

WEEK 35, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES
**ARTS &
CULTURE**

THREE LIONS/GETTY IMAGES



Peace at last: On Sept. 2, 1945, the American Army and Navy aboard the USS Missouri for the surrender ceremonies to mark the end of the war with Japan.

Lest We Forget the
Goodness of America...4

What Our Readers Say:

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THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION



Will the real Dickens stand up? Daguerrotype portrait of Charles Dickens, 1852, by Antoine Claudet. Library Company of Philadelphia.

LITERATURE

CHARLES DICKENS

HOW THE AUTHOR’S LIFE WAS FICTIONALIZED AFTER HIS DEATH

LUCY WHITEHEAD

When Charles Dickens died on June 9, 1870, newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic framed his loss as an event of national and international mourning. They pointed to the fictional characters Dickens had created as a key part of his artistic legacy, writing how “we have laughed with Sam Weller, with Mrs. Nickleby, with Sairey Gamp, with Micawber.” Dickens himself had already featured as the subject of one piece of short biographical fiction published during his lifetime. Yet, in the years following his death, he would be increasingly appropriated as a fictional character by the Victorians, both in published texts and in privately circulated fan works.

Dickens’s private family funeral at Westminster Abbey created a gap in knowledge that some journalists chose to fill with a fictional scene they considered more emotionally satisfying. The London Penny Illustrated Paper visually

reimagined the funeral, publishing a large illustration depicting a crowded public event.

Under the subheading “A National Honor Due to Charles Dickens,” the accompanying text acknowledges that the image is fictional, but argues that: “A ceremony such as is depicted in our Engraving would unquestionably have best represented the national feeling of mourning occasioned by the lamented death.”

It was the publication of John Forster’s “Life of Charles Dickens” in 1872–74, though, that marked a watershed in fictionalizations of Dickens. Victorian readers now had a full-length birth-to-death Dickens biography to draw on, written by a friend who had known him for his entire adulthood. Dickens’s Preface to his 1849–50 novel “David Copperfield” had encouraged readers to interpret it as semi-autobiographical. However, it was only with Forster’s biography that the full extent of the similarities between Dickens and the fictional Copperfield was made public.



Charles Dickens seems to have become as much a literary character as those he created. “Dickens’s Dream” by Robert William Buss, portraying Dickens at his desk surrounded by many of his characters.



The revelation that Dickens had performed child labor in a blacking warehouse when his father was imprisoned for debt, before rising to international fame in his 20s, gave him a life story that the press described as rivaling Dickens’s “most popular novel.”

The publication of John Forster’s ‘Life of Charles Dickens’ in 1872–74 marked a watershed in fictionalizations of Dickens.

Rags to Riches

The Household Edition of Forster’s “Life,” published by Chapman & Hall in 1879, included 28 new illustrations of the biography by Fred Barnard. Among them was an emotive image of Dickens as a young boy in the blacking warehouse.

Dickens wrote a private account of this time, for which Forster’s biography is our only remaining source. In this autobiographical fragment, Dickens describes how he was brought down to work among other boys in the warehouse. He was careful not to let them see his suffering, and to make sure that

he worked as hard as them. Yet what Barnard pictures is a scene of solitude, visible despair or perhaps exhaustion at the warehouse that is not described in this fragment. The image bears a closer resemblance to Dickens’s fictionalization of the first day at the warehouse in “David Copperfield.”

In the novel, the young Copperfield writes: “I mingled my tears with the water in which I was washing the [blackening] bottles.” Barnard heightens and externalizes the private emotion that Dickens wrote about in the autobiographical fragment to create a fictional scene. In doing so, he further blurs the boundaries between Dickens and the fictional Copperfield.

The practice of Grangerization—the art of extending and customizing a published book with inserted material—was popular among Victorian readers. Additional fictionalized illustrations of Dickens’s life, created by the Dickens illustrator Frederick W. Pailthorpe, are revealed in a 14-volume Grangerization of Forster’s “Life,” held in the British Library.

Some of these seem to have been created for personal interest and private circulation among fellow Dickens enthusiasts, rather than for publication. One sketch shows Dickens as a boy making a low bow to a friend of his father’s.

This image is based on an incident that Forster describes as taking place at the blacking warehouse where Dickens worked. Yet Pailthorpe’s illustration fictionalizes the location of the event, transposing the young Dickens to the front of the house of John Dryden, the former poet laureate next to whom Dickens would eventually be buried in Westminster Abbey. In doing so, Pailthorpe creates a narrative in which Dickens was always destined for literary greatness.

Biographical Fiction and ‘Real-Person Fiction’

In the 21st century, readers have commented on the resemblances between the fictional stories that the young Brontë siblings wrote about real-life contemporary figures such as the Duke of Wellington, and 20th- and 21st-century forms of fan fiction. Oscar Wilde’s 1889 story “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” focuses on a series of men whose bio-

(Left) Illustration by Fred Barnard of young Charles Dickens at work in a shoe-blackening factory after his father had been sent to a workhouse. In the 1892 edition of Forster’s “Life of Dickens.”

graphical speculations about the life of Shakespeare verge on fictionalization.

Nevertheless, recent scholarly work on biographical fiction has described it as coming into being “mainly in the 20th century.” Press articles on the form of fan fiction known as “real-person fiction” have largely focused on it as a product of internet culture (while noting briefly that many of Shakespeare’s plays also fictionalize real-life figures).

Archival work on the Victorian press, and on semi-private forms of reader response such as Grangerized books, can flesh out our understanding of the role that biographical fictionalization played in Victorian culture. It demonstrates a longer and more varied history of the human desire to appropriate and imaginatively re-create famous contemporary figures. And it shows that part of Dickens’s creative legacy, as well as his own works, was the fictional forms that his life inspired others to create.

Lucy Whitehead is a doctoral candidate researcher in the school of English, Communication, and Philosophy at Cardiff University in the U.K. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

An illustration of the characters Mr. Micawber and David Copperfield from Charles Dickens’s “David Copperfield,” considered the author’s most autobiographical novel.



The grave of Charles Dickens in Westminster Abbey. While Dickens had a private funeral, journalists reimagined it as a grand affair.



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(Left)
We need to remember that the Berlin Wall was built to keep East Germans captive. In this photo, East Berliners climb onto the Berlin Wall on Dec. 31, 1989.



(Right)
A German woman amid the rubble of what is left of Berlin after World War II in this file photo.



(Below)
Celebration of the victory over Japan in Times Square, New York City, on Aug. 14, 1945. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection.



Americans lost 400,000 fighting in World War II, a sacrifice that seems forgotten today. The World War II Memorial in Washington, in July 2017.

HISTORY

Lest We Forget the Goodness of America

JEFF MINICK

August 1945. My father-to-be, an Army sergeant and a combat infantryman in Italy, was on his way back to the United States to participate in the invasion of Japan. His brother was a doctor in the Army Medical Corps. My future father-in-law was in the Army in the Pacific and was also gearing up for the attack on the Japanese homeland.

