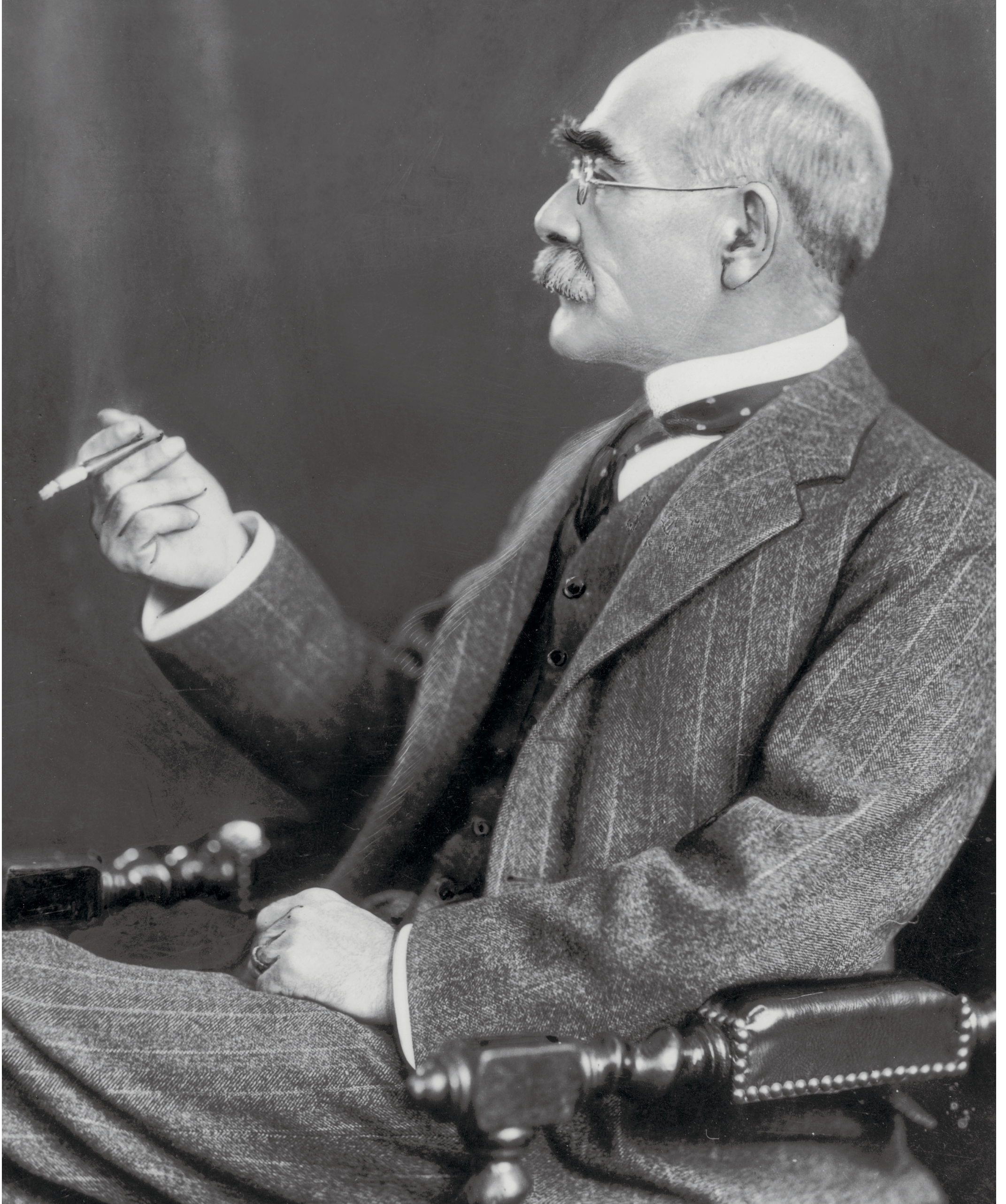


WEEK 28, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES  
ARTS &  
CULTURE

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Nobel Prize-winning English poet and  
novelist Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)  
in 1925, at the age of 60.



Analyzing  
***'The Gods of the Copybook Headings'***  
by Rudyard Kipling...4

# What Our Readers Say:

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THE EPOCH TIMES  
TRUTH and TRADITION

LITERATURE

# Lessons From the Future

What We Can Learn From Dystopian Literature

JEFF MINICK

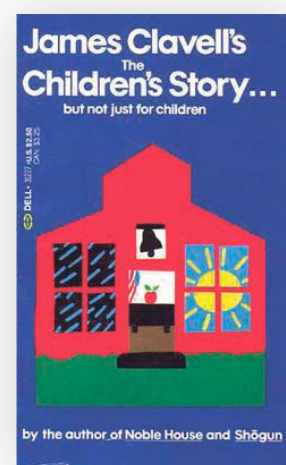
Writers of dystopian literature—fiction about a dehumanizing or terrifying future—can act as prophets, describing possible disasters should we follow certain pathways and advising us to stay awake and live with our eyes wide open.

In high school or college, many of us doubtless read such novels as George Orwell’s “1984” and “Animal Farm,” Pat Frank’s “Alas, Babylon,” Walter Miller’s “A Canticle for Leibowitz,” and Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World.” The possible consequences of nuclear war, the ugliness and brutality of communism, the seductive attraction to hedonism: By addressing such topics, these writers and many more raised the red flag in hopes that their readers would heed their warnings.

Here are five more “red flag” stories whose lessons deserve a look.

**Keeping an Eye on Education**

In “The Children’s Story,” James Clavell, author of bestsellers like “Gai-Jin” and “Shogun,” describes the takeover of an American elementary school classroom by the “new teacher.” In less than an hour, this tool of a totalitarian regime teaches the children to worship the new leader of their country, has them cut up the American flag, persuades them that prayer has no value, and convinces them that their parents have “wrong thoughts.”



In “The Children’s Story,” James Clavell demonstrates how easily education can subvert our children.

Clavell wrote this story after his young daughter came home from school one day having learned to recite “The Pledge of Allegiance” with no idea of its meaning. “The Children’s Story” came into being that day. It was then I realized how completely vulnerable my child’s mind was—any mind for that matter—under controlled circumstances,” Clavell tells his readers at the end of his book.

“Normally I write and rewrite and re-rewrite, but this story came quickly—almost by itself. Barely three words were changed. It pleases me greatly because it keeps asking me questions. ... Questions like What’s the use of “I pledge allegiance” without understanding? Like Why is it so easy to divert thoughts and implant others? Like What is freedom and Why is it so hard to explain? “The Children’s Story” keeps asking me all sort of questions I cannot answer,” he writes on the back cover.

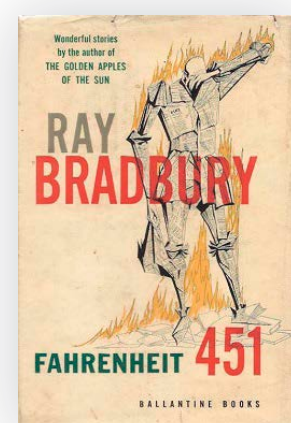
Clavell’s short tale—it can be read in minutes—should act as a wake-up call to parents, a powerful reminder of the possibility for indoctrination in our classrooms.

**The Value of Books**

In Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451,” fireman Guy Montag’s job is not to put out fires but to burn books. In a society where people take their entertainment from enormous television screens, the authorities consider books dangerous, disruptive to the human mind. Because of a conversation with a rebellious teenager, Clarisse, Montag begins secretly collecting books. Once discovered, he escapes the city and finds his way into a company of exiled intellectuals who hope to rebuild civilization.

Bradbury once said, “You don’t have to burn books to destroy a

culture. Just get people to stop reading them.” When we remove certain books, particularly classics of Western civilization, from our high school and university reading lists, we have in essence not only burned the books but also torched parts of our heritage. “Fahrenheit 451” is a tug at the sleeve, prompting us to read those works and value that heritage.



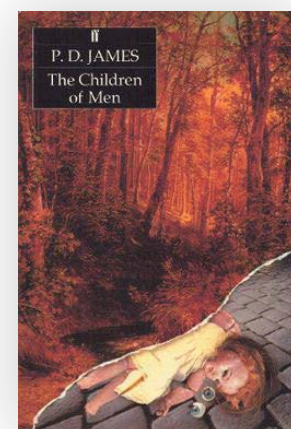
The first edition cover of Ray Bradbury’s classic dystopian novel.

**Respect for Life**

It’s 2021, and humanity has lost the ability to reproduce itself. This global infertility crisis appears unsolvable, nations descend into chaos, and dictators now govern former democracies.

This is the background for P.D. James’s “The Children of Men,” where readers follow Theo Faron, cousin of the Warden of England, as he battles gangs and government oppressors as well as his own conscience. After many misgivings and trials, Theo joins the resistance and attempts to protect a younger woman who has miraculously become pregnant.

“The Children of Men” has many messages for its readers: the arrogance, ignorance, and violence of the Omegas, those born in 1995, the last year the world witnessed any births at all; the brutality of totalitarian governments; the upheaval that fear and despair can ignite.

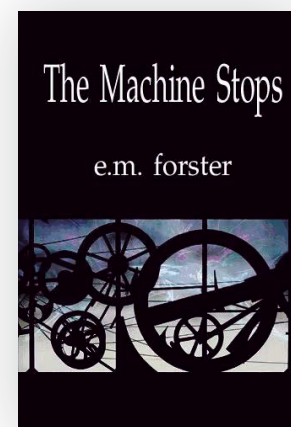


P.D. James’s “The Children of Men” shows us a world without children.

