

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



A self-portrait of an artist painting, sculpting, and playing harp, circa 1815–1820, by D.E. Brante. Oil on canvas.

FINE ARTS

Plotinus *and* Divine Beauty

Reflecting on the purpose of beauty and art

ERIC BESS

We've all heard the phrase "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," but what does this mean and does it hold weight? Over the centuries, philosophers and sages have debated what beauty is about, why it is important, and where it originates.

About 600 years after Plato, the ancient philosopher Plotinus (A.D. 205–270) studied philosophy in the great city of Alexandria and interpreted Plato's philosophy for a new era. Plotinus became the founder of the Neoplatonic school of philosophy. He also talked about beauty.

Extrapolating from Monroe C. Beard-

sley's book "Aesthetics: From Classical Greece to the Present," we can unpack Plotinus's understanding of beauty to gain insights ourselves.

Plotinus and the Source of Beauty

What does Plotinus think about beauty? He bluntly states: "This, then, is how the material thing becomes beautiful—by communicating in the thought that flows from the divine."

In sum, Plotinus says that an object is not beautiful in and of itself, but it is beautiful insofar as it is transformed by an artist in such a way that it communicates divine things.

Continued on Page 4



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

Original artworks, canvas wraps, and prints of Award-winning oil paintings now available at

InspiredOriginal.Org/Store

INSPIRED ORIGINAL



The Battle of Crécy, from a 15th-century illuminated manuscript of Jean Froissart's "Chronicles."

BATTLE OF CRECY

Centuries of Medieval Military History Turned on Its Head

DUSTIN BASS

Is it possible for nearly 700 years of historical narrative to be wrong? Michael Livingston has made a strong case that much of what we know about the 1346 Battle of Crécy, the battle that started the Hundred Years' War between England and France, is wrong.

In his new book, "Crécy: Battle of Five Kings," Livingston takes the reader back before the battle began, reaching all the way to 1066 and the battles of Hastings and Stamford Bridge. It is a brief yet thorough historical introduction to how these two European powers fell into continual conflict.

For readers cloudy, or clueless, about the medieval conflicts between England and France, Livingston catches them up on what they should know in less than 100 pages. For medieval scholars and enthusiasts, they may skim-read through those pages but will most definitely remain enticed because of Livingston's premise—or, I should say, premises.

The Premises

The author plays the role of detective. He walks the crime scene (the battlefield); pulls in clues, some tangible and some noticeably missing; consults witness statements (witnesses long dead); and sifts through hearsay and legend, or, as he terms it, "vulgato," to establish the truth—or at least get nearer to it than we have been.

Livingston states in his book that "history is probabilities." It is this thorough undertaking of surveying and establishing or dismantling these probabilities that has led him to these recent discoveries and conclusions. While reading Livingston's analysis of the evidence (or lack thereof) and long-believed fallacies, one will undoubtedly ponder how historians throughout the centuries could have been so mistaken.

For instance, the Battle of Crécy, according to the author, didn't happen at Crécy—or at least not in the spot in France that has become known as the location of the battle and is the destination for interested tourists. In fact, the author suggests that the battleground was miles away from the traditionally accepted location. Not dozens of miles away, but a few nonetheless.

You may wonder what the big deal is that the location is a few miles away, but consider how much location affects our view of history. What if it was discovered that Christ wasn't crucified at Golgotha? What if the Spartans and Persians didn't fight at Thermopylae? What if the signers of the Declaration of Independence hadn't signed in Philadelphia? Geography is pivotal to our understanding of history.

According to the author, geography affects everything, especially for the Battle of Crécy. After reading the book, you will be hard pressed not to agree with him. This recalculation of the geographical

standing for one of history's most famous battles impacts our views of Edward III, Philippe VI (king of France), the Black Prince, and those poor Genoese crossbowmen.

By taking the probabilities, and quite often the improbabilities, Livingston begins to make sense of things that have never made sense about the Battle of Crécy. It is truly a masterclass in what historians, especially modern historians armed with so much archaeological technology and source material, should be doing.

Questioning History

Historians, true historians, are advocates for questioning what has been passed down over the years, decades, and even centuries. Livingston, who serves as the secretary general for the U.S. Commission on Military History and is a professor at the senior military college The Citadel, has done what many historians wouldn't dare do: Question military historical orthodoxy.

He questions sources that have long been unquestioned. He ponders the motivations of contemporary and noncontemporary writers and historians. He questions their perceptions of what took place, and whether they were writing the truth or mere propaganda.

Most importantly, at least in this book, he questions the logic of what we know—or at least what we've been told—like logistical probabilities and tactical decisions.

Sadly, what Livingston has discovered could have, and should have, been discovered and reported long ago, even long before technology came along. It is, as the author states, "a sad testament to how few historians walk the battlefields."

An Enjoyable and Important Work

This is a book for everyone hoping to learn about the Hundred Years' War and how it started. It didn't start according to the long accepted "vulgato," with pride and folly taking precedence to enable an outnumbered English army to decimate a larger French force. It started the way it did because of the location of the Battle of Crécy, or at least what this author contends to be the accurate location.

This work by Livingston should be placed among the great books on the Hundred Years' War and this legendary battle. In many ways, this book, its discoveries, and its newly proposed probabilities are indispensable to the medieval story. Legends will still play their role in our understanding of these stories, but "Crécy: Battle of Five Kings" will help make sense of the legends—or perhaps make the legends make sense.

Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV's "About the Book," a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.

BOOK REVIEW

American's Past, Present, and Future on the Issue of Race

ANITA L. SHERMAN

Dr. Ben Carson has been celebrated in a variety of arenas.

He is the former secretary of housing and urban development, a 2016 Republican presidential candidate, and the former director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins. He is also a bestselling author having penned several books before this one. In 2008, under President George W. Bush, he was the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the land. He holds more than 70 honorary doctorate degrees.

He's also black, a Christian, and a conservative. He's been married to his wife, Candy, for nearly 50 years. They have three grown sons. When he was growing up, he got tagged a "bookworm" for his avid reading and pursuit of knowledge. He gives much of that credit to his mother, who instilled a strong work ethic in both him and his brother, Curtis. She had them doing weekly book reports outside of any class assignments.

Growing up in poverty, he dreamed of being middle class and was determined to make it happen for himself and his future family.

He has far exceeded those expectations and now enjoys a more-than-comfortable lifestyle. He has a great love and admiration for this country and despairs at the current destructive divisions that threaten to undermine and unravel a democracy that he holds dear.

Tackling the Tough Topics

In "Created Equal: The Painful Past, Confusing Present, and Hopeful Future of Race in America," Carson doesn't pull any punches.

He tackles today's seemingly omnipresent topics: the history of slavery, racism in America, white guilt, victimhood, critical race theory, media and big tech and their powerful narratives, Judeo-Christian values, education, the 1619 Project, and classism. These are a few of the hot subjects about which he expresses his views.

