

WEEK 32, 2020

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**ARTS &  
CULTURE**

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***Let's Take Back Our Schools***

It's time to change the way we educate our children...4

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ESSENCE OF CHINA



AN ANCIENT CHINESE STORY

# An Honest Deed That Led to a Reunion

SU LIN

There were three brothers, Lu Yu, Lu Bao, and Lu Zhen, who lived outside the east gate in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, during the Ming Dynasty. Lu Yu had a son named Xi'er. One day when Xi'er was 6 years old, he went with the children from next door to a temple fair and never returned.

Lu Yu and his wife, Wang, looked for their child for days, but there was no sign of him anywhere.

Distraught, Lu Yu decided to leave home to do business and look for Xi'er at the same time. A few years went by. One day, he came to a place called Chenliu and found a green cloth bag in a latrine. He opened the bag and was astonished to find 200 taels of silver in it.

Lu Yu thought: "Whoever lost the money must be desperately looking for it. A life might be at stake. Honesty is a virtue. I'll wait here for the owner to come back for his money."

A day passed, and nobody showed up. Lu Yu had no choice but to continue his journey. He met a businessman named Chen Chaofeng at an inn in Suzhou, Anhui Province. They talked about business, and Chen sighed and said he had lost a bag in Chenliu with 200 taels of silver in it.

Lu Yu asked him to describe the bag. The description matched the bag he had found. He promptly took out the bag to return to Chen.

Chen was delighted. He offered to split the money down the middle with Lu Yu as a reward, but the latter declined.

In gratitude, Chen invited Lu Yu to his residence. He was keen to give his daughter's hand in marriage to Lu Yu's son if he had one. Lu Yu cried and told him about his son who had gotten lost.

Chen sighed and said: "I have a boy here whom I bought from another man for three taels of silver some years back. He's 13 now. You can take him to be your son. It's my way of repaying your kindness."

Chen brought the boy to Lu Yu. The boy had a scar at the corner of his left brow. Lu Yu's heart skipped a beat, for his son had fallen down when he was 4, and it had left a scar at the corner of his left brow. He asked the boy where he hailed from and who had sold him.

The boy said: "I'm not sure. I only remember my father is called Big Lu. I also have two uncles. I was duped and taken away before I was sold here."

Lu Yu cried: "I'm your father! It has been so many years. Never in my dreams did I think I would run into you here!"

Chen and his family rejoiced at the Lus' reunion. With sincere gratitude, Lu Yu said to Chen, "I owe it to you that I could be reunited with my son."

Chen replied, "You did yourself a big favor by returning my money to me."

The two families' children were betrothed to each other. Chen gave the father and son 20 taels for them to go home.

The following morning, Lu and his son bade farewell to the Chens and came to a river. There was a commotion. A boat had capsized, and there were a few people in the water crying for help. Onlookers were arguing with some boatmen at the bank, who demanded to be paid for getting the people out of the water.

Lu Yu was eager to save the people. The 20 taels came to his mind. "I could offer them to the boatmen as a reward," he thought. He said to the boatmen, "If you get everybody out of the water, I'll reward you with 20 taels."

In no time, everybody was rescued.

Lu Yu gave the 20 taels to the boatmen. The people from the capsized boat were coming up to Lu Yu to thank him when someone shouted from among them, "Where did you come from, Brother?" It was Lu Yu's youngest brother, Lu Zhen.

"Heaven helped me save my brother!" Lu Yu exclaimed. He told his brother about the 200 taels, the 20 taels, and his reunion with his son.

Lu Yu asked Lu Zhen why he had come to Suzhou. Lu Zhen replied: "It has been a few years since you left home. We were told that you had died in Shanxi. Your wife is already in mourning, and yet Lu Bao is trying to force her to remarry. She refused, of course. Go home quickly to your wife, before it's too late."

Lu Yu panicked. He jumped onto the boat and headed home.

The middle brother, Lu Bao, was wicked. When he heard that a widower in Jiangxi



was looking for a wife, he offered Lu Yu's wife to him. The two men agreed on a price of 30 taels.

Lu Bao got the money and told the man: "My sister-in-law is stubborn. I'm certain she will not leave with you. Come to my house in the evening with a sedan chair. The one wearing a white hairband in mourning will be my sister-in-law. Just grab her, put her in the sedan chair, take the boat the same night, and go."

Lu Bao's wife, Yang, told Wang: "My husband has married you off to a Jiangxi man. He'll come in the evening for you. You had better start packing your things."

Wang cried and turned the idea down flat. "My husband may be dead, but I've yet to see his body. Let's wait till Lu Zhen comes back with news of Lu Yu before we do anything. Please do not force me! And how can I marry anyone when I'm still in mourning?"

Yang looked for a black hairband for Wang, but it was Heaven's will that she could not find one. So she exchanged hers with Wang.

Dusk fell, and the Jiangxi man came to the Lus' house with a bridal sedan. When the door was opened, a band of people headed straight for the woman wearing a white hairband.

Yang cried out, "I'm not the one!" But the band just grabbed her, stuffed her into the sedan, and sped off.

The following morning, Lu Bao came home and could not find his wife. When he saw his sister-in-law wearing a black hairband, he got suspicious and asked Wang what had happened. Wang told him about the switched hairbands.

Lu Bao pounded his chest. At the end of the day, it was his own wife he sold.

Lu Bao was about to leave when five people came in. They were none other than his brothers Lu Yu and Lu Zhen, his nephew Xi'er, and porters bringing in their luggage and goods. Ashamed of himself, Lu Bao ran out the back door.

Lu Yu said: "Had I not returned the 200 taels of silver, I wouldn't have found my son. And had I kept the 20 taels, I wouldn't have run into my brother and found out what had happened in the family. It is Heaven's will that we are reunited. Lu Bao got a taste of his own medicine for trying to sell my wife."

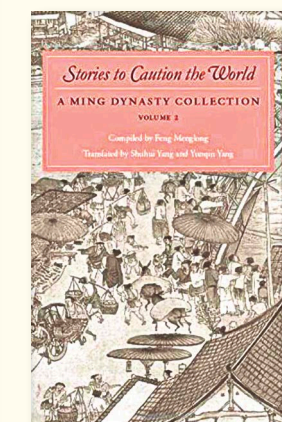
Lu Yu became even kinder to others. His family prospered. Xi'er married Chen Chaofeng's daughter and had many descendants.

The tale of Lu Yu's encounter is an excellent example of integrity and kindness.

*"This story is from 'Stories to Caution the World, Vol. 5, 'Big Brother Lu's Honest Deed Led Him to His Son.' 'Stories to Caution the World' is the second of the three collections of vernacular fiction written by Feng Menglong in the Ming Dynasty.*

SUN MINGGUO/THE EPOCH TIMES

'Heaven helped me save my brother!' Lu Yu exclaimed.



This story is from a collection called "Stories to Caution the World."

Lu Yu said to the boatman, "If you get everybody out of the water, I'll reward you with 20 taels."

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## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# Let's Take Back Our Schools

It's time to change the way we educate our children

JEFF MINICK

While visiting my daughter and her family in Elmhurst, Pennsylvania, I was standing in a line waiting to enter an Aldi. Near the doorway, an employee was sanitizing the handles of the carts shoppers had returned from the parking lot and talking to a customer and her teenage daughter.

The Aldi employee mentioned her 16-year-old son and how much he missed school. "He told me he hasn't learned a thing since the schools closed," she said. "Not a thing."

That remark snagged my attention, for it condemns the public education—the woman named her son's school—given this young man. After 10 years of sitting in a classroom, he had grown accustomed to being spoon-fed information rather than seeking out knowledge on his own.

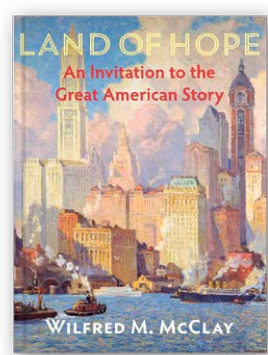
### Systemic Failure

The events of the past five months should give us pause in regard to our system of education. The shuttering of our schools has granted many parents a deeper understanding of what their children are learning in the classroom, and many, I would guess, are unhappy with these findings.