But what I find most important in this book is its pro-life message. Few Western nations, including the United States, are now producing enough babies to replace their populations, not from an infertility crisis but by choice. In “The Children of Men,” James reminds us of the precious gifts of childbirth and life.

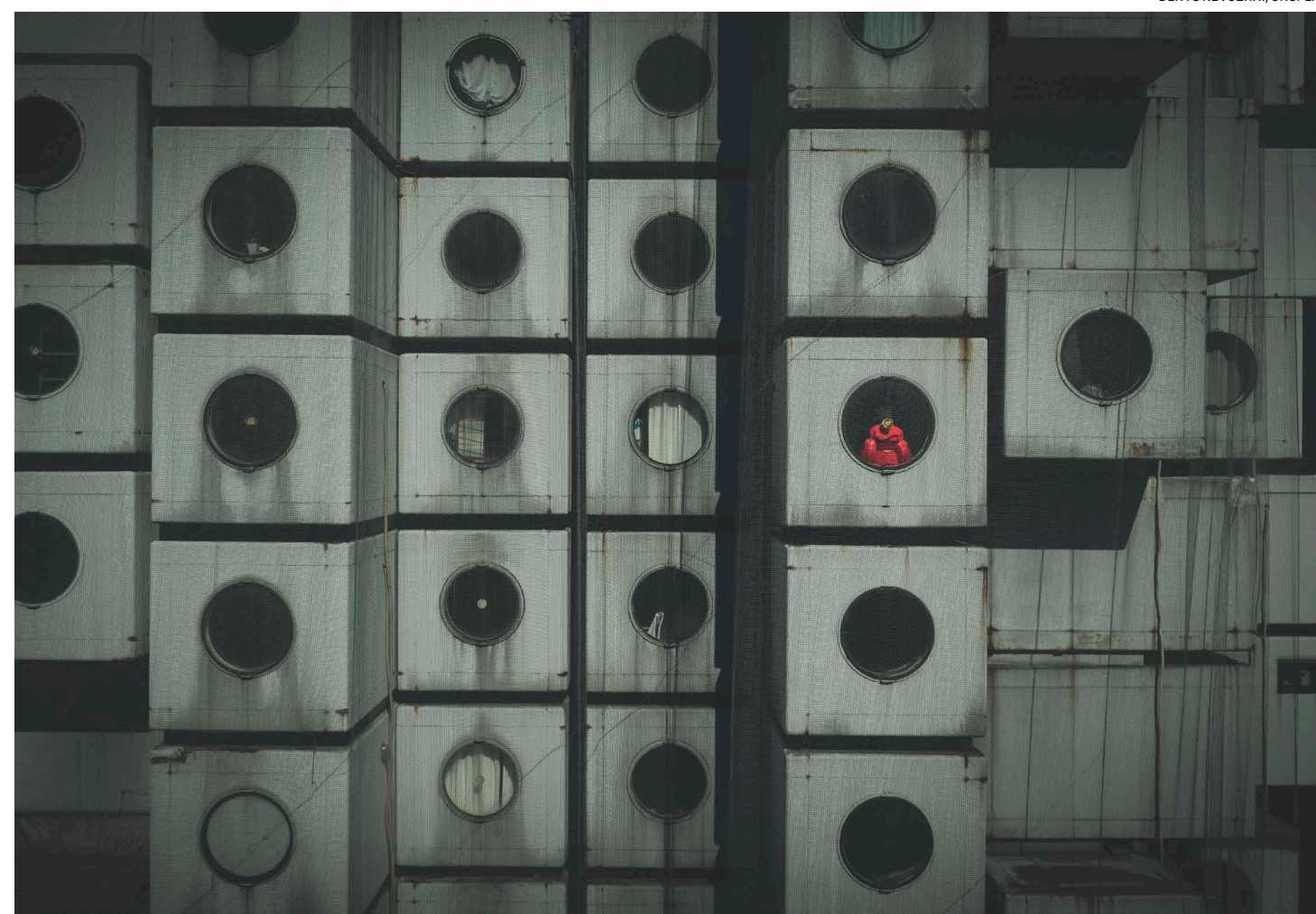
**In the Machine**

First published in 1909, E.M. Forster’s story “The Machine Stops” carries us off again to England and a future where human beings live beneath the surface of the earth, each one alone in a small room like “the cell of a bee.” The protagonist, Vashti, loves the Machine, which provides everything—water, food, air, all of her needs and most of her desires—and allows her to communicate electronically with her friends and deliver her lectures on music via devices similar to our computers.



Is E.M. Forster’s story “The Machine Stops” about the state overprotecting us, about our increasing isolation, or about giving ourselves over to technology?

Raised like all the other children in a public nursery and then a school,



Dystopian literature shows us our dead ends.

Vashti’s son Kuno requests a face-to-face meeting with his mother. When she finally consents, Kuno informs her that he has broken the law by visiting the earth’s surface without a permit, a violation that can result in banishment from the Machine.

Soon two developments occur. All visits to the outside world cease, and human beings begin to worship the Machine as divine rather than man-made:

“‘The Machine,’ they exclaimed, ‘feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we speak to one another, through it we see one another, in it we have our being. The Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition: the Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine.’ And before long this allocution was printed on the first page of the Book, and in subsequent editions the ritual swelled into a complicated system of

praise and prayer. The word “religion” was sedulously avoided, and in theory the Machine was still the creation and the implement of man. But in practice all, save a few retrogrades, worshipped it as divine.”

Forster’s extraordinary tale has some flaws—the shifts in time, for example, don’t always work—but even after a century, “The Machine Stops” reminds us of the dangers of relying too heavily on our own machines, particularly our screens. Most of us are thankful for the blessings of computers, Facebook, and cellphones, but Forster warns readers that these same devices can erode contact with people, thereby diminishing our humanity.

**The Importance of Community**  
William Forstchen’s “One Second After” examines life in Black Mountain,



“One Second After” gives us a glimpse into how thugs can take advantage of a cataclysmic event.

## The writers of these stories intended them as cautionary traffic signs.

a small college town in Western North Carolina, after a nuclear attack that uses an electromagnetic pulse cripples the United States, knocking out everything from cars to computers and throwing civilization back to the living conditions of the mid-19th century.

After this disaster, John Matherson, a veteran and a college professor, helps organize the townspeople. They band together to create a rationing system, do their best to supply medical help for the aged and the ill, and form a militia to defend their homes and streets from roaming gangs of murderous thugs.

“One Second After” emphasizes the importance of family and neighbors, people who know and trust one another. Most riots occur in large cities, in part because of anonymity—the lack of connection between those who throw bricks and those whose windows are smashed. In Forstchen’s Black Mountain, were some young protester to throw a brick through the drugstore window, his grandmother would likely grab him, whop him upside the head, and haul him off to the police station.

In times of trouble, it pays to know our neighbors.

The writers of these stories intended them as cautionary traffic signs—“Red Light Ahead,” “Detour,” “Dead End”—advising us about dangers down the roads we travel. Even more importantly, however, they remind us to honor liberty and truth, to preserve our traditions and way of life, and above all, to strive to become more fully human.

