

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



George Washington, here depicted in ancient dress, was often compared to the Roman patriot Cincinnatus. George Washington statue, 1840, by Horatio Greenough. The National Museum of American History.

HISTORY

COUNTRY PATRIOTS

How George Washington compares to legendary Roman Republic hero Cincinnatus

PAUL J. PREZZIA

Perhaps you've had Cincinnati chili. Delicious! No other chili comes close, at least to my mom's version. Or you're a Cincinnati Reds fan (horrible thought—this is a bitter Pirates' fan writing). Or you've been to Cincinnati, a most beautiful city located at the confluence of the Licking and Ohio rivers. OK, most people know about Cincinnati. But do you

know where the city's name comes from? George Washington.

No, this is not a slip of the fingers typing, an odd pronunciation, or a just plain wrong statement. Cincinnati was founded just after the end of the American Revolution, in honor of the Society of Cincinnati, which was a league of Continental Army officers. This society was named for Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, a legendary hero of Rome when it was a republic and not yet an empire. And

who did every American who knew about Cincinnatus think of when they thought about Cincinnatus? George Washington.

Now, perhaps you are asking, why would our forefathers couple these two leaders in their minds? There are lots of points of comparison between Washington and Cincinnatus, but lots of differences as well—more than just 22 centuries.

Continued on Page 4

Why would our forefathers couple these two leaders in their minds?

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The Smoky Mountains were home to a unique culture that brought forth unique literature.

LITERATURE

Gifts From the Hills: Some Highlights of Appalachian Literature

JEFF MINICK

Let's start with that next-to-last word of the headline.

If you visit Eastern Tennessee or Western North Carolina, you'll immediately mark yourself as an outsider if you pronounce Appalachian as Ap-pull-lay-shun. It's Ap-pull-latch-un to those who live there, with that last syllable dropping down hard as a stone.

Appalachia touches 13 states and extends from Northern Mississippi to Southern New York. Famous for its national park, the most visited in the United States, the Smoky Mountains are a subrange of the Appalachians joining North Carolina and Tennessee. Many of the first white settlers who first made the Smokies home were Scots-Irish, hardscrabble folks who built cabins and barns, and cleared the land for plowing. Logging eventually became a major industry, followed by mills that took advantage of the natural resources, swift streams, and cheap labor. With the coming of the railroad and automobiles, tourists traveled north—and still do—from places like Savannah, St. Augustine, and Charleston, seeking solace from the South's summer heat in the cool uplands.

The artisans of the Smokies, including the Cherokee, became noted for their baskets and quilts. Some visitors from outside the region collected the ballads and stories passed down by the generations living in these hills and hollows, while certain students of language noted some similarities between the speech of these mountaineers and that of Elizabethan England. Words like "Granny-woman," "winder-pane," "young uns," and "middlin' (moderately well)" were until quite recently in common use.

These people were also marked by their devotion to family and clan, a special sense of place, and an independent spirit—attributes that feature strongly in the literature written by or about them.

Kinfolk

Over the past 20 years and more, I have reviewed hundreds of books for the Smoky Mountain News. A fair number of these works were novels set in the Southern Appalachians, most of them in the Smokies, which will be my focus here.

Nearly all of these stories centered in one way or another on families. In his autobiographical novel "Look Homeward, Angel," for example, the region's best-known author, Thomas Wolfe, sets his story squarely in the Gant family, describing in great detail the alcoholic father; the petulant and frugal mother, Eliza; their son, the protagonist Eugene; and his siblings. We also hear of the Pentland clan (Eliza's relatives) and the Pentland blood that runs in the veins of the children.

Fast-forward almost 100 years to the publication of another novel, Janet

Beard's "The Ballad of Laurel Springs," and we again land in a family saga, this one set in the mountains of East Tennessee. Author of the bestselling book "The Atomic City Girls," Beard tells the story of an extended family haunted by its past, not only by violence and murder but also by Appalachian ballads—some of them seemingly as old as the hills—that have long recorded the dark deeds of lovers. Women, mostly related by blood or marriage, narrate this chronicle of century-old family turmoil and love.

Females take a prominent place in this literature. In an essay in "Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to 'Hill-billy Elegy,'" Ivy Brashear writes, and rightly so, that "Appalachia, in fact, is a very matriarchal culture. We revere our grandmothers and mothers."

This Place Called Home

"The mountains were his masters," Thomas Wolfe wrote in "Look Homeward, Angel." They "rimmed in life. They were the cup of reality, beyond growth, beyond struggle and death. They were his absolute unity in the midst of eternal change."

Or as Fred Chappell put it more compactly in his one-line poem, "Coming Home": "Even the sunlight is a smell you remembered." Winner of the prestigious Bollingen Prize for Poetry and for five years North Carolina's Poet Laureate, Chappell was born and raised in the Appalachian mill town of Canton, North Carolina. He is one of those writers who excels in a variety of genres—poetry, mainstream fiction, science fiction, memoir, and the essay—and in much of his writing, he guides us into the hills he knew in his boyhood and youth.

Published in 1987, his coming-of-age novel, "I Am One of You Forever," gives us 10-year-old Jess Kirkland and a cast of eccentric relatives, but the book, like some of Chappell's poetry, also salutes the land that nurtured him. Three other books finish off this Kirkland quartet, exploring the effects of both kinfolk and place on Jess Kirkland.

Like Fred Chappell, and indeed like so many other writers from this part of Appalachia, Wilma Dykeman took her inspiration and the subject matter for her books from the land of her birth. Spending her life in the mountains of both North Carolina and Tennessee, she most famously published the fine novel "The Tall Woman" and a regional history, "The French Broad River." In her memoir discovered after her death, "Family of Earth: A Southern Mountain Childhood," Dykeman also evokes the hills that nourished her as a young girl.

Though I lived for 33 years of my adult life in these same mountains, I feel no special attachment to them. I was a Carolina Piedmont boy, and my affections lay with that terrain around Winston-Salem.

But I have known men and women who had left the mountains where they were born and eventually wended their

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The two principal female characters in the novel, Ada, whom Inman loves, and Ruby, who helps her with the farm, are both independent spirits. "Needing and getting don't seem likely to match up any time soon," Ada says at one point. "What needs doing is mine to do."

Interestingly, as mentioned above, many female characters in Appalachian literature demonstrate a similar sense of self-will and determination. Dykeman's "The Tall Woman" gives us this quintessential self-contained woman in Lydia Moore. Like the characters in "Cold Mountain," Lydia is also a product of the Civil War. She works a farm, raises children, and tries to restore her husband Mark's health and soul after the damage done to him by the war. At one point, Lydia reflects: "In this moment of large weakness she suddenly knew large strength, a core buried deep within her that would refuse to be daunted by the outrageous blows or the niggling trifles human life was heir to."

