

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

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▲ A detail from “A Landscape With Horseman, Herders, and Cattle,” 1655, by Aelbert Cuyp. Oil on canvas. National Gallery, London.

BOOK REVIEW

Homesteaders, a Rancher, and a Rider From Nowhere

‘Shane’ reveals how hard work and strong families built America

By Jeff Minick

Though I consider Larry McMurtry’s “Lonesome Dove” and Charles Portis’s “True Grit” to be 20th-century classics, I’ve read few other Westerns. Louis L’Amour is a prince of this genre, yet of his many novels, including the Sackett series which an acquaintance highly recommends, I’ve read only “Last of the Breed,” a story set mostly

in Russia during the Cold War, and his “Education of a Wandering Man,” an autobiography, largely focused on literature, which I taught in several high school English classes.

It was disinterest rather than snobbery that steered me away from Westerns. Films about the Old West, new and old, have appealed to me since I was a kid, and I’ve ridden across the prairie with the likes of John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Gary Cooper, and Jimmy Stewart with

vicarious pleasure and excitement. Western novels, however, never grabbed my attention. Too bad for me.

Somewhere online this past month, a writer called my attention to Jack Schaefer’s novel “Shane.” The writer related his remarks about the book with commentary on today’s American culture, and blended the two so well that I set off for the library, where I lucked out by finding both a critical edition of “Shane”

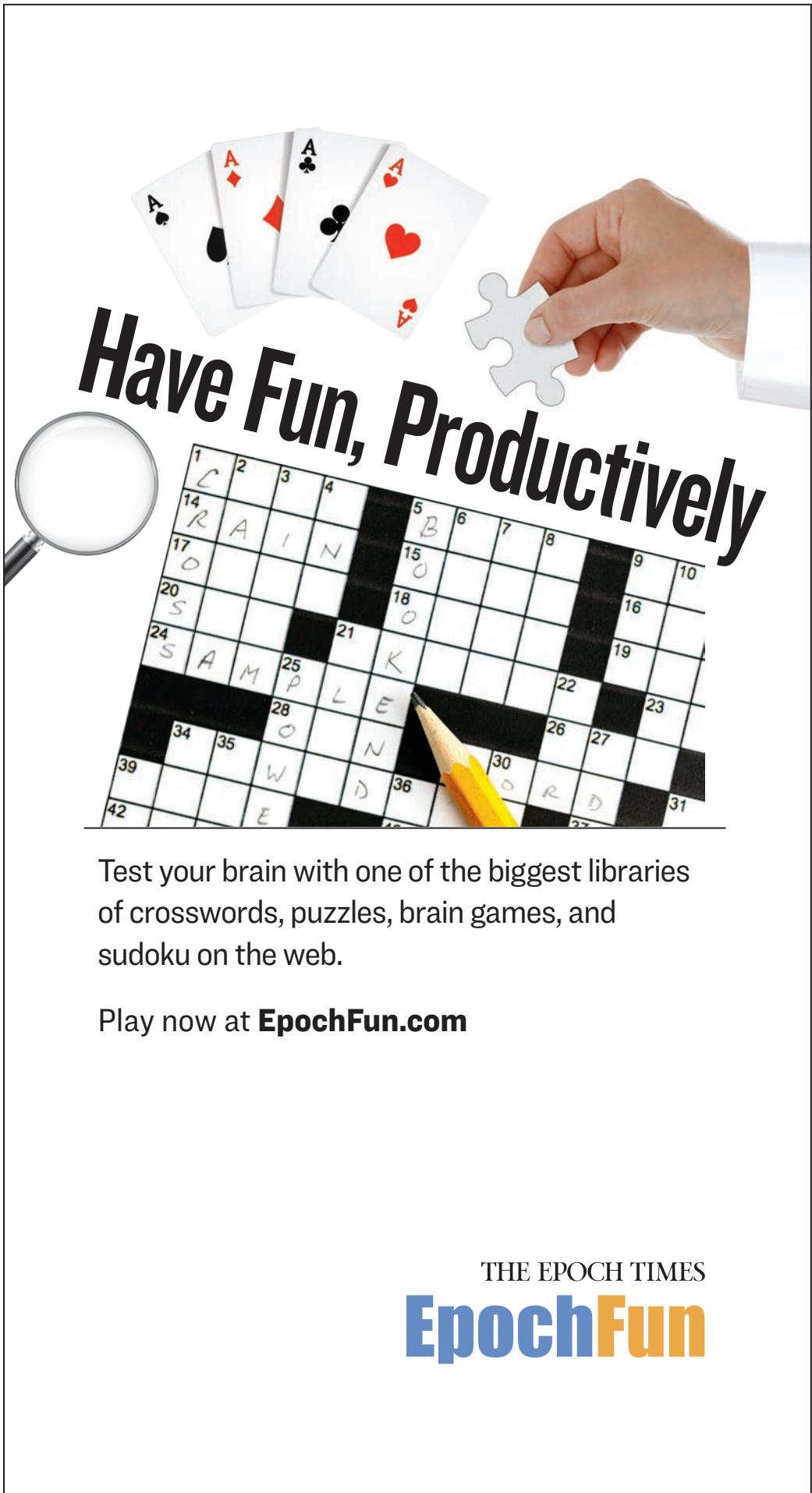
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▲ A happy childhood inspired Robert Schumann to write “Kinderszenen.” “The Old Stagecoach,” 1871, by Eastman Johnson, recalls the joys of childhood.

MUSIC

Remembering One’s Childhood Through Music

Short piano pieces give us Schumann’s childhood

By Ariane Triebswetter

For many of us, childhood represents a simpler time filled with dreams and hope. Over the last centuries, many artists tried to recapture this state of mind, but no one managed to capture it better than Romantic composer Robert Schumann in his “Kinderszenen” (“Scenes From Childhood”), a collection of 13 short piano pieces evoking childhood.

For Schumann, childhood was one of the happiest times of his life and a source of lifelong inspiration. The Romantic composer loved children and their worldview, and in 1833, he wrote that “in every child is found a wondrous depth.”

In 1838, Robert Schumann composed “Kinderszenen” Op. 15, 13 individual piano pieces with poetic titles evoking childhood. Originally, Schumann composed 30 pieces but selected only 13. He published the others in his cycles “Bunte Blätter” (“Colorful Leaves”) Op. 99, and “Albumblätter” (“Album Leaves”) Op. 124.

