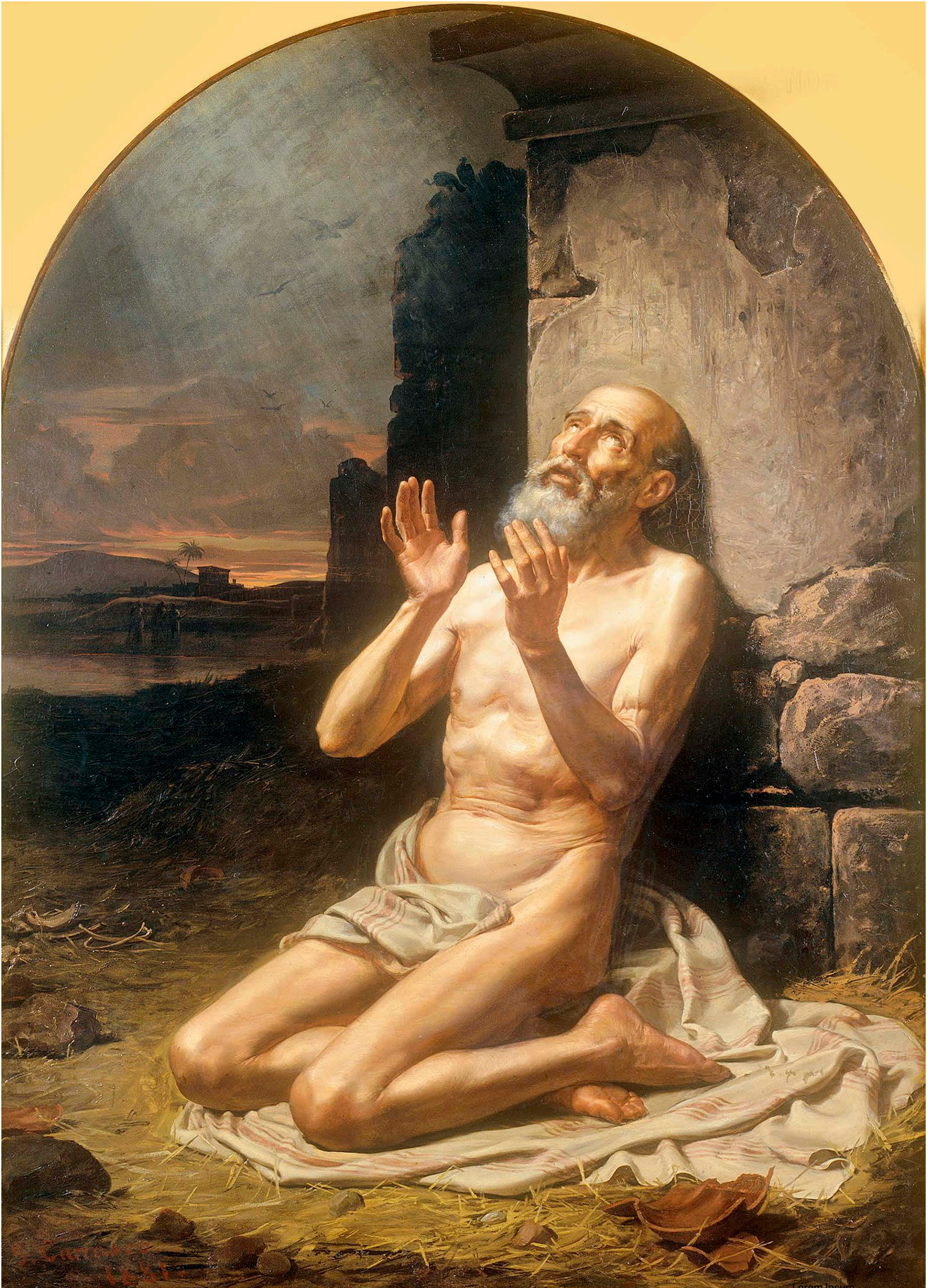


WEEK 23, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES
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"Job on the Dunghill," 1881, by Gonzalo Carrasco. National Museum of Art, Mexico City.

Comfort for Today
From Our Old Friend, Job...4



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RECOLLECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

'LET ME COUNT THE WAYS': WHY YOU MIGHT CONSIDER WRITING A SONNET

JEFF MINICK

With schools closed from the pandemic, the young men from Pennsylvania's Gregory the Great Academy, where my grandson Michael is a freshman, are taking their lessons via distance learning from their homes. In an effort to maintain the bonds of unity among these boarding school students, the English teachers decided to offer the same curriculum to everyone in grades 9 through 12. In addition to studying the Gospel of St. John, on which they write various meditations, and reading, discussing, and memorizing passages from "Hamlet," all the students are required to write and submit one sonnet a week to their teachers.

As Headmaster Luke Culley wrote to the students: "Our hope is that whether through following nature with their pens, or repeating the immortal lines of Shakespeare, or writing their own meditations on the Gospel of the beloved disciple, that all of our students will learn that beauty is real, and it is true, and it is something they can enter into with their whole being."

Apprehension and Delight

Although Headmaster Culley in the same letter reported hearing from a student about his "newfound joy in discovering how to write a sonnet," I suspect that some of these fellows find this assignment agonizing. To be told you must write a poem a week—and not only a poem, but a classical sonnet—isn't the same as being blindfolded and stood before a firing squad, but for a 15-year-old boy it might feel that way.

I am familiar with that anxiety firsthand. When I was a teacher, I once required my Advanced Placement literature students to write a sonnet, an assignment that brought moans, groans, and a gnashing of teeth. To assuage their anguish, I promised that I, too, would write a sonnet and share it with the class. With some careful editing, we shaped their work into presentable pieces of verse. One young woman wrote a lovely poem about her ballet class. Another classmate put his experiences as a baseball pitcher into his piece. Nathan, who treasured his Mac laptop as if it were gold, wrote his verse about that machine, sent it off to the Apple magazine, and was published.



Emily Dickinson kept her poems hidden in a trunk, where they were found after her death. The only authenticated portrait of Emily Dickinson after childhood. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

I Become a Poet

As for me, I was hooked. After writing that first sonnet—I no longer remember which one I delivered to the class—I wrote between 30 and 40 more over the next several years. A few found a home in a magazine or at an online site, but most of them I deemed either unworthy or too personal for publication. Besides these sonnets, I wrote other poems as well. Unlike Emily Dickinson, who kept her poems in a trunk to be discovered and published after her death, nearly all of mine reside in folders on my computer. Before taking a look at the good that might come from writing a sonnet, let

me share one I wrote after the death of a loved one:

Locomotive in Perpetuum
A point of strange and brutal clarity
Accrues to us when loved ones turn
toward death;
For these few ticks of time we pause
bereft,
Caught helpless, fixed and pinned by
agony;
On platforms hot with plank and tar
we stand
In blazing light beside the shining
track
And stare in glass as those we love
stare back.
Their dying faces fade. They reprimand
By dulling eyes our feeble hopes and
prayers.
We tap against the glass, we whisper
screams;
To banish track and glass, this flaming
air,
We tell ourselves—*This is not real but
dream.*
*Please help, help them, dear God, dear
God, we pray—*
And then the train shakes loose and
slips away.

Writing sonnets like this one was intense for me. Word choice, rhythm, rhyme, and of course, meaning—to pack all of these elements into a restricted number of words and lines sharply focuses the mind. Oscar Wilde once spoke of working all morning to take a comma out of a poem and all afternoon putting it back again. That observation, though exaggerated, sums up my experience with the sonnet and with writing poetry in general.

What Exactly Is a Sonnet?

The structure of a sonnet bears a resemblance to ballroom dancing. The meter, beat, and rhyme are the man in the black tuxedo, the frame for the picture, while the passions we bring to those parameters, our words and thoughts, are the woman in her brightly colored gown, the picture itself.

"Sonnet" derives from the Italian "sonetto," meaning "little song." It's a 14-line poem focused on a single theme and most often written in iambic pentameter, which means that each line contains five sets of unstressed/stressed syllables. The first eight lines of an Italian sonnet generally set up the problem of the poem and use the rhyme scheme abba; the last six lines seek to provide an answer to the problem and follow a cde rhyme or some variation of that. The English sonnet has three four-line quatrains followed, like a little punch, by the concluding statement of the two final lines. The rhyme scheme is usually abab cdcd efef gg.

My sonnet above blends both forms, using the Italian in the first two quatrains and the English in the last six lines. Here you can detect both rhyme schemes.