"Montani semper liberi," goes the old Latin tag that also serves as the motto of West Virginia: "Mountaineers are always free."

way back again, homesick for the grandeur of tree-covered ridges. My own children, raised by my wife and me in Waynesville, North Carolina, a gateway to the Smokies, still sometimes express their yearning for the mountains they knew in childhood.

As in literature, these blue hills get into the bloodstream and never disappear.

Necessity Is the Mother of Liberty

During those years I lived in the Smokies, I witnessed many examples of the independent spirit of those who called the mountains home, too numerous to mention here. That sovereign sense of self has, of course, found expression in the stories of these people.

In Charles Frazier's bestselling "Cold Mountain," for instance (the actual Cold Mountain was less than 10 miles from my home), Charles Inman deserts the Confederate army and begins his perilous trek home. He is a man on his own, trying to evade Confederate patrols looking for deserters and the outlaw bands that then ravaged the Smokies.

Lost Its Soul

Like the nation as a whole, Appalachia has changed since World War II. Factories and industries, like the shoe manufacturers and Dayco Plant once located near Waynesville, have closed. Government programs have brought social programs and upgraded schools, and health care has improved. Television and now the internet have homogenized the culture with society at large. The Brooklyn teen and her Waynesville counterpart have equal access to social media.

And as it has elsewhere, modernity has brought disintegration of the family and marriage. Most young people gave up farming long ago, and many of them seek work far from their ancestral land. Opioids, methamphetamines, and other drugs have wracked these communities with addiction, sickness, and death.

Contemporary writers have addressed the coming of these changes to the Smokies. In "The Risen," Ron Rash gives us Ligeia, a young woman from Florida who introduces the 1960s to two small-

Like the nation as a whole, Appalachia has changed since World War II.



Author Thomas Wolfe, circa 1938. Wolfe was born in North Carolina, and his scripts have autobiographical themes, including "Look Homeward, Angel."

MPJ/GETTY IMAGES



Thomas Wolfe explores the impact of the Smokies on those who dwelled among them in "Look Homeward, Angel."

town mountains brothers, with disastrous results. In an earlier Rash novel, "Above the Waterfall," a local sheriff and a park ranger face the evils that crystal meth has brought to their community.

William Forstchen's "One Second After," a story about an electromagnetic pulse strike that hurls most of America back into the 18th century, is unlikely to be considered by most critics an Appalachian novel. Nonetheless, the story is set in Black Mountain, North Carolina, and Forstchen's depiction of that place and its people gives us a glimpse into the old spirit of the mountains.

Regrets and Encouragement

To discuss in a single essay the authors of Appalachia, even when limiting that study to two states, necessarily means ignoring many fine writers. Novelists like Catherine Marshall, Robert Morgan, and Wayne Caldwell, poets like John Thomas York, and storytellers like Gary Carden—even adding these names would still scratch the list of authors worthy of inclusion.

To those I have neglected, my apologies. As for readers, I would encourage you to take up some of these books, and not necessarily for their portrayals of the past. When we read a book like Catherine Marshall's "Christy," based on her mother's teaching days in a Smoky Mountain school, or Frazier's "Cold Mountain," the men, women, and children who inhabit those pages can awaken the dreams and ambitions of an old America that lie half-sleeping in our hearts. They remind us of who we were, yes, but also gently shake us from slumber, or in some cases, from our nightmares, and remind us of who we are.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren.

For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

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After Washington retired from office, he returned to Mount Vernon in March 1797 and devoted time to his plantations. "The Washington Family," 1789-1796, by Edward Savage. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington.



While busy plowing in his field, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus is approached by several senators, representing the Roman people, who sought him out to appoint him dictator of Rome. "Cincinnatus Abandons the Plow to Dictate Laws to Rome," circa 1806, by Juan Antonio de Ribera. Oil on canvas. The Prado Museum, Madrid.

HISTORY

COUNTRY PATRIOTS

How George Washington compares to legendary Roman Republic hero Cincinnatus

Continued from Page 1

2 Farmers

Both Washington and Cincinnatus were pious: One was a Christian; one worshipped the traditional Roman gods. Both generals worked hard. Cincinnatus worked relatively quickly and took enemies by storm, whereas Washington's situation required a lot more time and patience. But the main, the fundamental, point of comparison is this: Both men were offered supreme power by their nations, and then, after wielding that supreme power well, laid it back down of their own accord.

While their military careers may seem to be the most obvious place to look for the similarities that formed their patriotism, selflessness, and incorruptibility, the best comparison is found in this: Both men considered themselves farmers.

Although it is generally agreed that Cincinnatus was a real historical figure, every detail in his story is questioned by one historian or another. Yet there is no question about one thing: His legend greatly influenced the Romans who came after him, not to mention the founders of the United States.

The story goes that Cincinnatus was born very close to the time (519 B.C.) that Rome expelled its kings and became a republic (509 B.C.). Right away, we can see that this would have been a volatile time, a time in which the actions of men of Cincinnatus's age would be critical in determining the success or failure of the young republic. Although he was from a rich and prosperous Roman family, Cincinnatus's situation changed drastically for the worse, and by about 458 B.C., he was reduced to living outside the city (and political influence), plowing, by himself, the last small bit of property he possessed.

Enter the Aequi, an Italian tribe hostile to the Romans. They broke a treaty and attacked the Romans near Mount Algidus. The Roman general who came to the Romans' relief made a huge blunder and

George Washington promptly laid down his supreme authority and went back to farming at Mount Vernon. "Washington as Farmer at Mount Vernon," 1851, by Junius Brutus Stearns. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.



From a portrait of George Washington, 1795, by Gilbert Stuart. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



From a statue of Cincinnatus at his plough, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

rested his men, while the Aequi quietly surrounded them. Only a few horsemen made it out of the encirclement, carrying the bad news to Rome.

Confronted with this news, the Romans in the city decided to make Cincinnatus "dictator." While dictator is a pejorative term now, the Roman dictator was a special office that came into existence only when the existence of Rome itself was threatened. It came with terrible, absolute power—kingly power—the power necessary to make the Romans act as a united force. It had only been invoked a handful of times before. Sure, it was a power that came with a term limit of six months, but one could abuse a lot of power in six months, or even attempt to dissolve the republic and establish a new kingdom.

The Romans came to fetch Cincinnatus. There he was plowing, without his toga on. The toga was the symbol of a Roman's dignity and responsibility as a citizen. Cincinnatus asked his wife to fetch his toga, and then discovered that he was the master of all Rome. He then acted decisively and immediately mustered all able-bodied Romans. He then acted strangely. He issued each conscript 12 valli, or entrenchment poles. Now, the normal practice was to issue one to each soldier, for the purpose of building a palisade wall around the camp. What was Cincinnatus up to?

