

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

OSTILL/SHUTTERSTOCK

ARTS AND CULTURE

Old Masters, New Disciples:

*A New Year's
Resolution and
the Arts*

Those restoring the fire-damaged Notre-Dame de Paris are considering updating its interior. Will its beauty be lost?

Cherish the arts and bring the gift of beauty into your life

JEFF MINICK

"Beauty," philosopher Roger Scruton once wrote in a book with that title, "is vanishing from our world because we live as if it did not matter."

One can easily make a case for Scruton's assertion. If, for example, we look at so many of the public buildings erected in the last hundred years, we find that the philosophy of function over form predominates, giving us the glass and metal structures ranging from the ubiquitous McDonald's golden arches to the high rises

in our major cities, all built with an eye toward purpose but too often lacking any iota of charm.

Even in restoration, the influence of modernism sometimes holds sway. Those charged with resurrecting the fire-damaged Notre Dame, including the archbishop of Paris, are intent on ridding the interior of the cathedral of some of its confessionals and altars, making the church into an "experimental showroom," and transforming a once sacred space into what some critics have condemned as a "politically correct Disneyland."

As we enter 2022, what if we resolve to acquaint ourselves and our young people with the arts?

In the other arts as well—painting, music, literature—beauty along with its two boon companions, truth and goodness, frequently seem to have taken a leave of absence. Some observers find in this evanescence the collapse of Western civilization itself, the disappearance from public consciousness of the arts that once distinguished our civilization: the sublime music of Mozart, the powerful paintings and sculptures of Michelangelo, the poetry of Shakespeare.

Continued on Page 4



Behind the Subscription

Your subscription will not only provide you with accurate news and features, but also contribute to the revival of American journalism and help safeguard our freedoms for future generations.

We aim to tell you what we see, not how to think; we strive to deliver you a factual picture of reality that lets you form your own opinions.

We believe that we live in truly epochal times, where the faithful representation of our current events won't just be important for the people of today, but also for the generations to come. The records we keep now will directly inform the foundations of the history they'll learn and the values they'll cherish—and this knowledge is what drives us.

Learn more at

EpochSubscription.com

THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH AND TRADITION

BOOK REVIEW

American History Embellished With Myth, Fantasy, and Folklore

ANITA L. SHERMAN

Fantasy fiction is not new.

Published in 1937 to wide critical acclaim, "The Hobbit" by J.R.R. Tolkien introduced readers to home-loving Bilbo Baggins. Bilbo's quest takes him from his familiar rural surroundings to much more sinister territory.

British author C.S. Lewis created "The Chronicles of Narnia," a series of seven fantasy novels published in the early '50s. Children play a critical role as they are transported to the fictional realm of Narnia, a world of magic, mythical beasts, and talking animals.

'Mountain Folk'

Author John Hood's "Mountain Folk" tells the story of America's founding but combines it with a twist of folklore and fantasy. Fairies, dwarfs, and enchanting water maiden, and nightmarish monsters play pivotal roles.

If you are not a fairy fan, this may not be the read for you. It's not a quick read and may be rather arduous at times when yet another mythical being or legendary creature makes an appearance.

However, from a historical perspective, there is nothing imaginary about the real-life characters and events that Hood describes, particularly as the colonists are gearing up for their break from Britain. Readers will be reminded of the role that Native American tribes played in the conflict. Some tribes sided with Britain and others with the colonists.

The Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834), an aristocrat and military officer, is a strong ally. The French fought with the colonists against the British during the Revolutionary War.

While there is much legend surrounding the life of Daniel Boone (1734-1820), he was an actual famous frontiersman who knew George Washington (1732-1799). When Washington was a young militia leader, Boone serves as a wagoner carrying supplies and men as needed.

In Hood's novel, Boone is gifted with the "Sight," meaning that he is able to see and interact with the many magical creatures that live alongside the humans—mostly undetected. Goran, a sylph fairy ranger, befriends Boone and helps him thwart danger on many occasions.

Among the many soldiers who fought in the American Revolutionary War was Isaac Shelby (1750-1826), who later became the first and fifth governor of Kentucky. He also served in the state legislatures of Virginia and North Carolina. Shelby, an expert woodsman and surveyor, played a crucial role in gathering supplies for the Continental Army.

In the book, Shelby joins forces with John Sevier (1745-1815), another fron-

tiersman and soldier, leading expeditions over the Appalachian Mountains against British forces in North Carolina. Known for his heroism, he plays a pivotal role in the British defeat at the Battle of King's Mountain. In the book, Shelby also has the "Sight" and is aided by a water maiden named Dela. Like Lafayette, Baron von Steuben (1730-1794) is another foreign fighter who joins the cause for American independence. A Prussian officer and strict disciplinarian, von Steuben trained the demoralized soldiers at Valley Forge, boosting their skills and confidence.

Har the Tower, a powerful dwarf, forms a strong bond with Peter Muhlenberg (1746-1807). Muhlenberg eventually follows in his father's footsteps to become a Lutheran minister. His life as a clergyman shifts, though, when he takes off his robes to don the uniform of a Continental soldier during the Revolutionary War. After the war, he serves in the United States House of Representatives.

The underlying historical narrative sparks curiosity and admiration.



'Mountain Folk: Book One of the Folklore Cycle'

Author John Hood

Publisher Defiance Press and Publishing, June 8, 2021

Pages 408

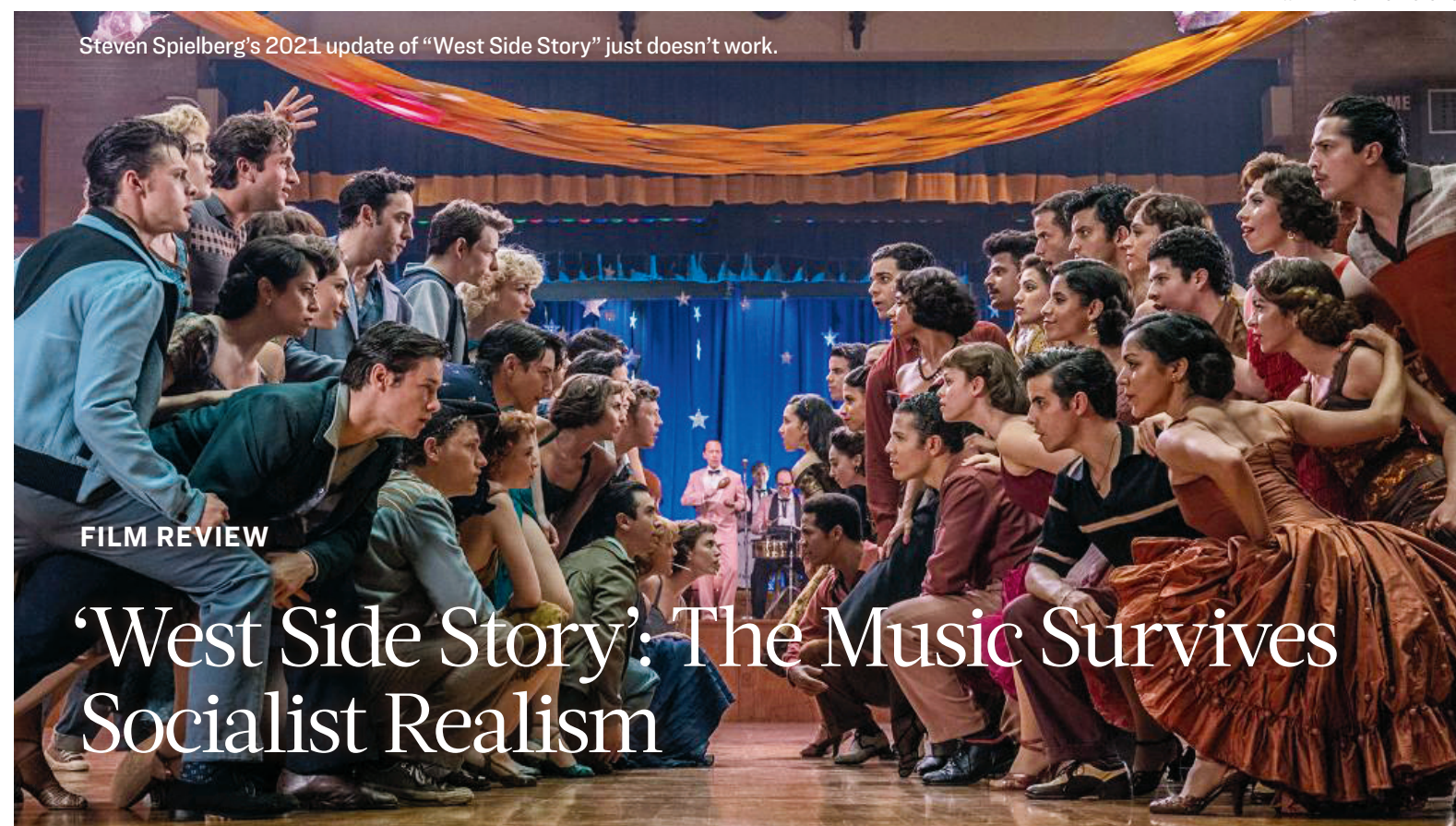
suspension of disbelief when reading a book of fantasy fiction, there is also the underlying historical narrative that sparks curiosity and admiration about the cast of characters who so elegantly and effectively connected to create this country.

