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THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

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▲ Alonso Berruguete's altarpiece of the "Transfiguration of Christ," circa 1560, inside the Sacra Capilla del Salvador (Holy Chapel of El Salvador) in Úbeda, Spain.

TRADITIONAL ART

Alonso Berruguete's Rise to Prominence

By James Baresel

In 1504, the young and ambitious Spanish artist Alonso Berruguete arrived in Italy with an aspiration to become part of the elite artistic world of the High Renaissance. Undertrained in comparison, he made the risky move not knowing if, or when, he would succeed.

But Berruguete proved himself in short order. In 1508, Michelangelo allowed him to study the preparatory drawings for his never completed "Battle of Cascina." It was a privilege granted to few, a sure sign that Michelangelo respected Berruguete as an artist and trusted him as a friend. For any new, still obscure artist to be taken under Michelangelo's wing so soon after arriving in Italy would have indicated rare talent. Berruguete did not even have the credentials that could have been provided by training in the Northern European centers of Renaissance art: the Burgundian Netherlands. His only previous artistic foundation had taken place in his native country, at a time when Spain was making its first belated and faltering steps into Renaissance culture.

His sculptural technique was one of the most unique of the Renaissance.

Spanish Changing of Hands

In 1468, the Iberian Peninsula (between Spain and Portugal) had been divided into a handful of small kingdoms and lacked the peace and stability needed for art to flourish. The 1469 marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella changed everything by uniting their kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. Rivalry was eliminated, and their government was strong enough to subdue tumultuous nobles and unify most of modern Spain by completing the Reconquista in 1492.

Under the new conditions, interest in cultural pursuits increased rapidly and dramatically in the country. At first, Spaniards embraced Flemish models, influenced by the dynastic connections between their own monarchs and the Duke of Burgundy. Soon enough, they were turning to the Italian Renaissance just as it was on the verge of its greatest achievements.

Berruguete was among the first Spanish artists formed in this atmosphere. His father, Pedro, was a prominent painter in Spain's artistic transition from Gothic to Renaissance and became Alonso's first teacher. The elder Berruguete's interest in Italy's artistic developments inspired Alonso's desire to study at the epicenter of the Renaissance. Once there, his deep understanding and masterful skill enabled young Berruguete to quickly excel.

*Continued on **Page 4***

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PUBLIC DOMAIN

▲ In the novel, father and son watch the rising moon. "Two Men Contemplating the Moon," circa 1825–1830, by Caspar David Friedrich. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

The Extraordinary Power of Beauty

Mark Helprin's 'A Soldier of the Great War'

By Jeff Minick

It's the summer of 1964. A retired university professor, Alessandro Giuliani, and a young factory worker, Nicolò, set out to walk 70 kilometers (about 44 miles) from Rome to the village of Monte Prato. Along the way, musing on his rich and tragic past, Alessandro shares some of his memories and what he has learned with his illiterate and naïve companion. He revisits his privileged youth in a loving family, his university studies in beauty and art, the horrors and hammer blows he experienced in World War I, and his love for the woman Ariane and their son, both now gone to the grave.

This is a barebones sketch of Mark Helprin's mountain of a novel "A Soldier of the Great War." Readers who ascend this peak of print and paper receive the reward of a finely told and moving story of a man of great character swept up in the chaos of the 20th century, a septuagenarian who by dint of his intelligence and powers of observation offers his new friend the education of a lifetime.

But this is only the skeleton of the book. When we add to these bones the flesh, blood, nerve, and tissue of Helprin's descriptions and the professor's many reflections on art, we discover a remarkable and singular celebration of beauty.

The Beauty of Nature

Early on in the novel, Alessandro returns in his mind to his university days and recollects a long-ago conversation with his father, a hard-working attorney. They are discussing Alessandro's future in an offhand way, and at one point the son says: "But what if you were to choose the profession of looking at things to see their beauty, to see what they meant, to find in the world as much of the truth as you could find?"

Long before he enters into such a profession, thrown off by his years in the war and its aftermath, Alessandro displays a natural talent for seeing and expressing aloud his appreciation for the charms and mysteries of the natural world. His vivid, poetic descriptions of mountains, the sea, woodlands, and gardens all reveal a man whose eye for beauty is akin to the genius of Mozart's ear for music or of Michelangelo's fingers for marble.

Here, for instance, night has fallen, and Nicolò and Alessandro are watching the rising moon, the light of which Alessandro contrasts with that of the city they've left behind: "Rome still looks like catacombs of fire, and will remain this shattered and amber color throughout the night. … But the moon, as it moves, has already run through a number of scenes. First, it was a farmer's fire, almost dead in the field, ruby red. Then it ripened through a thousand shades of orange, amber, and yellow. As it gets lighter, it sheds its mass, until somewhere between cream and pearl, halfway to its apogee, it will seem like a burst of smoke that wants to run away on the wind."

Earlier, while directing the young man's attention to the moon, he says: "The whole world stops as this stunning dancer rises, and its beauty puts to shame all our doubts."

The Beauty of Women

After being severely wounded in combat, Alessandro ends up in a hospital and falls in love with a nurse, Ariane. At one point, he sees the women who share Ariane's quarters preparing themselves for their work with the wounded and the dying. "He longed for the gentleness in the way they lived, the peace, and the safety. Even their fingers were beautiful—their voices, the way they brushed their hair, the way they laced their boots, leaning down with tresses about to tumble forward but held in check as if by a miracle. They were beautiful even in the way they breathed."