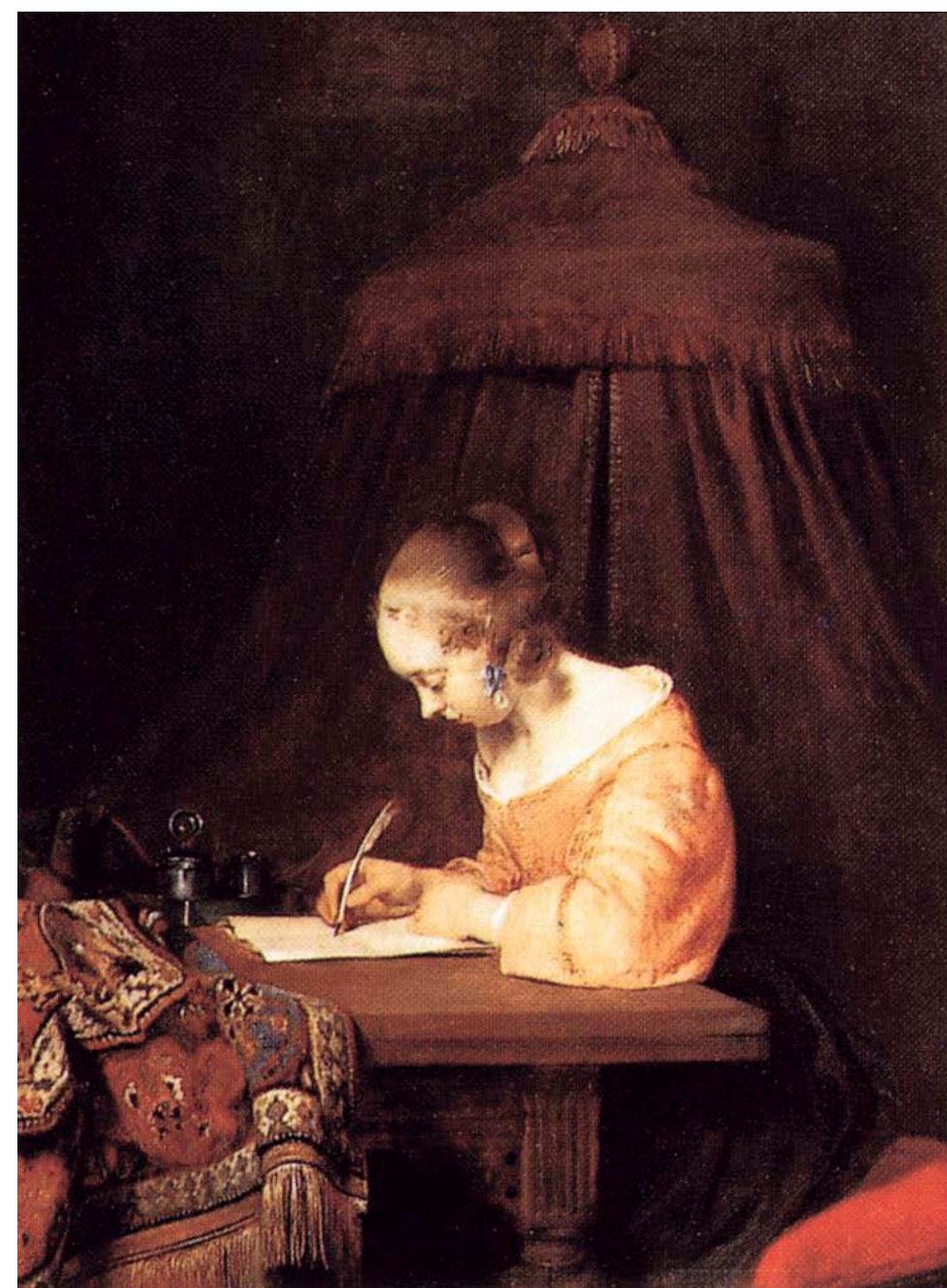
Benefits

So why consider attempting a sonnet? First, the guidelines for the construction of this form provide a sort of gymnasium for the mind, a personal trainer intent on exercising and strengthening your mental powers. To undertake a sonnet provides fresh air, jogging, and healthy food for the brain.

Second, a sonnet can remove us from the anxieties of everyday life. When we must bring all our powers of concentration into this verbal puzzle, that focus takes us away from the bills on the kitchen table, the worries over a meeting at work, or the daily news over which we have so little control. In its way, writing a sonnet offers a form of meditation, a chance to devote our attention fully to one task and so return to the world renewed in spirit.

To try our hand at a sonnet also forces us to blend the intellect and the passions in a way that can elevate us, stun us, and humble us. This challenge can be exhilarating.

Finally, there is this reason given by Headmaster Culley in his letter to my grandson and the other students: "For most of us mere mortals, writing a son-



(Above) Sonnet writing can have many benefits. A painting by Gerard ter Borch, Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands.



Why consider attempting a sonnet?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote some sonnets that are not difficult to read.



(Right) Robert Frost, one of America's most celebrated poets.

net is not the sort of thing you do spontaneously or just for kicks. We write the sonnet because it is part of an assignment. And yet, there is the possibility that entering into this small contemplative space called a sonnet and entering it again and yet again, one can, even mere mortals, learn to love and embrace the joy of creating, as we discover how to make for ourselves and for the world this tiny vessel of words that is both intelligent and beautiful."

Tips

Should you decide to try the sonnet, here

are some suggestions to help you begin.

Read some sonnets, preferably aloud. Study the complexities of a Shakespearean poem or the more approachable works like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How Do I Love Thee?" When you read these verses aloud, you can hear and taste the iambic rhythms.

Select a topic you find appealing. If you enjoy gardening, write about the beauty of the rose or the ripeness of a tomato.

Consider presenting your grandchildren with sonnets on their birthdays. The same holds true for any loved one.

Write the sonnet by hand. I have tried to compose poetry on my computer, but for me that method generally fails. Somehow, the intimacy of pen and paper seems more necessary for poetry.

Use a thesaurus and a rhyming dictionary. Sometimes you'll want a more exciting word, a more exact word, or you'll get stuck making a word rhyme. Some writers scorn these tools, but I find them, especially the thesaurus, invaluable.

Play with the words and sentences. Become a child again and treat that sonnet as a toy. When you tire of it, put it aside and come back another time.

Robert Frost once said, "Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down." When you write a sonnet, the net is up and secured.

All you have to do is get on the court.

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

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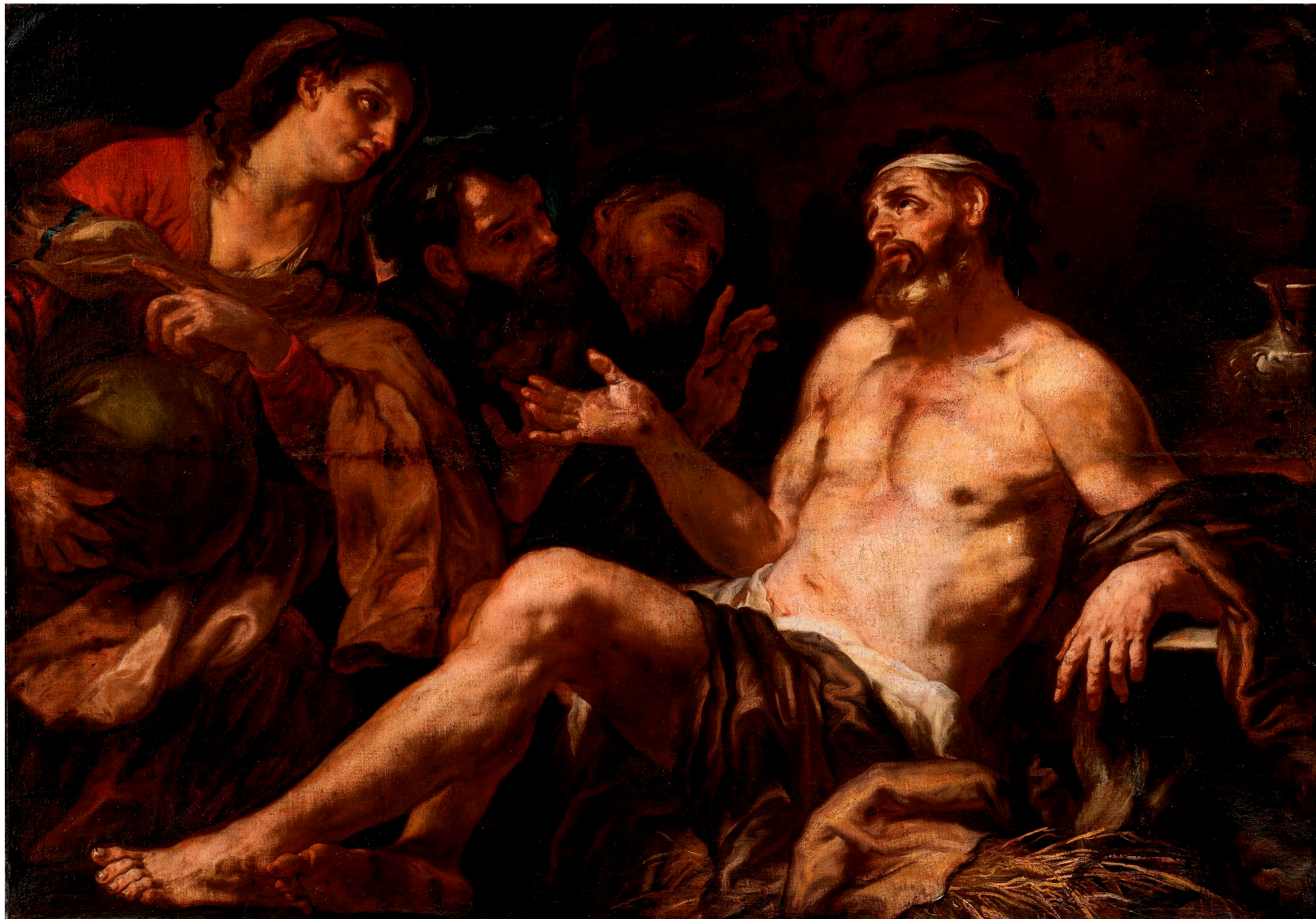
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(Above) All of Job's children die. "Job and His Children," 1650, by Domenico Piola. Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Spain.