The Romans and Aequians both found out when he again acted decisively: a double-time march out of Rome and, by means of the extra poles, a complete night encirclement of the Aequians, who were encircling the first Roman army. Cincinnatus's mix of efficiency and imagination resulted in the enemy's total surrender. He acted strangely again, in the weird way that a republic desperately needs: He immediately set down his power and went back to his farm.

One more detail needs to be added: Although the circumstances were not nearly as dramatic, Cincinnatus would be called to the dictatorship one more time, as an old

man, and in a similar way acted decisively and then gave up power.

Turning to George Washington, we find that he was also born into a fairly wealthy family. He is legendary as a general to us, as Cincinnatus was to the Romans, although for different reasons. Whereas what we know of Cincinnatus's soldiery is brief, singularly victorious, and surrounded by the mists of ancient times, there is a long chronicle of Washington's fighting, starting from when he was about 22 in the French and Indian Wars all the way through the end of the Revolutionary War at age 51. More persistence and patience were required of Washington as a soldier, and he faced reversals and outmaneuvers before coming out on top in 1783.

Washington, the man who had accomplished the impossible and defeated the world's superpower of the time, promptly proceeded to lay down his supreme authority and head back to farming at Mount Vernon. Similarly, when he was torn away from farming again when he was elected president in 1789, he would step down from the presidency of his own accord in 1797, setting the precedent for the two-term limit, which most of his successors have observed.

As can be seen, Washington's and Cincinnatus's military careers are as different as they are great. But when the dust from war settled, as when Cincinnatus gave up his two dictatorships, and as when Washington laid down his generalship and the presidency, there was the same giving up of power and the return to rural life.

The Virtues Proceeding From a Rural Life

A return to rural life is a refreshment, a restoration, a return to the original principles that made these men great leaders and greater citizens. Farming does not automatically make men good or great, but good farming does require some of the most important virtues that make men good and give them the potential for

greatness. These virtues are patriotism, selflessness, and incorruptibility.

Consider patriotism. Cincinnatus and Washington both lived while their respective republics were being born and growing up. Here's a crucial question: If you can't love what you don't know, how do you make the citizens of a new republic patriotic—to love something that, in a sense, they have just become acquainted with? One person who is very well placed to acquire this necessary love is a farmer, for a farmer knows very well the physical composition of his native country, what grows and doesn't grow, and how the seasons affect his crops. Someone who earns his living from the very soil of the land might well be willing to die for it. A conscientious farmer would have the wherewithal to be a conscientious patriot. And both these Roman and American patriots were conscientious farmers.

Washington studied the soil of his fields minutely. Instead of blindly sticking with

the trend of growing tobacco in his native Virginia, he took stock of the soil erosion and the tiny profits he obtained from this plant, diversified his crops, and thereby prospered. He kept incredibly precise records of his plantings, his experiments, and his profits. The historian Ron Chernow has pointed out that Washington's care for his expanding farm enterprises gave him the skills necessary to organize the Continental Army.

Selflessness, the second attribute, is demanded by farming. Thinking of the crops right in front of him, a farmer must find the best way to make them thrive. So too must he think of those who work the farm. Farming allows one to think of other human beings and their prosperity. Perhaps we can even see this in Washington's treatment of slaves. Washington had a far from perfect record with regard to slavery, but he had a much better record than almost any other large landholders of his time, making a provision to free all his slaves

Both Washington and Cincinnatus were offered supreme power by their nations.

after his wife Martha's death.

As Washington's farming was directly linked with his patriotism and selflessness, so was Cincinnatus's. Who did the Romans go to in their hour of direst need, but to a man who was so poor that he had to work his land himself, yet so dedicated to the republic that they knew he would be ready to defend it in a heartbeat? Cincinnatus could have felt it within his rights to snub the messengers from the Senate. Why should he fight for a nation where he had become impoverished and had even been forced by his circumstances to leave the city? But there was something about the republic, something about being a poor, free citizen farmer instead of a wealthy subject that convinced Cincinnatus to take up immediately the heavy task he was given.

Of course, it was a heavy task, but he finished it—and within only a few days. He then faced the prospect of almost six months of unlimited power, during which time he could take advantage not only of the power but also of the gratitude of Rome to do whatever he wanted. He did not, and given that same power again, did not, just as Washington did not.

Why use your power for the sake of the common good—being selfless—unless you are convinced of the connection between that common good and your own? Why give up power when you have it, unless you are convinced that your true kingdom in the world is your home and property? This is the kind of conviction that makes men incorruptible, that is, men who refuse to abuse power. It is the conviction that taking care of what is yours as a citizen is a higher thing than lording over other citizens. This seems to be the source of the last virtue, the incorruptibility found in both these men.

While the fame of Washington and Cincinnatus starts with their power, it is completed by their relinquishing power, and that willingness to resign power is something related to their both being farmers. The contemporary Frenchman Jacques-Pierre Brissot, like our forefathers, realized this. In his "New Travels in the United States of America. Performed in 1788," he wrote: "You have often heard [Washington] compared to Cincinnatus. The comparison is doubtless just. The celebrated General is nothing more at present than a good farmer, constantly occupied in the care of his farm and the improvement of cultivation."

Paul Joseph Prezgia received his M.A. in history from the University of Notre Dame in 2012. He now teaches at Gregory the Great Academy and lives in Elmhurst Township, Pa. with his wife and children.



The event of Cincinnatus taking on and then giving up absolute power was a story well known by Revolutionary-era colonists. Engraving, 1818, by Bartolomeo Pinelli. Rijksmuseum.

King Charles I and the Innovative Bust

ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

JAMES BARESEL

In 1636, Gian Lorenzo Bernini received an unusual painting—Anthony van Dyck’s “Charles I in Three Positions.” In the center, the king faces forward. To either side, he is depicted in full and in three-quarter profile. An eccentric demonstration of talent? A whim? No. The painting is a highly unconventional means of preparing to sculpt a bust commissioned by history’s greatest royal art lover.

King Charles I of England is almost as famous as a patron of the arts as he is for his role in the country’s civil war. He particularly favored the Flemish painters Sir Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, as well as the English architect Inigo Jones. But that’s not the whole story. Charles I was more than a connoisseur’s connoisseur. His devotion to beauty transformed England into a center of European artistic life.

When Charles became king in 1625, architecture and literature dominated English high culture. Shakespeare had been deceased for less than a decade, and Ben Jonson, the foremost English playwright and poet after Shakespeare, was at the height of his career. Inigo Jones (1573–1652) was the first major architect in England and the first to employ classical rules of proportion and symmetry in his buildings. His design of the Queen’s House was the first building in England to be constructed in the classical style. Yet, no major artist had spent significant time in England since Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543). Even good minor painters had been scarce. Few works by Italian masters had ever been imported.