Much earlier in the story, on a train to Munich to see Raphael's portrait of Bindo Altoviti, Alessandro again brings these powers of appreciation and analysis to an Irish travel agent with whom he shares a compartment: "She was as tall as an Englishwoman could get without difficulty in finding a marriage partner, and as slender and lean as if she were tied up in corsets. But the way her black-and-red silk dress fit her indicated that she had no corsetry and that her flesh was as hard as that of a country woman. … Her fingernails were carefully painted and glazed, and her hands, though long and powerful, were delicate nonetheless."

Only a man in love with beauty itself could offer these and the other similar elevated descriptions of women that occur throughout the novel. Moreover, Alessandro perceives that this outer beauty of women is further illuminated by love and respect. While imprisoned during the war for desertion and waiting to be executed—he survives with a last-minute reprieve—he briefly explains to his cellmate Ludovico how much he has enjoyed the difference between men and women. He concludes: "Here, at the end, I see that the most beautiful thing between a man and a woman is not the consummation of their love, but, simply, their regard for one another."

'La Tempesta'

Beauty, Alessandro reflects at the very end of the book, "was where the truth lay, it was strong and bright." Because of his lifelong passion for aesthetics, Alessandro naturally makes frequent references to painting, music, and dance. For the most part, he either rejects or remains silent about modern art, preferring the works of the great masters of the past.

Though his mention of these older artists and their work is often delivered only in passing, there is one exception: Venetian artist Giorgione's "The Tempest." In this painting, which was one of the first pastoral scenes by a Renaissance artist, are a breaking storm and a crumbling city. In the foreground a well-dressed man gazes across a stream at a baby being suckled by a nearly naked woman, who looks out from the canvas at the viewer as if surprised by the intrusion.

In its own time, and ever since, the meaning of "The Tempest" has baffled viewers and art historians.

This painting runs as a motif throughout "A Soldier of the Great War." Alessandro speaks of it several times and even believes, as he tells Ariane, that he has deciphered Giorgione's great work: "He intended to praise elemental things, and to show a soldier on the verge of return. … What does the painting mean? It means love. It means coming home."

Alessandro's words become a prophecy fulfilled, for it is "The Tempest" that eventually leads him back to Ariane after the war has separated them. Nearly certain that she is dead, Alessandro visits the painting in a Venice museum and learns from a museum guard that a woman vaguely matching Ariane's description and carrying a child has wept before this enigmatic picture.

Following different clues, he finally tracks her down in Rome. His description of their reunion would turn a heart of stone to a bed of leaves.

Through art, through beauty, Alessandro has at last come home.

The author teaches us how to apprehend the beauty of the world and of art.

'A SOLDIER OF THE GREAT WAR'
By Mark Helprin
Mariner Books
June 1, 2005
Paperback
880 pages

A Home for the Rest of Us

Near the end of their long walk together, Alessandro and Nicolò discuss God. "His existence is not a question of argument but of apprehension," says Alessandro. "Either you apprehend God, or you do not."

Alessandro would doubtless say the same of beauty.

I first read "A Soldier of the Great War" when I was in my 40s. Later, in my 50s, I read it again when a priest recommended it to one of my sons before he went off to college. The book offers many gifts, a great story with reflections on how to live, but only on my recent third reading have I recognized yet another level to this story.

In all those descriptive passages that I had once skimmed, or skipped altogether, Helprin is teaching us, as Alessandro taught Nicolò, the techniques for apprehending the beauty of the world and of art: to slow our pace, to pause and appreciate a great painting, to revel in the stars when the night sky is clear as glass, to be overwhelmed, even for a few seconds, by a stranger whose eyes dance like sunlight on a sea. "To see the beauty of the world," says Alessandro, "is to put your hands on lines that run uninterrupted through life and through death."

The question, then, is not whether such beauty exists, but whether we have the wherewithal to perceive it along with its comrades—truth and goodness—to seek out and touch those uninterrupted lines. "A Soldier of the Great War" gives us a compass and map to begin that journey.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

▶ This painting runs as a motif throughout "A Soldier of the Great War." "The Tempest," circa 1505, by Giorgione. Oil on canvas; 32.2 inches by 28.7 inches. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, Italy.

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 nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

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PETER HEIDELBERG/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ Detail of the "Transfiguration of Christ," from the main altarpiece, circa 1560, by Alonso Berruguete. The Sacra Capilla del Salvador (Holy Chapel of El Salvador), Úbeda, Spain.

TRADITIONAL ART

Alonso Berruguete's Rise to Prominence

Continued from Page 1

Sculpting the Artist

When Berruguete first began studying in Italy, he focused on oil painting techniques. His early artistic brilliance evidenced in "Salome" and "Madonna and Child" are comparable to early works of Raphael and Titian. However, he chose not to build extensively on that foundation but to shift to sculpture instead—the medium in which he would develop one of the most unique individual styles of the entire Renaissance.

While the details of his transition from oil paint to sculpture are lacking, he must have begun to dabble in the new medium shortly after his arrival in Italy. In 1510, one of the most famous sculptures of the ancient world, "Laocoön and His Sons," was found buried in the field of a Roman vineyard. Berruguete was one of four artists who entered a competition to sculpt the best wax arm for the the missing limb of the ancient Roman marble sculpture. He lost to Jacopo Sansovino, the 16th-century Italian sculptor and architect whose skill ranked him second to Michelangelo. For Berruguete to compete seriously at that level, however, was an indication of greater things to come.

