# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS© CULTURE



One of the world's last horsehair weavers, John Boyd Textiles Ltd. has woven horsehair fabric in Castle Cary, Somerset, in southwest England, since 1837.

One of the World's Last **Horsehair Weavers**...4

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#### REFLECTIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS

#### ART APPRECIATION 101:

# Benefits and Pleasures

#### **JEFF MINICK**

n "What's Wrong With the World," G.K. Chesterton wrote, "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly." Here and elsewhere, Chester-

ton defends the amateur against the professional, what he called the "generalist" against the specialist. "Amateur" derives from the Latin "amare," "to love," and applies to anyone who performs a task or engages in an art, sport, or hobby out of love and not money. We run our fingers up and down a keyboard, we dig in the dirt and care for our beloved garden, we play golf or tennis for fun and exercise, or we scratch out some verse every morning before the rest of the household rises. We give ourselves to

at them. In "Orthodoxy," Chesterton expands his definition of amateur, stating that "the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves—the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state."

these things because they please us,

not because we are particularly good

Which brings me, in a roundabout way, to the subject of art appreciation.

#### Here's an Opportunity

In this arena I am very much the amateur, untrained in aesthetics and often dazzled, dumbfounded, or depressed by a painting or a piece of statuary without really understanding why. Five years ago, a gift allowed me to spend a month in Italy, where almost daily I visited churches and museums, seeking relief from the brutal heat of the streets—it was the middle of summer, and Rome was experiencing a drought and temperatures in the 90s—and finding inspiration and beauty in the art of that ancient city. No guides and only the most cursory of books accompanied me on my explorations; I simply looked at paintings and sculpture, and took what pleasure I might from them.

Most of you reading these words are, I suspect, still in the pandemic shutdown, staying at home, entering stores only to buy essentials, prisoners of a sort in your own houses and apartments. With schools closed, many of you are teaching children or grandchildren at the dining room table, some of you through online courses offered by your child's school,

some through independent learning. Some of our politicians, past and present, have said, "You should never let a serious crisis go to waste." Well, I am going to turn that bit of cynicism on its head. Our present crisis has delivered a golden opportunity for us to visit the masterpieces of the past, share them with our young people, and discover in our excursions the hope, comfort, and strength such art affords us.



You may not necessarily agree with the experts about paintings. Sister Wendy Beckett's "The Story of Painting."

Because my public library is closed for the time being, and because I have

packed up 90 percent of my books in anticipation of a move, I have only two art books available to me: a jacketless, coffee-blotched, and beaten-up copy of Sister Wendy Beckett's "The Story of Painting" and Patrick De Rynck's marvelous "How to Read a Painting: Lessons From the Old Masters." In his excellent guide, De Rynck explores paintings from the late Middle Ages through the early 18th century, explaining to an audience often unfamiliar with Christian symbolism and mythological figures the meanings behind these great treasures.

Week 18, 2020. THE EPOCH TIMES

Both books sit on a shelf beside my desk, and I open them frequently. On these excursions, I have realized that we don't always need to accept the opinions of the experts. Sister Wendy Beckett, for example, describes Georges de La Tour's "The Repentant Magdalen" by writing "the Magdalen does not so much repent as muse," whereas I find this portrait of quiet repentance much more realistic than some anguished and fevered portrait. So as we proceed, bear in mind that you are entitled to your own interpretation of some particular painting.

#### Like poetry, like great literature, 'reading' a painting makes us more fully human.

#### Online Art

Of course, we don't need books to make art a part of our lives or of our school curriculum. For better or for worse—in this case, for better—we live in an age when the world is at our doorstep, great art at our fingertips. We can open the screens of our electronic devices and find museums, galleries and websites galore

Let's begin with a visit to "Google Arts & Culture." Hit "Explore," scroll down a bit, click on "Explore by time and color," choose "Time," and click "1500" on the timeline, as I did, and you will be treated to an amazing array of great paintings.

Suppose we find ourselves enamored of the Dutch masters—not to be confused with the cigars. Off we zip wingless to Amsterdam and the Rijksmuseum, where we can view at our leisure paintings by Rembrandt, Vermeer, and their contemporaries, all living in what we now call the Dutch Golden Age of Painting. Here to our heart's content we can immerse ourselves in canvas, paint, brushstrokes, and light.

#### Lagniappe

Parents especially might employ these paintings as tools to teach not just art but also history, fashion, and geography. Suppose, for example, you decide to explore the work of Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens. You Google his name, and there across the top of your screen appear dozens of his works depicting historical events, mythology, religion, and everyday life in Antwerp. Here are his paintings "Samson and Delilah," "Daniel in the Lions' Den," "The Fall of Phaeton," "Medusa," "Saint George and the Dragon," as well as portraits of various citizens, and much more.

Begin your adventure by selecting a particular painting, showing it to your children, and introducing them to the artist. Read with them a little about what the painting means, and then explore the story behind the art. Who were Samson and Delilah? Who was Medusa? You can charge off in all sorts of different directions. An example: Rubens's "Portrait of Susanna Lunden" or "The Four Philosophers," which Rubens created as a memorial to his deceased brother, might spark a discussion of fashion, hairstyles, and makeup of that time. Good detectives



Visit the famous art museums of the world-right now. The façade of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, as seen from Museum Square.

will engage in more online investigation of such topics.

(An aside: If your children tire of art, Good Housekeeping offers a link to many other virtual tours: museums, zoos, and amusement parks. Here are educational romps with creatures from sharks to elephants, and with historical artifacts from Ancient Egypt to the present time; you can even visit Disney World without shelling out money or standing in line.)

**Connecting the Cultural Dots** When we study these paintings in this fashion—entering them instead of simply looking at them and moving on—we not only come to appreciate the artwork, but we also acquire what scholar, teacher, and author

E.D. Hirsch calls "cultural literacy," which he defines as the "network of information that all competent readers possess." Readers unfamiliar with fairy tales and traditional children's poetry, with Greek and Roman mythology, with Bible stories, and with other key elements of our civilization find themselves limited in their understanding of information and knowledge that was once relatively common among Europeans and Americans.

We live in an age when the visual videos, television, and our electronic gadgets—dominates print. Many, for instance, prefer watching a movie about William Wallace than reading about him. The study of a masterpiece allows our children and us a meeting

place between what we see in a painting and what lies behind the painting, a nexus of entertainment and education allowing us to broaden our cultural literacy.

Like poetry, like great literature, "reading" a painting makes us more fully human, more aware of the sorrows and joys of human beings, connecting us to a past that can comfort our present and enlighten our future.

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 to follow his blog.





(Top) "The Repentant Magdalen," circa 1635–1640, by Georges de La Tour. Oil on canvas. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, National Gallery of Art.

(Above) "The Milkmaid," circa 1657-58, by Johannes

(Below) "Daniel in the Lions" Den," circa 1614-1616, by Peter Paul Rubens. Oil on canvas. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.







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through a hackle, a large comb with metal teeth. 3. Dyed horsehair is

combed on a hackle in

preparation for weaving.

4. John Boyd Textiles
Ltd.'s unique looms,
patented in 1872,

Workers prepare a press full of horsehair fabric.

are now powered by

electricity.

A press full of horsehair fabric is tightened.