(Left) "Job Tormented by Demons and Abused by His Wife" by Flemish engraver Lucas Emil Vorsterman, after Sir Peter Paul Rubens. Gift of Frank Anderson Trapp, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



"Job and His Comforters" by Luca Giordano. Smithsonian American Art Museum, transfer from the National Institute.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Comfort for Today From Our Old Friend, Job

JAMES SALE

The title song for the 1960s film "Alfie," starring Michael Caine, had the opening line: "What's it all about, Alfie?" Of course, this is an age-old question, and also a profound one, because whoever and wherever we are, this question keeps popping up.

Some hundred years or so ago, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, G.K. Chesterton, made the case that the Book of Job in the Old Testament was one of the greatest works of literature ever penned. He made the point, first, that all great literature was allegorical in that it espoused some definite view of the cosmos. We read, for example, the "Iliad" because we understand that life is a battle, and here preeminently we find life as a battle. Or perhaps even more compellingly, we study the "Odyssey" because life is a journey and here we find the ultimate journey. Indeed, so successful is Homer's "Odyssey" that we routinely refer to difficult undertakings or journeys as odysseys.

If that is the case, then what is the allegory that the Book of Job purports to expound? And the answer is perhaps the most incredible one of all: that life is a riddle, an enigma, a mystery beyond anything that human beings can comprehend or even imagine. In other words, it attempts to answer the question, or a variant thereof, "What's it all about?" And it does so in a way that is truly stupendous!

Ignored by All but the Wisest

It is curiously easy to forget all about the Book of Job. One reason for that might be

that it's tucked away somewhere in the middle of the Old Testament (in Christian terminology) and the human mind tends to remember the first and the last things, but not the ones in the middle. (To prove that to yourself, answer these two questions: Who was the first man on the moon? And who the third?)

Furthermore, it is in the Old Testament, and on the scale of importance to Christians, it doesn't compare with the Gospels and the central persona of the New Testament, Jesus Christ. Then, thirdly, it's not just Christians who might overlook it: The Jews themselves might see the Book of Job as not having the same authority as their Torah and subsequent historical writings, for clearly it doesn't.

So here's a really interesting thing: On the one hand, the Jewish scriptures are loaded with historical specificity—the names, the genealogies, the dates, the almost uninventible details that litter the pages of the Old Testament (and the New as well)—and on the other, they have fabulous, symbolic and mythological stories that populate the early Genesis and one or two other books (such as Jonah).

The story of Adam and Eve, for example: When did that happen, where is Eden, and so on? Two biblical scholars, W. Oesterley and T. Robinson in "The New Bible Commentary Revised" put it this way: "There are few poems in all literature whose date and historical background are of less importance than they are in the book of Job... It is a universal poem, and that is one of the features which give it its value and interest for us today."

Thus, it is that Job falls through the cracks: It seems like an early Genesis story and, at the same time, like some-



"The Lord Answering Job Out of the Whirlwind," 1825–26, by William Blake. From "Illustrations of the Book of Job," published by William Blake. Gift of Edward Bement, 1917, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

thing from the Book of Joshua as well. In other words, it is historical in some senses but almost entirely mythical in others. Small wonder, then, that it doesn't receive the attention it is due. Sometimes hybrids are difficult for people to get.

Of course, there is a simple explanation as to why it is more difficult to understand than most of the other books: It is primarily a poem; it is poetry (as Oesterley and Robinson note). Poetry is ambiguous; poetry is more difficult than prose.

And yes, the Psalms are poetry, but they are mainly short, heartfelt lyrics whose central thrust is much easier to understand. Hence readers love them and quote them. But Job?

As I said, Job is an epic poem, not some short lyric, and we must understand that this means that Job is an epic on a scale comparable to Homer's works. Yet Homer's works are not found within a honeycomb of other works. Thus, Job, sadly, gets lost. Despite its placement, Luther thought that Job was "magnificent and sublime as no other book of scripture," and Tennyson remarked that it was "the greatest poem of ancient or modern times."

Rebels Without a Cause

What, then, makes the Book of Job so profound and, while we are in the middle

of a pandemic, so relevant for our lives today? I cannot cover all the incredible beauties of this poem in the space of this short article, so I must concentrate on one key thing to draw to your attention.

Ever since the counterculture revolution beginning in the West in the 1950s and '60s, there has been a questioning of culture, of authority, and even reality itself.

And alongside this notion of "questioning" goes the idea of gritty realism: a focus on the less romantic, the less beautiful, the uglier sides of life. We see this in literature, music, theater, and the arts; it's virtually a badge of honor to be unconventional, unpleasant, explicit, offensive, and I could go on.

The proponents of this revolution (unconventional people) fearlessly face reality as it is and describe (embrace even) it in all its ugliness, and then so bravely face it down. Then they give themselves moral brownie points for their virtue (a primary virtue being "open-minded," although mostly the actual "virtue" is virtue signaling—promoting their own egos.)

The rebels without causes have prevailed and pervade our culture. That is what is so astonishing. This attitude has been allowed to gain cultural ascendancy so that, paradoxically, being unconventional is now entirely conventional—indeed, somewhat tiring and boring.

Where this "open-mindedness" (every perspective is entitled to respect) and being unconventional ends up, predictably, is in secularism, for what is more conventional than a belief in God? Therefore, we have the denial of the spiritual in human life, a belief instead in materialism and, most bluntly, atheism. And there is a huge

The great spiritual traditions are not conventional, middle-class cop-outs that ignore reality.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.

commercial market driving this lack of moral foundation to ever new heights of human degradation.

Even With Just Cause

So what has Job to do with all this? Well, Job is quintessentially the character who endures the very worst of all the tragedies life can offer: the loss of all possessions, of wife and children, and the suffering from a dreadful disease afflicting his very skin, as well as enduring false comfort from questionable friends in his hour of need. Here is the man—ecce homo!—who really has seen the horrors of life and suffering, who has every reason to be a rebel. His wife, before she dies, even urges him to curse God and be done with it, and yet Job comes out of this not an atheist but a much greater man because his faith is even stronger.

How can this be? The disillusionment and despair of Job are real enough, and they are portrayed in the most agonizing and personal detail. At one point, he even wishes not to have been born and for the day of his birth to be forever lost. But underpinning this is an unquenchable desire for truth, an unwavering sense that some wrong has been done him, and that if only the Creator of all would appear, then there would be an explanation for all this... this what? This mess, this stuff, this relentless suffering.

And Job won't be argued out of this primary position he takes: He has not done wrong, he does not deserve to suffer, and if God would but appear, then an explanation would be forthcoming.

At this point, the sublime happens, for God does appear out of the whirlwind. But the genius of it is that he doesn't

answer Job's questions at all. If you want conventional answers to the problem of suffering and the existence of evil (God, incidentally, having allowed Satan to have his way with Job), then this is not the place for it.

Instead, God asks his own questions. In a relentless barrage of breathtaking poetry, God demands that Job answer. Theologically speaking, this is exactly right, for God can never be questioned or summoned to account for himself.