And he does it with what I'd call critical caring. He went to Yale University. His professional career was as a neurosurgeon. He's very well educated, but on top of his academic prowess, he is foremost a Christian and takes

his guidance and comfort from God. It's his faith that allows him to speak out against what he sees as destructive forces in America being pushed by the progressives under the cloak of social justice when, in his view, it's a push to socialism.

Celebrate Rather Than Criticize

Because humans have no control over the color of their skin, Carson celebrates the gift of our racial and ethnic diversity and abhors groups that seek to use diversity as a wedge to divide us.

Slavery in America officially ended in the 1860s. Certainly, vestiges of that institution remain in our country today, causing victimhood for some and guilt for others.

Carson uses his own life experiences as a black man to provide an example of what is possible to achieve in America. He would rather applaud all the progress that blacks have made over the last decades than use race as an excuse to remake America into something far from what the Founding Fathers envisioned.

Carson errs on the side of faith and forgiveness when dealing with many forms of racial discrimination. He believes that much of the discrimination of the past was due to ignorance rather than maliciousness. He writes: "Once that ignorance was erased, the discriminatory behavior disappeared. When people behave unfairly out of ignorance, the faith-based principles of forgiveness should be on display."

While not dismissing past sins or the imperfect nature of America's past, Carson would prefer that we influence our environments in a positive rather than negative way. "We can be a victim or a victor. We can be guilt-ridden or happily guilt-free. We should never let others determine our state of being."

Engaged and outspoken, Carson warns against an apathetic populace. He encourages readers to be on their guard against the "slippery slopes of Marxist tendencies." Precious freedoms that we take for granted can be lost.

"Many people think that the United States of America is impregnable with respect to the overthrow of its capitalistic society and the imposition of socialism or communism. Peo-



'Created Equal: The Painful Past, Confusing Present, and Hopeful Future of Race in America'

Author
Dr. Benjamin Carson
with Candy Carson

Publisher
Center Street;
May 17, 2022

Hardcover
272 pages

ple would do well to remember how quickly the Soviet Union dissolved and how quickly Venezuela went from the most prosperous to the poorest nation in South America in a very short period of time. Once the erosion of freedom begins, its progression is frequently like a blitzkrieg."

Media and big tech do not escape his scrutiny. They can be a force for good or bad depending on the narrative they are advocating. These institutions can shape the definitions of morality or appropriate behavior. They wield huge power and, in many cases, are contrary to the freedom of speech, thought, and expression.

His book is not long. It's a fairly fast read, but it's packed with thoughtful, passionate, and insightful opinions about where we are in America and shows the potential of where we could be.

It's an uplifting and hopeful analysis. Carson chooses to celebrate America's strengths rather than its historical weaknesses.

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



Dr. Ben Carson is interviewed during a live streaming of "Wake Up America" in 2014 in Scottsdale, Ariz. Carson is a retired neurosurgeon whose latest book (co-authored with his wife, Cindy) opposes the push toward socialism that is happening in America today.

DONATE YOUR CAR

To a media that stands for TRUTH and TRADITION

Your old vehicle can support The Epoch Times' truthful journalism and help us get factual news in front of more readers.

WHY DONATE TO US?

- Accept cars, motorcycles, and RVs
- Free vehicle pick-up
- Maximum tax deduction
- Support our journalists

Donate Now:

www.EpochCar.org

1-800-822-3828

Our independence from any corporation or holding company is what ensures that we are free to report according to our values of Truth and Tradition. We're primarily funded through subscriptions from our readers—the stakeholders that we answer to, who keep us on the right track.

THE EPOCH TIMES

American Essence

FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF THE EPOCH TIMES



“Non-political, real-life look at goodness, decency, and excellence in the world.”

—EDWARD LONG



“A breath of fresh air in troubled times.”

—CHARLES MIDDLEMAS

“You'll hear a voice that reminds you all is not lost.”

—PAT MORACHE



“Uplifting stories, stunning photos. ... exceptional magazine.”

—MONICA GUZA

Bring Home Traditional American Culture and Great American Stories.

Subscribe today at AmericanEssence.net

ALL IMAGES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN



"Pygmalion Praying to Venus to Animate His Statue," 1786, by Jean-Baptiste Regnault. Oil on canvas. Palace of Versailles, France.

FINE ARTS

Plotinus and Divine Beauty

Continued from Page 1

In order to achieve this end, the artist must know, at least in part, the form or idea that flows from the divine, and that is accomplished only if the artist first is transformed to align with the divine.

Ironically, since the divine transcends the material world, the artist must turn away from the material world before he can beautify it. He must turn his gaze within and make himself, as Plotinus suggests, "morally excellent."

To understand what moral excellence is and what the soul's beauty entails, Plotinus suggests that artists need go no further than our understanding of ugliness. The ugly soul, according to Plotinus, is "dissolute, unrighteous; teeming with all the lusts; torn by internal discord; beset by the fears of its cowardice and the envies of its pettiness."

Plotinus lets us know that the ugly soul is not natural; we are not naturally ugly. Ugliness—moral inferiority—is something that obscures our true nature, a nature that aligns with the form or idea that "flows from the divine." To win back our grace, it must be

Pygmalion was amazed at just how beautiful his creation was.

Although sometimes painted sensually, it's likely Pygmalion had a pure love for his creation.

our business to scour and purify ourselves back to our original nature.

In other words, turning our gaze within is not simply accepting ourselves as we currently are but is an active purification of ugliness in our souls so that our true and beautiful nature can shine forth. Plotinus says, "In the Soul's becoming a good and beautiful thing is its becoming like to God."

Only after the soul transforms itself into its original source of beauty—a divine beauty—can it then transform the material world into beauty: a beauty that flows forth from the divine.

And the purpose of art for Plotinus, according to Beardsley, is that "the soul takes joy in recognizing its own nature objectified, and in thus becoming conscious of its own participation in divinity."

In other words, when the artist transforms matter into beauty, he produces a way for human beings to experience, connect, and form a path to the divine. According to Plotinus, "when we recognize the beauty of a picture we are after all recollecting, however dimly, the eternal beauty that is our home."

Pygmalion's Beautiful Sculpture

The myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, at least in part, may reveal to us the connection between the morally excellent artist with the beautiful soul, the beautiful work of art, and the divine.

According to the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.–A.D. 17 or 18), the myth of Pygmalion was a song sung by the semidivine Greek musician Orpheus after he summoned the gods to "be the start of [his] song." Let us look at both Ovid and "A Book of Myths" by Jean Lang to retell the story of Pygmalion.

In the story, the daughters of Propoetis, also known as the Propoetides, denied the goddess of beauty, Venus. The Propoetides even dared to prostitute themselves in the temple of Venus, which angered the goddess.

The sculptor Pygmalion, disgusted by the vices of the Propoetides, decided that he would forgo the company of women altogether. Instead, he single-mindedly focused on creating beautiful art, and this passion for creating beautiful things motivated him.

His devotion to beauty eventually allowed him to create a stunning sculpture of a woman, "an image of perfect feminine beauty," says Ovid. Lang adds, "How it came he knew not. Only he knew that in that great mass of pure white stone there seemed to be imprisoned the exquisite image of a woman, a woman that he must set free."