Influential Art

English art enthusiasts, however, had long admired Flemish painters. Sir Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck therefore started to influence English taste. Both were at the forefront of the Italian-oriented Baroque movement. Inigo Jones simultaneously introduced Italian architectural styles.

Charles’s interest in these artists prepared him for an aesthetic awakening during a 1623 visit to Spain. King Philip IV of Spain had one of Europe’s most magnificent art collections; Italian Renaissance oil painting was particularly well represented.

King Charles embraced that model. Importing on a grand scale, he purchased works by Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, and many others. Even ancient Roman sculptures were found by his agents. After a mere decade and a half, his collection included almost 2,000 pieces—comparable to what Spanish monarchs had taken a century to amass.

But Charles I didn’t stop with collecting works of earlier masters. He was equally devoted to the creation of new ones. By 1628, he was the primary employer of Orazio Gentileschi—one of the most important Italian Baroque painters. Sir Peter Paul Rubens, then Europe’s preeminent artist, visited England a year later. The king commissioned him to paint a series of works for the ceiling of Whitehall Palace’s Banqueting House.

In 1632, England saw the arrival of Anthony van Dyck and the beginning of one of history’s most significant artist-patron relationships. Van Dyck’s work was not just that of a great master. It was not just quantitatively vast. It also conveyed the spirit of life in King Charles’s milieu in a highly original way. Kings had previously been painted in highly formalized poses or contexts implying powerful leadership. Many of van Dyck’s paintings of Charles I maintained that tradition. Others capture scenes from daily life of the royals. “Charles I at the Hunt,” “Queen Henrietta Maria With Sir Jeffrey Hudson,” and “The Five Eldest Children of Charles I” all resemble photographs of people who “turn



toward the camera” amid normal activities. One van Dyck portrait of Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria captures a mutual tenderness previously unseen in paintings of royal couples.

The Novel Bust

Yet, some gaps remained in a collection that included such dramatic new developments alongside works by the greatest of old masters. King Charles had not been portrayed in sculpture. And he did not own any works by Bernini—the greatest sculptor since Michelangelo and his only rival. For Bernini to sculpt the king would fill both gaps. There was just one problem. Bernini worked for Pope Urban VIII. Leaving Rome for an extended period would do his career more harm than good. Charles couldn’t leave his kingdom without serious political or military need.

Those obstacles aside, both Bernini and Pope Urban were anxious to accommodate the king. For Bernini to receive a commission from such a famous foreign connoisseur was particularly flattering—and sure to be well rewarded. The pope had stronger motivation. Though unable to repeal anti-Catholic laws without the consent of an unwilling parliament, the pious Anglican Charles had considerably reduced persecution of English Catholics. Bernini agreed to attempt what no sculptor had done before. Accurately depicting someone in marble is even harder than doing so with a paintbrush. Bernini would go further—sculpting someone he had never seen in person. That required using the most accurate portraits as models, and van Dyck was the obvious collaborator. In addition to being Charles’s standard portraitist, he had known Bernini while working in Rome.

The bust was a triumph. Its fame quickly spread throughout Europe, and within four years, Bernini was called upon to repeat the performance—sculpting a bust of France’s Cardinal Richelieu from another triple portrait. Unfortunately, we must rely on that later work to gauge how brilliantly Bernini depicted the English king. Though inferior



“Charles I and Henrietta Maria Holding a Laurel Wreath,” 1632, by Anthony van Dyck. Oil on canvas. Archbishop’s Castle and Gardens, Kromeriz, Czech Republic.

“Charles I in Three Positions,” 1635, by Anthony van Dyck. Oil on canvas. Royal Collection, UK.

After a mere decade and a half, King Charles’s collection of art included almost 2,000 pieces.

copies exist, the bust of Charles was tragically lost in a 1698 fire at Whitehall.

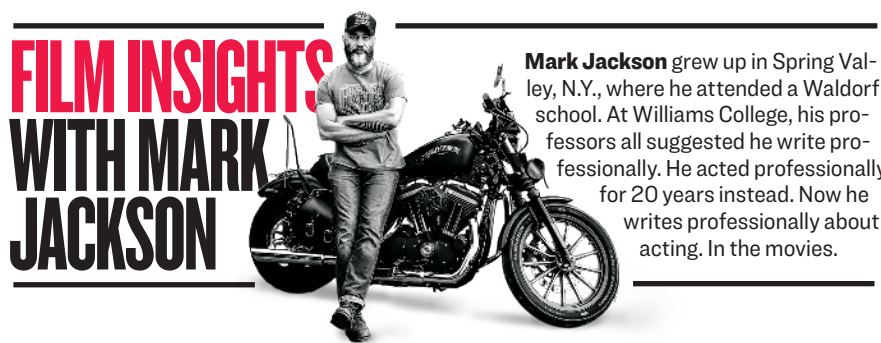
James Baresel is a freelance writer who has contributed to periodicals as varied as Fine Art Connoisseur, Military History, Claremont Review of Books, and New Eastern Europe.



Self-portrait, circa 1620–21, by Anthony van Dyck. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



“Double Portrait of the Painters Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck,” between 1632 and 1687, by Paulus Pontius, after a painting by Anthony van Dyck. Engraving on paper. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



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.

FILM REVIEW

Sky-High Survival Thriller Packs Powerful Punch

MARK JACKSON

“Fall” has so much in common with 2005’s monster movie “The Descent” that it should be titled “The Ascent.” The original was about six rock-climber girl buddies who go spelunking and run into some blind, cave-dwelling, orc-looking, ceiling-crawling, pasty-white humanoids who eat people.

“Fall” is about two rock-climber girl buddies who ascend a rusty, rickety relic—the 2,000-foot-tall, defunct B67 radio tower out in the desert. For reference, that’s twice the height of the Eiffel Tower, and the World Trade Center’s North Tower was 1,368 feet (1,730 feet including the antenna). It’s got screws rattling around; it creaks and groans in the wind—what could possibly go wrong?

At the very tippy-tippy top is a 1950s-looking lightbulb in a red glass casing—an aircraft warning light. That thing would burn out every three weeks. So, what ... they send the Wichita lineman up there, once a month, to shimmy up that last spire with no footholds, 2,000 feet off the deck, where you can see the Earth’s curvature—to change that planned-obsolescence rinky-dink bulb?

See, it’s best not to think these kinds of thoughts; “Fall” deconstructs extremely easily—but it’s nevertheless extremely potent. If you’ve seen “The Descent,” you know whereof I speak. Some producer type clearly said: Let’s take all that nail-biting mayhem from way down below the Earth’s surface, and put it waaaaay up in the sky.

