

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN



(Top) "The Dachstein From Sophien-Doppelblick Near Ischl," 1835, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 12 1/4 inches by 10 1/4 inches. Austrian Belvedere Gallery, Vienna.

(Above) "Self-Portrait at the Easel," 1848, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on canvas; 69 1/2 inches by 56 1/2 inches.

FINE ART

ILLUMINATING AUSTRIA, HOPE, *and* GOOD CHEER

The brilliance of painter Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller

LORRAINE FERRIER

Austrian painter Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller held nature in high esteem. "Nature must be the only source and sum total of our study; there alone can be found

Waldmüller's landscape paintings in particular show his brilliant attention to detail.

the eternal truth and beauty, the expression of which must be the artist's highest aim in every branch of the plastic arts," he wrote in 1846.

Throughout his life, Waldmüller (1793–1865) closely studied nature. He believed that artists should concentrate their efforts on the "rendering of sunlight," a practice he embraced as he studied, sketched, and painted the transient sunlight across Austria and Sicily, to name a couple of countries.

Continued on Page 4



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THE EPOCH TIMES

LITERATURE

The Raggedy Boys' Bard: Horatio Alger and the American Dream

JEFF MINICK

For 50 years, his name was a household word. Horatio Alger Jr. (1832–1899) was the creator and chief proponent of the “rags to riches” story. Once his writing career took off, he put out over a hundred novels, most of them aimed at adolescents. They were tales of street urchins and poor young men who by dint of their virtue, education, hard work, and enterprise broke free of their poverty, often with the aid of a rich patron who rewarded them for some brave deed of rescue. Alger's influence was profound. His books were read by countless young Americans. The renowned journalist Heywood Broun called the author's stories “simple tales of honesty triumphant,” and comedian and film star Groucho Marx said: “Horatio Alger's books conveyed a powerful message to me and many of my young friends—that if you worked hard at your trade, the big chance would eventually come. As a child I didn't regard it as a myth, and as an old man I think of it as the story of my life.”

Not all have viewed his work so favorably. In “Poor Little Stephen Girard,” Mark Twain satirized Alger's poor-boy-makes-good stories, and later writers and critics attacked his work as formulaic, which it is, and false in its premises. His books were already losing popular appeal when the Great Depression struck, seeming to put an end to the Algeresque formula that sweat, honesty, and ambition equaled success. Yet even now, Alger's vision inspires countless Americans.

The Small Man With the Big Message

Unlike his characters, Horatio Alger never knew poverty firsthand, though his father, a Unitarian minister, had faced financial ruin and often had trouble making ends meet. At 16, Alger entered Harvard University, of which he later recorded: “No period of my life has been one of such unmixed happiness as the four years which have been spent within college walls.”

On earning his degree in 1852, he turned to writing as his livelihood, and then teaching. But later, failing to support himself in these endeavors, he entered Harvard Divinity School and graduated in 1860.

Deemed unfit for service in the Union Army—Alger was sickly most of his life and was only 5 feet, 2 inches tall—he served in war-related work until 1864, when he was ordained and accepted a position at a church on Cape Cod. In 1866, he resigned his post and departed for New York City.

Young readers of ‘Ragged Dick’ and Alger's other stories were shown steppingstones to success.

First serialized in a magazine in 1867, Alger's “Ragged Dick, Or Street Life in New York With the Boot-Blacks,” appeared in book form in 1868 and became an immediate hit. This novel, which the author hoped would bring attention and help to the swarms of homeless children on New York's streets, also served as Alger's template for the scores of stories that came afterward. These books sold millions of copies both during and after Alger's lifetime, the proceeds of which he often donated to charitable works intended to improve the lives of children.

Alger spent his final years living with his sister in Natick, Massachusetts, where his impaired health and frequent depression affected his ability to write. On his instructions, after his

death his sister burned his letters and personal papers.

From Rags to Respectability

“Ragged Dick,” which is one of the few Horatio Alger books remaining in print, is as simple in its storyline as in its prose.