“Kinderszenen” features short pieces (often less than a page) with easily memorized melodies. The titles take us to the world of children: “Of Foreign Lands and People,” “A Strange Story,” “Catch-As-Catch-Can,” “Pleading Child,” “Happy Enough,” “An Important Event,” “Dreaming,” “By the Fireside,” “Knight of the Hobbyhorse,” “Almost Too Serious,” “Frightening,” “Child Falling Asleep,” and “The Poet Speaks.”

However, despite these childlike titles, they are not compositions intended for children. While the vocabulary may look simple, what is conveyed is not. Schumann’s compositions evoke the distant land of childhood from an adult perspective, that which can only be transmitted by a great interpreter.

Emotional Maturity Required
While the pieces in “Kinderszenen” are not technically demanding, they require a great deal of sensitivity and emotional maturity to transmit what can’t be said in words and evoke the emotional world of childhood.

The best known of the 13 pieces is No. 7, “Dreaming.” Not only is the piece incredibly beautiful and moving, but it also demonstrates an adult sensibility and impending sense of nostalgia. While children can learn to play it, they cannot yet understand the dreamlike quality of the work, whereas a more experienced pianist can use musicality to convey this. Oftentimes, this comes in the form of a rubato, a slight speeding up or slowing down of the tempo. As there is some uncertainty about the musical tempo of some of the pieces of “Kinderszenen” since the original manuscript didn’t survive, the interpreter has some liberty.

Another instance of the intrusion of adult sensibility is the final piece, “The Poet Speaks,” where there is a remarkable shift in tone, leaning toward nostalgia. The voice of the poet concludes the cycle instead of the composer, which is surprising. This opens a whole new dimension, where music and language become one. This also marks a shift in Romantic music, whereby the music works as an expression of the self and exists just for art’s sake rather than just a result of music patronage.

Popular Work

Schumann conceived this well-balanced work as a whole. Although most pianists tend to play some of the individual pieces rather than the whole cycle, every piece is intrinsically linked to one another. The main motif unifies the cycle and can be found throughout the individual pieces. This theme first occurs in the opening piece, “Of Foreign Lands and People,” and serves as the key to the work.

Each pianist has his interpretation of “Kinderszenen.” While the titles of the pieces might serve as an indication for the interpreter, it is up to the interpreter to communicate the music to the audience and try to convey the world that Schumann envisioned, while maintaining the soul and essence of a child.

Many of the most important pianists of the 20th and 21st centuries interpreted and recorded this cycle, and each of these recordings is unique and shows how the same pieces can take on different meanings for individuals. Some of the most famous interpretations include Vladimir Horowitz (1950, 1962), Martha Argerich (1984), Ivan Moravec (1987), and Alfred Brendel (1992).

A Gift for Clara
As with many of his works from that



▲ Robert and Clara Schumann, 1847, by Eduard Kaiser.



▲ Childhood carries different meanings for a child and an adult. “Merry-makers,” 1870, by Carolus-Duran. Detroit Institute of Arts.

time, Schumann wrote this collection for his wife, composer and pianist Clara Schumann. “Kinderszenen” was a gift for her two years before their marriage. When he sent her the pieces, he told her that they were “a musical response to what you once wrote me, that I sometimes seemed to you like a child.”

“Kinderszenen” was a symbol of Robert’s love for Clara, and the composer described the piano cycle as “light and gentle and happy like our future.” He asked his future wife to forget she was a virtuoso and to simply enjoy the pieces for what they were. Both Robert and Clara loved

this composition, and in a letter from 1838, Clara wrote that the pieces belonged to only both of them, that they were always on her mind, and that they were “so simple, warm, so quite like you.”

Robert and Clara were not the only ones to be delighted with these pieces. Composer Franz Liszt, a friend of Schumann, also loved the cycle and often played it to his daughter Blandine. Other prominent Romantic musicians admired this set of works, which symbolized a more experimental and complex phase of Schumann’s

compositions. However, its unconventional structure and overt emotionalism baffled audiences for a few years before it became an audience favorite and a staple of the Romantic repertoire for what it evokes.

Schumann composed many works for his children later in his career, notably his “Album for the Young” Op. 68, “Ball Scenes” Op. 109, and “Three Piano Sonatas for the Young” Op. 118. To this day, these are among the most poetic and imaginative piano works dedicated to children. But

among these compositions, “Kinderszenen” holds a special place. Childhood was a predominant theme in the Romantic era. It embodied a return to one’s roots and a world filled with imagination, a perfect subject for Romantic artists who wanted to capture everything poetic and fleeting, and Romantic composers were especially interested in this theme. Perhaps Robert Schumann managed to capture it best.

Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.