7. Lowering rolls of horsehair fabric from a factory window.

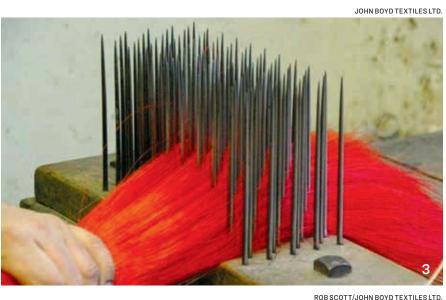








THE EPOCH TIMES Week 18, 2020





CRAFTSMANSHIP

John Boyd Textiles Ltd. offers custom, hand-guided embroidery on all its horsehair

fabrics, often using historic motifs.

# One of the World's Last Horsehair Weavers

How John Boyd Textiles Ltd. came to make a modern-historic fabric



#### LORRAINE FERRIER

or nearly 150 years, the production process at John Boyd Textiles Ltd. has barely changed. From its factory in Castle Cary, Somerset, in the southwest of England, John Boyd Textiles weaves horsehair cloth on the same looms that John Boyd patented in 1872, although the looms are now powered by electricity rather than steam, and before that, by a waterwheel

waterwheel.
As one of the world's last horsehair weavers, John Boyd Textiles ships its fabric worldwide. "We probably work with about 30 different countries around the world," said Anna Smith, managing director and owner of John Boyd Textiles. America and Germany are the company's biggest markets, both having had horsehair weaving industries.

#### The Tradition of Horsehair Fabric in the UK

For centuries, up until the Industrial Revolution, horses were an indispensable part of daily life in England. They helped work the land and were the main mode of transportation. For practical purposes, working horses' tails were cut short, similar to some of the horses depicted by 18th-century painter George Stubbs, Smith explained. And in Victorian times, horse tails were cut fashionably short, she added.

In the UK, horsehair weaving was a cottage industry found mainly in Somerset (southwest England), Suffolk (southeast England), and Scotland: all agricultural areas with an abundant source of working horses, Smith said.

The earliest reference of horsehair being woven and used as upholstery cloth is from about 1750, she said. Horsehair was the fabric of choice for preeminent 18th-century designers such as

Horsehair Thomas Chippendale and George Hepplewhite.

In the early 1800s, John Boyd, a textile merchant from Scotland, visited Castle Cary. Seeing the potential for horsehair weaving, he settled there and began weaving in his cottage. In 1837, the year of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, Boyd began to expand his business, establishing a factory in 1851.

Up until the Elementary Education Act of 1870 that mandated children between the ages of 5 and 12 to attend school, children worked across all aspects of industry. Boyd's factory was no different. Children actually sat within each loom, passing up horsehair to the weavers hair by hair.

With the advent of the automobile, Castle Cary's supply of horsehair lessened, so the company directors traveled by train to London and met overseas horsehair brokers. Up until the 1905 Russian Revolution, John Boyd

Textiles imported horsehair from Russia.

Today, the company imports the horsehair differently. "Now it's mainly Mongolian and Siberian hair, which comes through China—so it's a bit like the old-fashioned silk route—and it usually takes around three to five months to import the hair," Smith said. Interestingly, a harsh climate such as Mongolia's is believed to grow stronger horsehair, she said.

One-of-a-Kind Weaving
Most of the 12 staff members at
John Boyd Textiles are locals,
some of whom have worked at
the company for nearly 40 years.
Smith considers the company
lucky to have such a workforce,
one that's also multiskilled and

able to cover each other's jobs.

Training is in-house and covers all aspects of the production process. "Weaving is the most skilled job, so we'd start off with processes like dispatching an order,

Working horses' tails are kept short for practical purposes, as in the George Stubbs painting "A Saddled Bay Hunter," 1786. Oil on panel; 21 3/4 inches by 27 3/4 inches. Berger Collection, Denver Art Museum.

Horsehair is cut from live horses' tails for the same reason live sheep are sheared for their wool. threading up the looms, warping [arranging the vertical yarn, or warp, on the loom in preparation for weaving], and then they'll move on to weaving," Smith said.

move on to weaving," Smith said.

"We're quite small-scale. We have about 30 looms and they each produce one piece [of cloth] a month, so 50 meters [about 54 yards] a month. So it's the same speed as hand weaving," she said. "Our fabrics are at least 70 percent horsehair. We don't mix

other fibers into the weft."
Weft is the horizontal thread,
in this case the horsehair, that is
woven into the warp on the loom
frame. John Boyd Textiles' warps
are made from cotton, silk,
or linen.

The looms are one-of-a-kind. "We have a unique picking mechanism, which you won't see on any other loom," Smith said. That mechanism does the same job the child workers did prior to 1870, selecting one hair at a time to weave into the cloth. The factory engineers make different "pickers" according to the hairs' thicknesses.

Most of the machine parts are manufactured in-house or sometimes specially commissioned, although generic parts such as reeds and heddles (where the warp is threaded onto the loom) can be bought from outside suppliers.

Weaving With Horsehair
John Boyd Textiles weaves two
widths of horsehair cloth based
on color: A black or dark-colored
fabric and a narrower white or
pale-colored fabric. White horsehair is much more expensive than
its colored counterpart because

there's a greater demand for pure white hair, for violin bows, for

example.

For horsehair weaving, the hair is cut from live horses' tails for the same reason that live sheep are sheared for their wool: Hair or wool from a dead animal doesn't have the same shine or vitality and won't dye properly, Smith said.

Once cut, the horsehair is cleaned and sorted, just like wool. Up until the 1950s, this sorting, known as hairdressing, happened at John Boyd Textiles, but now it occurs overseas before the horsehair is exported. A hairdresser sorts the hair into different lengths, sending the short horsehair to be used for brushes, sporrans (a pouch worn on kilts), and judges' wigs, for example. And the longer hair is used for things like violin bows, fishing lines, and rope; of course, it can also be woven into horsehair fabric.

"If you go far enough back, it was used as a stiffener for fabric in clothing, because crinoline was made out of horsehair," Smith said.

The horsehair is dyed ondemand in small batches on

The horsehair is dyed ondemand in small batches on the premises. "It is quite skilled because you're dealing with a natural material and that does vary a bit in color," she said. Nevertheless, just about any color can be produced.

Once dyed, the horsehair is pulled through a hackle (a comb with metal prongs) to prepare the hair for weaving. If white horsehair is used, all the dark hairs are taken out by hand. Then the horsehair is combed through before weaving. Once woven, the

fabric is pressed, giving it its sheen.

Customers prefer plain fabric for upholstering, particularly for furniture that won't often be recovered. The original classic plain black sateen horsehair fabric has always been popular, but Smith notes that the company is now producing more colored horsehair fabric—taupe, mushroom, and white—which is quite popular at the moment. The John Boyd Textiles herringbone design is particularly popular as a texture rather than a pattern, she added.

For nearly 30 years, John Boyd Textiles has worked with an embroiderer who uses an old embroidery machine to hand guide the stitching (hand-guided embroidery), often according to historic designs.

#### Horsehair, the Modern-Historic Fabric

John Boyd Textiles' customers are mostly architects, designers, upholsterers, and antique restorers, as well as contractors for hotels, restaurants, corporate boardrooms, and the like. And the fashion industry uses horsehair for accessories like footwear, handbags, and belts, or for cuffs, collars, and jacket pocket edges.