Richard Hunter, who goes by the nickname Ragged Dick, is a 14-year-old living on the street and making his way as a shoeshine boy. He has some bad habits—“I am afraid he swore sometimes, and now and then he played tricks on unsophisticated boys from the country”—and he shows away most of his earnings on shows at places like the Bowery Theater and on gambling.

On the other hand, he is honest—“He would not steal, or cheat, or impose upon younger boys, but was frank and straight-forward, manly and self-reliant.” Throughout the novel, he has several opportunities to swindle others, but he always rejects that option. He's also kind to the bootblacks who are younger or inept at their trade, springing for a meal or offering them encouragement.

Several times, his honesty and generosity bring returns. After treating the orphan Henry Fosdick to a meal, for example, and then offering him a place in his newly acquired room, the barely literate Dick discovers that Fosdick can read and write, and strikes a bargain with him, offering him a permanent place in his quarters in exchange for lessons. The two boys team up, open bank accounts with their paltry earnings, save their money, and slowly begin the long haul out of poverty.

Others also respond to Dick's truthfulness and resourceful spirit. Having promised a Mr. Greyson to bring him change for a ten-cent shine, Dick eventually fulfills that obligation, an act that leads him to Mr. Greyson's church and Sunday school, with a Sunday lunch with Greyson's family in the bargain. Later, it is Greyson who helps Henry Fosdick by way of recommendation to procure a job as a store clerk.

Dick's best break comes at the end of the novel, when he rescues a 6-year-old boy who has fallen from a ferry. The boy's father, who owns a counting room, a sort of combination bank and accounting office, offers Dick a job. In the last lines of “Ragged Dick” is this exchange between Henry and Dick:

“When, in short, you were ‘Ragged Dick.’ You must drop that name, and think of yourself now as”—

“Richard Hunter, Esq.,” said our hero, smiling.

“A young gentleman on the way to fame and fortune,” added Fosdick.

Helping Hands

Young readers of “Ragged Dick” and Alger's other stories were shown steppingstones to success: aspirations, a virtuous character, an education, a willingness to work hard and to open the door to opportunity when it came knocking, and a heart for the less fortunate, all aided by the blessings of good fortune. Here's just one example: When Dick takes a job for a day escorting a wealthier country boy, Frank, on a tour of the city, Frank's father gives Dick one of his son's suits. That change of clothing and his conversations with Frank about education give Dick a new outlook on his life, a belief in the possibility that he might someday attain Frank's status.

Though critics accuse Alger of painting a false picture of the benefits born from Ragged Dick's attributes and mock the writer's focus on individual effort, Alger recognized the part played by others in that arduous climb out of the gutter, the mentors who help Dick—and who help the rest of us as well.

In the author's preface, Alger explicitly emphasizes this need for assistance, writing that he hopes his books will “have the effect of enlisting the sympathies of his readers in behalf of the unfortunate children whose life is

described, and of leading them to cooperate with the praise-worthy efforts now made by the Children's Aid Society and other organizations to ameliorate their condition.”

Making the Most of One's Life

To most fiction, we bring a set of natural prejudices. Readers who enjoy fast-paced action, an eccentric hero, and suspense will probably find a home in Lee Child's Jack Reacher series; those who prefer more sedate stories will instead open Jane Austen.

Aside from those connoisseurs who might dislike “Ragged Dick” for its literary imperfections, some may argue that “Ragged Dick” seems little more than a preachy, bogus fantasy. Yet Alger's vision of work, virtue, and personal responsibility meshed with the American Dream of his time. Even today, this dream survives, as can be seen by the many immigrants coming to our country, the shelves of self-help books that by their very genre speak of individuals taking charge of their own lives, and the pride that so many Americans still take in their work and achievements.

“I'll go to work and see what I can do,” says Dick in a conversation with Frank about education.

There's the Alger ethic. And there's the dream that still lives.

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.