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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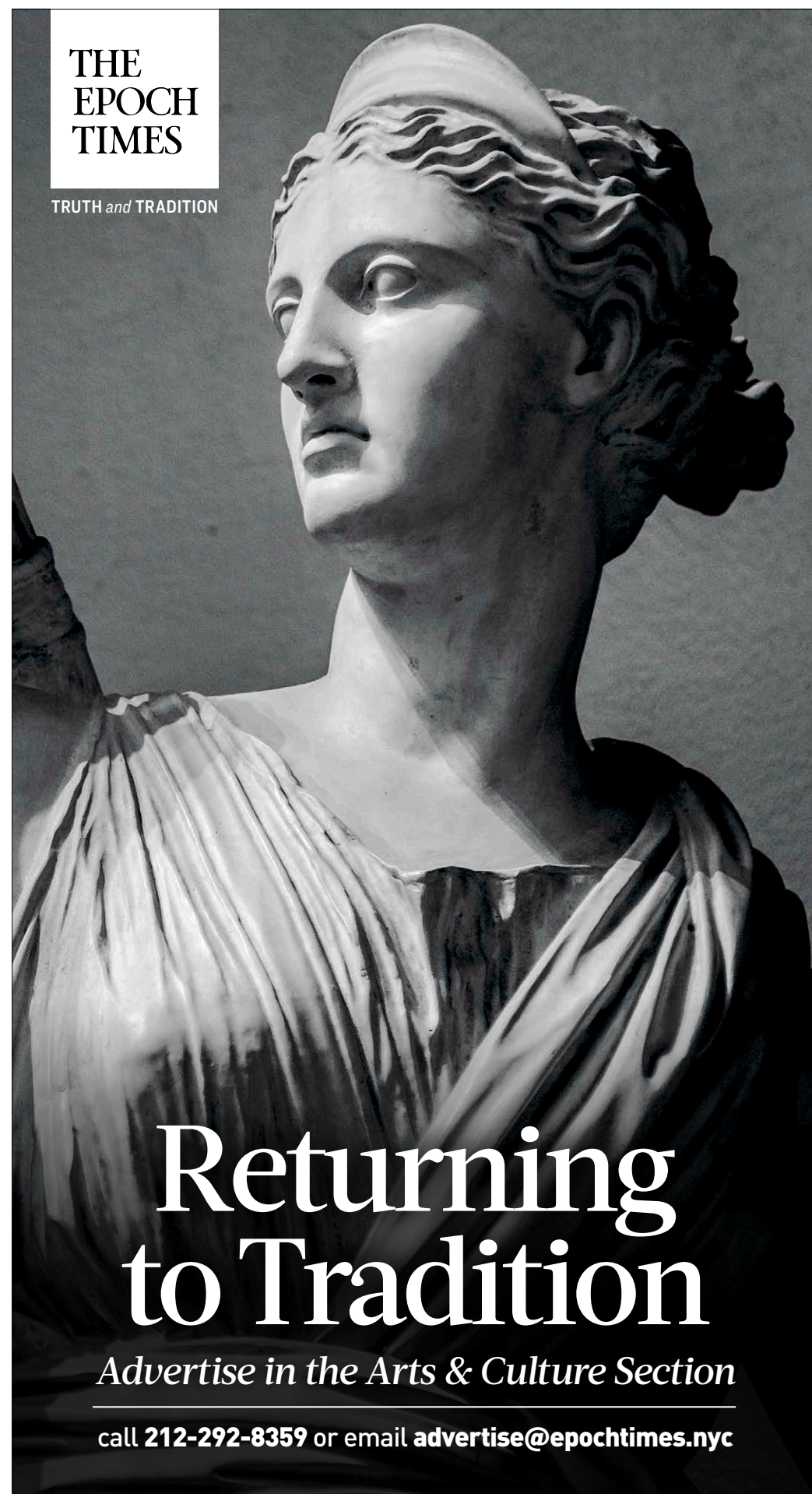
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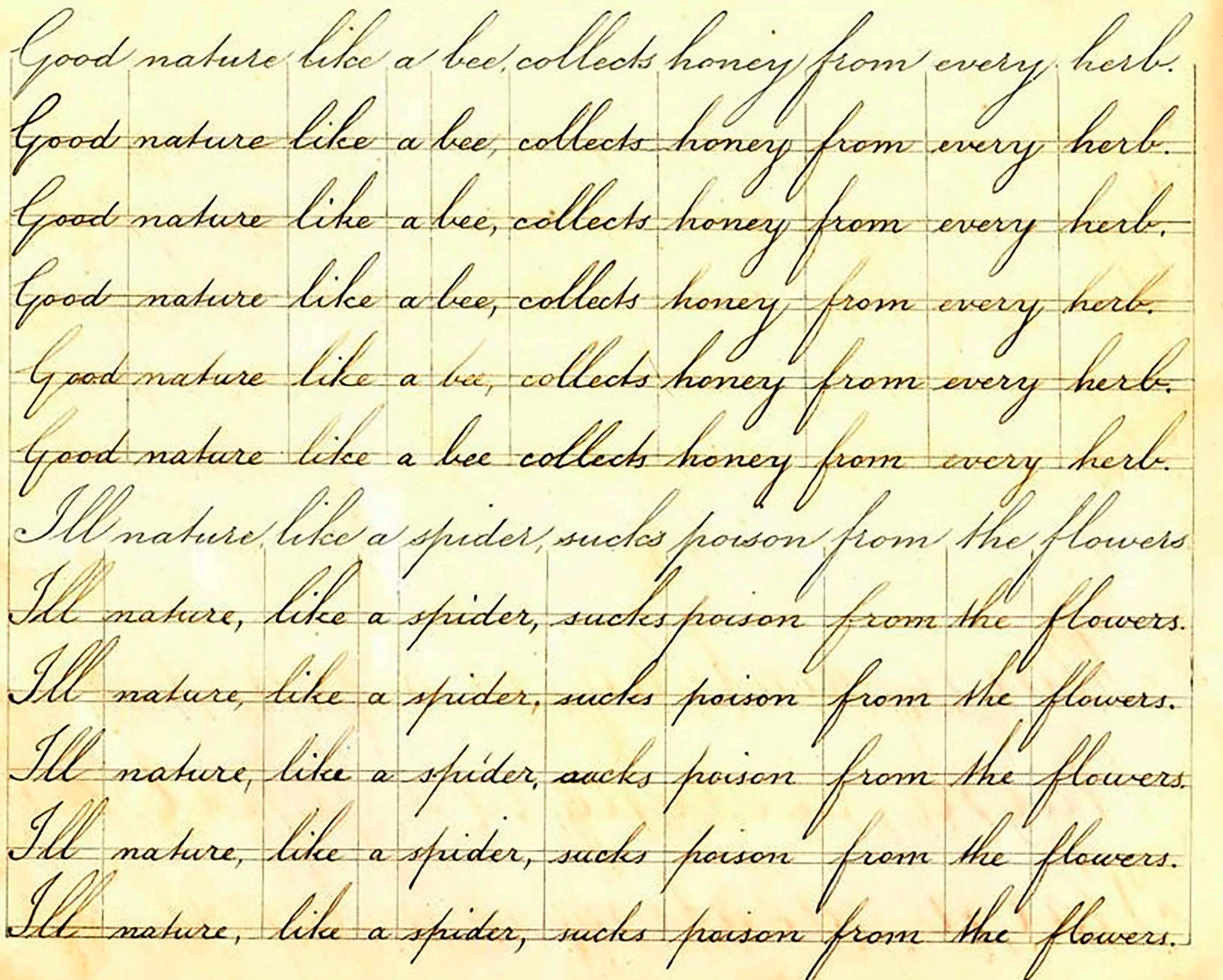
# Returning to Tradition

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ALL PHOTOS IN PUBLIC DOMAIN



A page from a 19th-century copybook, in which the printed headings have been copied. The homily is paraphrased from a 17th-century sermon of Isaac Barrow, "Against Detraction."

## LITERATURE

## Analyzing 'The Gods of the Copybook Headings' by Rudyard Kipling

TED HAYES

Rudyard Kipling's "The Gods of the Copybook Headings" was published in London in 1919, and in the United States in Harper's Magazine in January 1920—just over 100 years ago—as "The Gods of the Copybook Margins." It is sometimes referred to as "Maxims of the Marketplace."

Copybooks in Kipling's day—in the UK and, perhaps, in the United States—were books with lined pages, similar to a "yellow pad" today, but at the top were short sayings: aphorisms, maxims, verses from Scripture that drilled into the young student's perception the rules for life, the things that mattered, ostensibly given not as moral instruction but as examples for penmanship. On the dozen lines beneath, the student, using cursive script, wrote an exact copy, one copy on each line, until he had written the same maxim a dozen times—technically, to learn the art of exact handwriting, but in fact to have certain ideas driven into his or her head.

### 'The Gods of the Copybook Headings'

BY RUDYARD KIPLING

AS I PASS through my incarnations in every age and race, I make my proper prostrations to the Gods of the Market Place. Peering through reverent fingers I watch them flourish and fall, And the Gods of the Copybook Headings, I notice, outlast them all.

We were living in trees when they met They showed us each in turn That Water would certainly wet us, as Fire would certainly burn: But we found them lacking in Uplift, Vision and Breadth of Mind, So we left them to teach the Gorillas while we followed the March of Mankind.

We moved as the Spirit listed. They never altered their pace, Being neither cloud nor wind-borne like the Gods of the Market Place, But they always caught up with our progress, and presently word would come That a tribe had been wiped off its ice-

field, or the lights had gone out in Rome.

With the Hopes that our World is built on they were utterly out of touch, They denied that the Moon was Stilton; they denied she was even Dutch; They denied that Wishes were Horses; they denied that a Pig had Wings; So we worshipped the Gods of the Market Who promised these beautiful things.

When the Cambrian measures were forming, They promised perpetual peace.

They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would cease. But when we disarmed They sold us and delivered us bound to our foe, And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "Stick to the Devil you know."

On the first Feminian Sandstones we were promised the Fuller Life (Which started by loving our neighbour and ended by loving his wife) Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith, And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "The Wages of Sin is Death."

In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all, By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul; But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy, And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "If you don't work you die."

Then the Gods of the Market tumbled, and their smooth-tongued wizards withdrew And the hearts of the meanest were humbled and began to believe it was true That All is not Gold that Glitters, and Two and Two make Four And the Gods of the Copybook Headings limped up to explain it once more.

As it will be in the future, it was at the

birth of Man There are only four things certain since Social Progress began. That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the Sow returns to her Mire, And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire;

And that after this is accomplished, and the brave new world begins When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins, As surely as Water will wet us, as surely as Fire will burn, The Gods of the Copybook Headings with terror and slaughter return!

### A Poem for Our Time

The gist of the poem is simply that spiritual values exceed material values in every case. The way Kipling develops this idea, starting each verse as a would-be historical metaphor, explains why he is appreciated, outside of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, as a mountaintop poet.

Imagine if today's elementary school graduates, raised in our throwaway culture, had been required to write at least a dozen times—and with great care—the saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned." Perhaps our national debt, and people lying homeless in the street, would be reduced

problems.

Kipling's poem does not include any exact examples of these copybook headings. In his day, that was unnecessary. In ours, it requires a bit of research; that done, the meaning and the relevance of the poem come into focus.

His first verse pays some obeisance to "the Gods of the Market Place"—undefined, but in brief terms, the worship of business and material gain—but notes that the contrary Gods of the Copybook Headings have always outlasted them.

What would our Austrian economists, who believe that "the market solves all problems," have to say about that? Or present-day philosophers who believe that the Ten Commandments can easily be replaced by the lodestar "self-realization"?

In his second verse—when, he says, we

were still living in trees—the human race deserted the copybook headings, finding them "lacking in Uplift, Vision, and Breadth of Mind," and went instead to follow "the March of Mankind."