Under Michelangelo's Wing

For the next decade, Berruguete slowly progressed toward his later achievements, earning his living as a painter while studying sculpture on the side. Several years in Florence facilitated that effort. Both Michelangelo and Donatello were Florentines, and many of Donatello's sculptures were located there. Michelangelo, who was on friendly terms with Berruguete, helped to facilitate his relationships with local artists.

Despite such advantages, Berruguete completed only the first part of a sculptor's education while in Italy—designing sculptures through drawings and wax models. But the standing he gained through his painting ultimately facilitated his transition. By 1518, his reputation was high enough for him to be appointed as a painter to Spain's royal court.

Collaboration with court sculptors allowed him to finally learn how to carve sculptures on his own. Once the necessary lessons were learned, it did not take Berruguete long to shift into the role of Spain's most influential master.

Transforming Spanish Arts

Before Berruguete's influence on Spanish fine art, sculptures ranged from underdeveloped to crude in terms of design, shape, and anatomy. Wood had been a popular sculptural medium in the county and figures were often painted in bright, unrealistic colors. The contrast to the anatomically correct and refined marble and bronze sculptures of Italy could hardly have been starker.

Combining elements of Spanish tradition and Renaissance classicism into a unique personal style would become Berruguete's most famous contribution to the development of his country's art. His use of shape and design was reminiscent of Donatello's with intricately detailed and realistic, though somewhat elongated, forms. The medium was wood: Painting in deep, realistic shades would be Berruguete's finishing touch.

Although his wood sculptures take the limelight, Berruguete also introduced pure Italian Renaissance classicism into Spain through the sculpting of marble and alabaster works. In some of these sculptures, the classicism is immediately apparent, as in "The Transfiguration of Christ." In others, it is slightly obscured by the main figures' late medieval clothing, as in the "Tomb of Ferdinand and Isabella."

Berruguete lived until 1561, having transformed Spanish sculpture and artistic culture. Famous throughout Spain, his work would be found in many of its important cities, including Salamanca, Toledo, Valladolid, Burgos, Granada, Palencia, and Cáceres. Artists such as Juan de Juni, Gaspar Becerra, and Juan Bautista Vázquez built on the foundation that Berruguete laid, which survived well into the next century. Very few other artists can be likewise credited for having influenced an entire country's art single-handedly.

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

PUBLIC DOMAIN

◀ "Salome," circa 1512–1517, by Alonso Berruguete. Oil on panel; 34.6 inches by 27.9 inches. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

▶ "The Age of Iron," 1520s–1530, attributed to Alonso Berruguete. Pen and brown ink; 8 inches by 12 3/8 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

▲ Herbert's poem describes a "glass of blessings," which God pours upon man at his creation. "Still Life With Turkey Pie," 1627, by Pieter Claesz.

POETRY

A Reflection on Rest and Restlessness

George Herbert's 'The Pulley': We are pulled to our Creator and rest in him

By Marlena Figge

"Our hearts are restless until they rest in you," wrote St. Augustine. Over 1,000 years later, George Herbert wrote a poem giving us the backstory as to why this is so.

George Herbert lived from 1593 to 1633 and was one of the metaphysical poets who wrote in 17th-century England. I defer to the wisdom of T.S. Eliot, who said that metaphysical poetry is extremely difficult to define but generally is characterized by the use of conceit, which is an extended metaphor, and reflections on the invisible reality.

Both of these characteristics are exemplified in Herbert's poem "The Pulley," which presents us with the scene of the creation of man. Naturally, "The Pulley" is not a historical account of creation, but it is a means of understanding why work was always built into the divine plan for mankind, even before our relationship with it was corrupted by the fall.

In his poem, Herbert reveals the path to true rest and shows how it is inseparable from restlessness in this life.

The Pulley

As the title suggests, the poem revolves around the image of a pulley, which here refers to the means by which man is drawn back to his Creator. This image unfolds within a second metaphor: a glass of blessings that God pours upon man at his creation.

> When God at first made man,
> Having a glass of blessings standing by,
> "Let us," said he, "pour on him all we can.
> Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
> Contract into a span."
> So strength first made a way;
> Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
> When almost all was out, God made a stay,
> Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
> Rest in the bottom lay.
> "For if I should," said he,
> "Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
> He would adore my gifts instead of me,
> And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
> So both should losers be.
> "Yet let him keep the rest,
> But keep them with repining restlessness;
> Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
> If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
> May toss him to my breast."

The start of the poem seems like the reversal of the tale of Pandora's box as we are left with one blessing remaining in the glass. However, as we will see, this particular blessing could prove to be the only treasure it would be better not to pour out for the time being.

The pun in the first line of the final stanza presents us with the paradox in the poem: By keeping rest back, God gives us the fullest type of rest possible. As expressed by St. Augustine, our hearts are restless until they rest in God. In the end, as long as we find it in God, we receive rest, after all.

Here is where the image of the pulley is brought to completion. As man is dragged down by weariness, he is pulled (or "tossed") upward to God. It is in an everyday mechanical device that Herbert gives us an image of the divine plan for us at creation and of the continuing action of grace in our lives.

True Rest

To find the sort of rest that Herbert describes, we have to put aside our modern, utilitarian notion of rest as an absence of work, a break that merely prepares us to return to more work. Instead, our rest (that is, our conscious rest) must be an activity rather than passivity. The only way we find rest in this world is by seeking our Creator, which requires a proper understanding of leisure as a time of silence and active contemplation.

