



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Homily After Uncovering the Scrapped Blueprints of Early Designs of Man

Colin Pope

Pleiades: Literature in Context, Volume 40, Issue 2, Summer 2020, pp. 221-222 (Article)



Published by University of Central Missouri, Department of English and Philosophy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/plc.2020.0161>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/759400>

## Homily After Uncovering the Scrapped Blueprints of Early Designs of Man

The story goes that a one-armed monk wheeling his squeaky cart down the sub-basement rows tripped and toppled a few millennia of Coptic parchment and scrolls like brittle, dust-caked dominos. You know the rest: the latex-gloved clean-up, the plucky tortoiseshelled academic obsessive who couldn't believe her bloodshot eyes. And we imagined with seven fingers a hand. A furred ossicone on the medial brow-ridge. A tail made, apparently, of wood. The college of cardinals

later confirmed the lord's aborted plans, as well as the secret deletion of mermaids, centaurs, dinosaurs prior to the invention of organisms who could realistically wield belief. What springs to mind is that old saw Nietzsche proposed about a "God of the gaps"; you can almost see a deity squeezed in between subatomic matrices, neglecting the reversible chalkboard and formulae in favor of blinking another pointless star into existence. Tell you what I'd do: plate our bones

in gold so by the age we know where and how to touch each other we're dinged as counterfeit coins beneath our flesh. So it's worth opening ourselves up. Or so death appears a revelation of Heavenly Beauty, how we'd position our skeletons aboveground on the edges of cliffs to desiccate and catch the sunrise in a gleaming haystack of time. I'd do away with the heart. I'd tincture the hair a chlorophyllous green. In 27 AD, the Romans of Fidenae loved murder to such a degree

they erected an amphitheatre for their gladiators out of knotted, weather-beaten timber, which summarily collapsed, deleting 20,000 bloodthirsty screamers. See? We are too mortal to distinguish comedy from tragedy, intelligent from incompetent design. Laugh at the platypus if you want, but realize it could have been your king, could still be, if only its webbed foot had the strength to raise a bejeweled scepter. How would you decide the length of a life if you could contemplate forever? Opening up



---

your build-a-man kit to find a few pieces missing—a toe, the third eye, a purple, chevron-shaped organ to house the soul—it might be possible to overlook the bickering of multiple unfinished dimensions and focus your frustrations on where to put the spleen, on mashing the wisdom teeth sideways into the skull. Like the Germans, your resources are limited only by your ability to prioritize; World War II, they spent 2 million marks on the Krummlauf, a bent-barreled rifle that could shoot around corners.

God was on both sides of that war, remember. And in the mouth of that Ugandan leopard who dragged an untended child into tall grass, never to be seen again. Some mistakes pounce right up from the lord's plan as though planted around a blind bend of the tunnelways through the stomach. If you'd also whittled the shapes of distraction and neglect, you couldn't rightly call anything a mistake. Or, rather, mistake is a name for any reasoning which shirks its obligation

to your understanding. These blueprints weren't crumpled and thrown away. They weren't reduced to cinder by a god's snap and blink. It's an either-or: I've been so bladder-evacuatingly scared of certain dreams coming true that rising from the sweaty bed was worse than whatever its opposite. I've stepped into waking day uncertain how many of me there were. So either we're supposed to know what we're not—poured brimming with immortal light, or odorless, or moldable as pink putty so the throes

of passion tack and fix us together into sighing gobs—or what we are, which is lesser. And then, under the auspices of the laws of lesser, to save our work in case there's a god. And god to save in case there's a god of gods, and then a god of god of gods, and on, on, like the refracted beams in a house of mirrors in the Infinity Carnival. I know you don't believe you were doodled in the margins of a bored immortal's notebook, nor sifted from the nightmares of a being who invented fear. But, here: a mausoleum

in Australia was destroyed when a bloated corpse exploded for no reason other than we don't know how to treat what we contain. Weeks later, the smell, they said. The what-we're-not-prepared-to-be. Children giggling over a three-legged dog trying to squat. The windshield wipers engraining a dragonfly into glass, like a failed planet. And the church hugging itself at midnight, unable to decipher what anything means without the hatch marks and borders of shadow behind the daylight.