Each verse provides another example of what happens when society makes that fateful choice. Unlike the bulk of post-World War I poets, who, from Bloomsbury to Greenwich Village, became utterly disillusioned with warfare, his fifth verse offers the following: "They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would cease / But when we disarmed, they sold us, and delivered us bound to our foe / And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: 'Stick to the Devil you know.'" Weren't Mr. Churchill for his "Iron Curtain" speech, and America for the blood, sweat, tears, and treasure spent on NATO and U.S. defense, fully vindicated, as explained by Mr. Kipling, when Ronald Reagan called on a dictatorship to "Tear down this wall!" and freedom returned—or bloomed for the first time—in Eastern Europe?

The next verse offers a further viewpoint on contemporary values: "On the first Feminian Sandstones we were promised the Fuller Life / (Which started by loving our neighbor and ended by loving his wife) / Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith / And the Gods of the Copybook headings said: 'The Wages of Sin is Death.'" Isn't the birthrate in the Western world, for reasons unknown to experts, in decline? Isn't church attendance in free-fall?

Additional verses and lines seem prophetic: "Then the Gods of the Market tumbled, and their smooth-tongued wizards withdrew / And the hearts of the meanest were humbled..." And later: "All is not Gold that Glitters," and still later, "After all this is accomplished, and the brave new world begins / When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins..."

"Paid for existing"—interesting; "and no man must pay for his sins"—let the reader decipher.

A university faculty (Ph.D. University of California 1967, political science) and freelancer in his early career, Ted Hayes moved into full-time journalism and is now retired.

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## How to Read Shakespeare for Pleasure

EMMA SMITH

In recent years, the orthodoxy that Shakespeare can only be truly appreciated on stage has become widespread. But, as with many of our habits and assumptions, lockdown gives us a chance to think differently. Now could be the time to dust off the old collected works, and read some Shakespeare, just as people have been doing for more than 400 years.

Many people have said they find reading Shakespeare a bit daunting, so here are five tips for how to make it simpler and more pleasurable.

### Ignore the Footnotes

If your edition has footnotes, pay no attention to them. They distract you from your reading and de-skill you, so that you begin to check everything even when you actually know what it means.

It's useful to remember that nobody ever understood all this stuff. Have a look at Macbeth's knotty "If it were done when 'tis done" speech in Act 1 Scene 7 for an example. (And nobody ever spoke in these long, fancy speeches either. Macbeth's speech is again a case in point.) Footnotes are just the editor's attempt to deny this.

Try to keep going and get the gist. And remember, when Shakespeare uses very long or esoteric words, or highly involved sentences, it's often a deliberate sign that the character is trying to deceive himself or others. (The psychotic jealousy of Leontes in "The Winter's Tale," for instance, expresses itself in unusual vocabulary and contorted syntax.)

### Pay Attention to the Shape of the Lines

The layout of speeches on the page is like a kind of musical notation or choreography. Long speeches slow things down—and, if all the speeches end at the end of a complete line, that gives proceedings a stately, hierarchical feel—as if the characters are all giving speeches rather than interacting.

Short speeches quicken the pace and enmesh characters in relationships, particularly when they start to share lines (you can see this when one line is indented so it completes the half line above), a sign of real intimacy in Shakespeare's soundscape.

Blank verse, the unrhymed ten-beat iambic pentameter structure of the Shakespearean line, varies across his career. Early plays—the histories and comedies—tend to end each line with a piece of punctuation, so that the shape of the verse is audible. John of Gaunt's famous speech from "Richard II" is a good example.

"This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,

This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars." Later plays—the tragedies and the romances—tend toward a more flexible form of blank verse, with the sense of the phrase often running over the line break. What tends to be significant is contrast, between and within the speech rhythms of scenes or characters. (Have a look at "Henry IV Part 1" and you'll see what I mean.)

### Read Small Sections

Shakespeare's plays aren't novels; and let's face it, we're not usually in much doubt about how things will work out. Reading for the plot, or reading from start to finish, isn't necessarily the way to get

Don't buy into the myth that Shakespeare can only be enjoyed through performance. Visitors at Shakespeare's Globe in London on May 29, 2011.



Yes, go ahead. Buy that Shakespeare book. You'll enjoy it.

the most out of the experience. Theater performances are linear and in real time, but reading allows you the freedom to pace yourself, to flick back and forward, to give some passages more attention and some less.

Shakespeare's first readers probably did exactly this, zeroing in on the bits they liked best, or reading selectively for the passages that caught their eye or that they remembered from performance, and we should do the same. Look up where a famous quotation comes—"All the world's a stage," "To be or not to be," "I was adored once too"—and read either side of that. Read the ending, look at one long speech, or at a piece of dialogue. Cherry pick.

One great liberation of reading Shakespeare for fun is just that: Skip the bits that don't work, or move on to another play. Nobody is going to set you an exam.

### Think Like a Director

On the other hand, thinking about how these plays might work on stage can be engaging and creative for some readers. Shakespeare's plays tended to have minimal stage directions, so most indications of action in modern editions of the plays have been added in by editors.

Most directors begin work on the play by throwing all these instructions away and working them out afresh by asking



It might help to imagine Shakespeare's scenes unfolding.

questions about what's happening and why. Stage directions—whether original or editorial—are rarely descriptive, so adding in your chosen adverbs or adjectives to flesh out what's happening on your paper stage can help clarify your interpretations of character and action.

One good tip is to try to remember characters who are not speaking. What's happening on the faces of the other characters while Katherine delivers her long, controversial speech of apparent wifely subjugation at the end of "The Taming of the Shrew"?

### Don't Worry

The biggest obstacle to enjoying Shakespeare is that nagging sense that understanding the works is a kind of literary IQ test. But understanding Shakespeare means accepting his open-endedness and ambiguity. It's not that there's a right meaning hidden away as a reward for intelligence or tenacity. These plays prompt questions rather than supplying answers.

Would Macbeth have killed the king without the witches' prophecy? Exactly. That's the question the play wants us to debate, and it gives us evidence to argue on both sides. Was it right for the conspirators to assassinate Julius Caesar? Good question, the play says: I've been wondering that myself.

Returning to Shakespeare outside the dutiful contexts of the classroom and the theater can liberate something you might not immediately associate with his works: pleasure.

Emma Smith, a professor of Shakespeare studies at the University of Oxford in England, is the author of "This Is Shakespeare," published by Penguin Random House. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Things did not turn out well for Midas. Apollo in a red cloak, the god of music, gestures to Midas, the king of Phrygia. Midas, with donkey's ears, in "The Judgment of Midas," circa 1640, by Jan van den Hoecke. Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection).



## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## The Midas Touch and We in the West

JAMES SALE

From the beginning of human time, all peoples have known that there is a battle going on, and they have talked about this in the only way they could, which is to say, mythologically. They have known that the forces of chaos threaten to subvert the forces of order, and that chaos must be resisted. Indeed, it is from this understanding of order versus chaos that we understand what morality is; for the forces of order are good, and the forces of chaos are evil and must be resisted.

There is no doubt about this. It is very clear. And so for contemporary philosophers (and past ones too) to pretend otherwise is a form of deceit, which is itself chaos-inducing and thus evil. As Theodore Dalrymple expressed it, "I suspect that intellectual error is at the root of most evil." Of course, one of the considerable powers of evil is its ability to mimic good; one favorite old-fashioned word for this is "hypocrisy," and nowadays it might be "virtue signaling." The point is, whereas the myths make clear the distinction between order and chaos, good and evil, we find in our everyday lives that sometimes it is more difficult to distinguish between them. That said, relativism (Who says what's good and what's bad? It all depends on your viewpoint) is simply confusion or stupidity or, in both cases, chaos writ large.

Before considering one specific and famous myth, we must, however, correct the idea that we are suggesting that all disorder is bad. In fact, we cannot make progress without some disruptive forces. Zeus certainly stood for order and the cosmos, as did his three most shining children: Athena, Apollo, and Hermes. We recall, too, that Dionysus was the son of Zeus, and along with Dionysus were a host of other godlike beings, Pan and Silenus for example, devoted to disruption and orgiastic rites. But this (and their) disruption was entirely within the rules of Zeus's cosmological game.

This kind of disruption is quite different from the Titans, the Giants, and Typhon



In the Nathaniel Hawthorne version of the Midas myth, Midas's daughter turns to a golden statue when he touches her. Illustration by Walter Crane for the 1893 edition of "A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys."

**One of the remarkably bad things about the COVID-19 lockdown is not just the fact that the wealthy have become significantly wealthier, but that ordinary people have been hoarding.**

who threatened to overturn the universe itself and return everything to a state of dog-eat-dog and cannibalism, for Cronus ate his own children.

Thus, we come to our myth for today: the story of Midas and the Midas Touch. This is a well-known and charming myth, almost harmless in its fairy story qualities. But as Luc Ferry pointed out in his book "The Wisdom of the Myths," the story of Midas is often regarded as being "without much import or significance." Nothing could be further from the truth.

## King Midas's Folly

King Midas recognizes the prisoner brought before him as Silenus, the rather ugly and dissipated god who was the stepfather of Dionysus. Midas sees an opportunity here: Not only does he release him, but he also honors him by feasting and drinking in his honor for 10 days and nights! When Dionysus learns of this, he is extremely grateful and offers Midas an incredible gift, namely, anything he would like to have. This open-ended offer is immediately abused by Midas, who thus reveals his hubris. Without hesitation he replies, "Pray grant that all I touch be turned into gold."