Pygmalion was amazed at just how beautiful his creation was. It was almost as if this representation of feminine beauty was alive, so alive that he named it. He called it Galatea. Galatea's beauty caused him to adore his creation to the point of obsession. He bought gifts for it, dressed it, and kissed it.

At the festival of Venus, Pygmalion stood at the altar and requested that the gods grant him a woman like his sculpture. Venus was present at her festival and overheard Pygmalion's prayer. Pleased with Pygmalion, she granted his wish.

Pygmalion returned home to find Galatea alive. He thanked Venus and married Galatea.

Plotinus and Pygmalion

How might Plotinus's exposition on beauty correlate with the myth of Pygmalion? To recapitulate: Plotinus suggests that true beauty



Disgusted by the vices of the Propoetides (L, in the back), Pygmalion focuses single-mindedly on creating beautiful art. "Pygmalion and the Image - The Heart Desires," 1878, by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Birmingham Museums Trust.



In turning away from earthly temptations, Pygmalion presumably reaches a higher level of moral excellence. "Pygmalion and the Image - The Hand Refrains," 1878, by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Birmingham Museums Trust.



Pygmalion's love for Galatea represents our appreciation and love for divine things. "Pygmalion and the Image - The Soul Attains," 1878, by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Birmingham Museums Trust.

flows from the divine and can be created here on earth only when the artist—having reached a level of moral excellence by purifying the ugliness of his soul—communicates divine beauty in an earthly creation.

In the myth of Pygmalion, Venus, being the goddess of beauty, is the divine source from which true beauty flows. The Propoetides disrespected Venus by prostituting themselves in the temple—a place for expressing gratitude for the divine source of beauty.

Thus, the Propoetides represent the ugliness that may infect the beauty of the soul: They denied the existence of a divine source of beauty—a beauty beyond the material world—and instead participated in monetary exchange for sexual pleasure, an act arguably inspired by both greed and lust.

Pygmalion, however, turns away from the Propoetides and the ugliness they represent, thus purifying his soul. Through turning away from earthly temptations, Pygmalion presumably reaches a higher level of moral excellence, thus producing a work of art so beautiful that it inspires great love and adoration in him.

Here, it would be easy to conclude that the myth of Pygmalion simply represents one man's sexual desire for a woman he can control (since we can assume that he would be unable to control the Propoetides but would be able to control his creation). Another interpretation, however, suggests that this myth is arguably much more than this.

Pygmalion seems to control very little throughout the myth. He doesn't know how he produced this beautiful work of art, admitting that its beauty is beyond his capability. He wants to bring Galatea to life but cannot without Venus's help. The only thing he proves to be in control of is himself when turns away from the lust and greed represented by the Propoetides. Everything else, such as the creation of Galatea, his adoration of Galatea, and Galatea's coming to life all seem to happen by way of the divine.

Galatea is not a mere sculpture that turns into a woman. Instead, she represents the manifestation of divine beauty. Pygmalion's love for Galatea represents our appreciation and love of divine things when we purify ourselves of the ugliness that may obscure the nature of our souls. It's Galatea's divine source that makes her special. Otherwise, Pygmalion would have this response to every sculpture he created. Their eventual marriage suggests our desire to be united with the "thought that flows from the divine."

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



Pygmalion's wish for a wife, as beautiful as his statue Galatea, is granted by Venus. "Pygmalion and Galatea," circa 1890, by Jean-Léon Gérôme. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The equestrian portrait of Stanislaw Kostka Potocki, 1781, by Jacques-Louis David. Oil on canvas; 9 feet, 11 5/8 inches by 7 feet, 1 3/4 inches. Collection of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanow, in Warsaw, Poland.



FINE ARTS

Loyalty, Flair, and Polish Patriotism: 'Meeting' Count Stanislaw Kostka Potocki

LORRAINE FERRIER

WARSAW, Poland—I saw him as soon as I entered The White Hall of Wilanow Palace. On the far side of the room, a confident nobleman casually dressed in a white shirt, a velvet vest, leather trousers, and a blue sash, with a kind face and an open, approachable manner, sat astride his horse. He had a panache I couldn't ignore. So I walked toward him.

I cherish such moments, for the man I

was walking to meet was depicted on a canvas that was 9 feet, 11 5/8 inches by 7 feet, 1 3/4 inches—a portrait of Count Stanislaw Kostka Potocki, not the man himself. For me, that's the epitome of great representational art: to feel that you've seen the essence of someone you've never met before and, in most cases, probably never will.

Potocki (1755–1821), a politician, collector, art patron, and literary critic, lived in Poland during the Enlightenment. He

felt a responsibility to publicly open his Wilanow Palace home, which had once belonged to Poland's celebrated warrior-king, King Jan III Sobieski (1629–1696).

I might not have been able to view Potocki's portrait in the palace if it hadn't been for the man himself. Potocki made his collections available for the public to see for free by turning Wilanow Palace into Poland's first art museum, opening in 1805.

"Potocki was a very dedicated politi-

cian who fought for any possibility to preserve tradition at a time when it was forbidden," curator Marta Golabek said. (Golabek works in the art department of Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanow.)

Through his art collection, Potocki kept Poland's history alive. When David painted Potocki in 1781, Warsaw was the capital of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. But after 1795, Warsaw underwent many changes. In 1795, the city became a part of the Duchy of Warsaw (Napoleonic Poland). Then from 1815 (after the Congress of Vienna) the Russian Empire ruled Warsaw.

A French Masterpiece

French neoclassical painter Jacques-

Louis David (1748–1825) painted this striking portrait of Potocki in 1781. It's the only painting by the artist in Poland and a wonderful example of the artist's work before he defined his monumental neoclassical style.

David met Potocki in Italy, after the artist had won the esteemed Prix de Rome (a year's scholarship in the French Academy in Rome). A Wilanow collections catalog from 1834 notes that the portrait was "taken from a sketch executed in a manège [horse arena] in Naples, prepared and put on display at a fine arts show in Paris in 1781, regarded as one of David's best works."

David became known for his neoclassical-style paintings that removed the fancy and frivolity seen in the previ-

ous Rococo (late Baroque) style, favoring paintings that expressed the ideals and harmony of ancient Roman art.

His portrait of Potocki reflects the energetic style of Flemish Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), who deftly painted pictures full of color, movement, and sensuality. David's portrait of Potocki is close to the composition that Rubens used in a portrait sketch of George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham.

David painted this portrait with a sense of theater. As Potocki takes his hat off, his horse seems to take a bow. But look closer, follow the horse's gaze, and we can see that it has been startled by a barking dog. In general, the dog symbolizes loyalty, and the hunting dog painted here indicates Potocki's noble status. Da-

vid signed the date and his name on the dog's collar.

Jacques-Louis David's portrait of Count Stanislaw Kostka Potocki is on permanent display at the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanow, Warsaw, in Poland. To find out more, visit Wilanow-Palac.pl



The White Hall in Wilanow Palace, where Jacques-Louis David's equestrian portrait of Stanislaw Kostka Potocki is on permanent display.