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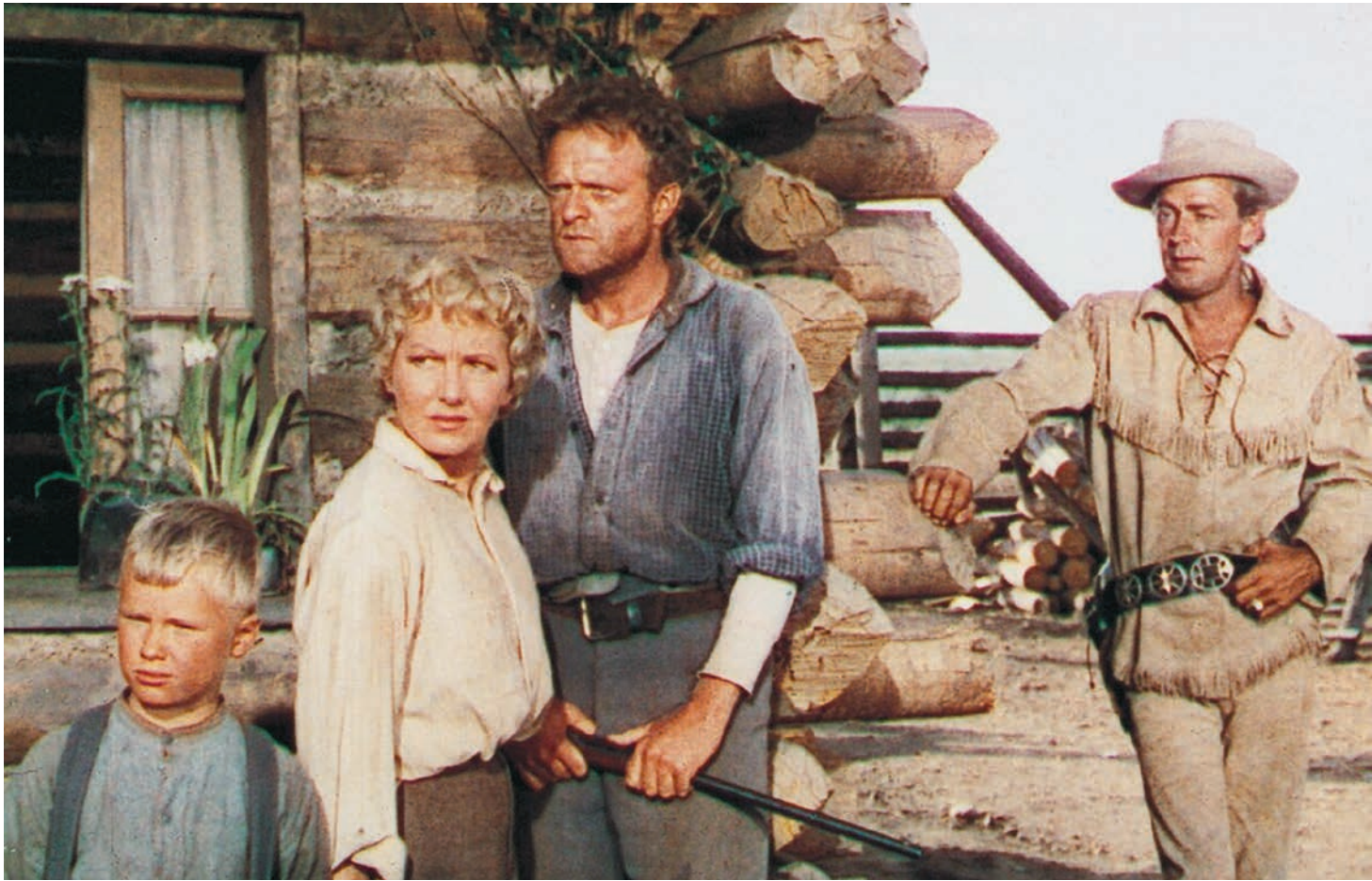
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▲ A still shot from the 1953 film “Shane” starring (L-R) Brandon DeWilde, Jean Arthur, Van Heflin, and Alan Ladd.

BOOK REVIEW

Homesteaders, a Rancher, and a Rider From Nowhere

Continued from Page 1

and the 1953 film based on Schaefer's story. After reading the book, I realized I've missed out on some great literature.

A Familiar Tale

On its surface, “Shane” is a story with few surprises for anyone familiar with films and books about the American West. A stranger rides onto a homesteader's property and asks for a drink of water for himself and his horse. The farmer, Joe Starrett, obliges and introduces his 13-year-old son Bob (the novel's boy-grown-to-man narrator) and his wife Marian to the rider, who goes only by the name of Shane.

Though Shane is traveling to a destination known only to him, he decides to accept Joe's invitation to stay and work for a while. He keeps his past hidden behind a polite façade, so much so that even on his first night with the Starretts, Marian comments to her husband that Shane is “mysterious” and “dangerous.” Joe's reply reveals his keen eye for judging character and a bit of Shane's personality.

“‘He's dangerous all right.’ Father said in a musing way. Then he chuckled. ‘But not to us, my dear.’ And then he said what seemed to me a curious thing. ‘In fact, I don't think you ever had a safer man in your house.’”

That assessment proves accurate and vital to the story. By means of threats and intimidation, a rancher, Fletcher, is determined to run off Joe and the other homesteaders who have lawfully laid claims to their land. Fletcher wants the land so as to have more room for grazing his expanding herd of cattle.

Subtle conflicts and themes explain why ‘Shane’ is regarded as a classic.

Fletcher's words soon escalate into violence, and after several confrontations, it is Shane who finishes this frontier war by killing Fletcher and his hired gun while revealing himself as the gunfighter he once was. The wounded Shane rides away, and the Starrett family and others are finally free to work their land and build a new territory.

The novel ends with Bob's words: “He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done road back whence he had come and he was Shane.”

Beneath the Surface

This simple plot contains subtle conflicts and themes that explain why “Shane” is regarded as a classic of Western literature.

Readers may be surprised, for instance, to find that Schaefer devotes an entire chapter, almost 20 pages, to the removal of a stump, “the one bad spot on our place.” Joe has hacked away with his ax at this stump off and on, but there it sits. Now Shane begins chopping at it, feeling that he owes Joe a debt not just for his food and a place to sleep, but because Joe defended him against the insults of a traveling salesman. Soon, both men are swinging their axes against the root of the stump, working away hour after hour until finally they conquer the “old monster.”

This scene reveals the labor that it took to break this land to a horse and plough, the bonding of Shane with the Starretts, and the attraction of Marian to Shane.

This attraction, which is mutual, runs throughout the novel and is so subtle that a careless reader might miss it altogether. It is never spoken in so many words until the final pages. And though Marian, Shane, and even Joe are aware of these flickering flames between the homesteader's wife and the lone drifter, both Marian and Shane realize, again, without words, that it could never work between them. Marian loves Joe and her son and the idea of a family, and Shane is an outsider, a man who envies what she has but knows that a wife and a family can never be his. When at last he straps on his pistol and heads for town



PUBLIC DOMAN

It took great effort to tame the land. “Early Settlers,” 1861, by Albert Bierstadt.

to settle the affair with Fletcher, he does so for the family, not just for Marian, and tells her so.

Much more obvious is Bob's hero worship of Shane, evident almost from the moment they meet. The boy loves and admires his father but wants to become like Shane, an idolatry that the man of mystery constantly deflects. Even at the end of the novel, when Shane is set to ride away, he tells Bob: “It's up to you now. Go home to your mother and father. Grow strong and straight and take care of them. Both of them.”

Lessons for Today

“Shane” was originally published in Argosy magazine in 1946 in a three-part serial. Originally titled “Rider From Nowhere,” it's set in 1889 Wyoming, which means that Jack Schaefer was closer to the time of which he wrote than the publication of the book is to us today. In the meantime, we've become an international power, put men on the moon, undergone enormous cultural changes, and invented digital machines and phones that have utterly changed our world. To some people these days, the Old West likely

seems as distant as ancient Greece.

Which may be one of the best reasons of all to read this book.