And we all know what happens now: Everything he touches does indeed become gold—everything. The myth, at this point, should perhaps remind us of the last myth I covered here, the myth of Medusa. In her case, her look turned living and organic matter to stone, literally petrifying it. Now we have the touch turning everything to gold.

The folly of hubris in the case of Midas is that his request is out of all proportion to the benefit he had delivered to Dionysus. It's as if (if we think about it) one had given somebody else's child a helpful lift home from school, and the grateful parent said, "Thank you so much, what can I do for you?" and the person replied, "Buy me a 14-bedroom country mansion."

In a way, by being so generous to Silenus, Midas had set out to trick Dionysus into a generosity that he would exploit. But tricking a god is tricky, if not downright dangerous.

There is, then, hubris in the request itself, which is out of all proportion to the actions of Midas in the first place and so incurs the censure of violating Apollo's maxim of the golden mean, or "not too much." It is also hubristic in its essential nature, since like Medusa's turning all to stone, we now have a being who can turn all things to gold.

Fortunately, perhaps because Midas is a true devotee of Dionysus (he fares much worse later when he crosses the god Apollo and is given ass's ears for his pains), and because Dionysus himself is a disrupter, this hubris is only lightly punished. When Midas discovers he can no longer eat or drink because everything he touches turns to gold, he pleads with Dionysus to remove the "gift," which Dionysus does. Midas must go and wash in the river Pactolus, and there he is freed from the curse.

But what has this to do with the modern world and the West especially?

### What Happens When We Give Away Money?

Bill Bonner observed: "Try an experiment at home. Tell your teenager he will get \$5,000 a month for the rest of his life, and a life time supply of marijuana. See how that stimulates him. Think he'll study harder, work harder?" The idea of having money for nothing, and something for nothing, and riches without any real effort on our part, are what is now endemic to our thought patterns—though one could hardly call it thinking.

As of April 21, the U.S. Federal Reserve was buying about \$41 billion in assets daily, says The World Resources Institute. Wow! That's a lot of money. In the UK, more modestly, rates have already been slashed to the historic low of 0.1 percent by the Bank of England, and another 200 billion pounds (about \$245 billion) of quantitative easing added, according to the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute.

A sensible question might be: Where is all this money coming from? And the technical answer might be: the Feds, or the Bank of England, or the governments, etc. (Of course, more technical still, the answer might be the public, through taxation!)

The nontechnical answer might be: It's all coming from the Midas Touch! We are simply creating money by fiat! To be clear, nobody's performance has improved; there has been no increase in productivity. On the contrary, in the UK alone some 25 percent of GDP was lost in two months, The Guardian says, and there has certainly been no uptick in most businesses' earnings, or profits (except in a few, celebrated and exceptional cases).

It seems as if we are in a world where banks and governments can simply turn on the Midas Touch at will and make gold. Money has not been earned in any meaningful way.

Economists, of course, give contradictory advice about this situation. Some say we did it in the financial crisis in 2008, and that saved the day and all turned out nice again; others argue that the circumstances in 2008 were fundamentally different from the circumstances today. For example, in 2008 the banks were undercapitalized and so could absorb all the free money, which is not the case today, and so this is going to lead to a dreadful level of inflation that we have not experienced since at least the 1970s. Who's right?

Well, the answer is not to turn to economists, for what do they really know? As Warren Buffett acridly commented, according to Reuters: "Any company who has an economist has one employee too many." No, the answer is in the Midas myth.

## Expecting Something for Nothing

When we understand the myth, we see what it is telling us: Expecting something for nothing leads to disaster. It is hubris against the Greek gods and the structure of the cosmos; similar ideas occur in various religions and mythologies throughout the world, including the Chinese "Tao Te Ching." So it is that Midas, with all the money in the world—all that gold—potentially ends up starving or dying of thirst.

The creation of gold via magic leads to death. Imagine that! Here we are trying to save lives from COVID-19, and yet we are—through our intervention—creating a situation that may potentially destroy many more lives than we are saving!

And, of course, what we haven't yet stated is that not only is Midas stupid and hubristic, but his most obvious vice is his avarice: his wanting more and more at the expense of the common good. One of the remarkably bad things about the COVID-19 lockdown is not just the fact that the wealthy have become significantly wealthier, but that ordinary people have been hoarding toilet paper, soap, and other types of hygiene products—their gold, as it were. Again, as Bill Bonner puts it, "A huge crisis—caused by fake money and fake thinking—is coming."

But Midas doesn't die. In this case, the god lets him off. But like Jesus telling the blind man to go and wash himself in the pool (John 9:7), Midas, who is also in a sense blind, too must wash himself. He must undergo a kind of baptism, a dying to the old life, a healing, and a being born anew. Can we do that?

Can we turn from the avarice, the free money, and embrace a new way of living? Midas did. But then sadly, he went back to his old ways. It didn't end well for him, not well at all.

*James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.*

### FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## The American 'Braveheart'

MARK JACKSON

"The Patriot," starring Mel Gibson (2000, directed by Roland Emmerich) is basically the American version of "Braveheart," starring Mel Gibson (1995, directed by Mel Gibson).

Consider the loads of things "The Patriot" has in common with "Braveheart": Substitute green vistas of Scottish mountains for green U.S. Southern cornfields. Both movies have massive casts and bone-crunching, bloody battle scenes. Both have a loathsome antagonist we love to hate. Both are nearly three hours long. In "Braveheart," William Wallace (Gibson) avoids war—against the Brits—until his young bride is murdered. In "The Patriot," Benjamin Martin (Gibson) avoids war—against the Brits—until his young son is murdered. These events turn both Wallace and Martin into infernally tricky guerrilla war-fighters, fighting for freedom. There are a number of string-laden score themes in "The Patriot" that are suspiciously similar to the score of "Braveheart."

Mel should've directed "The Patriot." Mel's an epic director, and while "The Patriot" is epic in length, it doesn't quite have that certain special epic something that Mr. Gibson's directing projects have.

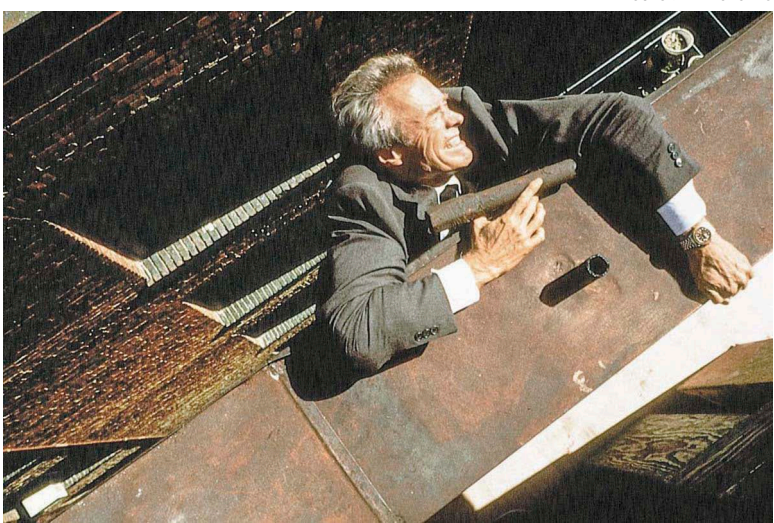
## The Story

It's 1776; the American Revolution looms, and the British are bent on quashing rebel independence. Fictitious South Carolinian land and slave owner (and French and Indian War vet) Benjamin Martin (an amalgamation of actual men who fought in the Revolutionary War) is trying hard to forget his sins of wartime violence. He prays for forgiveness while stowing away his elaborately carved tomahawk, at the movie's outset.

We learn he's considered a war hero of considerable stature; men continue to be moved and honored enough to buy him drinks.

He's got seven kids, his wife is dead, he longs for peace, but his eldest son Gabriel (Heath Ledger), a chip off the old block, enlists without his dad's blessing.

When Gabriel, before his father's very



Frank (Clint Eastwood) hangs on to a building ledge and life, in "In the Line of Fire."

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## Assassin's Revenge Versus Secret Service Redemption

MARK JACKSON

When aging Secret Service agent Frank Horrigan (Clint Eastwood), in rooftop pursuit, jumps to another roof in 1993's "In the Line of Fire," he narrowly avoids a death-fall into the alley.

As he hangs on for dear life, the man he's chasing, Mitch Leary (John Malkovich), a psychopathic former CIA assassin, offers Frank a helping hand. This is the essence of "In the Line of Fire," a top-tier cat-and-mouse thriller: Assassin Mitch revels in the irony that the U.S. government trained Frank to protect and Mitch to kill, and yet on that rooftop, protector Frank tried to kill killer-Mitch, while killer-Mitch tried to protect protector-Frank.