Evidence indicates a dramatic uptick in the fall in the number of homeschooling students. Here in Front Royal, Virginia, for example, the Seton Home Study School, a Catholic outfit providing curricula, lesson plans, and testing services to students around the country and abroad, reported in June a 35 percent increase in enrollments for the coming academic year. School officials informed me that August is the banner month for enrollments, so these numbers will likely increase by the end of the summer. The same surge in enrollments undoubtedly applies to other companies catering to homeschooling families.

Concern about the failures of our schools are decades old. In Guy Benson's online video post, for example, a journalist asks the ambassador to France, Jamie McCourt, whether she is worried that we might be in danger of losing the American Dream. McCourt responds by reminding her audience that the troubles of American education are nothing new:

How can we encourage critical thinking, the study of history and its nuances, a deeper knowledge of civics, and an appreciation for Western culture in general?



Why not use this history book in schools?

"I am petrified. I'm not just worried. I mean, I think it's been incrementally coming for many, many, many years. ... The education of our children is a little bit different than when I grew up, certainly, because we're less focused on the basics, we're less focused on civics, we're less focused on why certain things are important to our country. People need to understand why it is such a treasure, and there's no place like it in the entire world."

Are today's students being taught that their country is "a treasure," that "there's no place like it in the entire world"?

Recent events suggest otherwise. The boarded-up shops in Manhattan, Minneapolis, and other cities, the looted stores, the howling mobs of young radicals, many of them college-educated, the cancel-culture crew, the Marxist slogans, the shrill and derogatory attacks on America itself, all reflect what these people were taught in the classroom.

So what can we do to restore those standards of education mentioned by Ambassador McCourt? How can we encourage critical thinking, the study of history and its nuances, a deeper knowledge of civics, and an appreciation for Western culture in general?

Let's take a look.

### Small Is Beautiful

One of my college professors attended grades 1-8 in a one-room schoolhouse in South Carolina. He was well-acquainted with the other students, other children from that small community, and with the teacher. He later graduated from Washington and Lee, and earned a doctorate in history from the University of Wisconsin. Several times, in his remarks on the value of his early education, he claimed he had learned much from overhearing the teacher instruct students in the upper grades while he was working on his assignments.

Many home-educated families enjoy a similar experience by forming co-ops, where parents, grandparents, and others offer classes in subjects ranging from mathematics to art. For years, I taught homeschoolers in such subjects as Latin, literature, and history, up to and including Advanced Placement courses. Most of them performed splendidly, in part because of the small class size, in part because we came to know each other well.

Our public schools and our universities might take a lesson from these examples. Because so many larger institutions take a factory-style approach to education, such a change would be dif-

ficult but not impossible to implement. Hiring more teachers and getting rid of many administrators would at least be a step in the right direction.

### Get the Government Out of Education

In 1963, I entered Staunton Military Academy, now long defunct, as a seventh grader. Some of my classmates were from wealthy families and had the advantages of private education, yet in my two years at the academy, I stood at the top of my class, the product of Boonville Elementary School, a small town in Piedmont North Carolina with no public library. I credit my academic success to those Boonville teachers who taught and drilled us in the basics of mathematics, literature, grammar, history, and science.

All without the help of the federal government.

To demand, as the government does today, that 50.8 million public school students, a figure from the National Center of Education Statistics, can be educated according to federal directive is wrongheaded. Five years ago, for instance, Mason Classical Academy in Naples, Florida, abandoned the federal government's Common Core curriculum. Instead, this charter school switched to phonics, basic mathematics, and classical literature, history, and fine arts. When third- and fifth-grade students from Mason took the required exams for Common Core, they ranked in the top two percent of Florida students.

Time to say goodbye to bureaucrats and return our classrooms to our teachers.

### Cancel the Culture

Right now, "cancel culture" means a boycott or a nasty electronic mob attack on someone with whom they disagree. A celebrity makes a remark that some consider sexist and is swarmed by assailants via Twitter, the owner of Goya Foods speaks favorably of President Trump, and the Left urges a boycott of his company, which in this case backfired as others rushed to support Goya by purchasing its products.

Let me suggest that we flip "cancel culture" on its head and do our best to cancel the ugly, misinformed, and often cruel culture in which we live. Instead of the anti-American history taught in so many of our secondary schools—I am thinking specifically of Howard Zinn's "A Young People's History of the United States" and the New York Times' "1619 Project"—why not use a more balanced textbook like Wilfred McClay's "Land of



EVANS/THREELIONS/GETTY IMAGES

Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story?" Why not ditch sex-ed and instead teach civ-ed so that a high school graduate knows there are three branches to the federal government and how they work? Why not train our children how to write effectively, a skill needed by practically everyone in today's workforce.

Most of all, why not teach our children how to teach themselves? With our public libraries and our electronic devices, we have at our fingertips the greatest learning tools in the history of the world, leaving us absolutely no excuse for our students' abysmal test scores and lack of core knowledge.

### Take Responsibility

This year, America is at a crossroads, the likes of which we haven't seen since the Civil War. Many in our country, some of them knowingly, some of them unwittingly, are calling outright for socialism, which is the opposite of those principles—"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—embraced not only by our Founders but also by generations

since then.

Often we hear the term "woke" these days, a term the Left uses to describe an awareness of social justice issues. Like cancel culture, we should take woke, make that expression our own, and apply it to education. Parents should look carefully at what their children are learning in school. They should examine the textbooks the kids bring home, and if fault is found, they should address their concerns to the school. They should demand more freedom of choice in education, particularly in regard to charter schools. If the system refuses their requests, and if circumstances permit, they should send their children to private schools, homeschool them, or establish learning co-ops, much like the old one-room schoolhouses.

We must be on guard. Remember that poison doesn't always come in a bottle.

### Hope and Effort

At the end of her article "Four Months of Unprecedented Government Malfeasance," which appeared in the May

2020 edition of Hillsdale College's "Imprimis," Heather Mac Donald writes: "America's Founders, schooled in a profound philosophical and literary tradition dating back to classical antiquity, understood the fragility of civil peace and the danger of the lustful, vengeful mob."

"Our present leaders, the products of a politicized and failing education system, seem to know nothing of those truths. Pulling the country back from the abyss will require a recalling of our civilizational inheritance."

Pulling the country back from the abyss means rescuing and reviving education. Most of our politicians and cultural gurus, and even many of our teachers, display little interest in this rescue attempt; indeed, some seem determined to continue the race to nihilism.

So it's up to the rest of us. We must roll up our sleeves and get to work, starting where we are and making sure our children receive an education worthy of the name.

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.

## LITERATURE



NICKU/SHUTTERSTOCK

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: Archaeology Is Revealing New Clues About the Bard's Life (and Death)

WILLIAM MITCHELL

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time and one of the most important and influential people who has ever lived. His written works (plays, sonnets, and poems) have been translated into more than 100 languages, and these are performed around the world.

There is also an enduring desire to learn more about the man himself. Countless books and articles have been written about Shakespeare's life. These have been based primarily on the scholarly analysis of his works and the official record associated with him and his family. Shakespeare's popularity and legacy endures, despite uncertainties in his life story and debate surrounding his authorship and identity.

The life and times of William Shakespeare and his family have also recently been informed by cutting-edge archaeological methods and interdisciplinary technologies at both New Place (his long-since demolished family home) and his burial place at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon. The evidence gathered from these investigations by the Center of Archaeology at Staffordshire University provides

new insights into his interests, attitudes, and motivations—and those of his family—and shows how archaeology can provide further tangible evidence. These complement traditional Shakespearean research methods that have been limited to sparse documentary evidence and the study of his works.

Archaeology has the ability to provide a direct connection to individuals through the places and objects associated with them. Past excavations of the Shakespearean-era theaters in London have provided evidence of the places he worked and spent much of his time.