“Shane” reminds us of the enormous cost in blood, toil, and tears it took to turn a wilderness into farms and towns. “Root, hog, or die,” was a slogan some early settlers lived by, meaning either you worked or you withered away. Joe, Marian, and Bob Starrett, and the rest of the homesteaders labor from dawn to dusk to turn fallow land into fields, to carve out homes and barns, and to attend to all the little details that come with living this harsh life. There's no government to offer assistance, no safety net if things go south. Instead, they depend on their neighbors when they need a helping hand.

Schaefer also reminds us that the family is the building block of civilization. Shane instinctively understands this idea. Before setting out to settle the community's score with Fletcher, he knocks Joe Starrett unconscious to keep him out of the fight and so save his life. In an earlier incident, he distracts Fletcher's gunman to prevent him from possibly shooting Joe. Though he is endeavoring to put aside the violence of his past,

Shane recognizes that the time to stand up and resist evil is at hand, and straps on his firearm.

Noticeably absent from these pages are any of the political and cultural issues that make headlines today. Joe Starrett is a strong man, a good husband and father, and Marian is his equal in making decisions and plans for the future. Each has traditional roles in regard to work, but there's no hint here of feminist ideology or male patriarchy. Apparently, in 1889 and in 1946, these issues didn't exist.

Finally, we live in an age of bullying, ranging from threats and insults on social media to the mandates and demands of local, state, and federal governments. “Shane” reminds us that if we fold our cards and give way to thugs and tyrants, we lose. Strong-armed by Fletcher and his men, the homesteaders nearly abandon their hardscrabble farms. Only when Shane stands up to the intimidators and accepts the personal cost of that resistance are they free to live their lives.

If you're looking to pay a visit to the Old West, and for a story that's as appropriate for teens as it is for adults, you don't want to miss “Shane.”

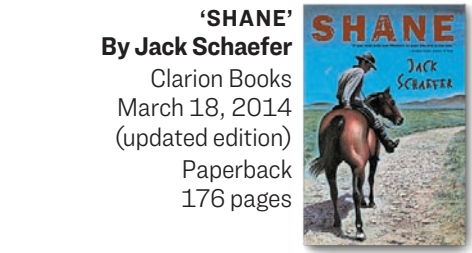


PUBLIC DOMAN

▲ Drifters sometimes helped settlers as hired hands. “The Fall of the Cowboy,” 1895, Frederic Remington. Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

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 nonfiction, “Learning As I Go” and “Movies Make The Man.” Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.



PUBLIC DOMAN

▲ God can work wonders for good people. “Abraham and the Three Angels,” circa 1896–1902, by James Jacques Joseph Tissot. Gouache on board-mounted paper; 7 3/4 inches by 11 5/16 inches. The Jewish Museum. New York.

SACRED ART

By Yvonne Marcotte

A Visit From Celestial Strangers

Artist James Jacques Joseph Tissot's ‘Abraham and the Three Angels’

Abraham left the land of his father to settle in Canaan. His prosperity and influence had grown. His tent set up near Shechem bore the trappings of Bedouin wealth: rugs and carpets of the most beautiful design and craftsmanship.

Despite his wealth, Abraham's tent did not peel with a child's laughter, as he and his wife, Sarah, had passed childbearing age and had no children. However, on this day, he was about to receive a visit from three strangers who would change his life in this regard.

This painting by James Jacques Joseph Tissot depicts a visit from strangers that begets a miracle: “Abraham and the Three Angels.”

While in his tent, Abraham looked up and saw three men appear out of nowhere and approach. Wearing the light fabric of desert dwellers, the men

walked toward him. Abraham threw himself to the floor, head bowed, hands up in adoration.

They were more than strangers just passing by. Because of his great faith, Abraham believed that two were angels, and the stranger, whom he called “My Lord,” was a manifestation of God himself.

Abraham brought water for the three strangers to wash their dusty feet, and invited them to rest under the oak tree nearby. He then asked Sarah to prepare food for his guests.

Tissot's composition, a gouache (opaque watercolor) on paper, frames the three strangers within the tent's opening. All lines of the painting point to the three figures, from the patterned rugs to the sloped opening of the tent. The angled figure of the prone Abraham is balanced by the two struts that hold open the tent's flap. Three tent poles mirror the staffs of the three figures

All lines of the painting point to the three figures.

outside. Tissot brought patterns to the painting with the patriarch's striped outer garment and the rich coverings on the tent's floor, sides, and ceiling.

Despite the richness of the tent's interior, the focus is on the simply garbed men outside. They are dressed in shades of white, walk within a bubble of sunlight, and approach from the fabled Oak of Mamre in the background. They do not appear worn or haggard, but fresh as if they had just come from a cool oasis.

The stranger that Abraham addressed as “My Lord” told Abraham that Sarah would have a child within the year. How could it be? Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. Yet Abraham believed that this would be so.

We know from the characters in Milton's “Paradise Lost” that angels bring messages from God. Sometimes God even comes with them, as it might have been in this visit to Abraham's tent.

Tissot's Turn to Religious Paintings

As a successful French artist working in Britain, Tissot met Kathleen Newton, who was said to be the love of his life. Sadly, she died of consumption at the age of 28.

“Tissot never recovered from this tragedy, and moved back to Paris within a week of her death,” according to Painting Mania. A few years later, he gave up painting scenes of society and devoted the rest of his life to religious paintings. Painting Mania also says, “He visited the Middle East twice to find genuine backgrounds for his religious paintings.”

Extraordinary events can occur under ordinary circumstances, and in this instance, it's the arrival of three strangers who receive hospitality from an old man and his elderly wife. Tissot's painting of “Abraham and the Three Angels” tells us that when we show proper respect to the divine, miracles can happen.

BOOK REVIEW

A Family Story of the Stage and the Home

Daughters learn about their mother as a young woman

By Anita L. Sherman

My daughter recently treated me with two tickets to our local community theater. Attending this play at the same time I was reading “Tom Lake” was serendipity for sure. Ann Patchett’s latest and ninth novel has its protagonist appearing in a community theater production of Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town.”

The story opens with two friends who have agreed to handle registration for the town’s community theater production auditions. But one of them, Laura, makes a daring choice. Taking the “u” out of her name to appear more worldly (and because she liked Lara in “Dr. Zhivago”), Lara Kenison makes a life-changing decision at 16 to try out for the part of Emily Webb, the play’s young female lead.

