup, our sense of moral judgment is satisfied.

The book also enables readers to connect to people with inner strength and integrity. Richard Hopkins is a Marine veteran and a USPS worker from Erie, Pennsylvania. By accident, Hopkins overheard his postmaster talking about how ballots processed after

Election Day in 2020 needed to be backdated in order to be counted in the election. He reported this to Project Veritas, and then did an anonymous interview telling what he had heard.

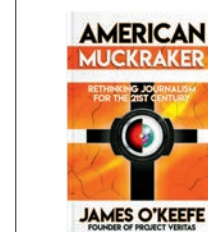
Later, Hopkins signed an affidavit attesting to what he had heard. Senator Lindsey Graham promised to use Hopkins's testimony in Senate hearings that would investigate voting irregularities in the 2020 election.

O'Keefe says the unelected government, or federal bureaucracy, sent a criminal investigator for the USPS Office of Inspector General to investigate Hopkins. The investigator tried to get Hopkins to recant his statement. No fool, Hopkins discreetly recorded the interrogation.

The tape was released and exposed how badly a federal officer treated a whistleblower. O'Keefe concluded this retelling by saying that one can only imagine the lies the media would be publishing today about Hopkins if the interrogation recording did not exist.

Throughout the book, O'Keefe seems at times to be talking directly to his readers.

Readers get the satisfaction of seeing corrupt people exposed.



Throughout "American Muckraker," O'Keefe seems at times to be talking directly to his readers.

'American Muckraker: Rethinking Journalism for the 21st Century'

Author
James O'Keefe

Publisher
Post Hill Press, Jan. 25, 2022

Hardcover
288 pages



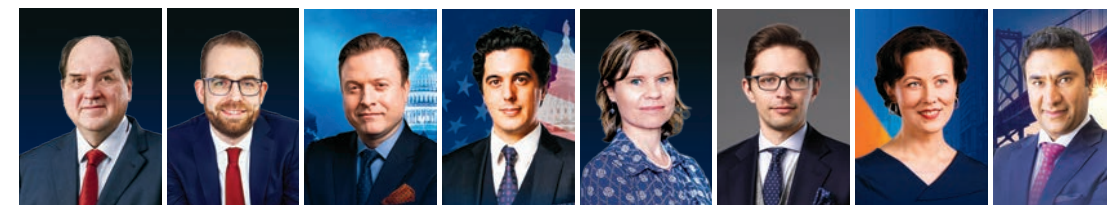
James O'Keefe, author of "American Muckraker: Rethinking Journalism for the 21st Century."

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ALL IMAGES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Late April was celebrated in ancient Rome with a festival celebrating Floralia, the goddess of flowers. "Spring," 1894, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Oil on canvas; 70 1/4 inches by 31 5/8 inches. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Maypoles, Mary, Flowers, and Poets

The many enchantments of May

Continued from Page 1

And long after the collapse of Rome and the end of celebrations like the one depicted by Alma-Tadema, other festivities and rituals continued to mark May as special.

A-Maying We Will Go

To "go a-maying," which is an expression we can trace back to the 14th century, was to celebrate this month, to "fetche the flowres fresh," and often to seek romance and revelry. Here's just one example. Basing some of his verse on Sir Thomas Malory's Arthurian works, Alfred Lord Tennyson in "Idylls of the King" at one point describes Queen Guinevere and her attendants in this fashion:

*"For thus it chanced one morn
when all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes
that mocked the may,
Had been, their wont,
a-maying and returned..."*

To go a-maying might also mean romance. In his 1595 song "Now Is the Month of Maying," called a ballet, Thomas Morley writes:

*"Now is the month of maying,
When merry lads are playing...
Each with his bonny lass
Upon the greeny grass.
Fa la la la la la la la la..."*

Round and Round They Go

Allied to these dalliances with the month of Maia are maypoles and May Queens.

Writers of verse have also employed May as a metaphor for youth and love.

The origins of the maypole are lost in the mists of history—many believe these ancient rituals began in Germany—but this ceremony is almost certainly a fertility dance, a whirling pagan prayer for fecundity and healthy crops. Men and women in those long-ago times first danced around a live tree, sometimes decorated. As the custom evolved, the object of their frolic became a cut tree shorn of its branches and plugged into the earth, around which dancers spun in circled patterns, weaving around one another while adorning the pole in complicated tangles of foliage and ribbons.