More importantly still, as the poetry of God sinks into the very being of Job (and remember that poetry speaks to reason, emotion, and imagination all in one go), Job repents of even asking his questions. Now, literally or in his mind's eye, he sees God and begins to feel the astonishing works of God for what they are.

True Comfort

Job's comforters were small comfort. As theologian E.S.P. Heaveror commented, also in "The New Bible Commentary Revised": "The word of man is unable to penetrate the darkness of Job's mind; the Word of God brings abiding light." The light that it brings through submission to God is faith and courage. It is a submission to reality.

The great spiritual traditions, therefore, are not conventional, middle-class cop-outs that ignore reality. They are, on the contrary, fiery encounters with reality, or The Reality, which have a transformative power.

Surely, today, in the time of the COVID-19 plague, faith and courage are exactly what we need; what we don't need is the counterculture's false heroics. Job, then, can be our comfort.

ONLINE-THEATER REVIEW

Shakespeare's Backwoods 'Cymbeline'

BETTY MOHR

One of Shakespeare's last plays, "Cymbeline" is considered to be one of his more problematic works. That's because it features bizarre events, confusing actions, and inexplicable motivations. It has so many twists and turns that it's not always easy to follow, which is why it's rarely produced. But transformed into "Cymbeline: A Folk Tale With Music," it's a charming romp of a show.

Indeed, that's what the First Folio Theatre's executive director David Rice did. His folksy fable adaptation of "Cymbeline" is placed in Civil War Appalachia, accompanied by rollicking original bluegrass and gospel music composed by Michael Keefe with lyrics by Rice.

The show became a big hit when it premiered at First Folio in an outdoor staging at Mayslake Peabody Estate in Oak Brook, Illinois, in 2013, winning Joseph Jefferson awards for Best Adaptation and Original Music for Rice and Keefe.

The theater recorded a live performance of the production and is now offering an online streaming Vimeo video recording of it from June 3-14. Although online viewing is not quite the same as sitting in the open air by candlelight under the stars, a little imagination can go a long way. Throw a blanket on the living room floor, prepare a picnic dinner, dim the lights, open a bottle of wine, and be transported to another time and another place.

The Story

In the original Shakespeare play, a king is married to a nasty queen, a feisty heroine fights for love, mistaken identities abound, and a magic potion creates havoc. First Folio remains faithful to those aspects of Shakespeare's classic but spins the story with important differences.

Shakespeare's original begins with the King of Britain opposing the marriage of his daughter, Imogen, to Posthumus, who makes a big mistake in mentioning to the evil Iachimo her faithfulness. Iachimo, in turn, brags that he can seduce her. Posthumus becomes so jealous that he wants to kill Imogen. She disguises herself as a man and runs away, where she discovers brothers she never knew she had.

The transformed version, elegantly directed by Michael Goldberg, is presented with a wooden-planked cabin centerpiece, surrounded by trees and green shrubbery (designed by Angela Weber Miller). Evoking a backwoods atmosphere, it all looks very country. And when members of the cast, dressed in period garb (by Rachel Lambert), begin to strum their banjos, pick



The cunning Iachimo (Jeff Award nominee James Earl Jones II) steals into the bed chamber of innocent Imogen (Kate McDermott) to defame her character, in First Folio Theatre's 2013 production of "Cymbeline," available for online viewing.

'Cymbeline: A Folk Tale With Music'

Tickets Available
FirstFolio.org June 3-14

their guitars, and sweep the strings of their fiddles, it feels as though one is taking part in a knee-slapping, toe-tapping hoedown.

Set in 1863 in West Virginia where mountain men rule, it begins as a yarn spinner (wonderful Ron Keaton) of the backwoods community opens a big book and narrates the fantasy within. He tells how Cymbeline (a fine portrayal by John Milewski), the patriarch of a frontier community, has aligned himself with the Southern rebels and hates paying taxes to the Yankee North. His daughter Imogen (an engaging portrayal by Kate McDermott) is in love with Posthumus (a nice turn by Matthew Keffer), but her cruel stepmother (a compelling Lia Mortensen) wants Imogen to instead marry her frivolous son Cloten (Andrew Behling).

The villainous Iachimo (an intense James Earl Jones II) makes a bet with Posthumus that he can seduce Imogen. (The scene in which he sneaks into Imogen's bedroom is one of the show's highlights.) Posthumus goes crazy with jealousy. To save her life, Imogen disguises herself and runs away to the hills, where she meets Morgan (Keaton) and two brothers (Ryan Czerwonko and Tyler Rich) she never knew she had.

In the end, there's forgiveness and restoration, and everything ends up happily ever after:

Posthumus and Imogen get back together, Cymbeline pays his taxes and is

reunited with his two sons, and Iachimo gets his due. (Everything is joyful except for Cloten who ends up losing his head.) It's a win-win for almost everyone, especially for those who watch the video.

The folksy fable adaptation of 'Cymbeline' is placed in Civil War Appalachia.

What is especially appealing about the video is its high technical quality, featuring sharp closeups of the performers with great lighting by Michael McNamara so that you can clearly see the expressions on the actors' faces and hear every word due to perfect acoustics, courtesy of sound designer Christopher Kriz.

In David Rice's "Cymbeline," it is easy to connect the dots. And while Shakespeare's dialogue is all there, it's delivered with a twang. Shakespeare has never been so earthy and so much fun.

As an arts writer and movie/theater/opera critic, Betty Mohr has been published in the Chicago Sun-Times, The Chicago Tribune, The Australian, The Dramatist, the SouthtownStar, the Post Tribune, The Herald News, The Globe and Mail in Toronto, and other publications.

BOOK REVIEW

A Fascinating Man Revealed in a Well-Researched Book

JUDD HOLLANDER

Phineas Taylor ("P.T.") Barnum (1810-1891), of Barnum & Bailey Circus fame, almost certainly never said "there's a sucker born every minute." He did, however, say "I don't believe in duping the public, but I believe in first attracting and then pleasing them."

Robert Wilson's biography "Barnum: An American Life" shows his subject often walking a fine line between these points of view on his way to becoming one of the most distinctive individuals of the 19th century. Best remembered for his showmanship, Barnum was also an author, publisher, lecturer, philanthropist, and politician.

The Showman

Barnum, Wilson says, always targeted his entertainment toward the middle class, but never regarded his audiences as people to be taken advantage of. He saw them as hardworking souls who deserved unusual and wondrous entertainment, all in a family-friendly environment. If an exhibition, such as the display of the remains of a so-called mermaid, wasn't quite what it seemed, then as long as the audience enjoyed the experience, what was the harm?

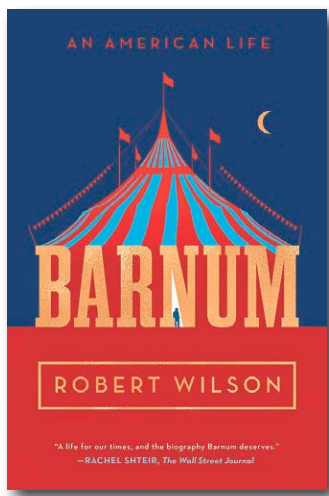
Born in Bethel, Connecticut, into what he would later call "an atmosphere of merriment," Barnum proved himself adept at mathematics and linguistics. Though

he hated hard work, he quickly learned that he enjoyed the feeling of independence that money gave him. He also realized he was happiest when working for himself.

Barnum got an early understanding of the power of publicity when he became involved in running lotteries, an unregulated and wildly popular practice at the time. His advertising in papers boosted sales for his contests above those of his competitors. Though, as Wilson also notes, Barnum often had a double-edged relationship with the press. He battled with those critics and reviewers who saw his shows as exploitative and fake, all while their papers accepted his paid advertising.

Wilson makes a point to explore Barnum's actions in the context of his era. Barnum first got involved in show business in 1835 when he took over an act featuring a blind African-American woman, who was supposedly 161 years of age and present at George Washington's birth. While such an exhibition would be completely unacceptable today, it was a perfect fit for the times, when news took days to travel from one location to the next and when people were hungry for new attractions and experiences.

Barnum would spend the next several years touring with various acts, until he purchased Scudder's American Museum in lower New York City in 1842. The building, a large storehouse of artifacts and de-



"Barnum: An American Life"
Robert Wilson
Simon & Schuster
352 pages.

voted to lectures and presentations of both the educational and entertaining variety, would become Barnum's home base for years. He acquired as many new objects and acts as possible for his museum.

Much of the book recounts Barnum's show business triumphs. There are entire chapters dealing with such people as "General" Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton, a young boy with dwarfism) and the Swedish singer Jenny Lind, as well as the extensive promotional campaigns Barnum created for each.

