

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

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"Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window," circa 1659, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 32 5/8 inches by 25 3/8 inches.

## FINE ARTS

## Reflecting on Johannes Vermeer, an Exceptional Dutch Master

The exhibition 'Johannes Vermeer: On Reflection' at the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden, Germany

LORRAINE FERRIER

Since 1742, visitors have delighted in seeing Johannes Vermeer's "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" at the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden, Germany. But the scene is not the same as it was when the painting first left Vermeer's studio around 1659.

In 1742, the elector of Saxony and king of Poland, Augustus III, bought 30 paintings from Prince Carignan in Paris, and the painting "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" was added as a complimentary gift to the king.

When the gallery acquired the painting, it was attributed to Rembrandt because

the empty white wall in the background resembled Rembrandt's style, exhibition curator Uta Neidhardt explained by telephone. "I think when people saw ... the high quality of the painting, but they had no name [on it], ... they thought it could be by Rembrandt," she added.

### Celebrating Love Once Lost

For centuries, the painting showed a young lady engrossed in reading a letter. The vast, blank background gave viewers a sense of the lady's solitude, and further emphasized her paying close attention to the letter's contents.

But the blank background had been overpainted, altering the painting's original state. Not until the 1860s was the painting officially attributed to Vermeer. And not until 2017

did experts realize that the overpainting happened decades after Vermeer created it.

Now, the painting has been restored according to Vermeer's intention. And since 2017, restorers have removed layers of grime and overpainting to reveal a vibrant picture with a whole "new" meaning: love. The overpainted background concealed a framed picture of Cupid that Vermeer had originally painted as an important clue to indicate that the girl is reading a love letter.

To celebrate the "new" Vermeer, around 60 Dutch masterpieces are gathered together for the "Johannes Vermeer: On Reflection" exhibition at the Old Masters Picture Gallery.

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**Vermeer's oeuvre is dominated by a serene artistic sensibility.**



## What People Are Saying



I read The Epoch Times daily. I still like hard papers [...] and I still like to grab that paper in my hand, but I get more printed versions of stories than ever before. You guys have done an amazing job, and really—I think there's such a void in media, especially newspapers. They slant so solidly one way that **there are very few papers that I can really feel that I can rely on, and The Epoch Times is one.**

**SEAN HANNITY**  
Talk show host



**I congratulate you and The Epoch Times** for the work you are doing, especially with regard to keeping the menace of the communist threat in front of us.

**DR. SEBASTIAN GORKA**  
Military and intelligence analyst and former deputy assistant to the president



**I rely on The Epoch Times** newspaper for factual and unbiased news coverage.

**LARRY ELDER**  
Best-selling author, attorney, and talk show host



**The Epoch Times is a great place where you can understand traditional values** in a way and in a tone and through content that is accessible. It's smart.

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TRUTH AND TRADITION



## Lest We Forget: Some Lessons From Rudyard Kipling

JEFF MINICK

"When I was a boy of fourteen," Mark Twain once noted, "my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

Like Twain, some children roll their eyes when parents or grandparents offer advice. The 1960s gave birth to the adage "Never trust anyone over 30," which some young people believed until they hit middle age and found themselves parents or in positions of authority. That's when the eye rolling abruptly ended.

The same holds true in regard to certain writers. In our age, some despise authors for their views on women, or race, or gender, and though they may be as gifted and wise as Shakespeare, Jane Austin, or Mark Twain, we're willing to throw them and their work into the dumpster when they offend our culture's standards of political correctness.

One early victim of such a cultural execution was Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936).

### A Mixed Reputation

Kipling, who in 1907 won the Nobel Prize, was once one of the most popular writers in the world. Even after his death, his work inspired Hollywood films like "The Jungle Book" and "Gunga Din," and his short stories and poetry regularly made their way into anthologies of English literature. My public library carries at least two dozen of his titles.

During the cultural upheavals of the last 50 years, however, Kipling's reputation has suffered the blows and kicks of our progressive age. Schools removed his works from their curriculum, and he's disappeared from certain textbooks—my sixth edition of X.J. Kennedy's textbook, "Literature," is 1,859 pages long but without a single reference to Kipling. And today many consider the author of such works as "Kim," "Captains Courageous," and the poem "If—" a racist, a jingoist, an imperialist, and a misogynist.

Of course, there is some truth to these charges. Kipling was, after all, a man of his time and a promoter of empire. On the other hand, if we judge any writer from the past by our present-day standards, we'll likely find some electric socket that

will shock our modern sensibilities, just as our own prejudices will no doubt appall or amuse our descendants a century from now.

If, however, we dig a little deeper into Kipling's prose and verse, we discover a writer who has some words of wisdom for us, some caveats we ignore at our peril.

Let's give it a look.

### Imperialism and Nation Building

Many today condemn Kipling as an imperialist, an apologist for the British Empire.

Let's grant them that point. But perhaps they should then read "The Man Who Would Be King" or watch the movie by the same name as directed by John Huston. Kipling's story focuses on two British ex-soldiers and con men, Daniel Dravot and Peachey Carnehan, who connive to set themselves up as kings of Kafiristan, today a part of Afghanistan. They intend to support one warring tribe against another, subvert the powers that be, make themselves monarchs, and then, as Dravot says in the film, "loot the country four ways from Sunday."

Their plan nearly works, but in the end the native people execute Daniel, and Peachey returns to India broken in health and mind, where he dies shortly afterward.

This sounds less like a prescription for imperialism than a warning about its dangers. Given our recent catastrophe in Afghanistan, we might urge our leaders to visit Kipling's tale of arrogance and its consequences before embarking on our next overseas adventure.

### Race

Given Kipling's reputation, what, some might ask with a contemptuous laugh, could he possibly teach us about race?

In short, toleration and respect.

In "Gunga Din," Kipling creates Gunga Din, a "regimental bhisti," or water carrier, who rescues a wounded British soldier, plugs his wound, gives him water, and is then himself shot dead. The soldier and his comrades had looked down on Gunga Din, but the poem ends with these words: "Though I've belted you and flayed you,/ By the livin' Gawd that made you,/ You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!"

In "The Ballad of East and West," Kipling returns to this theme of respect beyond

race or creed at the beginning and end of his poem:

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face though they come from the ends of the earth!

In "Kim," perhaps the best of his fiction, Kipling brings an array of characters into his story of India, with special emphasis on the Irish orphan and vagrant boy Kim and his Buddhist mentor and friend, the lama. Though we witness some racial prejudice in the story, these sentiments are representative of the age. In general, Kipling presents all his characters of whatever caste or color race realistically, and in the lama we meet a saintly man who treats those he encounters with respect and goodwill, regardless of their beliefs or the color of their skin.