On Aug. 6, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

On Aug. 8, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan.

On Aug. 9, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

On Aug. 15, Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Japan to the Allies.

After that announcement, my mother-to-be, still a teenager, found herself wading through a river of celebratory confetti in the streets of Detroit, part of the throng rejoicing that the war had at last ended.

On Sept. 2, representatives of Japan signed the surrender document aboard the USS Missouri, officially ending World War II. This summer marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, yet few of us will celebrate that historical victory over the forces of fascism and tyranny. Our attention is consumed by more im-

mediate trials and troubles. In addition to the chaos caused by the pandemic, we are facing riots in some of our cities and calls to eradicate our culture and our Constitution. Many, including some of our politicians, deny the idea of American exceptionalism, the concept that America is unlike any other country in the history of the world. They contend that America was and is evil, a blackhearted nation with an ugly history whose Constitution and ideals must be eradicated or altered.

Are they correct? Is there nothing special, nothing unique, about America?

The Rubble Heap and the Communists
Let's pay a visit to August of 1945 and the postwar years, and take a look.

By the war's end, much of the world lay in ruins. The British Isles would continue a system of rationing for years. The economies of France and Italy were flattened, their factories closed, with many of their citizens living in poverty. Germany was a landscape of bombed-out cities, Japan a country of smoking ruins whose population initially was terrified by a possible American occupation. In 1947, Winston Churchill described Europe as "a rubble-heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate."

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, which had suffered millions of military and civilian

deaths, was turning Eastern Europe into a communist bloc, locking up entire nations behind what Churchill would call the "Iron Curtain." In China, Mao Zedong's communist party seized control. Some countries—Korea, Vietnam, and Germany—were eventually split in two between capitalism and communism, between freedom and dictatorship.

Standing in sharp contrast to this devastation and the communist power grabs was the United States of America.

Home Front

Physically untouched by the war, American factories in the postwar era turned from putting out tanks and warships to the production of consumer goods: automobiles, refrigerators, radios, televisions, kitchenware, and hundreds of other items. Our system of free enterprise flooded the country with these goods, and the standard of living skyrocketed. Suburbs grew outside of cities, the construction of a massive interstate highway system was underway, and every day brought new wonders of science and technology, including medical advances and travel into space.

America also advanced the cause of liberty among its people. Within 20 years of the end of World War II, segregation was dead or dying, African Americans

had won the right to vote, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended discrimination in schools and the workplace.

American Generosity

Moreover, while communism around the world was bent on subjugating people and suppressing liberty, America reached out to preserve freedom and to rebuild a world ruined by war. With its billions of dollars in aid, the Marshall Plan and other American programs helped prevent communism from gaining ascendancy in Europe and allowed countries like Italy and France to reopen for business.

Particularly significant was the assistance given by America to Germany and Japan. Throughout history, the old adage "To the victors belong the spoils" has applied, and conquered peoples were often enslaved or reduced to penury. In some cases, they were simply exterminated, like the Carthaginians after the Third Punic War.

Instead of keeping the Germans and Japanese on their knees, however, the United States brought both these nations back to life by shaping them into democracies and by providing them with massive economic assistance. Coupled with the work ethic of these two peoples, this tactic worked so successfully that within 20 years Japan and Germany were

competing internationally in trade, were developing new technologies, and saw the bulk of their citizens earning middle-class incomes.

And in both countries, again largely by American guidance, democracy flourished. Gone were the goose-stepping armies, the dictators, the concentration camps, and the secret police. Replacing them were voting booths, political parties, and constitutions. Japan and Germany stand today as living monuments to American benevolence and generosity.

Keeping Democracy Alive

In addition, postwar United States offered economic and military support to countries around the world. South Korea remains a vibrant country to this day because America and its allies defeated the attempted conquest of that tiny nation by the North Koreans and the Chinese communists. During this time, the United States assisted other struggling nations as well, many of them in places like Africa and Asia, with financial aid and other incentives to retain their liberty.

The contrast between these real democracies and communism was glaring, with the most vivid example of that difference found in the city of Berlin. In 1961, the East German government, hand in hand with the Russians, built a wall separating East and West Berlin, a concrete barrier designed to prevent refugees from fleeing to West Berlin and freedom. On one side of that wall was East Berlin with its breadlines, its government stores with their empty shelves, its darkness and silence at night. On the other side was West Berlin with its busy shops and streets, its restaurants and fine hotels, its bright lights, clubs, and bars.

Did the United States have ulterior mo-

Standing in sharp contrast to this devastation and the communist power grabs was the United States of America.

tives in its support for these countries? Of course. They served as markets for our goods, provided us with locations for our far-flung military bases, and were allies against the worldwide threat of communism. To bring democracy and free enterprise to the world was in our best interests.

But so what? If I give five dollars to someone in need on the streets, does it matter to him whether that small generosity makes me feel better about myself?

Real American Radicalism

But where does it come from, this American wealth and the love of liberty? Why did Abraham Lincoln once describe the United States as "the last best hope of earth?" What were the roots for an American prosperity so vast that we boosted half the postwar world into economic recovery? Why do we so often battle dictators and advocate for democracy?

We find the answer to these questions in a single sentence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Those words from Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence constitute the most radical political idea ever conceived. Here are not suppositions, but "truths," and "self-evident" means that these truths are clear to the most casual observer. "All men are created equal" means that rich and poor, black, white, and brown, and citizens from all walks of life have equal rights in the courtroom and the polling booth, and need bow to no one. "Certain inalienable rights" means that human beings are born with rights no government can bestow or

take away. "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" are the lifeblood of the American Dream.

Keeping the Dream Alive

When we fail to remember those words, or cast them aside as old-fashioned and useless, the Dream dies.

Consequently, we must ignore those who today have turned their backs on Jefferson's Declaration and want us to do the same. As we have done in the past, we must work to correct real injustices when we find them, but we must refuse to heed those who tell us that America is inherently evil and who advocate canceling our culture and our uniqueness.

This August, let's put on a new pair of glasses and take time to look back at a postwar nation that not only brought prosperity and greater justice to its citizens, but also did the same for countries around the world. Let us remember leaders of that age—men like Harry Truman, George C. Marshall, Douglas MacArthur, and Dwight Eisenhower—all of whom believed in the American Dream of liberty and its concomitant prosperity.

Let us also remember those 400,000 Americans who died in lands far from home fighting against fascism and tyranny.

In the midst of our troubles, let's pause to remember and celebrate the goodness of America and the unique vision of the American Dream.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C., Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



SUSANNAH PEARCE

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A good read: "Freddy and the Ignormus."

The Forgotten Freddy the Pig

SUSANNAH PEARCE

If you put P.G. Wodehouse, Kenneth Grahame, and Mark Twain into a martini shaker, the cocktail you'd pour out would be Walter R. Brooks.

