

WEEK 17, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES  
**ARTS &  
CULTURE**

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A statue of Scottish King Robert the Bruce, who led the Scots in the Battle of Bannockburn against England, in Stirling, Scotland.

***Scots Language, Poetry, and  
Freedom-Loving Influence Celebrated***

On the 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath ... 4

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I enjoy reading The Epoch Times daily and share links, stories and “real news” updates whenever I can. Because of this, several friends and family members are now subscribers and have thanked me for sharing “real news” that is going on globally.

—DELINDA FORSYTHE

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THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION

### POETRY

WORDS TO LIVE BY:

# Fighting a Pandemic With Poetry

Celebrating April: National Poetry Month

JEFF MINICK

“April,” poet T.S. Eliot once wrote, “is the cruelest month.” Certainly his words apply to April 2020.

Though we are slowly winning the fight against the pandemic, the struggle has brought hardship and dire changes to all. Untold numbers of businesses have closed, and some are likely to remain so once the pandemic passes. Millions of Americans have lost their jobs, millions more are locked inside their homes under “shelter-in-place” orders, the stock market gyrates up and down, and we are in the meantime beset by a maelstrom of faulty models, misinformation, and biased reporting by many in the mainstream media seeking to point fingers for this disaster.

In such a dark time, we can take comfort and hope from the heroic efforts of some of the people around us: our health care providers, our truck drivers and grocery store clerks who have kept our system running as best they can, even the loan officer I know who is working 12-hour days seven days a week at her bank to help thousands of customers with their mortgages and the loans pouring out of the Small Business Administration.

Some of us gather strength from our religious faith, some from the presence of family and friends, some from the examples of our ancestors who themselves endured terrible calamities.

And some of us turn to the written word to keep us going, to strengthen our hearts and minds, to inspire us to keep up the good fight.

#### Candles in the Darkness

April is National Poetry Month. It is the month when libraries and bookstores typically set up displays of poetry books, offer readings from the works of poets both living and dead, and celebrate the place of verse in literature and in our lives.

Those stores and libraries are mostly shuttered now, locked down for the duration of the pandemic, but we Americans can still salute poets and their verse by means of the internet. Even more importantly, we can avail ourselves of poems that will inspire us, boost our spirits, quell our fears, and push away despair.

Google “poetry” on your electronic device, and sites will pop up like the dandelions on my front lawn. Though I find the Poetry Foundation and the Society of Classical Poets especially helpful—the Society even features poets writing about the pandemic—I encourage you to shamble around on the internet and investigate other sites as well.

Google ‘poetry’ on your electronic device, and sites will pop up like the dandelions on my front lawn.

#### Reading Tips

Poetry is best read aloud and to others. If you are quarantined with family or friends, and particularly with children, now is the time to cut loose and take some fun from these readings. If you’re delivering Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” for example, give rein to your inner actor, match your ges-

tures to the poem’s actions, and roar out the words until you arrive at the last stanza, discarding that roar for a whisper.

Even if you live alone, I encourage you to read poetry aloud. If you’re like me, you’re talking to yourself anyway, and the read-aloud approach not only enhances the meaning of the poem but also fills your silence.

If you’re now teaching your children at home because of COVID-19, adding poetry to your curriculum can bring both pleasure and learning. The older children can read poetry to the younger, thereby enhancing their ability to read with greater expression. You might consider, too, asking your students to memorize some poetry as a part of their school day. Learning poems by heart, as we once called it, gives young people a gift of words and sentiments they can carry through the rest of their lives.

#### Listening

If you want a change of pace, go to YouTube, where you can enjoy thousands of read-alouds by those who love poetry. Some of these presentations are amateurish, but you’ll also find recitations by men and women whose voices can break your heart or bring shouts of laughter.

The poetry read at RedFrost Motivation, a channel on YouTube, for example, stirs the heart and soul. One of my favorites is “The Man in the Glass,” which I’ve listened to so many times that I almost have it memorized. At Pearls of Wisdom, the woman reading John Donne’s “The Sun Rising” has a voice and an accent as entrancing as the poet’s words. She shares many other poems as well, and in part because of her magical voice, I now listen to a poem a day there.



A portrait of poet John Donne, 1622, by Isaac Oliver.

#### Words of Courage and Hope

To help you get started, below are eight inspirational poems, all of them available online in print, as an audio, or both.

RedFrost Motivation offers a beautiful recitation of Rudyard Kipling’s classic poem “If.” Though aimed at the younger set, all of us can draw strength from these wise reminders of what it means to be a mature adult.

Henry Newbolt’s “Vitai Lampada” reminds us to “Play up! play up! and play the game!” Life is a battlefield, and Newbolt urges us to join the action.

Elsie Robinson’s “Beauty as a Shield” was new to me before I began this article—I stumbled across it in the book “The Best Loved Poems of the American People”—but it is a fine piece of verse recommending beauty as a guard against despair.

Lanta Wilson Smith is another poet I’d never read, but her “This,

Too, Shall Pass Away” reminds us that troubles may be always with us but that all of them, including our pandemic, eventually end.

R.L. Sharpe’s “A Bag of Tools” asks whether we will be “a stumbling block or a steppingstone.” Because of the poem’s brevity and its powerful message, I used to ask my students to learn it by heart.

John James Ingalls’s “Opportunity” tells us that when opportunity knocks, we have but one chance to answer. “Opportunity” was Theodore Roosevelt’s favorite poem, and an autographed copy of it hung from the wall of his office in the White House.

In “Worth While,” once-renowned poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox, whose most famous line was “Laugh, and the world laughs with you; Weep, and you weep alone,” writes “the man worth while is the one who will smile, /When everything goes dead wrong.” One line in the poem really hit home with me: “the sorrow that hides in a smile.” Often, like some of my readers, my smile has hidden my sorrow.

The mother in “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes explains to her child and the rest of us that “life for me ain’t been no crystal stair,” but “I’se still goin’, honey, /I’se still climbin’...” For most of us right now, life is no crystal stair, but we nevertheless must keep climbing.

#### Renewing Our Hearts and Minds

All of these poets have gone to the grave. Nearly all of them are little read these days, which is one reason I sought them out. Like all human beings, they endured and suffered personal tragedies, which are echoed in their words. If we have the ears to listen and the eyes to see, these writers of verse have lessons to teach us.

Great poetry, as is true in all classical arts, summons us to look to the stars, to know we are not alone in misfortune, to find the courage when we are on a walk through hell to keep on walking.



Ella Wheeler Wilcox circa 1919.

If we have the ears to listen and the eyes to see, these writers of verse have lessons to teach us.



Read poetry to soothe your soul. “Reading Woman,” after 1866, by Ivan Kramskoy. Oil on canvas. Tretyakov Gallery.



Release your inner actor and read aloud Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” The painting is by Richard Catton Woodville Jr.

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. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

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The Declaration of Arbroath's noble and freedom-loving words undoubtedly had an influence on the formation of the United States of America some 450 years later.

LITERATURE

# Scots Language, Poetry, and Freedom-Loving Influence Celebrated

## On the 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath

A reproduction of the "Tynninghame," 1320, copy of the Declaration of Arbroath.