### Raising Our Children, Particularly Boys

When it comes to educating young people and building their character, ours is an age of confusion. We lack a universal moral standard, we often fail by our words and deeds to set a good example for our children, and our teenagers in particular may fall under the adverse influence of our electronic culture.

Here again, Kipling may give us a star to steer by. His novel "Captains Courageous," for example, tells the tale of a wealthy, self-centered teen who falls overboard and is rescued by Portuguese fishermen. In his essay "The American Boy," Theodore Roosevelt says of this book that it "describes in the liveliest way what a boy should be and do. The hero is painted in the beginning as the spoiled, over-indulged child of wealthy parents, of a type which we do sometimes unfortunately see, and than which there exist few things more objectionable on the face of the broad earth. This boy is afterward thrown onto his own resources, amid wholesome surroundings, and is forced to work hard among boys and men who are real boys and real men doing real work. The effect is invaluable."

In "If—" Kipling gives us a more succinct formula for turning boys into men. In the 32 lines of this poem, we find distilled the magic of that transformation. You can find

my take on this poem in my online essay at The Epoch Times, "You'll Be a Man, My Son: Rudyard Kipling on Manhood."

### Forewarned Is Forearmed

Finally, Kipling issues several warnings about the troubles plaguing our nation right now. "The Gods of the Copybook Headings" with its admonitions against breaking or abandoning a moral code is more applicable today than when Kipling wrote it. These headings were the maxims or proverbs at the top of a page in a copybook, which students then wrote over and over again to develop their penmanship. After the poem's narrator recites a litany of sorrows suffered when we ignore this timeless wisdom, the poem ends with this verse:

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

In 1897, Kipling wrote "Recessional" for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Here we see none of the jingoism of which he stands accused. Instead, his poem is a somber reminder about the impermanence of empire and power. Here is the final verse:

For heathen heart that puts her trust  
In reeking tube and iron shard,  
All valiant dust that builds on dust,  
And, guarding, calls not Thee to guard;  
For frantic boast and foolish word—  
Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord!  
Humility, not hubris, is the theme of the poem.

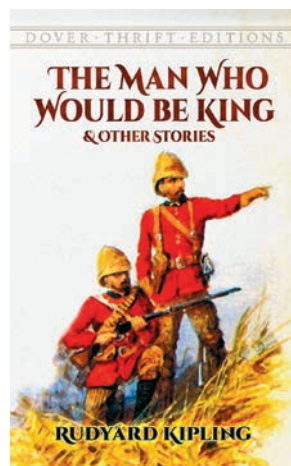
### Let's Look Backward to Move Forward

In Ring Lardner's short story "Zone of Quiet," Miss Lyons, a hospital nurse, blathers on unceasingly to the poor man in her care. At one point, she tells him of a man she's seeing:

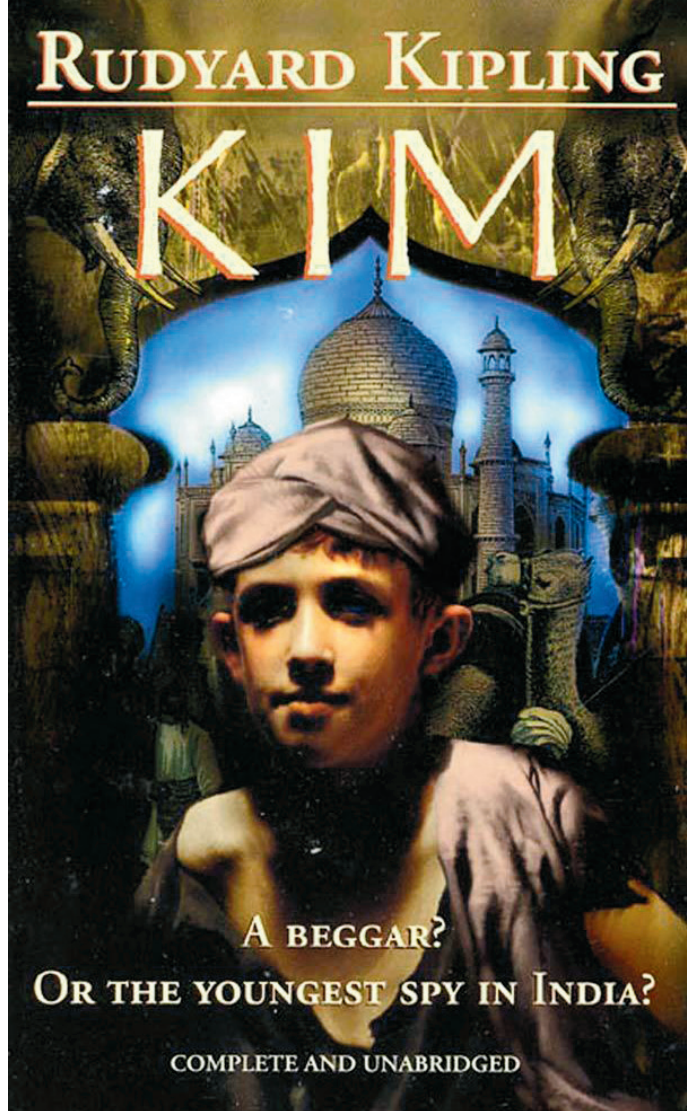
"We were talking about books and reading, and he asked me if I liked poetry—only he called it 'poultry'—and I said I was wild about it and Edgar M. Guest was just about my favorite, and then I asked him if he liked Kipling

"Kim," perhaps Kipling's finest novel, shows that a person's selflessness is of greater value than skin color.

One early victim of cultural execution was Rudyard Kipling.



In "The Man Who Would Be King," Kipling shows the selfishness of would-be imperialists.



and what do you think he said? He said he didn't know; he'd never kiplid."

That last line has stuck with me since my classmates and I read this story in a high school lit class. It was funny then and still brings a smile.

We put ourselves in grave danger when we ignore the wisdom garnered by our ancestors. Maybe it's time we all tried kipling ... or rather, Kipling.

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. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.



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FINE ARTS

# Reflecting on Johannes Vermeer, an Exceptional Dutch Master

The exhibition ‘Johannes Vermeer: On Reflection’ at the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden, Germany

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‘On Reflection’

The exhibition is in nine rooms, Neidhardt said. Each shows the artistic environment that Vermeer was immersed in, and the stylistic development of his paintings, especially those that he created in the same period as “Girl Reading at an Open Window,” the star of the show. In addition, prints, drawings, sculptures, and historic furniture from Vermeer’s lifetime are on display to show the rich influences surrounding the artist.

Neidhardt explained that in the second half of the 17th century, the Dutch Republic (formally the Republic of the United Netherlands) in what’s now the Northern Netherlands was Calvinistic, as opposed to the southern part of the Netherlands, which was Roman Catholic under the reign of the Spanish Habsburg Monarchy.