Brooks is the author of the hilarious "Freddy the Pig" series that from 1927–1958 kept his American readers awaiting the next installment. The 26 "Freddy" books combine talking animals à la Kenneth Grahame's classic "Wind in the Willows," American flavor the likes of Twain, and snappy conversation and convoluted scenarios worthy of P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves and Wooster tales.

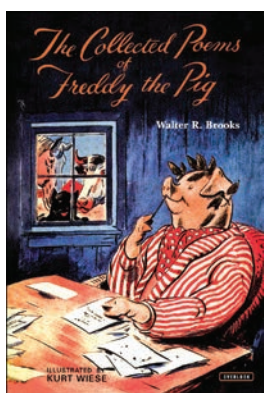
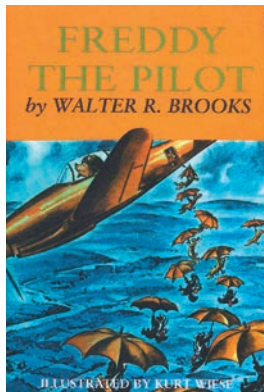
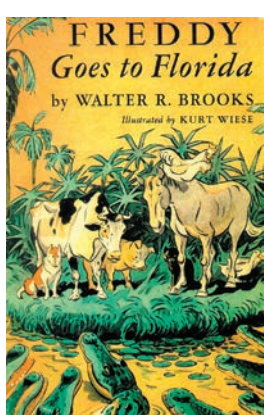
What the four have in common is an exceptional ability to write books purportedly for children that grown-ups appreciate at least as much. Or the other way around: books for adults that do not exclude themselves from immense enjoyment by children.

You may be asking, "Why, in heaven's name, haven't I heard of Brooks and his marvelous series?" I asked the same question when I happened upon one of the series, "Freddy and the Ignormus," among the juvenile audio books at our local library. My 12-year-old daughter and I have been devouring them piecemeal ever since by scouring purveyors of secondhand books and audio recordings. Why would books this enjoyable go out of print, and why does no one know about them anymore?

Perhaps it is because they were originally published for the "juvenile" market, the literacy of which has declined in the decades following the 1950s with the proliferation of televisions. I know of only four other people who have heard of the "Freddy the Pig" books. It is a really mournful state of affairs that these masterpieces of delightful American humor have been so long neglected.

Who Is Freddy the Pig?

Our hero, Freddy, is a remarkable member of the Bean Farm in rural New York of an indeterminate time, roughly falling within the parameters of Brooks's lifetime (1886–1958). Bean is the farmer, incidentally, not the crop grown.



A collection of "Freddy the Pig" books.



SUSANNAH PEARCE

Freddy is a clever and affable fellow (yes, a pig, but a pig of the world), who manages to get out of as many scrapes as he and fellow citizens of Centerboro get into—but not without extended complications and the assistance of friends, both animal and human.

The first of Brooks's books, "To and Again," involves the animals' decision to escape the coming winter in a drafty barn by migrating south, like the wild birds. It is no simple feat for a pig, cow, chickens, ducks, cat, dogs, horse, mice, and a pair of spiders as they face robbers, politicians, alligators, and more. It is a raucous success, both migratory and literary.

A second book was immediately demanded by young readers. Spun out by Brooks, the animals again departed on adventures, this time northward to the pole in "More To and Again."

A Pig of Distinction

Freddy was not originally cast as star in the early books, but he began to distinguish himself in subsequent stories through his emerging skills as detective (and disguise artist), poet, newspaper editor, problem solver, and friend to all (except a few reprobates). It is he who suggests forming an animal government to manage the farm while Mr. and Mrs. Bean are on vacation. He founds the First Animal Bank, develops fundraising schemes, and leads battles against Simon the Rat and his legions, who are the main animal antagonists in the adventures.

By the third book, "Freddy the Detective," Freddy takes center stage and thereafter receives top billing in most of the titles. The first book has even been renamed "Freddy Goes to Florida" in later editions to reflect Freddy's acceptance as titular character of the book and series.

Ever the regular, dependable pig, success doesn't go to Freddy's head. Well, maybe a little, as can be seen by his proclivity to poetry in praise of himself, such as "The Courageous Pig," which appears in "Freddy and the Ignormus."

The other animals and even the people at the Bean Farm help keep him humble if he should get carried away. One of the most humorous instances is seen in "Freddy and the Space Ship," when Mrs. Bean makes up a poem on the spot, attributing it to Freddy, to recite to the pig himself, who is in disguise. Mrs. Bean, of course, knows it is Freddy all along and takes advantage of the situation to poke fun at the pig. It begins, "I am smart and I am bright. When I do things I do 'em right."

Who Is Walter R. Brooks?

Brooks grew up in a well-to-do family in the small town of Rome, New York. Though he lost his father at the age of 4, he had a happy childhood, surrounded with caring relatives and lots of books. His idyllic days came to a sudden end at the age of 15 when his mother died unexpectedly.

His lonely years at boarding school led to a nostalgic imagination and perhaps a touch of cynicism. The fictional town of Centerboro, New York, which is home to the Bean Farm, bears a remarkable resemblance to the Rome of Walter's childhood. The "Freddy" books may have been a means for Brooks to revisit the happy

memories of his youth.

Brooks was not a novice to writing when his first "Freddy" book was published. He was already known as a humorist in American journalism in the 1920s when he began scribbling the animal stories for his own amusement.

Since he didn't set out to write a children's book, he was able to let spout and flow a fountain of imagination and a cascade of silliness that would eventually entertain and delight readers. You might call it "escapist literature," but, let's face it; there are times when escape from the "real" world is the best means to maintain sanity and a grasp of the truth!

Literature Lite

Since Brooks didn't set out to write a book for children, he didn't fall prey to the fault of writing down to children. He just wrote rollicking stories. In fact, many contemporary readers will be better prepared to enjoy them with a dictionary handy for occasional reference. That's not to say his writing is highbrow and stuffy. On the contrary, it's filled with the sort of slang you might expect to hear from farm animals and regular folk. But it is also strewn with the language of more erudite characters, such as Old Solomon the never-known-to-lose-an-argument owl, and Mr. Groper the polysyllabic-uttering hotel proprietor (a Homo sapiens citizen of Centerboro).

These books don't aim to teach anything, deliver great epiphanies, or grapple directly with universal human themes. They are refreshingly un-self-conscious and yet still make a considerable contribution to truly American literature in the same way that the works of P.G. Wodehouse do to English literature—through their genius in humor.

It's the sheer volume of wit, sentence after sentence and book after book, that dazzles (true of both Brooks and Wodehouse). The books contain the sort of snappy dialogue delivered in films of the Golden Age of Hollywood by Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn. Perhaps it isn't surprising that this grand era of film coincides with the first few years of the "Freddy" series. Even Bugs Bunny, making his advent in the late 1930s, shows off the verbal agility of that age.

Since Brooks didn't set out to write a book for children, he didn't fall prey to the fault of writing down to children.