As German philosopher Josef Pieper says, "Leisure … is a mental and spiritual attitude—it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, week-end, or a vacation." He goes on to say: "Leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation."

In Pieper's understanding, the proper end of leisure is divine worship. We are taken out of the weariness of daily work into the "love of the invisible reality." So, too, Herbert demonstrates that our restlessness must move us. In the poem, man is left not with a vacuous absence of rest but with an active restlessness, which propels us to our Creator.

We cannot be content without God, and so, whether from virtue or the weariness of the world, we must necessarily turn to him for our rest. Though it seems counterintuitive that we find rest from our activity in further activity, that we find rest is thanks only to restlessness. This paradox leads us to fullness rather than emptiness: Rest is no longer just a state of worklessness, but rather consists of adoration.

The fact that the glass of blessings was not quite emptied leads us to our greatest sense of fulfillment. We as finite creatures are pulled into union with our infinite Creator, such that we are the richer for having been weary.

HEIDI PINKALL/SHUTTERSTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ The poet uses the image of the pulley to show how God pulls us to him.

Marlena Figge received her M.A. in Italian Literature from Middlebury College in 2021 and graduated from the University of Dallas in 2020 with a B.A. in Italian and English. She currently has a teaching fellowship and teaches English at a high school in Italy.

LITERATURE

Awakened by a Warm Breeze and the Scent of Lilac

O. Henry's short story, 'The Romance of a Busy Broker'

By Kate Vidimos

In "Essays, Letters and Miscellanies," Leo Tolstoy says: "Stop a moment, cease your work, look around you." Tolstoy urges us to resist the human tendency to be so consumed by work that we forget to look up and see the life that surrounds us.

In his short story "The Romance of a Busy Broker," O. Henry shows that when we allow work to swallow us, we do not see what is around us and end up losing our humanity. By following the busy broker Harvey Maxwell, Henry shows that we can see life, with all its secrets and beauties, if we pay attention.

Harvey is an efficient and hardworking broker who hardly ever lets anything distract him while he works. At his desk, he is "no longer a man; [but] is a busy New York broker, moved by buzzing wheels and uncoiling springs."

He is so absorbed that when his young stenographer, Miss Leslie, approaches, he does not notice her kind smile or that she seems to be reminiscing about something.

Soon a young, flamboyant woman comes in to apply for the stenographer position. But when brokerage office manager Pitcher brings her to speak with Harvey, Harvey is confused and frustrated. He completely forgets the instruction he gave to Pitcher the day before to have Miss Leslie replaced:

"Why should I have given you any such instructions? Miss Leslie has given perfect satisfaction during the year she has been here. The place is hers as long as she chooses to retain it."

Waking Up to Life

As the hours pass, some of the hectic action subsides. Harvey begins to look up from his work. He opens the window to let the spring air into the office.

As the warm breeze surrounds him, the sweet scent of lilac hits him. His heart is overcome, and his mind is filled with thoughts of Miss Leslie, for this scent is Leslie's scent: "It is her own, and hers only."

All thoughts of work disappear from his mind and are replaced with the strongest attention on her. He's in love. Harvey mutters to himself: "By George, I'll do it now. I'll ask her now. I wonder I didn't do it long ago."

With determination, Harvey hurries to Leslie's desk. As she looks up at him with a smile, he quickly proposes to her, acknowledging his inability to court her properly.

This proposal stuns the young lady, and she exclaims: "Oh, what are you talking about?" Then, after repeating his love for her, Miss Leslie must remind Harvey of what has recently occurred.

Through this story, O. Henry shows that if we allow work to swallow us so completely, we fail to notice those people and things that are most important. We forget important words and actions and cannot remember the beautiful secrets that we share with others.

Though work is good and crucial, it must not be our principal thought and aim. Life should be our focus, with all its beauties and wonders. These are the beauties and wonders that make life worthwhile.

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate from the liberal arts college at the University of Dallas, where she received her bachelor's degree in English. She plans on pursuing all forms of storytelling (specifically film) and is currently working on finishing and illustrating a children's book.

GROUND PICTURE/SHUTTERSTOCK

What's important in life can get away from us as it did with the busy broker in O. Henry's short story "The Romance of a Busy Broker."

ALL IMAGES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Haydn's last opera features the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. "Orpheus and Eurydice," 1862, by Edward Pointer.

MUSIC

Haydn's Opera 'Orpheus and Eurydice' Returns to the Original Source

By Ariane Triebswetter

When opera first emerged around the late 16th century, composers and librettists took a special interest in the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. It became the subject of the very first opera, "L'Orfeo," by Claudio Monteverdi. Since then, composers such as Jacopo Peri and Christoph Willibald Gluck created operas around the mythological figure of Orpheus, an embodiment of music itself, and thus a perfect vehicle for this new art form—sung drama.

Franz Joseph Haydn's (1732–1809) take on the Orpheus myth was his last opera: "The Soul of the Philosopher, or Orpheus and Eurydice" ("L'anima del Filosofo, ossia Orfeo ed Euridice"), a dramatic opera in four acts (an "opera seria," a serious opera), with an Italian libretto by Carlo Francesco Badini.

Not in His Lifetime

Along with Mozart, Haydn was one of the most in-demand composers of the Baroque era. Since the 1780s, English impresarios tried to attract the famous composer to their country. Johann Peter Salomon finally succeeded in 1791, when he brought Haydn to London following the death of the composer's Hungarian patron, Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy. There, Haydn composed several symphonies, and "The Soul of the Philosopher" opera for the reopening of the King's Theatre.