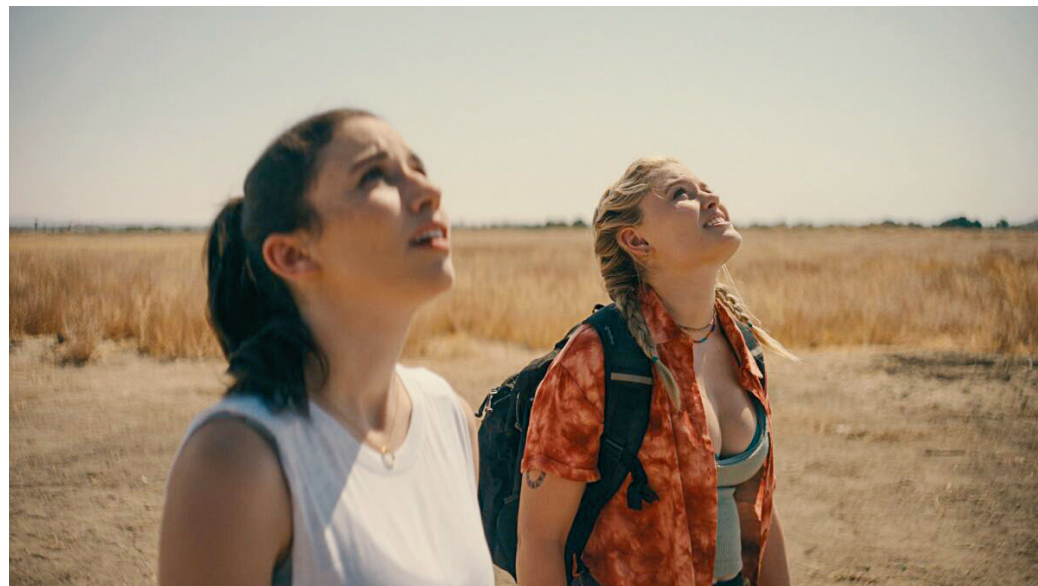
If you have a severe fear of heights, don’t go anywhere near “Fall”; you’ll have a heart attack. Or at least a panic attack. But if you love roller coasters and want to give yourself a guaranteed, good old-fashioned scare equal to the most heart-stopping roller coaster you’ve ever been on, “Fall” is just the movie for you.

Personally, I don’t have an extreme fear of heights; I used to, but my first-ever rock climb was 300 feet with pretty extreme exposure, and it immediately cured my acrophobia. But “Fall” had me cringing in my seat, holding my breath for extended periods of time, and made my palms sweat, which is exactly what a good survival thriller is supposed to do.

The Players

Becky Connor’s (Grace Caroline Currey) husband, Dan (Mason Gooding), died in a rock-climbing accident nearly a year ago. She’s spiraled out of control with grief, drinks too much, and hasn’t yet opened the box containing his remains, much less planned on where to scatter them.

Shiloh Hunter (Virginia Gardner), Becky’s bestie, is an extreme adventure YouTuber. Hunter comes to check up on Becky, and pitches a get-back-in-the-saddle climbing project—climb the above-mentioned decommissioned B67 radio tower. This tower is largely a CGI creation, but it’s based on the 2,049-foot KXTV Tower in Walnut Grove, California, which was built in 1986. It’s the tallest structure in California, the third-tallest guyed mast in the world, and the seventh tallest structure to have ever existed.



Becky (Grace Caroline Currey, L) and Hunter (Virginia Gardner) look up at Tower B67 in dread and anticipation.



Becky gets dragged, kicking and screaming, but understands the need to get back on the horse and slay her depression. However, when they finally summit on the uppermost platform, a tiny octagonal grate floating stratospherically above the yawning desert, a perfect storm of bad luck ensues.

This is due to a combination of poor decisions, ignoring the structure’s obvious decrepit state, and Hunter’s need to video-document everything and tempt the Grim Reaper for social media likes—like doing a one-handed hang, off the observation deck, without being roped in. All this results in a loss of gear crucial for navigating a descent, and leaves them “sittin’ on top of the world,” and not in the way Howlin’ Wolf originally intended that lyric. They’ve got no water, food, or cell signal.

Similarities to ‘The Descent’

“The Descent” and “The Ascent,” er, “Fall,” share the same premise: grieving woman reunites with her adventure buddy(s) to get her mind off her late husband, and the women get trapped due to a combination of hubris and attempting to tackle an extreme level of daunting physical adventure.

They also share similar narrative and emotional beats. Both films contain an 11th-hour plot switcheroo that will be immediately recognizable. My mentioning it here is not a spoiler; it’ll catch you off guard all the same. Overall, “Fall” isn’t as powerful as “The Descent,” but it’s an effective thriller in its own right. I would actually say it’s better; the reason being, “The Descent” is really a horror film and will leave its mark on your soul as horror films do, like a festering disease, whereas “Fall” is thriller scary but clean for the soul. It’s more (no pun intended) uplifting.

Both films also share another common denominator: the clear point of an inner shift from victim to fearless warrior. In “The Descent,” this moment when the gore-soaked last survivor morphs into a thoroughly empowered, havoc-wreaking, wrathful goddess of vengeance is stunning. In “Fall,” it’s less dramatic but also quite satisfying.

The Scares

As mentioned, the dizzying shots of Becky and Hunter climbing the insanely tall tower and peering down into the void will be enough to send even those with a mild fear of heights out into the theater lobby in search of a paper bag to breathe into. The film uses a variety of shots—helicopter shots, drone shots—to convey just how high up these women are. As they reach the halfway mark, a wide shot of the situation is heart-stopping; the tower is so tall that, even at a long distance, its top and bottom are not visible, and the two girls look like a couple of fleas.

It may happen that somebody gets a debilitating injury along the way. What does blood attract out in the high desert? You know. And then there are those shaky screws, where the washer and nut rattled loose at least two decades ago.

The quiet moments in “Fall” are sometimes just as sobering and chilling as the “dynos” (leaping from one hold to another), falls, and stumbles that will set viewers’ hearts racing. There’s that element of the impartiality of nature in the outcomes of human affairs, similar to shark thrillers such as “The Shallows” and “Open Water.” After the women argue on their tiny octagonal platform, there’s a beautiful shot of them backlit by the sunrise, silhouetted by the cruel reminder of another scorching hot day, 2,000 feet away from safety. They sit, back to back, like the god Janus, and talk about the faithlessness of men.

As in any survival movie, there’s a fair amount of attempted MacGyvering, a few instances of which involve trying to lower cellphones low enough so that they can pick up a signal. Can they stuff a phone in a Converse high-top sneaker, padded and cushioned with a push-up bra (said bra is, of course, for the enhancement of YouTube likes), throw it off the tower, and attract attention that way? Then again, that might only attract local desert-dwelling riffraff who’d possibly take an uninvited interest in their parked truck.