It was the Depression; people needed cheerful distractions. It was Prohibition; people needed entertainment. Radios were just becoming a feature in homes. Television was not yet invented (thank God!). People read. Stories were often published serially in magazines and newspapers. Brooks's name was recognized from that milieu. His "Mr. Ed, the Talking Horse" stories, later turned into a popular television show, were widely known. Brooks's happy, imaginative stories were a welcome way for many readers to refresh themselves during trying times.

Not Without Literary Merit

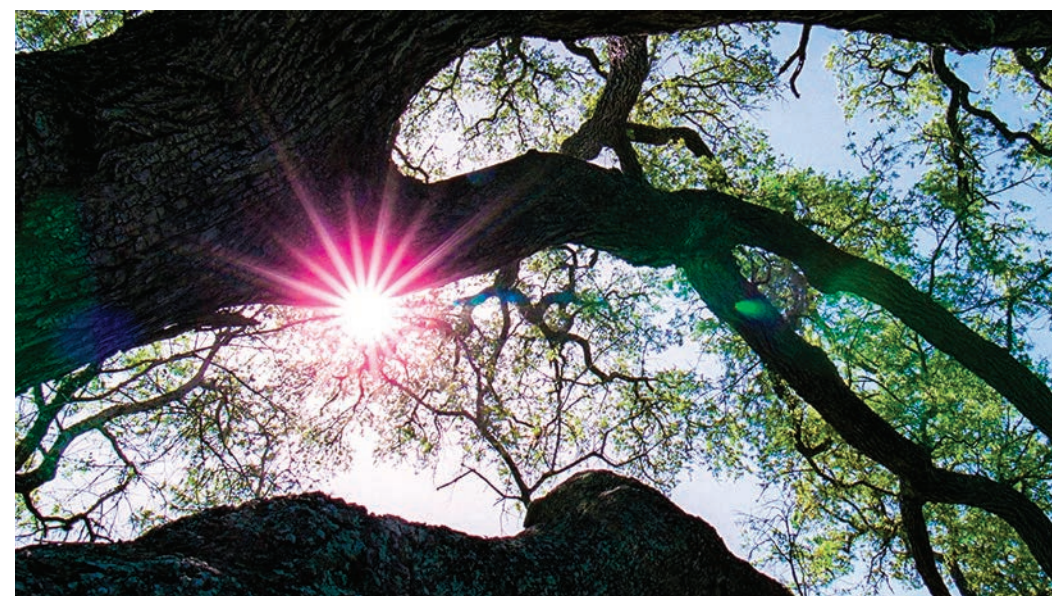
Along with Twain, Brooks ushered in a new, less formal style of writing for children's literature. It sounds less like the stories narrated by a saintly grandmother and more like the tales told by a single uncle. It is not didactic; if you learn something from the "Freddy" books, you can't blame Brooks, for he didn't put it in there on purpose. But, there is still much of value that can be gleaned from them.

Vocabulary and interesting sentences have already been mentioned. The character development draws out a very realistic mix of virtue and temptation to vice. As often as we see the foibles of others in one of the characters, we'll also feel a spark of self-recognition. Freddy and company are largely honorable and good, and generally sorry when they're not.

The books offer still more in extracurricular knowledge. Under the entertaining tutelage of Walter R. Brooks, my daughter has come to know a fair bit about baseball, the judicial system, politics, banking, and poetry. Her vocabulary has been expanded to a remarkable degree. Who knew her favorite teacher would be a pig?

If you're looking for a refreshing escape to a world where order and goodness ultimately win through quick-thinking, good friendships, and clever plots, embark on a reading adventure with Walter R. Brooks and Freddy the Pig. Don't forget your cocktail shaker!

Susanah Pearce holds a master's degree in theology and writes from her home in South Carolina.

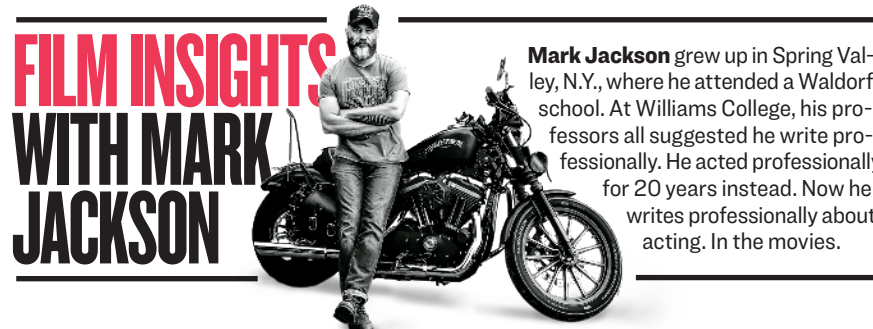


TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

(Left) A big tree in "The Tree of Life." (Right) The desert is a place to get some perspective. Sean Penn in the "Tree of Life."



MERIE WALLACE/TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX



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

Putting Life's Problems in Perspective

MARK JACKSON

As our cinematic director-elders move closer to the end of their lives, the big questions are starting to surface in their work. Clint Eastwood's 2010 "Hereafter" explored the afterlife. Then came Terrence Malick in 2011 with "The Tree of Life."

Co-produced by Brad Pitt, "The Tree of Life" was the toast of the film world at the time, having won the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in France.

This is not your average moviegoing experience, not really entertainment per se. It's a grand mirror of nature and the cosmos, over the surface of which skates a tiny human story.

The film draws on many sources, resulting in a sort of mash-up of a family narrative, Discovery Channel's "Planet Earth" and "Animal Planet," Science Channel's "The Cosmos," and even a tiny bit of "Jurassic Park."

'The Tree of Life'

Director
Terrence Malick

Starring
Sean Penn, Brad Pitt, Jessica Chastain, Fiona Shaw, Michael Showers, Hunter McCracken, Tye Sheridan

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
2 hours, 19 minutes

Release Date
May 17, 2011

★★★★★

"The Tree of Life" is a symphony, a cinematic opus, a poem of images. It requires a contemplative state of mind. Moviegoers who know how to meditate might think about emptying their minds and slowing their breathing. If you need pure popcorn, watch "Thor," which also came out in 2011—this here is popcorn and inspiration.

Speaking of which, "Thor" shares something with "The Tree of Life." Actually, two things: Yggdrasil, the gargantuan tree of life in Norse mythology, is somewhat explained in "Thor" and is quite possibly the source of Malick's title, although numerous religions speak of a tree of life.

The two movies also share spectacular shots of the cosmos—great rotating spiral galaxies, white dwarf stars, red giants, neutron stars, wormholes, black holes, and that stunning, widely seen "Eye of God" nebula.

As for the human story, we see Sean Penn's architect in his skyscraper office, thinking about a death in the family, flashing back to a Midwestern upbringing in the 1950s. His character, Jack, is a seeker, questioning the meaning of life. Two themes run through the movie, namely, the power of nature and the power of grace.