EVAN MANTYK

When, long ago, the Roman Empire reached far and wide across Europe, there was one land where the Roman legions could not extend their iron grip and where Emperor Hadrian finally had to build a wall to protect the empire. This land of unmatched bravery and free spirits was none other than Scotland. About 1,200 years later, that same Scottish mettle stood in defiance of England when the English king, Edward II, tried to put someone of his liking on the Scottish throne. Scottish King Robert the Bruce picked up where the legendary Scottish hero William Wallace left off and led his people to their most famous victory at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Six years later, under pressure from Pope John XXII in Rome to make peace and give in to the English crown, the Scots again stood their ground. They came together as one people and sent a respectful but stern letter to the pope (who had vast political power in medieval Europe). The letter, signed by six Scottish earls and 31 Scottish barons on April 6, 1320—which was 700 years ago this month—became known as the Declaration of Arbroath and secured both Scottish freedom and good relations with the pope. The declaration states: "As long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be brought under English rule. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honors, that we are fighting, but for

freedom—for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself." Such noble and freedom-loving words undoubtedly had an influence on the formation of the United States of America some 450 years later. Many of America's Founding Fathers had Scottish blood coursing through their veins, and two signers of the American Declaration of Independence (James Wilson of Pennsylvania and John Witherspoon of New Jersey) were actually natives of Scotland. In a 1998 resolution, the U.S. Senate formally recognized that America's Declaration of Independence was "modeled on" the Declaration of Arbroath. **Scottish Roots** For the American poet Joseph Charles MacKenzie, the Declaration of Arbroath's 700th anniversary has been an occasion to celebrate his Scottish roots. A New Mexican native and current resident, MacKenzie grew up like many Americans, with a European last name scooped up out of America's deculturizing melting pot. However, unlike most who have been here for many generations, his father treasured his ethnic roots and made sure to pass that love on to his son. "I remember quite fondly my father and I attending a Burns Supper in Albuquerque the year I was selected to recite the 'Ode to a Haggis,'" said MacKenzie by email. The Burns poem on the classic Scottish dish begins:

**Scots**  
Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,  
Great chieftain o' the puddin'-race!  
Aboon them a' ye tak your place,  
Painch, tripe, or thairm:  
Weel are ye worthy o' a grace  
As lang's my arm.

**English**  
Good luck to you and your  
honest, plump face,  
Great chieftain of the sausage race!  
Above them all you take your  
place,  
Stomach, tripe, or intestines:  
Well are you worthy of a grace  
As long as my arm.

With such fun poetry, it is perhaps no wonder that MacKenzie continues to celebrate his Scottish heritage so vibrantly—he even can be seen dressed in a kilt on his poetry website. After childhood, MacKenzie would go on to study the Scots language during his graduate course in philology. In the 1990s, he entered the Scottish International Open Poetry Competition and became the first American to ever win it. While there, he had the opportunity to meet some of the great Scottish poets of the 20th century, who were part of the Scottish Renaissance movement. "To have spent an afternoon with Norman MacCaig in Edinburgh after reciting his poems in Irvine—and just to hear Norman's voice, really—or to speak with Iain Crichton Smith at length, and then to meet my future mentor, Sam Gilliland, whose Lallans [a dialect of Scots] speech still rings in my ears to this day, all these

experiences drew me into the language irrevocably," said MacKenzie. **A Resurging Language** More recently, through his connection to Gilliland, MacKenzie met Scottish poet George T. Watt. Watt, who writes exclusively in Scots, said that the Scots language is making a comeback. "As the spoken word between Scots, it is used quite a lot and there is currently a revival of interest in written Scots, especially in poetry. Lallans, the magazine of the Scots Language Society, which incidentally, is the only magazine that is all in Scots, has new writers appearing in each issue," said Watt, in an email interview. He is hoping the Scottish parliament will also step in to promote Scots, which is mostly absent from Scotland's English-language television and radio. Watt sees the renewal of interest in the Scots language by Americans with Scottish background, such as MacKenzie, as another positive development. "It is part of who they are. As part of their genetic makeup, it is surely part of their inner self," Watt said. **A Poetry Bridge** Undaunted by the pandemic and resulting social effects, MacKenzie and Watt have worked in conjunction with the New York-based Society of Classical Poets to create what MacKenzie calls a "poetry bridge" on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath.

The project includes a poem and translation by Watt in Scots, and a poem specifically honoring the Declaration of Arbroath, also in Scots, by MacKenzie. The poems are accompanied by Scots readings by Watts, as well as English translations. In a public comment, C.B. Anderson, an award-winning American poet, said he can't understand Scots but nonetheless enjoyed the reading: "I like the sound, either spoken or presented to the mind's ear, of the auld language. It gives me goose-flesh, and that is rare these days." MacKenzie sees the Declaration of Arbroath as not only relevant today but also "politically active." He describes himself as an "unapologetic, Catholic monarchist who rejects Vatican II" and who has always defended the royal line of Great Britain, the Stuarts, against "academic revisionism while arguing for the superiority of traditional forms of monarchy over modern parliamentarianism." Whether or not Scots is your cup of tea, the history behind the Declaration of Arbroath—a major work in Western civilization—has gained renewed attention. Thus, the poetry bridge of MacKenzie and Watts delivers a uniquely Scottish yet also universal message about celebrating traditions that enrich our lives and rejecting those ideas that seek to destroy such traditions. *Evan Mantyk is an English teacher in New York and president of the Society of Classical Poets.*

ORIGINAL SCOTS

**The Scribe fae Arbroath**  
by Joseph Charles MacKenzie (b. 1962)

Arbroath! Sae lief tae the hairts o the free  
Foondstane o Scotland's sovereignty  
Birthgrund o aw man's leeberty,  
Dear as oor faithers' bluid ye are tae me!

For we focht na fir glory, nor riches nor gain,  
Whilk a man gaes nae ower except wi his life,  
But we focht, to the soond o the drum an the fife,  
For the freedom alane.

I' ane vyce we declared to Christ's Vicar on yirth,  
Oor Maist Haly Faither, that Scotland's great worth  
Wis her lue o Saunt Andrew, her patron and laird,  
Saunt Peter's guid brither, oor protaktour an gaird.

I' ane vyce we declared that Laird Robert oor keeng,  
Wears by richt Scotland's croun, an true peace wad he bring,  
That sae lang as ane hunder o us shall be livin  
Oor kinrik to Edward wad niver be gwyyn.

But shuid Robert the Bruce oor great nation betray  
An gree tae subject us tae England ane day,  
We'll drive him awa, that he niver return,  
Frae the Scotland we deed fir at auld Bannockburn!

Arbroath! Sae lief tae the hairts o the free,  
Foondstane o Scotland's sovereignty  
Birthgrund of aw man's leeberty,  
Dear as oor faithers' bluid ye are tae me!

For we focht na fir glory, nor riches nor gain,  
Whilk a man gaes nae ower except wi his life,  
But we focht, to the soond o the drum an the fife,  
For freedom alane.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

**The Declaration of Arbroath**  
by Joseph Charles MacKenzie (b. 1962)

Arbroath! Belov'd of the hearts of the free  
Foundation stone of Scotland's sovereignty  
Birthplace of mankind's liberty,  
Dear as my fathers' blood are you to me!

For we fought not for glory nor riches nor gain,  
Which a man does not give, except with his life,  
But we fought, to the sound of the drum and the fife,  
That freedom would reign.

In one voice we declared to Christ's Vicar on earth,  
Our Most Holy Father, that Scotland's great worth  
Flowed from love of Saint Andrew, her patron and lord,  
Saint Peter's good brother, our defender and guard.

In one voice we declared that Lord Robert our king,  
Wears by right Scotland's crown, true peace would he bring;  
That as long as a hundred good Scotsman shall live  
Our kingdom to Edward, we never would give.