That is a fascinating tale with or without fairies.

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



In John Hood's novel, Daniel Boone has the ability to see and talk with a fairy. "Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through the Cumberland Gap," 1851-52, by George Caleb Bingham.



FILM REVIEW

'West Side Story': The Music Survives Socialist Realism

KENNETH LAFAVE

The new film adaptation of the 1957 Broadway musical play "West Side Story" opened Dec. 10 to the conundrum of rave reviews and limp box office. Why director Steven Spielberg decided that the highly celebrated, Oscar-winning 1961 film of this musical needed remaking is anyone's guess. If his purpose was to update the script to reflect current politically correct attitudes, he succeeded.

Tony Kushner's screenplay includes several laughable interpolations of present cultural beliefs, including the pointless inclusion of the Puerto Rican national anthem sung with raised fists. Another is the evolution of tomboy character Anybodys into a fully trans female-to-male whose monstrous physical strength somehow allows her/him to beat up a roomful of police officers.

Playwright Arthur Laurents' original script has been replaced with dialogue and action straight out of socialist realism. A major example: In the stage musical and in the 1961 film, when Tony and Maria first see each other at the dance at the gym, a kind of magical portal is opened in which they see each other and nothing else. But

socialist realism admits only of material "reality," so Kushner has the pair sneak into a curtained-off area. It ruins the moment. But more than that, it clashes absurdly with the following anti-realistic scene, in which Tony sings "Maria! Maria! Maria!" ecstatically as he roams the neighborhood.

The classically influenced music of pre-1960s standard popular music clashes with the hyper-realistic vision of director Spielberg and writer Kushner.

Updated Script Plus Original Music Equals ... ?

The one thing that Spielberg failed to alter, and was presumably forbidden to alter by dint of contract, is Leonard Bernstein's glowing score. It is his undoing. While Kushner's script pushes the political and Spielberg's direction substitutes naturalistic violence for the stylized violence-as-

ballet of the 1961 film, the music has undergone only minor alterations of arrangement and orchestration. Its four core ballads—"Maria," "Tonight," "One Hand, One Heart" and "Somewhere"—exalt the feelings of its protagonists in a way only possible in the classically influenced music of pre-1960s standard popular music, clashing with the hyper-realistic vision of Spielberg-Kushner.

As I point out in my book, "Experiencing Leonard Bernstein," Bernstein composed the score for "West Side Story" at precisely the last moment such music would have been permissible for stories of teenaged gangs. In 1957, rock 'n' roll was new and was not yet the only music on the scene. Bebop was a thing. Bernstein consulted Count Basie to help with understanding the changing language of jazz. This shows up in some of the music for the dance at the gym and in the song "Cool." Rock 'n' roll is absent, while traditional ballad forms familiar from the Gershwin brothers to Rodgers and Hammerstein dominate.

Just in Time

Another few years and this musical language would've seemed hopelessly archaic for the subject. Imagine "West Side Story"

being written in 1965 with the same score, ignoring the advance of rock music and the changing sensibilities of teens. It would've been a bad joke. The score for "West Side Story" represents an older sensibility captured in musical aspic and invulnerable to interpretations that impose on it the inept silliness of socialist realism.

Such criticism as has been leveled at this "West Side Story" has been, predictably, that it does not go far enough in a culturally Left direction. To do so would have been possible only by replacing Bernstein's music with hip-hop and current pop. Stephen Sondheim's lyrics are almost incidental, and Sondheim's role in shaping "West Side Story" has been overemphasized. He disliked the show and didn't even write all the lyrics. The more romantic ones, such as for "One Hand, One Heart," were written by Bernstein, who was originally to have shared lyric-writing credit.

The Music in Musical Theater

On the other hand, I suspect that the outpouring of admiration for the film has to do with seeing once more the great songs of this score on the big screen. I have never heard "One Hand, One Heart" performed with greater feeling than it is in this film. "Somewhere" triumphs, even in its reassignment to the new character of the drug-store owner's widow. The fiery "Mambo" in the gym (which Bernstein composed after a trip to Puerto Rico) blazes with energy. And the outright operatic nature of the Maria-Anita duet, "A Boy Like That/I Have a Love," is a stunning reminder that the composers of musical theater used to be educated in the legacy of classical singing.

Traditional American musical theater is closer to the fantastic sensibilities of opera than to any form of realism, let alone the socialist variety. The major venue for this condition is the music, in this case the last of Bernstein's four musical theater scores prior to his taking on the mantle of music director for the New York Philharmonic in 1958. It is strong music, fit to survive any misreading, even this one.

Former music critic for the Arizona Republic and The Kansas City Star, Kenneth LaFave recently earned a doctorate in philosophy, art, and critical thought from the European Graduate School. He's the author of three books, including "Experiencing Film Music" (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).



Original artworks, canvas wraps, art posters, and framed prints of Award-winning oil paintings now available for purchase at

InspiredOriginal.Org

INSPIRED
ORIGINAL

2022 NTD 8TH INTERNATIONAL CHINESE VOCAL COMPETITION



GOLD AWARD \$10,000 Merkin Hall-KMC NEW YORK Sep. 2022

VOCAL.NTDTV.COM

REGISTER +1-888-477-9228 VOCAL@GLOBALCOMPETITIONS.ORG



In the past, it wasn't only European musicians who would gather to perform and recite together. "Schubert's Evening," 1896, by Julius Schmid.



Shall we encourage our children to participate in the arts?
"Three Children in a House Concert" by Antoine-Jean Gros.



We can support our local dance or community productions.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Old Masters, New Disciples: A New Year's Resolution and the Arts

Continued from Page 1

They fade because we live as if they did not matter—or worse, because some despise their very existence as symbols of Western culture.

To breathe life back into these arts may appear impossible, but only if we allow it to be so.

We're coming up on New Year's Day, when many of us will make resolutions—to lose weight, to exercise more, to quit some bad habit or to adopt a good one.

But here's a thought: As we enter 2022, what if we resolve to acquaint ourselves and our young people with the arts? What if we took it upon ourselves to resuscitate the past and so bring new life to our present-day arts as well?

Making Time for the Sublime

In Peter Pouncey's beautifully written novel "Rules for Old Men Waiting," his protagonist, Robert MacIver, is an old man who is dying alone in his cabin. As death creeps ever closer, he writes a novel, thinks of his deceased wife's paintings, and remembers his dead son. He also makes a list of rules to live by in his final days, one of which includes listening to classical music, truly paying attention to the works of composers like Mozart and Mahler by sitting in his chair rather than busying himself with chores.

Suppose we did likewise. Our knowledge of classical music—and I include myself in this category—is minuscule. We may know the words to half a dozen of Johnny Cash's hits, which is all well and good, but we can't identify a single piece by Bach or Handel.

What if we resolve to follow the example of MacIver? What if we determine to spend 10 to 15 minutes every evening sitting on the sofa with our spouse and children, or a friend, or alone for that matter, and truly listening to such music?

Perhaps we start with Joseph Haydn, whose Symphonies No. 49, No. 52, and No. 58 combined run just over an hour, a figure I know because I recently purchased the disc at a public library sale. In just a few such sessions, we'll have heard all three symphonies. To make these pieces truly a part of us, perhaps we decide to listen to each of them two or three more times. In the matter of a month, or less, we have begun constructing our treasure house of classical music.