We are invited to entertain the idea that perhaps these two forces shape everything. In the microcosm of the family, Brad Pitt embodies the force of nature in the character of an authoritarian, bullying father. A newcomer at the time, Jessica Chastain—looking like a luminous, willowy mixture of Cate Blanchett and Bryce Dallas Howard—embodies grace.

The scenes of the boys growing up are fiercely nostalgic and haunting; they're a poetic version of the life of young boys depicted in Rob Reiner's "Stand by Me."

Oceans, sand dunes, poetry, light patterns, human birth, birth of stars, whispered philosophies, choirs, volcanoes, clouds, waterfalls, red rocks, hot springs, jellyfish, dinosaurs, manta rays, sequoias... "Where does the soul go after death?" ... "Why does our father hurt us?" ... "I didn't notice the glory" ... "Only way to be happy

is to love, or your life will flash by."

Pondering Life's Big Questions

This ultrawide spectrum immediately and inherently generates some of the huge questions that humans tend to ask. Simultaneously, by using what seems like the widest span of macrocosmic and microcosmic images photographed to date, it allows intuitions of answers to well up in our minds by simply expanding our visual perspective.

By juxtaposing the tiny, "mundane" human with the towering, colossal setting in which we exist, it's almost impossible not to imagine that there must be rhyme and reason behind the sheer magnitude of this imagery.

Two themes run through the movie, namely, the power of nature and the power of grace.

"The Tree of Life" challenges the question of whether modern science can encompass all that. We don't regularly look through this wide a lens. When viewing the family dramas, it brings to mind one of my favorite Eastern-philosophy phrases: "When you take a step back in a conflict, you will find the earth and seas boundless, and it will certainly be another situation."

There should be more movies like this. It seems to me that if we don't start filling our minds with these kinds of questions, slowing our breathing down, and taking a break from Everything, we will love less and less, and our lives will indeed flash by.

I'd recommend a double-feature night: See "Thor" first and follow it up with "The Tree of Life." If you're experiencing some difficulties, this prescription of Popcorn and Inspiration will help you take a step back from the current COVID conflicts and put things in perspective.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE 2011's 'Contagion' Is COVID-19 Prescient

MARK JACKSON

From a May 6, 2020, Washington Post article: "Faced with fear and uncertainty about a dangerous virus spreading quickly and potentially becoming a pandemic, many people are turning to movies and TV shows that depict a dangerous virus spreading quickly and definitely becoming a pandemic."

"That's good news for the streaming services renting out the 2011 thriller 'Contagion' by Steven Soderbergh, which on Thursday [April 30, 2020] was the eighth most popular movie in the United States on iTunes. The movie is currently the second most popular film in the Warner Bros. catalog, up from 270th last year. Its newfound popularity coincides with the novel coronavirus being diagnosed in more people around the world and across the country."

Pandemic Nuts and Bolts

Some of the things that generally go on in movies about a contagious epidemic are how it spreads, the symptoms, the advanced stages of frothing and convulsing, the one-immune person who can't catch it, the quarantining, the hazmat suits, the isolating of its origin, the suspicious talk of some country having "weaponized" it, the frantic search for its vaccine, the mass panic, and the deployment of the National Guard. There's an un-

avoidable, "seen one, seen 'em all" aspect of virus-outbreak movies.

"Contagion" opens with Gwyneth Paltrow's character exhibiting symptoms. The camera looks suspiciously at places of human contact: subway poles, sipped drinks, indiscreet public coughing, and so on.

Paltrow's bits are among the film's creepiest, since, award-winning actress that she is, she looks rather horrifyingly convincing while in the throes of advanced symptoms. She also does an excellent job of looking extremely dead.

Also of note is Jude Law's character, Alan Krumwiede, who appears to be a version of the assassin he played in "Road to Perdition." He drives most of the more interesting plot lines as a conspiracy-theory journalist-blogger looking to sniff out sinister government involvement in the virus's spread.

'Contagion'

Director
Steven Soderbergh

Starring
Gwyneth Paltrow, Matt Damon, Laurence Fishburne, Jude Law, Kate Winslet, Elliott Gould, Marion Cotillard

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
1 hour, 46 minutes

Release Date
Sept. 9, 2011

★★★★★

Watching "Contagion" elicits an eerie déjà vu. Young movie extras in masks in 2011's "Contagion."

WARNER BROS.



His ideas are a bit too all-over-the-place, and he's eventually reprimanded by Elliott Gould's brilliant research doctor with the excellent line, "Blogging is not writing! It's graffiti with punctuation!"

Nevertheless, a mirroring of the physical epidemic is shown in the proliferation of hordes of people (12 million) flocking to Krumwiede's website for answers, thus creating a panic pandemic.

We never really find out if the government is trying to pull a stunt similar to one by the "James Bond" villain Goldfinger, who intended to detonate a small atomic bomb in Fort Knox, thus rendering all the gold radioactive and thereby sending his personal gold stock through the roof.

If everyone's dying and the government has the only vaccine ...

Who knows what's going on? It's left ambiguous. It demonstrates how a fear pandemic can be just as insidious and dangerous as an actual virus. In a quote from the film's press notes, Soderbergh says, "This film could do for elevator buttons and doorknobs what 'Jaws' did for going to the beach."

Is that a good thing? That's the same fearmongering that Krumwiede is supposed to be demonstrating as being a bad thing. Film directors need to be responsible; large numbers of people who saw "Jaws" in 1975 won't swim out farther than 10 feet from the shore 45 years later, not to mention that the film kicked off a massive, contagious human massacring of sharks.

Catching Up to COVID

Since my original review, I've gone from appreciating "Contagion" as a thriller to no longer wanting to be

thrilled about a pandemic. I want answers. So does everyone else, judging by the number of viewings it's receiving, and that's probably due to the fact that the science in "Contagion" is by and large grounded in reality.

SARS happened, apparently, through some kind of human contact with bats. The disease in "Contagion" starts with the bats and adds pigs. Interestingly, it's always starting someplace in China.

If you're looking for answers, it's no secret that The Epoch Times has coined the term "CCP (Chinese Communist Party) virus," regarding the novel coronavirus, and presents factual evidence that China knowingly exported this contagion.

There's much to ponder regarding plagues and pandemics in terms of the concept that all such occurrences reflect a debased state of human morality. Ancient China, long before the Cultural Revolution, had many such stories describing this connection.

Hopefully, this type of inner reflection becomes highly contagious and widespread before it's too late. If you're looking for answers, it's no secret that The Epoch Times has coined the term "CCP (Chinese Communist Party) virus," regarding the novel coronavirus, and presents factual evidence that China knowingly exported this contagion.

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BOOK REVIEW: 'ROBERT WISE: THE MOTION PICTURES'

Getting to Know Robert Wise and His Family Film 'The Sound of Music'

TIFFANY BRANNAN

When famous Hollywood directors are listed, Robert Wise rarely is included. However, he directed many iconic pictures during his diverse career, which lasted from 1944 to 2000. Film fans can gain a new appreciation for Mr. Wise, as a director and as a man, through descriptions of his fascinating films, by reading "Robert Wise: The Motion Pictures" by J.R. Jordan. Especially interesting is Jordan's chapter on Wise's "The Sound of Music" (1965), an account that deepens our understanding of why the film is so remarkable.