LORRAINE FERRIER/THE EPOCH TIMES

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Block the Sun, Move the Planets, Save the World!

JAMES SALE

In the last few years we have had at least three amazing, mind-boggling concepts from the super-rich and super-powerful elites who, though unelected, seem to have extraordinary influence over governments, academic institutions, and the working lives of ordinary people.

In no particular order, these three ideas are: One, that we can go to Mars and live there. (Anyone? Great views, apparently.)

Two, that it's fine for NASA to spend \$324.5 million to send a rocket into space in order to save the world. This plan to save the world involved crashing into an asteroid to alter its orbit. I am reminded of Oedipus who, learning from a prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother, fled Corinth and, by fleeing, thereby managed to unintentionally fulfill the prophecy. Perhaps we would now call this the Law of Unintended Consequences.

Three, and perhaps most worrying of all, there is a plan for sun-dimming technology. Sun-dimming technology? What? We are going to block sunshine? Aside from all the other factors involved in climate change, one striking thing that I learned from Jeremy Nieboer's book "Climate: All Is Well, All Will Be Well" (2021) was this astonishing piece of research: "On a global scale an analysis of 75,225,200 deaths in 13 countries over the period 1985–2012 with wide ranges of climate conditions revealed that cold weather kills 20 times more than hot weather." I guess that blocking the sun is going to make us colder, then. Hm.

Acts of Hubris

Those who have read my articles will know that I am not a scientist and am not making any pretense of being one; my interest is in mythology and what it tells us. Usually, what it tells us are profound psychological truths—truths more revealing than the many facts of science, which seem to change as political opinion sways back and forth. The recent epidemic and the question of vaccination is just such a case in point.

So which myth is most relevant here to explain these incredibly reckless, dangerous, and irresponsible actions? It's not one myth, but really one word—one word that the Greeks had for all this kind of activity—hubris.

What exactly, then, is hubris? My favorite example of it from the ancient myths is one I have referred to before. (See my previous article, part of the "Myths for Our Times" series, "Capaneus and the Age of Hubris.") In storming the city of Thebes, Capaneus cried out, "Not even Zeus can stop me now," and for this blasphemy, Zeus struck him down with a lightning bolt, for after hubris (as the Greeks knew) comes the other god, Nemesis, or retribution.

But let us examine this concept a little more. It begins with the Enlightenment. Note that the word "light" in enlightenment recalls that Prometheus's hubris entailed his stealing fire for man: fire producing light. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, according to the philosopher John Gray, "saw themselves as reviving paganism, but they lacked the pagan sense of the dangers of hubris. With few exceptions, these savants were actually neo-Christians, missionaries of a new gospel more fantastical than anything in the creed they imagined they had abandoned."

This new gospel, of course, which replaced Christianity and all organized religions, was the gospel of "reason." Through reasoning, human beings could create a utopia on earth and be free of God and the gods once and for all.

Worshipping Reason

The Jungian psychologist James Hollis correctly observed, however: "Our hubristic belief that we are in control of ourselves and nature only makes us more unconscious of what is at work within us."

This blindness to the forces unconsciously at work within us—for all the so-called reason that was being practiced—led to World War I and II, and is still with us today. Communism is just one manifestation of it as it manifests in scientific materialism.

It may seem a stretch to say that the world wars were caused by worshipping reason. Worshipping reason, in effect, is what the Enlightenment initiated and what has been going on ever since. Witness the status and seemingly unquestioning authority of science and scientific experts. It is not just a stretch but also a profound irony of the Oedipus type.



"A Philosopher Giving That Lecture on the Orrery, in Which a Lamp Is Put in the Place of the Sun," circa 1766, by Joseph Wright of Derby. Oil on canvas. Derby Museum and Art Gallery, Derby, England.

The fanatics of this creed specifically sought to destroy Christianity and religions, which they perceived as superstitions, and then replace them with reason.

They held religions responsible for wars, crusades, inquisitions, and all the evils of the world. If only one could be rid of religions and replace them with reason, then the world would be a better place by far: utopia around the corner, in fact.

The Darker Side of Hubris

But hubris, when we break it down even further, isn't just about defying Zeus and the gods, or Christianity or other religions; there is a deeper level to it. In his book "A Brief Guide to Classical Civilization," Stephen Kershaw writes: "Hubris is more than an attitude—it manifests itself in violent or arrogant actions. It was the Greek word for GBH [Grievous Bodily Harm]."

Elaborating on this further, Peter Jones, in his book "Eureka! Everything You Wanted to Know About the Ancient Greeks but Were Afraid to Ask," states that hubris

"... originally meant doing physical violence to someone; by extension, it came to mean humiliating someone in order to get the upper hand over them, to show them who was boss, physically or socially. The aim was to degrade or demean the other person, as Aristotle says, for the sheer pleasure of demonstrating your superiority. That was something no proud Greek would take from anyone; and no god would take from any mere mortal."

In other words, hubristic individuals are not just displaying an attitude that is antagonistic to religions, to the gods, or to God Almighty himself, but that, in its very spirit, is violent and aggressive and seeking domination. It brings to mind that prophetic book by J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Lord of the Rings," wherein we have the Dark Lord, Sauron, seeking to dominate all living things in Middle Earth.

Colonizing Mars, knocking asteroids off



Hubristic individuals exhibit violence and aggression, seeking domination. "A Knight, Death, and the Devil," 16th century, Attributed to Jakob Züberlin. Oil on panel. John G. Johnson Collection, 1917, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

Prometheus's hubris entailed his stealing fire for man. "Prometheus Brings Fire to Mankind," circa 1817, by Heinrich Füger. Oil on canvas.

Colonizing Mars, knocking asteroids off course, and blocking the rays of the sun are surely acts of massive aggression and hubris.



course, and blocking the rays of the sun are surely acts of massive aggression and hubris. These acts all say: We can control the universe! Watch us as we do it!

On top of this unsavory attitude, the individuals proposing all this nonsense are also quintessentially virtue signaling. They are not only doing good, but are also saving the world. They are to be the saviors of mankind. We do not need to praise and celebrate gods or God, but them!

Charlie Munger, Warren Buffett's long-time friend and business partner, once sadly observed that "In every era ... a great nation will, in due time, be ruined. ... Our turn is bound to come. But I don't like thinking about it too much." Who does like thinking about it? America is a wonderful country, probably the greatest in the world, but with these kinds of hubristic people taking an increasing role in its affairs, the time lag before it comes undone is massively shortened, for after hubris comes Nemesis, and Nemesis is the god of retribution.

You don't start bossing the sun and planets around, do you, and think that they are not going to come back with a vengeance.

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

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

At a critical moment in "Stairway to Heaven," 1946 (later titled "A Matter of Life and Death"), a character quotes Sir Walter Scott and says, "Love is heaven and heaven is love." Around that foundational belief, screenwriter-producer-director duo Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger build their memorable comedy-fantasy film. They then illustrate, as comically as possible, that in spite of this aspirational common ground, the earth is nothing like heaven.