Attributing objects to Shakespeare is difficult. We have his written work of course, his portrait(s), and memorial bust—but all of his known possessions, like those mentioned in his will, no longer exist. A single gold signet ring, inscribed with the initials W.S., is thought by some to be the most significant object owned and used by the poet, despite its questionable provenance.

### Shakespeare's House

Shakespeare's greatest and most expensive possession was his house, New Place. Evidence obtained through recent archaeological investigations of its foundations gives

us quantifiable insights into Shakespeare's thought processes, personal life, and business success.

The building itself was lost in the 18th century, but the site and its remains were preserved beneath a garden. Erected in the center of Stratford-upon-Avon more than a century prior to Shakespeare's purchase in 1597, from its inception, it was architecturally striking. One of the largest domestic residences in Stratford, it was the only courtyard-style, open-hall house in the town.

This type of house typified the merchant and elite classes; and in purchasing and renovating it to his own vision, Shakespeare inherited the traditions of his ancestors while embracing the latest fashions. The building materials used, its primary structure, and later redevelopment can all be used as evidence of the deliberate and carefully considered choices made by him and his family.

Shakespeare focused on the outward appearance of the house, installing a long gallery and other fashionable architectural embellishments as was expected of a well-to-do, aspiring gentleman of the time. Many other medieval features were retained, and the hall was likely retained as the showpiece



MICHELLE WALZ ERIKSSON CC BY 2.0

Great Garden at New Place in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, where William Shakespeare's house once stood.

of his home, a place to announce his prosperity and his rise in status. It provided a place for him and his immediate and extended family to live, work, and entertain. But it was also a place that held local significance and symbolic associations. Intriguingly, its appearance also resembled the courtyard inn that catered to London and elsewhere with which Shakespeare was so familiar, presenting the opportunity to host private performances.

### In Search of the Bard

Extensive evidence of the personal possessions, diet, and leisure activities of Shakespeare, his family, and

the inhabitants of New Place were recovered during the archaeological investigations, revolutionizing what we understand about his day-to-day life.

An online exhibition, not yet available, will present 3D-scanned artifacts recovered at the site of New Place. These objects, some of which may have belonged to Shakespeare, have been chosen to characterize the chronological development and activities undertaken at the site.

Open access to these virtual objects will enable the dissemination of these important results and the potential for others to continue the research.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

A sketch of Shakespeare's home New Place, 1737, by George Vertue from contemporary descriptions when he visited Stratford-upon-Avon.

### Here Lies ...

Archaeological evidence recovered from noninvasive investigations at Shakespeare's burial place has also been used to provide further evidence of his personal and family belief. Multi-frequency Ground Penetrating Radar was used to investigate the Shakespeare family graves below the chancel of Holy Trinity Church.

A number of legends surrounded Shakespeare's burial place. Among these were doubts over the presence of a grave, its contents, tales of grave robbing, and suggestions of a large family crypt. The work confirmed that individual shallow

graves exist beneath the tombstones and that the various members of Shakespeare's family were not buried in coffins but in simple shrouds. Analysis concluded that Shakespeare's grave had been disturbed in the past and that it was likely that his skull had been removed, confirming recorded stories.

These family graves occupy a significant (and expensive) location in Holy Trinity Church. Despite this, the simple nature of Shakespeare's grave, with no elite trappings or finery and no large family crypt, coupled with his belief that he should not be disturbed, confirm a simple regional practice based on pious religious observance and an affinity with his hometown.

There is still so much we don't know about Shakespeare's life, so it's a safe bet that researchers will continue to investigate what evidence there is. Archaeological techniques can provide quantifiable information that isn't available through traditional Shakespearean research. But just like other disciplines, interpretation—based on the evidence—will be key to unlocking the mysteries surrounding the life (and death) of the English language's greatest writer.

William Mitchell is a lecturer in archaeology at Staffordshire University in the U.K. This article was first published on [The Conversation](http://TheConversation.com).

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

# Love in a Time of Separation

JUDD HOLLANDER

NEW YORK—There is perhaps nothing more painful than the forced separation of two people who are truly in love—no matter how legitimate the reason for that separation. This topical subject is brilliantly handled by On Site Opera, which taps into these feelings with the world premiere of “To My Distant Love.”

Presenting the work in connection with the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth, On Site Opera is billing it as “the world’s first telephone-based opera experience.” Each performance is presented for an audience of one.

This immersive undertaking presents its story via the Beethoven song cycle “An die ferne Geliebte,” with the song text by Alois Isidor Jeitteles. Beethoven based the cycle on a collection of poems by Jeitteles published in 1815.

Using the premise of separated lovers as the starting point—in fact, the English translation of “An die ferne Geliebte” is “To the Distant Beloved”—the production requires all those who have purchased tickets for a performance to become an integral part of this equation.

At a prearranged time, the performers, either soprano Jennifer Zetlan or baritone Mario Diaz-Moresco, telephone the audience member in the persona of an absent romantic love. The beloved is currently separated from the audience member by a great distance.

Zetlan or Diaz-Moresco will then serenade the listener with the six songs that make up the cycle. Ms. Zetlan and Mr. Diaz-Moresco are accompanied in this endeavor by, respectively, pianists David Shimoni and Spencer Myer.

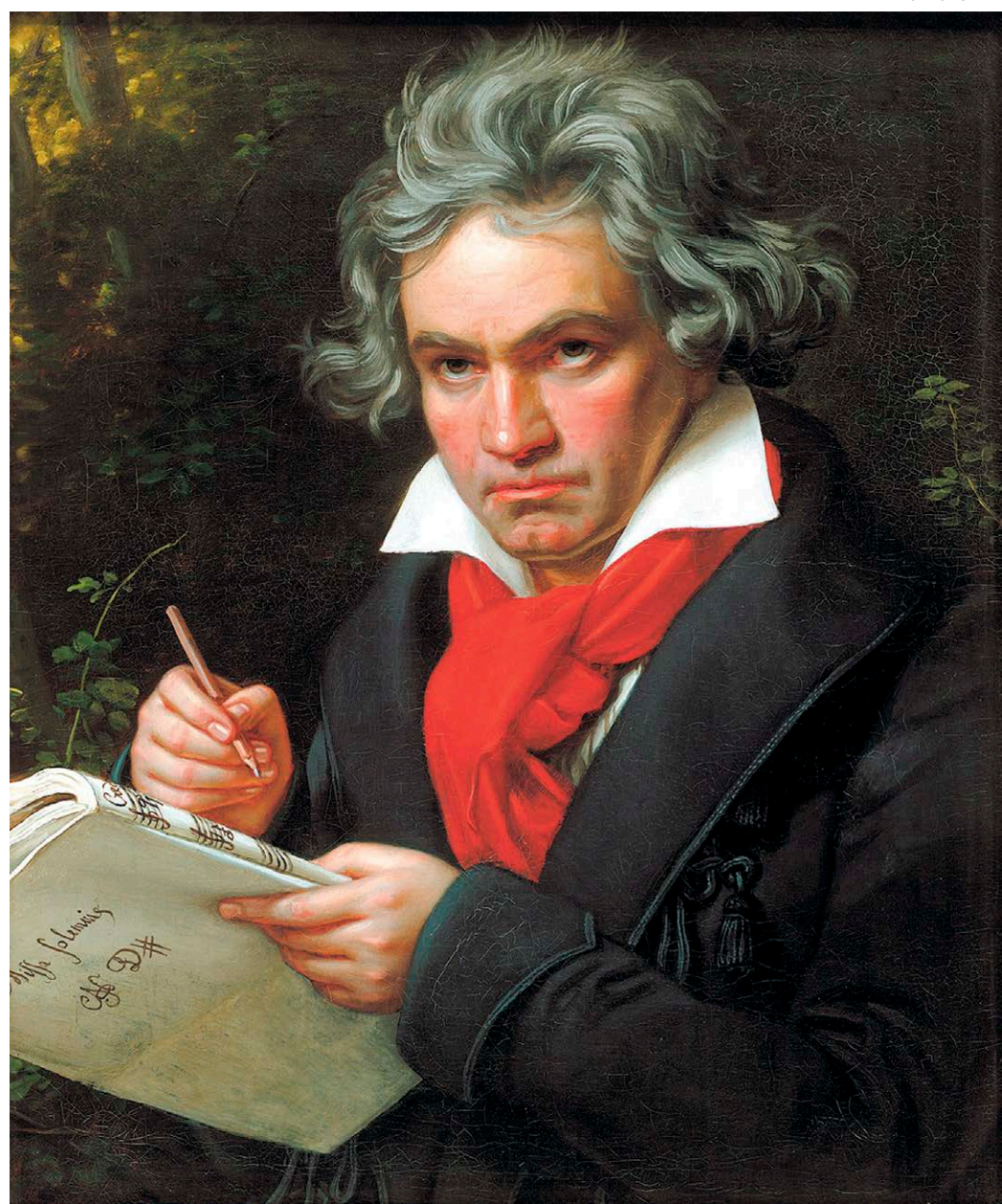
So as to better prepare those participating, each person receiving a call is first provided a bit of background via email. This message gives the recipient an idea of how to respond to specific questions he or she may be asked—questions such as where he or she is right now (that is, a park bench, a chair by the window), a favorite place the two lovers shared, the happiest time they spent together, and so on. While the actual songs are all sung in German, English lyrics are also provided prior to the call for those who want to follow along.