The work also explores Barnum's late-in-life partnership with James A. Bailey and his partners actually bested Barnum in terms of popularity with their own circus acts, leading Barnum to agree to join forces with them.

Best remembered for his showmanship, P.T. Barnum was also an author, publisher, lecturer, philanthropist, and politician.

The Man

Just as interesting is how Wilson shows Barnum to be someone who evolved personally. Growing up, he seemed to accept slavery, or at least turned a blind eye to it. However, by

1855 he had become a strong supporter of abolition. His disdain for those who refused to support the Union cause during the Civil War spurred him to get involved in politics.

Barnum served as a member of the Connecticut legislature and later the mayor of Bridgeport. He unsuccessfully ran for Congress and was considered at points to be a possible presidential candidate.

He supported several movements, including the temperance movement, eventually abstaining from any type of alcohol and lecturing frequently on the subject.

While Barnum was an avid letter writer and correspondent, he spoke very little about his family or any personal or financial tragedies he suffered. He was widowed once and married twice, and had four children, two of which he outlived. His pursuits often required him to be away from his family for more than a year at a time, which Wilson puts down to Barnum's restlessness and need to immerse himself in new projects.

Well-researched—with quite an extensive bibliography and a footnote section of interesting information that didn't make it into the book itself—"Barnum: An American Life" is straightforward yet deeply involving and makes for a fascinating read.

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle.



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting in the movies.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Mel Gibson's Homage to Freedom and Integrity

MARK JACKSON

Prior to his 2006 fall from grace due to a drunken, anti-Semitic rant that immediately blacklisted him in Hollywood, Mel Gibson had transitioned, à la Clint Eastwood and Robert Redford before him, from hunky movie star to now-you-really-have-to-take-him-seriously iconic filmmaker. The zenith of that trajectory (with Gibson doing triple-threat duty as producer-director-star) was the epic, almost-three-hour-long "Braveheart."

Scotland Versus England

Set in the Scottish Highlands in the late 13th century, "Braveheart" opens with one of the most haunting, brilliant soundtracks in movie history, over which Scottish nobleman Sir Robert the Bruce (Angus Macfadyen) narrates the following monologue:

"I shall tell you of William Wallace. Historians from England will say I am a liar. But history was written by those who have handed heroes. The king of Scotland had died without a son. And the king of England, a cruel pagan known as "Edward the Longshanks," claimed the throne of Scotland for himself ...

After a nightmarish establishing scene in which young William (James Robinson) stumbles upon some of Longshanks's (Patrick McGoohan) treachery against the Scots—dead knights and pages hanging from the rafters—and sees his father slain, the boy is taken forth from the village by his uncle Argyle (Brian Cox) to France. There he receives a nobleman-level education, learning French as well as Latin.

When he returns in his late 20s to the village of his youth, William intends to live a peaceful life, raising crops and a family. He basically courts the girl next door, Murrin (Catherine McCormack). At 4 years old, Murrin (Mhairi Calvey) had picked a

purple thistle to give to 7-year-old William, to comfort him, as he stood weeping at his father's burial. He never forgot her empathy and compassion.

Reenter ruthless Longshanks. As he smirkingly notes: "The trouble with Scotland ... is that it's full of Scots." And so he attempts to breed them out, imposing the hellish law of "Prima Noct" (first night), which declared that a new Scottish bride must submit to being deflowered with intent to impregnate by an English nobleman on her wedding night.

Wallace is not having any of that and marries Murrin in secret, but when an English soldier attempts to rape her and she violently resists, she's tied to a stake and publicly executed.

When Wallace finds out about it, England is soon given notice that the towering rage of an alpha-dominant Scottish leader in command of a shocking array of guerrilla warfare tactics has been unleashed on it like a full-blown, modern-day special operations warrior.

The Battle of Stirling

The historic Battle of Stirling, where, almost biblically, Wallace's starving and outnumbered ragtag band of farmer-soldiers—warrior poets, he lauds them—armed with handmade weapons took on and decimated Longshanks's armor-clad and heavy-horsed Northern English army, is a sight to be seen.

Building on Kenneth Branagh's 1989 groundbreaking, arrows-whirling-overhead and horse-hooves-churning-the-muck "Henry V," Stirling ups the ante with a brutal depiction of the repelling of a thundering cavalry charge via long, thin, sharpened tree trunks, raised last second to impale the armored-up horses and riders.

Throughout, Wallace, on horseback and bedaubed with electric-blue war paint (which inspired a global sports-fan craze

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Acknowledging Spiritual Reality

MARK JACKSON

"Thunderheart" (1992) has something in common with today's spiritual movements, which claim that soon everyone's third eye will rapidly evolve and suddenly humans will have visions of angels sitting in the clouds. If that is indeed the case, it is going to present a major problem for atheists and nonbelievers. They'll be stunned, dazed, and confused.

In "Thunderheart," Ray Levoi (Val Kilmer), who is a young FBI agent, is brought in from Washington, D.C., to investigate the murder of an Oglala Sioux tribesman on the South Dakota Badlands-situated Bear Creek reservation. Coming into contact with the powerful energy of a tribal medicine man, agent Levoi subsequently has many visions. He also witnesses human-to-deer shape-shifting, has prophetic dreams, and is visited by what might be a winged messenger. (It might also just be an owl.) At first, he's considerably dazed and confused.

Conspiracies Abound

Ray Levoi has been assigned a homicide case connected to the revolutionary upris-

ing of the radical "traditionalist" group ARM (Aboriginal Rights Movement), who are in a minor civil war with the thuggish Guardians Of the Oglala Nation (GOON) leaders, who are allied with Washington.

Why did Levoi get assigned? Cynical FBI reasoning that his one-quarter Sioux blood will curry favor with the locals.

The locals that Levoi gets to know are 1) the traditionalist Walter Crow Horse (Graham Greene), a constantly wisecracking, hilariously bird-flipping-while-riding-by-on-his-motorcycle Oglala sheriff, 2) Maggie Eagle Bear (Sheila Tousey), a pretty, Dartmouth-educated, radical school teacher intent on reporting the uranium-drilling source of the community ground water being poisoned, and 3) Grandpa Sam Reaches (Chief Ted Thin Elk), a folklore-filled tribal elder with a face like an ancient red-rock cliff, who likes to pretend he doesn't speak English. These three characters alone make "Thunderheart" worth watching.

Other key figures are Levoi's boss Frank Coutelle (Sam Shepard), a tough, seasoned, highly cynical

'Braveheart'

Director
Mel Gibson

Starring
Mel Gibson, Brendan Gleeson, David O'Hara, Catherine McCormack, Sophie Marceau, Patrick McGoohan

Rated

R

Running Time
2 hours, 58 minutes

Release Date
May 24, 1995

★★★★★



Brendan Gleeson (L) and Mel Gibson in "Braveheart."

of attending football games sans shirts and in full face-paint in freezing weather), inspires his troops with hoarse speeches about Scottish freedom.

In general, "Braveheart" is jam-packed with all manner of bone-crunching ax murders and carnage: You've got disembowelments, decapitations, castrations, buckets of red-hot black pitch poured over ramparts, skull-crushings via maces, and manly men bleeding out in the dirt.

Director Mel Gibson's focus is on valor, bravery, and integrity—not history.

Plot Lines and Players

Then there are the various betrayals of Wallace by Scottish lords, as well as by the reluctant Scottish heir to the throne, Robert the Bruce, whose narration frames the entire story from the perspective of his own journey to manhood, truthfulness, courage, and integrity.

A fun fact: The very Irish Brendan Gleeson plays the very Scottish, red-bearded Hamish, and the very Scottish David O'Hara portrays the very Irish Stephen, the self-admitted madman in Wallace's inner circle, who claims that an Irishman

must, when in doubt, look heavenward and converse directly with The Almighty.

Although women are scarce in this many tale, they carry the film's soul: Catherine McCormack as Murrin, who inspires Wallace from the afterlife, and Sophie Marceau as French-born Princess Isabelle. Isabelle is the wife of Longshanks's son. Hers was an arranged marriage to the prince, who is homosexual. She is also Longshanks's unwilling political emissary to Wallace, but she later becomes Wallace's lover and accomplice.

Martyrdom

After all the rousing battles, "Braveheart" grows sadder and, indeed, legendary as Wallace is finally captured by Longshanks and hauled to England to be made an example of: He is strung up by the neck, bone-poppingly stretched on the rack, and publicly disemboweled. Yet like some present-day Army Combat Applications Group or Naval Special Warfare Development Group warrior, he refuses to break or compromise in his quest for Scottish freedom.