A World War II British pilot, Peter Carter (David Niven) radioing for help as his plane burns up midair off the English coast, manages to connect with a Boston-born radio operator, June (Kim Hunter). June is horrified that his crew members are dead and that the parachutes onboard, including his own, are ruined. Charmed by his lively banter in the face of death, she tries to talk him through to safety, but he ends up bailing out in a fall that would've killed any other man.

In a series of bizarre episodes in heaven, on earth, and possibly somewhere in between, Peter regains consciousness on a seashore and promptly falls in love with June, who happens to live nearby. Thanks to some heavenly glitch, Peter's stuck on earth, while June's overjoyed that although he's plagued by headaches and hallucinations, he isn't dead yet. Meanwhile, heavenly forces, rather than admit goof-ups in their afterlife logistics, dispatch Conductor 71 (Marius Goring) to escort Peter back to heaven. June and her friend, Dr. Frank Reeves (Roger Livesey), try to keep Peter alive and firmly on earth.

For Heaven's Sake

Powell and Pressburger push the limits of credulity, creating a fantasy world that's a wand wave short of an outright fairy tale. But their narrative, choked with symbols from science, medicine, law, philosophy, sports, war, and the arts, flits just enough between serious and silly to keep things engaging.

The narrator tops to the universe to show how insignificant humans are in the vast scheme of things, dwarfed as their puny planet Earth is by giant suns, stars, clouds, entire solar systems, and galaxies.

The film uses the symbols of the brain (or its philosophical equivalent, the mind) and

the heart (or its equivalent, the will) to distinguish between merely living and living a life of love. It shows how imminent death lends urgency to what really matters: love, and therefore a will to live.

Moments from certain death, all Peter can think of is messaging his mother and sisters to reassure them that he loves them, and dreaming about meeting June at some point in the future.

Ever the soldier, Peter obviously loves battle and ends up fighting his own—for June and for his life. His sport, though, is limited to the intellectual realm (chess). He adores historians, philosophers, poets, and artists, and never tires of referring to Sir Walter Raleigh, Plato, and Aristotle.

Indulgence, Irony, or Wit?

Some scenes overflow with irony and wit, without which the story wouldn't have held together on screen. Exchanges between heavenly beings and earthlings hint at the irrelevance of political affiliations, language, race, color, sex, and religion when the human body has crossed the time-space barrier.

Powell's cinematographer Jack Cardiff and editor Reginald Mills are ambitious and creative. They grippingly present dream sequences and scenes of a plane crash, a motorbike in driving rain, or a monstrous escalator going up into heaven, past imposing statues of philosophers and statesmen. There's even an "insider" shot of Peter's drooping eyelids as he falls unconscious in the operating room.

As Reeves coaxes his surgeon friend to urgently operate and give Peter's brain a fighting chance, the surgeon wonders if Reeves's worried that Peter's going mad. Reeves nods thoughtfully, arguing that Peter has a fine mind, perhaps too fine a mind: "A weak mind isn't strong enough to hurt itself. Stupidity has saved many a man from going mad."

Cinematic Turnaround

Despite the creativity, neither cinematographer nor editor allow the action to overwhelm the actors, or allow the set design (no matter how impressive) to overwhelm the script. Cardiff shoots the fantastical sequences in heaven in black-and-white and those in the real world in color. It is the reverse of what works in "The Wizard of Oz" (1939), where colors run riot in dreams but are a tempered

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

A Dystopian Warning Coming True

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Before he became a sci-fi writer, Harry Harrison was an illustrator for sci-fi comics. His most famous novel, "Make Room! Make Room!" (1966), was so visually compelling that filmmaker Richard Fleischer adapted it into the dystopian thriller "Soylent Green" (1973), based on Stanley R. Greenberg's screenplay.

Fittingly, Fleischer as director, his cinematographer Richard H. Kline, editor Samuel E. Beutley, and score composer Fred Myrow open their movie with an arresting, comic-book-like montage. It illustrates mankind's all-too-hurried transition from a languid, 19th-century agrarian economy to a whirling 20th-century industrial economy.

First, soft, mild music accompanies a slow succession of images of hillocks, boats, and horse-drawn vehicles. We see only a handful of people: children and adults sitting, standing, and indulging in leisurely activities (fishing, farming, and the like).

Next, loud, aggressive music accompanies a rapid series of images, but this time we see multitudes trapped in a frenzy of industrialization, overpopulation, and urbanization. It's a scene of people driven to a crisis of decay and shortage, not by some alien external hand but by their own excess. As they flicker onto the screen, the images turn more disturbing and, in hindsight, prescient: unprecedented overcrowding, pollution of the land, water, and air, mountains of waste, and epidemics that necessitate the wearing of face masks.

The Future Is Now

The film isn't set in 1973, when it hit the big screen, but decades into the future. It's 2022, the place is New York City, and the population is 40 million.

Those opening sights and sounds continue in apocalyptic fervor. Civic broadcasts announce a curfew one minute and a vegetable concentrate that's available the very next. And what exactly is this miracle substance? It's the "new, delicious Soylent Green, the



Robert Thorn (Charlton Heston) and Sol Roth (Edward G. Robinson) work to uncover the secret of the food product Soylent Green in the 1970s film.

miracle food of higher-energy plankton from the ocean." Or so we're told. Soylent Corporation, it turns out, controls half the world's food supply and at least some bureaucratic elements within a powerful state. Its spinoff products flood the market: Soylent soybeans, Soylent buns, Soylent crumbs.

As irate crowds protest against a drying up of Soylent supplies, a ruthless state enlists earthmovers, not just riot police, to disperse and silence them.

The movie explains how greedy corporations that promise paradise to desperate consumers are, in short, liars. No different from governments that lie to their citizens. One such liar on Soylent's board, Mr. Simonson (Joseph Cotten), pays for his lies with his life.

One of the movie's subplots is about Detective Thorn (Charlton Heston) and his aging aide Sol Roth (Edward G. Robinson), who are trying to track down Simonson's killers.

In a scene meant to illuminate the little things that we take for granted, Heston's eyes light up, startled at seeing nature at its unself-conscious best: animals, plants, flowers, birds, trees, hills, rivers, fish, oceans, clouds, the sky, the sun. All breathtaking.

Food, water, housing, and energy shortages are so acute that the very sight of a strip of edible beef, warm water gushing from a tap, or a fragrant bar of soap is enough to drive a person to tears. In a



Actors David Niven and Marius Goring provide a fair bit of mirth with their verbal repartee.

'Stairway to Heaven'

Directors: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger

Starring: David Niven, Kim Hunter, Marius Goring, Roger Livesey

MPAA Rating: PG

Running Time: 1 hour, 44 minutes

Release Date: Dec. 25, 1946

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

black-and-white in the real world.

Niven and Goring provide a fair bit of mirth with their verbal repartee, leaving Livesey to deliver one of the film's more serious messages: "Nothing is stronger than the law in the universe, but on earth, nothing is stronger than love."