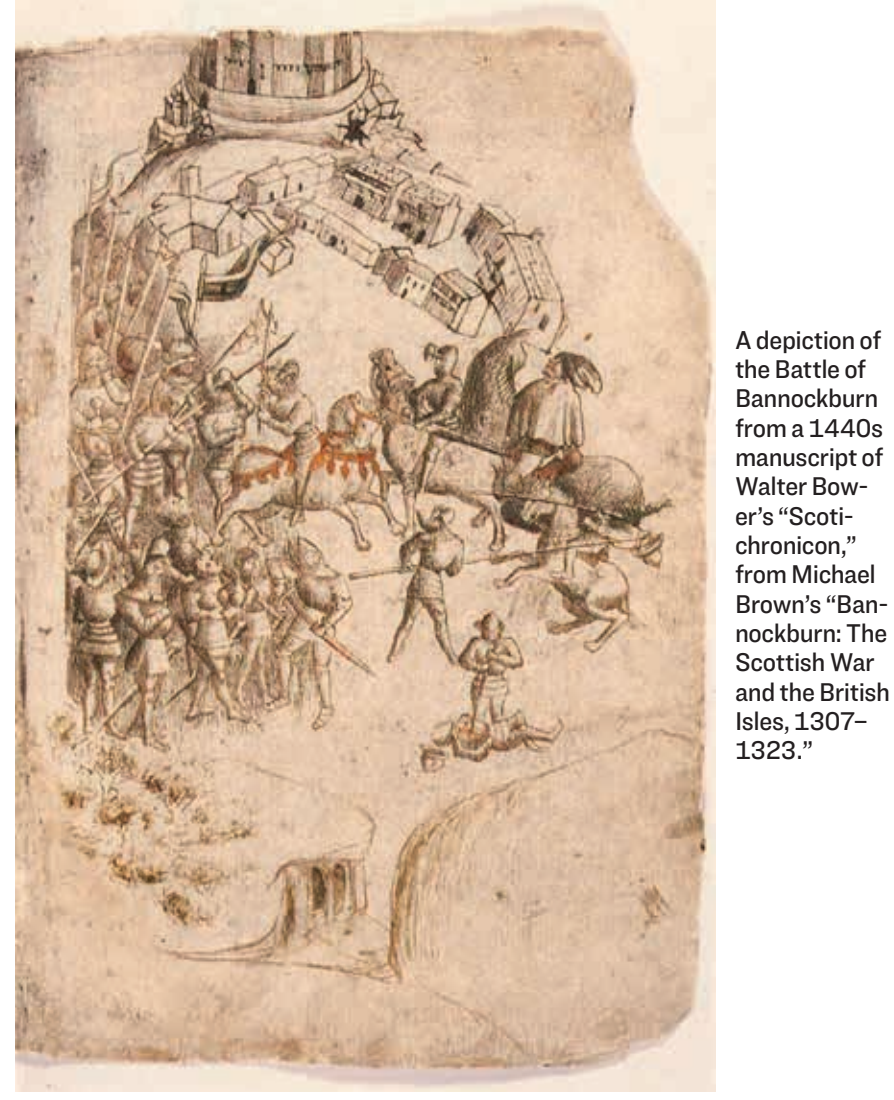
But should Robert the Bruce our great nation betray  
Or agree to subject us to England one day,  
Then we'll drive him away, that he never return,  
From the Scotland we died for at auld Bannockburn!

Arbroath! Beloved of the hearts of the free,  
Foundation stone of Scotland's sovereignty  
Birthplace of mankind's liberty,  
Dear as my fathers' blood are you to me!

For we fought not for glory nor riches nor gain,  
Which a man does not give except with his life,  
But we fought, to the sound of the drum and the fife,  
That freedom would reign.



Memorial for the Declaration of Arbroath, depicting a 1320 letter submitted to Pope John XXII held by Bernard, Abbot of Arbroath (L), and Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots, in Grampian Gardens, Arbroath, Scotland.



A depiction of the Battle of Bannockburn from a 1440s manuscript of Walter Bower's "Scotichronicon," from Michael Brown's "Bannockburn: The Scottish War and the British Isles, 1307-1323."

PD-US



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF TEATRO COMUNALE LUCIANO PAVAROTTI



The 2019 "La Bohème" at the Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti in Modena, Italy.

## OPERA

## A Little Bit of Pavorotti and a Lot of 'La Bohème'

YouTube for opera lovers

## BETTY MOHR

Imagine opening night. You're sitting on a plush red chair and looking out at a gilded stage in a stunning Italian opera house. Suddenly the auditorium goes silent as the orchestra begins to play the intoxicating overture from Giacomo Puccini's "La Bohème." A stranger walks out on stage. He has a large frame with the face of a cherub. You've never seen or heard him before. You think he's just another new tenor who has been given a chance to sing in the Teatro Comunale in Modena, Italy. There are so many operas playing in Italy all the time that you have no reason to believe this production will be any different than anything you've heard before.

But then the tenor, playing the part of the struggling artist Rodolfo, begins to sing. It's an electrifying voice, a voice that hits high

notes like you've never heard before. It's a voice you know you'll never forget, and it's a voice that startles you and others in the audience of the Teatro Comunale.

Then it goes on to stun the world.

On May 4, 1961, Luciano Pavarotti, then the fresh winner of the Achille Peri Competition in Reggio Emilia, walked out for the first time onto the stage of the Teatro Comunale in the role of Rodolfo in "La Bohème."

Indeed, the Teatro Comunale is proud that it gave its native son his big chance. After all, Pavarotti was born in Modena (Oct. 12, 1935) and spent his formative singing years in the city as a school teacher, and died (Sept. 6, 2007) in that same city of his birth.

It's still possible to hear what that voice

sounded like when Pavarotti sang, that first time, "Che Gelida Manina." Go to "Luciano Pavarotti - La Bohème 1961 debut" on YouTube.

The opera company, now called the Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti, celebrated its relationship with the legendary tenor by opening last year's season with a live streaming of "La Bohème" on Oct. 11 and 13, 2019.

### Love at First Hearing: 'La Bohème'

"La Bohème," written by Puccini around 1893, was based on Henri Murger's novel "Scènes de la vie de bohème." The Teatro Comunale's revived production for 2019 features Puccini's ravishing musical score and is a faithful remounting of the story that revolves around a series



of struggling bohemian artists trying to survive in the Latin Quarter of 1830s Paris.

The opera opens on an impoverished garret in which snowflakes can be seen falling outside the window. The destitute poet Rodolfo is burning pages of his play in order to keep warm, when he's interrupted by a knock on the door. It's his neighbor, a young woman named Mimi whom he has never met before. Her candle has blown out, and she asks Rodolfo if he has some matches to relight it. It's love at first sight as Rodolfo invites her to come in. Their eyes lock and their hands touch as he lights her candle.

We know they are doomed, but we can't resist a great love or the most seductive music in the pantheon of opera. We're not the only ones who find "La Bohème" irresistible. Indeed, this opera has been revived by more opera companies around the world than any other. It's so well-loved that the 1987 movie "Moonstruck" used the Puccini music throughout, and the highlight scene of the film follows the two impossible lovers to "La Bohème" at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Furthermore, Jonathan Larson based his 1996 musical "Rent" on "La Bohème." Instead of Mimi dying from consumption, as she does in the opera, in Larson's musical, she suffers from AIDS. And instead of Puccini's spine-tingling music, the musical score is filled with pop-style songs.

### Watch the 2019 Production

Teatro Comunale's revival of the opera in 2019 is faithful to Puccini's intent, although we can't help but wish we could have been present to witness the great Pavarotti step onto the opera stage for his debut performance. But, we can still catch the revival of the opera in its entirety at "Giacomo Puccini LA BOHÈME - OPERALIVESTREAMING" on YouTube.

