

**Shakespeare,
Music and Meditation:**

A MacGuffin Story

Keith William Loach

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Keith William Loach holds a **MusBac** (University of Toronto), an **MA Music** (York University) and an **MBA** (University of Toronto). His graduate work in music examined the effect of music on the brain, with a broader focus on how music and meditation can be supported in healthcare policy.

Keith has delivered papers at the *International Conference of Dalcroze Studies* at Laval University in Quebec City and at the *International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation Colloquium* at Guelph University in Guelph, Ontario. Keith supports community music.



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Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story

Prelude

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story is an essay about critical thinking, fake news, education, financial-industry MacGuffins and how **The Arts** can help. Shakespeare wrote about similar concerns in a voice as relevant now as it was then. Troubling life-issues in these areas are not new and the human condition is likely in the same state today as it was 400 years ago.

A MacGuffin Story examines the dark side of media control and how it is responsible for the state of upheaval in our world today. Many societal beliefs have imposed massive and disruptive distraction in our lives. We have lost our attention spans, our ability to focus, our moral compass, and worst of all, we have lost our understanding of *critical thinking*.

Different literary techniques are available for spreading misinformation - red herrings, bluffs, false flags, misdirection, lies of omission. Today's "fake news" uses many of these techniques in not-so-subtle ways to push forward an agenda. Much of it is obviously bogus and identifiable with minimum effort.

But it is the not-so-obvious misdirections lying well below the surface that could be the most devious and most disruptive. Many of these are typically not on the critical-thinking radar. They exist as established

societal norms that are rarely questioned yet justify unfair and biased behaviour in everything.

This story is not a whodunit; it is a whatdunit.

The MacGuffin

A MacGuffin is a literary plot device, such as a person, a goal or an object, that is introduced to drive a narrative forward. It typically motivates the characters in the story but is ultimately insignificant to the reader or audience. It is the application of an "often-replacable catalyst", a technique popularized by Alfred Hitchcock.

Hitchcock once described the MacGuffin as: "The device, the gimmick, if you will, or the papers the spies are after... The only thing that really matters is that in the picture, the plans, documents or secrets must seem to be of vital importance to the characters. To me, the narrator, they're of no importance whatsoever." He also suggested that, "The MacGuffin is the thing that the spies are after, but the audience doesn't care." A MacGuffin does not have to be a physical item; it can be a secret, a piece of information, or an idea. This type of distraction is referred to as an "intangible MacGuffin".

The MacGuffin is a well-used literary device included in works by Alfred Hitchcock, Agatha Christie and possibly every TV police procedural drama ever produced. Examples of MacGuffins in Hitchcock's work include the microfilm in *North by Northwest* and, in John Huston's work, the statuette in *The Maltese Falcon*. Sometimes, the story tricks the audience into thinking that the subject or item matters when it does not, or the item turns out to be a fake, serving as a plot twist. The briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*, the Ring in *Lord of the Rings*, or "Rosebud" in *Citizen Kane*, the MacGuffin is

everywhere. And the MacGuffin's roots are far deeper than pop culture.

The MacGuffin in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the tale told by the ghost of Hamlet's father. Claudius, the uncle, killed Hamlet's father in order to marry his mother and become King, or so says the ghost on a dark evening on the battlements of Castle Elsinore. While this may be an interesting view of events, the MacGuffin's purpose is to explain and support the reason for Hamlet's vengeful behaviour throughout the play. Shakespeare's *Henry V* uses the desire the King has to own France as the MacGuffin that drives him to apply his moral ambiguity and harsh tactics to achieve his goal. It is fascinating that Shakespeare's works were produced over four hundred years ago and written with an insight that defies time, creating situations and moral dilemmas that are real and pertinent in today's world.

Fake News

A MacGuffin is technically a plot device used in fiction, be it an object, secret, or goal, that drives the characters' actions but, in itself, is ultimately insignificant. "Fake news", on the other hand, refers to fabricated information, misinformation or disinformation presented as legitimate and it can be devastating. This "news" is typically motivated by a deliberate intention to either mislead or generate revenue.