Vermeer lived in the North, in Delft, where many painters specialized in genre paintings. The painters in the surrounding towns—Leiden, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Dordrecht—also specialized in the same subject matter.

Neidhardt explained that, previously, genre paintings depicted multiple figures. For instance, soldiers in a guard room or companies with five to ten people. “But these very focused scenes of single female figures or a pair: a gentleman and a lady together, ... those very focused scenes with a detailed description of an interior with some still-life [elements] ... and the open window (mostly on the left side), they were very modern in the 1650s, 1660s, and 1670s,” she said.

Vermeer took a lot of ideas from his colleagues, Neidhardt said. For instance, Gerard ter Borch was important to Vermeer, and so was Pieter de Hooch from Delft. Vermeer “took ideas ... but he developed them in the most illusionistic manner. So he was better than all of them. He overtook them in the quality of his painting, and also in the manner he was able to look. When Vermeer looked at the surface of a plate, or a curtain, or the dress of a girl, or her hair, or her face, he saw much more than the others, and he was able to depict it with the help of paint on a flat canvas,” she said.



Vermeer’s Genre Style

“Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window” marks a change in Vermeer’s painting style. He had previously concentrated on creating history paintings, such as the mythological “Diana and Her Nymphs,” which is featured in the exhibition. Also on display is a rare example of

“Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window,” circa 1659, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 32 5/8 inches by 25 3/8 inches.

an early painting style he tried only once: Utrecht Caravaggism, the work of Dutch artists from the city of Utrecht who were influenced by the Italian artist Caravaggio. Neidhardt explained that “The Procuress” was painted under that influence using Caravaggio’s rather raucous, dramatic, and highly realistic scenes.



“A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal,” circa 1670–1672, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 20 1/3 inches by 17 3/4 inches. The National Gallery, London.



“Woman Holding a Balance,” 1662–1665, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 15 5/8 inches by 14 inches. Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



In contrast to Caravaggio, Vermeer’s oeuvre is dominated by a serene artistic sensibility. Many of his paintings feature solitary figures deep in contemplation. “Our painting, ‘Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window,’ is one of the first steps in his new stylistic development,” Neidhardt said. He began painting interior scenes with one or two figures, where the focus is a corner of a room or entirely on the figure itself, like in the “Girl With a Pearl Earring,” she explained.

To highlight Vermeer’s change in style, Neidhardt has carefully selected some key works for the exhibition, which Vermeer painted in the early 1660s. Each painting is stylistically similar to “Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window,” and each one features a woman, alone, and a window on the left side of the painting (although this is out of sight in “Letter Reader in Blue”).

Paintings of a similar style include “Woman with a Pearl Necklace” from State Museums in Berlin; “Woman Holding a Balance” from the National Gallery of Art, Washington; and “Letter Reader in Blue” from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Paintings Within Paintings

Vermeer painted many recurring motifs in his pieces, and contemporaries viewing his paintings would have understood their meaning. In “Girl Reading at an Open Window,” for example, we can see a letter, the girl’s reflection, and a curtain in the right of the painting. These motifs are explored in the exhibition. Many of these pieces include a painting in the background, a device Vermeer used to strengthen the message of the work.

Over 10 years after Vermeer painted his “Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window,” he painted “A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal,” which is now owned by The National Gallery, London. Strikingly, the same Cupid painting appears in the background of both. Ac-

“Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window” before its recent restoration.

Many of these paintings include a painting in the background, a device Vermeer used to strengthen the message of the work.

The exhibition: “Johannes Vermeer: On Reflection,” is at the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden, Germany, until Jan. 2, 2022. To find out more, visit [Gemealdegalerie.SKD.museum](http://Gemealdegalerie.SKD.museum)

According to The National Gallery website, Cupid is in the style of a 1608 book illustration, representing faithful love. In the London painting, there’s no love letter, but an empty chair indicates that the woman at the virginal is waiting to make music with her faithful love.

Neidhardt explained that Vermeer often included empty chairs in his paintings, indicating that the woman was waiting for or welcoming a man.

A different type of picture appears in the background of Vermeer’s painting “Woman Holding a Balance.” Here, faith is the subject. A woman stands at a table near an open window. On the table, there’s an open jewelry box and what appears to be opulent velvet. She’s lost in concentration as she holds a balance in her hand while attempting to steady and maintain the scales, in perfect harmony. “If you look carefully, you’ll see the balance is empty. There’s no gold or powders,” Neidhardt said. She’s balancing the empty scales, perhaps to signify that she’s balancing her life, Neidhardt added.

In the background is a painting of the Last Judgment. Vermeer has cleverly mirrored and reemphasized the concept he was communicating in the foreground, that of balance, perhaps the balance between faith and the temptations of the world.



“Diana and Her Nymphs,” circa 1653–1654, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 38 1/2 inches by 41 1/8 inches. Royal Picture Gallery, Mauritshuis, The Hague.



“The Procuress,” 1656, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 56 1/3 inches by 51 1/8 inches. Old Masters Picture Gallery, Dresden State Art Collections (SKD).



“View of Houses in Delft, Known as ‘The Little Street,’” circa 1658, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 21 3/8 inches by 17 1/3 inches. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



(Left) “The Geographer,” 1669, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 20 7/8 inches by 18 1/3 inches. Städel Museum, Frankfurt.

(Right) “The Girl With the Wine Glass,” circa 1658, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 30 1/2 inches by 26 1/4 inches. Duke Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig.



(Left) “Woman With a Pearl Necklace,” circa 1662–1665, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 22 inches by 18 2/3 inches. Picture Gallery, Prussian Cultural Heritage, State Museums in Berlin.

(Right) “Letter Reader in Blue,” circa 1663, Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 18 1/3 inches by 15 1/3 inches. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



# Arthur Miller’s ‘Tragedy and the Common Man’ Through a Natural Theater Lens

ROBERT COOPERMAN

In February 1949, Arthur Miller’s essay “Tragedy and the Common Man” appeared in The New York Times, a mere two weeks after the premiere of his most acclaimed play, “Death of a Salesman.” Considered by some to be the justification for the “tragedy” of Willie Loman, the piece—which never mentions Loman or the play itself—nevertheless sets the foundation for a new examination of the genre of tragedy. It proposes, as its title indicates, that tragedy can no longer inhabit the realm of the royal, the warrior, or the god. Instead, argues Miller, tragedy is suitable for the common person who shares with the tragic heroes of old an existential striving to find “his rightful place in the world.”

Even after 72 years, “attention must be paid,” to use Miller’s famous line from “Death of a Salesman,” to an American playwright of Miller’s significance. Unfortunately, while his essay retains much of its rhetorical power, its message has been bastardized by our contemporary sensibilities, so much so that the tragedy Miller envisions is neutered to the point of losing its grandeur and permanence. When looked at from a Natural Theater perspective, one can see just how contemporary theater cannot support Miller’s treatment of tragedy (but the Natural Theater can!).