Speaking of cruel, “Fall” doesn’t hesitate to be cruel to either the audience or the characters. There are a couple of laugh-out-loud moments due to the disbelief of having your inner thoughts of how this could get any worse answered with a resounding face-smack of just how much worse it can get.

The Payoff

In spite of an anemic, perfunctory script, the two leads do a fine job of conveying their characters’ long and complicated history, as well as the enormity of their situation, and appear to have actual climbing skills. There are a few climbing situations early on that will have actual rock climbers scoffing, but they mostly have to do with shots of the deceased husband climbing and goofing off in the middle of a life-threatening situation.

While the women’s personalities aren’t as clearly delineated as those in “The Descent,” you’ll still very much care about what happens to them. Only Becky’s anguished dad, James (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), appears to be phoning in his performance.

The silver lining of desperate survival situations is that they impart the gift of gratitude and facilitate a long period of taking nothing for granted and living in the moment. This is the addiction of expedition mountain climbing, solo long-distance sailing, long-distance adventure motorcycling, and even vision questing. The extreme discomfort is followed by a curious wistfulness and nostalgia. Forced to be atop a sky-high tower is a white-knuckle, vertiginous endurance test of anxiety-inducing suspense, but shortly after the end, you may find yourself in that funny place one gets to in one’s head, when the roller coaster car arrives back at the starting gate: “Can we go again?”

To see a real-life version of “Fall,” watch “Free Solo.”

ALL PHOTOS BY LIONSGATE

Becky (Grace Caroline Currey) shimmies up Tower B67’s spire to attempt to recharge a drone battery, in “Fall.”



Shiloh Hunter (Virginia Gardner) tempting fate with a one-handed hang with no rope off the tower deck.



"Guardroom With the Deliverance of Saint Peter," circa 1645–47, by David Teniers the Younger. Oil on wood; 21 3/4 inches by 29 7/8 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Being Good to Ourselves: Gaining Freedom Through God's Truth and Goodness

ERIC BESS

Our days are filled with things that compete for our attention. Our jobs, our families, and our friends demand our time. This doesn't include the new hobbies that interest us or the side ventures we want to take. Everything demands our time.

But what about our spiritual fulfillment? Is this getting the attention it needs and deserves?

The business of our day-to-day lives can distract us from what's best for us. It's easy to forget that we can only be good at our jobs and for our family and friends if we are first good to ourselves.

To me, David Teniers the Younger's painting "Guardroom With the Deliverance of Saint Peter" reminds us to be good to ourselves.

'Guardroom With the Deliverance of Saint Peter'

To understand Teniers's painting, we must know the backstory. Peter, an original disciple of Jesus, was arrested and jailed by King Herod for spreading the truth and goodness of God. In jail, Peter is met by an angel who tells him to escape. Peter follows the angel to the jail entrance and walks out without anyone noticing him.

Teniers shows the moment when Peter escapes jail. We can see Peter and the angel in the very back on the right side of the painting. The angel is shown pointing toward the exit, and Peter's hands are clasped in prayer.

The rest of the painting is filled with guards ignorant of Peter's escape. There

are three guards to the left, four in the middle, and four on the right near Peter and the angel.

On the left, one guard sits and rests his head against a support column while another guard smokes his pipe and puts his hand toward the fire in front of him. The third guard stands behind these two and looks toward the group of guards in the middle, who are playing a game of dice.

The four guards to the right stare at something outside of the picture plane. A dog at the bottom right stares at an unruly pile of items at the bottom left. This pile includes armor, weapons, clothing, and a drum, and their haphazard arrangement creates a subtle sense of unrest.

Escaping Our Prison

How might Teniers's painting remind us to be good to ourselves?

I think it's helpful to look at the characters in this painting as multiple aspects of one person. All of these people represent certain ways in which we divide our attention.

Sometimes, we are captivated by the excitement of playing a game with friends like the men in the middle. Sometimes, we're enticed by the comforts of life represented by the men to the left, who sleep and warm themselves by the fire.

And sometimes, curiosity gets the best of us like the group of men to the right, who are distracted by what's hidden behind the wall.

At first glance, these men appear to be doing everyday things. None of these things are bad in and of themselves. Taken to an extreme, however, they can cause us to neglect our spiritual well-being.

Our spiritual well-being, of course, is represented by Peter and the angel. Peter is imprisoned by the figures that represent our distractions. Here, it's the distractions of comfort, entertainment, and curiosity that imprison our spiritual side.

How does Peter free himself from this prison? How might we be good to ourselves? Peter holds his hands in prayer, which lets us know that he has faith. It is because of Peter's faith in God that the angel comes to him and leads the way to freedom.

Does Teniers suggest that Peter's faith is the key to his freedom? Teniers paints an armored glove pointing at a physical key at the bottom of the composition. No one in the painting is paying attention to the key. Does he want us to see it?

I think Teniers wants us to know that the physical key is not the actual key to Peter's freedom. Here, the physical key is useless and ignored. Instead, faith is the key; Peter's clasped hands represent his unshakable belief in God, and it is this that sets him free.

So how do we take good care of ourselves? How do we make sure that we mind our spiritual well-being?

The key is strong faith in the truth and goodness of God. So no matter how busy our lives get, how many people or things demand our attention, or how comfortable we become, we must make sure to make time for the truth and goodness of God.

Even if it's in the background of our lives, as Teniers has depicted it in the background of his painting, our belief in God is still at the heart of our stories.

God's truth and goodness are the keys to freeing us from the many demands of life; this is how we take good care of ourselves.

We must make sure to make time for the truth and goodness of God.



At the back of the painting, we see the cell where Peter is praying and an angel is directing his escape. A detail of "Guardroom With the Deliverance of Saint Peter."

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 a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSV).



In this view of "Guardroom With the Deliverance of Saint Peter," we see three groupings of guards occupied in different ways.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Director Ingmar Bergman's Journey of Self-Reflection

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

"Wild Strawberries" (1957) begins with lines uttered by the protagonist, an irascible professor Isak Borg (Victor David Sjöström): "I am an old pedant, which, at times, has been rather trying for myself and those around me." This forms the kernel of screenwriter-director Ingmar Bergman's Swedish drama on selfishness and its poisoning of personhood.

Isak, a 78-year-old widowed physician, contemplates his life through flashbacks, dreams, and experiences while on a long drive from Stockholm to Lund University to receive his Doctor Jubilatis, an honor bestowed for 50 years of service. The journey isn't so much a car ride as a voyage of self-reflection. Marianne (the lovely Ingrid Thulin), his daughter-in-law, accompanies him. As the story unfolds, Isak's initial understanding of his own misanthropy turns out to be understated. If anything, he's been more ruthless to those he was supposed to love than he imagines.