Not everyone was enamored of these festivities. In 1644, for example, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, and his government banned maypoles and ordered those standing to be torn down, describing them as "a Heathenish vanity, generally abused to superstition and wickedness." Following his death and the dissolution of his government, maypoles once again became popular in England.

During the Victorian era, the maypole dance became much tamer, with young girls dressed in their finery dancing and decorating the pole. As we learn from John Chu of Britain's National Trust, the May Queen, another old custom of these celebrations, was "embodied by a young girl decorously dressed in white and crowned with flowers. Accompanied by a 'court' of other girls, the May Queen had become a symbol of purity and the promise of spring."

These customs continue to this day in many different places, with men and women erecting these poles, decorating them with bright ribbons, and weaving in and out of the dance.

The Month of Mary

The Roman Catholic Church kicks off May with the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, but otherwise devotes the entire month to his earthly spouse, Mary, who in many places is honored with the title "Queen of May." Churches frequently feature Marian hymns during Mass, she is the subject of homilies and the center of special devotions, and parishioners are encouraged to pray the rosary. Usually, May is the month for Catholic chil-

dren to receive their first communion. Often, this occasion includes a brief ceremony in which a young woman, dressed in her white gown, places a crown of flowers on the head of Mary's statue.

The Poets Also Go A-Maying

Poets like Robert Herrick, William Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, and Emily Dickinson have all paid homage to the gentle beauties and passing joys of May. In "May and the Poets," Leigh Hunt remembers some of the earlier bards of this merry month:

*There is May in books forever;
May will part from Spenser never;
May's in Milton, May's in Prior,
May's in Chaucer, Thomson, Dyer;
May's in all the Italian books:—
She has old and modern nooks,
Where she sleeps with nymphs and elves,
In happy places they call shelves,
And will rise and dress your rooms
With a drapery thick with blooms.
Come, ye rains, then if ye will,
May's at home, and with me still;
But come rather, thou, good weather,
And find us in the fields together.*

Writers of verse have also employed May as a metaphor for youth and love. In these lines from "It Is Not Always May," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow advocates for "carpe diem" as he urges a young woman to make the most of this Maytime of her life:

*"Maiden, that read'st this simple rhyme,
Enjoy thy youth, it will not stay;
Enjoy the fragrance of thy prime,
For oh, it is not always May!"*

On the other hand, another poet, Christina Rossetti, reminds us in this truncated sonnet that despite the season, the world goes on spinning, and we go on spinning with it. Not all in May is merriment.

*"I cannot tell you how it was,
But this I know: it came to pass
Upon a bright and sunny day
When May was young; ah, pleasant May!
As yet the poppies were not born
Between the blades of tender corn;
The last egg had not hatched as yet,
Nor any bird foregone its mate.
I cannot tell you what it was,
But this I know: it did but pass.
It passed away with sunny May,
Like all sweet things it passed away,
And left me old, and cold, and gray."*

A Toast to the Month of Flowers

That last line hits the reader like an unexpected punch. But another of Rossetti's poems offers a more tender view of the month of merriment and gaiety:

*"There is but one May in the year,
And sometimes May is wet and cold;
There is but one May in the year
Before the year grows old.
Yet though it be the chilliest May,
With least of sun and most of showers,
Its wind and dew, its night and day,
Bring up the flowers."*

Here, Rossetti reminds us that though May might not be the month of sunshine and soft winds as so many other poets have proclaimed, it nevertheless bestows on us its lilies, lilacs, and other bursts of color and blossom.

Few of us moderns go a-maying or wend our way around a maypole, but like our agrarian ancestors we can enjoy the bounties of May and raise a glass to its beauty.

And we can, as the hoary old cliché goes, stop and smell the flowers.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



The month of May is also associated with courting. "May Day Morning," 1890-1894, by Edwin Austin Abbey. Oil on canvas; 42 inches by 68 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, Yale.



May is often the time for a Catholic's first communion. Painting of a "First Communion" by Laszlo Pataky.



The maypole may have German origins. Maypole festival in front of a forest farm, 1848, by Carl Millner. Oil on canvas.



"May-Day in the Country," from Harper's Weekly, April 30, 1859, by Winslow Homer. Wood engraving; 11 1/4 inches by 16 1/8 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, Yale.