The composer's arrival was highly anticipated and celebrated by the English public, and the press even nicknamed him the "Orpheus of his age." In those days, people were fascinated with the Orpheus figure. Haydn himself loved Gluck's "Orpheus and Eurydice," so it was only natural for him to compose his interpretation of the myth of Orpheus.

Haydn's opera was never performed during his lifetime, as the King's Theatre lacked a license from the king and parliament to stage Italian opera. Haydn continued working on what he called his "Orfeo for England," but the opera would see the light of day only in the 20th century, when various available scores from multiple European libraries were assembled.

The opera was first performed in 1951, at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence, Italy, and the role of Eurydice sung by none other than Maria Callas. In 1967, the opera saw its first British staging in Edinburgh, Scotland, featuring Dame Joan Sutherland. Since then, the opera has been recorded and performed many times.

Classical Vision

With "The Soul of the Philosopher," Haydn presented a new vision of the myth by adhering closely to the original story and the classical tradition.

Haydn took direct inspiration from Ovid's "Metamorphoses" (A.D. 8). "The Soul of the Philosopher" begins with Eurydice in a forest. She is distraught, as she loves the musician Orpheus but her father, Creon, has betrothed her to the beekeeper Aristaeus.

Franz Joseph Haydn's last opera was not performed in his lifetime, but only later in the 20th century. A detail of "Portrait of Joseph Haydn," 1791, by Thomas Hardy.

The chorus, in the model of Greek tragedy, advises Eurydice to leave the forest as wild shepherds appear, wanting to sacrifice her to the Furies. Orpheus saves her, charming the shepherds with his music, and the chorus praises the victory of art over barbarity.

Believing that Fate has intervened, Creon lets the young couple marry. However, as they celebrate their union, Orpheus hears a suspicious sound and leaves Eurydice alone, where she is pursued by followers of Aristaeus. As she attempts to flee, a snake bites and kills her.

In Act 3, Orpheus seeks the counsel of the Sibyl, a famous oracle in classical mythological literature. She advises him to remain calm, and they both travel to the underworld. Pluto (the god of the underworld) grants Orpheus access to the underworld and allows him to take Eurydice back to the earth above, as he is charmed by his musical talents and touched by his love.

However, Orpheus is not allowed to look at his beloved until they reach the world above. Sadly, he looks back at Eurydice and thus loses her forever. The Sibyl abandons him, and as he weeps, a group of Bacchantes (followers of Bacchus, god of wine and pleasure) approach. They try to entice him to forego sorrow and seek pleasure, but he refuses. The Bacchantes force Orpheus to drink a poisoned beverage and he dies. As the Bacchantes leave, a storm erupts and they drown.

While Haydn's version is not as romantic as other operatic versions, it is the one that conforms the most to the classical myth. "The Soul of the Philosopher" treads darker paths, where questions are raised and not necessarily answered, and dramatic events unfold, over which the protagonists have very little control.

The opera keeps the main characters of the myth: Orpheus (Orfeo, tenor), Eurydice (Euridice, soprano or mezzo-soprano), Creon (Creonte, bass), Pluto (Plutone, bass), and the Sibyl (Genio, soprano). The opera also maximizes the power of the chorus to fill narrative gaps.

The opera was first performed in 1951.

Complex Drama

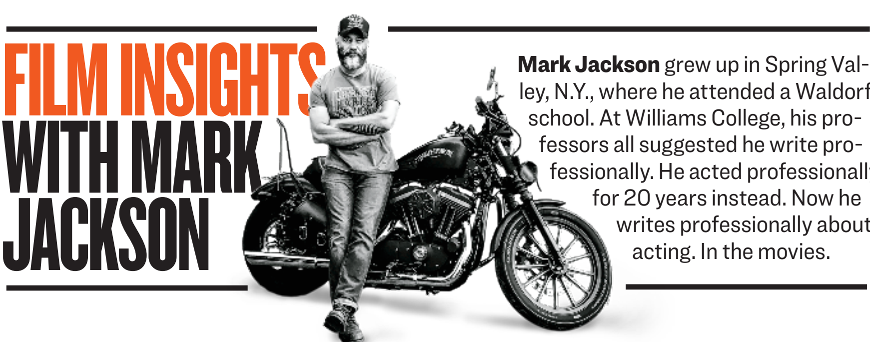
"The Soul of the Philosopher" portrays the internal struggle of the philosopher between reason and passion, with an emphasis on the spiritual and the personal.

Although betrothed to Aristaeus, a man of industry (in myth, also a minor deity), Eurydice loves Orpheus, a man of art. Sadly, she is hurt by Orpheus, who appears to be drawn more to music than to her. But when Orpheus, who could tame beasts and men with his music, loses Eurydice, neither art nor philosophy can console him.

Today, "The Soul of the Philosopher" is mostly remembered for its beautiful score rather than its libretto. The arias are some of the most beautiful pieces that Haydn composed for the voice, with richly ornamented coloratura sections. A notable example is Eurydice's death aria: "All my longing" ("Del mio core"). The choral writing, accompanied by a large orchestra, is equally powerful, reminiscent of the chorus in Mozart's "The Magic Flute."

Even if it was never performed in his lifetime, Haydn included the opera in his list of works, as his way of saying that his retelling of the Orpheus myth was worthy of his brilliant career. Some critics lament a lack of theatrical quality in Haydn's operatic repertoire, but "The Soul of the Philosopher" stands out as an exception with its incredible drama, complemented by glorious music.

Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.



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

CHRISTIAN BLACK/PARAMOUNT PICTURES/SKYDANCE

Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise), in "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One."

Another Summer Blockbuster for Tom Cruise

Maybe not the best of the series, but right up there

By Mark Jackson

Tom Cruise adapted the original 1960s–1970s "Mission Impossible" television series for cinema usage in 1996, and since then the franchise's popularity has only snowballed.

You've probably heard about the on-set goings on regarding "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One." Tom Cruise's production company continued shooting during the pandemic, and a leaked audio clip has Mr. Cruise berating his crew for not adhering to mask-wearing protocol.

Whether you agree with the COVID narrative or not, you can't really fault a movie star, who continues to do death-defying daredevil stunts for our collective entertainment, for strictly observing safety rules.

According to press notes, Mr. Cruise rehearsed for this film's apex motorcycle stunt by completing more than 500 skydives and 13,000 motocross jumps. This is part of why he's being touted as America's last real movie star. Mr. Cruise has always, ever, been about excellence in movie-making, and I give credit where credit is due. It's probably the summer of 2023's only real blockbuster.

'Mission'

Much like 2022's rather astounding "Top Gun: Maverick" (although not quite on that level), this latest "Mission" installment is yet another colossal, expertly engineered Cruise vehicle delivering the maximum Cruise payload.

At 2 hours and 43 minutes, it spends a bit too much time on expository yakking, which, while being stylized in delivery to the point of being slightly annoying, gets the job done and allows one to have more clarity while watching Mr. Cruise do his Cruise thang.

What Goes On

Ethan Hunt (Cruise) and his Impossible Mission Force (IMF) team embark on their latest assignment (that they've chosen to accept, of course) of preventing a humanity-extinguishing MacGuffin from falling into the wrong hands.

What is it? An omniscient, nameless, faceless artificial intelligence program that would very much like to hack the entire civilized world. It's such a massive threat that one movie can't handle it all, and "Dead Reckoning" will pick up again in the summer of '24.

Which means, for now, that the AI MacGuffin must be located and chased around, with some double-reverse fake-outs via pickpocketing, and knife fights atop moving locomotives.

There's a set piece stolen, I think, from a "Jurassic Park" installment; you know the one, where cliff-hangerish-ly, the protagonists must crawl up through a vertical train car that's literally hanging off a cliff.

Another wave of déjà vu hit me during a car chase that takes place in Rome. I'd swear they used the same grand staircase to roll Mr. Cruise down, hilariously, in a tiny yellow Fiat that this summer's installment of "Transformers" rolled some transformers-in-car-mode down.

Then Mr. Cruise, à la Evel Knievel, motorcycles with alacrity up a natural cliff ramp and barrels into the void, popping his chute and attempting to land aboard that runaway train. If you like roller coasters, this is your movie.

Writer-director Christopher McQuarrie delivers, via all this various thrilling set-piece stealing, a top-notch, high-octane action-thriller.

'Mission: Impossible' is probably the summer of 2023's only real blockbuster.

Performances

Mr. Cruise once again nails his role as Ethan Hunt, performing most of his own stunts with impressive precision while not taking himself too seriously.

As I've always maintained, Mr. Cruise is one of our most underrated comedic actors, in both clown and straight-man capacities. When Ethan encounters the beautiful, mysterious, international criminal Grace (Hayley Atwell), a thief who keeps trying to steal one half of a key that's crucial to stopping the AI nemesis, Ethan meets his match: Grace outwits him, and Atwell scene-steals like the pro she is. But it takes a generous star like Mr. Cruise to let himself be upstaged for the overall good of the production.

Returning players like kittenish, dangerous, nose-crinkling Alanna (Vanessa Kirby) and the noble Ilsa (Rebecca Ferguson) don't scene-steal; their performances all support the narrative seamlessly.

"Part Two" comes out next summer, but "Part One" is expected to repeat the success of last year's "Top Gun: Maverick," which was such a phenomenal success that it prompted master director Steven Spielberg himself to praise Mr. Cruise for saving the entire movie industry.

Lately, Mr. Cruise's mission—which he appears to have accepted—is reinstalling in the public consciousness the superiority of seeing films in actual cinemas, as opposed to streaming platforms. Definitely see "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One" in IMAX.

'Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One'

Director
Christopher MacQuarrie

Starring
Tom Cruise, Hayley Atwell, Rebecca Ferguson, Vanessa Kirby, Simon Pegg, Ving Rhames, Cary Elwes, Esai Morales

Running Time
2 hours, 43 minutes

MPAA Rating
PG-13

Release Date
July 12, 2023

★★★★☆

DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

The Sacrifice and Suffering Recounted by 5 of the 'Greatest Generation'

The POW experience of veteran World War II pilots

By Joe Bendel

VISION FILMS, INC.

World War II veteran Robert Barney interviewed in "Angels of the Sky."

They have been called the "Greatest Generation," but only a few of the young American men (and they were almost entirely men) who fought the National Socialists during World War II are still alive to tell their stories. Fortunately, quadriplegic filmmaker Trent McGee and co-director/co-writer Josh Berman recorded the dramatic oral history of five American pilots who were shot down by the Germans and held as prisoners of war (POWs) in the documentary "Angels of the Sky."