A portrait of Joseph Haydn, 1791, by Thomas Hardy.

Other Excursions Into Beauty

And if we know nothing of painting and sculpture? We can either search out artists and their work online or head off to the public library to ramble through the collection of art books, pulling out those volumes that speak to us. Two years ago, I spent a week with Caravaggio this way, looking almost every day at the reproductions of his dramatic and sometimes violent work in these oversized tomes. Looking back, I regret only that I discontinued this practice of exploring artists.

This same ease of introduction holds for poetry. The works of John Donne, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Robert Frost—these and many more poets are just a tap of the keyboard away. To get started, we might begin with an anthology of poetry, find a poet who particularly pleases us, and pursue his or her other verse. Again, we might spend just a few minutes during the evening reading these poems with others in our household or aloud even if we are alone—poetry was meant to be read with the eye and the tongue—and so again taste the beauty of the past.

In addition, subscribers to The Epoch Times receive an ongoing education in the arts, both in the hard copy of the paper and online. In my latest edition of the paper, for example, are articles like "What's the Point of Painting Directly From Life?"; a fine essay on Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" and devilish greed; and an interview with Yuchien Yuan, a virtuoso on the cello who has performed more than 1,400 times with Shen Yun, the "world famous dance and music company that has made its mission

to revive 5,000 years of China's divinely inspired culture."

When we read these stories from The Epoch Times for our own edification and pass them along to our children, we are giving life to the fine arts.

Steppin' Out

To support these arts, we can also leave our living rooms and witness performances and displays in person. Here in particular, we can treat our children to valuable experiences they may remember for the rest of their lives.

This year, let's add art and beauty to that litany of recollection.

These days, even smaller cities and towns feature live ballet, orchestras, and plays. If there is a university nearby, we may avail ourselves of performances there as well as lectures. Here in Front Royal, Virginia, a speaker in our public library lectured on Caravaggio, which is what sparked my interest in that painter. And in this magical age we inhabit, when we can explore the world through a screen and a keyboard, we can tour galleries from around the world without ever leaving the sofa. Google "digital tours art museums," and an extravaganza of sites will pop up. For instance, "The 75 Best Virtual Museum Tours—Art, History, Science" takes us into these establishments, shows us the artwork, and usu-

ally includes lectures and comments to enlighten our tour.

Participation

Taking part in the great works of the West is another grand way to celebrate our culture. Gaining some mastery on the piano or the violin, joining a chorale, or appearing onstage with a school drama club or community theater can add to appreciation of the classics by our young people. Learning to draw or paint also connects them, and us, to the traditions of the past.

We can even perform in our homes. We can read aloud, along with our family, such plays as Shakespeare's "King Lear" or Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." For the younger set, we can bring to life poetry, fairy tales, and stories by dramatically throwing ourselves into the words and rhythms of speech, however silly they may appear.

Not so long ago, our ancestors made a practice of such read-alouds and parlor performances, adding to the cultural bounties of their children. In "Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution," author Natalie Bober sketches out a picture of that sort of entertainment, which was undoubtedly common in thousands of colonial households: "Abby loved best the times that she sat with her father in the warmth of the crackling fire, his large, warm, dark eyes, so much like her own, shining down at her as he read to her from the works of Shakespeare, Dryden, or Pope."

Preserving Beauty Will Rescue Us

In his novel "The Idiot," Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, "Beauty will save the world." That enigmatic phrase may leave us puzzled,

but if we recast it as "Beauty will save each of us," the meaning becomes clearer. An appreciation of beauty in art and nature can restore our souls. It can lead us to goodness and truth. It can help make us more fully human.

And here's more good news: We need not depend on any government, civic organizations, or even our schools to bring us to this spring of goodness and truth. We have at our fingertips all the implements we need to taste these waters.

On New Year's Eve, some of us will sing these words, which are one more small part of our culture:

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days of auld lang syne?"

As we sing, perhaps we'll think of friends and loved ones, and times gone by. This year, let's add art and beauty to that litany of recollection.

After all, if we resolve to make beauty a part of our daily lives, the dark winter so many have predicted for us in 2022 may well shine with starlight and moonlight.

Now, let me hit the Play button on Haydn.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminary homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



The poetry of Emily Dickinson is just a few keystrokes away. A daguerreotype of Emily Dickinson taken December 1846 or early 1847. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.



The Epoch Times article "A Christmas Carol" and "Overcoming Devilish Greed" explores the illustration "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?" 1915, by Arthur Rackham. Illustration.



"Jonah Leaving the Whale," circa 1600, by Jan Brueghel the Elder. Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Can One Avoid Fate? Part 2: Fate Versus Destiny

JAMES SALE

We discussed in Part 1 of this article how fate or destiny seems to be an inescapable part of the human condition. Indeed, in the pagan myths even the gods themselves, including Zeus, seem to be subject to its power, although there is also the opportunity to avoid catastrophe by doing the right thing.

Zeus himself avoided being defeated by the prophecy that the son of the nymph Thetis—whom he was considering impregnating—would be greater than his father. Circumspectly, therefore, Zeus married the nymph to a human, Peleus, and their child was the great warrior Achilles; but being only human, Achilles was no threat to the supremacy of Zeus.

Perhaps at this point a distinction might usefully be made between "fate" and "destiny" and this distinction is based on the connotations of these words. Fate—not always but often—has a negative connotation: It is like a trap that we cannot escape from, as when we say something or some situation is "fatal." It comes on us no matter what we do to the contrary, and it may or may not be for our good. We commented last time that Achilles, in a sense, chose his fate. But according to Homer, it proves to be an unfortunate

one: He is unhappy in Hades.

Destiny, on the other hand, contains the sense not only of a purpose being achieved—Achilles certainly did as a warrior—but also of a higher purpose being achieved. Heracles suffered, massively, but as a result of his contribution to the gods (and humankind), he was elevated to the heavens, both as a constellation and to Mount Olympus, the home of the gods.

It would appear, then, that we have to avoid our "fate"—as in, my father or my mother is an alcoholic or a junkie or whatever, and so I am fated to become one. This is reading someone else's script or fate as if it were our own and as if we are powerless to alter it.

Instead, we have to actively seek out our own higher purpose or destiny. This is when our choices and actions accord with the will of the gods (in pagan mythology) or in theistic times, the will of God. There is a higher destiny for each and every one of us. However, the catch is this: The higher destiny always seems to involve acute suffering as well as taking personal responsibility.

What Is My Destiny?

People might ask, what then is this destiny I have been called to? And in trying to answer this question, we need to notice one really important feature about the myths and stories of long ago that they have in common.

Namely, that whether we are talking about a myth like that of Oedipus in the Greek tradition or the account of Jonah, say, in the Bible, both are given a prophecy, or an oracle, or a warning of what their destiny will be, or what they need to do to fulfill it. Put another way, human beings are not left untended, unwarned, or ignorant of the transcendental purpose coming their way.

Destiny contains the sense not only of a purpose being achieved but also of a higher purpose being achieved.

In the case of Oedipus, the prophecy comes before his birth even: He would kill his father and marry his mother. For this reason, his biological father, King Laius, attempts to have his son destroyed after birth but fails.

As Oedipus comes to adulthood, he learns of the prophecy concerning himself, and as a result—taking personal responsibility by countering the oracle—he flees as far as he can from the possibility of fulfilling it. But, sadly, he is blind to his own, true situation, and the flight itself places him in the way of, unwittingly, fulfilling the prophecy.

The Irony of Oedipus and His Redemption

What is ironic here is that Oedipus is, from the perspective of human reason and cleverness, one of the greatest minds of his day: He solves the famous riddle of the Sphinx when no one else can. Yet, as to his true situation, he is wholly blind.

He wants to do the right thing and actively takes responsibility, but each step he takes paradoxically drives him to his fate, or perhaps, better to say, to his destiny. For although, after discovery of the truth, his suffering is intense, he takes complete responsibility for all his actions—including blinding himself (thus acknowledging guilt) and immediately renouncing his kingship.

His final and mysterious disappearance in the sacred grove at Colonus suggests not fatality, but destiny: a high reconciliation with the gods because he has fulfilled their will. In fact, the voice of a god cries out as he walks into the depths of the sacred grove: "Oedipus, Oedipus, why do you linger. Long indeed have you been made to wait." There is redemption in realizing one's destiny.