Other trade comes from muse-

ums and historic buildings: "We do some work for the Oxbridge colleges, as most of them have horsehair fabric on their seats." Smith said.

In America, horsehair from
John Boyd Textiles is in the White
House, and Mount Vernon asked
John Boyd to quote a price for

reupholstering the chairs that America's founding fathers sat on for the first cabinet meeting,

Smith said.
Horsehair is incredibly unique.
Not only does it last over 100
years, but "it passes all fire tests, so match and cigarette tests," she said. "It passes all the acoustic tests, so it's actually used in quite modern applications for speakers and cinema rooms." All these qualities make horsehair an attractive multipurpose fabric—enduring for generations, as our forefathers' furniture attests to.

To find out more about John Boyd Textiles' traditional horsehair fabric, visit JohnBoydTextiles.co.uk



John Boyd Textiles' black sateen is a historic horsehair fabric that remains a popular choice today. Puffen Upholstery, in Norway, covered these chairs.

# A Star of Yesteryear

**JUDD HOLLANDER** 

t can be a challenge to create a complex portrait of a man when any mention of his name calls to mind a single film role, one from more than eight decades ago. But that is exactly what author Holly Van Leuven provides in the informative and entertaining "Ray Bolger: More Than a Scarecrow," the title referring to Bolger's iconic turn in the 1939 film "The Wizard of Oz."

Raymond Wallace Bolger (1904-1987) was a dancer, comedian, and actor, with a career spanning over 60 years. It included vaudeville, musical theater, movies, nightclubs, and television.

#### **Raymond Wallace Bolger was a** dancer, comedian, and actor, with a career spanning over 60 years.

Born into a working-class Irish-Catholic family, Bolger grew up in Dorchester, Massachusetts. One of his early influences was the Frank L. Baum "Oz" books, which his mother encouraged him to read. Although he had an eye toward a career as an insurance salesman, his passion for dance manifested in his early teens.

Learning his craft on the streets of Boston, Bolger began to mimic other performers of the day, eventually coming up with a looselimbed frenetic routine of movement combined with tap, splits, and high kicks.

#### **Unavoidable Gaps in Our** Knowledge

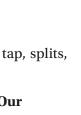
Not only does Van Leuven provide an exploration of Bolger's life and career, but she also re-creates the eras in which he worked. Written in an inviting style without being overcomplicated, the author introduces readers to vaudeville in the 1920s, then the growing popularity of film, and later, television.

Van Leuven's research, a process that took seven years and saw her become the first researcher to gain access to Bolger's personal papers in the UCLA Special Collections Film Library, revealed several gaps in his history, particularly of his early childhood and his relationships with his family—subjects he refused to talk about.

The star remarked at one point, "No one will ever learn what I was before I made it." He preferred for people to know him through his stage persona: a genial soul, always ready to talk about the world of show business.

One personal aspect of Bolger's life which is explored is his 57-year marriage to Gwendolyn Rickard. It was quite loving from all accounts, despite the separations they endured when Bolger was on the road.

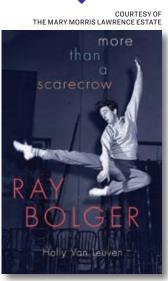
At one point, Gwen, an aspiring actress, became Bolger's confident, adviser, and greatest advocate. She was also an associate producer for the 1948 musical comedy "Where's Charley?" which netted Bolger the Tony for Best Actor. And she was deeply involved in Bolger's television series "Where's Raymond?" (1953–1955). The was renamed "The Ray Bolger Show" during its second





Ray Bolger in 1942 (L), and in 1939 as the Scarecrow

> An informative and entertaining biography.



"Ray Bolger: More Than a Scarecrow" Holly Van Leuven Oxford University Press 256 pages, hardcover

Bolger's work on the stage, where he felt most at home, is covered extensively. In addition to "Where's in "The Wizard of Oz." Charley?" his other Broadway appearances included the Rodgers and Hart musicals "On Your Toes" (1936), choreographed by George Balanchine—the highlight of which is Bolger's performance in

the jazz ballet "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue"—and "By Jupiter" (1942). While a tireless performer who took great delight in improvisation at the drop of a hat, Bolger's lack of formal training would prove detrimental later in his career as he could not learn complicated choreography properly.

Also working against him were the changing tastes. By the late 1940s, Bolger was already considered something of a nostalgic

#### The Stage Here and Abroad

Bolger's film work is also covered nicely, including the film adaptation of "Where's Charley?" (1952), and, of course, "The Wizard of Oz." He developed a friendship with Judy Garland during filming and later, when the two appeared in the 1946 movie "The Harvey Girls," noted how drugs had taken their

For the most part, however, Bolger was not happy working in film or

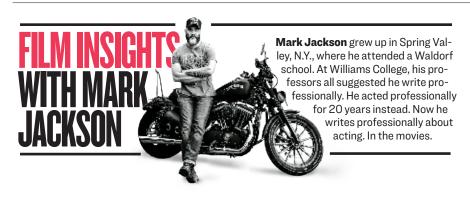
television. He often felt constrained by restrictions of the camera and other technical aspects of the mediums. He projected an oversize personality when he danced, which worked far better on stage.

Perhaps the most intriguing section of the book concerns Bolger's work for the USO during World War II, when he headlined and managed a tour to the South Pacific. He often performed for soldiers quite close to the front lines. Bolger had a deep respect for those serving in the armed forces, many of whom just wanted a little taste of home before returning to the field.

The book closes with an extensive section of notes, some of which offer trivia that didn't fit into the book. The only thing really lacking is an appendix listing Bolger's theater, film, and television credits, which would have nicely rounded out the work.

When asked if he received residuals from "The Wizard of Oz," Bolger would usually reply: "Just immortality. I'll settle for that." As Van Leuven clearly shows, Bolger had quite the life—one that added up to far more than just a man of straw.

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



POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

# **Uproarious Odd Couple** on the Road Film



Charles Grodin (L) and Robert De Niro star in "Midnight Run."

#### **MARK JACKSON**

or "Popcorn and Inspiration" this week, I'm choosing 1988's "Midnight Run" for a few reasons. 1) It's one of the funniest American movies ever made and we all need a good laugh right about now, and 2) it has, a certain twisted nobility—a moral code and set of ethics the two main characters live by, which ultimately prevail—and, should you see the movie, I think you'll find it inspiring.

It's also the first movie I saw upon returning to America after living in Germany for five years. I cried laughing, floored with grateful reverse culture shock and warm fuzziness for the illogical, quirky humor shared by Americans and Brits. Germans find logic (where you can see the punchline coming from a mile away and march right up to it) knee-slappingly funny.

I still appreciate that mid-1990s Beck's beer ad featuring a German comic at an American comedy club: "Good even-ingk, ladies and germs. I just flew in from Berleeen. Boy, are my ahms tie-yuhd" (flaps elbows). Voiceover: "Germans don't do comedy. Germans do beer." "Senk you. 1 be here all ze veek."