It is not difficult to make a connection between the MacGuffin and fake news. They share thematic similarities in how they function: both serve as distractions or catalysts that can either 1) shift focus away from reality or 2) provide underlying support for a cause or behaviour. Fake news in today's world has become the perfect tool for audience distraction. In Johann Hari's book, *Stolen Focus*, he

discusses the internet as a marketing machine designed to control and direct every moment of our screen time for someone else's benefit, mostly for monetary gain but more insidiously for influencing outcomes.

As Hari suggests, resistance is futile. The internet is driven by thousands and thousands of the world's best programmers whose sole mission is to deprive you of choice. Every click-bait is designed to pull you into the next click-bait giving the illusion that you are making your own decision for the next pageview. You are not. You are being led to where the programmers want you to be. Online manipulation is a proven science and we are at their mercy. In hunting for a good will moment, we must realize that our inability to focus is *not our fault*. We are but pawns.

The Arts are discussed here as a moving-forward solution to our societal MacGuffin-blindness.

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story

The Arts

The education system today promotes the development of critical thinking. This includes not only self-examination but also the ability to question the sources, timelines, perspectives and motives of everything encountered. Skepticism is healthy in the pursuit of truth. As well, an awareness of conditions such as *confirmation bias* and *cognitive dissonance* helps guard against misinformation.

(*Confirmation bias* is the natural tendency to see more often things you agree with versus things you do not. *Cognitive dissonance* is the natural tendency to disregard and avoid processing things that do not fit within your worldview or opinion.)

STEM is an acronym (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) discussed in education policy and curricula to address and stimulate a sector of education that, in 2001, was perceived to have been in decline for decades. Its importance has dwindled over the years as institutions that followed the President Bush-driven agenda have failed on all counts to improve education in any way. The tragedy, of course, was the decimation of study in the humanities; the arts became a casualty in the rush to technology.

Creativity

Studying the arts – literature, music, visual arts, etc. – introduces *subjectivity* (not just objectivity), *abductive reasoning* (not just

deductive reasoning), and *integrative thinking* (not just linear thinking), and it is these qualities that provide the needed creative foundation for ‘engineers’ to succeed.

Subjectivity is rooted in individual perspectives, emotions, feelings, and opinions, which can vary from person to person. *Objectivity*, on the other hand, is based on verifiable facts, research, and data, independent of personal biases, making it essential for scientific, technical and neutral reporting. Objectivity discourages out-of-the-box thinking thereby restricting creative potential.

Abductive reasoning is often referred to as our gut-feeling and is typically based on general information acquired over time through life experience. Although the potential is huge for abductive reasoning to be clouded with emotion and misinformation, it is still effective as a starting point to form creative hypotheses for further examination. Many ideas derived through *abductive* reasoning that may begin as whimsical or tangential become practical over time. *Deductive reasoning* begins with a hypothesis and through analysis and exploration, attempts to arrive at a logical conclusion justifying the hypothesis. Scientific method is based on it. But conclusions arrived at through deductive reasoning can only be as valid as the premises upon which they are built.

The *integrative thinking* methodology, inherent in artistic study, provides an infrastructure that fosters the creative and analytical thought processes required in all aspects of life. It scaffolds a framework that rises above the limitations of an “A or B” (either/or) solution to seek new and creative solutions that accommodate both A and B. It promotes a broader awareness of possibilities. *Linear thinking*, on the other hand, is based on a logical sequence of thought

processes, which tends to discourage the freedom to explore tangential options.

Integrative Thinking

Integrative Thinking theory was developed by Graham Douglas in 1986. Douglas describes it as “the process of integrating intuition, reason and imagination in a human mind with a view to developing a holistic continuum of strategy, tactics, action, review and evaluation for addressing a problem in any field.”

Roger L. Martin is a prominent writer, strategy advisor, and Professor Emeritus at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Martin's 2007 book *The Opposable Mind* builds on Douglas's theory to define and build a practical creative process that relies on *salience*, which is the ability to identify and prioritize the most vital variables in a problem while ignoring extraneous noise.