Lara’s résumé carries no previous acting experience but, in her gut, the role is hers and she gets it by sheer confidence and presence, proving to be a diamond in the rough.

Past and Future Chapters
Fast forward several decades and Lara Kenison is now Lara Nelson with three grown daughters who are all home. It’s 2020 and the pandemic has altered many lives. Together on the family farm in northern Michigan, the three daughters along with their parents, Lara and Joe, spend their days harvesting cherries from the acres of rows spread lusciously with the ripened fruit. It would seem an idyllic setting—and it is—and is lavishly described by the author.

But as sublime as their days are gathering fruit, resting in tall grass, and sharing simple meals, there is a story to be told, and its unraveling brings moments of exhilaration and poignancy. Lara’s daughters want to know all the

details of her time on stage and her summer romance with Peter Duke, one of the other players and one who would go on to become a famous and well-known actor. The action takes place nestled close to Tom’s Lake, a favorite swimming hole. “Tom Lake” is also the name of the production company.

It starts innocently enough. The girls are watching one of their favorite films starring Peter Duke. Their father, Joe, walks through the room and casually mentions that their mother used to date him.

Now, the emotional ball gets rolling as this charismatic man is not only a favorite star but also a man who dated their mother. All in their 20s, with a father they adore, the thought of their mother

with another man is both threatening and tantalizing. Tell us the story. We have to know. Ms. Patchett is a master storyteller, and her skills as a writer shine in this narrative, braiding the bonds of a woman and her husband, her past loves, her grown children, and the intricacies of family dynamics.

Emily, the eldest daughter and on the verge of marriage herself, has been convinced for years that Peter Duke is actually her father. Like a roller coaster never stopping, her snappiness and coolness toward her mother is offset by moments of genuine tenderness and understanding. Her heart is with the farm, and she plans to keep and run it.

Maisie, in the middle, is studying to be a veterinarian. She is curious and courageous. She’ll dash off to deliver puppies for a neighbor, not minding the blood and smell, and happy to help. While not yet licensed, she has earned the trust of the community. She trusts who her mother was and who she is now.

Lara’s early success on stage and opportunities for advancement are particularly heart-rending for Nell,



▲ A cherry farm in northern Michigan is the stage for a family drama in Ann Patchett’s “Tom Lake.”

the youngest daughter, who aspires to the acting life herself. As her mother relates her moves around the country for different parts, her early independence, her betrayals and her triumphs, it’s hard for young Nell to picture herself in those situations and what she would do.

And Joe, the ever trustworthy and strong husband who, readers will soon learn, was also a character in Lara’s early life, emerges as a caring hero: consistent, understanding, faithful to family, and a beacon of bright light.

Lara’s Loves Then and Now

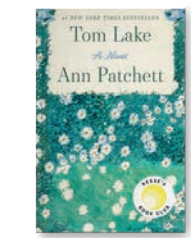
Structurally, the narrative moves back and forth along Lara’s journey as a young actress—from her relationship with Peter Duke and his tennis-playing brother, Sebastian; her understudy, Pallace; and her agent, Ripley—to her life as a wife and mother to three grown daughters. Ms. Patchett very deftly captures the subtle nuances of mother-daughter relationships, with the sweet and sour notes of unconditional love.

Ms. Patchett wrote the entire novel on a treadmill desk, a workstation over a treadmill. She knew she wanted to be a writer since the age of 6. Perhaps those ingredients account for the novel’s clarity, its pacing and energy, and the overall joyous nature of its themes.

There is sadness, for sure, and unexpected twists of fate. I was surprised at

the ending. “Tom Lake” is an insightful reflection on young love and seasoned love, and the ability to find peace and happiness in an often-chaotic world. Ms. Patchett’s graceful and moving narrative reminds us that we are all the stuff of stories, and those stories are the collection of moments in life that we seized or let go.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. She can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com



‘TOM LAKE’
By Ann Patchett
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LITERATURE

The History of ‘The Hobbit’

By Walker Larson

A vintage, paperback edition of “The Hobbit” with cover illustration by J.R.R. Tolkien, published on Sept. 21, 1937.

The creation of “The Hobbit” by J.R.R. Tolkien marked the beginning of a modern mythology. As Randel Helms states in “Tolkien’s World,” Tolkien had once expressed to a friend that he was dismayed the English people had so few myths of their own that they had to borrow from other traditions, and so he had decided to make one himself. Tolkien’s desire to create a new folklore similar to traditional world mythologies was central to his creation of Middle-earth. Such an expansive endeavor—such

myth-making—takes time. As Helms has it, “Tolkien’s world did not spring full-grown from his head like Minerva. ... Only slowly as he worked and reworked ‘The Hobbit’ in the 1930s, and as he rethought the contemporary meanings and values of mythological literature ... did Tolkien grasp that what he had discovered ... was a means of ... exploring and suggesting answers to some of the most profound questions and problems of the mid-twentieth century.”

“The Hobbit”

“The Hobbit” was first published in 1937, though its origins stretch back much further. According to Douglas Anderson’s introduction to “The Annotated Hobbit,” Tolkien began telling stories to his children around 1924, including a tale called “The Orgog” about a creature traveling through a strange land, and “Roverandom” about a toy dog’s trip to the moon and back.

John Rateliff’s “A Brief History of The Hobbit” suggests that many elements of “The Hobbit” came from stories like these that Tolkien told to the family. Tolkien recalled the precise moment of inspiration that, combined with family stories, launched “The Hobbit.” In a June 7, 1955, letter to W.H. Auden, Tolkien wrote:

“All I remember about the start of ‘The Hobbit’ is sitting correcting School Certificate papers in the everlasting weariness of that annual task forced on impecunious academics with children. On a blank leaf I scrawled: ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.’ I did not and do not know why. I did nothing about it, for a long time,

and for some years I got no further than the production of Thor’s Map. But it became ‘The Hobbit’ in the early 1930s.”

Tolkien read portions of it to his children as he wrote. “The Hobbit” was written slowly. Mr. Rateliff divides the book’s composition into Phases 1–7. Phase 1 of the novel’s composition consists of that first line scrawled on the exam paper and the writing of most of Chapter 1. Mr. Rateliff includes in this phase two early manuscripts that he calls “The Pryftan Fragment” and the “Bladorthin Typescript” due to the name of the dragon and wizard used in each respectively. These names would later be changed to the familiar “Smaug” and “Gandalf.”