Cover of the 1895 Henry T. Coates and Company edition of “Ragged Dick” by Horatio Alger Jr.



Alger wrote tales of street urchins who broke free of their poverty. “Shoeshine Boy,” 1891, by Karl Witkowski. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.

THE SHADOW STATE

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THIS INVISIBLE HAND CONTROLS MORE THAN YOU THINK

In the past couple of years, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) policies have taken the business world by storm. But what do these three words actually mean—and what does their prevalence signify for the American consumer?

The Epoch Times takes a deep dive into the multitrillion-dollar ESG industry, tracing the movement's development from its origins. We examine the key players driving ESG, their goals for climate and social justice, and how they've united both governments and corporations in their quest for change.

And most importantly, we take a look into the future of ESG. Will it bring about the cleaner, more peaceful, and more equitable world it promises, or will it control our lives in ways that 20th-century totalitarians only dreamed of?

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"The Monastery Soup," 1858, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 36 7/8 inches by 47 7/8 inches. Austrian Belvedere Gallery, Vienna.



"On Corpus Christi Morning," 1857, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 25 5/8 inches by 32 1/4 inches. Austrian Belvedere Gallery, Vienna.



"The Halted Pilgrimage," 1853, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 18 1/8 inches by 22 7/8 inches. Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna.

FINE ART

ILLUMINATING AUSTRIA, HOPE, and GOOD CHEER

Continued from Page 1

Toward Nature

At 14 years old, Waldmüller studied at the Academy of Art in Vienna, where he gained a strong foundation in the Old Master painting tradition. Soon after finishing at the academy he took commissions, mainly copying old master works. His teachers were German painter Hubert Maurer, who introduced classicism to the academy, and Italian painter Johann Baptist Lampi.

Early in his career, Waldmüller painted portraits, which paid well and for which he became famous in the 1830s, before he focused on his love of genre and land-

Waldmüller painted hope and the innate goodness of the human spirit.

scape paintings. In 1856, Waldmüller gained international success after an exhibition in Buckingham Palace, London.

Waldmüller's landscape paintings in particular show his brilliant attention to detail. He painted his best landscapes between 1829 and 1843, when each summer he would visit the pristine alpine lakes and towering mountain peaks of the Salzkammergut, Austria's lake district. Austrians often refer to one of the region's lakes, Lake Altaussee, as an inkpot for writers and poets. In a similar vein, the entire Salzkammergut provides a breathtaking palette for painters.

Waldmüller, who loved to paint the high mountains, created the distant mountain

and forest vistas just as detailed and clear as the foreground motifs. Waldmüller's ability to render the distant details without any loss in definition defined his style.

Waldmüller's sojourns to Salzkammergut gave him infinite opportunities to see how the sunlight caressed the land from dawn to dusk, and gave him endless plein-air painting practice. From 1834 on, he mainly painted landscapes of the region.

In "The Dachstein From Sophien-Doppelblick Near Ischl," Waldmüller created a harmonious composition that leads the viewer deep into the Dachstein Mountains, a group of peaks in the Eastern Alps of Austria. In the foreground, a wooden fence directs viewers to the houses in the valley and to a meandering river on the right side of the painting. Waldmüller created the trees in the foreground with as much detail as the mountains and valley beyond, yet there is still a sense of space and depth of field—specialties of his work.

Waldmüller's painting "View of the Dachstein With Lake Hallstatt Seen From the Hüttenekalm Near Ischl" shows an

example of how he placed figures and buildings to give a sense of scale and depth. The tiny figures against the towering Dachstein Mountains put the vast, majestic scene into perspective, while allowing him to render the foreground and background objects in detail.

In addition to his landscapes, Waldmüller specialized in floral paintings. His 1843 still-life painting "Roses" shows how he applied his signature love of details to that genre, with its highly reflective objects such as the silver vase brimming with roses in various states of decay.

Capturing the Natural World and Human Nature

Waldmüller also had a talent for capturing human nature on canvas. He combined his love of the Austrian landscape with his keen insights into the human psyche to make successful genre paintings, often full of multiple figures. He painted these in the Biedermeier style of realist art that originated in Germany.