As an analogy to the salience component of the integrative process, imagine flying from Calgary, Alberta, to Vancouver, British Columbia. On a rainy day, it might be possible to see only a few of the Rocky Mountain peaks throughout the entire flight. And on a clear day, the entire range may become visible right down to the valleys and rivers of the rugged landscape. But on a cloudy day, the primary mountain tops are still visible but many mini-peaks appear as well. It is this filtered information, these new and smaller mountain tops, that Martin would refer to as "salient points".

Mountain Tops

The secondary peaks might display characteristics that make them unique amongst their peers, such as being snow-covered, having trees

or grass, or being pointed, rolling, wide or narrow, etc. Combinations of these salient points could then make a correlative connection with one or more of the primary-peaks. Applying minor and seemingly-insignificant associations to obvious and seemingly-unrelated characteristics opens a broader world of options and possibilities for big-picture solutions.

Linking several mini-peaks together can create arguments that could support one or more of the primary peaks. Possible solutions are presented that include not just A or B, but options that could include A, B, C, D and E that become viable through a variety of mini-peak connections.

Martin also makes an excellent case for the use of abductive reasoning ("gut feeling") as opposed to relying solely on inductive and deductive reasoning to arrive at decisions. Because of its flexibility and un-tethered freedom from limitation, abductive reasoning can be used as a starting and finishing point in the creative process.

Habit Of Thought

Martin distinguishes between *integrative* thinkers versus *conventional* thinkers and suggests that we can train ourselves to dig deeply and creatively for more comprehensive solutions. With increased exposure to the discovery process, he believes we develop a "habit of thought" that becomes our natural method for decision-making in all aspects of our lives. Integrative thinking is a skill that develops over time with repeated practice.

The Arts encourage the repeated application of *subjective*, *abductive* and *integrative* thinking. It is in this way that study in the arts

improves the potential success of study in the sciences and all aspects of life.

Shakespeare, music and meditation are areas that can help build a solid foundation for creativity and good mental health. They can support a multi-tiered framework upon which we can hang little bits of baggage-free reality to attain calmness and grounded thought. Thinking bigger than ourselves is a process that The Arts nourishes.

The following illustrates an example of art-in-action using literature and music, hopefully fostering creativity through subjective, abductive and integrative thinking.

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation

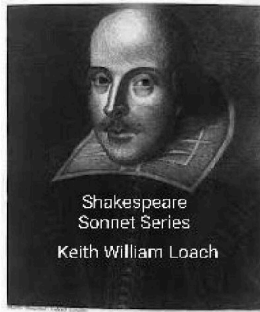
Sonnet 25 All You Need Is Love

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.

Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.

The painful warrior famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd:

Then happy I, that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove nor be removed.



Music Meditation - LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story

All You Need Is Love

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, all of which were written in iambic pentameter and contain *fourteen lines* of text comprised of *three quatrains* (verses/descriptives) and *one couplet* (conclusion/resolution). They were composed between 1592 and 1598, with 126 sonnets written for a young man, 26 sonnets written for a woman, and 2 of a general nature. It was Shakespeare's publisher in 1609 who contextually ordered, and then numbered, the sonnet series to be printed as a collection titled **SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS. Neuer before Imprinted.**

None of Shakespeare's sonnets were titled and it was standard practice in the day to refer to sonnets through their first line of text. For example, Sonnet 18 would have been called *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?* and Sonnet 29 would have been called *When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes.*

The word iambic refers to two syllables – *da-DUM*. The word pentameter refers to a group of five.

da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM
Shall I comPARE thee TO a SUM mer's DAY
When IN disGRACE with FOR tune AND men's EYES

Iambic pentameter is a common poetic meter consisting of lines with ten syllables. It is popular because it mimics a natural rhythm found

in speech and, at a basic level, the iambic pulse connects with the sound of a heartbeat.