Strongly delivered—I had the chance to experience the performance by both performers—the entire work is both stirring and lyrical. A common theme that runs throughout is the yearning to be with the one we love, as well as the need to sometimes seek respite from the world and its

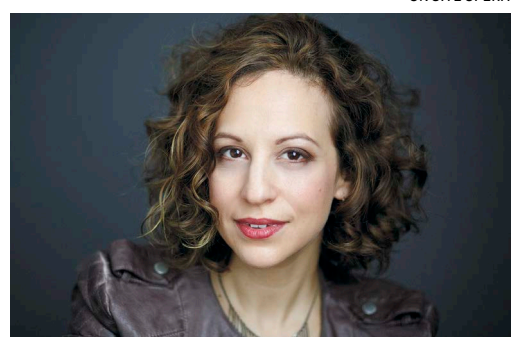
(Right) On Site Opera presents a love song from Beethoven, apropos for today. A portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven, 1820, by Joseph Karl Stieler.

(Below left) Soprano Jennifer Zetlan is one of two performers who might serenade you with Beethoven—by phone!

(Below right) Baritone Mario Diaz-Moresco.



PUBLIC DOMAIN



ON SITE OPERA

ON SITE OPERA

### ‘To My Distant Love’

**Tickets**  
OSOpera.org  
**Running Time**  
20 minutes  
**Closes**  
Aug. 23  
**Presented by On Site Opera**

The entire work is both stirring and lyrical.

travails. Indeed, it’s not hard to feel swept away in a torrent of emotion as the power and passion of the songs come through.

At the same time, one can’t help but feel a mournful quality to the music as it conjures up images of the power of the human heart. Specifically, it has the capacity for experiencing the pain and longing caused by separation, but at the same time it’s buoyed by the unyielding certainty that the heartache will eventually pass, and those currently apart will someday be together once more.

On Site Opera has come up with a winning premise here. The current COVID situation has forced theaters to rethink how to present performances that will attract audiences and draw them into the story.

Credit must also go to the performers for managing to keep the songs, music, and the emotions completely fresh, despite the fact they’ve presented these songs numerous times before and are scheduled to do so for many times to come before the

production winds up. The only downside to the entire experience is that, due to the way the work is structured, and unless one is fluent in German, it is sometimes had to tell where one specific song ends and the next begins.

Also, the verbal interplay between the performer and the listener does not take place after every song. Director Eric Einhorn, as well as playwright Monet Hurst-Mendoza, who provides additional English dialogue for the piece, might want to look at this issue before future iterations of this presentation.

Both grandly sweeping and intensely personal, “To My Distant Love” taps into the universal pain of separation, and the need we all have to be with the one we love. All in all, it makes for quite an impressive undertaking.

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

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

# Heartbreaking and Uplifting in Equal Measure

IAN KANE

Inspirational, feel-good, family-friendly films seem to be increasingly hard to find in these chaotic, mean-spirited times. Heck, just even a few years ago there seemed to be a little more variety when it came to positive-themed movies. Even some of the cartoons that youngsters watch these days are pretty darn violent and cynical. Therefore, I increasingly find myself going back in time on my searches for inspirational films.

One movie that not only is inspirational but also has some great life lessons as well is director Stephen Chbosky’s 2017 film “Wonder.”

Chbosky, no stranger to helming inspirational films (2012’s “The Perks of Being a Wallflower” and 2017’s “Beauty and the Beast”), has deftly adapted gifted author R.J. Palacio’s bestselling 2012 children’s book into a movie of the same name.

ing parents, mother Isabel (Julia Roberts) and father Nate (Owen Wilson), as well as his older sister, Olivia “Via” (Izabela Vidovic), and cute little dog, Daisy (played by doggie actor Gidget). They all live in a nice house tucked away in a quaint New York suburb.

The only thing that is out of the ordinary is the fact that Auggie was born with Treacher Collins syndrome, a condition that has resulted in facial deformities. In order to hide his face, he dons a NASA helmet, which was given to him by Via’s former best friend, Miranda (Danielle Rose Russell).

When Auggie attends a local private school for the first time, he abruptly realizes that he is indeed different from other kids. Bereft of his bulky helmet, he becomes subject to all manner of double-takes, as well as some straight-up stare downs.

The school’s principal, Mr. Tushman (Mandy Patinkin), tasks a trio of young students—Jack (Noah Jupe), Charlotte (Elle McKinnon), and Julian (Bryce Gheisar)—to give Auggie a guided tour of the school’s layout. From the outset, we realize that Mr. Tushman sees behind Auggie’s facial deformities to someone extraordinary.



LIONSGATE

▲ A poster artwork for “Wonder.”

### ‘Wonder’

**Director**  
Stephen Chbosky  
**Starring**  
Jacob Tremblay, Julia Roberts, Owen Wilson, Izabela Vidovic  
**Rated**  
PG  
**Running Time**  
1 hour, 53 minutes  
**Release Date**  
Nov. 17, 2017  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Auggie’s adjustment to traditional schooling is a rough one as he becomes a lightning rod for teases, taunts, and gawking. Although the film is primarily told from Auggie’s perspective, it also gives Via, Jack Will, and Miranda some screen time to illuminate the film’s backstory.

A subplot of the movie involves Via, who feels largely neglected by her parents since they are constantly doting on Auggie. She has also had a huge falling out with Miranda and is no longer on speaking terms with her.

The crux of the storyline begs an incessant question: Does Auggie have enough patience and perseverance to endure his rocky accli-

mation to private school life?

### A Wonder-ful Film

Tremblay does an excellent job of depicting a sensitive, extremely smart boy who has to face others’ ire. Roberts’ smile is as beautiful and radiant as always (I believe we even get to see some of her molars in one shot), and she does a stand-out job of portraying Auggie’s ever-supportive mother. Wilson is likewise a very likable character and disappears into his role as the quirky, “cool dad” that everyone would love to have.

At its core, “Wonder” carries a firm anti-bullying message. It shows that bullying affects not only its victim but also that person’s relationships with peers and family members.

The film never devolves into sappy sentimentality, as is the case sometimes with movies that cover this sort of sensitive subject matter. I managed to make it through the film’s incredibly heart-rending scenes, and it was worth it—“Wonder” has a powerfully effective message that everyone should take the time to learn.

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

ALL PHOTOS BY SCOTT GARFIELD/OPEN ROAD FILMS



(Left) Jake Gyllenhaal (R) and Michael Peña as the good guys, in “End of Watch.” (Above) Michael Peña and Natalie Martinez as a husband and wife welcoming their firstborn in “End of Watch.”