As one of the former POWs explains, at the height of the war, the 8th Air Force was losing 60 airplanes a day over Europe (which meant they were also losing 60 pilots). It is hard to imagine how the partisan media would have reacted if we had lost 60 planes each day during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. In any event, that was the reality Mr. McGee and Mr. Berman's interview subjects—Robert Barney, Walter Drake, George Emerson, Harry Selling, and Ed Stapleton—survived to talk about years after the fact.

Mr. McGee and Mr. Berman start with a brief recap of America's entry into World War II, which really should not be necessary, but it probably is for far too many younger viewers. Regardless, many of the veterans enlisted rather than waited to be drafted, as a strategy to be accepted for flight training.

Even to this day, the five veterans express respect for their German fighter-pilot counterparts, precisely because they were so lethally effective. Once the Americans were captured, the terms of the Geneva Convention were supposed to protect Allied POWs, which they sort of did, but several of the five 8th Air Force vets still endured regular "enhanced interrogation" techniques.

However, the most harrowing sequences of "Angels of the Sky" chronicle the forced march that the transfers of entire prison camps endured to prevent their liberation as the Allies advanced on both fronts. While not quite as horrific as the Bataan Death March in the Philippines, the treatment that POWs endured in transit with the retreating Germans was brutal and often deadly.

Fans of classic World War II films will be interested in their experiences at Stalag Luft III, which was the setting for the classic Steve McQueen–Charles Bronson film "The Great Escape." Yet the conditions at the infamously overcrowded Nuremberg camp were much more hazardous.

In the eight decades since the five pilots were taken prisoner, many subsequent generations have lost a sense of the scale and urgency of World War II. Even though the directors take a very personal approach throughout "Angels of the Sky," the five veterans' perspective helps viewers understand just how great the mortality rate was for air crew and how many were lost in action while serving their country.

Several of the five 8th Air Force vets still endured regular 'enhanced interrogation' techniques.

The proportion of talking-head footage to other visuals is very high (which is a drawback), but the insights and experiences that the film records are invaluable. Mr. McGee and Mr. Berman's film should appeal to the same viewers who enjoyed David Fairhead and Ant Palmer's documentary "Lancaster," but it should have a broader audience due to its focus on the POW experience and its American viewpoint.

Regardless, "Angels of the Sky" is an important and worthy endeavor, because it reminds us what it was like to fight a global war against a totalitarian ideology. All five of the former POWs Mr. McGee and Mr. Berman interviewed are great Americans, who fought for their country during a time of crisis, making considerable personal sacrifices.

Coincidentally (but not insignificantly), the upcoming release of "Angels of the Sky" coincides with the 29th anniversary of the traffic accident that paralyzed the then 7-year-old McGee. (A criminal speeding away from the police rammed into his mother's car, while she was turning in an intersection.) It really is not overstating matters to suggest that "Angels of the Sky" represents courage and resiliency in several ways.

Recommended for its oral history, Mr. McGee and Mr. Berman's documentary releases on July 11.

"Angels of the Sky" is available on TVOD.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit JBSpins.blogspot.com

'Angels of the Sky'

Documentary

Directors
Josh Berman, Trent McGee

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes

MPAA Rating
PG

Release Date
July 11, 2023

★★★½☆

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Imagining Abundance

When the American Dream seems a mirage

By Rudolph Lambert Fernandez

Betty Smith's partially autobiographical novel inspired Elia Kazan's coming-of-age film that won three nominations and was awarded two Oscars. Like many of Frank Capra's films, Kazan's directorial debut about the needy Nolan family in 1912 downtown Brooklyn, New York, prioritizes the heart over the head.

Playful singer-daydreamer Johnny (James Dunn) waits tables. His diligent but dour wife, Katie (Dorothy McGuire), is a homemaker. So their children, Francie (13-year-old Peggy Ann Garner) and Neeley (12-year-old Ted Donaldson), can't elude the shadow of want that haunts their home. Penury may have taken up permanent residence, but through the irrepressible Johnny, laughter finds a way in as an equally stubborn houseguest.

The dialogue-heavy screenplay captures the exhilaration of growing up with countless dreams, and the dread of growing old with many of them unrealized. The characters are layered, their arcs deliberate, their interiority believable. In their little universe of scarcity, no one's a villain and nearly everyone's a hero. So, it's want that stands in as antagonist, needing no melodrama to tear families apart or reunite them.

Kazan asks piercing questions: Does a romanticizing of poverty numb its sting? Is love merely a responsibility fulfilled (working, earning, providing, protecting), visible in tasks we "do" willingly, if sullenly? Or does love demand more? Does it demand that we "be" cheerfully caring in thought too, in unspoken word, unseen gesture?

Kazan's inquiring camera peers up at the Nolans' rundown tenement, their crumbling balconies peering right back over desolate clotheslines. As you watch, a tree in the neighborhood and later a Christmas tree take on special meanings.

20TH CENTURY FOX

▲ Francie (Peggy Ann Garner) believes in her father's (James Dunn) dreams, in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn."

Garner and Dunn, in roles of a lifetime, play father-daughter soulmates. As bookworm Francie, swayed by breezy prose and poetry, Garner exudes an aching melancholy, yet Dunn as her father senses he must rise above it.

It's tempting to dismiss tension in this family as a harmless, if typical, personality clash: Johnny the romantic versus Katie the realist. But there's more at work here than a pragmatist fending off pipedreams.

> The film asks whether love demands that we be cheerfully caring.