Americans do comedy, and if you haven't seen "Midnight Run" yet, you're in for a

#### **Never Got Its Just Due**

"Midnight Run" actually opened on the same day (July 20, 1988) as "Die Hard," which buried it at the box office, and it therefore never really had a chance to

However, there's a certain blue-collar demographic pocket in America where this film will live on forever. I still hear manly guys quoting it 30 years later: I'd just gassed my bike up at a trucker café two years ago, was enjoying a coffee, and

Martin Brest

Starring Robert De Niro, Charles Grodin, Joe Pantoliano, Yaphet Kotto, Dennis Farina, John Ashton

Rated

**Running Time** 2 hours, 6 minutes **Release Date** 

\*\*\*

Date: July 20, 1988

at a nearby table of construction guys, one fellow goes, "Serrano's got the disks! Serrano's got the disks!" And every man in the place looked over, nodded knowingly, and chuckled appreciatively.

Director Martin Brest had just scored big directing the young, incandescent Eddie Murphy in "Beverly Hills Cop." Next up for him was this sidesplitting story about Jack Walsh, an ex-cop turned bounty hunter (Robert De Niro), who uproariously schleps mild-but-stubborn accountant Jonathan "The Duke" Mardukas (Charles Grodin) across America to Los Angeles, to deliver him to his lying, grinning, sleazebag bail bondsman Eddie Moscone (Joe Pantoliano).

The Duke, though shrewd, did a noble but incredibly stupid thing: He embezzled \$15 million from deadly mob-boss Jimmy Serrano (Dennis Farina) to be Robin Hood.

#### Odd Couple on the Road

After about 15 minutes of establishing Jack's bounty-hunter status and his relationship to his hilarious, sneaky boss Eddie, Jack is hired to track down The Duke. This leads to the memorable scene of Jack flashing his badge at The Duke from behind Mardukas's plexiglass shower door, to avoid The Duke's snarling white dog.

Now, Jack's got five days to get Mardukas to L.A., all the while hindered and waylaid by 1) Jack's rival bounty hunter (John Ashton), 2) slightly inept, easily ruffled agent Alonzo Mosely of the FBI (Yaphet Kotto), and 3) the Chicago mafia, represented primarily by Tony (Richard Foronjy) and Joey (Robert Miranda) as two goof-off knucklehead enforcers, testily supervised by boss Serrano: "Is that Moron Number-one? Put Moron Numbertwo on the phone!" They all want a piece of The Duke.

"Midnight Run" was the first film that

gave notice to the world that the heretofore deadly serious Robert De Niro of "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull," could be—given the right script and director extremely funny.

Charles Grodin, who'd been of note up until then mostly for being "Late Show" legend Johnny Carson's favorite guest due to his brazen-but-deadpan delivery, knocked the role of The Duke out of the park. It's a character-actor role for the ages. Grodin tapped the archetype of The Incredibly Annoying Person.

#### There's a certain bluecollar demographic pocket in America where this film will live on forever.

The essence of this uproariousness is the running gag of Mardukas's nonstop digging ("Why aren't you popular with the Chicago police department?"); his accountant brain connecting the dots and slowly but surely exposing the obsessively private Jack's mental and emotional state, and harping on it, and, like some kind of nagging, persnickety therapist, passiveaggressively judging Jack's various and sundry instances of bad behavior. Which all lead to De Niro, playing straight man, alternatively either slow-burning or exploding with frustration. You will die laughing.

The Duke aspired to be Robin Hood with a hood's millions, so what makes Jack special? He's a good cop, he's got integrity. And when it comes right down to it, as much as he can't stand The Duke's annoying self— Tack ultimately does the right thing.

## Book Clubs and the Blitz: How WWII Britons Kept Calm and Got Reading

THE CONVERSATION

hese are unprecedented times-but, **L** even so, comparisons are being made to the World War II in terms of the magnitude of the crisis that coronavirus represents. Some of this rhetoric is unhelpful but, as we bunker down into our homes and the government gets on a war footing, there is little doubt that the challenge to our liberty, leisure time, and sense of well-being is real.

With early reports that book sales are soaring while bookshops and warehouses close down and publishers reassess their lists, what can the reading patterns of an earlier generation tell us about getting through a crisis and staying at home?

The restrictions at the beginning of World War II affected all aspects of dayto-day life. But it was the blackout that topped most people's list of grievancesabove shortages of food and fuel, the evacuation, and lack of news and public services. Households were reprimanded and fined for showing chinks of light through windows, car lights were dimmed, and walking around, even along familiar streets, late at night became treacherous.

With the widespread limitations to free movement, the book trade was quick off the mark. Books were promoted by libraries

and book clubs as the very thing to fight boredom and fill blacked-out evenings at home or in shelters with pleasure and forgetfulness. "Books may become more necessary than gasmasks," the Book Society, Britain's first celebrity book club, advised.

choices and recommenda-

#### **Selling Tales** I've been researching the

tions of the Book Society for the past few years. The club was set up in 1929 and ran until the 1960s, shipping "carefully" selected books out to thousands of readers each month. It was modeled on the success of the American Book-of-the-Month club (which launched in 1926) and aimed to boost book sales at a time when buying books wasn't common. It irritated some critics and booksellers who accused it of "dumbing down" and giving an unfair

advantage to some books over others-but was hugely popular with readers. The Book Society was run by a selection committee of literary celebrities-the likes of J.B. Priestley, Sylvia Lynd, George Gordon, Edmund Blunden, and Cecil Day-Lewis-chaired by bestselling novelist Hugh Walpole. Selections were not meant to be the "best" of anything, but had to be worthwhile and deserving

> Guaranteeing tens of thousands of extra sales,

book trade, with publishreach of what publisher Harold Raymond called "the Book Society bun." **Books Will Go On** The Book Society guided

of people's time and hard-

Pilots and air crew passing the time with books and newspapers. the club had a huge impact on the mid-20th-century

ers desperate to get the increased sales and global

readers through the confusion of appeasement and the run-up to World War II with a marked increase in recommendations of political non-fiction examining contemporary geo-politics. The classic novel of appeasement was Elizabeth Bowen's "The Death of the Heart" (Book Society Choice in October 1938) in which a sense of malaise and inevitability of future war haunts the characters' desperate actions.

When Britain finally declawred war against Germany in September 1939, the Book Society judges were divided. Some were relieved that, as George Gordon put it, "an intolerable situation has at last acquired the awful explicitness of war." But others were devastated, especially Edmund Blunden who was still traumatized from fighting in the first world war.

#### Nielsen BookScan has reported a rise in sales of classic fiction as the coronavirus crisis deepens.

The judges advised members that when they became weary of news, people "will turn to books as the best comfort," as had happened in World War I with the increase in reading

and library membership. Publishers and booksellers faced huge challenges during World War II, including paper shortages, problems in distribution, a vanishing workforce, and bomb damage to offices and warehouses. But there were more readers-and from a wider social class-at the end of it. Demand consistently outstripped supply as consumer expenditure on books more than doubled between 1938 and 1945.

#### **What People Were**

Reading Throughout World War II. the Book Society varied its lists between books that offered some insight on the strangeness of contemporary life and works of fiction-especially historical fiction-that took readers' minds off it.

Titles in the first group include comic novels by the likes of E.M. Delafield and Evelyn Waugh, as well as forgotten bestsellers like Ethel Vance's "Escape" (1939) (an unlikely thriller set in a concentration camp) and "Reaching for the Stars" (1939), American journalist Nora Waln's inside account of life in Nazi Germany.