Trouble is, in this film, love is obvious only to some of us; the rest of us need "proof," and for some, no amount of proof is enough. It's why the film elevates philosophers, poets, and artists above practitioners of science, law, and medicine. The former see with different eyes and hear with different ears. They see "beyond," rather than merely see.

In a deceptive aside, Reeves explains precisely why June enjoys looking at the countryside from a vantage point. She sees it "all clearly and at once, as in a poet's eye." Without trusting God as a character into their film (about heaven and earth), that's about as close as Powell and Pressburger get to hinting that a human who lives well and loves well is the surest sign on earth of the divine.

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

brilliantly wordless scene, Thorn and Roth share a meal reminiscent of some long-forgotten time when they'd tasted "real" food, instead of the stale junk they're now so used to hoarding.

A New Generation of Sci-Fi Film

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a new breed of sci-fi films and scripts with greater depth than the B-movies of the 1950s. These newer films were backed by big studios and big budgets: "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968), "Planet of the Apes" (1968), "The Omega Man" (1971), and "Soylent Green" (1973).

Fleischer portrays the paranoia of a vulnerable public by presenting Thorn as both an instrument and an object of state intrusion. As the long arm of the law, Thorn barges into homes, unrepentantly frisks women, searches and seizes without warrant; he is a thief in broad daylight, not always in the service of his investigation. Later, the tables are turned as nameless, powerful vested interests spy on him, stalk him, and shoot at him.

Like many good sci-fi films, "Soylent Green" instills both terror and awe. By magnifying a terrifying present filled with despair, it hints at an alternative future filled with hope. In some scenes, Fleischer and Greenberg play on the word "home" with more than a touch of irony. Of course, home is a metaphor for Earth, but it's also something more. At one point Roth ruefully tells Thorn, "I should have gone home long ago." Home here is a refuge, a balm to our body, mind, and spirit. It is as salvific as death itself, granting us escape from a life of misery.

But home can also be a return to our senses, a more clearheaded view of the terrors we have wrought on ourselves, opening our eyes to what we've habitually shut them to.

For all its ominous signs and symbols, "Soylent Green" is an invitation to create a new Earth by creating new life on it. It is a call to live more meaningfully and more reverential toward life in all its forms.

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



History Comes Alive With Shen Yun Zuo Pin's Original Opera 'The Stratagem'

MARIA HAN

China has a long and continuous history of 5,000 years. Like the rise and fall of the tide, its dynasties came and went. The thrilling story of one such dynasty—the late Eastern Han Dynasty—is now a four-act opera titled “The Stratagem” and is available for viewing on the website Shen Yun Zuo Pin.

This world-class production is truly one of a kind. In under 40 minutes, it presents a drama of high-powered stakes that will determine China's future.

Saving the Dynasty

The opera tells the story of the tyrant Dong Zhuo, who is more powerful than the very young puppet emperor. Dong's trusty protector and sidekick, Lu Bu, is a mighty general. Together, they make life at court incredibly difficult for the ministers. If they dare to speak out against Dong, they fall to the blade of Lu Bu.

Something must be done to stop the tyrant from destroying the dynasty altogether. Stepping forward, Wang Yun, a loyal subject to country, devises a plan to separate Dong Zhuo and Lu Bu, who

In under 40 minutes, it presents a drama of high-powered stakes that will determine China's future.

are as close as father and son.

Wang Yun has an adopted daughter named Diao Chan. In Chinese history, she is known as one of the four great beauties. Wang Yun's plan is to use Diao Chan's beauty to turn Dong and Lu against one another.

The hero knows the dangers that come with such plotting, but he is determined to see it through. In Act 1, Wang says: “Even if we end in common ruin, I'll put my gray head on the line. I'll lay down my head for this country.”

And so the strategy begins. Lu Bu is

ALL PHOTOS BY SHEN YUN ZUO PIN



Something must be done to stop the tyrant from destroying the dynasty altogether.

(Top left to bottom right) Scenes from the Shen Yun opera “The Stratagem.”

invited to Wang Yun's home and, upon seeing Diao Chan, he is immediately bewitched by her beauty. Diao pays the general a few compliments and soon he is even further taken with her. He describes her to be “enchanting as a fairy,” and says, “She's too good to be true.”

Wang Yun then promises Lu Bu her hand in marriage.

Knowing that both Dong Zhuo and Lu Bu are lusty men, Wang then invites Dong to his home for a banquet. As soon as he sets his eyes on Diao Chan, he promises to make her an imperial concubine once

he usurps the throne. He says, “Three thousand ladies in the harem, yet you bloom above them all.”

With Dong Zhuo and Lu Bu vying for the same woman, it takes only a few more steps in the plan before they point swords at each other.

Behind the Scenes

Under the direction of Artistic Director D.F., the opera is an original work with the libretto written by Tianliang Zhang and the music composed by Qin Yuan. The New York-based Shen Yun Perform-

ing Arts Orchestra will accompany the cast, which stars award-winning vocalists from Shen Yun, including tenors Gao Liang and Gu Yun, and soprano Yu Ming. Although sung in Chinese, this production is nothing like Peking opera. The Shen Yun singers are trained in the traditional bel canto singing technique—the most natural way of singing and a method mostly lost through history.

Shen Yun's mission is to revive China's 5,000 years of civilization and to present China in its glory before communism destroyed the long-treasured values of

the country. Thus, this opera presents not just a tale from Chinese history. It also portrays many vices that can destroy humanity: cruelty, lust, and the abuse of power.

Wielding power, especially, is a great responsibility and, if leaders abuse the power bestowed on them, the heavens will not let them keep that power for long.

Visit the website ShenYunZuoPin.com or bit.ly/TheStratagem to enjoy the full opera. Subtitles are available in several languages.

“The Muses Urania and Calliope,” circa 1634, by Simon Vouet. Oil on wood, 31 7/16 inches by 49 3/16 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.



REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

A Call to Praise the Eloquence of Heaven: Simon Vouet's 'The Muses Urania and Calliope'

ERIC BESS

Who were the Greek Muses? Zeus, the thunderbolt-wielding king of the gods, and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, had nine daughters who were referred to as the nine Muses. The Muses were considered goddesses who brought inspiration. They inspired music, poetry, dance, and knowledge.

It's interesting to note that it took the union of Zeus, often associated with the flash of lightning, and Mnemosyne, the mother of memory, to create the nine Muses as sources of inspiration. We sometimes refer to our moments of inspiration as coming to us “in a flash.” We may also think, “Why didn't I think of that earlier?” as if it was something we already knew.

The first of the nine Muses was Calliope,

which in Greek means “beautiful voiced.” Calliope was the Muse of eloquence and epic poetry. The last of the Muses was Urania. In Greek, Urania means “heavenly one.” As her name implies, she was the Muse of astronomy and astronomical writings.