That broadcast will be more than worth one's time. Puccini was a perfectionist, and the revival reflects the composer's attention to detail so that nothing in the production is superfluous to the story.

Moreover, in the roles of the young lovers, Rodolfo and Mimi, Matteo Desole and Maria Teresa Leva have great chemistry, which is why we find their tragic love so compelling—to the point of tears. And while Desole's high C's are not those of the famous Pavarotti, he does deliver a rich tenor that goes well with Leva's soprano, and he gives a standout rendition of "O Suave Fanciulla."

If opera lovers are suffering from withdrawal because of the pandemic lockdown and miss the passion, the romance, the excitement, and the drama of great opera, check out YouTube and mine its treasures.

*As an arts writer and movie/theater/opera critic, Betty Mohr has been published in the Chicago Sun-Times, The Chicago Tribune, The Australian, The Dramatist, the SouthtownStar, the Post Tribune, The Herald News, The Globe and Mail in Toronto, and other publications.*

## A Farce Beyond Funny

For your at-home enjoyment

## DIANA BARTH

Originally produced by London's National Theatre of Great Britain back in 2012 and later brought to Broadway's Music Box Theatre the same year, this side-splitting farce was available, free of charge, on the small screen via YouTube.

As if from a front-row seat, you'd be seeing a live performance of this major hit, filmed before a London audience.

Adapted by playwright Richard Bean from the 1746 commedia dell'arte classic "The Servant of Two Masters" by Carlo Goldoni, this hilarious version is set in 1963, in the rather tacky seaside town of Brighton. A dowdy assortment of characters follow their dreams, democratically divided between love and money, under Nicholas Hytner's fervent yet disciplined direction.

Hytner is aided and abetted by a top-drawer cast, headed by young scalawag farceur James Corden. Corden, who starred in Hytner's Broadway and film productions of "The History Boys" a few years back, wraps the audience around his pudgy finger.

Corden's character Francis Henshall is a gofer serving wealthy patrons: govners (governors). At first, he has only one client, Rachel Crabbe (Jemima Rooper), impersonating her recently murdered twin brother, Roscoe Crabbe (never seen).

The tough-strutting Rachel is here to collect money owed her brother by Brighton-fringe-underworld-type Charlie "the Duck" Clench (Fred Ridgeway), a rather good-natured, gentle soul. Charlie had promised his vapid daughter Pauline

James Corden won a Tony Award for "One Man, Two Guvnors," which was recently available on YouTube, courtesy of National Theatre Live's at-home programming.



(Claire Lams) to Roscoe, not realizing he's deceased. But Pauline insists she's in love with aspiring thespian Alan Dangle (Daniel Rigby), who emotes and poses spontaneously whenever he gets the chance.

Never mind the convoluted plot. Henshall, in his slightly loud plaid suit (courtesy of terrific set-and-costume designer Mark Thompson) is the true center of attention. He muses about his inner conflict between the need for food and love. Now he craves food and addresses the audience, pleading for a sandwich. When someone offers an unappetizing humus sandwich, Henshall alternates between being repelled and droolingly grabbing for it.

Suddenly, he's interrupted by the arrival of Stanley Stubbers (Oliver Chris), a phony snob who has fled to Brighton to lie low after murdering, either on purpose or by chance, the aforementioned Roscoe. Stubbers immediately hires Henshall to take charge of his oversized trunk. Now Henshall has two masters. Things are looking up.

The superbly slapstick trunk sequence features Henshall persuading two stalwart audience members to carry the weighty item into a nearby pub. Stubbers has just registered at the pub, where, unbeknownst to him, Rachel has also registered. She is in love with him despite his having murdered her brother. After all, love conquers all, right?

The dinner scene closing the first act is arguably the set piece of the entire show. Henshall engineers the proceedings, remarkably managing to have both Rachel and Stubbers served their meal without knowing of the other's presence.

And with outrageous aplomb, Alfie (Tom Edden)—an 87-year-old, stooped-over waiter, with tremors and a malfunctioning artificial heart—performs such physical shtick as would have had Charlie Chaplin look to his laurels. (Credited with choreographing the brilliant physical comedy

scenes is Cal McCrystal.)

Act 2 gives Henshall the opportunity to pursue his romantic desires, in the person of Dolly (Suzie Toase), Charlie Clench's impossibly curvaceous bookkeeper. Smiten, Henshall impulsively invites Dolly to spend a week with him in Majorca. But Dolly insists on a date first. When Henshall inquires of the audience as to what would constitute a good first date, several women simultaneously shout out an answer, which I won't divulge here. It would spoil your fun.

Of course, all is sorted out at the end. Music happily envelops the entire production, with original songs by Grant Olding. A four-piece skiffle combo called The Craze ushers the audience to their seats and plays brief, zippy interludes during scene changes. Corden himself contributes a snappy xylophone segment.

The production has the feel of British music hall or old vaudeville; the audience here seems a part of the action, with Corden's consummate skills making it all work neatly.

The National Theatre of Great Britain offered a statement preceding the performance, to the effect that the present pandemic has temporarily closed their theaters, making inroads on their profits. Thus, anyone who wishes can make a contribution to their organization, details being offered onscreen.

It is without doubt a worthy cause. This screening, which was available in early April, resulted in tens of thousands of viewer hits.

*The company will stream a different performance for free from 7 p.m. UK time (2 p.m. EST) every week, and then it will be available on demand until the following Thursday. Visit the National Theatre of Great Britain website for future showings.*

*Diana Barth writes for several theater publications, including New Millennium. She may be contacted at diabarth99@gmail.com*

## FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON

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

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# Watch 'The Work' Instead

## MARK JACKSON

Let me preface this review of "Welcome to the Men's Group," a comedy about modern men's-work groups, with a quote from my review of the documentary "The Work," which covers the same basic subject matter, except far, far more effectively. (In fact, there's no comparison.)

Of all the film critics on Rotten Tomatoes writing about the documentary "The Work," I'm the only one who has actually done the work (and facilitated the work) on display in this riveting documentary about healing, set in a maximum-security prison. And done it with three of the actual facilitators in the film.

In addition, it's pretty much guaranteed that I'm also the only film critic who's read all the literature about men's work since the 1980s, staffed five weekends, and attended a weekly men's group for six years.

I've read the other reviews. They're fairly clueless, writing about things they've never experienced. Here's the deal: Nobody likes this movie. But they don't like it for mostly all the wrong reasons, and they don't know what those reasons are.

## Circling Up

Lawyer Larry (Timothy Bottoms) wakes up in his brand new West Los Angeles McMansion, makes some coffee, and accidentally locks his chihuahua in a cupboard.

Soon, like dwarves arriving on Bilbo Baggins's doorstep, seven members of Larry's monthly men's group (they've been circling up for 10 years now) show up hauling a food fest.

After feasting and small talk, they do some scanty rituals, pass around the talking-stick, and share about work issues, dad issues, sex and women issues, children, and so on.

Some guys' issues are more serious than others'. Larry's depressed that his wife



Counterclockwise from man in blue shirt, Timothy Bottoms (C): Ali Saam, Joseph Culp, David Clennon, Mackenzie Astin, Terence J. Rotolo, and Phil Abrams in "Welcome to the Men's Group."



(Above) Clockwise from man in black shirt, Joseph Culp (C): Timothy Bottoms, Ali Saam, Stephen Tobolowsky, Terence J. Rotolo, Phil Abrams, David Clennon, and Mackenzie Astin, in "Welcome to the Men's Group."