The Natural Theater is a movement that builds on the philosophy of our nation’s founding, in that all people are free to pursue their lives in accordance with the Natural Rights given to them by Nature’s God. Such pursuits inevitably lead to conflict. Translated for the theater, this means that characters of the Natural Theater encounter conflict not because they are victims of an unjust society, but because they have contributed to this conflict through their own actions (defined by reason, as the founders outlined). Ultimately, despite setbacks and suffering, the plays of the Natural Theater remain hopeful, forgiving, and redemptive. Human nature, therefore, becomes both the cause and the resolution of drama.

Miller’s salient point is that within the great masses of humanity, there are “those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them.” Miller offers two possibilities for the source of this degrading “scheme of things”: the psychological and the societal.

Neither possibility in its entirety suits Miller. “If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action is obviously impossible,” he writes. One only need think of Don Quixote fighting windmills or the Emperor Jones seeing specters to see how ludicrous—and unheroic—their actions are.

Similarly Miller says, “If society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character.” Here Miller recognizes the fact that human nature is imperfect. Such recognition is particularly acute in our modern age where the unspoiled heroes of old do not satisfy as much as seriously flawed commoners do.

So, Miller is looking to share the blame for the tragic character’s misfortunes between an inward assessment (psychological) and an outward evaluation (societal). Under normal circumstances, or at least more rational times, this would be a healthy approach. Now, however, our contemporary playwrights tend to create “tragic” characters with no ability to inspect their own complicity in their dire situations. I’ll get back to this later.

**The True Tragic Hero**  
The Natural Theater does not support



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Arthur Miller, considered one of the greatest 20th-century American playwrights.

Natural Theater is a movement that builds on the philosophy of our nation’s founding.

“Tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker’s brightest opinions of the human animal.”

Arthur Miller, playwright

## Tragedy and the Common Man by Arthur Miller

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy—or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instance, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.

More simply, when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well-placed and the exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly. And finally, if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggles that of the individual attempting to gain his “rightful” position in his society.

Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his tragic flaw, a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing—and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are “flawless.” Most of us are in that category. But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action everything we have accepted out of fear or insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us—from this total examination of the “unchangeable” environment—comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy.

More important, from this total questioning of what has previously been unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy.

such a stance and denies the authenticity of characters who blame society for all their ills. Any character who does not examine, first and foremost, his or her own moral character cannot be a tragic character of Natural Theater. Thus, it stands to reason that the foundation of Miller’s argument—the wronged individual taking a stand against some force that attempts to destroy the character’s “sense of personal dignity” and “rightful position in his society”—can be significantly weakened by today’s culture of victimization, neutralizing tragedy regardless of the rank of the sufferer.

Tragic heroes of the past looked inward, found fault in what they saw, and made peace with it in order to set the world right. Hamlet, for example, is all about self-reflection and ultimately acceptance. (“But let it be. Horatio, I am dead.”) Oedipus, after learning of his fate, blinds himself and accepts his exile. Even poor Willie Loman comes to realize that his adultery is every bit a part of his downfall as is the impending menace of new technology and old age. All examined their moral character in much the way our founders expected each of us to pursue a moral life that would, in turn, allow us to govern ourselves.

Indeed, our country was founded on the belief that every human being has natural rights to pursue as the individual wishes, but always with the same goal of living a life of virtue and preserving our institutions for future generations.

### Our Rightful Place

Throughout the essay, Miller reminds us that the tragic character seeks a place or position within the universe, using the adjective “rightful” as a modifier. But what exactly does he mean by “rightful”? Miller suggests it is “the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what or who we are in this world” that constitutes rightfulness (emphasis added). Later he offers that the hero needs to realize himself or herself as “the only fixed star.” Therefore, “rightful” seems to imply some sort of personal sense of self-worth and fulfillment of individual dreams for success and happiness.

On the surface, this concept is in sync with the American experience, with its emphasis on individuals living life in a manner they see fit and without government interference. Once again, however, today’s world takes Miller’s concept of the “only fixed star” and alters it into a selfish trait devoid of any connection to a greater society or a greater significance.

Thus, we have characters adrift in a meaningless, hostile world that has somehow done them wrong. (The lovable tramps of playwright Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot” come to mind.) This leads to countless dramas featuring the common person in decidedly common—but not tragic—circumstances: failing to succeed in relationships, engaging in meaningless sexual encounters, drowning in additions, lamenting their condi-

tion. Today, these characters are elevated to a state of prominence that flies in the face of what Miller had in mind for the tragic hero.

In a comment directly aimed at playwrights, Miller warns that “no tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable.”

Indeed, today’s playwrights do tend to question everything (as they should). But rather than merely question, today’s artists condemn the very immutable institutions that have sustained us for almost 250 years. The playwrights among us who question the everlasting qualities built into our nation’s conception—and seek to depose them—will believe that they are creating tragedy on par with that of the ancient Greeks and Shakespeare. Instead, what they tend to create are depressing, often horrific stories lacking any realistic understanding of the human condition, an understanding our founders mastered. The basic instincts of today’s artists have taken what Miller suggests to the extreme; thus, they cannot create the tragedies he anticipates as the outcome.

Miller also observes that “the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies.” He is right, of course, and American audiences, if they have any inkling of the principles of our founding (a proposition that becomes more and more doubtful given the state of education today), should immediately appreciate why the tragic heroes of yesterday still tug at our hearts even as we try to usurp their power with today’s antiheroic figures (the dissatisfied, the angry, the misfits). Deep down, we know that the ideals of individual responsibility, compassion, self-sacrifice, and humility are the traits we find most satisfying as Americans. These are precisely the traits we find in the tragic figures of antiquity and why yesterday speaks so loudly to us today.

One final point that Miller makes is that tragedy is a positive force whereby the “possibility of victory” exists. “In truth,” Miller argues, “tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker’s brightest opinions of the human animal.”

The Natural Theater wholeheartedly embraces this idea. The sooner playwrights start writing tragedies where the impact of outside forces is balanced with honest introspection, the sooner we will once again have a theater of noble values, connected naturally to the American experience. And it won’t matter if the hero is a commoner or a king.

Robert Cooperman is the founder of Stage Right Theatrics, a theater company dedicated to the preservation of the founders’ vision through the arts. Originally from Queens, N.Y., he now lives in Columbus, Ohio, where he earned his doctorate at The Ohio State University.



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.

### MARK JACKSON

“Dead Poets Society” won the Oscar for Best Screenplay in 1989, beating out Woody Allen’s “Crimes and Misdemeanors,” Nora Ephron’s “When Harry Met Sally,” Spike Lee’s “Do the Right Thing, and Steven Soderbergh’s “Sex, Lies & Videotape.”