Simon Vouet's 'The Muses Urania and Calliope'

The 16th- to 17th-century French painter Simon Vouet painted a lovely depiction of these two Muses called “The Muses Urania and Calliope.”

At the far left of the piece, he painted Urania, dressed in white and blue, and wearing a crown of stars as she sits on a celestial globe. Her body faces Calliope, but her idealized face looks back over her shoulder at us, the viewers.

Calliope, however, dressed in yellow and pink, looks attentively at Urania as Urania places her hand on Calliope's shoulder. Calliope holds a book in her lap. A partial word, “odiss,” can be seen on the book, which may identify it as Homer's epic poem “Odyssey.”

The two Muses sit in front of ancient architecture with fluted columns that rise above their heads and outside of the picture plane. To the right of the Muses are three cherubs wearing yellow, pink, and blue sashes. The cherubs carry laurel wreaths toward the open landscape on the right side of the composition.

A Call to Praise the Eloquence of Heaven

What meanings may we gather from this painting? Let's first look at Calliope and Urania. In his work “Phaedrus,” Plato describes Calliope and Urania as the Muses “who are chiefly concerned with heaven and thought, divine as well as human, and they have the sweetest utterance.”

Based on the meanings of their names, when they are depicted together, they are the “beautiful-voiced heavenly one” who inspires music, poetry, dance, and knowledge above heaven.

Urania sits on the celestial globe, which could represent heaven supporting her. She looks over her shoulder at us, and her expression suggests that she's silently waiting for us. What might she be waiting for us to do?

Before we answer that question, let's look at Calliope. She is looking attentively at Urania, and Urania places her hand on Calliope's shoulder as if to comfort her. However, there may be more to consider about the hands of these figures.

Does Urania touch Calliope as a way of sharing the heavens with her? And does Calliope turn toward her to accept it? Perhaps Urania is like a conduit of heavenly things, and heaven moves from the globe she sits on to Calliope, whom she touches.

Calliope continues this heavenly transference. What does Calliope touch? What does she share the heavens with? She touches

Homer's “Odyssey,” which suggests that the epic poem—literature—is a way by which the eloquence of heaven is shared. Thus, Urania shares heaven with Calliope, and Calliope shares heaven through poetry.

And what about the three cherubs? What might they represent? Though the cherubs are depicted behind Calliope, compositionally, they fly forth from the area where she holds the poem. Might they represent the inspiration to create epic poetry, beautiful words, and sweet utterances?

They carry laurel wreaths—symbols of victory—away from the two Muses. These are the things that they touch. So far, we can presume that the other two figures share heaven by the things they touch. Are the cherubs also sharing heaven by way of the laurel wreaths? I say yes.

And where are they carrying them? They are carrying them to our world to crown someone victorious. And whom might they crown victorious? Whoever among us might be worthy of being inspired to praise the eloquence of heaven. The ones the cherubs crown will be the ones the Muses inspire.

To return to our question above, I think that this is why Urania looks out at us: She calls us to be worthy enough for the Muses' inspiration. And what are the worthy inspired to do? To speak on behalf of heaven's truths with eloquence and beauty. Her look asks, “Who among you shall we inspire?”

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 (IDSVA).

BOOK REVIEW

A Concise Yet Thorough Translation of Aristotle's 'Poetics'

Ancient advice for writers and readers alike on the makings of good literature

DUSTIN BASS

Writers-to-be, unite! Actually, writers-who-already-are, feel free to come along, too. Philip Freeman, who holds the Fletcher Jones Chair in humanities at Pepperdine University, has issued a new and more concise translation of Aristotle's famous work “Poetics.” Freeman's translation is part of Princeton University Press's ongoing Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers collection, to which the author has already contributed five translations of other classic works.

For those who have read other translations of Aristotle's “Poetics,” they will have undoubtedly noticed the missing parts and jumbled text of the original. In his introduction, Freeman compares the original text, which Aristotle actually didn't intend for publication, to “unpolished lecture notes.” Though Aristotle never fully completed the work (the section on comedy is lost to history), his thoughts and comparisons of the three forms of literature—comedy, tragedy, and epic—are insightful and can be considered the foundation upon which writers should base their literary projects. Fittingly, Freeman's translation is titled “How to Tell a Story: An Ancient Guide to the Art of Storytelling for Writers and Readers.”

Becoming a Better Writer Through Tradition

Just as we do today, Aristotle experienced the works of great writers, good writers,

and bad writers. The ancient philosopher discusses the many reasons for the disparities. Typically, it is because there are writers who either abide by or disregard the rules of writing. Aristotle's instructions are based on his knowledge and study of literature—both good and bad.

From his study, he lays out what exactly works in literature and why. “Poetics” is similar to Aristotle's other works in that it is a study in natural philosophy. In other words, there are laws of nature that should not be broken, and when they are, it creates an undesirable result—such as a person of poor character (“Nicomachean Ethics”), a subpar city-state (“Politics”), or bad literature (“Poetics”).

This idea of natural law applying to even fictional stories can be summed up in one of Aristotle's statements: “We can't change traditional storylines. The task of the writer instead is to be creative and make good use of a given tradition.”

“Tradition” in this sense doesn't refer to religious, political, or cultural traditions. Rather, it is in reference to specific rules for writing. Aristotle points out the basics in his book, which include plot; the sequence of a beginning, middle, and ending; and avoiding unreasonable writing by ensuring that the dialogues and actions are probable, or at least possible.

This doesn't mean that the action itself has to fit within the actual laws of nature. Anyone who has read ancient works knows that much of the writing of the time involves divine intervention, actions taken by mortals that seem otherworldly, or characters who are themselves otherworldly (that is, half mortal and half deity).

Aristotle is discussing literature—in par-



In his work “Poetics,” Aristotle summarizes good writing by stating that “in stories, what is impossible but believable is preferable to what is possible but unconvincing.” Philip Freeman has translated the philosopher's work in his new book.

ticular, fiction—or at least historical fiction as in the works of Homer. Therefore, the writer, as is pointed out consistently in the book, should be writing for the audience, and an audience that has agreed to the terms of the suspension of disbelief. According to Aristotle, this suspension of disbelief is acceptable only as long as the writing (that is, action and dialogue) is believable. Aristotle summarizes this by stating that “in stories, what is impossible but believable is preferable to what is possible but unconvincing.”

In other words, don't sell readers short by taking quick, lazy, or unconvincing paths to resolution. This idea of resolution is often a stumbling block for writers today, just as it was for ancient writers thousands of years ago. The resolution is central to the plot of the story because it brings the plot to its conceivable conclusion. And Aristotle warns that the conclusion must be conceivable. Otherwise, future writers should prepare for what the past writers had to endure: the booring and hissing of the crowd.

“The proper and most important way to compare and judge tragedies is by plot, that is, how the writers handle both complication and resolution,” Aristotle wrote. “Some writers are good at creating complications, but bad at resolutions. Excellence at both is what makes a great story.”