Renaissance

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the peak of the *renaissance* era. Music at that time (one hundred years pre-Bach) used modes and one of the most popular was the *dorian mode* (used here) based on the second degree of the major scale. Renaissance music also featured a compositional technique called *fauxbourdon*, which uses a parallel harmony that follows the melody one sixth below.

This *a cappella* arrangement of Shakespeare's Sonnet 25 attempts to stay true to the style of music in use and popular at the time. The quatrains here play on the iambic pentameter rhythm in a 3-beat pattern over a 4/4 time signature. The da-DUM rhythm could represent, in 4/4 time, an eighth note followed by a quarter note. A three beat sequence would therefore include two da-DUMS. When all five da-DUMS are played consecutively in 4/4 time, they tend to feel unnatural and even awkward. Its performance requires concentration and focus.

Lyrics

Sonnet 25 is about the elusiveness of happiness in the pursuit of fame and fortune. The three quatrains establish Shakespeare's quandary. The first quatrain refers to the envy associated with the world of public recognition. The second shines light on the fickle and fleeting world of pride and glory. The third speaks to the famed warrior, honoured for battle but nothing else. And then in the couplet, where

Shakespeare always summarizes his sonnets with a conclusion or revelation, he states that, in the end, love is all you need.

The chorus of this arrangement uses the phrase *Live, Laugh, Love*. These words have often been attributed to a 1904 poem by Bessie Anderson Stanley called *Success*, which reads: "*He achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much*".

Success

Shakespeare suggests that fame and fortune may not be the path to happiness or success. Perhaps in life, living-well, laughing-often and loving-much may reap better rewards.

Another “success story” is an expression credited to Zig Ziglar (1926-2012) with a deeper reference to the philosopher Seneca: "*Success is when preparation meets opportunity*." It suggests that achieving goals requires being ready to act when favorable chances arise. Proactive skill development and hard work allow individuals to capitalize on moments that others might miss, effectively turning potential into success. We owe it to ourselves to be prepared for life in the best possible way, not necessarily financially, but absolutely cognitively and mentally.

So, what is success? If we believe the currently accepted financial-industry mantra, the important things in a *power-takes-all* world include leverage, cruelty, lies, deception, greed and selfish motivation. These attributes are part of the currency that defines success driven by today's accepted societal norms.

William Shakespeare
(1564-1616)

All You Need Is Love

Sonnet 25

Keith William Loach

♩ = 92 Quatrain (verse)

Voices 123 Shhhh... *p* (Let) those who are in fa - vour with their stars Of pub - lic ho - nour and
4x's prin - ces' fa - vour - ites their fair leaves spread But as the ma - ri - gold
pain - ful war - rior fa - mou - sed for fight, Af - ter a thou - sand vic -

Voices 123 One two three *pp* (Optional harmonies. Gradually build through quatrains to couplet.)
(Whisper)

Voice 4 One two three four One two three four One two three four One two three four
(Whisper)

Clap/Stomp *pp*

5

V123 proud ti - tles boast, Whilst I, whom for - tune of such tri - umph bars, Un - look'd for joy in that
at the sun's eye, And in them - selves their pride lies bu - ri - ed, For at a frown they in
to - ries once foil'd, Is from the book of ho - nour ra - zed quite, And all the rest for - got

V123

V4 One two three four One two three four One two three four One two three four

Clap/Stomp

9

V123 1. I ho - nour most. 2. Great 3. their glo - ry die. The for which he toil'd;

V123

V4 One two One two three One two One two three One two three

Clap/Stomp

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Sonnet 25 - All You Need Is Love

Audio and PDF Score available at www.keithloach.com

2

14 Couplet (conclusion)

V123 *mp* Then hap py I, that love and am be-loved Where I may not re - move nor be re-moved.

V123 Ah Where I may not re - move nor be re-moved.