(Left) A lot of the shenanigans just don't feel safe. (L-R) David Clennon, Joseph Culp, Ali Saam, Phil Abrams, and Terence J. Rotolo in "Welcome to the Men's Group."

dumped her meds down the toilet and vamoosed, and he's also facing financial problems. Latino, ex-military, personal trainer Eddie (Terence J. Rotolo) is about to become a dad and is pretending that's awesome.

Michael (director and actor Joseph Culp) is a sex addict. Hipster, hat-wearing, 70-something artist Fred (David Clennon) resents his woman crowding his bong-smoking freedom. And Carl (Stephen Tobolowsky, who played Ned Ryerson in "Groundhog Day") is suicidal.

There's a meek, new, red-haired recruit (Mackenzie Astin) who broadcasts plaintive, deer-in-the-headlights confusion, dismay, concern, reluctance, and so on, at the proceedings throughout, via eyebrow-acting, to the point where you want to slap him. (For the record, you don't just randomly add some new guy to an established men's group. He has to do his weekend first, be initiated, and learn the common language.)

accurate and makes the entire endeavor feel chaotic and dangerous.

2) This minimally diverse group, which includes an Arab (Ali Saam) and the aforementioned Latino, is pretty white, with, generally speaking, first-world problems. Which is largely true in America, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and Scotland. In fact, this cliché is best illustrated by what I once heard an irate white man shout at a giant circle of 100-plus white men: "MKP [Mankind Project] is basically a bunch of white men pretending to be Indians." However, what the film fails to show is that in the real men's work world, there is a sizeable number of African-American men in top leadership positions and, especially in New York, a large gay contingent.

Men's work clichés abound here; it's almost as if the writer put 100 men's groups through a sieve, gathered all the clichés together, and made a film about that. Almost.

**It can't decide what it wants to be: comedy or drama.**

3) It can't decide what it wants to be: comedy or drama. It's a hodgepodge, where the comedy is just not funny enough to work, and which doesn't set up the heavy drama that comes later. This incohesiveness is confusing, and when you add feelings of un-safeness, rambling and boring monologues, and a lack of context that makes everything feel like it's just TMI, you end up with this dud. And that's a crying shame. The writer-director clearly had high hopes and expectations, but badly misrepresented all of the following:

The international men's movement and men's work as it exists in the world today is a magnificent attempt by the world's men to recover their integrity, be authentic, accountable, and truthful; to face their deepest fears, have the courage to dig down, find, and heal the wounds that cripple their lives; and to find trust in other men to help them heal, to become earth stewards and better husbands and fathers. All of that, in context, can only be described as heroic by anyone who's ever witnessed it.

Men's work is about retrieving, rescuing, resuscitating, reviving, and resurrecting the tribal, sacred masculine, in order to attempt to help heal our messed-up world. And to fumble that ball with a flaccid, half-cocked comedy that portrays men as a passel of, basically, blithering idiots is a bit of a crime.

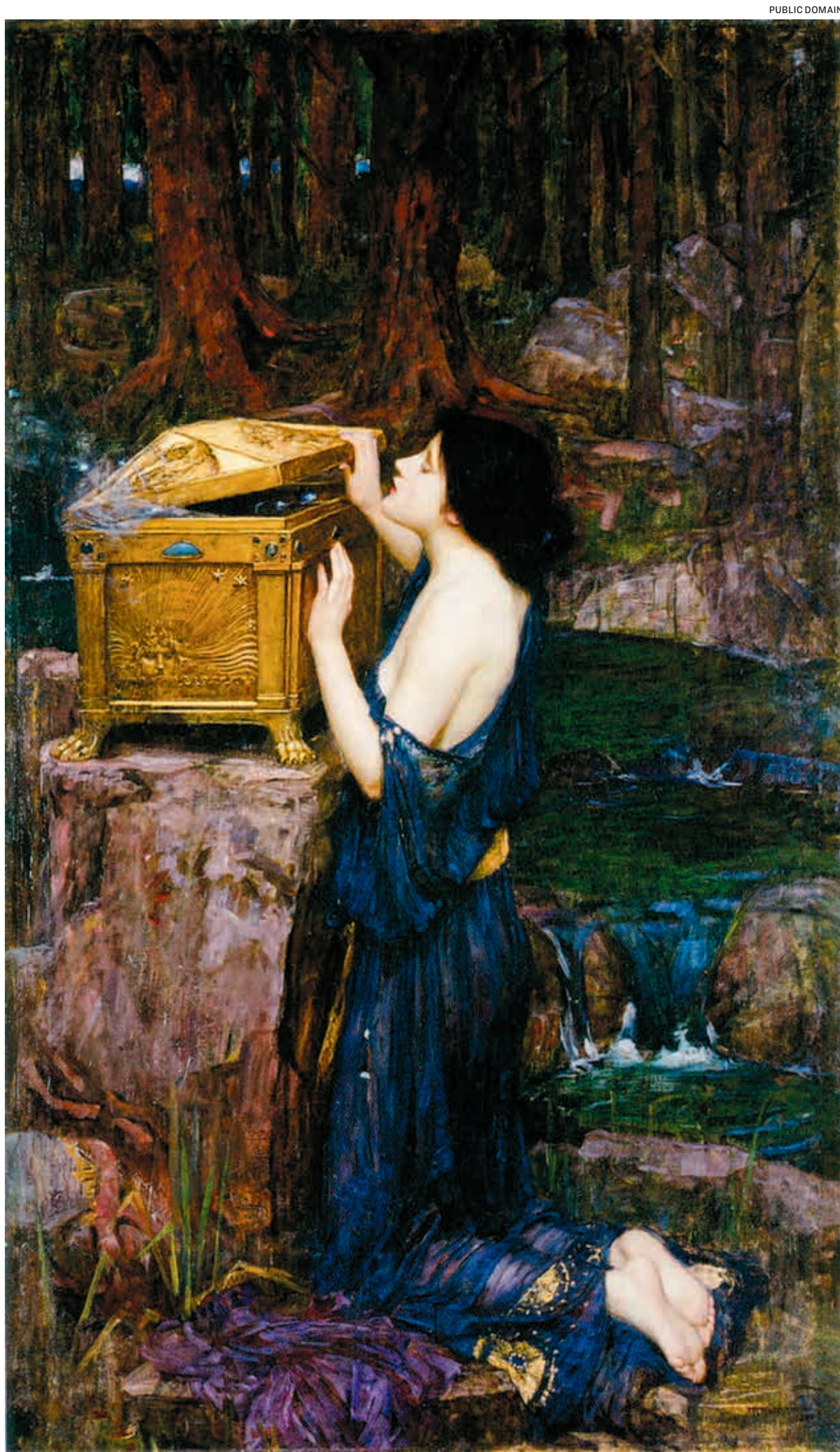
Do not watch "Welcome to the Men's Group." Watch "The Work" instead.



Behold the Beauty: On April 26, celebrate naturalist and painter John James Audubon's birthday. Audubon's seminal work, "Birds of America," was serialized between 1827 and 1838, in Edinburgh and London. Plate 17 of "Birds of America," by John James Audubon, depicts the Carolina turtle dove, now known as the mourning dove.

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"Pandora," 1898, by John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas; 35.9 inches by 59.8 inches. Private Collection.

REACHING WITHIN:  
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

## Deserving the Magic of the Gods

ERIC BESS

From time to time, humanity is dealt a hardship that is impossible to ignore. As the world currently deals with how to navigate the woes of the pandemic, I am left asking: What brought us here, and how might we deal with it?

### The Tale of Pandora

In framing this question, I came upon the tale of Pandora. Pandora's tale, as told by Hesiod in his "Work and Days," starts with the Titan Prometheus, who creates humans and steals the magic of fire from the gods and gives it to humans.