For those who need a refresher, the cinematic version of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's Broadway musical follows the story of a young postulant in 1930s Austria, Maria (Julie Andrews). Unsure that Maria is suited to convent life, the Mother Abbess (Peggy Wood) sends the lively young woman to be governess for a Salzburg family. The father, widowed sea captain Georg von Trapp (Christopher Plummer), is a stoic parent who runs his home like a naval ship. His seven children have been trained to march rather than play; their only fun is mischief toward their numerous, short-employed governesses. Maria uses her faith, determination, and love for music to befriend the children while their father is in Vienna.

When Captain von Trapp returns, he brings with him the wealthy widow Baroness Elsa von Schraeder (Eleanor Parker) and impresario "Uncle" Max Detweiler (Richard Haydn). Although Georg and Elsa are considering marriage, the baroness has no interest in raising children. Meanwhile, Maria is beginning to soften the stern captain and question her own feelings about becoming a nun. Forming the background for these personal issues, the Nazis are gaining power and threatening the safety of patriotic Austrians like Captain von Trapp.

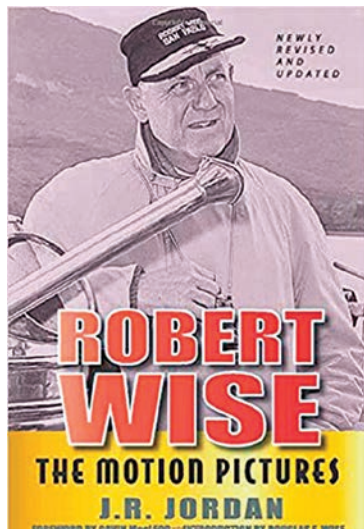
The Biography

Although originally published by Bear Manor Media in April 2017, this book's revised edition came



(Above) (L-R) Director Robert Wise, Canadian actor Christopher Plummer, and British actress Julie Andrews talk on the film set of "The Sound of Music," in 1965.

(Right) Cast members from "The Sound of Music" during the 40th anniversary reunion in New York on Nov. 10, 2005.



The 2020 revised edition features more interviews and pictures than J. R. Jordan's 2017 edition of the Robert Wise biography.

EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES



London's Dominion Theatre, advertising the film "The Sound of Music."



PAUL HAWTHORNE/GETTY IMAGES

out this year, featuring more interviews and pictures. Jordan began writing it in June 2014, completing it by September 2016. Jordan's appreciation for Robert Wise's films was inspired in childhood by his father, Joseph C. Jordan Jr.

As Jordan explained in an email, his father, a Navy man, loved "The Sand Pebbles" (1966), which was also director Robert Wise's favorite of his films. "I'll never forget our experience of watching 'The Sand Pebbles' together. It was my first time, and I was absolutely mesmerized. The experience ultimately compelled me to write my book," he said.

"Robert Wise: The Motion Pictures" differs from other Hollywood biographies by describing its subject's life through his work. The book is divided into 40 chapters, each one dedicated to a different film that Mr. Wise directed. In addition to providing the films' plots and production information, 22 chapters include quotes from at least one person involved with each production.

These quotes are not single paragraphs but lengthy sections containing detailed memories and fascinating anecdotes about experiences during productions with Robert Wise. As well as informing about the making of each film, these quotes say a lot about Wise himself.

The numerous interviewees' descriptions of Robert Wise create one clear picture of him. His directorial style reflected his beginnings as a film editor, since he relied heavily on storyboards. Unlike many directors, he gave his actors little instruction during filming. He directed through casting, by choosing actors who were well-suited to their parts.

He was very calm, professional, and orderly, so his sets had that atmosphere. Everyone described him as a gentleman. His colleagues remember him as soft-spoken, patient, gracious,

considerate, and good-naturedly humorous: an exceptional man.

In the chapter on "The Sound of Music," Heather Menzies-Urich (Louisa von Trapp) recounted: "Robert Wise was like a father figure to me. And he remained so until his death. He was the type of guy who didn't take any prisoners. If you did something that Mr. Wise did not like, he would say, 'Stop it, right now. This is not happening.'

"But he was so validating. And considering that he had to deal with seven kids for almost a year, I'd say that's an accomplishment in itself. He never lost his cool. ... We were just having fun, running around singing 'Do-Re-Mi' all over the hills, but Mr. Wise was the most patient director I've ever encountered.

"He always referred to a desired take as 'a beauty take.' ... And whenever he followed the filming of a particular shot with the words, 'That's a beauty take,' you immediately knew you'd done a good job.

"Mr. Wise had the whole storyboard in his head because of his experience as an editor back in the day. He knew exactly what he wanted to do before he even placed the camera on you. He knew exactly what he wanted the shot to look like before we started filming."

A Rare Family Film

"The Sound of Music" is a true family film, but not just because of its story. Although it contains serious topics, its content is appropriate for all ages. While movies that were acceptable for everyone were once standard in America, by the mid-1960s that had changed. Hollywood's moral standards had slipped drastically during that decade, beginning with Joseph Breen's retirement as head of the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1954. For 20 years, his enforcement of

the Motion Picture Production Code had kept American films family-friendly.

This musical's pro-family story, religious themes, and narrative about fighting for freedom are Code characteristics. How did this post-Breen Era film manage to espouse these bygone values? The Margaret Herrick Library's online PCA files show that Geoffrey Shurlock, Mr. Breen's successor, approved this script as completely acceptable on Jan. 14, 1964, suggesting no cuts or revisions. Thus, Ernest Lehman's original screenplay must have been as exemplary as the finished film without help from the PCA.

The screenplay was based heavily on the Broadway musical's book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Unlike many other Rogers and Hammerstein musicals, this score's lyrics needed no moral revision to reach the screen. The three Broadway songs not used in the film were removed for artistic reasons. Since Mr. Lehman added no objectionable content to the screenplay, it remained totally decent.

According to Jordan, this film's unusual decency is due to its creators' desire to make a family production: "Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II intended for their musical to be wholesome. Wise respected their original vision and did very little to alter it. As a result, 'The Sound of Music' appeals to a wide range of audiences," he said.

This statement is supported by the PCA file, which shows that the film received no self-regulation. Jordan's research about this film revealed that its family values weren't just on the screen: "During my interview with Heather Menzies-Urich, it became clear to me Wise's film (production and content) stressed the importance of family. The cast and crew shared a special camaraderie. In turn, the end result was especially appealing to families across the world."

Lasting Appeal

"The Sound of Music" was not just a fad. It won five Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director, out of ten nominations; and two Golden Globes, including Best Motion Picture—Musical or Comedy, out of four nominations. The highest-grossing film of 1965, it broke box office records around the world. Adjusted for inflation, it remains the sixth highest-grossing film of all time. "Sound of Music" tours, festivals, and singalongs are still held in the 21st century, showing that this film's appeal lives on.