Bergman's first scene shows Isak hunched over his desk, his face turned away from the camera and, symbolically, away from people. Photographs in his study tell us who they are: his dead wife Karin (Gertrud Fridh), his son Evald (Gunnar Björnstrand), and his aged mother (Naima Wifstrand). Yet, for all the family that once surrounded him, it's Isak's housekeeper Miss Agda (Jullan Kindahl) who is now closest to his experience of a "family."

Isak spars with Agda in the touching, if lighthearted, opening sequence. He wakes her at an unearthly hour, announcing that he's driving out to Lund. As she tries to talk him into setting out later, as he'd planned all along, he puts her in her place. "We're not married!" he says. She exclaims with folded hands: "I thank God for that every night." Seconds later, she's affectionately rustling up breakfast and packing his bags for him.

People Matter More Than Fame or Fortune

Isak's luxurious house bursts with self-importance. He is not only wealthy but is also used to a lifetime of getting his way; he exudes entitlement in every impatient gesture, every frown, every intolerant shake of his head.

En route, young hitchhikers, and later a middle-aged squabbling couple, hop into his spacious car. Isak strikes up conversations with them. These conversations are interwoven with dream sequences of his dead wife and filled with his regret over their bitter marriage. Other conversations in dream sequences with Marianne, his mother, and embittered son Evald critique Isak's repeated refusal, over the years, to love.

In one family flashback, Sara (Bibi Andersson), Isak's cousin and a symbol of the love of his youth, overhears singing in honor of an old uncle. She mocks the silliness involved in singing for a "deaf" man. And Isak feels the futility that the unloved feel

when loving those unable to "receive" love.

In one dream, Isak stares at a giant town clock, the "face" of which has no minute or hour hand. Later he's shown his dead father's pocket watch without hands, like the giant clock of his dreams. It's meant to be a symbol of Isak's wasted years, wasted because he's merely lived rather than also loved.

In another dream, Sara refers to Isak's knowing much and still not knowing anything: an indictment of his professorial knowledge in contrast to his ignorance about how to care for others.

At his journey's end, as he approaches the ceremony at the university, Isak's mind is filled with thoughts from the day's events. He senses an "extraordinary logic" to them and plans to write it all down.

Bergman's Brilliance

The theatrical feel of "Wild Strawberries" flows from Bergman's stage sensibilities. Here, his camera doesn't move too much within scenes, and he almost never cuts away mid-scene. In spite of his dependence on dream sequences, he uses few, if any, "effects." He also avoids offering visual clues to separate dream and reality; often it's only mid-scene that you realize it's happening in reality and not in a dream.

Bergman isn't so concerned with the realism that swept European cinema then, and even less with storyline. What matters to him is what the story means and how he can make that meaning profound at the film's every stage.

The camera's almost obsessive gaze at Isak reveals his confusion in a dream, and his dread in a nightmare. Sjöström, in his final film role, plays Isak with sensitivity, supported by a superlative cast who serve as a sounding board for Isak's musings.

For all the screen time taken by the central male character, strong, perceptive, and outspoken women (as many as half a dozen of them) figure almost as prominently. Their screen time adds up, as well as the sheer weight of their lines in the script and their impact on Isak's mind and soul.

Crafted scenes and camera angles, brimming with symbolism, tell us of Isak's bottled-up self-loathing.

Some shots of Isak reveal a "twin" of sorts: his dark reflection in the glass pane of a door or on a pond's glassy surface—a sign of his grumpier, earlier self. Each moment seems to offer him a chance to be a new man: to love or to stay indifferent, to reach out in compassion or to continue withdrawing in aloofness.

Bergman extends the reflection theme when young Sara (in a dream) holds up a mirror to the aged Isak to have him really look at himself.

Bergman's film presents us with questions that we must reflect on. Will Isak shed his guilt? Will he forgive himself for his cruel indifference? Will he heal festering wounds? Or will he rationalize his way out and harden himself further?

The Swedish title of Bergman's master-

Something for Summer Reading: 'The Jungle Book' by Rudyard Kipling

SEAN FITZPATRICK

Are you looking for a fine and fun summertime read to rekindle the sunny days of your youth? Or perhaps to read to your children in the late-summer evenings? There may be no better book for you and your little ones than "The Jungle Book" for its whimsy and its wisdom.

Rudyard Kipling's celebrated collection of stories called "The Jungle Book" is a spirited, playful safari with moments of profound gravity that both evoke and enshrine what it means to be human in a wilderness of creatures—that is, to have ascendancy and stewardship.

The collection of curious and compelling tales of the animal kingdom and the king of the animals seeks to point to the place where creatures great and small belong in the wild and wild world.

A World of Tigers, Seals, Elephants ... and Men

Mowgli is the man cub raised by wolves

in the jungles of India, who grows to learn his place first in the pack, then in the human village, and finally in overcoming the dreadful tiger Shere Khan.

While Mowgli's episodes are the most famous, it is a shame to abandon to obscurity Kotick the White Seal, who saves his kind from hunters in the Bering Sea; or Rikki-Tikki-Tavi the mongoose, who protects an English family from a pair of cobras; or Toomai of the Elephants, a young elephant handler who, by his kindness, comes to discover the mysterious dance of those lumbering beasts.

"The Jungle Book" teems with creatures that have purpose and pleasure in distant environs. It is more of a jungle than a book, and its joy is the joy of the wild things together with the noble and fearful sovereignty of man, the wildest thing of all. For, as Mowgli shows, it is his gaze that the animals cannot bear to meet.

A Dated Yet Eternal Perspective

One thing to be cautious of in "The Jungle Book" is Kipling is often criticized for his emphasis on what he would call patriotism—and we might call imperialism—and the caste systems that influence his tales. But they are not overbearing.

The English presence in India, Africa, and Afghanistan, whether in family units as in "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" or in military units as in the final chapter, "Her Majesty's Servants," is not presented as a racial or ideological invasion, but rather as a simple and accepted matter of business.

The situations bear a practical rather than a demeaning air, offering a hierarchical charm that organizes the animal kingdom



Ingmar Bergman (L) and actor Victor Sjöström in 1957 during production of "Wild Strawberries." Some consider the film to be one of Bergman's greatest and most moving films, and also one of the greatest films ever made.

The film shows the price we pay when we betray our promising childhood of trusting love.

piece, "Smultronstället," loosely translates as "the wild strawberry patch," a symbol not so much of a place, but of a state or time in life worth nurturing. His film shows the price we pay when we betray our promising childhood of trusting love by following it with narcissistic youth and adulthood.

"Wild Strawberries" nudges us to contemplate our lives, just as Isak's dreams, nightmares, and experiences on the drive show him what he made of his.

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



In a dream sequence, young Sara (Bibi Andersson) holds a mirror up to Isak Borg (Victor David Sjöström) to show him the poverty of his life.