Thusly glorifying the talent of will to endure and forbear, Gibson canonized Wallace to the point where Scotland made a state of Wallace that looks like Gibson.

Is "Braveheart" historically accurate? As Robert the Bruce says, "History was written by those who have handed heroes," so probably not. But Gibson's focus is on valor, bravery, and integrity—not history.



Val Kilmer (L) and Chief Ted Thin Elk in "Thunderheart."

'Thunderheart'

Director
Michael Apted

Starring
Val Kilmer, Sam Shepard, Graham Greene, Fred Ward, Fred Dalton Thompson, Sheila Tousey, Chief Ted Thin Elk

Rated

R

Running Time
1 hour, 59 minutes

Release Date
April 3, 1992

★★★★★

Fed who does not suffer fools gladly, and the antidisestablishmentarian Jack Milton (Fred Ward), a perennially shotgun-toting Sioux lawman in cahoots with the Feds, who maintains political power by meting out vigilante justice via his local GOON squad.

Coutelle, who's been involved with the reservation for years, claims the murder is an open-and-shut case, and he blithely fingers traditionalist leader Jimmy Looks Twice (John Trudell) to be the killer.

Blood Will Out

As mentioned, Val Kilmer's Levoi has Oglala blood in his veins but no knowledge of his heritage and history. He's immediately derided with the nickname "Washington Redskin" by the tribesmen. But he's also teasingly taken under the wing of the sheriff (and master-tracker) Crow Horse, who stirs Levoi's roots-curiosity via a trail

of breadcrumbs involving startlingly brilliant character insights and enticing sprinklings of folk wisdom.

Levoi's tribal education and self-enlightenment also entail visits to Grandpa Reaches's peeling-paint, relic-strewn trailer, whose insights are downright spooky and paradigm shifting for Levoi.

At first Levoi doesn't want to believe, but as the evidence piles up, he starts his own clandestine investigation—the turning point being when Grandpa informs Levoi that he's been summoned to the Badlands by the spirits to fulfill a mission, revealed to Levoi in the form of desert mirage-like visions of ancient tribal dances. Levoi's spiritual Hero's Journey of self-discovery eventually picks up the narrative of his previous incarnation, as a medicine man in that very region.

Hidden in Plain Sight As a reservation-politics murder mystery, "Thunderheart" ultimately becomes too complex to comprehend, with no satisfying resolution to the ever-widening conspiracies Levoi unearths. Probably because Native American reservation problems, in general, don't present easy solutions.

"Thunderheart" is at its best when accompanied by cliché but nevertheless effective eagle screams, overblown native flutes, peace pipes, rattles, and

drums. It ties together in ways that whisper of a deep, organic logic, both the humanly visible as well as the existence of unseen, other-dimensional realities that were commonplace in early American tribal life.

Director Michael Apted builds worlds, cutting between the slum squalor of rez life and then back out to the stark beauty of the wild Badlands-mooncape desert, strewn with the occasional defunct 1940s vehicle. Grandpa's cozy, oversized rabbit hutch of a trailer reveals a "third world" hiding in plain sight in the American heartland, as well as the ancient wisdoms America has lost.

Speaking of hiding in plain sight, it must also be mentioned that "Thunderheart" was the extremely liberal Robert De Niro's first-ever TriBeCa production. As such, it's probably safe to say that it romanticizes the pro-communism leanings by papering over the radicalism: To subtly infer that extreme social reform is close to lost Native American mysticism and spirituality and therefore has the moral high ground stems from a misunderstanding of the communist agenda.

But, ignoring momentarily the radicalism, it's clear that before the nascent end times for these Native Americans, Levoi has reckoned with and come to acknowledge spiritual reality.

REACHING WITHIN:

WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

The Balancing Act of the Beautiful

ERIC BESS

Gustave Moreau was a 19th-century symbolist painter in France. The symbolists believed that the art of the 18th century was too scientific and had discarded spirituality from its subject matter and execution.

Artists also found themselves competing with the newly invented camera. Instead of only reproducing reality like a camera would or ignoring the spiritual as earlier artists had, the symbolists set out to create suprasensible imagery by attempting to synthesize the content of their souls with representations of the natural world.

According to the website National Museum of Gustav Moreau, "Moreau wanted to create a body of work where, in his own words, the soul could find: all the aspirations of dreams, tenderness, love, enthusiasm and religious ascent towards the higher spheres, where everything in it is elevated, inspiring, moral and beneficent; where all is imaginative and impulsive soaring off into sacred, unknown, mysterious lands."

Moreau believed this kind of painting to be "the language of God! One day the eloquence of this silent art will be appreciated. I have lavished all my care and endeavor on this eloquence, whose character, nature and spiritual power have never been satisfactorily defined."

Moreau's appreciation for the spirit of painting caused him to deeply study the painters of the past. He went to Italy and studied works by Renaissance artists Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, and others. He took the knowledge he gained from studying these masters and set out to revitalize painting by infusing his own spirit into it.

'Perseus and Andromeda'

Around 1867, Moreau began painting "Perseus and Andromeda," based on a Greek myth about beauty, love, and courage.

Andromeda was a beautiful princess whose mother angered the gods when she said that Andromeda was more beautiful than the Nereid sea nymphs. Poseidon sent a sea monster to punish Andromeda for this blasphemy.

Perseus, on his way after slaying the monster Medusa, saw the sea monster attacking Andromeda. He was captivated by Andromeda's beauty and wanted to rescue her. He flew to the sea monster on his horse, Pegasus, and revealed Medusa's head to it. The sea monster looked into Medusa's eyes and turned to stone.

Thus, Perseus saved Andromeda from the monster, and they are later married. The goddess Athena promised Andromeda a place in the sky as a constellation.

The Balance of Beauty

Moreau depicts the moment Perseus sweeps down on Pegasus to save Andromeda. Andromeda's left foot is chained to a rock, and the sea monster threatens her from below. Perseus points Medusa's head toward the sea monster to turn it to stone.

Moreau organized the picture plane with higher contrast and energy on the left side. The right side is left almost empty, and the area where the two rocks meet at the bottom of the right side serves as an arrow that draws our attention to the tail of the sea monster.

The head of the sea monster points directly at Andromeda who, as the focal point, takes up the center of the composition. She covers herself modestly, and her body possesses an elegant curve.

From Andromeda, we are led to the head of Pegasus, whose energy matches the head of the Medusa with eyes wide and corners of the mouth pulled down. The eyes of Medusa, the head of Pegasus, and Perseus's red robe lead our eye back down to the sea monster to again start the journey upward.

For the Love of Beauty

Why is the left side of the picture plane full of life and the right side practically empty? Why does Moreau depict Andromeda as the focal point? Why does Pegasus appear as if he is in distress?

Moreau depicts the moment Perseus sweeps down on Pegasus to save Andromeda.

For me, the difference in the right and left sides of the composition represents balance. The symbolists were suggesting that the art of the 18th century was unbalanced and became too scientific. Art needs spirit and emotion too. It could

also be that beauty itself occurs through balance: When nothing can be added or subtracted, there we may find beauty.

Is the beauty in our own souls contingent on the balance of our spirit and emotions? Maybe this is why Andromeda—whom I see as the symbolic personification of beauty and therefore of balance—is the focal point and in the middle of the busy left side and empty right side. Here, beauty is modest, elegant, and even calm despite the surrounding danger. Beauty bends and flows with its environment.

In contrast, I see the sea monster below as symbolic of ugliness and distress. Does ugliness occur within us when we are unbalanced? There's always a danger of ugliness overwhelming the beautiful in our lives when emotions based on unsatisfied desires become extreme.

Perseus protects beauty by turning ugliness into stone. If ugliness consists of extreme emotions and unsatisfied desire, then turning them to stone stops their effect. Is the act of looking deep into ourselves in search of our own ugliness enough to turn it to stone? Can we overcome the ugliness that threatens the beauty in our souls by acknowledging it and hardening our

resolve against it?