Phases 2 and 3 encompass the completion of the first draft and its first publication. As Anderson relates, a former student of Tolkien’s, Elaine Griffiths, was approached by a friend, Susan Dagnall, who worked for Allen & Unwin. Dagnall was looking for publishable material, and Griffiths, who had read some of “The Hobbit,” told her to go along to Professor Tolkien and see if you can get out of him a work called “The Hobbit,” as I think it’s frightfully good.” Dagnall read the manuscript and encouraged Tolkien to finish it and send it to A&U, which he did. Stanley Unwin approved of it and asked his son Rayner, age 10, to read the manuscript as well. With Rayner’s approval, contracts were signed.

Phase 4 marks the transition to post-publication revisions. Between the first

edition of “The Hobbit” (1937) and the second edition (1951), Tolkien made key revisions to the scene where Bilbo finds the ring and encounters Gollum, in order to align it better with “The Lord of the Rings.”

In Phase 5, around 1960, Tolkien set out to rewrite “The Hobbit” in the more serious, adult style of “The Lord of the Rings.” This effort was never completed, however.

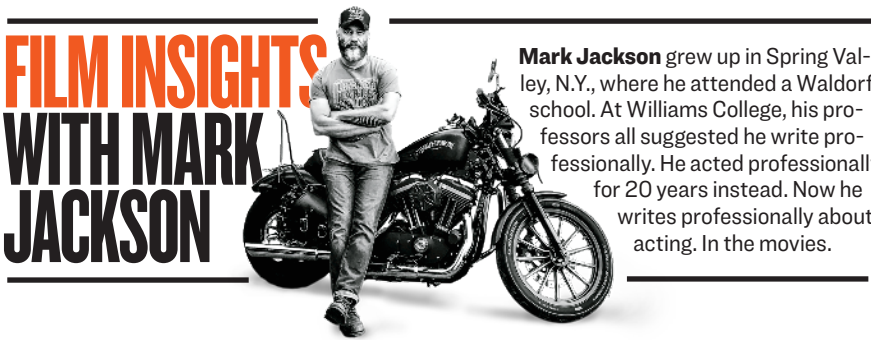
In the early 1960s, Tolkien’s American publisher asked him to revise “The Lord of the Rings” and “The Hobbit” in order to assert the American copyright against unauthorized editions. This marks Phase 6.

Finally, in Phase 7, Tolkien made some final small changes and included some addition paratextual material for a 1966 edition by Longmans Green and Company, including a timeline of events and charts of

dwarven runes.

The little story about a hobbit and his journey “there and back again” was the leaf that expanded into the tree of “The Lord of the Rings” and other Middle-earth stories. It was the beginning of a modern mythology, and one of the most critically and commercially successful bodies of work of all time.

Walker Larson teaches literature at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife and daughter. He holds a Master’s in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in *The Hemingway Review*, *Intellectual Takeout*, and his *Substack*, “*The Hazelnut*.”



FILM REVIEW

Is Love Fated or Just a Numbers Game?

A cute exploration of chance and choices

By Mark Jackson

How does love happen? How do, say, two bookstore owners who hate each other (“You’ve Got Mail”) fall in love? How does a famous American actress fall for a non-famous British bookstore owner (“Notting Hill”) after a chance encounter?

In “Love at First Sight,” Cupid shoots two of his arrows in the middle of an airport. The love-struck man and woman start detecting that sweet pain immediately, and then realize that they’re beyond rescue later, at 1) the preemptive memorial of the man’s mom (who’s not dead yet), and 2) the woman’s dad’s second wedding. Got that?

“Love at First Sight” is a reminder that falling in love isn’t always supposed to make sense, can happen when you least expect it, in the midst of drama and sadness and in the craziest places. It explores the roles that fate and choice play in our lives, and how, to use the hoary cliché, whenever God closes a door, he opens a window.

The premise of love at first sight is obviously not new. What’s innovative here are the statistics and probability of it happening, continually being explained to the audience in an ongoing sidebar commentary.

Story

Hadley (Haley Lu Richardson) flies to London to attend her dad’s (Rob Delaney) wedding. She’s still not over her parents’ divorce and resents him for bailing on her and her mom and starting a brand new life in another country.

Hadley has issues with being on time, and also flying in airplanes, and be-

ing therefore four minutes late for her flight—misses it. She manages to get a seat on the next one and, during the wait, meets a blond Brit named Oliver Jones (Ben Hardy).

He’s a good-looking math nerd (hence the running commentary about percentages and statistics from the narrator/fate/Greek chorus (Jameela Jamil), who pops up as different characters: a flight attendant, an immigration officer, a wedding guest, and so on. She makes it clear that love is just as much about choice as it is about fate.

What’s innovative here are the statistics explained to the audience in an ongoing commentary.

Anyway, enter Cupid. Twang! Twang! The imminent lovebirds grab some food at the airport, and then, wouldn’t ya know—wind up seated next to each other on the flight.

Then, arriving in London, they promptly encounter a dead phone-battery situation wherein their exchanged info gets irrevocably lost. And so while Hadley’s at dad’s wedding, Oliver attends mom’s (Sally Phillips) living memorial.

Oliver’s mum wanted to be present at that inevitable gathering *now*, and actually hear the nice things everyone will eventually say about her, instead of missing the party. It’s a nice idea, except that eldest son Oliver, seeing the world mathematically, as he does, can’t understand why mom won’t do chemo, and is understandably dis-

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Musical That Asks: ‘Shall We Dance?’

A memorable film by director Walter Lang

By Rudolph Lambert Fernandez

Margaret Landon’s partly fictionalized biography of Anna Leonowens is about the widowed British educator who served the 19th-century king of Siam (modern-day Thailand). It inspired several heavily fictionalized stage and screen adaptations, one of the most memorable being director Walter Lang’s film.

Anna (Deborah Kerr), tasked by the outwardly boorish but inwardly benevolent king (Yul Brynner) to modernize Siam with the best of Western culture, becomes governess to his numerous wives and children. Both are so headstrong that a playful tug-of-war follows, with her holding her ground on some issues and ceding ground on others.

Soon, the king is forced to fight a different kind of war, one that requires womanly tact, not a warrior’s tactics. Neighboring kingdoms, fancying the prospect of such an independent king being shown his place, may be feeding reports to the queen of England that he’s “a barbarian.” Cut to the quick, that an imperial delegation is arriving possibly to check rather than check in on him, the king is at a loss as to how to respond without antagonizing the empire.