More topical non-fiction became a priority as the devastation of the Blitz kicked in. "Winged Words: Our Airmen Speak for Themselves" (1941) and "Into Battle: Winston Churchill's War Speeches" (1941) were especially popular.

Historical fiction was consistently in demand. Half the club's choices in 1941 were long novels with historical settings. As today's readers prepare to batten down the hatches with Hilary Mantel's 900-page latest book, it is sobering to reflect on how an imaginative connection with the past has long helped readers find relief from the madness of the present. The other fail-safes in

#### classics. As books already in print became scarce, the Book Society reissued new editions of Jane Aus-

ten's "Pride and Prejudice," and Tolstoy's "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina." These were books that Walpole said he believed he could sit down with even through an air raid. Indeed, Nielsen Book-

World War II were the

Scan has reported a rise in sales of classic fiction as the coronavirus crisis deepens-including "War and Peace"-as readers use this unfamiliar time to knuckle down to the heavyweights. You can also join a "War

and Peace" reading group online if you want a bit of company. After the homeschooling, working from home, and everything else.

Nicola Wilson is an associate professor in book and publishing studies at the University of Reading in the UK. This article was originally published on The Conversation.



#### FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL A Bully-Proof Nerd of Great Coolness

**POPCORN AND INSPIRATION:** 

#### **MARK JACKSON**

What's the inspirational takeaway of the cult classic, high school comedy "Napoleon Dynamite"? A phenomenally geeky high school nerd's (Jon Heder) secret, giant ego renders him bully-proof to a level of shaming that would normally make a kid contemplate suicide. Why? Because he actually thinks he dwells on a plane of coolness far above that of the actual cool kids.

And while it's exactly that type of snooty, incredibly annoying, limited selfawareness-having, loser kid whose imperious pride attracts bullying like a lightning rod, we have to root for him because of the sheer audacity of his chutzpah. This degree of chutzpah is a little bit outlaw-heroic, and therefore inspirational!

People either love "Napoleon Dynamite" or hate it. It cuts uncomfortably close to American rural community upbringings, and that either makes people depressed, or, if they've evolved enough from their modest origins, they appreciate this sendup of smalltown, high school life. And in the latter case, appreciation also means rolling on the floor laughing.

"Dynamite" has in common with "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and "The Simpsons" that this particular brand of humor is best savored while sharing choice bits and impressions with fellow fans: All you have to say to someone you met in, say, an airport, where you happened to discover a 'Napoleon Dynamite'

Pedro (Efren Ramirez,

L) and Napolean (Jon

Heder) campaigning, in

"Napolean Dynamite."

**Jared Hess** Starring Jon Heder, Aaron Ruell, Efren Ramirez, Jon Gries, Tina Majorino, Diedrich Bader. Haylie Duff, Sandy Martin

Director

Rated

**Running Time** 1 hour, 36 minutes **Release Date** Aug. 27, 2004

 $\star\star\star\star\star$ 

shared love of "Dynamite," is "Kip and LaFawnduh" or "Rex Kwon Do," or do your impression of Napoleon saying, "Luck-eee! It's got shocks, pegs ... ever take it off any sweet jumps?" and you will have a new friend.

#### **Loser Land** Set in the apparently

of Preston, Jon Heder's character-invention for the ages, Napoleon, is a frizzyhaired, coke-bottle-glasses-wearing mouth breather. He's so exceptionally weird, little kids like to bait him to see what he'll do next. They're like tapping on the glass of some hapless species in a zoo that has a highly enjoyable, aggressive threat display. "What're you gonna do today Napoleon?" Napoleon: (with go-to-hell disdain) "I'll do whatever I feel like

doing ... gosh!!" You just can't get enough of that. His singular, loping gait is enough to cause any high school football team to immediately clear the bench and beat him until he stops walking like that.

Napoleon lives with his really just-as-weird, 30-something, chat-room-addicted brother Kip (Aaron Ruell); it's a home dork-fest of epic proportions, overseen by their ATV-riding, pet-llama-owning grandmother (Sandy Martin).

Eventually their 1970s pornstache'd, door-to-door snake-oil salesman Uncle

Rico (Jon Gries) takes over the parenting duties, and Uncle Rico will also go down in history as a fabulous comedic characterinvention.

Napoleon eventually makes one friend and throws himself behind promoting Pedro's (Efren Ramirez) class presidenbrain-dead Idaho town cy run. Pedro's degree of chutzpah and obliviousness to reality matches Napoleon's, and hence, they

#### are bosom buddies.

We Are Napoleon It's challenging to talk about anything else in this film other than to continuously stand in awe of Heder's creation, and play tour guide to other signposts of the film's hilarity. Here're some more:

#### You will be inspired to likewise walk to the beat of your own drum.

In addition to the permed hair and the walk, Heder created what looks to be at least six different types of sniffy variations on the theme of a contemptuous "ugh," regarding the surrounding fools he does not suffer gladly. My favorite is the one where he just stands there, eyes closed,

mouth open, doing an overprolonged, barely audible exhale from the back of his throat.

We all knew a Napoleon. And we all overlap with his archetypal awkwardness in some form. I recognized that in high school: I myself also thought the liger (a hybrid species of lion and tiger that produces the biggest cat on the planet) was the coolest cat ever. But I didn't sketch them. I sketched Earl "The Pearl" Monroe and Walt "Clyde" Frazier slam-dunking basketballs.

If you haven't seen Napo-

leon disco dance onstage at a school assembly in moon boots, if you haven't seen his brother Kip prepare for his chat-room-generated date with Lafawnduh by getting a trailer park version of a gangster-grill, or Kip's Bruce Lee spinning back-kick/sweep attempt in local dojo sensei Rex Kwon Do's (Rex Kwon Do!!!) self-defense class (where Rex Kwon Do immediately slaps him in the head and says, "That was pretty good!")—you haven't lived.

But again, what inspires here is the extent to which Napoleon thinks he's dynamite, wearing his brown velour suit and various and sundry 1970s fashion faux pas like they were bestowed on him to be cooler-thanyou in. You will be inspired to likewise walk to the beat

# The Power of the Imagination

**ERIC BESS** 

ometimes, I'm the victim of my own imagination. I let my thoughts run wild with desires for my future and what I'd change about my past. And sometimes, my imagination adds the creative element I need to complete a complex project or add an element of wit to an otherwise bland conversation.

I was looking through paintings by John William Waterhouse and saw his painting "The Lady of Shalott," which is based on Alfred Tennyson's poem of the same name. I began to think about what this poem and painting say about the imagination and was led down a path riddled with "what ifs?"

#### The Lady of Shalott

Tennyson was one of the most famous poets in English history. His poem "The Lady of Shalott" was written in 1832 shortly after the death of his abusive father and then updated in 1842, after the poet hadn't written anything in 10 years.

The poem tells the story of the lady who lives on an island called Shalott in an isolated tower surrounded by fields, flowers, and a river that flows down from King Arthur's castle at Camelot. No matter how many people pass by her tower, however, no one ever sees her. She remains hidden because she'll be cursed if she looks out her window or leaves her tower. But a mirror that reflects the outside world hangs in front of her, and she spends her days embroidering the images she sees from the mirror.