Remembering it as very inspiring in 1989, I originally thought this would be a “Popcorn and Inspiration” treatment, but upon rewinding and reviewing, I feel a need to re-rate it. In 2021, I see it as the poster child (or movie poster) for the insidious, creeping way that Hollywood snuck communism, Trojan-horse-wise, into America via the movies.

And what’s scary is that it probably wasn’t intentional on director Peter Weir’s part. The decaying of traditional ethics that lies at the heart of communism’s disintegration of America’s moral foundation had already been revealed to be at an advanced state 20 years before, at Woodstock ‘69. “Dead Poets Society” didn’t have to fly below America’s communism-alert radar, because the radar had long been defunct. The movie was received as right, true, and just so; the gold standard for “teaching our children well,” to swipe a Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young lyric.

**This film shows, in fact, ground zero for when societies begin their decline into decay.**

### First, the Story

John Keating (Robin Williams), the new poetry teacher at the prestigious Welton Academy prep school for boys, doesn’t do boring lectures with pseudoscientific rules that say what poetry is and is not. No sir. He’s more of a charismatic camp counselor, emboldening his students to literally deface their textbooks and rip out the introduction that offers a “scientific” graph by which the merit of a poem can be “tested” and “proven.”

He rants, he raves, he stands on his desk, he calls “gather ‘round ye good lads” huddles, and kneels down in the middle, offering pithy, sotto voce Walt Whitman-sprinkled poetry, nay, life lessons.

The time is 1959. Keating has the class look at the venerable photos of the school’s students from the 1800s, 1910s and ‘20s, noting that they’ve all got that same youthful “carpe diem” gleam in their eyes as the current crop of boys, but those alums are now pushing up daisies. Soon he’s got the previously snickering boys addressing him as “O captain, my captain.” Which is, truth



(Left) Mr. Keating’s class: (L–R) Charlie Dalton (Gale Hansen), Steven Meeks (Allelon Ruggiero), Mr. Keating (Robin Williams), Todd Anderson (Ethan Hawke), Richard Cameron (Dylan Kussman), Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard), Gerard Pitts (James Waterston), and Knox Overstreet (Josh Charles). (Right) (L–R, on desk) Knox Overstreet (Josh Charles), Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard), and Charlie Dalton (Gale Hansen) try getting a new perspective on life, a tactic unorthodox teacher Mr. Keating encourages.

### REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# How an Inspiring Film Contributed to Society’s Downfall

ALL PHOTOS BY TOUCHSTONE PICTURES/WARNER BROS



Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) is celebrated by his students, whom he has inspired to “seize the day,” in “Dead Poets Society.”

(Left) Unfortunately, the film seems to justify the suicide of the teen Neil Perry, played by Robert Sean Leonard. (Middle) Allelon Ruggiero (L) and James Waterston as two science buffs trying out their illegal radio. (Below) Robin Williams plays John Keating, perhaps his finest role, an inspiring teacher of poetry.



### Where’s the Communism?

“Dead Poets Society” would at first appear to be about literature’s potential to be liberating, celebratory, and life-affirming. All these “downtrodden,” “persecuted” (and upper-class) boys appear to be doomed to have the life drained out of them by family patriarchs in cahoots with the academy’s patriarchal instructors. And then here comes Keating, and life is suddenly passionate and promising. That’s good, right?

Yet, the time-bound progression of all things and all processes in the universe follows the law of growth and decay. The moral foundation of early phases of societies supports laws governing the greatest good, for the greatest number.

Such ethical modalities tend to be labeled as conservative today. Then along came Karl Marx, a self-avowed Satanist, who shrieked about oppression and sowed jealousy via the concept of class struggle, and... wait a minute ... I don’t have time for a treatise on communism here in a movie review. Suffice it to say, the main point of “Dead Poets Society” is to incite students to break the traditions, break the laws, and cherish above all else—themselves. Sounds awesome by today’s standards, but this is, in fact, ground zero for when societies begin their decline into decay.

The stabilized, early phases of societies are always about human lives focusing on contributing to the greater good of the tribe. Rebellion against good old church-going tradition starts the slippery slope to our current no-morality, no-truth state of crystal meth, plastic-infested oceans, Jeffrey Epstein, the MS-13 gang, the Sinaloa cartel, child pornography, Americans left behind in Afghanistan, and everything that can be found on a certain American president’s son’s laptop.

Then there’s the example of Neil Perry, the kid who wants to be an actor. His uptight dad says no way; you’re going, by hook or by crook, to be a doctor, and we’re pulling you out of Welton and sending you to military school for lying to me and being in a play. How does the kid deal with this? If you won’t let me be an actor, I’ll shoot myself in the head with your gun, dad. That’s hardly an inspiring message for the PG crowd of kids who were the target audience for this film.

Communism espouses that everyone is equal, which has led to the current misleading mentality of “everyone should get a trophy.” Soviet communists legislated that any old nasty geezer could have sex with any beautiful young girl, for example. In reality, billionaire alphas and NFL quarterbacks get alpha female trophy wives. People are not actually created equal. Life is not fair. Having courage to go after what one wants is good, but in real life, Knox Overstreet does not get that girl.

“Dead Poets Society” didn’t help matters, but the cat had already long been out of the bag. How are we going to put the genie back in the bottle? At the Bergen County Harley-Davidson dealership recently there was a woman named Trish in the parking lot, giving up her Labor Day weekend to take names for a petition to ensure that our freedoms (regarding vaccinations) don’t get eroded more than they already have been. What would we call that? Carpe Diem.



REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

# A Journey of True Love ‘Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion’



“Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion,” 1812, by John Martin. Oil on canvas, 72 1/8 inches by 51 5/8 inches. Saint Louis Art Museum.

ERIC BESS

Irrespective of our backgrounds, so many of us have endured what seemed like insurmountable hardship, and, somehow, we made it through. But what were our hearts like during those hardships? What type of mindset were we strengthening and reinforcing during our turmoil? Did we let faith be our guide and love be our aim, despite our exhaustion? John Martin’s painting “Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion” captures a moment of self-discipline and endurance with the aim of true love.

**‘The Waters of Oblivion’** “The Waters of Oblivion” is one of the tales from the second volume of the book titled “The Tales of the Genii,” a Persian manuscript like the “Arabian Nights.” It was initially thought to be a translated manuscript—the original highly esteemed in ancient Persia—by the ambassador from the British settlements in India, Sir Charles Morell. But all of the above information about the book was actually a farce. Instead, it was created by English author James Ridley under the pseudonym “Sir Charles Morell” and was intended to be a moral satire. “The Waters of Oblivion” has four main characters: Amurath, the sultan; Sadak, a warrior and slave of Amurath; Kalasrade, Sadak’s loving wife; and Doubor, the chief of the eunuchs, who is also Amurath’s servant. At the beginning of the story, Sadak and Kalasrade share a divinely deep love for one another. Their love is pure and without lust. Sadak, however, soon finds his house on fire and his wife kidnapped. He searches for her in vain. Amurath, a jealous and lustful sultan, kidnapped the beautiful Kalasrade to take as his own. When he tries to force himself on the imprisoned Kalasrade, she resists his advances and asserts her love for her husband. Doubor wants to help Kalasrade, but he can’t reveal his intentions lest he lose his life for undermining Amurath. So, Doubor devises a plan for Kalasrade to follow. She is to tell Amurath that she will give herself to him if he first completes the impossible task of obtaining the Waters of Oblivion. Kalasrade follows Doubor’s instructions as a way to counter Amurath’s lust.