V4 *p* Bah Bah

Clap/Stomp

19

V123 *mf* Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love

V4

Clap/Stomp

23

V123 Mu - sic med - i - ta - tion

V123 Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love

V4

Clap/Stomp

25

V123 Mu - sic med - i - ta - tion Ah

V123 Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love Ah

V4

Clap/Stomp

MUSIC AND MENTAL HEALTH
 Non-invasive, non-chemical, community-based, artistically-driven solutions
 Get involved, support community, be healthy, join a choir
 Shakespeare, Music and Meditation - LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE
 Renaissance, a cappella, dorian mode, fauxbourdon, iambic pentameter
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But what if success was defined by a different currency, one based on humanitarian values? Perhaps the *power-of-good-will* could and should be most important. Attributes that include integrity, knowledge, compassion, fairness, honesty, community and accountability would be a welcome relief.

As *fake news* explodes and *fact checking* implodes, today's *currency* of control, based on *money, status* and *power*, is in desperate need of a paradigm shift to include *respect, integrity* and *compassion*. Perhaps the pendulum has bridged its extreme arc and is ready to return to a more moderate and kinder world.

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story

MacGuffins

A brilliant British documentary about capitalism is *The Century of the Self* by filmmaker Adam Curtis. It is about the twentieth century conflation of three concepts: the positive attributes of *democracy*; the less positive attributes of *capitalism*; and the zero positive attributes of *consumerism*.

Curtis suggests that *democracy* has become synonymous with *consumerism*, and it has become our constitutional right to get more stuff - whatever, whenever and however we want. Throughout the four-part miniseries, which covers 100 years of psychologically deceptive marketing, it is difficult to avoid feeling used, abused and manipulated as the work of Edward Bernays (nephew of Sigmund Freud and self-proclaimed originator of “public relations”) is reviewed and analyzed.

Using psychotherapy techniques beginning in the early 20th century, Bernays’ marketing campaigns (passionately embraced by governments and industry) conflated democracy with the *desire to acquire*. Purposefully stroking egos and playing upon feelings of entitlement, he positioned *wanting* as more important than *needing*. Over the past century, democracy has been transformed from a concept promoting freedom of choice and self-determination into a self-centered competition for winning approval, a narcissist-driven reward through the accumulation of assets.

This decades-long misdirection was, and continues to be, a truly brilliant and almost-indisputable MacGuffin.

Democracy

Democracy was conflated with *consumerism* through the aggressive promotion of *capitalism*, specifically neoliberal capitalism, now a well-established principle found at all levels of society and government.

Neoliberal capitalism is based on financial accountability. Governments and businesses attempt to follow a strict code of austerity, restraint, privatization, cutbacks and balanced budgets. This would be fine except that the cuts typically affect lower/middle class jobs and happen on the front line where service provider support is most valued and most needed (i.e. teachers, administrators, laborers, etc.). Budget frugality is focused on returning tax-payer (i.e. shareholder) value but rarely addresses excessive management salaries or bloated infrastructures.

Neoliberal capitalist governments tend to support concepts such as trickle-down economics, providing tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy. The expectation is that tax savings will flow through to new investment and the creation of more and better middle-class jobs.

Horse And Sparrow

Trickle-down economics is based on the *horse and sparrow theory*, which suggests that if the horse is fed enough oats, some of it will pass through the horse's digestive tract and be excreted on the road, where the sparrows will find enough food to satisfy their own modest needs. Although a somewhat graphic analogy, it sums up the root

problem of wealth inequity in today's society. That is, the rich do not feel that the non-rich deserve anything.

The application of this policy has been a proven failure countless times, from the 1890s *horse-and-sparrow theory* through to the 1980s *Reagonomics*, and yet, almost comically, the same programs are reintroduced time and time again.

The latest installment of trickle-down economics, *Trumponomics*, resulted in record government deficits and a dispersal of quantitative-easing funds to corporations (tax credits totaling over one trillion dollars) that did nothing to stimulate the economy. Unfortunately, corporate windfall tax savings tend to be used for corporate profit, such as *share-buybacks* (benefitting only the shareholders) and *employee reduction buyouts* (again, benefitting only the shareholders).