As she tires of these images, Lancelot arrives and appears in her mirror. Lancelot, appearing larger than life, entices her to turn from her weaving and look out her window. When she looks out her window, the mirror cracks, and she knows: "The curse is come upon me."

She leaves the castle and hurries to a boat on which she writes The Lady of Shalott." She boards the boat and floats down the river, but it's not long before the curse takes her life. The boat carries her lifeless body down the river until it reaches the shore. A group of knights come upon her body and see a piece of paper on her chest, which reads: "The web was woven curiously, The charm is broken utterly, Draw near and fear not,—this is I, The Lady of Shalott."

#### The Moment of No Return

Waterhouse was greatly influenced by Tennyson. According to the Tate galleries website, Waterhouse "owned a copy of Tennyson's collected works, and covered every blank page with pencil sketches for



paintings." In this painting, Waterhouse decided to depict the scene from this stanza:

With a steady stony glance— Like some bold seer in a trance, Beholding all his own mischance,

Mute, with a glassy counte-

She look'd down to Camelot. It was the closing of the day: She loos'd the chain, and down

The broad stream bore her far The Lady of Shalott.

Waterhouse showed the moment in which the Lady of Shalott removes the chain that keeps the boat docked to the shore. She doesn't pay attention to the chain itself but stares longingly into the distance as if in a "trance ... with a glassy countenance." She's dressed in white, which is typically a sign of purity, and is framed by the dark masses of her environment. She sits on a blanket that is embroidered with the woes of her own story, as if she's "some bold seer."

**The Indeterminate Question** The Tate interprets this as follows: "In Victorian society women were often restricted to the home and

"The Lady of Shalott" 1888, by John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas; 5 feet by 6 feet 7 inches. Tate Britain, London.



A detail showing the embroidery by the Lady of Shallot.

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

domestic life as men went out to work. The poem could be read as a warning to women who didn't conform to this." However, I think more can be gathered from the potential meaning of this poem and painting than reducing it to issues we deem important today.

> I imagine the Lady of Shalott is plagued by the possibilities of the curse placed on her. The curse has everything to do with her leaving her tower and experiencing the real world. Is it possible that the tower is symbolic of our imaginations? It's not that she doesn't experience the sounds and sights of the world. She does; she just doesn't experience them directly. She can hear the sounds from outside and see the sights of the world in the mirror.

Are our imaginations mere reflections of the "real" world, and do we sit with the needle and thread employed by our minds to fashion images inspired by this world? If so, what is the danger of leaving our imaginations behind and turning toward the "real" world? The mirror—the very thing that inspired the images that the Lady of Shalott wove—is cracked when she looks at the "real" world. Was Tennyson reminding us of

the power of our imaginations

to provide meaning to our lives,

that without the imagination the mind's eye—we might find ourselves feeling lifeless on this journey down a stream over which we have little control?

It also seems that Waterhouse's painting suggests the importance of the imagination. The Lady of Shalott does not look at what she's doing but stares longingly into the distance as if she's captivated by her own imagination.

Waterhouse depicts her as "some bold seer"—as if she's a soothsaver of old—telling her own fortune in the images she weaves. The blanket she sits on depicts the image of a woman dressed in white in front of a castle. It also shows a procession of knights. Are these knights the ones who accompany Sir Lancelot, or are they those who will find her lifeless body later? If she is a seer, it must be the latter. How, if not by the workings of the images in her own mind, would she be able to weave parts of her

own story before they happened? But then I read the letter that's found on the Lady of Shalott: "The web was woven curiously, The charm is broken utterly, Draw near and fear not.—this is I. The Lady of Shalott." And I ask: Are Waterhouse and Tennyson also warning us about the potential dangers of the imagination?

She weaves the images inspired by the "real" world with a curiosity for experiencing the "real" world. The charm that keeps her confined to the reflections in the mirror is utterly broken when her desires for the images in the mirror are redirected into the real world. Our imaginations can sometimes stimulate unhealthy desires, which have the potential to cause us harm only when we actually pursue them. Even when we know these desires will cause us harm—just as the Lady of Shalott weaves the woes of her fate in Waterhouse's painting—we still sometimes find ourselves pulled by desires down a path we would otherwise avoid.

Or maybe Waterhouse and Tennyson are suggesting that our imaginations, and the desires they stimulate, give us the power to face our fears. Our imaginations give us the strength to come face-to-face with the possibility of our own death, and in so doing, we may come closer to understanding what it means to be authentic to ourselves. Is this why the Lady of Shalott writes: "Draw near and fear not,—this is I, The Lady of Shalott"?

She requests that whoever finds her lifeless body come toward it and not be afraid. To me, it's almost as if she's saying there's no reason to be afraid of death. The person who finds her should come close to see her lifeless body and conquer their own fears of death. She's found her own authenticity in conquering her fears of death.

So many questions are stimulated by great works of art. Tennyson and Waterhouse have reminded me of the power of imagination, especially when it's stimulated by a question that gives birth to other questions. Through these questions, stimulated by works of art, I'm led to weave images I otherwise wouldn't and, in the process, I'm also reminded that the imagination is a powerful thing. It can have positive or negative consequences based on how we direct

And what directs its powers besides wisdom? Maybe the message of Tennyson and Waterhouse can be summed up as follows: The imagination is dangerous without wisdom, and wisdom is lifeless without imagination.

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.* 



**POPCORN AND INSPIRATION** 

# 'Apollo 13': Space Exploration Needs New Science

**MARK JACKSON** 

ifty years ago, the Apollo 13 d flight on April 11, 1970, was no longer interesting to the An oxygen tank ruptures, ripping public. The USA had already won the space race with the Soviets and put a but the astronauts don't know exman on the moon. The TV networks actly what's wrong, which leads to didn't even bother to broadcast the

However, in 1995's "Apollo 13," director Ron Howard depicts how, when disaster eventually struck, and Jim Lovell Jr. (Tom Hanks), Fred Haise Jr. (Bill Paxton), and Lovell's wife (Kathleen Quinlan) discovers every TV channel shamelessly spewing doomsday predictions.

Soon, like flies on roadkill, here **The Right Stuff** comes the media trying to get comfortable on her front lawn in order to better film the Grim Reaper should he come a-calling. She's not having it.

This suspenseful, true story of the entire NASA team of rocket scientists attempting to coach three asthe moon is a nail-biter, and watchamazement at how antiquated all the cutting-edge technology of the period looks.

There's some fun movie-cronyism here: Ed Harris was in the major rocket movie of the previous decade, "The Right Stuff" (1983). Heck, there's a lot of just plain cronyism here too: Hanks is reunited Sinise; and director Ron Howard, Joe Spano (who plays the NASA director), and Kathleen Quinlan all got their start together in "American Graffiti."

#### **Space Shot**

Ridiculously close to liftoff, one well-oiled cog in the rocket flight team, Ken Mattingly (Gary Sinise), is pulled by NASA for having come into contact with the measles. Mattingly's replacement, Jack Swigert, has only two days to get with the program. Two days! One appreciates why astronauts had to have topflight fighter-pilot backgrounds, and "the right stuff" (cool heads, gumption, and a lack of claustrophobia) late-1960s technology, in cramped spaces, while flying.

Off they go! On route to the moon, their module suffers an explosion: off one of the spacecraft's sides, Hanks's delivery of Lovell's famous line, "Houston, we have a problem."