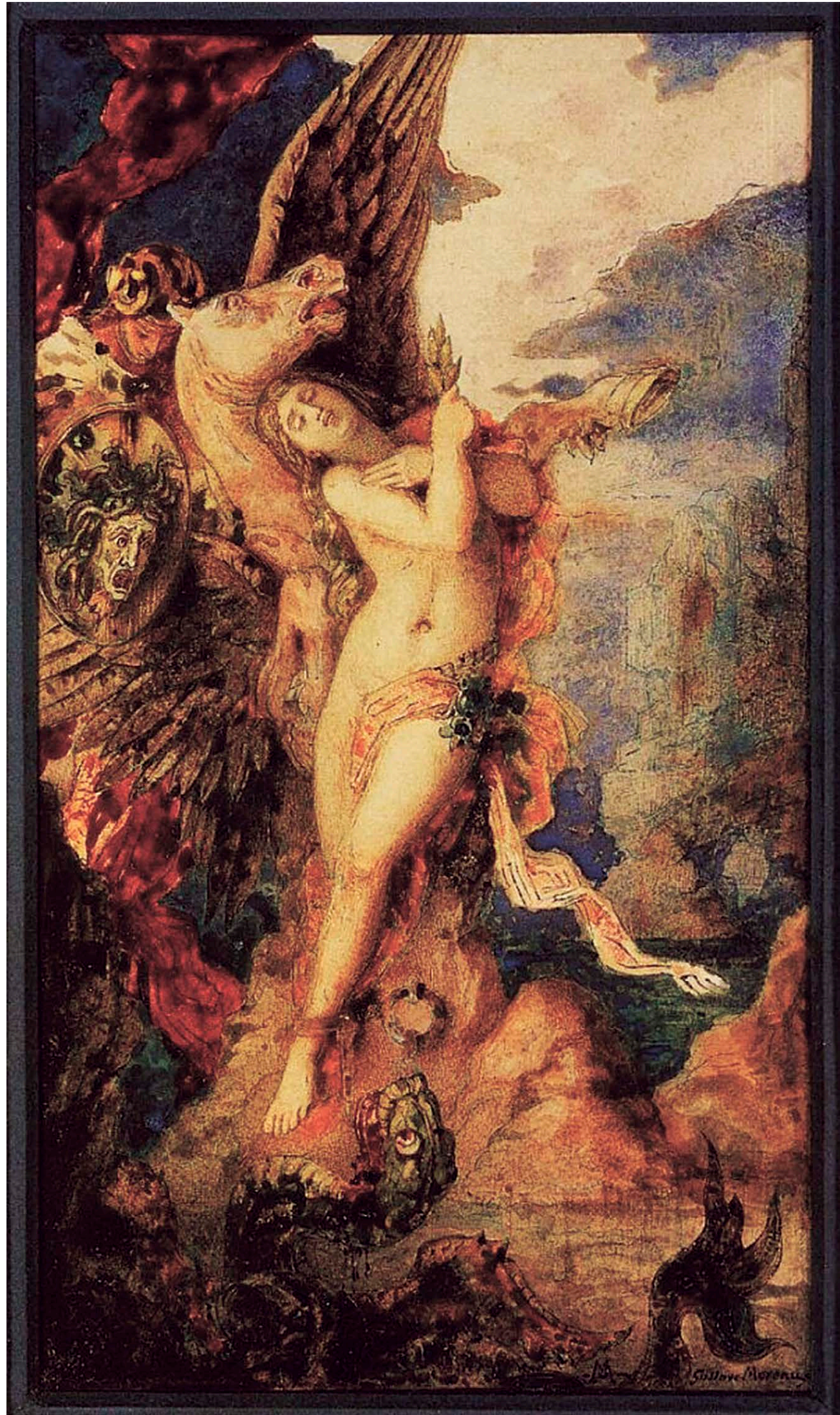
Like Perseus, it is up to us to protect and uphold the beautiful. In upholding the beautiful, we practice balancing our spirits. Upholding the beautiful, however, is a difficult task that must be taken repeatedly. Is this why Moreau leads our eye around the composition again and again?

I think Pegasus represents this difficult and repeating task, which is why he appears distressed. It's as if Moreau is suggesting that saving and upholding the beautiful will be a bumpy ride toward balance. Who among us is up for the challenge?

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.

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

PUBLIC DOMAIN



"Perseus and Andromeda," between 1867-1869, by Gustave Moreau. Private Collection.

COURTESY OF THERESA RODRIGUEZ



A Classical Singer Turned Poet

An interview with poet Theresa Rodriguez

With deep emotion, "Longer Thoughts," the third book of poetry by Theresa Rodriguez, presents poems on such topics as love, beauty, mortality, aging, and theological questioning.

The retired classical singer and voice teacher is a native Manhattanite, who now lives outside of Philadelphia. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in vocal music performance from Skidmore College and a master's of music with distinction in voice pedagogy and performance from Westminster Choir College.

Her poetry has appeared in the Midwest Poetry Review, the Journal of Religion and Intellectual Life, an Anabaptist publication titled Leaf Magazine, The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry, Mezzo Cammin: An Online Journal of Formalist Poetry by Women, Spindrift, the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, and the Society of Classical Poets.

Last summer, Rodriguez participated in a Society of Classical Poets' reading at Bryant Park in New York City where she, James Sale, James B. Nicola, and Mark Stone each read from American poets, including Poe's "The Raven," and then read selections of their own work.

This year, she was one of four featured poets who read at the 2020 Society of Classical Poets Symposium. Her background as a classical singer has given her "the ability to render [her] spoken poetry in an interesting and engaging way without being overly dramatic," she said as part of an email interview on April 3.

CAROL SMALLWOOD: Why did you call your new collection "Longer Thoughts"?

THERESA RODRIGUEZ: As opposed to my

previous collection of sonnets, "Longer Thoughts" contains many longer poems in a variety of forms as well as free verse. It is a small collection but diverse in its range of subjects.

MS. SMALLWOOD: How do you use symbolism and imagery in this collection?

MS. RODRIGUEZ: There are three poems in particular that use symbolism and imagery in "Longer Thoughts." In the poignant free verse "China Crystal Fairy," I describe a "delicate fairy creature," which symbolizes a particularly fragile relationship that I had broken apart through my own clumsiness.

In another free verse titled "Full Circle," I use the imagery of a tree and the fullness of its life cycle to symbolize the aging process. In the sonnet "The Rise of Fall," I also reflect on the aging process by comparing its phases to the four seasons.

MS. SMALLWOOD: One of your poems is about keeping a journal. When did you begin writing one and how does it help?

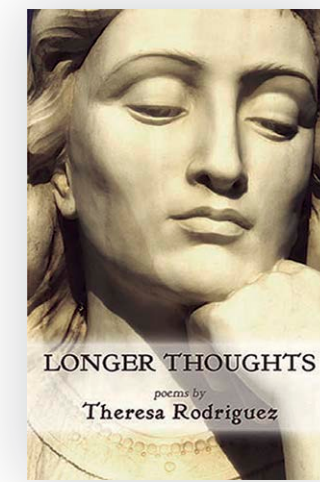
MS. RODRIGUEZ: My first poems began appearing as diary entries in junior high school. As I mention in the sonnet "My Journal," the place where I write is "a sanctuary, hallowed space." It is where I work out the rough drafts of my work, prune and hew and adjust and temper what I have done, as I craft it into art.

I am not a very fluid writer, and there are lots of marginalia and scribbled out lines and words in my journals. What I usually do these days is get the poem written to a basic condition, then type it up on my computer, edit it and prune it some more, and then again, and again, as many times as necessary, and then transcribe it back into my journal so that I have both the rough

Theresa Rodriguez was one of four featured poets who read at the 2020 Society of Classical Poets Symposium.

“My first poems began appearing as diary entries in junior high school. As I mention in the sonnet ‘My Journal,’ the place where I write is ‘a sanctuary, hallowed space.’”

Theresa Rodriguez



"Longer Thoughts" was published by Shanti Arts LLC on March 31, 2020.

Carol Smallwood's recent books include "In Hubble's Shadow," "In the Measuring," and "Library Partnerships With Writers and Poets: Case Studies."

material and finished product in the same place. It helps to have a journal because it is my workshop, my studio, where I can work hard and get dirty and then preserve a polished work at the end of my endeavors.

MS. SMALLWOOD: When did you begin writing poetry? Do you do other kinds of writing also?

MS. RODRIGUEZ: I am sure I began writing poetry in earnest when I was about ten, and by high school had some poems published in my school's literary magazine. In addition to poetry, I have written articles for Classical Singer Magazine on a myriad of topics of interest to classical singers.

When I was a young mother, I wrote a book titled "Diaper Changes: The Complete Diapering Book and Resource Guide" and had articles about cloth diapering published by various parenting magazines. My book "When Adoption Fails" explores my life as an adoptee in a dysfunctional adoptive situation.

In "Warning Signs of Abuse: Get Out Early and Stay Free Forever," I provide encouragement and instruction to women in abusive relationships. I am sure I have a few more books inside of me yet to come! I have also begun writing book reviews as well.

MS. SMALLWOOD: Do you have ideas for your next book?