'Wild Strawberries'

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Starring: Victor David Sjöström, Ingrid Thulin, Bibi Andersson

Not Rated

Running Time: 1 hour, 31 minutes

Release Date: Dec. 26, 1957

★★★★★



"Mowgli Made Leader of the Bandar-Log (Monkey folk)," 1903, by John Charles Dollman.

A Book for Young and Old

"The Jungle Book" is a delight for readers young and old because it revels in energy that the young can relate to and the old can recall. Mowgli's adventures are thrilling for children and recall the rites of passage to maturity.

Kotick is a playful seal who must take on a dangerous mission to save his family. Rikki-Tikki-Tavi engages an ancient instinct against his snake-like foes to preserve new life in the nursery. Mowgli must use the knowledge that he learned in his feral youth to become a responsible man and to deliver the human community from the menacing tiger.

As for style, Kipling's tales are narrated with a formality that amuses readers with its antiquated yet lively tone. Kipling's skill as a storyteller renders "The Jungle Book" a graceful tour de force, blazing a trail through a menagerie that has more life and vigor at every turn than anything that can be seen in a dull tour of a zoo.

It's a Jungle in There

The lure and love of animals is part of humanity, rooted in the ancient jungles of our heredity, and echoing through ages past when man walked naked and fearless with the beasts. The childlike fascination of the animal kingdom might be a remnant of the time when man was in his infancy and

walked in the Garden of Eden as king of all the animals. Much of this lost inheritance—this lost innocence—is conjured and cherished in literature that reconnects man to the animals through imaginative, anthropomorphic adventures.

"The Jungle Book" is a leader of that pack of books that reunite mankind with animal-kind, allowing readers to recall the thrilling wildness that pulses with summer heat and the unbridled romance of the untamed.

Take a tour of the jungle in these waning summer weeks and find out for yourself that there is a simplicity in Kipling that can help navigate the jungle of our day-to-day lives.

Sean Fitzpatrick serves on the faculty of Gregory the Great Academy, a boarding school in Elmhurst, Pa., where he teaches humanities. His writings on education, literature, and culture have appeared in a number of journals, including Crisis Magazine, Catholic Exchange, and the Imaginative Conservative.

FILM REVIEW

The Amazing Story of Explorer Ranulph Fiennes

MICHAEL CLARK

The third cousin (once-removed) of the Fiennes acting family (Ralph, Joseph, and three others), Sir Ranulph Fiennes (full name: Ranulph Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes) has lived a life that would make most overachievers blush and cause others to reconsider their own bucket lists.

To wit:

He was the first person to circumnavigate the globe, not (the relatively easier) east to west, but north to south, while crossing both polar ice caps in the process.

He, with Mike Stroud, a physician who accompanied him in a vehicle for safety and possible medical reasons, were the first to cross the entire continent of Antarctica and did so over the course of a mere 92 days.

At the age of 65, he climbed Mount Everest, becoming the oldest British person to ever do so.

At the age of 59, he ran seven marathons—in seven consecutive days—on seven continents.

He served eight years in the SAS (Special Air Service), a covert branch of the British Army as a demolitions expert, and in 1968 helped defeat a Yemini communist insurgency in Oman.

Not quite as impressive: He was on the short list to replace Sean Connery as James Bond and has written 24 fiction and non-fiction books.

Air-Tight Narrative

Every one of these accomplishments is worthy of its own stand-alone feature, and it is to the credit of director Matthew Dyas that the 113-minute-long documentary “Explorer” goes by in a flash. There’s not an ounce of fat in the entire film. Dyas, along with editors Ben Stark and Charlie Hawryliw, doesn’t include a single unneeded frame.

Having previously collaborated with Fiennes on the overlooked 2019 docuseries “Fiennes: Return to the Nile,” Dyas has what appears to be unlimited access to his subject. Although the bulk (about 70 percent) of the film is culled from the usual archival footage, stills, newsreels, and the like, the remainder is recently shot and most of it is just Fiennes discussing, while regularly downplaying, his

many astonishing accomplishments.

Childhood Sweethearts

A decade later, when he returned to England at the age of 12, Fiennes met Virginia “Ginny” Pepper whom he would eventually marry in 1970. Theirs was a unique relationship. It was a rarity, even back then, for childhood sweethearts to wed. And not only did they remain together until her death from cancer in 2004, but she was his professional partner as well.

It was she who managed the logistics of the three year-long global treks, and Fiennes lavishes relentless praise upon her, stating the mission could not have succeeded without Ginny at the helm while operating out of their home base. Fiennes makes it clear: Ginny wasn’t a “woman behind the man,” but rather side-by-side the man as a team. Watching them go from preteens to senior citizens is nothing short of awe-inspiring.

No ‘Sir’

Despite a heredity title of baronet, Fiennes bristles at being referred to as “sir,” claiming that the only people who should receive such honors should do so by earning it with merit. Fiennes was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1993 for “human endeavor and for charitable services.” His various expeditions also raised 14 million pounds (\$16,440,000) for various charities up to that point and since then, another 5 million pounds (\$5,870,000).

What is most surprising about Fiennes was in hearing his reasons for becoming an explorer in the first place. Far too frequently, when questioned why they climb mountains or engage in equally dangerous activities, most adventurers and thrill-seekers respond with the tired and clichéd “because it’s there.”

Fiennes didn’t enter the world wealthy. He wasn’t an eccentric millionaire wanting to prove this, that, or the other. He did it to make ends meet.

For instance, during the four-year buildup to the “around the world” expedition, Fiennes and Ginny amassed \$27 million from close to 650 sponsors, mostly companies that manufacture goods and equipment he would use during his trip. It’s not all that different from the practice of businesses that pay race car drivers to wear logos patches



FINDANY FILM

Director Matthew Dyas, along with editors Ben Stark and Charlie Hawryliw, doesn't include a single unneeded frame.

‘Explorer’

Documentary

Director: Matthew Dyas

Running Time: 1 hour, 53 minutes

MPPAA Rating: Not Rated

Release Date: Aug. 30, 2022

★★★★★

on their hats, and jumpsuits and slap decals on their vehicles.

Privilege?

Late in the film, Fiennes presents questions many of us ask ourselves daily (if not more frequently) regarding the mounting “political correctness” verbiage that has infested our vernacular. He queries his detractors who accuse him of “white privilege,” and the exact meaning and intent of being “woke.”

The only “privilege” Fiennes had was being born with great intellect, superior athletic skills, and an uncanny ability to conquer the elements. He is also thoroughly lacking vanity or hubris.

You know that guy: the salt-and-pepper-haired dude hawking “Dos Equis” beer on TV, online, and in thousands of subsequent memes? The one who is touted as being “The Most Interesting Man in the World?” He can’t hold a candle to Ranulph Fiennes.

Originally from Washington, Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

Sir Ranulph Fiennes at an airfield camp in Denali, Alaska, as featured in “Explorer.”



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