Amurath, overcome with excitement, immediately agrees to her request. He summons the assistance of a sage to inform him about the Waters of Oblivion, and the sage tells him that the waters are on an inaccessible island filled with fatal dangers; all who have attempted the quest in the past have perished. Disappointed but crafty, Amurath comes up with a plan of his own. He decides to send Sadak on the impossible journey to obtain the Waters of Oblivion. If Sadak succeeds, Amurath will have the Waters of Oblivion and Kalasrade, and if Sadak fails, Amurath will have gotten rid of Kalasrade’s pesky husband. Amurath convinces Sadak that this is a journey only Sadak can make. However, Sadak discovers the truth: that Amurath is the one who holds his wife captive. While at first resistant, it’s not long before he succumbs to the sultan’s wishes and makes the dangerous journey after learning of Doubor’s plan.

**A Treacherous Journey** The journey is not only a trial of physical and emotional suffering but also a test of Sadak’s faith. He must endure storms at sea, a plague-torn city, fatigue, hunger, and the death of one of his sons before he even makes it to the island where the Waters of Oblivion are.

Finally arriving at the island, Sadak and his other son seem stranded and are unsure of where to go. There are jagged rocks and crashing waves everywhere they turn, and despite their efforts to shield themselves, they are battered by the elements.

At the point of starvation, Sadak’s son decides to jump into a whirlwind of water to see if it leads to the Waters of Oblivion. Sadak, worried when his son doesn’t return, follows him.

In the whirlwind, Sadak is first tempted by a mirage of pleasures, but his faith makes the mirage evaporate. He then can see the summit of the mountain and begins his ascent. He climbs all the way to the top of the treacherous terrain. There, he is greeted by a woman who presents him with the Waters of Oblivion and tempts him to drink.

Sadak tells the woman that the water is not for him but for his sultan. The woman again tries to convince him to drink so that all of his worries will disappear, and he will finally have peace. Sadak, however, refuses and essentially suggests that, above all else, he needs only his faith. The woman then congratulates him on passing the tests and gives him the Waters of Oblivion, and Sadak magically reappears before Amurath.

When Amurath demands and drinks the Waters of Oblivion so that he can finally fulfill his lust for Kalasrade, he can feel it taking his life away. He dies right then and there, and Sadak and Kalasrade are reunited. Later, their son will reunite with them as well.

To me, Sadak represents faith and

Clearly the hero is exhausted as he mounts a ledge, yet enduring faith propels him.



Sadak reaches his goal by way of faith.

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virtue. He is virtuous in so far as he dares to endure the arduous journey and can maintain righteous faith throughout. Kalasrade represents pure love and resistance to lust, which Amurath represents. Thus, a fundamental interpretation of the story suggests that virtue and pure love are united only upon resisting lust: Lust is ruinous to pure love.

**The Discipline Required to Reach an Impossible Elevation** John Martin, however, in his painting “Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion,” focuses on a specific moment in the story. Martin depicts Sadak, after so much suffering and hardship, taking all of his remaining energy to pull himself up ever higher to the summit where the Waters of Oblivion are located. Sadak is at the bottom center of the composition. He has just pulled himself up onto a ledge, and his body language tells us that he is exhausted. Jagged terrain and falling waters obscure his path. Lightning even appears to strike at certain points in the composition.

Light shines from the top left corner of the composition and contrasts with the darkness at the bottom of the painting. The upper illumination suggests the end of Sadak’s journey. Despite his exhaustion, he will still achieve his goal. But what is Sadak’s goal? On the surface, he seeks the Waters of Oblivion, but why does he want it? Is it not for the sake of his wife, Kalasrade, who represents pure love and the resistance to temptation?

And how does Sadak reach his goal of pure love and resistance to temptation? He reaches it by way of faith.

In the story, the enduring faith and love embodied by Sadak and Kalasrade are contrasted with the impatient lust of the sultan. Amurath does not pursue the Waters of Oblivion out of love, but believing that it erases one’s memories, he wishes to obtain it so that Kalasrade will forget her love for Sadak and love him instead. He is unwilling to take the journey of suffering himself, and instead compels Sadak to take it. Amurath’s lust ultimately leads to his death. True love, however, is righteous. Though its journey may be fraught with difficulties, it forges an indestructible bond not only with another human being, but also in righteousness itself. Thus, Martin’s painting is not just a mere illustration of Sadak climbing a mountain, but it is a representation of how faith and love allow us to endure the impossibilities of our journey.

*The traditional arts often contain spiritual representations and symbols the meanings of which can be lost to our modern minds. In our series “Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart,” we interpret visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We do not assume to provide absolute answers to questions generations have wrestled with, but hope that our questions will inspire a reflective journey toward our becoming more authentic, compassionate, and courageous human beings.*

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

FILM

## ‘Teenage Rebel’: How Divorce Hurts Children

TIFFANY BRANNAN

Sometimes the publicity for a film is hard to understand. Rather than promoting a film’s actual attributes, many ad campaigns sell themes that aren’t even in the movies. “Teenage Rebel” is an example of such misleading advertising, starting with its title. “Teenage Rebel” evokes images of reckless youth racing around on motorcycles—James Dean style. That’s far from the theme of this 1956 film. Instead, the film tells the story of a troubled 15-year-old girl whose character and life are almost ruined by her parents’ divorce. Although the action centers on the daughter’s visit to California, the real star is Ginger Rogers, who plays her mother, Nancy Fallon. We see this story through her eyes as she struggles to regain her daughter’s love and respect. A better title comes from the play that the movie is based on: “A Roomful of Roses” by Edith Sommer, which debuted in October 1955. Twentieth Century Fox bought the film rights to the play months before it opened, intending it as a project for Ginger Rogers. Betty Lou Keim, who plays the daughter, Dottie McGowan in the film, created the role on Broadway (where she is named Bridget) with Patricia Neal as her mother. Although the title was changed for the film version, it is quoted in a line when Nancy and her maid, Willamay (Louise Beavers), are preparing the guestroom for Dottie’s arrival.