Jonah's Story

A very different story concerns the destiny of Jonah in the celebrated story in the Bible. Although one of the shortest books in the Old Testament, this story is surely one of the most famous. Along with Adam and Eve, and Noah's Ark, it is one of those archetypal stories that resonate in the imagination in

almost inexplicable ways.

Here, however, we find Jonah not explicitly fated before his birth, but receiving as an adult the "word of the Lord"—an explicit command from God to go to Nineveh and there prophesy against it; there tell Nineveh of its fate.

The fate or destiny of Jonah is not seemingly the issue initially, but the fate of the 120,000 people, who according to the Bible "do not know the difference between their right and left hands, as well as many animals." Their fate is connected to their willingness, or otherwise, to submit to the will of God, which means abandoning their evil ways and repenting.

And this, too, seems to be a common feature in deciding whether there is to be a great destiny or an ignominious fate: The citizens of Nineveh, including the king, do repent—in sackcloth and ashes—and the disaster, the fatal doom, is thereby averted.

Oedipus, on the other hand, cannot prevent the prophecy from coming to pass, but in submitting to the will of the gods, he finally earns a high destiny and appears to be joining them.

But Jonah, of course, rebels against the word of the Lord. He goes away from Nineveh, which is hundreds of miles inland, to Joppa (current-day Tel Aviv) to sail to Tarshish, which was at the farthest western limit known to the Hebrews. In other words, Jonah goes as far as possible to escape the command of God.

The Making of Jonah, the True Prophet

It is not to be, however: Jonah cannot escape the destiny that God has ordained for him. Enter the whale. From the stomach of the fish, realizing that resistance is futile, he cries out that he is now ready to fulfill his destiny and go to Nineveh, and the fish vomits him out.

His preaching, to his chagrin, is successful. We are not told why the people and the king believed his proclamations about God's forthcoming judgment, but with a little imagination it is, perhaps, not difficult to see how he was so convincing.

First and foremost, he was a living emblem of someone who had experienced judgment himself. Psychologically, how profound must this turnaround have been to him? How would it have affected his speech patterns and mental focus? I would argue that this event was every bit as overwhelming as Oedipus's experiences.

And second, what must his appearance have been like? People who work in fish markets develop over time an extreme odor. But to be inside the fish—what of Jonah's hair and complexion? One might imagine that his skin would attain a sort of albino coloration as a result of internal acidic processes. The famous and alleged story of James Bartley in the 19th century being swallowed by a sperm whale for 36 hours records that his skin had been bleached when they recovered him.

Jonah's fate was certainly not to be a bureaucrat in a smart suit. He appeared out of nowhere, though probably rumors of this crazy, wild-looking nomad approaching Nineveh started circulating long before he actually arrived—a prophet indeed!

If we think about it, the weird reality is that if Jonah had initially obeyed God's command and gone to Nineveh and preached, he probably would not have been acknowledged as a messenger of God. For God's will—Jonah's destiny as well as Nineveh's fate—to be realized, Jonah had to reject the command. Only through his suffering could he fulfill it.

This leads to the final observation that there is much in common between Oedipus and Jonah: Both receive a divine revelation, and both run away from their respective oracles. Indeed, both seek to go as far away as they can from realizing the prophecy, only to find that in doing so, they fulfill it. Both ultimately comply with divine will.

That is to say, however reluctantly and given their circumstances, they chose freely their destiny once they understood beyond all personal revulsion that it was divinely ordained. At that point, a wonderful synergy kicks in. As Patrick Harpur observes in his book "A Complete Guide to the Soul," "Free will for married to fate, whereby whatever is freely chosen is also forever ordained."

This marriage of our free will with divine ordinance is what constitutes realizing our destiny, and the alternative is fate and fatal. Discovering our divine ordinance is the central purpose of our life and so generates our life's mission.

Part 1 in this series talks about how the ancients understood the idea of fate.

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, "Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams" (Routledge, 2021). He has been nominated for the 2022 poetry Pushcart Prize, won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is "HellWard." For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit EnglishCantos.home.blog



The Miraculous NFL Career of Quarterback Kurt Warner

MARK JACKSON

The life and times of Kurt Warner, the retired NFL quarterback, is already known to most football fans. Warner is considered the NFL's greatest undrafted player, and he is the only undrafted player to be named NFL Most Valuable Player and Super Bowl MVP. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2017, and is the only player inducted into both the NFL Hall of Fame and the Arena Football Hall of Fame. However, his incredible career was hard won—it's nothing short of miraculous.

"American Underdog" tells his story with a minimum of fuss and Christian emphasis, although the filmmaking brothers Andrew and Jon Erwin are strongly faith-based directors who tend to wear that element on their sleeves. It debuts Christmas Day 2021, but it's already at 89 percent critics, 97 percent audience on Rotten Tomatoes. It's an easy movie to like. A lot.

It's not a flashy movie, it's not particularly aesthetic, and it's a little low-key for a football movie. The normally goofy Zachary Levi of "Shazam" fame, while having some physical similarities to the real Kurt Warner, wasn't maybe the most charismatic choice for a leading man.

But it matters not. Warner's story stands on its own as a towering example of the American dream, as it's classically framed: If you never give up on your dreams, no matter how devastating the setbacks, and continue to put in the work in order to be ready when you get your shot, and if you put your faith in God, then dreams come true. If you're planning on seeing a movie Christmas Day, this is certainly one that will pay dividends in the escalation-of-faith department.

The Story

The movie has a straightforward narrative told in chronological order, with a few flashback scenes of Kurt as a football-obsessed young boy (Beau Hart). Approximately the first third of the movie is about Kurt's college years at the University of Northern Iowa and his first few years post-graduation.

Shortly after graduating college, Kurt's NFL dreams appear to be on track after he's recruited by the Green Bay Packers. He suffers his first major setback when he demonstrates a lack of urgency; he doesn't have the Packer playbook memorized like all the other quarterback hopefuls. He thought he was a sure thing and would learn on the job. This naive understanding of the NFL's level of ambition and intensity gets Kurt cut after two days.

This life-altering mega-rejection leads to years of being down-and-out for Kurt. He's plagued by financial problems, unemployment, and temporary homelessness. However, he sucks it up in classic American bootstrap style and takes a job as a shelf stocker at a grocery store in Cedar Falls, Iowa, where, much like Frances McDormand's character in "Nomadland," he has to face the ignominy of shoppers being embarrassed at how low he's fallen from his former college football-star status. Seeing Miami Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino's happy face on a Wheaties box

rub salt in Warner's wounds.

The Romance

One of the mainstays of "American Underdog" is Kurt's courtship and marriage. Kurt apparently wasn't particularly smooth with the ladies. At a country music bar, he's instantly smitten with a woman who clearly loves line dancing. Kurt can't dance; he gets his teammate to teach him how, muscles his way in on the lady's dance partner next time he sees her out on the floor, and introduces himself.

She plays exceedingly hard to get, but as they slowly get to know each other, it becomes apparent how different their lives are. Kurt's father abandoned the family, and his mother, Sue Warner (Cindy Hogan), raised Kurt and his brother as a financially struggling single mom. As Kurt relates, "Football was the most important thing my dad taught me before he left."

The future Brenda Warner (Anna Paquin), a former U.S. Marine, tells Kurt that she hates sports and is divorced with two kids, one of whom has special needs. "If I never see you again, I'll totally understand," she says. Brenda's parents have been happily married for decades, and she is living with them because she's unemployed. Brenda figured all this info would scare Kurt off.