As an example, the GM *staff reductions* of 2018 (over 25,000 jobs lost) and *plant closures* (five facilities shut down: Oshawa, ON; Detroit, MI; Warren, OH; White Marsh, MD; Warren, MI) were a direct result of the cash flow made available through the government's trickle-down tax-savings policy. The taxpayer-funded program provided GM a tax break of over \$500 million. Ironically, the gift was intended to stimulate growth and employment in local manufacturing, but it did exactly the opposite; management bonuses increased and shareholders were happy.

Neoliberal capitalism is a MacGuffin that sets a false premise for fund distribution to corporations and the wealthy, but it is not on our fake-news-check-list as being untrue or questionable.

Wealth Inequality

As the wealth-inequity ratio of rich-to-poor declines (i.e. what used to be the top 10% moved quickly through the top 1% and is now closing in on the top 0.1%), it is becoming obvious that the extra cash flow held by corporations and wealthy individuals is not invested in new business opportunities. It serves only to line the pockets of the already rich.

And perhaps a sign of our generally weakened social conscience, the rise in extreme poverty rates is a key indicator of the lack of empathy and philanthropy found in today's nouveau riche. Government hand-outs to the rich end up in the stock market where the shareholder is king and an increasingly small number of exceedingly wealthy individuals benefit from the closed system of self-serving intent amongst their peers.

"Capitalism is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone."

John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946)

Market As God

Society has come to worship financial success as our reason for being, our *raison d'être*. Some authors suggest that capitalism has become the new religion. That is, God did not die, but was instead transformed into money.

Harvey Cox, author of the book *Market as God*, suggests that the rights of individuals have been replaced with the rights of shareholders. In deifying itself, the Market has become omniscient,

omnipotent and omnipresent, basing its existence on the business theology of supply and demand. Compassion for humanity cannot exist in this type of economic infrastructure because the poor and needy have no currency, respect nor relevance. Their position has no leverage and therefore no voice nor place at the table. The stock market (as God) rewards the rich and commodifies everything else.

In the book *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari takes this analogy one step further stating that the “capitalist-consumerist ethic” has strong religious overtones, setting the lifestyles of the rich as the *utopian paradise-reward*. Money and envy have become the benchmarks for achieving heaven-on-earth. Our religion of *consumerism* encourages the less well-heeled to “go into debt buying cars and televisions they don’t really need.” Harari continues with “The supreme commandment of the rich is Invest! The supreme commandment of the rest of us is Buy!”. In a Market-as-God world, losing faith becomes more than personal; it can be profoundly devastating at the mental, physical, economic and societal levels.

This is a hallelujah-MacGuffin that our society-as-audience unconsciously accepts without questioning its fundamental flaws.

Money In Motion

The *velocity of money* is a term used by economists to describe the number of times one unit of money is used to buy goods and services per one unit of time. It is a measure of the movement of cash in the economy. During recessionary times, the velocity of money is typically low as individuals and corporations tend to save and conserve. When the economy is booming and inflation may be high, money can burn a hole in your pocket, and the tendency is to spend

(and receive) more quickly and more often. Either of these conditions could be considered good or bad for a variety of reasons, but it is typically more desirable to have money changing hands more often; it is a sign of an active and stimulated economy.

What if the 2017 trillion-plus dollars of trickle-down Trumponomics was instead divided evenly and given to each individual in the United States? This would have put approximately \$4,000 into the hands of each man, woman and child in the country. It is almost certain that the vast majority of this cash would end up back in circulation stimulating the economy through locally purchased goods and services. Some of these funds would be clawed back to the government through income taxes and sales taxes. That is, 1) higher earners have higher income tax rates and 2) a higher turnover of funds would reap more sales taxes. This plan would have put money into the hands of people that need it while at the same time stimulating the economy at the local level.

With an abundance of financial-industry MacGuffins, it is easy to understand why the concept of *Universal Basic Income* is dismissed. The reality is that the funds put into the hands of needy individuals (to purchase goods and services necessary for survival) would be recirculated quickly and locally, thus stimulating the economy effectively and efficiently.