## 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: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

# It’s Time for Some Cop Appreciation

MARK JACKSON

“End of Watch” (EOW) is the last thing a police officer writes in his logbook after noting the day’s policing activities. Then he goes home. Hopefully, he goes home. If he doesn’t go home ... that’s also called an end of watch.

So explains director David Ayer in the EOW press notes. Best known for his dirty-cop film “Training Day,” the very authentic 2012-released “End of Watch” most likely had the Los Angeles Police Department breathing a collective sigh of relief that someone finally told their story in a positive light.

This well-rendered if brutal portrait is a welcome counterweight to the seemingly endless stream of Hollywood paens to corrupt-cop life in the USA, not to mention, in 2020—America’s current cop crisis.

### On the Job

Officers Brian Taylor (Jake Gyllenhaal) and

### ‘End of Watch’

**Director**  
David Ayer  
**Starring**  
Jake Gyllenhaal, Michael Peña, America Ferrera, Anna Kendrick, Natalie Martinez, Frank Grillo, Cody Horn  
**Rated**  
R  
**Running Time**  
1 hour, 49 minutes  
**Release Date**  
Sept. 21, 2012  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Mike Zavala (Michael Peña) are partners. They love their jobs. South Central L.A. is easily the most dangerous location in America for the police, but they’re to-the-manor-born and on the job with enthusiasm.

Their world shifts from hilarious practical jokes in the squad room to heart-stopping, potentially deadly encounters with local gangs with enough firepower to equip a small army, and back to brotherly banter in the squad car in the blink of an eye.

Taylor and Zavala function like any well-practiced, experienced special operations team that has been tempered in combat—they’re ready to die for each other.

When they search an SUV and Zavala narrowly avoids getting blasted by the driver’s 9 mm handgun, it’s reminiscent of the hair-trigger reflexes of a mongoose avoiding a lethal cobra strike, and then pinning the snake in the blink of an eye. It has the same ferocious yet casual confidence. These are metaphorical cop black-belts.

One quickly comes to appreciate the talent required for this dangerous job. Highly competent cops, like all true war fighters, have restless Type A personalities. They’re energetic and aggressive normally, but with an ability to shift to a preternatural calm in the high-stress situations that typically cause hysteria in civilians. While they youthfully relish their roles as ghetto gunfighters, all of this is truly informed by a desire to do the right thing.

Officer Taylor carries a video camera everywhere, making his own homegrown version of the TV show “Cops” (which ran from March 1989 to May 11, 2020). Much like the movie “Chronicle,” where the lead character chronicles everything with a hand-held cam, this sign-of-the-times cultural shift was already well in place in 2012. It’s now morphed into a nonstop (mostly) millennial state of being: the endless re-

coding of the movie of one’s life, that one is starring in, to be displayed on social media.

This is not your father’s LAPD. These kids say “dude” every other sentence, play ear-splitting rap in the cop-cruiser, and equip funny asides at the camera, like, “Being a cop is all about comfortable footwear.” They beat 100-degree heat by surreptitiously sticking their heads in open beverage coolers in neighborhood bodegas.

Director Ayer, who grew up in South Central, captures the atmosphere with lots of smoggy sunrises and sunsets. Anna Kendrick, as Taylor’s fiancée, is always a revelation. Peña and Gyllenhaal have highly enjoyable bickering chemistry. The rest of the cast, including TV’s “Ugly Betty” star, America Ferrera, are all highly effective in portraying LAPD culture.

The drama inherent in cop-corruption stories is low-hanging fruit. It’s easy and it sells, which is why Hollywood does so much of it. As Ayer points out, there’s also riveting tension in a situation where good cops do life-and-death things all day, then come home at their end of watch, fit into everyday society, and work hard to make their relationships normal.

This is a super-gritty, ultra-violent, hyper-explosive-ridden, and often very funny film. See it only if you have a stomach strong enough to deal with the very disturbing scenes involving gangland violence, hard drugs, and human trafficking.

If nothing else, “End of Watch” is a first-rate lesson in law-enforcement appreciation. And in this time of virulent law-enforcement non-appreciation, “End of Watch” has the ability to inspire us to really think about the fact that anarchy is slowly setting in worldwide, and what the lay of the land is realistically going to look like in our current cop-cancel culture and looming lawlessness.



FOCUS FEATURES

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

# Sweet Nostalgia for American Innocence

MARK JACKSON

World-renowned acting coach Michael Chekhov (nephew of playwright Anton Chekhov) said that the main thing missing from most modern theater productions is “atmosphere.”

By “atmosphere,” he meant that rare, mystical feeling generated by all great works of art. A work with atmosphere becomes a world unto itself and creates a longing in the soul, as well as a desire to revisit. It’s as if a living being with personality inhabits or overshadows that stat-

ue, play, book, painting, and so on. Director Wes Anderson created a bit of this type of atmosphere in 2012’s “Moonrise Kingdom.”

The time is 1965, and the location is mostly Rhode Island, with some Narragansett thrown in. Twelve-year-old Sam (Jared Gilman), an orphan in foster care, goes AWOL from the Khaki Scouts. Twelve-year-old Suzy (Kara Hayward), daughter of estranged parents and lover of girl-centric adventure novels, runs away from home.

They had met by chance in a community pageant and, to describe it

▲ Suzy (Kara Hayward) and Sam (Jared Gilman) meet in a field to go camping together, in “Moonrise Kingdom.”

### ‘Moonrise Kingdom’

**Director**  
Wes Anderson  
**Starring**  
Bruce Willis, Edward Norton, Bill Murray, Frances McDormand, Tilda Swinton, Jason Schwartzman, Bob Balaban, Jared Gilman, Kara Hayward  
**Rated**  
PG-13  
**Running Time**  
1 hour, 34 minutes  
**Release Date**  
June 29, 2012  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

in today’s terms, took down each other’s info and started writing snail-mail letters to each other. After a year of that, they decide to meet in a field.

They have a wondrous adventure, at once mundane and magical. They camp and cook. He demonstrates his Scout skills—he’s got a pocket knife, air rifle, and a Davy Crockett coonskin cap! She looks pretty in pink, brings a kitten, and reads books to him. They jump in the lake, dance to her portable record player, and attempt a kiss. It’s immensely adorable.

Meanwhile, Captain Sharp, the sheriff (Bruce Willis), and Scout Master Ward (Edward Norton), as well as the girl’s hysterical parents (Bill Murray and Frances McDormand), go searching for Sam and Suzy. Also joining the search is a rather vicious Scout pack with a mob mentality. A major rainstorm rolls in!

Someone gets hit by lightning, and survives! It gets rather chaotic all around. A bearded Bob Balaban plays the narrator. Reminiscent of Anderson’s 2009 “Fantastic Mr. Fox,” and also of the 1986 rite-of-passage film “Stand by Me,” it is, however, a bit confusing at first. One wonders what kind of film it’s trying to be. Is it a comedy? Is it for children only? It’s obviously very trademark-Anderson-stylized.

Kids will love it certainly, but for their parents, it turns out to be a rather heartwarming walk down memory lane. “Moonrise Kingdom” re-creates a child’s-eye view of the early 1960s, when the ‘60s still contained much of the ‘50s.

It unpacks and dusts off childhood memories of tents, tree-houses, secret maps, campfires,

innocent conversations, and performing theater in grade-school assemblies. It’s a magical lens that captures the joy of first-ever experiences, and purity. And all around is atmosphere.

The two newcomer 12-year-olds, Jared Gilman and Kara Hayward, have great kid-chemistry, and this movie was about as strong a foundation as one could have for each of them to eventually become a permanent fixture in the acting industry.

With this stellar cast, of course, the acting is exceptional except for the normally side-splitting Bill Murray and brilliant Frances McDormand who don’t appear to be bringing their A-games.

Wes Anderson’s humor manifests often in his use of well-timed sight gags, but what’s he ultimately trying to say here? The children are loners and outcasts, and the earnest, brutally truthful Sam with his inquisitive mind and hilarious self-loathing is the movie’s main attraction. Suzy is occasionally (and hilariously) disturbingly violent, as the pursuing mob-mentality scouts are unfortunate enough to experience.