## 'In the Line of Fire'

Director Wolfgang Petersen

Starring Clint Eastwood, John Malkovich, Rene Russo, Dylan McDermott, Gary Cole, Fred Thompson

Rated R

Running Time 2 hours, 8 minutes

Release Date July 19, 1993

★★★★☆

## 'The Patriot'

Director Roland Emmerich

Starring Mel Gibson, Heath Ledger, Joely Richardson, Jason Isaacs, Chris Cooper, Tom Wilkinson, Donal Logue, Adam Baldwin

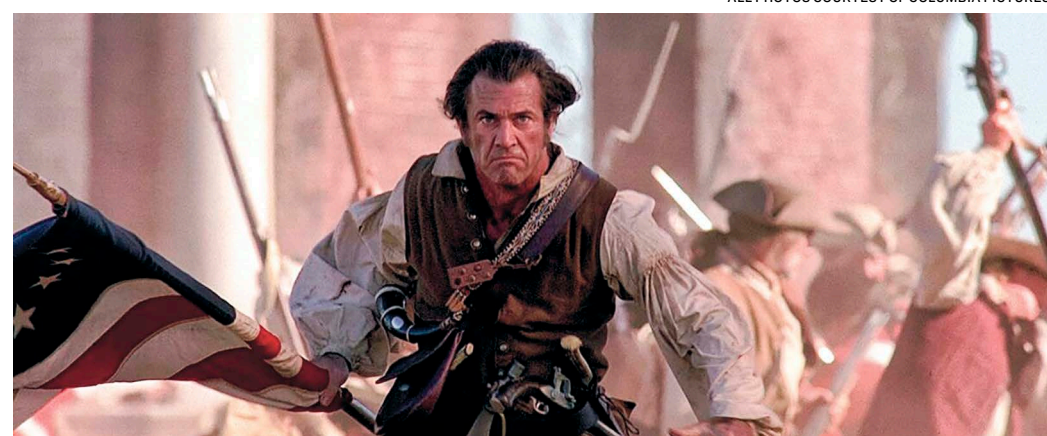
Rated R

Running Time 2 hours, 45 minutes

Release Date June 28, 2000

★★★★☆

War was once considered an honorable thing.



(Top) Mel Gibson as Benjamin Martin, bent on revenge, in "The Patriot." (Above) Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson) hiding from British soldiers he's about to ambush.

eyes, is captured by the Brits, and the sardonic British Col. William Tavington (Jason Isaacs) orders Gabe to be taken off and hanged, and then slays Martin's second son Thomas (Gregory Smith) on the spot, it re-ignites Martin's bloodlust.

Arming his two youngest sons with flintlocks twice their height, they ambush 20 British redcoats. And then Martin and sons, with a high degree of accuracy, snipe every last one of them. And forthwith, there are rumors among Brit soldiers of a killer ghost that roams the Southern fields and forests.

Like William Wallace, Benjamin Martin's God-given leadership ability makes him the natural go-to-leader of the South Carolinian local militia chapter, which consists of a motley crew of farmers, former slaves, war buddies, and eventually son Gabriel as one of his lieutenants.

As Martin fought, this war would consist of skirmishes picked in and around the country homes, farms, fields, and towns of South Carolina. So while the Brits stage field battles that outnumber and out-arm the rebel forces, Benjamin Martin conducts elusive, stick-and-move guerrilla-tactic raids on British supply lines and forces, popping up, raining down death and destruction, and quickly fading back into the bush.

## Honor and Tradition

What really hits home about "The Patriot" is something we've seen countless times before: Lines upon battle lines of men facing each other, from 50 feet away, standing there stock still while the enemy shoots

he's on offense and Frank's on defense. It's a classic sports match-up in a sense—the best of the best going up against each other.

We see Mitch at work at his craft, concocting in his lab, pouring liquid epoxy into molds, calibrating, filing, and putting the finishing touches on a metal-detector-defeating plastic gun, replete with a hollow rabbit's foot keychain fob. It holds the metal bullets that, sleight-of-hand-wise, don't get noticed going around the metal detector, while the plastic gun isn't noticed going through it.

We see Mitch test his gun on two yokel duck hunters. We see Mitch inadvertently expose a gap in his cover story to a bank clerk, and, meticulous about loose ends, he follows her home and murders her and her roommate.

## Dessert

Clint is vintage Clint with all his Clintisms here, and that almost always means quality. But Malkovich was nominated by seven different award associations for Best Supporting Actor.

A great stage actor, Malkovich plays Mitch like a fallen angel who cartwheeled into the lowest pits of hell, and while he sees the glory of his former military and patriotic honor reflected in Frank, he wonders about Frank's demons. He queries in a taunting manner, but it's clear he's looking for coping clues and probably fishing for tidbits of wisdom from a fellow traveler of sorts, as to where the entrance for the path to redemption can be found.

Mitch's profound sense of betrayal stemming from the CIA's sending his best friend and comrade in arms to Mitch's home to kill him is extremely palpable. But will he find redemption? Or will Frank redeem his own failure to protect President Kennedy?

them dead willy-nilly. What is up with such incredible stupidity?

Because how else, in this day and age, can it be described? Mathematician Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi invented algebra in the ninth century. Very intelligent. So why, nine whole centuries later, are men standing still in fields allowing their heads to get blown off? Rebel soldier: "Take your best shot!" Redcoat: "Blam!" Rebel ghost: "Doh!"

War was once considered an honorable thing. Honorable and courageous. Same with pistol dueling; one knew never to question a man's honor because if you did—just like that—you'd be called out to get your head blown off at dawn. And if you didn't show up? Your reputation was ruined for life, and I mean ruined.

Today's military still thinks war is honorable, and of course, serving and protecting one's country certainly is. But the rules of war were vastly different back in the day. You did not shoot someone in the face. Even back in the 1970s, pre-Bruce Lee, you did not kick someone in a fight. It was not cool. Honor is interesting. For years, before special operations sniping came to be considered cool, it was considered cowardly. Now there's nothing cooler—endless books and movies dedicated to the art of sniping. Shooting someone while hiding behind a tree is smart, but is it honorable to hide? Is it now honorable? Was it ever honorable? Does the end justify the means?

Questions to ponder. Have a peep at "The Patriot" and ponder people's present-day pittance of honor and propriety.

There's a romantic subplot between Frank and fellow agent Lilly Raines (Rene Russo), which has a similar paradoxical feel to the killer-protector relationship: She's much younger than Frank, but functions as older by way of her mothering, nurturing nature. She's also more grounded professionally by dint of the fact that she's young, hungry, in a leadership position, and squared away in terms of technology. Frank's sociologically, culturally, and technologically a bit of a dinosaur.

**The movie's traditional values concerning classic first responder, law enforcement, military, and Secret Service FBI CIA agent hero types who dutifully put their lives on the line for patriotism is timeless.**

Speaking of dinosaurs, Frank's pickup lines regarding Lilly were already clunky and almost unbearably chauvinistic (even though it's all said in jest) 27 years ago. Now, it's laughable.

But while the dating stuff is dated, the movie's traditional values concerning classic first-responder, law enforcement, military, and Secret Service/FBI/CIA agent hero-types who dutifully put their lives on the line for patriotism is timeless. "In the Line of Fire" is a top-notch thriller that remains, almost 30 years later, one of the best examples of the genre.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF COLUMBIA PICTURES



Italian paintings, 17th century, in The National Gallery, London.

**As I sat among those masterpieces, I always gained some kind of respite and solace, no matter what was happening in my life.**

created in 1998 by British artist Tracey Emin. Emin's installation consisted of her unmade bed while she was in the midst of having a mental breakdown. The bed was littered with cigarette packets, vodka bottles, dirty tissues, and the like. Admittedly, it was thought-provoking: It made me question whether I'd made my bed that morning. It didn't make me strive to be a better person beyond making me think of cleaning my house. It just brought up disgust and some compassion for Emin. Emin's art felt too much like what I was seeing in the news: A statement of someone's life without any positivity. The second was an art installation at the Tate Modern that prompted me to never return there again. The offending installation was a collection of colorful totemesque poles with suffragette and feminist protest war cries. I left the Tate Modern in quiet protest. I realized that art by Monet, Emin, and the like wasn't for me. I longed for art with a redeeming quality. Quite simply, I sought solace in art.

**Ancient Wisdom**

Now that I understood more about how different types of art had impacted me, there was another dot to connect.

For around 10 years, I worked as an Ayurvedic practitioner. Ayurveda, pronounced "eye-U-vay-da" (Sanskrit for the knowledge of life) is an ancient natural medicine system, similar to Chinese medicine, that began in India some 5,000 years ago.

Ayurveda looks at disease differently from Western medicine and defines disease (disease) as anything that causes discomfort, whether it has a mental or physical origin. Using the principles of Ayurveda, we can be aware of how the little things in our day can affect our health. For instance, one foundation of Ayurveda is the principle of "similar increases similar." Most of us practice this instinctively: When we are hot, we may automatically reach for an ice cream or ice cold glass of water to cool ourselves down. We wouldn't grab something hot, as that would increase our temperature. That's the principle of similar increases similar in practice.

So Ayurveda states that to alleviate any dis-ease we should go for the opposite quality from what we're experiencing.

Ayurveda also believes that everything we consume, whether it's our food or through our sensory experiences, is nourishment. It makes sense, then, that one of Ayurveda's tenets for good health and happiness is the proper use of our five senses—perhaps something we don't necessarily think about. Yet, everything we consume with our senses affects us.

Ayurveda has the concept of "asatmyendriyarthasamyoga," Sanskrit for the unwholesome contact of the senses with their objects. The objects of the sense of sight are the eyes, for example. Unwholesome actions come under three categories that can cause dis-ease: excessive, inactive, or improper use of the senses.

Most of the time, we're probably in a state of excessive use of our senses, if our daily commute involves being bombarded with billboard signs and surfing social media, for example.

Within this context, I could begin to understand how viewing art affected my health. Of the three unwholesome actions, the improper use of our senses, which Ayurveda calls "mithya yoga" (Sanskrit for improper union) was particularly relevant. This improper union is an action we carry out even though we know it is not good for us. One improper use of sight would be to see any distorted vision or repulsive, frightening, or aggressive objects.

With this knowledge, I can see how I created some dis-ease in myself by looking either at art that was unpleasant or art that however beautiful wasn't quite true to real life. It then made sense that the art I saw as a girl moved me so much because, even if I didn't know what it meant, it connected me with my humanity. I recognized it on a soul level, and that experience nourished me.