Wasting-money-on-poor-people is yet another MacGuffin working on behalf of neoliberal capitalism.

Income and Assets

The average income of the bottom 99% of U.S. tax filers is approximately \$85,000, with overall average wages for the broader

population hovering around \$61,136. For context, the top 1% of earners require an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of roughly \$561,500 or more. (Wikipedia 2026)

The average savings of the bottom 99% of U.S. households is roughly \$120,000 to \$140,000, though median savings (the exact middle point) are much lower, typically falling between \$8,000 and \$40,000. The "average" is heavily skewed upward by the extreme wealth at the top of this bracket. (Wikipedia 2026)

Nationally, the average annual income for the top 1% of earners in the U.S. is approximately \$794,000, with top wage earners averaging around \$731,000. To simply cross the minimum threshold to enter this bracket, you need an adjusted gross income (AGI) of at least \$561,000. (Wikipedia 2026)

Households in the top 1% of US net worth have average total wealth of about \$35.5 million, with approximately \$2.5 million held in liquid or designated savings accounts (including transaction, brokerage, and retirement funds). In contrast, the median American household has an overall net worth of roughly \$200,000. (Wikipedia 2026)

Money-For-Nothing

For the top 1%, the average household owns approximately \$2.5 million in liquid assets or designated savings accounts. Invested at a bank rate of, say 3%, the annual return of \$75,000 represents a 22% increase above the broader population's entire annual income of \$61,136. To borrow a line from pop-culture, this would be referred to as *money-for-nothing* requiring little or no management. And for the top 1%, this "idle investment" represents only 7% (\$2.5m / \$35.5m)

of the funds invested in stock markets, homes, real estate and other assets.

It is no small wonder that the inequality ratio continues to spiral out of control. Doing the math with minimal effort reveals an obvious wealth/lifestyle discrepancy, yet many financial articles presented to the general population seem bewildered that the reason behind the inequity problem is a mystery. Please understand that individuals working in financial services are the primary beneficiaries within the industry, well-motivated to maintain their money-making machine; it is their job.

The Stock Market

Parking cash in the stock market has no societal benefit. The financial services industry does not create value in the traditional sense nor does it contribute to a goods and services economy other than money management. Likewise, growth in the stock market has little value in the health of the economy; the benefit to operational activity is negligible.

We should not be excited about a soaring stock market. A rising stock market is of value only to the segment of the population that is invested in it – wealthy individuals and cash-rich corporations. As far as participation goes, the middle class is typically not well-invested in the stock market as many have their cash tied up in home ownership (especially the boomer generation) and other assets. The poor typically have no discretionary income available to devote to this type of investment activity. Extra funds directed toward the top 1% typically end up in the stock market providing no shared advantage.

This is the mother-of-all MacGuffins perpetrated by governments today. Associating a rising stock market with a thriving economy is false, and governments use it to justify horrible and inhumane behaviour under the auspice of success.

Creative Thinking

Democracy has been under attack for a very long time and the blind acceptance of these financial-MacGuffins has accelerated its decay. The endless stream (and acceptance) of fake news has eroded confidence in the Fourth Estate (Press/Media) and the Fifth Estate (Digital/Independent Media), and we would be naive to think that this was not done deliberately.

A cornerstone of critical thinking is *fact checking* and, regardless of the external pressure to simply accept what we are fed, we must persevere.

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story

Finale

Meditation is a gateway to critical thinking. By clearing one's mind of debris, a clean slate is presented that promotes creativity without limitation or baggage. "*White. A blank page or canvas. So many possibilities.*", were the prophetic words written by Stephen Sondheim in his 1984 musical *Sunday in the Park with George*. Spoken by pointillist artist Georges Seurat as he stares at his easel, he is expressing the joy of calm and rational thought without distraction.

Meditation

One of the objectives of meditation is to slow mental activity to let the subconscious mind bubble up without judgement or control. Many individuals express their desire to "stop the noise" or "clear their thoughts." Many explore meditation to "improve their focus" or "help them concentrate." The quest for "inner peace and tranquillity" is common and many attach religious overtones to the process, which, while important, is not a requirement for meditative success.