Both Sam and Suzy are, in the awkward and universal ways of 12-year-olds, morose and self-aware, but they’re fairly OK with all of that; each has a strong sense of, if not purpose, then destiny. The parents and adults, in contrast, are compromised, sad, and clueless.

Maybe it’s as simple as this: If you take a risk to follow your destiny, you’ll discover true love waiting at the end of the road. Or maybe in a field. It’s definitely inspiring. And all around is atmosphere.



“The Banjo Lesson,” 1893. by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Oil on canvas, 49 inches by 35.5 inches. Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Va.

REACHING WITHIN:  
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

# A Familial Lesson of Love: ‘The Banjo Lesson’

ERIC BESS

**M**y family is very important to me. I really don’t know where I’d be without their constant love and care. My grandparents, uncles, and aunts all had a significant impact on my life, making sure I understood that I could become anything I wanted to be if I was willing to put in the effort.

For me, Henry Ossawa Tanner’s painting “The Banjo Lesson” reminds me of the affection and encouragement I received from my family. Tanner used the depiction of love within the black family as a way of mending the harsh reality of 19th-century race relations. Instead of propagating a divisive ideology of revolution and destruction, he decided to use his art to show how we human beings, irrespective of our differences, are all capable of love.

**Henry Ossawa Tanner**  
Tanner was a black American painter at the turn of the 20th century. His mother and father were former slaves but became

quite accomplished after the Civil War. Despite their circumstances, Tanner’s parents raised him in a relatively cultured and educated household.

As a young teenager, Tanner became interested in fine art. His parents were able to provide him with private lessons, and he eventually attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. In 1879, he was the first black American to attend the internationally respected academy, where he learned under the acclaimed artist Thomas Eakins.

Tanner, however, left the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art to pursue a photography career in Atlanta. Though this venture would fail, he was able to make contacts in Atlanta who would fund his later travels overseas.

After settling in Paris, Tanner became an internationally renowned artist himself. He found that Paris was more racially accepting than America. He wanted his paintings to be a catalyst for improving race relations in America.

Tanner sought to use his paintings to undermine the negative effects of minstrelsy, a form of entertainment that often depicted black Americans with demeaning stereotypes. Minstrel shows became an accepted part of culture that propagated centuries of abuse toward American blacks.

For Tanner, art possessed the possibility of transforming those demeaning stereotypes into something positive: into a more accurate portrayal of black life in America. The artist began to paint images of black Americans as virtuous and dignified human beings in an attempt to repair and uplift black culture.

The black community felt hope through Tanner’s efforts. Sharon Patton, author of the “Oxford History of Art: African-American Art,” uses a quote by W.S. Scarborough, who is considered to be the first African American classical scholar, to exemplify this:

“African Americans hoped that the treatment of race subjects by Tanner ‘would serve to counterbalance so much that has made the race only a laughing stock subject for those artists who see nothing in it but the most extravagantly absurd and grotesque.’”

“The Banjo Lesson” and a Spotlight on the Black Family

“The Banjo Lesson,” painted in 1893, is now one of Tanner’s most popular pieces. He depicts a tender moment shared across black generations. A grandfather is shown teaching his grandson how to play the banjo.

A direct light source from the left of the composition illuminates the grandfather and grandson as they share a small wooden chair. The light source serves as a spotlight on the stage set for black life to play out. The grandfather looks intently and with care as he helps the boy hold the banjo and strum the chord of the day’s lesson.

Tanner used yellows, blues, and loose brushstrokes to depict the scene, which are impressionistic methods he would’ve learned at the Académie Julian, a private studio for art students. The lighter yellows and blues and loose brushstrokes of the surrounding environment help the high contrast and highly detailed figures stand out. He placed everyday objects around the two figures to let the viewer know that this is a moment in the everyday life of the black American.

Learning to Love

“The Banjo Lesson” speaks to me deeply today. It shows the significance of family, irrespective of race. Family is not something unique to Western culture; every major culture on earth has reaped the benefits of family. It is often through family that our young learn how to love, how to care, and how to treat other people. It is through family that we learn how to be or not to be a good human being.

“The Banjo Lesson” also makes me consider how we learn. Do we not learn from our past and through our experiences? Who is better at learning than one who, like a child, is open to asking questions? Is it possible that we have lost, in our desire to condemn a tainted history, the child-like innocence of an open question? And if so, what do we lose in failing to be open to learn?

After considering the idea of learning, however, consider the reciprocal concept of teaching. Who is better equipped

**He depicts a tender moment shared across black generations. A grandfather is shown teaching his grandson how to play the banjo.**

For more arts and culture articles, visit [TheEpochTimes.com](https://www.theepochtimes.com)

to show us the way than those who have lived longer, who have experienced more? Is the past, in its ability to subsume all experience, not also one of our greatest teachers?

How are we transmuted a troubled past into a fruitful future? Are we respecting the struggles of our past with our present creations? Are our creations infused with the love that we hope is cultivated between members of a family? How else are we to bring people together around divisive issues if we are not, with love, finding those areas in which we are more similar than we are different?

I think Tanner attempted to place this love in his art, a love bound in what is deeply relational across cultures: family. He provided a lesson for white America of a reliable truth about black life in America, a truth grounded in the love and care of family. To the black American, Tanner’s painting not only provided hope but also taught the truth that blacks need not be defined by demeaning stereotypes, which unfortunately can, over time, be incorporated into concepts of black self-worth.

But for me, “The Banjo Lesson” is not merely a depiction of a black grandfather teaching his grandson how to play the banjo, nor is it merely a summation of everyday black life in America at the end of the 19th century. “The Banjo Lesson,” if we are open to learning from it, is a lesson on how to love and care for our fellow human beings through an institution that’s familiar to almost every culture on earth: family.

*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 I explore in my series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart."*

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

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

## ‘The Asphalt Jungle’ (1950): What Is Film Noir?

TIFFANY BRANNAN

“Film noir,” the classic genre of crime and mystery films, isn’t usually considered uplifting. However, these films can be very entertaining and sometimes, surprisingly, inspiring. One such film is “The Asphalt Jungle” (1950).

German criminal mastermind Doc Riedenschneider (Sam Jaffe) arrives in a Midwestern city after his release from jail. He immediately visits bookie Cobby (Marc Lawrence) with a plan for a major heist. Fifty-thousand dollars will finance a jewelry store robbery yielding over \$1 million in profit. Cobby helps him choose the heist team, including safecracker Louis Ciavelli (Anthony Caruso), driver Gus Minissi (James Whitmore), “hooligan” Dix Handley (Sterling Hayden), and financial backer Alonzo Emmerich (Louis Calhern), plus Doc.

Each man wants the money for a different reason, and each has a different grudge. Ciavelli supports a wife (Teresa Celli) and baby, who are unaware of his dishonesty. Gus is a hunchback who runs a bar and protects petty criminal Dix. Dix was raised on a Kentucky farm, which his family lost after his father died. He started stealing to bet on horse races, hoping to earn enough money to buy back the farm. Emmerich is a successful lawyer who, unknown to anyone, has gone bankrupt. He has an adoring invalid wife (Dorothy Tree) but maintains a mistress (Marilyn Monroe).

The plan becomes complicated when Emmerich agrees to finance it, although he is broke. He tells private detective Bob Brannom (Brad Dexter) his double-crossing scheme. He will convince Cobby to supply the initial \$50,000. Then, promising to “fence” the jewelry, Emmerich will persuade the crooks to give him the jewels, go abroad, and sell them to start a new life. Brannom agrees to help

for half of the profit.

Meanwhile, Cobby pays corrupt policeman Lt. Ditrach (Barry Kelley) to keep his bookie joint open, even bribing him to “forget” seeing Doc.

The crime is committed, but who will escape?