His colleagues remember him as soft-spoken, patient, gracious, considerate, and good-naturedly humorous: an exceptional man.

"The Sound of Music" is an endearing classic that remains family-friendly because its creators chose wholesome substance over cheap sensationalism. This reflects Robert Wise's high ideals. Ultimately, this film and this book are about family. Just as Robert Wise dedicated his film to family, J.R. Jordan dedicated his book to his father, who died at age 90 in July. In the foreword, Jordan wrote: "Those I interviewed for this book generally described Robert Wise as noble, patient, validating, and a class act. Such words, in short, apply to Dad."

Tiffany Brannan is a 19-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.

GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK

The Lost Art of Great Popular Song

MICHAEL KUREK

Is the Great American Songbook still being written?

The so-called Great American Songbook is defined as a canon of the memorable "standards" of popular song that helped to define American culture in the first half of the 20th century. Its great composers included Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, the Gershwins, and Jerome Kern.

These songwriters' names were just as well-known as the names of famous singers, because it was an age when the song stood proudly independent from the performer. Standards such as "Stardust" by Hoagy Carmichael would be uniquely recorded by many singers, from Frank Sinatra to Doris Day to Nat King Cole. One of the last songs to receive such multi-artist treatment was Paul McCartney's "Yesterday" (1965), the most recorded song in history, with over 4,000 versions by everyone from Ray Charles to Plácido Domingo.

These songwriters' names were just as well-known as the names of famous singers, because it was an age when the song stood proudly independent from the performer.

By contrast, the second half of the 20th century saw the rise of so-called singer-songwriters, who both wrote and performed their own songs, like James Taylor, John Denver, Carol King, and Elton John. The practice of having separate songwriters and singers has declined now, except in country music, but even there, the singer who records a certain song still tends to "own it."

Another big difference from the



PUBLIC DOMAIN

(Above) Johnny Mercer, circa 1947, wrote the lyrics to "Midnight Sun." William P. Gottlieb Collection from the United States Library of Congress's Music Division.

(Below) Johnny Mercer's song "Midnight Sun" was an Ella Fitzgerald hit in 1957.

past is that songwriters' names are little-known by the general public now. How many have ever heard, for example, of Nadir "RedOne" Khayat, co-writer of some of Lady Gaga's biggest hits?

'Poker Face' Versus 'Midnight Sun'

Allow me to do a comparison of one of Lady Gaga's most famous songs, "Poker Face," with one of the Great American Songbook songs, "Midnight Sun," to see what exactly might have changed in the art of songwriting. Never fear—I will be sure to explain my analysis in terms that everyone can understand.

In 2009, Gaga's hit was one of the bestselling singles, with over 9.5 million sales that year. I got hold of the "Poker Face" score and did a bit of simple analysis, comparing it with the score to the great lyricist Johnny Mercer's "Midnight Sun" (1954), with music by Sonny Burke and Lionel Hampton. This song was first a big hit for Ella Fitzgerald in 1957 and subsequently recorded by many others, including Jo Stafford and Sarah Vaughan, and more recently Diana Krall.

First of all, let's compare the chords of the two songs. "Mid-



EXPRESS NEWSPAPERS/GETTY IMAGES

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

The Self-Sabotage of Harboring Evil

ERIC BESS

I often ask myself, "What does it mean to be a sincere, good, and patient person?" Despite the fact that I haven't found an absolute answer to this question, asking it has revealed a lot about myself that I otherwise would not know. Asking this question initiated my journey into the truths of my own soul.

Keeping this in mind, I recently was reading overboard in anger. Then Thor took the two whales, went back to Hymir's home to get the cauldron, and returned to the gods.

Thor and the Fishing Trip

In Norse mythology, Thor and the Midgard Serpent (also known as Jormungand) are age-old enemies. Once, Thor almost defeats Jormungand but is interrupted in the process. The story goes as follows:

Two giants, Aegir and Ran, offered to host a feast arranged by the gods if the gods provided a cauldron big enough to serve everyone at the feast. Hymir was the only giant who was known to possess a cauldron that large. The god Thor volunteered to meet with Hymir and request his cauldron.

After Thor arrived at Hymir's home, Hymir slaughtered three bulls to eat. Thor, however, having a notorious appetite, ate two bulls in one sitting. These bulls were supposed to last Thor's whole stay! This irritated Hymir because now they had to go to sea to fish for more food. Thor, annoyed by Hymir further, slaughtered another bull as bait for the fishing trip.

Thor and Hymir journeyed out to sea to get more food. It wasn't long before Hymir caught two whales to eat. Thor, however, kept rowing out to sea. Hymir, frightened, asked Thor to go no farther since Jormun-

gand, the evil Midgard Serpent, swam in these waters.

Thor was undeterred and cast his line into the sea. It wasn't long before he felt something pull at the line. He began to reel in his line and found that he had caught Jormungand. Thor wasted no time and reached for his hammer to destroy the evil serpent, but Hymir, in his fear, cut Thor's line and released Jormungand back into the water.

Thor became upset and threw Hymir overboard in anger. Then Thor took the two whales, went back to Hymir's home to get the cauldron, and returned to the gods.

In Norse mythology, Thor and the Midgard Serpent (also known as Jormungand) are age-old enemies.

Battering the Midgard Serpent

Henry Fuseli, a Romantic painter of the 18th and early 19th centuries, presented his interpretation of Thor's battle with Jormungand. He was greatly influenced by the musculature of Michelangelo's sculptures and paintings and tried to incorporate this style into his own work.

Fuseli created a dark composition that serves to have the brightness of Thor stand out in the upper center of the painting. The darkness and the lack of information in the painting's background may suggest just how far Thor has rowed out to sea to find Jormungand.

Behind Thor, cowering in the boat, is

Hymir. Hymir watches in fear as the event unfolds. Thor, having caught Jormungand, reaches to unsheathe his hammer to finally destroy his old foe. In the top left-hand corner is a bust of Thor's father and the greatest of Norse gods, Odin, who watches the scene.

The Courage to Journey Within

For me, Fuseli's painting represents a journey that many of us may have the opportunity to make, a journey into the inner recesses of our own souls. It takes courage to make this journey, but with it we may bring our fears of what we will find.

I think there's a part of us that is always looking to overcome the deep, dark, evil things that may exist in us. This is the part of us that is like Thor: This part is unafraid and treats abolishing personal evil like a meaningful mission that must be upheld.

Then, there's another part of us that is afraid of what we may find when we make the journey deep into ourselves. This part of us is like Hymir: Afraid of confronting the evil that lurks beneath our surface, this part finds ways to sabotage our efforts to overcome our own shortcomings.

We may find that deep within us, we embody, hide, and shelter selfishness and evil. We may find that we, not something outside of ourselves, are our own worst enemies. And right when we go to destroy that evil aspect of ourselves, our fear, often by way of denial or rationalization, prevents us from following through.