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

When Johnny Depp Was Johnny Depp

MARK JACKSON

Mega-move star Johnny Depp is currently all over the news due to a courtroom showdown with his ex-wife Amber Heard for defamation of character. (She claims she was a victim of spousal abuse; he claims her alleged lies ruined his career.) So it seemed like a perfect time to take a look at 1995's "Don Juan DeMarco" and Johnny Depp of the '90s, whose star was then on the rise.

People always took him seriously as an actor, even while his stock in trade was shaping up to be odd characters in movies of fantasy and whimsy, like Willy Wonka, Edward Scissorhands, and later Captain Jack Sparrow in Disney's massive franchise "Pirates of the Caribbean."

In "Don Juan DeMarco," Depp plays an eccentric young man who's convinced that he's the world's greatest lover. Marlon Brando plays the psychiatrist assigned to divest him of his delusions. The results are hysterical.

'Now I Must Die'

As the film opens, a young man in a Zorro mask, cape, and fencing sword has climbed to the top of a billboard, about to jump to his death. The cops call in Dr. Jack Mickler (Marlon Brando) to talk him down from the ledge. Mickler goes up in a cherry picker to the top of the billboard. When the psychiatrist is asked his identity by the potential jumper (who himself claims to be the real Don Juan), Mickler decides to play along and improvises, "I am... Don... umm... Octavio... de Flores."

Young Mr. Don Juan is promptly hustled off to a mental asylum. However, his presence very soon has all the nurses in a romantic tizzy and absconding with more Valium than the patients are taking.

Mickler, burned-out as he is, and ready to retire, is intrigued by the young man's serious demeanor, sincerity, and by the ring of truth and wisdom underlying his outrageous claims and statements. He asks his reluctant supervisor for 10 days to evaluate the young man.

Don Juan regales Dr. "de Flores" with fantastical stories about his adventures and vast history of female conquests. Mickler listens intently. The reason, it turns out, that Don Juan was about to jump to his death was because, while he had successfully seduced in excess of 1,000 women, he could not win the woman of his dreams, the beautiful Doña Julia (Talisa Soto)—the one whom, when he looked into her eyes, he could see his unborn children there. And so life was therefore no longer worth living.

The stories, told in flashback, become ever more fantastical—there's a Mexican hacienda! His father dies in a sword duel! There's a desert island called Eros, with yet another true love, and an Arabian seraglio with thousands of women!

Depp plays it all completely straight-faced, and soon Dr. Mickler is so fired up that he rushes home to romance his wife (Faye Dunaway) and their stale marriage with flowers (he is after all Don Octavio de Flores), jewelry, champagne, and a mariachi band.



Don Juan DeMarco (Johnny Depp) tells his tale, in 1995's "Don Juan DeMarco."

People always took Johnny Depp seriously as an actor.

Director Jeremy Leven

Jeremy Leven, a novelist who once made his living as a clinical psychiatrist, wrote and directed this impressive debut, and having scored a hat trick of three powerhouse leads, delivered a hilarious comedy that's remarkably believable and unpredictable. Depp agreed to work with Leven on condition that his hero, Marlon Brando, be his co-star.

"Don Juan DeMarco" is, of course, a variation on the old theme of the shrink who learns from his patient, like "Awakenings." It's also a celebration of romance, poetry, love, and adventure. Its fragile illusion wouldn't stand up to close scrutiny, of course, but Depp—who at the time had evolved as America's most unpredictable and interesting young star—read all his lines with complete sincerity and not a hint of camp (which is really the most powerful and effective way to play most kinds of comedy).

In these times of political correctness, the concept and stereotype of the hot-blooded Latin lover (as represented by, say, Valentino) has become an endangered species. Which is an excellent reason in and of itself to watch Depp try on Valentino's mantle. The other reason is that you will laugh yourself silly. Or at least find the proceedings highly amusing.

Ultimately, though, the inspiration that underlies the whole film is the magic of discovering the sublime in the superficial by dedicating one's life to living perfectly in the moment.

'Don Juan DeMarco'

Director: Jeremy Leven
Starring: Marlon Brando, Johnny Depp, Faye Dunaway, Rachel Ticotin, Talisa Soto
MPAA Rating: PG-13
Release Date: April 7, 1995
Running Time: 1 hour, 37 minutes
Rating: ★★★★★ for delightfulness, ★★★★★ for execution



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