**What Is Film Noir?**

The term “film noir” is used primarily to describe 1940s and ‘50s black-and-white films with dark subjects and cinematography featuring dark alleys, dimly lit streets, and other nocturnal backdrops for the often-criminal characters’ shady activities. “Noir,” French for black or dark, presumably applies to films with such moral coloring.

French critic Nino Frank is often credited for coining this term in 1946. However, the term was used earlier. William Ahearn revealed in “The Death of Film Noir: On the Streets of Paris” that some French 1930s films were called film noir. For instance, in his 1938 review of “Le Puritan,” François Vinneuil called it “the film noir, plunging into debauchery and crime.”

Does “plunging into debauchery and crime” define American film noir? Many said that because of the crime and violence in these American 1940s and ‘50s films, the films had flouted the Motion Picture Production Code. The Code served as Hollywood’s guidelines for film decency that were strictly enforced in 1934–1954 by its director Joseph I. Breen and his staff, according to Thomas Doherty’s “Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration.”

However, not every black-and-white crime movie is a film noir in the sense of its morality. In fact, the classification is based merely on opinion, since classic films weren’t intentionally made as such. This term didn’t reach America until the mid-1950s or later.

As film scholar Chris Fujiwara writes, earlier films “didn’t

think of them as ‘films noir’; they thought they were making crime films, thrillers, mysteries, and romantic melodramas. The nonexistence of ‘noir’ as a production category during the supposed heyday of noir obviously problematizes the history of the genre.”

It seems that film noir is a misleading, ambiguous term that is applied too eagerly. One should judge films individually, not try to label them.

**Crime Doesn’t Pay**

If any movies are films noir, “The Asphalt Jungle” certainly is. It is frequently cited as an example of the genre’s criminal focus, for which people call noir notorious Code-violators. However, the Production Code did not forbid crime in films. It only forbade its glamorization, depictions likely to inspire imitation, and scenarios that created sympathy against the law. The Code, written by Martin J. Quigley and Father Daniel Lord in 1930, states: “The sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil, or sin.”

This film properly handles its characters’ crimes and sins. They never look right or justified. The climactic jewel theft is too complex to be imitated, and the criminals who execute it are unsympathetic. Calculating Riedenschneider’s weakness is lust for beautiful, young women, whom he obviously uses for selfish pleasures. Safecracker Ciavelli’s family makes him less likeable, since his crimes endanger them. Emmerich’s infidelity is despicable, and he is so corrupt that he plans to betray his criminal cohorts and leave both his wife and mistress. Cobby, Gus, and Brannom are greedy, bitter men just out for themselves.

Only Dix inspires sympathy. His sad past and determination to buy back his home are very relatable. While Cobby and Ciavelli think he

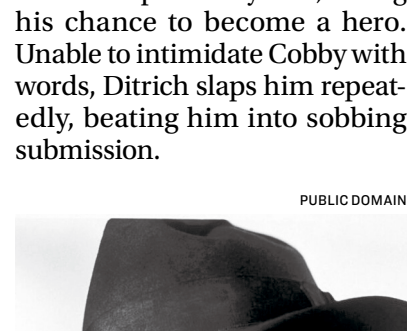
is just a hooligan, Doc realizes that he is a man of honor. One Code passage applies to Dix:

“Sympathy with a person who sins is not the same as sympathy with the sin or crime of which he is guilty. We may feel sorry for the plight of the murderer or even understand the circumstances which led him to his crime: We may not feel sympathy with the wrong which he has done.”

While we wish Dix had found happiness, his crimes doom him. As the film ends with three criminals imprisoned and four dead, crime clearly doesn’t pay.

**Police Brutality and the Jungle**

“Police brutality,” a phrase frequently used in current headlines, is depicted in this film. Crooked cop Ditrach constantly neglects his duty by ignoring crimes for bribes. He sets the plot in motion by not reporting his discovery of Doc, allowing him to plot the robbery. Later, he pressures Cobby to confess the crime’s details. Ditrach won’t accept bribery now, seeing his chance to become a hero. Unable to intimidate Cobby with words, Ditrach slaps him repeatedly, beating him into sobbing submission.



Sterling Hayden plays the only sympathetic criminal, Dix Handley, in “The Asphalt Jungle.”

Under the Code, corrupt officials required punishment. Therefore, Ditrach goes to jail. Afterward, Police Commissioner Hardy (John McIntire) tells reporters that the job’s dirt corrupts perhaps one out of a hundred officers. “The other ninety-nine are honest men trying to do an honest job.”

One policeman’s violence against a criminal should not discredit all police. Hardy switches on police radios, saying: “We send police assistance to every one of those calls, ‘cause they’re not just code numbers on a radio beam. They’re cries for help. People are being cheated, robbed, murdered, raped. And that goes on 24 hours a day, every day in the year. And that’s not exceptional; that’s usual. It’s the same in every city in the modern world. But suppose we had no police force, good or bad. Suppose we had [switching off the radios] just silence. Nobody to listen, nobody to answer. The battle’s finished. The jungle wins. The predatory beasts take over. Think about it.”

*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.*

“The Asphalt Jungle”

**Director**  
John Huston  
**Starring**  
Sterling Hayden, Louis Calhern, Jean Hagen, Sam Jaffe, Marilyn Monroe  
**Running Time**  
1 hour, 52 minutes  
**Not Rated**  
**Release Date**  
June 1, 1950 (USA)  
★★★★★



James Norton as Mr. Jones.

FILM REVIEW: ‘MR. JONES’

## Trampling on the Truth of Murdered Millions for the Sake of a Utopia

The press and Stalin’s Holodomor

JOE BENDEL

In times of crisis, some reporters set a valiant standard of professionalism, while others cravenly betray their commitment to truth and free expression. Do not count on the journalistic establishment to accurately identify the former or the latter.

Today, Walter Duranty is widely recognized as a willing stooge, who knowingly covered up Stalin’s genocidal crimes. Yet, the Pulitzer board refuses to rescind his Pulitzer Prize and his old employer, The New York Times has declined to return it. Gareth Jones exposed the Ukrainian Holodomor—the deliberate, systemic starvation of millions of Ukrainians—the very story Duranty tried to hide from the world.

Now director Agnieszka Hol-

SAMUEL GOLDWIN FILMS

and production designer Grzegorz Piatkowski make 1930s Moscow literally resemble the dystopia of “1984.” Clearly, this is deliberate, since Holland flash-forwards to George Orwell writing “Animal Farm” (inspired by Jones’s reports) as a recurring motif.

James Norton is well-cast as Jones, convincingly conveying his initial naiveté and idealism, as well as his profound revulsion and righteous outrage. Yet, the real horror comes from Peter Sarsgaard’s chillingly calculated Duranty. You will be hard-pressed to find a more unsettling film villain—and he is scrupulously based on a real-life (Pulitzer Prize-winning) figure. Sarsgaard’s performance and Holland’s depiction of the Holodomor largely overshadow much of the film, but as Brooks, Vanessa Kirby still has some memorable moments, late in the third act.

**An Orwellian Dystopia Comes to Life**

“Mr. Jones” is very much a historical exposé, in the tradition of Holland’s masterwork The Burning Bush, but in many ways, it also functions as a gripping thriller. Viewers can almost literally feel the eyes of the early surveillance state on them as Jones secretly pursues the truth. At times, Holland and production designer Grzegorz Piatkowski make 1930s Moscow literally resemble the dystopia of “1984.” Clearly, this is deliberate, since Holland flash-forwards to George Orwell writing “Animal Farm” (inspired by Jones’s reports) as a recurring motif.

James Norton is well-cast as Jones, convincingly conveying his initial naiveté and idealism, as well as his profound revulsion and righteous outrage. Yet, the real horror comes from Peter Sarsgaard’s chillingly calculated Duranty. You will be hard-pressed to find a more unsettling film villain—and he is scrupulously based on a real-life (Pulitzer Prize-winning) figure. Sarsgaard’s performance and Holland’s depiction of the Holodomor largely overshadow much of the film, but as Brooks, Vanessa Kirby still has some memorable moments, late in the third act.