Zeus, angered by the theft, punishes Prometheus by having him chained to a rock, where an eagle will forever daily peck away at his liver. Zeus is dismayed that humans have the magic of the gods without their first proving themselves worthy. He decides that they must experience some type of loss in relation to having gained the blessings of fire.

Zeus orders the gods to create a female who is fashioned with all of the qualities that would make her both a blessing and a curse. The Olympians each give her some quality of their own, and Zeus calls her Pandora, meaning "she who was given all

gifts" and "she who gives all gifts." Zeus bestows her to Epimetheus, Prometheus's brother. It is at this point that she finds the box that she is told to refrain from opening. Her insatiable, greedy curiosity causes her to open the box, which in turn unleashes pestilence, death, hate, and every other woe upon humanity. Only hope remains locked inside.

### Waterhouse's 'Pandora'

In his painting titled "Pandora," John William Waterhouse depicts the crucial moment when Pandora opens the box.

The 19th-century English painter Waterhouse was greatly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who, according to the Tate art museum, "believed in an art of serious subjects treated with maximum realism. Their principal themes were initially religious, but they also used subjects from literature and poetry, particularly those dealing with love and death."

Waterhouse uses maximum realism to depict Pandora and her environment. The trees, rocks, water, and grass are painted in a very detailed way.

Though everything around Pandora is painted with attention and care, it's all darker than she is. If we squint at the painting, the details disappear, and Pandora becomes

a light shape in the center of the painting that stands out against and is framed by the surrounding dark mass.

I think Waterhouse wants to ensure that there are no questions about what the focal point is. The compositional elements and the degree of realism make it seem as if Pandora and the box are present, and we've happened upon her in the middle of the act. The relative darkness of the environment surrounding her, along with the smoke that emanates from the box, may represent the darkness she unleashes by opening the box.

### What We Forego by Lacking Patience

As she opens the box, I imagine Pandora thinking to herself: "I know that I'm not supposed to do this, but a little peek won't hurt anything. The box is golden and shiny. Something beautiful must be in it. Why should I not be allowed to look inside? I was created by the gods! Am I not entitled to the things I want?" She looks around, sees no one is looking, and opens it.

Pain, horror, hardship, sickness, and death emerge from the box and frighten her. Realizing her error, she slams the lid shut and traps hope inside. But why is hope inside of a box of horrors?

**As she opens the box, I imagine Pandora thinking to herself: 'I know that I'm not supposed to do this, but a little peek won't hurt anything.'**

It is because the gods wanted to offer us a way past our sorrowful condition, or is it because unfulfilled hope—when it's extreme—is just as painful as everything else in the box?

Either way, these painful troubles arise from certain behaviors that include cleverness, sneakiness, lying, and stealing. Prometheus cleverly steals fire from the gods and gives it to humans although he was not supposed to; as a consequence, hu-

mans lose the opportunity to learn the value of hard work because they didn't have to first prove themselves worthy of the gift.

Pandora sneakily disobeys the order to not look into the box because of her sense of entitlement and therefore wreaks havoc on the world. She doesn't have the patience to wait until she is granted permission to look in the box.

However, hard work and patience are important. They add value to our lives and teach us to appreciate what we've worked or waited for. In fact, hard work teaches us patience. It teaches us that it's fine to wait for what we want.

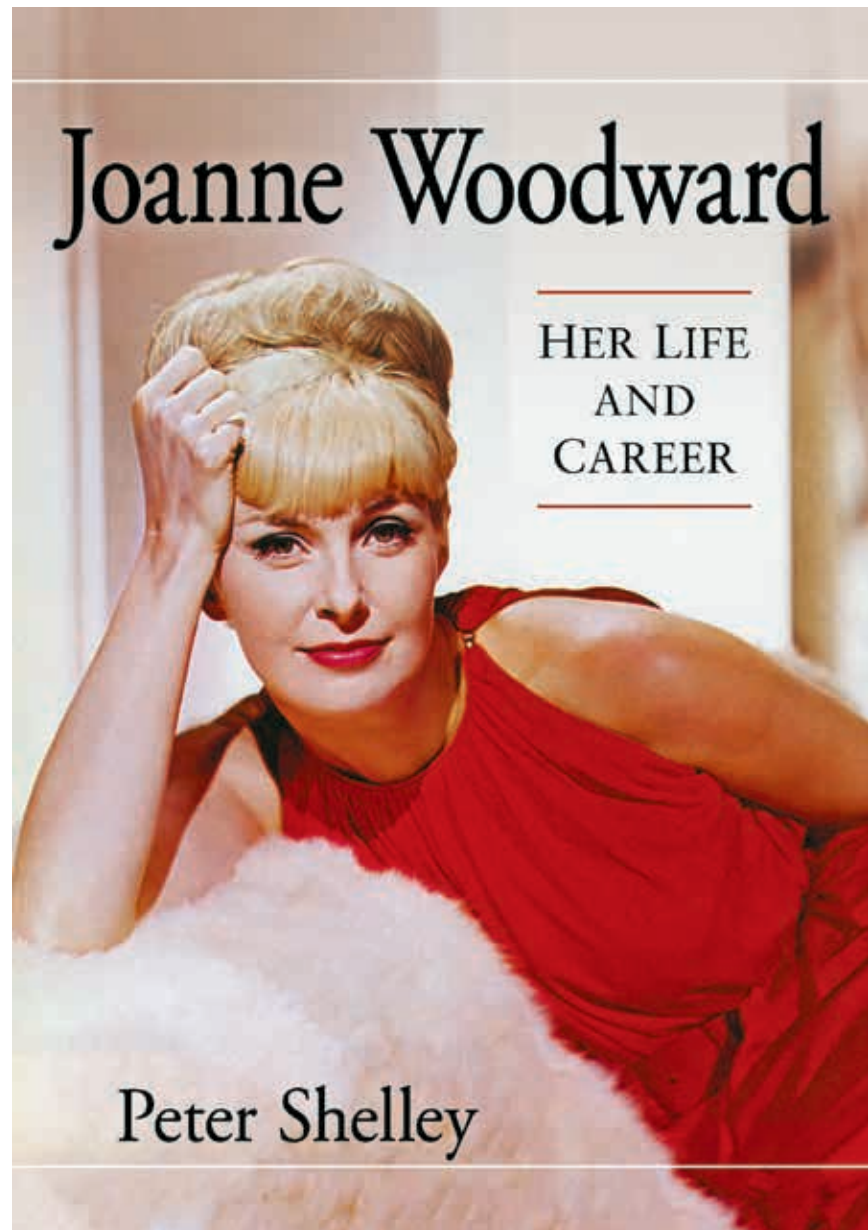
Hard work can also become a practice of gratitude. It provides us the opportunity to recognize and be grateful both for our own potential to achieve and for the outcome for which we work.

Without coming to appreciate the value of hard work, it's easy to fall into a mindset of entitlement, to disobey the rule of law, and to legitimize theft. Pandora is not only the embodiment of entitlement, but her actions are also its consequence: Those who feel entitled do, indeed, wreak havoc upon the world. If a person who, out of a sense of entitlement, finds that through lying, cheating, and stealing he gets what he wants, these behaviors may become habitual. This type of character can stem from a culture in which its people value the pleasures of comfort over hard work.

Pandora's story reminds me that without loss, there's no gain, and that it's more beneficial to intentionally lose through hard work first than it is to gain first through deception and be forced to lose later.

*Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions we explore in our series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.*

*Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSV).*



"Joanne Woodward: Her Life and Career" by Peter Shelley.