English painter Sir Joshua Reynolds got it right when in 1784 he said: "A room hung with pictures is a room hung with thoughts." Worth thinking about is the intent of the picture, the thoughts the artist tries to convey, in addition to whether the art is imbued with goodness integral to our health.

We cannot unsee what we've seen. But, for the most part, we can choose what we consume. The question is: Do we want to consume art that contributes to our dis-ease or to our inner harmony?

# How Our Art Consumption Affects Our Health

'A room hung with pictures is a room hung with thoughts'

**LORRAINE FERRIER**

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future," former Apple CEO, the late Steve Jobs said in his 2005 Stanford University commencement address.

In his speech, Jobs explained how after he dropped out of college, he stayed on campus and took a calligraphy class. Jobs attributed that class as the reason Apple Mac's typography was so beautiful, and one of the reasons the Mac was an incredible success.

Jobs took the calligraphy class because he enjoyed it; he didn't understand how important it would be to his future success.

Inspired by Jobs's insightful reflections, I joined the dots throughout my life, but in a very different way: to recount how art had affected my wellbeing. Many of us, at one time or another, have probably looked at our health and wellbeing in terms of the food and drink we consume, but we may not have considered how the art we consume affects our quality of life.

**Girl Meets Masterpiece**

Art has always been a part of my life, and I've been fortunate to have visited many of the world's best galleries and museums such as the Louvre in Paris; the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam; the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia; The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and more. And having lived most of my life a short commute from London's world-class art institutions, great art is practically on my doorstep.

My first memory of meeting a masterpiece is etched in my mind. It was on a school trip to a London gallery when I was around 11 years old. I saw a red chalk drawing gently rendered by the hand of Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, or the like—you'll forgive my 11-year-old self for not remembering this important detail.

I was in awe of the rather dainty depiction, yet I couldn't quite explain why. I don't remember even understanding the subject matter. But the drawing fascinated me to such an extent that as my school party walked off into the distance, I just stayed and stared at this mysterious masterpiece.

Around 10 years after that first encounter, I spent many a lunchtime sitting in the Old Masters gallery at the London Tate Gallery (now the Tate Britain), which was just a stone's throw from where I worked. As I sat among those masterpieces, I always gained some kind of respite and solace, no matter what was happening in my life.

Those experiences I'd had with traditional paintings seemed to have an ability to uplift me. I thought back to other art that had left a deep impression on me to understand more.

**Monet and More**

One thing I'll never forget was seeing Monet's "Water Lilies" on a school exchange trip to Paris in 1991. At the time, I was in complete awe of anything Monet made.

Monet specifically painted his series of water lilies to span the length and breadth of two oval galleries in the Orangerie Museum, covering more than 100 linear yards.

I walked around one of the oval galleries, with my eyes fixated on Monet's pastel blue-pink-green water lilies that seemed to dance with light. As my feet closely followed the curve of the gallery, I became more and more hypnotized by the soft play of colors, so much so that I failed to realize a small ledge on the floor where the floor met the wall. In an instant, I lost my footing and slipped. I instinctively stretched my arm out to steady myself and nearly high-fived Monet's canvas. Needless to say, I was mortified. I was awakened from the deafening awkward silence (that seems to accompany any accident) by a gallery attendant screaming at me in French. It wasn't my proudest art encounter, but it taught me a lot.

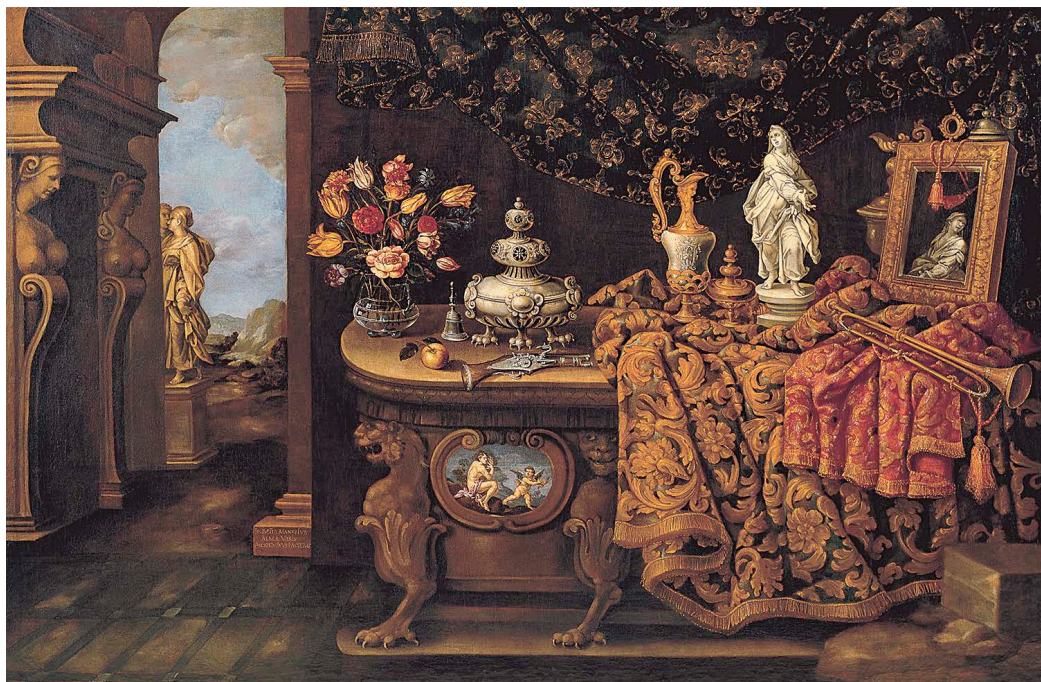
Monet's "Water Lilies" mesmerized me to such an extent that I literally lost my footing. I now realize that that's what a lot of modern art does: It disorients us rather than guides us.

Remembering my awkward, close encounter with Monet's art surprised me. Only two other pieces of modern art made a lasting impression on me. The first was "My Bed,"

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"The Five Senses," circa 1675-1700, by Giovanni Battista Manerius. Oil on canvas; 57 inches by 89.4 inches.



"Allegory of the Five Senses," circa 1630, by Pietro Paolini. Oil on canvas; 49.2 inches by 68.1 inches. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

# Dancers Need to Dance: 'The Unfinished Dance' Versus 'The Red Shoes'

**TIFFANY BRANNAN**

When COVID-19 shuttered the United States, the performing arts were hit hard, especially ballet. Few dancers have space to dance if they're unable to go to studios or theaters, and they can't practice a "pas de deux" (partnering dance) while social distancing!

Unfortunately, some noteworthy anniversaries landed in 2020, like American Ballet Theatre's (ABT) 80th anniversary. Its spring-summer and fall seasons, which were to feature special performances and events, were canceled. Virtual events can't replace dancing for ballet dancers.

In honor of ABT's tragically canceled 80th anniversary season, I am exploring two classic ballet movies: "The Unfinished Dance" (1947) and "The Red Shoes" (1948). Although one is American and the other British, both films show that ballet dancers must dance.

In "The Unfinished Dance," a ballet company school student, young Meg Merlin (Margaret O'Brien), prefers watching prima ballerina Ariane Bouchet (Cyd Charisse) dance to going to class. When famous ballerina La Darina (Karin Booth) arrives to star in three productions, Meg hates to see her beloved Ariane outshone. She decides to shut off the lights during a performance to humiliate Darina. However, she accidentally opens the trapdoor instead, causing a horrible accident that teaches Meg, Ariane, and Darina about dancing, love, and forgiveness.

In "The Red Shoes," composer Julian Craster (Marius Goring) learns that his professor stole his music for a ballet score. However, after telling impresario Boris Lermontov (Anton Walbrook) that he is the real composer, he is hired as the Ballet Lermontov's orchestral assistant. Meanwhile, lovely ballerina Victoria Paige (Moira Shearer) meets Lermontov at a party, and he hires her. After the prima ballerina (Ludmilla Tcherina) retires to get married on tour, Vicky stars in the new ballet "The Red Shoes," and Julian writes the score. Vicky's performance launches her career, yet Lermontov resents her romance with Julian. She must choose between dancing and love.

Before 1968, Hollywood had no rating system. From 1934 to 1968, the Motion Picture Production Code dictated the

decency of American films. The Production Code Administration (PCA), which enforced the Code, determined acceptable content. No film could be released in the United States without a PCA Seal of Approval, which ensured acceptability for everyone. This standard was maintained from 1934 to 1954, when Joseph I. Breen, the head of the PCA, effectively enforced the Code.

Not all 1934-1954 movies achieved these decency standards. Only American films were self-regulated by the PCA. British films were supervised by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), a panel of filmmakers formed in 1912 as industry self-regulation to avoid uncontrolled censorship. With no written guidelines, the BBFC was vague about what it allowed and what it forbade. After T.P. O'Connor became the BBFC's president in 1916, he clarified by listing 43 issues that frequently required deletion.