At first, in our denial, we may find ourselves comforted by the thought that we don't harbor such evil in our own waters. But it's not long before said evil surfaces again, and we, during a trip in which we are supposed to be considering how to provide for others, are left disturbed and interfered

with. "Midnight Sun" has 24 different kinds of chords (in other words, it is richly and continually varied in harmony) in a highly sophisticated "progression." Dramatically contrasting with this, "Poker Face" has just three chords repeated monotonously over 30 times and which do not even make a progression, such as you'd find in the three chords of a rock or country song.

Next, let's look at the melody in the two songs. "Midnight Sun" presents a typically wide range for the singing voice, from low to high, of an octave plus three steps, with an interesting melodic shape that often contrasts the singer's warm lower notes with his or her climactic high ones. The beautiful melody stands first as a tune on its own, having first been recorded as an instrumental.

By contrast, "Poker Face" mostly hovers on the note middle C and dips down to a few other notes within the narrow range of a fourth (four scale steps), only occasionally jumping up to a note an octave higher. Its overall effect is as a drone or chant, and the vocal line would not likely stand up on its own as a memorable tune without words.

Finally, perhaps the biggest contrast is in the lyrics to the songs. Johnny Mercer's lyrics are utterly poetic and romantic, for example: "Your lips were like a red and ruby chalice, / Warmer than the Summer night. / The clouds were like an alabaster palace, / Rising to a snowy height. / Each star its own Aurora Borealis, / Suddenly you held me tight, / I could see the midnight sun." The lyrics to "Poker Face" are more overtly sexual and make little attempt at either poetry or romance, for example: Oh, whoa, oh, oh / Oh, oh oh / I'll get him hot, show him what I've got / Can't read my, can't read my / No, he can't read my poker face ... P-p-p-poker face, p-p-poker face (mum-mum-mum-mah).

While it may be argued that the rhythmic, driving beat or the fantastic video production of today's songs compensate for the missing elements described above, it could be counterargued that those things only serve to mask their deeper deficiencies.

The Great American Songbook remains a treasure worth preserving and celebrating, and, thankfully, it lives on in fresh recordings by people like Michael Bublé and even by Lady Gaga herself (with Tony Bennett)! And for those who don't know "Midnight Sun," please savor its melody and the rest of its fabulous lyrics.

American composer Michael Kurek is the author of the recently released book "The Sound of Beauty: A Composer on Music in the Spiritual Life" and the composer of the recent Billboard No. 1 classical album "The Sea Knows." The winner of numerous composition awards, including the prestigious Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has served on the Nominations Committee of the Recording Academy for the classical Grammy Awards. He is a professor emeritus of composition at Vanderbilt University. For more information and music, visit MichaelKurek.com



PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent," 1790, by Henry Fuseli. Oil on canvas, 52 inches by 37.2 inches. Royal Academy of Arts Collections, London.

with by our own selfishness.

Who has the courage to make the journey in consideration of others? Who has the courage to keep rowing forward? Who has the courage to throw his or her fears overboard and destroy the age-old enemy that is selfishness?

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.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

A Taut, Buoyant Thriller

Elevated by Cary Grant's Comedic Talents

IAN KANE

When it comes to film directors, Alfred Hitchcock is widely considered to be one of the greatest of all time, especially during his heyday period, which lasted from the 1940s well into the 1960s. Some of his films have been seen as instrumental in influencing the creation of future genres. For instance, one of Hitchcock's most famous films, "Psycho" (1960) is considered by many critics to be the precursor of the modern slasher film. Similarly, his 1959 effort "North by Northwest" has certain facets that may have influenced the James Bond franchise, which took the world by storm in the 1960s. In fact, many fans refer to it as the "first James Bond film," even though the main protagonist isn't a trained spy.



Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint in "North by Northwest."

and debonair advertising executive, Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), whose quick pace is almost as snappy as his rapid-fire wit. From the outset of the film, we see Thornhill constantly in motion as he leaves his ad agency, with his secretary in tow, and proceeds to plan out his schedule with her. Their back-and-forth scheduling banter continues seamlessly as they hop into a taxi on the busy streets of Manhattan.

The cab soon pulls up to a swanky dining establishment where Thornhill is to meet up with some fellow advertising execs. But just as he's settling in, he inadvertently makes a hand gesture that is misinterpreted by certain criminal elements watching the place. At that moment, he is marked as an international spy. These henchmen manage to isolate and then kidnap Thornhill.

He is whisked away to a palatial estate where he is held captive until eventually the head honcho of the spy ring, Phillip Vandamm (a game James Mason), arrives to interrogate the captive ad exec.

Vandamm suspects Thornhill of being a government agent named Kaplan. Although Thornhill tries his best to convince Vandamm that the whole ordeal is simply a case of mistaken identity, his pleas fall on deaf ears.

After Thornhill narrowly manages to escape certain death, he soon finds himself framed for the death of a high-ranking U.N. official.

As he seeks out clues that will hopefully lead to clearing his name, he takes a cross-country train on which he meets the beautiful Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint). She turns out to be the one person who seems to believe his rather outlandish story.

Kendall helps Thornhill evade capture by authorities who are hot on his trail, and the two bond in scenes that are considered pretty racy by 1950s standards. Questions soon arise: Does she truly have his best interest in mind, and is she who she says she is?



Cary Grant in one of the most famous scenes in cinematic history, in "North by Northwest."

There is an especially tense scene in which Thornhill is to meet up with the "real" Kaplan, whom Thornhill is suspected of being. Under strict instructions, he travels by bus to a desolate area of Indiana that has nothing but sprawling crops and cornfields as far as the eye can see.

Despite all the life-or-death scenes, 'North by Northwest' is one of Hitchcock's most whimsical thrillers.

As he awaits Kaplan's arrival, several vehicles approach him, and each time Thornhill expects them to be carrying the mysterious man. But his hopes are dashed every time they pass him by. Finally, a plane that has been supposedly crop-dusting in the distance begins to fly directly at him. It flies so low that Thornhill has to dive out of the way of the plane's lower fuselage. Additional fly-bys have the plane shooting at our protagonist, and a real sense of dread begins to creep over the proceedings. How will Thornhill ever be able to defend himself against

an airborne enemy out in the open plains?

Despite all the life-or-death scenes, "North by Northwest" is one of Hitchcock's most whimsical thrillers. The script, written by Ernest Lehman ("The Sound of Music," "West Side Story"), allows Grant to flex his natural comedic muscles and get away with things other actors couldn't. He oscillates between expressing fear and anxiety with equal measures of wit and quirkiness. Thus, the film exchanges much of the heaviness of films like "Rear Window" and "Vertigo" with a buoyant charm that elates, rather than discourages.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

'North by Northwest'

Director
Alfred Hitchcock

Starring
Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint, James Mason

Running Time
2 hours, 16 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
July 1, 1959

★★★★★

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