The Biedermeier style of art and architecture (around 1815–1848) grew during

a period of European peace after the Napoleonic Wars. Austrian diplomat and statesman Klemens von Metternich's leadership in Europe had brought political stability to the region. Urbanization and industrialization thrived and a new European middle class emerged, which was keen to collect and enjoy the arts.

In Austria, Biedermeier-style paintings contained no social or political commentary. After the country's years of instability, Biedermeier artists created realistic pious, sentimental paintings that generated warmth, good cheer, and a sense of belonging.

Waldmüller painted hope and the innate goodness of the human spirit in his genre paintings of pastoral scenes, people in poor houses, soup kitchens, and the like. Some of the paintings shows people in bleak circumstances, but even in these scenes, he showed the joy and the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

In "The Monastery Soup," Waldmüller created a grand, harmonious work with multiple figures, reminiscent of the old

masters' compositions, such as Raphael's large figurative works.

Waldmüller's composition hints at a triangle, leading our attention to the bustling scene. Even though there's much activity—jostling, laughter, prayer, and the general care of the children—each of the small figurative groupings, like each note in a great symphonic work, strengthens the overall composition of the painting. Even the monk in the wall painting seems to interact with the figures.

Many of Waldmüller's works celebrate Austrian rural life and traditions, such as his endearing work "On Corpus Christi Morning," wherein a group of jolly villagers ready themselves for the day. The painting centers on a group of girls dressed in white, with flower head-dresses. A grandfather watches on the left side of the work, as a mother and baby and possibly a grandmother fuss over the girls' dresses. A smartly dressed young boy in a blue sash holds a candle as he walks off to the right.

In his late work, Waldmüller combined genre and landscape subjects in his com-

positions, such as in "The Halted Pilgrimage." It shows a group of pilgrims walking along a rocky hilltop pause to aid their companion, who has collapsed from exhaustion. Waldmüller painted the sick pilgrim and the figures close by at the highest point in the painting, perhaps to show the importance of the cross she holds and that the journey they're making is not without sacrifice. He depicted the evening sunlight outlining the land like a halo, again emphasizing the pilgrims' sacred plight.

Each brushstroke Waldmüller made captured the brilliance and delight of nature. His paintings have universal appeal; the heart of "true painting" does. French art critic Roger de Piles explained in his book "The Principles of Painting" in 1708: "True painting is such as not only surprises, but as it were, calls to us; and has so powerful an effect, that we cannot help coming near it, as if it had something to tell us." Each of Waldmüller's paintings tells us that he found the eternal truth and beauty he searched for, in the wilderness and in human nature itself.



"View of the Dachstein With Lake Hallstatt Seen From the Hüttenekalm Near Ischl," 1838, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 17 7/8 inches by 22 5/8 inches. Vienna Museum, Vienna.



"The Radhausberg at Gastein," 1837, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 10 1/4 inches by 12 3/8 inches. Winterthur Museum, Library & Gardens, Winterthur, Del.



"Roses," 1843, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 18 7/8 inches by 15 3/8 inches. Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna.



"After School," 1841, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 29 1/2 inches by 24 3/8 inches. Old National Gallery, Berlin.



"The Rose Season," circa 1864, by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller. Oil on panel; 22 3/8 inches by 27 3/4 inches. Vienna Museum, Vienna.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Preservation of Our Past for Our Future

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

In 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter, who discovered the tomb of Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun, stood at its door. After a prolonged excavation, or “dig,” in Egypt’s Valley of the Kings, Carter was the first human in some 3,000 years to set foot there. In typical British understatement, he captured the momentous occasion saying that time seemed to have “lost its meaning.”

The film “The Dig” directed by Simon Stone, takes its philosophical cue from Carter and reflects on time and its meaning. But it draws inspiration from another dig, in 1939 England, which revealed an ancient Anglo-Saxon treasure-laden ship buried beneath a countryside moor. It also draws on John Preston’s eponymous novel based on the real-life man and woman who powered that historic discovery.