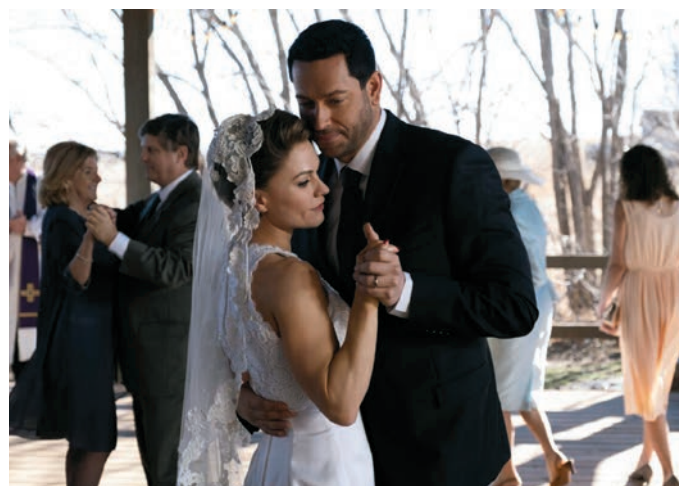
But no. Kurt asks the bartender for her address and walks many, many miles to her front door with a rose to proffer, since he had no car at the time. Brenda doesn't want to let him in, but her 7-year-old blind son, Zack (Hayden Zaller, legally blind in real life, is adorable), does when she's not looking, and it's immediately male-bonding city.

Zack relates that his transistor radio doesn't work anymore. Kurt does an inspection, adds a battery and, voilà—Kurt and Zack chill like bros, on the bathroom floor to listen to the radio. Turns out, Zack's Marine dad, named Brad, cheated on Brenda when she was pregnant, and then, when Zack was four months old, dropped him on his head in the bathtub. When Zack was rushed to the hospital with a swollen head, Brad didn't tell anyone the reason, and Zack lost most of his eyesight because of the brain damage. Kurt's not intimidated by any of this.

So Brenda finally agrees to a date. Kurt's got wheels and the kids go, too. They're just hanging out at a lake and talking while the kids sleep in the back of the truck. This is the beginning of Kurt and Brenda being each other's lifeline during the lowest respective points in their lives. It's not glossy and shiny. It's all-American. It's the good stuff.

Arena Football

Eventually, Brenda invites Kurt to live with her and her parents because Kurt has nowhere else to live. At one point they're so financially broke that they run out of gas, with the kids in the back of the car, on a deserted road—in a snowstorm. Kurt's looking at a five-mile walk in freezing weather all the way back to the nearest gas station for \$4 and change worth of gas, and another five-mile return trip, hoping that Brenda and the kids don't freeze to death, not to mention himself. Brenda's dad eventually asks him why he's taking so long to pop the



Brenda (Anna Paquin) and Kurt (Zachary Levi) get married, in "American Underdog."



Kurt Warner (Zachary Levi) stocks shelves and gets depressed seeing Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino's face on a Wheaties box.



▲

Zachary Levi (L) and the real Kurt Warner pose for the cameras on the set of "American Underdog."

The film's already at 89 percent critics, 97 percent audience on Rotten Tomatoes.

question, and Kurt says that he doesn't feel worthy yet.

All of the above prompts Kurt to do something that he swore he'd never do: sign with owner Jim Foster (Bruce McGill) of the American Football League's Iowa Barnstormers arena football team. Kurt believes that arena football is for guys who are "circling the drain," but curiously doesn't see himself as being in that particular boat. Luckily for him, his college best buddy Marshall Faulk (O.J. Keith Simpson) is now also a Barnstormers teammate. It's déjà vu all over again as Kurt now becomes an arena football star quarterback. And then the Los Angeles Rams come a-calling.

Ultimately

There were probably better physical resemblance casting choices, but Zachary Levi sells the role well and pulls off the football scenes passably. There are plenty of rousing football scenes, but "American Underdog" is really about Kurt and Brenda and a prime example of the great woman standing behind every great man.

Dennis Quaid played the Major League Baseball version of Kurt Warner's story in 2002's "The Rookie." And here he plays Rams head coach Dick Vermeil, who, having had a similar late-bloomer history to Warner's, believed in Kurt against all odds and gave him a shot.

"American Underdog" is the inspiring story of ordinary people doing extraordinary things with a no-quit attitude, a powerful marriage support system, a belief in God, as well as a deep understanding that life's tough tests are there for us to build character, to be true to our dreams, and to learn compassion, which in turn strengthens the ability to endure until our ship comes in.

Lionsgate will release "American Underdog" in U.S. cinemas on Dec. 25, 2021.

'American Underdog'

Directors: Andrew Erwin, Jon Erwin

Starring: Zachary Levi, Anna Paquin, Dennis Quaid, Bruce McGill, Adam Baldwin, Chance Kelly, Hayden Zaller

Running Time: 1 hour, 52 minutes

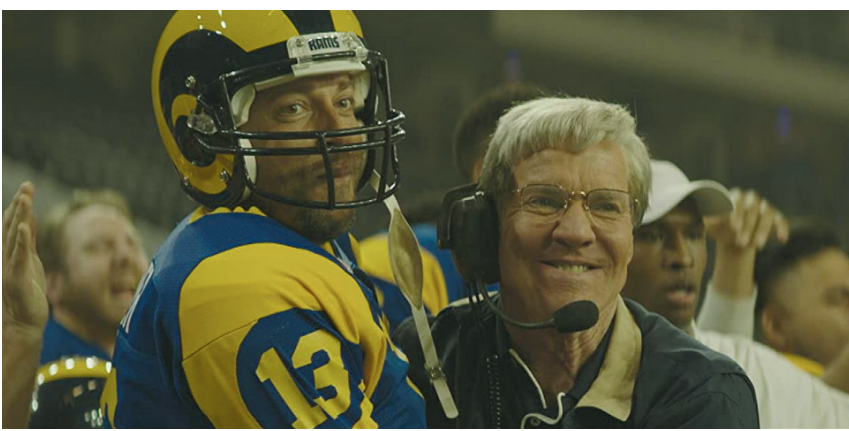
MPAA Rating: PG

Release Date: Dec. 25, 2021

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Kurt Warner (Zachary Levi, R) tries out for the Green Bay Packers' quarterback spot.



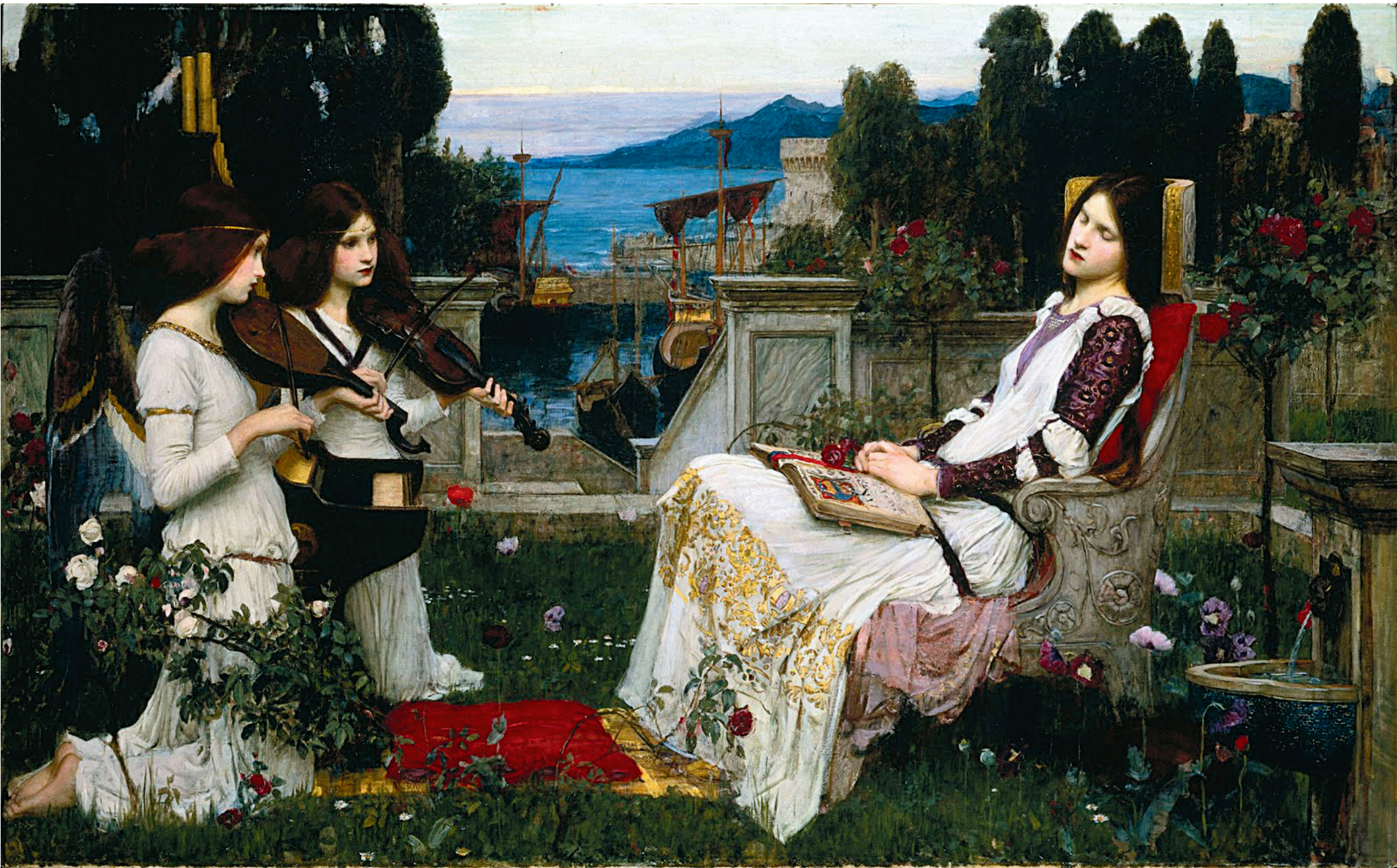
Kurt Warner (Zachary Levi, L) and Los Angeles Rams head coach Dick Vermeil (Dennis Quaid), who gives the quarterback a second shot.