**A Family Story** Nancy Fallon is thrilled when her 15-year-old daughter from her first marriage comes to visit her for the first time since her divorce. The mother has been happily married to Jay Fallon (Michael Rennie) for eight years, and they have a 7-year-old son, Larry (Rusty Swope), together. Nancy hasn’t seen Dottie since she left her father for Jay. Her ex-husband, Eric McGowan (John Stephenson), has purposely kept Dottie out of the country so that she couldn’t visit her mother, despite the divorce settlement allowing for a three-week visit each year. Nancy is dismayed when she realizes that the sweet 7-year-old she remembers has grown into a bitter, stuck-up young woman who insists on being called Dorothy. Nancy is convinced that her daughter will grow to love her in time, although she realizes that her ex-husband has poisoned her mind against her. Little does Dorothy know that her father finally sent her to visit her mother because he is remarrying and knows Dottie dislikes his fiancée (Irene Hervey). Jay supports Nancy in her efforts to win over Dottie, so he enlists the aid of the youngsters next door. Bribed by spending money and a new part for his car, Dick Hewitt (Warren Berlinger) and his sister, Jane (Diane Jergens), agree to befriend Dorothy. This proves a lot more difficult than anticipated, but Dick is persistent. Gradually, he breaks down her unfriendly façade, and she starts falling for him.

**Divorce, a Costly Mistake** “Teenage Rebel” shows the terrible consequences of divorce. It’s sad that two people are unable to make their marriage work, but what is even more tragic is the suffering that their children feel. For more than half of her life, Dottie hasn’t had a real family or home. Eric fought strenuously to obtain custody of her during the divorce, but not due to love. He merely wanted to hurt his ex-wife by keeping them apart. Eric is obviously a very selfish and bitter man, but he wasn’t the only one to blame for the divorce. Although he and Nancy didn’t get along well when married, Nancy fell in love with Jay Fallon, while still married to Eric, and so she left her husband. Nancy hoped that she and Jay could raise her daughter together, but she ended up losing custody of Dottie in the divorce. Eric was very angry and hurt when Nancy left him, and those feelings led to his selfish behavior toward Dorothy. The difference between the divorced couple is that Nancy acknowledges her mistake and cares about what happens to Dottie, while Eric does not. Since Nancy deserted her daughter years ago, Dottie thinks that her mother doesn’t love her. Nancy tries to explain that she never imagined that leaving her husband would result in her losing custody of Dottie. Although she now has a new husband and a son, she has thought about Dottie every day since they parted.

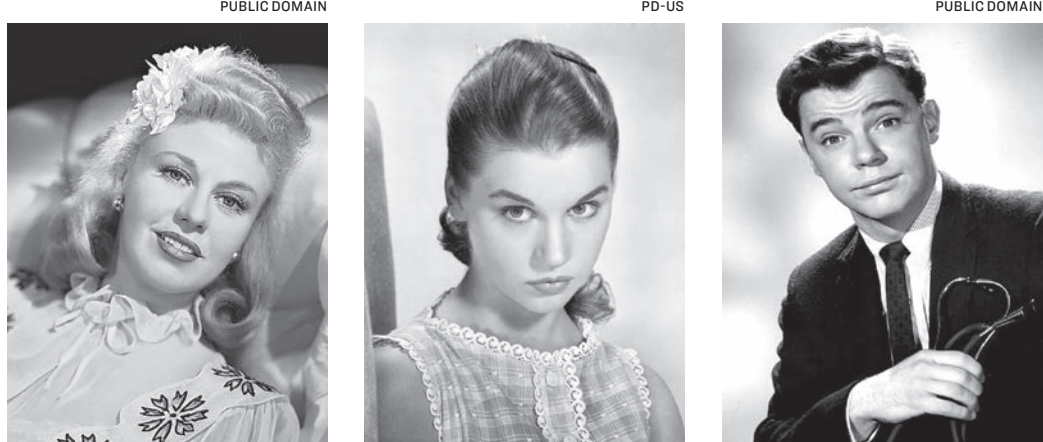
Nancy is extremely anxious to befriend Dottie, but she also wants to mother her. When Dottie speaks disrespectfully to her mother, Nancy firmly forbids her to speak to her that way again, no matter how much she hates her. Rather than spoiling her, Nancy tries to give her daughter discipline and guidance as well as love and kindness. Eventually, Dottie begins to respond to her mother’s love, feeling close enough to confide in her about her feelings for Dick and her other girlish concerns. She eventually realizes that her mother loves her and wants to help her, if she’ll only give her a chance. The film contrasts children who come from a broken home and those raised in a traditional family. While Dottie has had a very unstable upbringing, Jane and Dick come from a happy home. We never see Mr. Hewitt, since he is a Navy man who is currently at sea. However, Jane is obviously very close to her father, since she says that she couldn’t possibly choose between her parents. While Dottie has a chip on her shoulder toward everyone, Jane and Dick enjoy the normal pleasures of youth with their friends while acting respectful and polite toward adults. Through the efforts of her family and her new friends, Dottie learns that she doesn’t have to have a bitter, miserable life because of her parents’ mistakes.



Nancy Fallon (Ginger Rogers, R) tries to win back the love of her troubled 15-year-old, Dottie McGowan (Betty Lou Keim), in “Teenage Rebel.”

**Love and Forgiveness at Summer’s End** This film is appropriate for the end of summer, which is marked by Labor Day. Few classic movies contain scenes set on Labor Day. In fact, this is the only movie I know that does. Dick is very excited about the Labor Day celebration in the community of Palo Alto, California, which includes a drag race and a country club dance. For weeks in advance, he works on modifying his car, spending all his spare time trying to get more speed out

of the jalopy. The Labor Day festivities are the focal point of the film’s action, since it’s then that Dottie really warms up to Dick and begins lowering her barriers toward everyone who tries to be kind to her. Although her blossoming romance with Dick softens her heart toward everyone, her transformation isn’t complete until she truly opens her heart to her mother’s love. The issues in “Teenage Rebel” are just as relevant today as they were in 1956.



The real star of the film is Ginger Rogers, here in 1943.

Actress Betty Lou Keim played the daughter, named Bridget McGowan in the stage play (1955), and Dottie in the film (1956).

Warren Berlinger plays Dottie’s love interest, Dick Hewitt. Berlinger is pictured here in an episode of the early 1960s television program “The Joey Bishop Show.” NBC Television.