Although both the PCA and the BBFC were created to self-regulate the industry, only one truly did. Since America's PCA reviewed films pre-

production, eliminat-

ing objectionable content, post-production editing was minimal. In contrast, the BBFC rarely reviewed content pre-

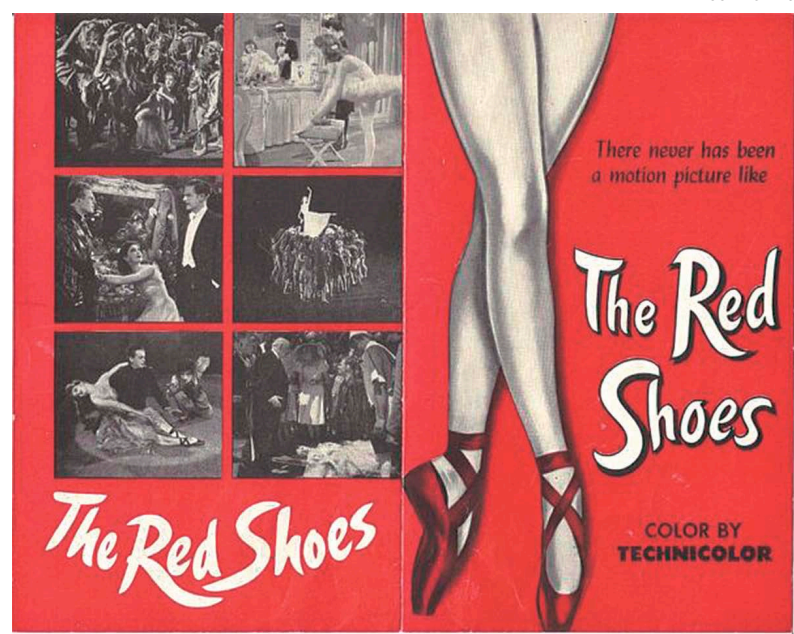
production (although more filmmakers began seeking advice about scripts after World War II). The BBFC usually just screened and cut completed films. Even when regulated by an industry-created

board, this practice was censorship, which never creates the kind of decent entertainment that self-regulation can.

Although the PCA approved many foreign films for American distribution, these do not contain the level of decency found in American films. The difference is obvious in these ballet films. Beyond moral objections, the British film's general darkness sets the movies apart.

**Toe Shoes on Celluloid**

"The Unfinished Dance" was one of Hollywood's first ballet films. Leading lady Cyd Charisse began studying ballet at age 6 to bolster her health and loved it immediately. At 12, she began studying in Los Angeles with ballet greats Adolph Bolm and Bronislava Nijinska. At 14, she auditioned for the Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo, was hired, and toured with the company in Europe. In Paris, she married dancer and choreographer Nico Charisse, who had taught her years earlier in Los Angeles. They relocated to Hollywood when the Ballet



The original publicity still for the film "The Red Shoes." From The Red Shoes (1948) Collection at Ailina Dance Archives.

Russe disbanded during World War II.

Karin Booth, though, was not a ballerina, so a double was used. However, she had "always danced a little" and once took a lesson with Mia Slavenska. She trained daily with David Lichine, the film's Russian choreographer, to look convincing in close shots, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Nine-year-old Margaret O'Brien had danced since she was a "baby." She took to the Russian dancers' instructions eagerly, especially enjoying working with Mr. Lichine. She did all her own dancing, including the pointe work.

"The Red Shoes" is acclaimed for featuring real ballet dancers. Leading lady Moira Shearer was an up-and-coming ballerina at England's Sadler's Wells dance company. Robert Helpmann, the Australian dancer who played Ivan Boleslawsky, Ballet Lermontov's "premier danseur," recommended her to filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Having worked with her at Sadler's Wells, he knew she possessed the beauty, acting talent, and ballet technique required.

After a year, Moira reluctantly accepted the part, according to Adrienne L. McLean's 1987 article in Dance Chronicle.

The Ballet Lermontov's resident choreographer and character dancer, Grischa Ljubov, was played by Leonide Massine, a renowned Russian dancer and choreographer who choreographed his part in "The Ballet of the Red Shoes."

The rest of the 17-minute ballet sequence was choreographed by Helpmann. The company's original prima ballerina, Irina Boronskaya, was played by Ludmilla Tcherina, a French ballerina whom Michael Powell cast, history and media scholar Mark Connelly says, because of her "unconventional beauty."

**Dancers Must Dance**

To professional ballet dancers, dancing is more than a job. It is their life. Both these movies emphasize how vital dancing is to ballet dancers. In "The Unfinished Dance," Mr. Paneros (Danny Thomas), Meg's temporary guardian, tries to convince Meg that she should quit ballet. She solemnly says, "If a dancer can't dance anymore, she just dies." In "The Red

Shoes," upon first learning that Vicky is a ballerina, Lermontov asks her, "Why do you want to dance?" She responds, "Why do you want to live?" Lermontov answers, "Well, I don't know exactly why, but I must." Vicky simply replies, "That's my answer, too."

## 'The Unfinished Dance' was one of Hollywood's first ballet films.

Compare these two films to observe their artistic and moral differences. While "The Red Shoes" features more classical ballet excerpts, its lack of self-regulation is obvious. "The Red Shoes" shows a ballerina torn between art and love, ultimately driven to self-destruction. The tragic conclusion darkens the whole film, turning a story behind ballet curtains into a melodrama that influenced later films about disturbed ballerinas.

In contrast, "The Unfinished Dance" depicts a ballerina who overcomes a devastating accident to find fulfillment in teaching. While in a foreign film, Darina might have gone mad or killed herself, this Code film shows her finding contentment in mentoring Meg. While one ends with bleak symbolism, the other shows the redemptive powers of forgiveness.

"The Unfinished Dance" begins with the following dedication: "Long before people sang, they danced. Out of their dancing grew a new world, strange and wonderful—the world of ballet." I hope that, while stages remain empty, viewers can instead enjoy classic films about dance and that today's ballet dancers, like Darina, can find contentment in other aspects of ballet besides performing until they can take the stage again!

*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.*

Promotional flyer for "The Red Shoes." From The Red Shoes (1948) Collection at Ailina Dance Archives.

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ONLINE THEATER REVIEW

# Easing a Loved One's Pain

JUDD HOLLANDER

In the wake of the current pandemic, theatrical performances must try to present the same emotional effect that comes from a live presentation through a different, less visceral medium. One offering that succeeds quite admirably in doing just that is the Irish Repertory Theatre's world-premiere presentation of Darren Murphy's "The Gifts You Gave to the Dark." Their online drama offers an unflinching look at the COVID-19 outbreak and its devastating effect on one family, and through them, the world at large.

**The play explores the pain of saying goodbye to someone you love.**

Stricken with COVID-19, Tom (Marty Rea), an actor by trade, is alone in his house in Belfast, in Northern Ireland. His life has been reduced to what he can see from his bedroom window. Tom's illness, as well as the country's quarantine, prevents him from joining the rest of his family in Dublin, where his gravely ill mother (Marie Mullen) is dying.

When Tom receives a call from his uncle Larry (Sean McGinley), he is told that his mom is now just clinging to life in the hope that she will see her son one last time. Larry asks Tom to talk to her and,

in doing so, allow her to let go.

While certainly topical, "The Gifts You Gave to the Dark" illuminates the specter of loneliness we have all felt at points when separated from loved ones, no matter the reason.

Tapping into this universal dread of having no one close by in times of need allows the audience to empathize with Tom as he tries to tell his mom what she needs to hear. At the same time, he forces himself to put aside his own fear of dying alone and uncomforted. The play shows the importance of helping others, even in the most difficult and uncertain of times.

Running a brisk 25 minutes, the intimate piece unfolds without being overly maudlin. Tom evokes images of happier times from more than a decade earlier, when his mother accompanied him on a road trip to an acting audition. It was a journey full of laughter as she sang along to Doris Day on the radio while listening to her son prepare for his tryout.

**Winning Performances**

Catriona McLaughlin's direction brings together each element of the story in a sobering and satisfying manner.

The cast is excellent. Rea powerfully shows the desperation, fear, and anger of being alone, while at the same time coming to terms with the fact that he can still be of help—though at a great personal cost. Several times, Tom begs Larry not to interrupt his talk with his mom, but rather allow them just a few moments more together—especially as Tom is recalling the return trip of their journey, when



During the pandemic lockdown, (L-R) Tom (Marty Rea) is asked by his uncle Larry (Sean McGinley) to come online and give solace to Tom's dying mother (Marie Mullen), in a newly produced play.



**'The Gifts You Gave to the Dark'**

Presented by Irish Repertory Theatre

**Running Time**  
24 minutes

Free online viewing through October 2020

he and his mother headed home together. The importance of home and what it represents is another theme in the play.

Mullen is heartbreaking as Tom's mother, offering a performance that is amazing in its seeming simplicity. A woman who once had a caustic sense of humor and "the laugh of a 6-year-old," she is now barely conscious in her sickbed. Yet the audience is so invested in the story that we fill in the blanks of her almost non-existent movements with passion and emotion.

McGinley acquits himself admirably while serving as the conduit between Tom and his mother. The character is forced to keep his own emotions in check, even though he feels "wound up as a spring" from the frustration of not being able to do more for his family.

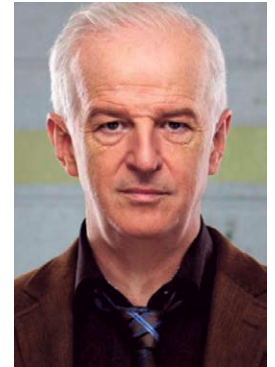
"The Gifts You Gave to the Dark," the title a reference to a song lyric, explores the pain of saying goodbye to someone you love. It's a pain no less sharp if that goodbye is for all the right reasons.

For further information, visit [IrishRep.org](http://IrishRep.org)

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for [stagebuzz.com](http://stagebuzz.com) and a member of the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle.



Marie Mullen.



Sean McGinley.



Marty Rea.

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