A widow with an archaeological itch, Edith Pretty (Carey Mulligan), contracts archaeologist-excavator, Basil Brown (Ralph Fiennes), to dig on her land on her hunch that it’ll throw up a “find.” True to her instinct, it does. As the dig proceeds, they unearth special meanings that time holds for them, and a little more than treasure in the mud.

Brown spurns legacy contracts with the local Ipswich Museum in favor of Pretty’s. But as treasures surface, the British Museum imposes itself on them and their little village and takes charge. Pretty’s son Robert (Archie Barnes), cousin Rory (Johnny Flynn), and Brown’s wife May (Monica Dolan) are sympathetic witnesses to this drama that plays out amid impending war.

Digging Inside

At one level Stone’s film is about how time leaves shards of history buried under a tomb or mound, hidden, sometimes for centuries. At a deeper level it’s about how we sometimes bury our true self under a façade. Only those who care enough can help us uncover the “treasure” we’ve hidden.

Brown’s treasure is his thirst for knowledge, his mastery of Latin, geology and astronomy, and his nose for soil and its secrets.

Edith Pretty (Carey Mulligan) owns farmland where she would like Basil Brown (Ralph Fiennes) to dig for archeological treasure that she believes is buried there.

Stone’s film is about how time leaves shards of history buried.

‘The Dig’

Director: Simon Stone

Starring: Carey Mulligan, Ralph Fiennes, Johnny Flynn, Monica Dolan

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 1 hour, 52 minutes

Release Date: Jan. 15, 2021

★★★★☆



But he’s hidden that treasure from everyone, including from himself. When he’s tempted to leave the dig to the petty machinations of museums, it takes the collective persuasion of Pretty, May, Robert, and Rory to let his treasure surface and shine.

Pretty’s treasure is her selflessness, likewise hidden, especially from herself. It takes more than nudges from Brown and others to let her treasure shine.

Brown loves his wife May, yet enjoys a companionship with Edith that flows more from mutual admiration than from romantic tension. If there’s a wisp of romance in the air everyone, including May, recognizes it as that: a wisp and nothing more.

Mulligan is a terrific actress. Perfect for pugnacious Pretty, she brings a delicate mix of softness, backbone, and repressed upper-class sensibilities to the role. As Ipswich Museum pleads with her to free Brown from her contract, she leaves it entirely to him. There will be no landlord’s tantrum to insist that he obey her or the museum.

Fiennes is brilliant as a mascot for “continuity.” He rises at night to prevent rain from ruining the dig; his bid to preserve the past from an intervening present. Not satisfied with looking down at the soil, he uses his telescope to look up at the sky.

Simon Stone delights in using symbols and contextualized imagery to suggest an endless interplay between past, present, and future.

Pretty removes old petals as she places new flowers at her husband’s tomb, determined to find fresh ways of honoring the past. Her wireless-radio interrupts her reverie about the past with broadcasts of a rude present: imminent war. Pained, she watches historical monuments slowly doubling up as gun-positions. Sci-fi comics near a sleeping Robert suggest he’s dreaming of a future currently too fantastic for his present.

Amateur photographer Rory captures the present on his camera (the historic dig in progress), but for the sake of the future (archives that’ll tell the story behind the dig). When Brown’s about to give up, thanks to meddling museums, May dares him not to by reminding him why he uncovers the past at all: to let future generations know their roots.

Extraordinarily long long-shots show Edith walking or Brown cycling across the moor. You see their tiny silhouettes against a massive countryside landscape and a great big sky, which hints how individuals do matter in the larger scheme of things. Individuals can make a difference if they take a stand and live up to their convictions, instead of succumbing to the “flavor of the month.”

We can decide the kind of future we want by choosing what of the past and present we must protect, and what we can afford to let die away. “The Dig” reflects on this.

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

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