BOOK REVIEW

## A Talented Actress Seen Through Minutiae

JUDD HOLLANDER

For better or worse, actress Joanne Woodward (born Feb. 27, 1930) will always be linked with her late husband, Paul Newman. It's an issue brought up time and again in Peter Shelley's biography "Joanne Woodward: Her Life and Career," which looks at the couple's life together, interwoven with explorations of Woodward's professional career. Shelley notes that while there have been multiple biographies of Newman and of the two as a couple, this is the first work focusing specifically on Woodward.

While Shelley has certainly done his research on Woodward's career, including a detailed list of the actress's film, theater, and television credits, his efforts are not always so clear when it comes to Woodward as a person. All of the book's information come from sources of the time; that is, newspaper articles and television interviews, without any firsthand comments—such as from her children or longtime friends—to better put her life in perspective.

Though, as one reads, certain attributes of Woodward's personality do become clear.

Named after actress Joan Crawford, Joanne Gignilliat Trimmier Woodward was born in Thomasville, Georgia, and decided at an early age to become an actress. She appeared in numerous plays in high school and enrolled at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge with a major in drama. Dropping out after two years, she moved to New York City to study acting.

She was told almost immediately to lose her Southern accent as it would limit the roles available to her. However, in one of life's ironies, many of the parts Woodward is remembered for required a Southern dialect. Though after working to get rid of her accent, a process that required six months of vocal practice, it wasn't that easy to slip back into it again.

Woodward felt a good deal of turmoil when trying to balance marriage, children, and her career. She believed in the importance of family—a rare belief in Hollywood—due to her upbringing in the American South of the 1940s, and she often put her own career on hold to care for her husband and children. (She and Newman, whom she married in 1958, would have three children together.) At one point, Woodward refused to make films unless they were shot near where her husband was working.

Interestingly, while many considered Woodward to be the better actor and Newman the bigger star, Woodward was always thankful that she didn't have countless fans following her everywhere she went. She was also wary of the press, a factor that may have been a result of the couple's attempt to avoid officially commenting on their relationship while Newman was still married to his first wife.

It wasn't until later in life that she fully allowed herself to get back to her first love, the theater—both as an actor and a director. Woodward became heavily involved with the rehabilitation of Westport Country Playhouse, a well-known summer theater in Westport, Connecticut. She was the institution's artistic director for several years and helped to spearhead a massive renovation of the structure, turning it into a year-round performance venue. The Newmans also supported a variety of social, political, and environmental causes over the years.

Among the films of Woodward discussed are "The Three Faces of Eve," for which she won the Oscar for Best Actress; "Rachel, Rachel," a story that she and Newman, who directed the work, helped bring to the screen and which revitalized her career after a series of box office disappointments; and "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge," a project that Woodward tried to get made for over 20 years before it came to fruition. The book also looks at her many television roles, including the television movie "Do You Remember Love," in which she plays a woman diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease—a condition both she and her mother would contract in real life.

One won't find a lot of trivia in the book, though a few amusing stories do crop up. Joan Crawford made the comment that the night Woodward won the Oscar for "The Three Faces of Eve," she set Hollywood glamour back 20 years by wearing a handmade dress to the Academy Awards. Frugality was another of Woodward's qualities.

Also interesting is the effect that Woodward's character in the 1972 film "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds," a play about a terrible mother, had on her. She became depressed and suicidal during filming.

**She was told almost immediately to lose her Southern accent as it would limit the roles available to her.**

While Shelley mentions just about every acting role Woodward undertook, he focuses on minutiae rather than giving readers the big picture: His stream of comments on how her hair was styled and what costumes she wore for each of her roles quickly becomes annoying. He also lists nearly every public appearance she made.

The book also doesn't really have an ending. The final chapter deals with Newman's death in 2008 and the projects Woodward worked on after that until health issues forced her to retire. Yet there is no summing up of her life or career; rather, the work just stops with the reader left hanging.

"Joanne Woodward: Her Life and Career" presents some interesting incidents, but it goes too far into minute details while never offering a strong connection to the actress herself.

*Judd Hollander is a reviewer for stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle.*

**'Joanne Woodward: Her Life and Career'**

Peter Shelley  
McFarland and Company, Inc.  
184 pages; hardcover

## Seeing Red: Top 10 Films That Expose the Chinese Communist Party's True Colors

MASHA SAVITZ

While the pandemic proliferates across continents, so too does a global awareness of the duplicitous and insidious nature of China's regime. We are collectively coming to understand the magnitude of the devastation, and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) role in the COVID-19 outbreak, caused by the novel coronavirus, more aptly named the CCP virus.

With time on our hands under lockdown, many of us have an increasing appetite to understand how we have come to be in the situation we are in.

The following is a list of both documentaries and narrative features that shed light on the CCP, each focusing on a different aspect of the regime's reach and reign of terror.

### 'Red Reign'

I came to understand the extent of the CCP's oppression and rancid abuse of power when, in 2006, I first heard reports that the CCP was performing forced organ harvesting on its own citizens, practitioners of Falun Gong, which is a peaceful practice of mind and body. Shortly thereafter, I had the opportunity to interview David Matas, a Canadian human rights lawyer and former Nazi hunter, who was asked to investigate these allegations.

When I learned that even U.S. news agencies were bribed or threatened by the CCP to silence this story, I knew I had to make the documentary "Red Reign," which came out in 2013, explaining and exposing forced organ harvesting from



What going on across the street from the Chinese consulate in London?

prisoners of conscience.

Sadly, this crime against humanity continues today and now also victimizes Uyghurs and other vulnerable peoples.

### 'It's a Girl!'

China's now infamous policy of one child per family brought world attention to an issue that has its roots in many cultures and political systems around the world: the preference for male children and the abandonment, trafficking, and often murder of female children. "It's a Girl," shot in both India and China, sheds light on this heartbreaking practice, the cultural and political systems that allow it, and the women, mothers, and daughters who have fallen victim to this abomination.

### 'Death by China'

The totalitarian regime of China has immense control over its own capitalist markets and businesses, but that influence reaches far beyond its own borders to extend its position of strength to the world economy. Based on the book "Death by China: Confronting the Dragon" by Peter Navarro and Greg Autry and narrated by Martin Sheen, "Death by China: How America Lost Its Manufacturing Base" investigates China's corruption of world markets through abusive trade policies and currency manipulation.

Navarro claims China's rise to economic strength is based in large part on illegal trade subsidies that allow it to flood the United States with cheap products, mak-

ing it almost impossible for American companies to compete.

### 'Transcending Fear: The Story of Gao Zhisheng'

Written and directed by Wenjing Ma, the documentary "Transcending Fear: The Story of Gao Zhisheng" charts the life of one of China's most notable freedom fighters. From the humblest of beginnings, Gao, born in a cave, became one of China's top-tier attorneys, gaining the respect and admiration of the whole country. Some called him "the conscience of China."

But then, in the eyes of the CCP, he went too far. After speaking out about human rights abuses, he was abducted and tortured. His life and the lives of his family members were threatened.

Gao is now a renowned freedom fighter, but he had to make the choice between a fight for justice and truth and his own life. This film uncovers the fear that sits beneath the barbarism of the CCP.

The film was released in 2015; in 2017, Gao was arrested again and has not been heard from since.

### 'An Elephant Sitting Still'

The industrial wasteland of North China forms the backdrop—with its muted palette and characters often depicted in silhouette—for what many consider a classic of Chinese filmmaking, "An Elephant Sitting Still." Sadly, director Hu Bo died shortly after making the film.