MS. RODRIGUEZ: I am currently working with Shanti Arts to publish "Sonnets" in an enlarged second edition. Since the first edition in 2019, I have begun writing in the Petrarchan sonnet form, and these as well as other new poems will be a valuable addition to my current sonnet collection.

2 Poems From 'Longer Thoughts'

My Journal

Within my world there is a sacred place,
Where I can hide and then reveal my heart;
Where thoughts and feelings go, and become art;
It is a sanctuary, hallowed space.
Creating something new and touched with grace,
I put my mind to pen, and then impart
My soul's outpourings through my mind, to start,
Then show my whole raw self with open face.

And when complete, I then perfect my words,
And get them ready for the world to see;
I take them from these pages, then display
Them out for those who read, and hear. This girls
Me up for naked vulnerability.
Indeed, I offer all I am this way.

The Rise of Fall

There were such pretty flowers in the spring:
The fragrant colors of a verdant time;
Such fresh potentiality, sublime
In all the loveliness that they did bring.
Then summer issued forth a deep wellspring,
Maturely ripening, where vines would climb
And trees begin to bulge. This is the prime
Of life when growth will dance and sway and sing.

But autumn is the time of now. I stand
Amid the harvests and the fruit. The change
Between the then and now, it leaves me jaded;
I barely have the bearings to withstand
This person of today. Indeed, how strange,
How much the beauty of the past has faded.

The Educational Glue That Binds

JEFF MINICK

In 1988, E.D. Hirsch's "Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know" became a bestseller.

In this book, Hirsch argues that when we fail to pass along certain pieces of core knowledge to our young people—the dates for World War II, the poetry of Emily Dickinson, the meaning of sayings like "Touché!" or "tempest in a teapot"—we may produce readers, but they will be culturally illiterate.

The book contains over 5,000 bits of information everyone needs to know to meaningfully engage with our culture.

In Chapter I of "Cultural Literacy," Hirsch recounts some dismaying stories of bright students who nevertheless were culturally ignorant: the pre-law student who thought that Washington, D.C. was in Washington state; the Latin student who believed Latin Americans spoke Latin; the many students who had no idea who Thomas Jefferson was or when the Declaration of Independence was signed.

And that was over 30 years ago.

Hirsch later went on to found the Core Knowledge Foundation and edit and publish a series of books for elementary school students: "What Your Kindergartener Needs to Know," "What Your First Grader Needs to Know," and so on.

These books regale their readers with all sorts of information about history and literature, science and mathematics, art and music. Here, parents and children can find a wealth of what Hirsch called the funda-

mentals of education.

In "What Your Sixth Grader Needs to Know," for example, we find poems by Wordsworth, Poe, and Dunbar, stories about the Trojan War and Julius Caesar, a section of sayings and their meanings, several histories, a beautifully rendered visual arts section, and much more. Many adults will also learn things from this presentation of core knowledge. For instance, I had never heard of the African-American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner or his warm, sweet painting, "The Banjo Lesson."

In his introductions to these books, Hirsch gives three reasons for the necessity of core knowledge.

1. Commonly shared knowledge makes schooling more effective. Here, he makes the point that third-grade students coming together from different second-grade classrooms or different towns often don't share the same relevant knowledge, and the teacher must, therefore, impart information some of the students already know.

2. Commonly shared knowledge makes schooling more fair and democratic. When all the students who enter a higher grade share a common education—all having a grasp of American history or some of the mechanics of poetry for example—"then all the students are empowered to learn." In a Core Knowledge program, both rich and poor children have the same base knowledge and they can all build upon that knowledge.

3. Commonly shared knowledge helps create cooperation and solidarity in our schools and nation. Here Hirsch recognizes the diversity of America and the value of different cultures, and argues that a classroom that includes knowledge of many cultures and that has a core curriculum "gives all students, no matter their background, a common foundation for understanding our cultural diversity."

Hirsch argues that when we fail to pass along certain pieces of core knowledge to our young people, we may produce readers, but they will be culturally illiterate.

In his lengthy but worthwhile online essay, "A Sense of Belonging," Hirsch reinforces this last point with these words:

"The federated American idea continues to be, as Abraham Lincoln said, the 'last best hope on earth.' The 'disuniting of America' has been an unfruitful effort. The individualism of our schools coupled with the divisive anti-nationalist pieties of the recent past have encouraged polarization and helped make our internal politics tribal rather than federated. Our elementary schools need to stop abetting that ominous

trend and instead become the first line of defense against them."

With our schools shut down, perhaps now is the time for American parents and teachers to revisit Hirsch and his ideas about core knowledge, and take a long look at the educational principles he advocates. We might encourage our schools, especially our elementary schools, to add more of this essential core knowledge to their curricula and to build on that knowledge from one year to the next.

In doing so, students might actually possess the information Hirsch views as so critical.

If nothing else, parents can purchase Hirsch's series of books and use them in the home. The stories, poems, history lessons, art, music, and science should appeal to the young people in our lives and make up for any of the alleged educational deficits school closures may be causing.

"Hit your wagon to a star" is one of the "Sayings and Phrases" in "What Your Sixth Grader Needs to Know." When we share these books with our children and grandchildren, when we give them the basic building blocks of our culture, we are helping them do that very thing.

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

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Poking Fun at Modern Office Politics

IAN KANE

Office spaces have come in various configurations throughout the 20th century. Open layouts have been most predominant, at least until the 1960s. They were originally designed so that there would be more teamwork and spontaneous communication between office workers. However, open layouts also brought along a multitude of detriments, with issues such as heightened anxiety, noise, and a general lack of privacy.

In the 1960s, as a reaction to the open-office layout, the cubicle-office plan was developed and quickly became popular. It allowed for more privacy, less noise, and a little more personalization as workers could decorate their spaces since they were ensconced by three walls. This afforded folks some individuality.

'Office Space' is a lighthearted, charming, and good-natured comedy.

Director Mike Judge's 1999 film "Office Space" delves into some of the sociopolitical hijinks that arose when the cubicle craze was at its peak. Much of the impetus behind this hilarious comedy came from Judge's animated series of shorts, titled "Milton," which he created in 1991. In fact, the live-action version of

Milton is even included in this film (played by character actor Stephen Root).

The film is set in the drab "Initech" building—the type of ubiquitous corporate building found in typical business parks across North America. The film centers on the monotonous office lives of the main protagonist Peter (Ron Livingston) and his fellow brohams and cubicle neighbors in misery, Michael Bolton (David Herman) and Samir Nagheenanajar (Ajay Naidu). Michael is particularly embittered since he shares his name with a certain smarmy romantic lyricist, which is a running joke around the office.

Peter's girlfriend, Joanna (Jennifer Aniston), is a server at a casual dining establishment (think: Chili's, Applebee's, or TGI Fridays). She routinely gets chastised for not having enough "flair," meaning she doesn't wear enough of the goofy pins that the company hands out to its employees.

One day, while hanging out with Joanna, Peter reveals that he isn't particularly motivated to keep working at his white-collar job. Soon after, he seeks out a therapist to sort out his motivational issues. Unfortunately, the therapist drops dead right in the middle of one of their sessions, leaving Peter in a state of zero inhibitions.

Upper management soon notices Peter's new, laissez-faire attitude (he shows up later for work, if at all, and plays games when he's at the office), and instead of disciplining him, they hand him a promotion.

Ironically, one of the bigwigs comments: "That's just a straight shooter with upper-management written all over him." Meanwhile, Joanna has finally



Ron Livingston in the 1999 film by Mike Judge, "Office Space."

had enough of her job, and she quits and storms out of the restaurant.

Eventually, Peter, Michael, and Samir concoct a scheme to release a computer virus that will conveniently siphon off pennies from Initech's accounts. They justify this plan by saying that the company won't even miss the small change that they'll extract regularly. Of course, the plan goes haywire and things suddenly get serious for the thieving trio.

The film, with stellar performances by Livingston, Aniston, Herman, and Naidu, as well as Gary Cole as the three men's boss Bill Lumbergh, is filled with humorous scenes that just about anyone who has ever worked an office job can relate to. In a particularly funny scene, the three men take their finicky office printer out into a field and give it a savage baseball bat beatdown, reminiscent of the brutal mafia beating featured in Martin Scorsese's 1995



Jennifer Aniston and Ron Livingston.

mob film "Casino."

In all, "Office Space" is a lighthearted, charming, and good-natured comedy that is consistently funny due to Judge's wicked sense of humor (he also wrote the script). Watch with loved ones for lots of shared laughs.

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

'Office Space'

Director
Mike Judge

Starring
Ron Livingston, Jennifer Aniston, David Herman

Running Time
1 hour, 29 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
Feb. 19, 1999 (USA)

★★★★☆

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