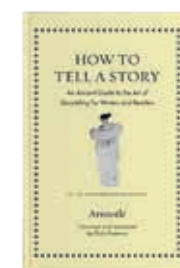
A Necessary Read for Writers—and Readers

Freeman's translation of Aristotle's famous work is a very concise translation. Its concision, however, doesn't eliminate the impor-

tant aspects of the book. On the contrary, it eliminates the convoluted of the original and allows the reader to focus solely on what Aristotle suggested, and proved, to be the pivotal (that is, natural) elements of good literature.

Although young writers should adhere to Aristotle's instructions, these instructions can also guide readers in identifying good literature, as well as plays and movies. When readers (or viewers) have the correct expectations and understanding of what makes good literature, the bar will be set higher for writers, and therefore the stories will be better.

Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV's “About the Book,” a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.



How to Tell a Story: An Ancient Guide to the Art of Storytelling for Writers and Readers'

Translated by Philip Freeman

Publisher Princeton University Press

Date May 10, 2022

Hardcover 264 pages

FILM REVIEW

The Secret Double Life of a Civil Rights Photographer

MICHAEL CLARK

Born in 1922 in the Manassas section of Memphis, Tennessee, and dying in the same city in 2007, Ernest Withers led as full a life as anyone could possibly want or expect. He achieved national and international notoriety as a significant photojournalist.

Withers was a go-getter and a hustler and, through luck, fate, or a combination of both, found himself at or near every seminal event of the 1960s civil rights movement. Virtually every still image displayed in the new documentary “The Picture Taker” was shot by Withers, whose personal archive is estimated to be close to 1.8 million photos.

2 Halves, Not 3 Parts

In lieu of the traditional three-act narrative, director Phil Bertelsen divides the film into two distinct, radically different halves that will likely end up dividing audiences.

Shortly after getting married, Withers joined a segregated unit of the U.S. Army where he quickly developed an interest in photography and honed his craft by taking portraits of his fellow soldiers.

After leaving the service with funds he received through the G.I. bill, Withers hung his shingle on the storied Memphis thoroughfare, Beale Street.

For reasons never clearly explained, Withers temporarily abandoned his passion and took a job as one of the first black policemen in Memphis. This was at a time when race relations in Memphis were beginning to simmer, and the city’s law enforcement higher-ups thought that bringing black town members into their ranks might reduce tensions.

This experiment didn’t pan out as hoped, and Withers returned to photography full time—and never looked back.

Politics, Sports, and Entertainment

In addition to covering anything resembling politics and civil rights, Withers also worked closely with baseball teams affiliated with the Negro leagues, and any musical acts traveling through town.

As Memphis was also the home of the Stax-Volt record label, he had multiple opportu-

nities to capture images of the likes of Isaac Hayes, Carla Thomas, Sam and Dave, Ike and Tina Turner, B.B. King, and Elvis Presley. Withers was also the official Stax photographer for two decades.

After receiving a send-off funeral rivaling that of a head of state, Withers became the providence of legend. A 7,000-square-foot museum on Beale Street dedicated to his works opened, and his archives have been earmarked for permanent inclusion at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture. Pretty impressive stuff, indeed.

‘The Picture Taker’ isn’t perfect, but it does go far in dispelling perceptions.

At this point, we’re 40 minutes into the movie. With just a quick nip here and a tuck there, “The Picture Taker” would have qualified as a (long-ish) short film guaranteed to please Withers’s many throngs of followers and supporters, but Bertelsen, to his immense credit, wasn’t quite done yet.

The Other Shoe Drops

This is the part where things get fuzzy. Either in 2010 or 2013, a journalist with the Memphis newspaper The Commercial Appeal filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) release with the FBI.

As early as 1946, the FBI identified Withers (code name ME-338-R) as a probable communist, due to his affiliation with the United Negro Veterans of America (UNVA).

The FBI considered the UNVA to be an arm of communism in the United States and began leaning on Withers in a largely benevolent, patriotic manner. Recognizing his burgeoning profile in Memphis, the FBI convinced Withers to cooperate with them in order to clear the UNVA of any communist connections.

In reality, the FBI wanted Withers, who had earned the respect of the black community, to chronicle through photographs



A photograph of Ernest Withers promoting his photography business in the 1940s, in the documentary “The Picture Taker.” Withers Family Trust.

the percolating civil rights unrest. As he had entrée into secret meetings with high-level members of various groups (who trusted him completely), Withers would become the perfect mole.

Withers was initially duped, but not duped enough to charge the FBI for the photos he took at these various clandestine events, the bulk of which took place between 1968 and 1970.

It is well worth noting that Bertelsen does not present these highly inflammatory accusations based on mere hearsay or conjecture, but rather with images of actual, semi-redacted, official government documents.

There is little to no doubt that Withers was a willing participant in this wide-reaching operation.

What is interesting in Bertelsen’s movie are the reactions of the principal interviewees and how they greatly differ in tone during the two distinct halves. In the opening portion, Withers is regarded as an integral cog in the civil rights movement: an indispensable recorder of history whose work was a leading factor in the success of the cause. All of that is true.

Most of these individuals’ attitudes go into sidestep or sidetrack mode when pressed on the accusations of Withers’s being identified as a snitch or traitor to the cause. Some go from idealized, near hero worship to barely cloaked disgust.

Some shrug it off as an untidy sidebar

that results in their looking away from the camera. Others employ doublespeak, stating that what Withers might have done had no effect whatsoever.

“The Picture Taker” isn’t perfect, but it does go far in dispelling perceptions. High praise needs to be lavished upon Bertelsen for not cherry-picking the facts and for presenting a warts-and-all profile of a well-intending but significantly flawed man.

Originally from Washington, D.C., 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.

‘The Picture Taker’

Documentary

Director: Phil Bertelsen

Running Time: 1 hour, 20 minutes

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Release Date: Oct. 14, 2022

★★★★★



Grow With Epoch Press Group

The Epoch Times’ full-service commercial printing service provider

Since 2005, Epoch Press Group has made our name by giving each client our full attention. We ask questions and make suggestions to save you time and money without sacrificing quality. Ultimately, it’s our goal to anticipate your needs and deliver print projects you can be proud of.



When you grow, we grow, so we treat your print or publishing project like it’s our own, including:

- Newspapers
- Premium hard/soft cover books
- Magazines
- Brochures
- Catalogues
- Product inserts
- Flyers
- Posters
- Postcards
- Calendars
- Mailing services

About: Epoch Press Group is a full-service printing provider associated with The Epoch Times. It consists of The Epoch Press, Inc. with a 37,000 square-

foot facility in New Jersey, Cai Hong Enterprises, Inc. with a 78,000 square-foot facility in New York, and New Epoch Press, Inc. in California.

EPOCH PRESS GROUP

Contact Epoch Press Group today for a free quote on your next project!

Newspaper Printing:

- ☎ 973-694-3600, 862-282-3873
- ✉ info@epochpress.com
- 🌐 EpochPress.com

Books/Magazines/Brochures/All other printing:

- ☎ 845-692-5909, 201-575-9989
- ✉ info@caihongenterprises.com
- 🌐 CaiHongenterprises.com