Anna calms the initially combative king, helps him play gracious host to the queen’s emissaries, and defuses the crisis. But another crisis is brewing.

The older, more contrasting couple—the king and Anna—stay silent about their mutual attraction, but another couple, both young and Burmese, don’t: commoner Lun Tha (Carlos Rivas) and Tuptim



(Rita Moreno), a pretty “gift” to the king from the prince of Burma. Behind the king’s back, Anna unites the young lovers, but by defying his hierarchical credo, has she now upset him beyond a point?

In one of many comic scenes, Anna is advising the king on a matter of statecraft without seeming to. He’s too vain to accept direct advice, especially on the minor matter of whether he’s “a barbarian.”

Tactfully, Anna empathizes, “But this is a lie.” Yet to master English, he roars, “It is a false lie!”

The double negative is meant to be funny and poignant. It is both. To all except Anna and Head Wife Lady Thiang (Terry Saunders), the king’s visible callousness cancels out his less visible compassion. The film, which boasts splendid direction, acting, music, costumes, and set design, asks: Can two impossibilities cancel each other out, creating space for the possible: friendship, romance, even transformation?

Anna is everything a woman in a Siamese palace can’t possibly be: dignified, British, Christian, widowed, and a single mother to her little boy. The king is everything she’s not: haughty, Siamese, Buddhist, and a husband and father several

times over. Mutual kindheartedness first draws them together. The rest follows as naturally as his newly learned phrase, “et cetera, et cetera, et cetera!”

Meaningful Musical

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s songwriting so mischievously blends the satirical with the sage that it’s delightfully hard to tell which is which.

As he learns Western ways from Anna, the king wonders, through the song “A Puzzlement” (sung by Brynner): should he teach his son and heir that equality is, after all, better than an imagined superiority of sex, race, cutlery, language, or religion?

“Shall I tell him everyone is like the other,” And the better of the two is really neither?”

Brynner, who’d been a director at CBS since the 1940s, helped layer the subtle relationship between the two principal characters. When he, Kerr, and Lang won Oscar nominations, Kerr joked via telegram: “A well-deserved double victory. Not only are you a marvelous actor but a marvelous director.” Kerr was being gracious; she’s marvelous too.

Soprano Marni Nixon, dubbing Kerr’s



▲ Oliver Jones (Ben Hardy) and Hadley Sullivan (Haley Lu Richardson) fall in love quickly, in “Love at First Sight.”

traught, albeit in a British, stiff upper lip kind of way.

Meanwhile, in the last book Hadley was gifted before her dad left—Charles Dickens’s “Our Mutual Friend”—she reads that well-known quote: “Is it better to have had a good thing and lost it, or never to have had it?” She overhears a wedding guest mention a memorial happening somewhere across town and impetuously bolts from the wedding.

Overall

The main problem with a film with this particular title is that the lovebirds must be twitterpated from the get-go, which can easily result in the whole thing hitting a ceiling early and having no place else to go. This story builds well.

We get a glimpse into their characters, and why they grew up with three specific fears. These fears (which include a shared loathing of mayonnaise) end up pushing them away from each other. What are the chances they will end up back together again?

Fate brought Hadley and Oliver together, but decisions count too, as does courage. When Hadley tells her dad, “It sounds insane, and it makes no sense,” his answer is, “It’s not supposed to.”

Particularly baffling to the logical Oliver is the fact that love isn’t logical. His mother’s memorial makes him realize that he has spent his entire life hiding behind numbers. Statistics are what

kept him in control of his surroundings and prevented any surprises, stopping him from fully letting Hadley in.

It’s because they are different and find themselves in different situations that one of them has the key to unlocking the solution—which the other one doesn’t—and that they are able to connect and bring out something unique in each other. Hadley makes Oliver forget about the probability of falling in love at first sight, while he makes her realize that things can be good even if they don’t last.

“Love at First Sight” is a sweet little film, and due to the Christmas setting, a good watch for the holiday season. It’s one of the better romantic movies currently on Netflix.

‘Love at First Sight’

Director
Vanessa Caswill

Starring
Haley Lu Richardson, Ben Hardy, Jameela Jamil, Rob Delaney, Sally Phillips, Tom Taylor

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes

MPAA Rating
PG-13

Release Date
Sept. 15, 2023

★★★★★

◀ **Anna (Deborah Kerr) and the King of Siam (Yul Brynner), in “The King and I.”**

songs, lowered her register to suit Kerr’s. Watch out for “Getting to Know You,” “Hello, Young Lovers,” and the electrifying “Shall We Dance?”

To the king’s children, who’d never seen snow, Anna describes it as water freezing on its way down from the sky and explains how it’s possible to walk on water when a lake freezes over. Watch them weave this learning into a play they stage for the king’s British guests, a Siamese interpretation of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.”

The film isn’t meant to be a historical record of the real-life king who embraced Western innovations and led Thailand’s modernization. Instead, it hints that contrasting cultures are bridged not so much through embracing each other’s language, attire, or religion but by sharing fine values such as respect and restraint.

Genuine friendships, like those between the king and Anna, help rather than hinder self-discovery. The seemingly supreme monarch discovers and accepts that he’s all too human, as subject to self-doubt as his subjects.

You can watch “The King and I” on YouTube and Vudu.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

‘The King and I’

Director
Walter Lang

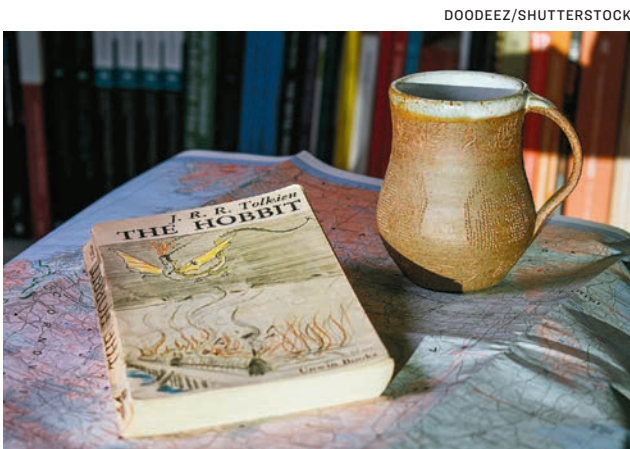
Starring
Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr

Running Time
2 hours, 13 minutes

MPAA Rating
G

Release Date
June 29, 1956

★★★★★



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

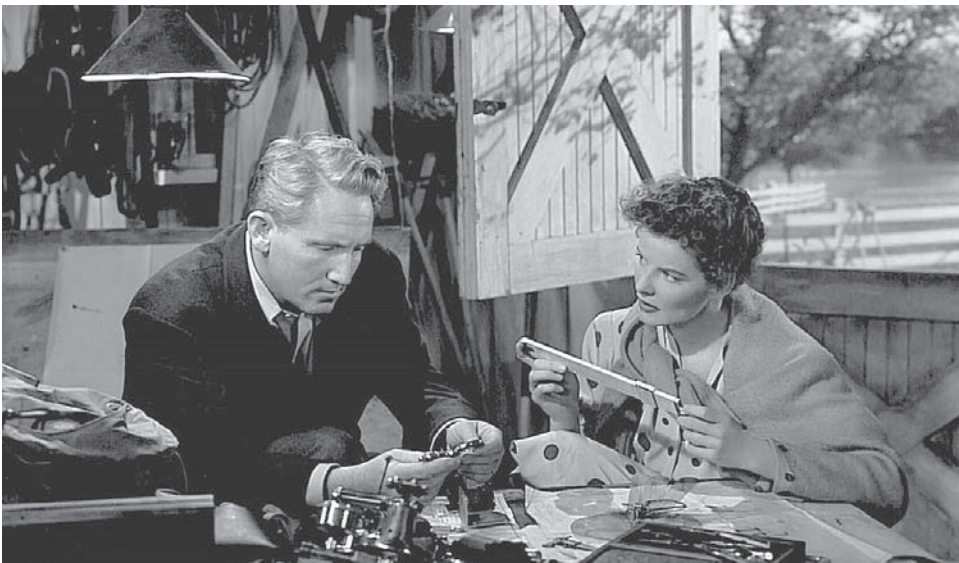
A Marriage for the Long Run

By Tiffany Brannan

Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy were known as unconventional actors. However, in their movies together they usually played very conventional characters. In “Without Love” from 1945, Hepburn plays a wife who is a true helpmate to her husband, played by Tracy. It was the third movie Hepburn and Tracy made together, following “Woman of the Year” and “Keeper of the Flame.” As in all but three other of their movies, Hepburn and Tracy are married for much of the runtime. This story is really unique and interesting because the spouses try to prove that a marriage can be successful without love.

Scientist Needs a Room

Scientist Pat Jamieson (Tracy) is working on developing an oxygen mask that functions at high altitudes to help the military during World War II. When he arrives in Washington, D.C., he desperately needs a place to work, but he doesn’t have a place for him and his little dog, Dizzy, to sleep. He shares a taxi with drunken socialite Quentin Ladd (Keenan Wynn), who lets him spend the night at his cousin’s house. The next morning, Jamieson meets Jamie Rowan (Hepburn), a young widow who has come to town to interview potential caretakers for her house. He tries to persuade her to hire him, since the house’s basement is an ideal workspace for his experiments. Although she hadn’t planned on hiring a single man for the job, she agrees when she learns about his project, since her father was a famous scientist who taught her the importance of science as a public service. That evening, Jamieson and Rowan have a candid conversation about their different experiences with love. Jamieson is completely soured on romance because he was hopelessly in love with a selfish, flighty girl in Paris. Rowan has also sworn off love because nothing can



▲ Pat Jamieson (Spencer Tracy) and Jamie Rowan (Katharine Hepburn), in “Without Love.”

match the relationship she had with her beloved husband before his tragic, early death. Because they share this mutual understanding, after they pass several weeks apart, Rowan suggests to Jamieson that they get married. Although it sounds crazy, her idea is a sensible plan for a platonic marriage, allowing them to live together while working side by side on his oxygen mask. He accepts her offer, but they find out that being married without love isn’t as simple as it seems. **Man’s Helpmate** “Without Love” shows how two people who have given up on finding happiness and companionship find both in married life together. The idea of marrying without even the hope of love baffles Jamieson, who has cynically sworn off romance because of his painful romantic experience. Rowan is initially offended by Jamieson’s frank assertion that she is being selfish in shutting herself off from the rest of the world. However, after thinking about his words, she realizes that he’s right and decides that she needs to rejoin the liv-

ing and dedicate her life to doing something to help others, like aiding the war effort through scientific developments. She determines to become Jamieson’s helpmate. Rowan realizes that Jamieson is also running away from life, just in a different way. After getting over the humor of the suggestion, he sees the sense in it. Without the complications of emotions like passion, jealousy, and desire, they make an excellent team. However, the Jamiesons learn that it’s impossible to be exclusively scientific about a situation when human beings are involved. Although society, literature, and the arts have promoted the idea that marriage must be based on nothing but passionate romantic attraction, “Without Love” shows that mutual admiration and the desire and ability to help each other are good bases for a marriage, which can grow into genuine fondness and love. **An All-Star Romance** Tracy and Hepburn are in excellent form in this movie. Although not as fast-paced and intense as their more famous and hard-biting films, “Without Love”

shows off this dynamic duo’s talent for light comedy. Tracy is perfect as the bitter scientist with a swollen head and a chip on his shoulder, and Hepburn is charming and warm as the woman who restores his faith in love. The cast is rounded out by a young Lucille Ball as Jamie’s wisecracking business manager, a hilarious Keenan Wynn as her fickle beau, Carl Esmond as a ladies’ man who tries to romance Rowan, and Felix Bressart as Jamieson’s lovable colleague. With the right blend between comedy and sincerity, “Without Love” is a delightful classic film. You can rent or buy this movie on Amazon Prime Video or on DVD at Amazon, eBay, and Barnes and Noble.

Tiffany Brannan is a 22-year-old opera singer, Hollywood historian, vintage fashion enthusiast, and conspiracy film critic, advocating purity, beauty, and tradition on Instagram as @pure_cinema_diva. Her classic film journey started in 2016 when she and her sister started the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society to reform the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code. She is launching Cinballera Entertainment this summer to produce original performances which combine opera, ballet, and old films in historic SoCal venues.

‘Without Love’

Director
Harold S. Bucquet
Starring
Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn, Lucille Ball
Running Time
1 hour, 51 minutes
Not Rated
Release Date
March 22, 1945
★★★★★

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