While there is a ray of hope at the end, Bo's filmic description of the people and the place leaves no doubt that we are products of our landscape and environment. Populated by a teenage boy and his family whose lives are devoid of any real meaning or beauty, and who are given to sniping jealousies, the film gives us a window into life in the industrial North. It is a society, isolated and downtrodden, that has lost its way.

### 'Mao's Last Dancer'

It seemed that Li Cunxin was destined

to become a farm laborer in a destitute, small rural village in Shandong Province. But fate had another life in store for him. He was offered a chance to study at Madame Mao's Beijing Dance Academy, and the rest, as the saying goes, is history. "Mao's Last Dancer" is the story, taken from his own memoirs, of how Li rose to become one of the world's leading international ballet dancers. It would be the story of a dream come true if it were not for the brutal regime under which he was to study.

But Li persevered and eventually, in a cultural exchange, he was allowed to study in the United States. Upon his arrival, he was astonished at the freedom and opulence of the country, which ran directly contrary to the propaganda he had experienced his entire life under the rule of the CCP.

### 'Candlelight Across the Street'

The tender and inspiring documentary "Candlelight Across the Street" is about Portland Place, just off the busy shopping center of Oxford Street in London. The film tells of a building bought by the Qing Dynasty Empress Cixi, back in 1875, which now houses the Chinese Embassy to the UK.

Back in 2002, a small group of people appeared outside the Chinese Embassy, and they have been there, faithfully, in peaceful protest ever since. Who are they and why are they there, even through the coldest of winters? They take shifts to ensure someone is there 24 hours every day because, as they say, the CCP persecutes the Falun Gong practitioners 24 hours every day. This is their story.

### 'In the Name of Confucius'

Referred to as a Trojan horse, to infiltrate mainstream America and promote Chinese influence and interests abroad, the Confucius Institute (CI) had been attached, ostensibly as a Chinese-language learning facility, to as many as 1,600 college and university campuses around the world, according to the website for "In the

Name of Confucius."

Doris Liu's award-winning documentary focuses on a former CI teacher. When Sonia Zhao, who defected and made an initial complaint about the multimillion-dollar institute, one of Canada's top 10 universities and its largest school board found themselves embroiled in a growing global controversy as scholars, parents, and officials questioned the political influence and true purpose of CI programs.

### 'Letter From Masanjia'

Julie Keith, a private citizen living in Oregon, was astonished to find a letter hidden inside a box of Halloween decorations. The letter, a desperate plea for help, had been written thousands of miles away by Sun Yi, a political prisoner working in a forced labor camp, the Masanjia Labor Camp, in China.

Sun Yi's letter began an investigation that eventually led to massive labor reforms in China. This documentary, "Letter From Masanjia," directed by Leon Lee and released in 2018, tells a harrowing story of desperation that led to eventual victory.

### 'Claws of the Red Dragon'

Inspired by real-life events, the narrative drama "Claws of the Red Dragon" depicts the political battle over global 5G-cyberspace dominance. Following the arrest for U.S. crimes, on Canadian soil, of Meng Wanzhou, who is the heiress and CFO of telecom giant Huawei, the CCP relied on its usual gangster-like tactics to get its way: It retaliated by arresting and sentencing an American in China to death; it bribed a Huawei employee to convince his journalist wife to cooperate with its propaganda; and it threatened that reporter's Chinese family traveling abroad—all to ruthlessly ensure its "Belt and Road Initiative" and succeed at taking control of Western infrastructure at any cost.

*Masha Savitz is a freelance writer and filmmaker in the Los Angeles area.*



**POPCORN AND INSPIRATION:  
FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL**

Sylvester Stallone as the titular character in "Rocky."

## A Good-Hearted Classic About One Shot at Self-Respect

IAN KANE

“Rocky,” the timeless underdog story that captured the hearts of millions, opens on the cold, mean streets of Philadelphia in 1975. The titular character, Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), is an interesting mixture of seeming contradictions. Physically, he has an intimidating, brutish presence that makes his job as a loan-shark debt collector a shoo-in. However, as the movie rolls on, we see layers peel back and realize that Rocky has a tender, lovable side as well.

### ‘Rocky’ feels authentic as much as it does inspiring.

Rocky’s a troubled soul; he’s realized that at 30 years of age, he may no longer have what it takes to make anything out of his dwindling boxing career. The cantankerous owner of the local boxing gym where he trains, Mickey (Burgess Meredith), doesn’t care for the pugilist much. Mickey realizes that although Rocky has all of the tools to be a phenomenal boxer, his lack of focus has derailed his potential.

Director John G. Avildsen paints Rocky’s stagnated life well. We see the grimy, one-room apartment where he lives (with a fish and two turtles), and the bleak, frozen streets of the neighborhood he calls home.

When he’s not putting boxing or the beatdown on late debtors, he’s crudely attempting to court local pet store worker Adrian (Talia Shire). Adrian lives with her alcoholic brother, Rocky’s friend Paulie (Burt Young), who works at a butchery.

Rocky’s attempts to woo Adrian are hampered by two things: his tender-yet-coarse courting methods, and Adrian’s extremely skittish, introverted nature. However, these romantic scenes reveal the caring, protective qualities that lurk beneath Rocky’s unpolished exterior.

As Rocky drifts through his mediocre life, the undisputed Heavyweight Champion of the World, Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers), has a dilemma. An important, upcoming bout is on the ropes, since his opponent has pulled out because of an injury. As a publicity stunt, Creed decides to give a local boxer from Philadelphia a one-shot chance at greatness. Creed likes Rocky’s nickname of the “Italian Stallion,” so Balboa is chosen to replace the injured contender.

The only catch is that Rocky has only five weeks to train. Realizing that this is a once-in-a-lifetime



opportunity, he sets about to train himself with a burgeoning do-or-die spirit. Mickey shows up and asks to be his trainer, and although Rocky is still smarting from the old timer not believing in him, he eventually agrees. This training period culminates in a rousing scene where Rocky raises his fists at the top of the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s stairs, to Bill Conti’s song “Gonna Fly Now.”

#### A Character Study

In fact, Rocky seems oddly self-aware that his chances of winning a fight with such an accomplished champion as Creed are pretty slim. But he also realizes that he’ll never be able to live with himself if he doesn’t take the shot. He figures that winning the bout isn’t as important as fighting his heart out, and thereby getting the respect that has eluded him.

But Avildsen doesn’t immediately segue to the actual fight. At its heart, wrapped inside of a sports drama, this film is a character study and a romance. It’s more concerned about the everyday life of its characters in their squalid surroundings, as well as their relationships.

#### ‘Rocky’

**Director**  
John G. Avildsen

**Starring**  
Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, Burt Young, Burgess Meredith

**Running Time**  
2 hours

**Rated**  
PG

**Release Date**  
Dec. 3, 1976 (USA)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

For instance, Paulie, like Rocky, is unhappy with how his life has turned out. However, instead of doing anything about it, he has become a much more deeply troubled man. As Rocky’s big, anticipated final bout with Creed approaches, Paulie is a boiling cauldron of bitterness and despair.

As Young seems to disappear into the character of Paulie, Stallone’s performance as the reluctant hero is likewise superb, and Shire plays his shy object of attention with the utmost of talent. Meanwhile, the screenplay (also written by Stallone) is well-paced. It pairs well with Avildsen’s direction and allows the perfect amount of time for each of the characters to live within their dramatic beats.

Although the classic tale of the underdog is an old one, once in a while all of the pieces just seem to fall together tighter. “Rocky” feels authentic as much as it does inspiring, as ordinary folks dream and strive for something greater in life. As the climactic fight at the end of the film shows, it is not whether someone wins or loses—it’s having the heart to try that truly counts.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

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