Our boys' bitter disappointment at realizing that they've lost their shot at a moon landing soon gives away to the horrifying realization that they stand an excellent chance Jack Swigert Jr. (Kevin Bacon) are in of never returning to planet Earth, danger of getting stranded in space, and "Apollo 13" sustains suspense throughout its entire length—and it's a long film.

Philip Kaufman's "The Right Stuff" (based on author Tom Wolfe's book of the same name) put the heretofore little-known, secretive military culture that obscured the iconic heroism of U.S. fighter pilots on the map, thereby magnifying the glory of the tronauts back from the dark side of NASA space program. This exposure of Navy fighter-jock derring-do, ing it in 2020 is a chance to gawk in in particular, eventually led to the megahit "Top Gun."

Ron Howard's let's-hang-out-inthe-capsule-with-the-boys, popentertainment thriller, on the other hand, focuses on vulnerability, human foibles, and the eye-popping degree to which Mr. Murphy (of Murphy's Law) is actually in charge. rocket science was (they boast of Release Date

with "Forrest Gump" buddy Gary American splendor—gleaming room, with less computing power \* \* \* \* \* white rocket, pure white spacesuits, than a smartphone), from the 2020 NASA Flight Director Gene Kranz's (Ed Harris) spanking white vest, Air Force insignia, NASA logo, and so on—to the point where a more sarcastic mind might be tempted to indulge in snark, recalling Gil Scott Heron's hilarious yet misguided paean to socialist mores, "Whitey on the Moon."

> But this film is truly a tribute to the all-American values of tenacity, teamwork, ingenuity, and—as is the case for all teams on dangerous missions—selflessness and brother-

Director Howard takes the potentially highly boring, static setting of three fellows stuck in a tin needed for tricky maneuvers using can and makes it crackle with ac-





tion and nail-bitery, primarily by (Top) keeping the fears of the astronauts (L-R) Bill Paxton, directly linked to the fears, hopes, Tom Hanks, and and prayers of their desk-riding Kevin Bacon star in tech coaches, and their writhingin-inner-anguish relatives.

One high point (pun intended) is Ed Harris as the realism and authenticity of see- Gene Kranz in ing the actors actually float in the "Apollo 13." spaceship, which was realized by flying the entire film crew, sets, and actors up in a NASA plane, on an arc that provided short periods of weightlessness, sort of like the initial plunge of a roller coaster.

What's really brought into stark contrast, however, is science versus faith. At one point, Lovell is required to calibrate coordinates so the capsule won't either burn up on reentry or go skipping off the Earth's atmosphere, never to return. Imme- 'Apollo 13' diately it's "Ground Control to Major Director Tom" for confirmation, and we see Ron Howard the earthbound math whizzes at-

tacking the problem with slide rules. Tom Hanks. It's insane that we humans tried to Kathleen Quinlan, land on the moon with such caveman technology. But my point is, on the one hand, we see primitive tech, and on the other we see lots of prayer. And due to our current ability to recognize how primitive Rated all that so-called advanced 1970 "Apollo 13" captures towering a computer that fits into an entire June 30, 1995 perspective, the two modes of belief don't look all that dissimilar.

The end of "Apollo 13" is an invitation to explore the heavens more. Prayer is already good to go, but clearly, we need better science for that. How do we achieve that? We might start by refocusing our science in the way the ancients did—by elevating their moral stature.

Imagine for a minute that the white rocket and white spacesuits don't refer to American racism, but instead, recast that whiteness as a metaphor for purity of soul. Without getting into specifics in a movie review, that's the human starting point for a new science that could seriously explore outer space.

Gary Sinise, Bill Paxton, Kevin Bacon.

# 'The Grapes of Wrath' Versus 'The River': Desperation in Rural America

**TIFFANY BRANNAN** 

ovies about common people fighting oppressors, nature, and pover-**V \( \)** ty are as endearing in recent times as in 1940. "The Grapes of Wrath," John Ford's 1940 drama about the Dust Bowl, is considered one of the greatest of American films. "The River," Mark Rydell's 1984 drama that marked Mel Gibson's American debut, strongly resembles it. Although released 44 years apart, these movies are remarkably similar.

"The Grapes of Wrath" follows the Joads, Oklahoma sharecroppers who lose their land after drought ruins their crops. Tom Joad (Henry Fonda) gets out of jail on parole and finds his family packing for California. He and his parents, grandparents, siblings, brother-in-law, uncle, and former minister Jim Casy (John Carradine) head west in a

jobs. The family must fight to survive and stay together.

"The River" follows Tom Garvey (Mel Gibson), whose Tennessee farm is threatened by a rising river and impending foreclosure. He and his neighbors are burdened by the milling company's low grain prices. The company is run by Joe Wade (Scott Glenn), who is as eager to buy Tom's land for a dam as to steal his wife, Mae (Sissy Spacek). Tom fights for his land and family.

#### **Different Settings, Similar Stories**

Both these films depict whole communities of farmers plagued by economic hardships and natural disasters, though they focus on individual families with leading men named Tom. The Oklahoma farmers in "The Grapes of Wrath" face drought and dusty winds, while the Tennessee farmers in "The River" endure torrential rains and ramshackle jalopy, hoping for nonexistent flooding. In both films, some lose farms that

their families have owned for years, so they must pack single vehicles to leave the land where they have lived their whole lives. The Joads lose their farm, and although the Garveys keep their land, the Gaumers, who are the Garveys' neighbors, leave their repos-

sessed farm to find work elsewhere.

Both films contain strikes. In "The Grapes of Wrath," the Joads' first California job is picking peaches, locked in gated grounds. When Tom Joad investigates at night, he learns that they were hired as strikebreakers after previous workers wanted increased salaries. In "The River," Tom Garvey earns extra money at a steel mill. When the workers see disgruntled strikers outside, they realize they are "scabs," locked in for protection. In both films, the strikebreakers are mistreated when the strike ends, in the first film by lower wages and in the second by abrupt dismissals.

Both movies show farmers defending their properties against destruction. In "The



The rural poor heading west in an old jalopy. Henry Fonda (C) stars in "The Grapes of Wrath."

Grapes of Wrath," the Joads' neighbor, Muley Bates (John Qualen), watches tractors reduce his land to dusty fields. When one nears the house, Muley threatens to shoot the driver. Recognizing him as Joe Davis's boy (John Arledge), Muley asks why he has this job. Davis says he needs the daily \$3 to feed his family. This scene resembles the climax in "The River," when the Garveys defend their levee against Joe Wade's shovel-bearers. Tom Garvey sees someone climbing the levee and shoots at him. When he recognizes Baines (Mark Erickson), a fellow steel mill scab, he asks why he's doing Wade's "dirty work." Baines, who lost his farm and supports a wife and baby, replies, "I'm hungry."

PG-13 Versus PCA-Approved

When "The River" was released in 1984, the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) rated it PG-13. When "The Grapes of Wrath" was released in 1940, it was not rated, since the CARA was not created until 1968. Its predecessor was the Production Code Administration (PCA), which guided films throughout production to ensure their compliance with the Motion Picture Production Code, Hollywood's content guidelines 1934–1968. A PCA Seal of Approval, which

was necessary for American distribution,

signified acceptability for everyone.