Attitude More Than Achievement

Francie knows that Johnny will move heaven and earth for his family, never mind that neither heaven nor earth so much as stir. To her, his chirpy effort matters more. Once, as she does when sharing something special with him, she whispers her quaint expression of inexplicable gratitude, "My cup runneth over!"

Katie and her much-married sister, Sissy (Joan Blondell), are soulmates too, but only Sissy echoes Johnny's gratitude for the tiniest of things. Sissy figures that life's pointless if you can't be grateful even for being born, being born to someone (a father, a mother), with someone (a brother, a sister), living for someone (a husband, a wife, a child). She believes that what you have or don't have doesn't matter; it's miraculous enough to get to care and be cared for.

Katie, ever conscious of dispossession (not enough food, clothes, or savings, no role models for the children), can't spot any miracles. Johnny and Sissy? They never tire of pointing at miracles: in the house, out of it, on their way upstairs, on their way down.

In Katie's defense, Johnny's drinking and gambling make it tougher to simply wink at his daydreaming. But she rarely stops to question if her overweening pessimism plays some part in pushing him away in the first place. Her children are naughty, but not naïve; they spy a connection and hint at it. Her mother's more direct: "You have forgotten to think with your heart."

Katie bears contempt for "foolish" wishes, whether Johnny's or Francie's, and sees even a new baby in the house as a bother rather than a blessing. But Johnny can't wait for Francie to voice a wish for herself, and when she does (wanting to go to a better school), he trembles not with impatience at her indulgence but with fear at not being able to fulfill it.

The reality of deprivation stalks their every desire, warning that longing isn't fulfillment. Yet to Johnny, longing is his birthright: If he's denied abundance, he'll imagine it and draw what joy he can from it. So he shares, even from the little he has. Katie struggles to be generous because she sees nothing but drudgery.

Francie insists that Katie tip the man who helps them move: "He worked awful hard, Mama." Katie refuses. "We moved up to this flat to save money, and we're not gonna start by throwing dimes away."

If poverty of body or spirit is a kind of living hell, Kazan's point isn't that some people feel their hell more than their heaven; many of us do from time to time. Through his bittersweet film, he wonders why some don't feel heaven at all.

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

'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn'

Director
Elia Kazan

Starring
Peggy Ann Garner, James Dunn, Dorothy McGuire, Joan Blondell

Running Time
2 hours, 8 minutes

MPAA Rating
PG

Release Date
Feb. 28, 1945

★★★★★

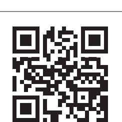
TRUTH and TRADITION

In Our Own Words

From the Desk of Our Puzzle Master

"I've benefited greatly from the many relationships and friendships formed making the puzzle pages better and better with each passing year.

Tom Houston
Puzzle Master



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Dear Epoch VIP (and Puzzler!),

Thank you for subscribing to The Epoch Times and for supporting our journey of providing the world with truthful, uncensored journalism as well as analysis of world events, especially in China.

My journey with The Epoch Times actually began in 2009 when I discovered the publication's outstanding coverage of events in China, something of which I had studied for over 30 years principally as a linguist and China analyst. The Epoch Times' coverage was unique and included many aspects and facets of Chinese life under the Chinese Communist Party that were either not covered or were entirely avoided by the mainstream press. After reading this coverage, I felt compelled to "climb aboard" and support The Epoch Times on its journey toward truthful reporting that would not be beholden to any kind of censorship, whether it's from a government or commercial entity.

After discussions with the editor-in-chief on what the newspaper actually most needed and what I personally could do to support the paper, **I published my first puzzle page on Jan. 4, 2010—over 12 years ago.** Since then, my Epoch Times journey has been eventful, to say the least. I have learned and grown a great deal, and so has our puzzle page! It's grown from a single page of puzzles in a 16-page edition to two pages of puzzles (and a half page on the Wednesday "For Kids Only" page) in what is now a 52-page paper!

Along the way, hundreds of puzzlers have reached out through our feedback@epochtimes.com email to comment on the puzzles, send me pictures of their unique solutions, ask questions, point out my mistakes (I've made many!), pass along a compliment or constructive criticism and offer to help. I've benefited greatly from the many relationships and friendships formed making the puzzle pages better and better with each passing year.

Thank you, readers! We wouldn't be where we are today without you! **Each and every one of you who has subscribed, advertised, or who has sent in encouraging words, constructive comments, or ideas has helped to make The Epoch Times what it is today.**

A number of Epoch Times readers (and puzzle fans) actually contribute to our puzzle pages! "Coder Chang" developed a "4 Numbers" puzzle tool (4Nums.com) that we have been using since January 2018. Our skydiving chess master, Michael Gibbs, began donating "Chess Challenges" to The Epoch Times over two years ago. Liz Ball, an accomplished puzzle developer whose work has appeared in more than 300 publications (HiddenPicturePuzzles.com) began donating her popular "Hidden Picture" puzzles to The Epoch Times' kids page over a year ago.

We sincerely appreciate these puzzles, and for me, they are a kind reminder of the community that has built up around this newspaper.

In short, seeing people genuinely moved by The Epoch Times' commitment to journalism and truthful reporting of events, often glossed over or "slanted" by other media outlets, has been a heartwarming experience for me.

I hope that your journey with The Epoch Times will be as educational, satisfying, and fulfilling as mine has been. And, please, always feel free to drop us a line at **feedback@epochtimes.com**. We appreciate your insight, and who knows—I could always use a few more hands in the puzzle workshop.

In truth and tradition,

Tom Houston
The Epoch Times

THE EPOCH TIMES