Sophocles's play "Oedipus at Colonus" ends with the king, who atoned for his sin, being a blessing to the city where he is buried. "Oedipus and Antigone" by Franz Dietrich. Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, Calif.



Kurt Warner (Zachary Levi, C) is a newly minted Rams quarterback before his fall from grace.



"Saint Cecilia," 1895, by John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas. Legion of Honor, San Francisco.

REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

St. Cecilia and the Musical Celebration of God

ERIC BESS

There's something about the rhythmic expression we call music that affects us emotionally and spiritually. We love music. We hear it everywhere: in our cars while on our way to work, at work, back in our cars when we go to the grocery store, and yes, even at the grocery store. Almost everywhere we go, music plays.

When I shop with my wife, I often joke that—because of the music I'm hearing—these department stores must want their customers to leave as quickly as possible. Yet no one seems to notice or care. Having so much music, so often, makes me wonder whether we've become desensitized to bad music. If so, then how do we recognize good music?

I came across a painting by John William Waterhouse called "Saint Cecilia" that made me think critically about the nature of good music.

Historical Figure

So who was Cecilia? Cecilia lived some time between the second and fourth centuries and was a virgin martyr of the early Christian church.

As legend has it, she vowed her virginity to God but was forcibly married to a pagan, Valerian. Even though her husband was a pagan, she heard music in her heart when they married. She told her husband that an angel of God wished her to remain a virgin after marriage, and Valerian said he would respect her wishes if he was allowed to see the angel too. She requested that he get baptized, and after his baptism, he saw an angel donning his wife with roses and lilies.

After seeing the angel, Valerian helped the persecuted Christians by burying the bodies of the martyrs after they were executed. Cecilia was also executed for preaching and for giving her possessions away to the poor.

Other than hearing music in her heart on her wedding day, why else is Cecilia the patron saint of music? In her early life, she is thought to have rejected the music playing in her husband's home. She claimed that she wanted to listen only to heavenly music, which helped her maintain the purity of her body and soul.

Waterhouse's Sleeping Cecilia

Waterhouse depicted Cecilia sleeping in an ornate, marble chair on the right side of the composition. On her lap rests an

illuminated songbook and a rose. Behind her is a rosebush that blooms near her head, and a rose vine winds toward her foot. At the foot of the chair, behind the ancient fountain at the bottom right, are poppy flowers.

To the left, on the other side of the composition, two angels kneel in front of Cecilia on either side of a small organ that, according to Christie's, she was playing before she fell asleep. The two angels, dressed in all white to signify their purity, play music for her. A bush of white roses rises around the leg of the angel closest to us and also signifies purity.

Celebrating God's Love

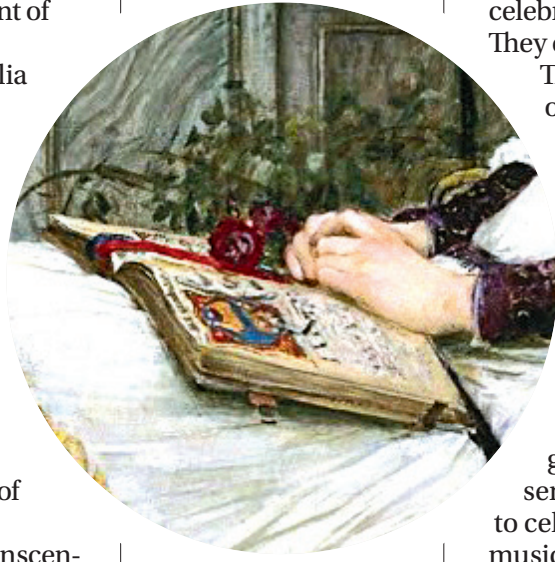
So what does Waterhouse's painting of St. Cecilia say about music? Why did he depict Cecilia sleeping with an illuminated songbook? Why did he paint roses and poppies instead of roses and lilies—the two flowers traditionally associated with St. Cecilia? And why are the two angels kneeling to play their music in front of her?

Let's start with the fact that Cecilia is shown asleep with poppies by the foot of her chair. The poppy—a flower associated with oblivion and sleep—suggests several things. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, oblivion can mean freedom from care or worry. In other words, because she closes her eyes to the world, she is oblivious to the cares and worries of the world. In closing her eyes to the world, she transcends the cares and worries of the world.

And what is the source of her transcendence? God's love is the source of her transcendence, and this is revealed by the rosebush that transcends the poppies and blooms near her head. The rosebush represents God's love in medieval Christian symbolism. The fact that roses bloom near her head suggests that her mind is on God.

She also, however, holds a rose on the illuminated songbook in her lap. Illuminated manuscripts are handwritten religious texts that are decorated with precious metals like gold or silver. So, Cecilia's illuminated songbook would be a book of handwritten hymns to God, and it would be decorated with gold and silver. The rose she holds on the book suggests that these hymns are about God's love, and she was singing these hymns as she played the organ.

Does she represent both the music we can produce to celebrate God's love and the heavenly music that may play within our hearts?



St. Cecilia has an illuminated songbook on her lap.

What does Waterhouse's painting of St. Cecilia say about music?

Is it the case that playing the organ and singing the hymns about God's love are what put her in a state of oblivion—a state of oblivion that is symbolic of her transcending the cares and worries of the world? If so, then the music she plays to celebrate God is also the music that elevates her beyond the cares and worries of the world.

Then, why do the angels kneel at her feet and play music? Why do the angels play music at all? To me, music is a type of adornment. What I mean is that music beautifies and celebrates what it accompanies. Music that accompanies lyrics about money, sex, drugs, and violence beautifies and celebrates those things. Music, however, that accompanies a love of the divine beautifies and celebrates that love.

Thus, the angels who kneel at Cecilia's feet are not kneeling to Cecilia as a person or saint; they kneel because she transcends the world by way of music that celebrates God, which is a sacred event. They celebrate her elevation toward God.

The angels play for Cecilia in her state of oblivion, and since she would have transcended the cares of the world, the music she hears is not of the world. The angels chime in and play their instruments to celebrate Cecilia's celebration of God's love. They provide for her a source of pure, heavenly music—the type of music she desires to maintain her own purity.

Does St. Cecilia represent the goodness of music? Does she represent both the music we can produce to celebrate God's love and the heavenly music that may play within our hearts and minds when we transcend the world? How might we make musical creations that celebrate the divine so that we too may elevate ourselves toward the love of God?

Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart," we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see how our historical creations might inspire within us our own innate goodness.

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

BOOK REVIEW

'The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek'

ANITA L. SHERMAN

It's 1936. Cussy Mary Carter is a young woman living in a small, remote town in eastern Kentucky. Her beloved mother is dead. Her father, a coal miner, is determined that she marry. His intentions are good, but his headstrong daughter has other ideas.

She is proud to be part of a new government initiative created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Works Progress Administration (also known as the WPA). Reeling from the economic and social consequences of the Great Depression, Kentucky's Pack Horse Library Project had a two-pronged mission of giving work to women and bringing literature and art to remote areas of Appalachia.