Screenwriter Andrea Chalupa (who wrote and directed the excellent short documentary “Stalin’s Secret Genocide”) shrewdly shapes the well-constructed nar-

ative. This is a tense, suspenseful, and surprisingly literate film. It also blasts out a much-needed cannon-shot of truth. Even to this day, Russian nationalists and Putinists still deny the truth of the Holodomor, and the journalistic establishment continues to sweep Duranty’s duplicity under the rug.

Yet, Holland and Chalupa do not merely expose journalistic malpractice. They rally cut to the heart of the matter when a skeletal Ukrainian woman explains to Jones: “They are killing us. Millions gone. Men came and thought they could replace the natural laws.” (It is not clear from the closing credits who plays her, but her brief work is devastating.)

“Mr. Jones” vividly illustrates the potential dangers to democracy when journalists start with their ideological conclusions and tailor their reports accordingly. Indeed, the contempt that Duranty and Brooks express for the notion of objectivity sounds eerily similar to what we are hearing today. Perhaps Holland is not entirely objective herself, but her direct observation and lived-experience of the Soviet socialist era inform her filmmaking in very personal and relevant ways.

Very highly recommended, this is a powerful film that leaves viewers in a state of deep disquiet.

“Mr. Jones” opened in October 2019 in Poland.

*Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit [JBSpins.blogspot.com](https://www.jbspins.blogspot.com)*

“Mr. Jones” opened in October 2019 in Poland.

SAMUEL GOLDWIN FILMS



“Mr. Jones” opened in October 2019 in Poland.

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Commonsense Approach to the Often Chaotic Contemporary Artworld

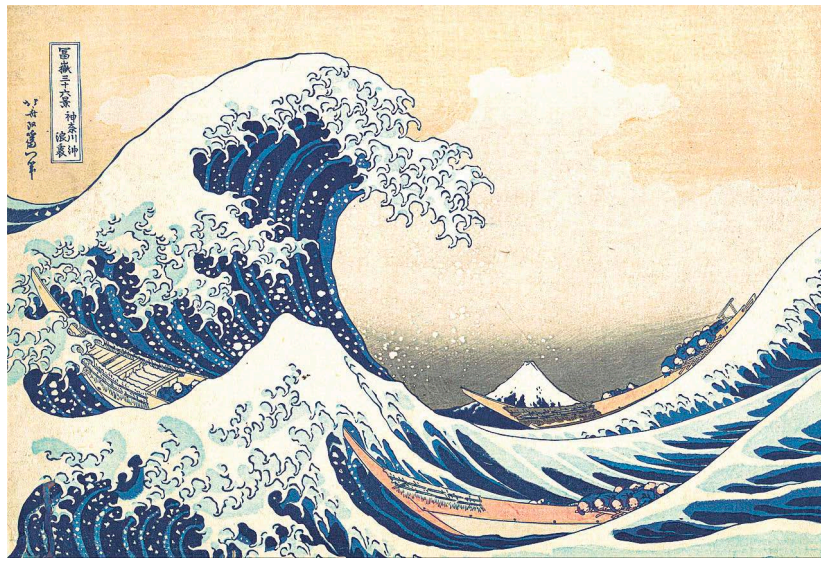
LORRAINE FERRIER

The artworld is awash with nontraditional art. Refreshingly, independent art scholar and critic Michelle Marder Kamhi offers us an honest look at the artworld through the lens of traditional art in her book “Bucking the Artworld Tide: Reflections on Art, Pseudo Art, Art Education & Theory.” Kamhi’s enthusiastic mission to defend traditional art may compel many to grab an oar and join her in her boat against the tide.

The book, Kamhi says on the book cover, is a prequel and sequel to her book “Who Says That’s Art? A Commonsense View of the Visual Arts.”

Kamhi champions traditional art in an artworld that she says is almost submerged by a “virtual tsunami of anti-traditional work and supporting critical spin generated by the contemporary artworld.” Such a deluge she likens to Katsushika Hokusai’s “Great Wave off Kanagawa” (as seen on the book cover). Kamhi suggests that the small boats depicted in the painting are full of traditional art advocates battling against that tremendous, contemporary artworld tide.

In the new book’s preface, Kamhi shares “the view aptly expressed by the critic and art historian John Canaday (1907–1985) that art is ‘the tangible expression of the intangible values men live by.’” She continues: “Throughout my work, I have sought to show how works of genuine art fulfill that essential function, while the contemporary work that dominates today’s



PUBLIC DOMAIN

artworld (I call it “pseudo art”) largely fails to do so. In addition, I have aimed to explain why such expressions are important for both individuals and society.”

Kamhi’s book will appeal to anyone who wants to understand more about art and why today’s art is so radically different from the predominant representational art of the past.

### Curated Content

The book is a carefully chosen selection of Kamhi’s work spanning three decades, and many were articles written for the art journal *Aristos*, where she has been associate editor from 1984–1992 and co-editor since 1992.

Divided into four parts, the book covers “Art & Pseudo Art,” “Abstract Art,” “Art Education,” and “Art Theory.” Each article in a section offers a standalone look at an aspect of the topic, rather than being a chapter to be read as a whole

from start to finish. Kamhi includes extensive footnotes for each essay, and each image mentioned can be accessed online to view while reading, which is a thoughtful touch.

Kamhi says that a key component of the book is her critique of K–12 art education, mainly covered in the “Art Education” section. Everyone should read this section—even if you’ve long left the education system or your children have long-flown the nest. It’s a chance to decontaminate ourselves of agenda-driven art classes. One point is how American art classrooms have been infiltrated by social justice agendas that have nothing to do with art. For instance, in “The Hijacking of Art Education,” Kamhi writes: “The social justice theme in art education is intricately linked to ‘critical theory’—and, more particularly, to what is called ‘critical pedagogy.’ These methodologies derive from the Marxist-inspired approach to philosophic and social analysis known as the Frankfurt School.”

### Accessible Art

“Bucking the Artworld Tide” is written in such a way that makes it accessible to anyone who is curious about art. Part of the joy of reading Kamhi’s work is that she preempts and answers those niggling questions we have. In her essay “The Undefined of Art and Its Consequences,” Kamhi asks: “How did we get to the point

where people of normal intelligence cannot begin to understand the art of our own time without expert help?”

Throughout the book, Kamhi answers such questions with eloquent discourse, communicating her arguments so clearly (and with humor) that it is easy to forget she’s often tackling complex ideas. And oftentimes she attempts to make sense of nonsensical modernist or post-modernist art (that even the artists admit have no meaning), which is no easy feat.



Art critic and scholar Michelle Marder Kamhi, 2014.

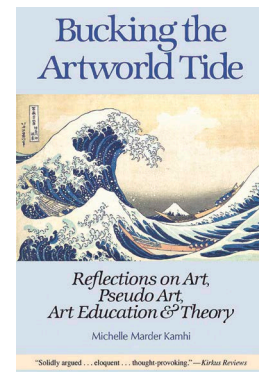
This book is important in understanding and protecting our traditional Western art heritage. In her essay titled “R.H. Ives Gammell,” she quotes the perhaps prophetic words of the Boston painter from his book “Twilight of Painting” that was published in 1946:

“The ultimate importance of Modern Painting in the history of art will be seen to lie in the fact that it discredited and virtually destroyed the great technical traditions of European painting, laboriously built up through the centuries by a long succession of men of genius. The loss of these traditions has deprived our potential painters of their rightful heritage, a heritage without which it will be impossible for them to give full scope to such talent as they may possess.”

Traditional art, it seems, has not been lost in the contemporary art whirlpool just yet. If more guardians of traditional art like Kamhi step forward, then surely the artworld tide can be bucked.

**“Bucking the Artworld Tide: Reflections on Art, Pseudo Art, Art Education & Theory”**  
Michelle Marder Kamhi  
Pro Arte Books  
380 pages; paperback

“The Great Wave of Kanagawa,” circa 1831, by Katsushika Hokusai. Woodcut. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Michelle Marder Kamhi’s new book.

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