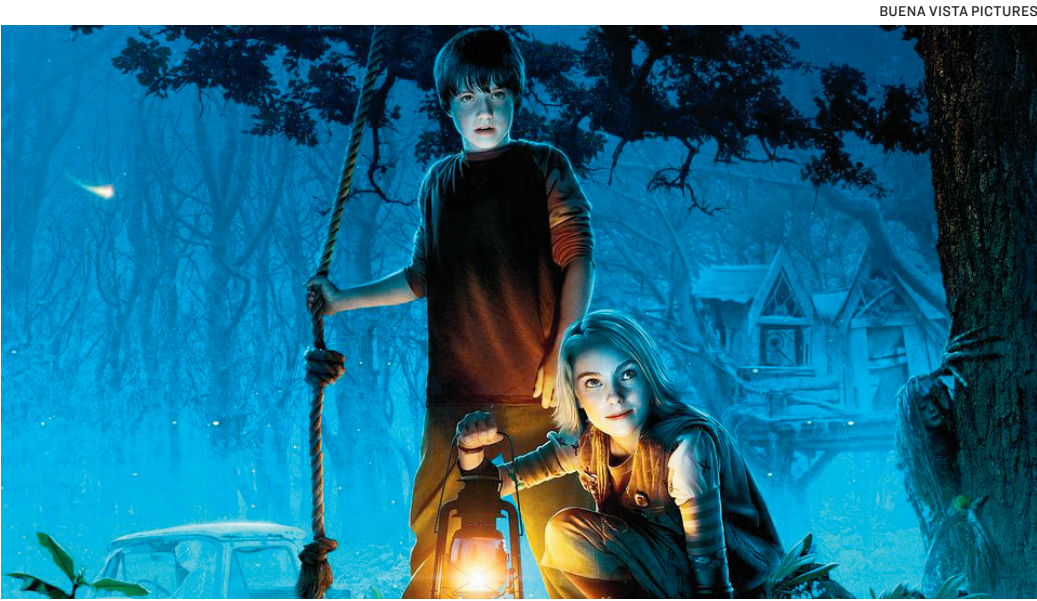
The film contrasts children who come from a broken home and those raised in a traditional family.

Unfortunately, the traditional values that were common in the 1950s have become ever rarer since. Divorce and remarriage were still taboo in this era, as Jane refers to Nancy’s past as “scarlet.” However, whether common or rare, divorce is just as devastating to the children in 2021 as it was in 1956. This movie shows that children don’t have to let their parents’ mistakes ruin their lives. Dottie chooses to forgive her mother and accept her love, so hopefully she won’t make the same mistakes herself.

*Tiffany Brannan is a 20-year-old opera singer, Hollywood history/vintage beauty copywriter, film reviewer, fashion historian, travel writer, 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.*



Artwork for “Bridge to Terabithia,” starring Josh Hutcherson and AnnaSophia Robb.



POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# A Brilliant Coming of Age Fantasy

MICHAEL CLARK

Based on the immensely popular fact-based novel by Katherine Paterson, “Bridge to Terabithia” is a textbook example of how great a Hollywood movie can be when it treats child characters as complex individuals and not stock caricatures. This movie should not be confused with another sub-par effort sporting the same title that debuted on PBS in 1985. Harder to make than it might appear, the majority of what is passed off these days as family fare is moronic and insidious slop that insults the intelligence of both children and their parents. For every gem (“My Dog Skip,” “Gifted,” “Babe,” “Finding Neverland”) Hollywood studios produce, they make three films that are complete wastes of time (“Daddy Day Camp,” “How to Eat Fried Worms,” “The Cat in the Hat,” the Tim Allen “Santa Claus” trilogy).

**Devoid of Electronics and Trendy Fashion**  
Paterson’s Newbery Medal-winning book has remained popular since its first publication in 1977, and even though the movie was updated to the then present-day 2000s,

the filmmakers took a considerable chance by not including any electronic devices or adorning children in oversized urban-based garb. Some attributed this to the quaint Mid-western setting, while others accused the filmmakers of not living in the real world. Either way, it was refreshing to see children acting normally and not portrayed as slaves to modern technology or fleeting fashion. This isn’t to say that the movie lacks dramatic tension or isn’t well-grounded in reality. As children, behaving “normally” means there will be plenty of peer pressure, a playground bully or two to contend with, and the awkward emotions that come with the acknowledgment of the newfound attraction to the opposite sex. The two leads—AnnaSophia Robb as Leslie and Josh Hutcherson as Jesse—are about as unaffected as one could expect to see in a mainstream movie. Jesse is the only boy in a working-class family of six and he basically keeps to himself. When not at school or doing chores, he works on his drawings and paintings and tries to remain the fastest runner in his class. He loses that title when new arrival Leslie whips him in a foot race. The single child of two writers, Leslie takes

**Both children are far more imaginative than any of their peers.**

**‘Bridge to Terabithia’**  
**Director**  
Gabor Csupo  
**Starring**  
AnnaSophia Robb, Josh Hutcherson, Zooey Deschanel, Robert Patrick, Bailee Madison, Kate Butler  
**Running Time**  
1 hour, 36 minutes  
**MPAA Rating**  
PG  
**Release Date**  
Feb. 16, 2007

★★★★★

*Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has written for over 30 local and national film industry media outlets and is ranked in the top 10 of the Atlanta media marketplace. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a regular contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles.*

after her parents, and after a confrontational start, she gets Jesse to lower his guard and lighten up. In no time at all, the pair become inseparable and spend all of their free time constructing a fort in the nearby woods. Both far more imaginative than any of their peers, Leslie and Jesse build their own private world with fantastical, interactive creatures. It is during the scenes in the woods that the Hungarian-born, multiple Emmy-winning animator-turned-director Gabor Csupo (“Rugrats,” “Duckman,” “The Simpsons”) takes the film into distinct fantasy territory with inanimate objects being brought to life and not always in a pleasant or carefree manner. Some of these apparitions are truly foreboding, and Csupo deserves immense credit for not sugarcoating or softening the imagery.

**From the Producers of ‘The Chronicles of Narnia’ Trilogy**  
The filmmakers remain faithful to Paterson’s text for the duration, which is good for storytelling purposes but may also disturb some younger, easily rattled children and perhaps some adults. Without going into detail, an event transpires toward the end of the second act that will shock some and surely sadden most viewers. It’s an event that occurs in real life and not one you’d normally find in this kind of film—another facet that makes the picture as a whole all the more relatable. Parents are strongly urged to offer counsel and guidance to their children immediately after (and maybe even before) viewing the film. At the time of its 2007 release, “Bridge to Terabithia” was the 12th feature produced by Walden Media, which was co-founded by Tufts University roommates Micheal Flaherty and Cary Granat. For its first decade (2000–2010), Walden’s output comprised mostly children’s book adaptations and family-friendly documentaries. Some of the recommended titles include “Holes,” “Charlotte’s Web,” “Because of Winn-Dixie,” “The Chronicles of Narnia” trilogy, and “The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep.” Csupo, his technical crew, the screenwriters, and Walden didn’t reinvent the family movie wheel with “Bridge to Terabithia,” but they did create an enchanting, suspenseful, masterful work that digs far deeper than most films of this genre before or since. It took chances where none were needed, and all of those gambles paid off in spades. Watching it will make you a better human being.

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