Cussy's love of books and reading comes from her mother. She is thrilled with her new job that pays less than \$30 a month, and she has no qualms about mounting a horse or mule (in her case) to traverse the beautiful, but often brutal, landscape on her daily routes to deliver reading material.

Fending off would-be suitors that her father arranged to come calling is an unpleasant affair for her—that, and the fact that she is marked as an untouchable. Like her father, she is among the last of Kentucky's true blue-skinned people.

Bluet, the Book Woman

Author Kim Michele Richardson, who lives in Kentucky, has reached deep into her state's history to create a charismatic, unforgettable, and inspiring woman. While Cussy, or Bluet as she is called, is a fictional character, the backdrop of the packhorse librarians and the discrimination against the blue-skinned people was real.

Richardson wants to bring those realities to the reader's attention and does so brilliantly through her use of language and character development.

At that time, under WPA guidelines, women with an employable husband were not eligible to apply to be book women. Cussy liked that and used it as an argument with her father, who was determined that she have a suitable man in her life.

"I liked my sensibility just fine. I liked my freedom a lot—loved the solitude these last seven months had given me—and I lived for the joy of bringing books and reading materials to the hillfolk who were desperate for my visits, the printed word that brought a hopeful world into their dreary lives and dark hollers. It was necessary. And for the first time in my life, I felt necessary."

The Librarian's Clients

Told in Cussy's voice, the book contains many other stories that revolve around

hers. Young Henry, thin and emaciated, waits eagerly for her visits. He shares a single pineapple Life Savers candy (won in a spelling bee) in thanks for her reading to him and others in their small, bleak classroom taught by Winnie Parker. His favorite is "Peter and Wendy." He loves it when she has time to play the piano and sing.

Loretta Adams is old with poor eyesight but welcomes Cussy's company and often has a bit of bread to share. R.C. Cole dreams of becoming a forest ranger. His days are spent in a high tower above the trees. He wants to take young Ruth for his wife.

Perhaps one of the most touching characters is Angeline. Her husband, Mr. Moffit, suffers from ill spirits and an ailing foot. Waiflike, she is pregnant and sees in Cussy a kindred soul. She looks well beyond Cussy's blue hue. Cussy is surprised, at one point, when Angeline takes her hand. "Hain't no harm. Our hands don't care they're different colors. Feels nice jus' the same, huh?"

Not all find favor with the book-lending program, and Cussy is often met with resistance. Devil John Smith is a moonshiner who doesn't take kindly to his wife and children spending their days reading rather than working. Cussy manages to cleverly bridge the gap between his stubbornness and his family's thirst for knowledge.

One constant, loyal, and protective fan is her mule, Junia, ever ready to alert her to trouble on the trail. Cussy's affection for the feisty, four-legged creature is enduring.

Queenie Johnson is her friend and mentor among the local pack women. Often the butt of ridicule, Cussy fights for feelings of self-worth and being valued as others go to dances and win prizes for their pies. She flirts with the fringes of what she feels is a world that she will never be a part of. While she is oftentimes lonely, her books and her clients afford comfort.

Her father's early choice of a suitor in the person of Charles Frazier ends drastically for all involved. "My heart pained for Mama and for my ugly color and what Charles Frazier had taken from me." Then Jackson Lovett enters the scene, perhaps as the white knight in shining armor. They share brief moments as the novel unfolds their mutual love of books and of the land, their caring souls, and contempt for hypocrisy. Educated and living in the house on the hill, he weaves in and out of her life and, at one point, acts (in her mind) as a catalyst for her to temporarily exchange her blue color for white.

Overcoming Intolerance

While extremely rare, methemoglobinemia is the condition that the blue-skinned people suffered from. A local doctor, ever

AMERICAN TREASURES

Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings

Following the path of honesty

KENNETH LAFAVE

In the 20th century, intellectual trends in classical music clashed with popular demand, pushing composers in one direction and audiences in another. This had never happened before.

The move away from baroque intricacies toward clean classical lines in the late 18th century was accompanied by the popularity of Haydn and Mozart. The arrival of Romanticism in Western intellectual circles was embraced by composers and their listeners alike. In the 20th century, by contrast, composers and listeners sharply diverged, as if a committee had decided that music must be X, even if audiences expected and desired Y.

Consider: What is the reason you've heard the music of Mozart and Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, even if you don't listen to classical music, but not (unless you are a music student or one of a tiny group of aficionados) that of Pierre Boulez or Karlheinz Stockhausen? The latter pair were hugely esteemed in the academy, and their principles were elevated to dogma, yet chances are good that you will never hear their music, nor the music of most classical composers born in the 20th century, even if you live to 80.

An Exceptional Adagio

There are exceptions, of course, and one of them, Samuel Barber (1910–1981), composed a piece nearly as ubiquitous as the "Ode to Joy" and as popular as anything Tchaikovsky ever penned: his Adagio for Strings, composed in 1936 as the second

movement of his sole String Quartet and later adapted for string orchestra.

Barber's mournfully beautiful piece is among the most frequently programmed symphonic pieces of music of any era. As late as 2006, a recording of it was the No. 1 classical music seller on iTunes, beating out Beethoven and company. It has been heard in films ("The Elephant Man," "Platoon," "Lorenzo's Oil"); played at the funerals of notables, from Albert Einstein and Princess Grace of Monaco to Mary Travers of the 1960s group Peter, Paul, and Mary; and used to commemorate public tragedies, including the 2015 terrorist attack on the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo, the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, and most notably, the 9/11 attacks of 2001.

In "Absolute Beauty," a 2017, PBS-produced film about Barber's life (available for rent or sale at SamuelBarberFilm.com), American conductor Leonard Slatkin recalls leading a concert in London just days after 9/11. In observance of the tragedy, Slatkin had added the Adagio for Strings to a previously planned program, with devastating results. After the performance, he says, "I collapsed in the dressing room. It got to me in a way no other piece of music ever had."

Whys and Wherefores

How did Barber manage to compose a piece that transcends time to be one of the most listened-to classical pieces ever written, while most other music from the 1930s has been forgotten? The same way Bach, Mozart, and the others did it—by being honest.



'The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek'

Sourcebooks Landmark,

2019

Paperback:

286 pages

LEIGH PHOTOGRAPHY



Author of "The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek," Kim Michele Richardson.

Fans of Kim Michele Richardson can look forward to her next book, "The Book Woman's Daughter," slated for release in May 2022.

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

"The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek" tells of the blue-skinned hill people of the Appalachian Mountains.

curious about the blues' condition, gets Cussy to agree to a series of tests in exchange for baskets of food (which she distributes to her clients). She takes tablets, with unpleasant and harsh side effects, that change the color of her skin—but only temporarily. The outcome is not what she thought it would be.

The book women not only deliver books but magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets as well. Cussy spends hours putting together her scrapbooks of recipes, knitting patterns, fishing tips, and baby care recommendations.

Her deliveries go way beyond books. One person's gift of jam goes to sweeten another's bit of bread. Medicines meant to relieve her pain go to help others out of reach of the doctor. Cussy's books bind her to many lives. There is sadness, grief, and dying.

There are also moments of profound joy and hopefulness interwoven in these stories of the hills and what they hold. A baby named Honey brings a gift of poignant perspective into Cussy's life, one that nurtures her soul. She cradles more than this little life in her arms as she plans for a brighter future.

Richardson's descriptions will have all your senses seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting the hills of Appalachia. She has you coming face-to-face with acute poverty and the daggers of intolerance and small minds. She also speaks to the power of re-invention and redemption.

Her book opens readers to a time and place in history that is given little attention but is of huge cultural significance. Her protagonist comes alive on the pages, bringing us an indomitable spirit that brings light to a dark world.

Are Cussy's labors of heart rewarded? Does she see the redemptive power of books at work? Does she find love and happiness in the hills?

Cussy's story is one of stunning strength in the face of formidable odds. She confronts danger, suspicion, and prejudice but always leaves herself open to places that her books can take her.

"Yonder comes Book Woman. Book Woman's here."

FERENC SZELCSENYI/SHUTTERSTOCK



How did Barber manage to compose a piece that transcends time?

Adagio for Strings is one of the most frequently programmed symphonic pieces of music of any era.