Technology has dramatically limited our capacity for reflective examination. Social media platforms encourage spontaneous emotional reactions and the few seconds typically allotted between receipt and response leave little time for sober second-thought or moral consideration. It is a challenge to maintain composure, and the

current social and political arenas of hatred, narcissism, selfishness and bullying tend to inspire knee-jerk retributions.

Critical thinking is somewhat of an art form. It requires diligence, patience, commitment, integrity and a desire for truth. Taking arms against a sea of MacGuffins and fake news requires unbound creativity to parse fiction from fact, lies from truth, and by opposing end them. Studying The Arts gets you out of the box and into a world of possibilities.

Critical thinking is a discipline that can be learned.

Darwin

Darwin's 1859 *Origin of Species* was based on adaptation capability, a result of the creative randomness and improvised variation built into our evolving gene pool. It is the subtlety of improvisational nuance through adaptation that defines evolution, and although the expression *survival of the fittest* might work well in sports analogies, it was not a part of Charles Darwin's thesis, nor was it connected in any way to his evolutionary theory.

Creativity is naturally built into our bodies, both chemically and intellectually. It is an important component in the process of adaptation and, ultimately, our survival as a species.

We need creativity. The Arts are there to help.

Mental Health

Clarity of thought requires a healthy mind. Studies in addiction and mental health have shown that developing social connections through community involvement, especially in music-making ensembles, such as choirs, can have a profound effect on physical and mental well-being.

Anecdotal stories regarding the success of music for improving health abound, and many are supported with scientific studies. Some of the researched benefits and attributes of singing in a choir include the following:

- rhythmicity* (auditory and motor neuron connectivity)
- synchronicity* (group breathing and heart rates)
- stress relief* (cortisol decrease)
- physical therapy* (abdominal and facial exercise)
- creativity* (improvisational expression)
- depression management* (serotonin increase)
- communal participation* (primal needs of engagement)
- “happiness”* (increases in both oxytocin and dopamine).

Participating in The Arts, a forum that implicitly features *non-invasive, non-chemical, community-based and artistically-driven* mental health solutions, can improve the quality of our lives.

Sometimes a MacGuffin is just a harmless MacGuffin. It is not our job to blindly accept them as inconsequential, but to evaluate and analyse their premise and purpose. *Fake news masquerading as accepted and unquestionable truth is the ultimate marketing dream.* MacGuffins are used as distractions to support plot development that,

in the end, may or may not be right. Sometimes they can be nefarious and sometimes they are just another squirrel.

Shakespeare's works rarely provide answers. His positions on various topics are often vague and are almost always observational and reflective in nature, leaving judgement and opinions to his audience.

Searching for truth has forever been a full time job. From 400 years ago, Shakespeare's voice speaks to a world that sees history reliably repeating itself over and over and over again. What have we learned? What will we learn? What can we learn? Think about that.

Shakespeare, Music and Meditation: A MacGuffin Story

A MacGuffin Story is an essay about critical thinking, fake news, education, financial-industry MacGuffins and how **The Arts** can help.

All You Need Is Love

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) Keith William Loach
Sonnet 25

♩ = 92 Quatrain (verse)

Voices 123 Shhhh... *p* (Let) those who are in fa - vour with their stars Of pub - lic ho - nour and
 4x's prin - ces' fa - vour - ites their fair leaves spread But as the ma - ri - gold
 pain - ful war - rior fa - mou - sed for fight, Af - ter a thou - sand vic -

Voices 123 One two three *pp* (Whisper) (Optional harmonies. Gradually build through quatrains to couplet.)

Voice 4 One two three four One two three four One two three four One two three four (Whisper)

Clap/Stomp *pp*

Shakespeare's Sonnet 25 is about the elusiveness of happiness in the pursuit of fame and fortune. In the end, *love is all you need*.

*"Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust.
 Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy."*

Maria Ressa, 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Recipient