According to an email response from Tom Zigo of the Motion Picture Association, "The River' was rated 'R'... on September 25, 1984. CARA's Appeals Board upheld the 'R' rating on October 3, 1984. The film had been edited, and the edited version also was rated 'R.' CARA's Appeals Board overturned the 'R' rating on October 12, 1984, and the film was rated 'PG-13." It doubtless received its initial rating for frequent profanity. In addition, there is graphic blood in a steel mill fight and when Mae is injured. Also, Tom and Mae

have a suggestive bedroom scene.

"The Grapes of Wrath" came from John Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1939 novel, a difficult book to turn into a Code film. Its controversial pro-union message made it banned in many areas. Since the Code discouraged political agendas, conservative director John Ford highlighted the Joads as people, saying he "was not interested in 'Grapes' as a social study," according to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb). He sympathetically depicted the Okies' plight without leftist messages. Content revisions were necessary, since the novel contained profanity, vulgar humor, and sacrilegiousness. The novel's ending was unacceptably controversial, so it was replaced with a hopeful speech. Despite these changes, IMDb reports that author Steinbeck loved the film, saying Henry Fonda made him "believe my own words."

#### **Temporary Victory Versus Inspiring Hopefulness**

"The Grapes of Wrath" ends with an ideal, not a single victory. Jobs couldn't truly solve the problems of the Joads or the millions they represented. Since it was impossible to happily, realistically conclude the story, Ma (Jane Darwell) summarized their future thus to Pa (Russell Simpson): "Rich fellas come up, and they die, and their kids ain't no good, and they die out. But we keep a'comin'. We're the people that live. They can't wipe us out; they can't lick us. We'll go on forever, Pa, 'cause we're the people." Such determination can inspire everyone.

#### Both these films depict whole communities of farmers plagued by economic hardships and natural disasters.

"The River" had great potential but remained obscure. I think its biggest shortcoming is its ending, which feels incomplete. Seeing he has been licked by the farmers' camaraderie, Joe Wade plugs the last, single leak with a sandbag as a sign of truce, but his defeat is temporary. He then predicts, "Sooner or later you're going to have too much rain, or too much drought, or too much corn. I can wait." Although the film ends with the Garveys happily together, we fear they soon

will lose their land.

These films have similar plots and comparable scenarios, yet one is considered a masterpiece while the other received negative reviews and lost money. "The Grapes of Wrath" cast a rising young star, and "The River" cast a charismatic up-and-comer, so

both had great potential. "The River" captured realism through blood, vulgarity, and foul language, precluding families from seeing it. "The Grapes of Wrath" avoided inappropriate and offensive content, yet its stark realism remains gripping. When filmmakers cannot vivify their movies with swearing, violence, and risqué situations, they must deepen their stories and characters. If "The River" had been a Code film, perhaps it would have had depth, completion, and hope like "The Grapes of Wrath."

Tiffany Brannan is an 18-year-old opera singer, Hollywood historian, travel writer, film blogger, vintage fashion expert, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.

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

# A Deep, yet Uncomplicated Tale About Self-Discovery

**IAN KANE** 

he year 2006 was certainly an interesting one for movies. The multiplexes were filled with filmgoers eager for cinematic escapism. Movies like "Casino Royale," "X-Men: The Last Stand," and "The Hills Have Eyes" were doing just that, thrilling and chilling audiences with violent tales of espionage, superheroes (and villains), and mutated cannibals, respectively. However, besides these big-budgeted displays of sound and fury, other filmmakers were taking a chance on tales with more positive messages.

# Dan begins a journey of self-discovery and spiritual awareness that puts him on the path of recovery.

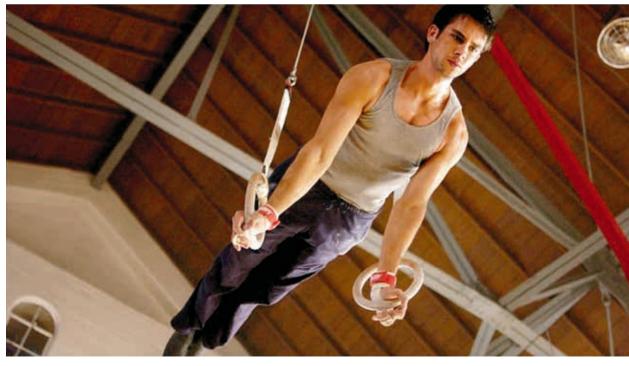
Director Victor Salva teamed up with screenwriter Kevin Bernhardt and together they adapted a bestselling book by Dan Millman called "Way of the Peaceful Warrior." The result was a film simply titled "Peaceful Warrior." Based on Dan Millman's early life (and starring Scott Mechlowicz as the lead), young and cocky Dan is a gifted gymnast from a well-to-do family. He has plenty of friends and girls eager for his attention. In other words, it would appear that he has it all.

However, although things seem to be going just dandy for Dan, he has a nagging feeling that something is missing. It's an unsettling feeling that makes him question his very existence. He also has a disturbing nightmare where he's attempting a high-risk maneuver on the parallel bars, falls off, and breaks his leg in multiple places.

After one such nightmare, Dan awakes and decides to go on a nocturnal run in order to release some of his pent-up anxiety. During his jog, he comes across a derelict-looking gas station where a middle-aged man in dusty coveralls is working under the hood of a car parked outside.

Dan begins a conversation with the man, whom he dubs "Socrates" (Nick Nolte) because the older man always seems to speak in parables and philosophical riddles. Because Dan has such hubris, Socrates might as well be speaking in an alien language—everything seems to go in one ear and right out of the other.

Later, Dan experiences a horrible motorcycle accident and breaks his leg in multiple places. He is told that, because of the severity of his injury, he'll never



What if your dreams are suddenly shattered? Scott Mechlowicz in "Peaceful Warrior."

be able to compete as an athlete again. With Dan's dream world crumbling around him, he slowly begins to warm up to Socrates.

Thus, Socrates becomes somewhat of a mentor and spiritual guide for the young, troubled man. Dan begins a journey of self-discovery and spiritual awareness that puts him on the path of recovery. But with his disability, does he have enough belief in himself to overcome the greatest obstacle that he's ever faced?

Although this film has a familiar narrative arc, here the lessons are told in an earnest way that piques one's curiosity. Much of the spiritual wisdom that Socrates dispenses has a universal appeal that just about anybody can comprehend.

Acting-wise, Mechlowicz does a fantastic job of portraying a young, arrogant, hot-shot athlete. He seems to disappear into the role and even made me loathe him (a bit). However, by the end of the film, I was on the edge of my seat, rooting for him. Gravelly-voiced Nolte is likewise perfect in his role as the enigmatic mentor, who never gives up on chipping

away at Dan's inflated ego.

While big movie studios are busy putting out films about families breaking up, senseless and violent rampages, and other unsavory debris, "Peaceful Warrior" is an uncomplicated, uplifting film that should inspire all but the most jaded.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt. com or contact him at Twitter. com/ImIanKane

#### **'Peaceful Warrior'**

Director

Victor Salva

**Starring** Scott Mechlowicz, Nick Nolte, Amy Smart

**Running Time** 2 hours

Rated

PG-13

Release Date June 23, 2006





Scott Mechlowicz (L) and Nick Nolte in "Peaceful Warrior."

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