The Adagio for Strings does everything a 20th-century piece of music "should not" do according to dictates of the time. It clearly and unashamedly conveys an emotion—in this case, deep sorrow—in a musical language that would have been comfortable for Brahms and Mahler, structured so as to build to a climax overwhelmingly Romantic in nature.

Most of all, its language is that of tonality—the system of 24 major and minor keys that had defined Western music for centuries, but which intellectuals claimed was halfway out the door by 1936.

In other words, Barber was honestly saying in music something important to him, without a care for the anti-tonal trends of the day. Even The New York Times noticed this: "We have here honest music, by an honest musician, not striving for pre-tentious effect," wrote Times critic Olin Downes after the work's premiere.

Looking to the Future

It's darkly amusing to hear some of the interviewees in "Absolute Beauty" try to make Barber out to be modern in some obscure way. One commentator even calls the Adagio "minimalist," comparing it to the work

of Philip Glass, which means that he can't hear the difference between repetition that evolves and mere static.

One bright light in the film are the words of young composer Jordan Kuspa, who sees in Barber a model for composers who wish to pursue their own modes of expression. Says Kuspa: "The legacy of Barber's music is that he was a composer who said, 'I will do what I want.' I will be honest, and honesty in music almost always leads back to tonality."

The title of "Absolute Beauty" comes from a statement made by conductor Leonard Bernstein about Barber's music. Bernstein compared it to the Platonic ideal of beauty.

In truth, all real musical beauty is absolute, expressing honest emotions common to everyone. Do that today, and you just might compose the 21st century's Adagio for Strings.

Former music critic for the Arizona Republic and The Kansas City Star, Kenneth LaFave recently earned a doctorate in philosophy, art, and critical thought from the European Graduate School. He's the author of three books, including "Experiencing Film Music" (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Fighting for Religious Freedom in Mexico

IAN KANE

History, as far as it is taught in the public schools of the United States, is a very politically correct subject and often omits or otherwise ignores unpopular or shameful aspects that have happened at different points in time.

One inconveniently true stain on Mexico's storied history is the period known as the Cristero War, which lasted from 1926 to 1929. Coincidentally, much of the world was embracing the emerging socialist and communist movements during that time, which obviously didn't work out too well for any of the parties involved. Maverick director Dean Wright tackles this period of history with great skill in his 2012 film, "For Greater Glory: The True Story of Cristiada."



Enrique Gorostieta Velarde (Andy Garcia) stands up to tyranny, in "For Greater Glory: The True Story of Cristiada."

This movie delivers one powerful takeaway: Our religious freedoms aren't as free as we often assume they are.

The film begins with sweeping shots of Mexico City's beautiful architecture, with text that outlines what the country is going through:

"Mexico 1926—a few years after the Revolution. The precarious situation between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church deteriorates as President Plutarco Elías Calles begins strictly enforcing the anti-clerical laws written in the Mexican Constitution of 1917."

It then goes on to describe how civil organizations formed in response to these troubling, ever-worsening political developments. One of the major organizations, the League of Religious Liberty, was composed of defiant men and women called "Cristeros." These brave, common folk spearheaded the growing fight for freedom.

President Plutarco Elías Calles (Rubén

Blades) is then seen giving a public address with many reporters present. He talks about how foreign "fanatics" and "outcasts" from Rome and other areas of Europe are behind an "insidious" plot to undermine and destabilize the Mexican government. And who is conveniently public enemy No. 1, as far as the Mexican government is concerned? Those who believe in the Catholic faith, that's who.

As he sees it, Catholics are turning the Mexican populace into "fanatics" who serve "foreign interests." With self-aggrandizing flair, he states that he is merely preserving the dignity of Mexico. Mexico must be rid of the influence of Catholicism—and rid of it both swiftly and decisively.

As President Calles begins to enforce Articles 3, 5, 24, 27, and 130 (called the "Calles Law") of the Constitution, the apparatus of the Mexican government, mainly the police and military, spring into action—first feverishly rounding up Catholic priests and clergymen, and then expelling them from the country, literally at the end of gun barrels. Any priests who are defiant enough to criticize the government are quickly sen-

tenced to five years in prison. The wearing of the trappings of Catholicism, mainly the religious vestments worn by priests, is also strictly outlawed, at least in public.

Father Christopher (Peter O'Toole) is an older, well-established Catholic priest who becomes aware of the religious crackdowns but dismisses them as inconsequential—at least initially. As it becomes evident that the government is indeed using violence and intimidation to suppress Catholics, he becomes one of the first major symbols of defiance to tyranny by challenging the authority's ban on the Catholic Mass. A man of deep faith, Father Christopher also stubbornly refuses to abandon his parish even though many of the local citizens warn him of the potentially deadly repercussions.

Several major figures of the resistance to the government-sanctioned tyranny become martyred. But instead of paralyzing the movement, this galvanizes it further. What the authorities don't expect is the rise of the brilliant military leader Enrique Gorostieta Velarde (Andy Garcia), in opposition to them. He organizes thousands of

newly minted Cristeros and leads them in their war against President Calles. Enrique's righteous moral compass compels him to resist the government since its crackdown measures become increasingly violent and out of control.

While this terrible period of Mexico's history is distinctly Mexican, the evil forces that lead the oppression of believers have been seen many times before. From the Roman Empire's mission to quash the nascent Christian movement to the many purges of Christianity by communist countries, the tyranny inevitably implodes on itself. There are also direct parallels between the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and its overly enthusiastic condemnation and vilification of the peaceful Falun Gong (also known as Falun Dafa) spiritual practice.

This movie delivers one powerful takeaway: Our religious freedoms aren't as free as we often assume they are. People's right to worship (especially Christians but other faiths as well) is often encroached upon by the various governments of the world. They always start by taking baby steps, increasing degree by degree, to then ratcheting up their tyranny and repression.

This film reminds us of how people resist tyranny. A hopeful message indeed.

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

'For Greater Glory: The True Story of Cristiada'

Director: Dean Wright
Starring: Andy Garcia, Peter O'Toole, Eva Longoria, Oscar Isaac, Catalina Sandino Moreno
MPA Rating: R
Running Time: 2 hours, 25 minutes
Release Date: April 20, 2012

★★★★★

Rediscover America—One Story at a Time

Our nation like you've never seen it before

American Essence is a magazine created for anyone who loves America.

American Essence focuses on traditional American values and great American stories. It recounts significant historical events, from the time of the Founding Fathers to the Americans today who want to give back to their community and country.

American Essence celebrates America's contribution to humanity, and focuses on three pillars—from history to future, timeless values, and perseverance.

American Essence

Subscribe today at AmericanEssence.net or use this form.



“I want my world to be filled with positive real heroes that emulate, share and care [about] the authentic human values that make America great . . . creating a new set of hero values for our children to grow into as the “New America.” — Laurel Young

Yes, I'd like to subscribe!

BEST DEAL

1 Yearly (12 Issues) + 2 Free Issues**
\$95.40 Save \$113.90 (63%)*
 \$7.95/issue for the 1st year, \$8.95/issue from the 2nd year

6 Months (6 Issues)
\$59.70 Save \$30 (33%)*
 \$9.95/issue for the 1st year, \$10.95/issue from the 2nd year

** No free issue(s) upon renewal. *** Based on a monthly rate of \$14.95. Rates are subject to change without prior notice.

3 EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

ONLINE : AmericanEssence.net

HOTLINE : 888-805-0203

BY MAIL: **American Essence***
 Subscription Department
 5 Penn Plaza Fl. 8, New York, NY 10001

* American Essence is part of Bright Magazine Group, a non-profit media company committed to bringing stories that elevate the daily lives of our readers.

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY (INCLUDE APT., STE., OR UNIT NO.)

American Essence

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ APT. # _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL _____ PHONE _____

PAY BY CHECK (PAYABLE TO **American Essence**) USE MY CREDIT CARD / DEBIT CARD

CARD # _____
 We use your credit card solely, and securely, for your subscription. We do not share it with any third parties. The subscription is auto-renew with credit card payment.

EXPIRATION _____ CARD CVV# _____ ZIP _____

NAME ON CARD _____ SIGNATURE _____

BY SIGNING THIS SUBSCRIPTION FORM, I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AT AmericanEssence.net/Terms. I ALSO AFFIRM ALL INFO ABOVE IS COMPLETE AND ACCURATE.