

## **A Review of Dr. Sam Rocha's (2017) *Tell Them Something Beautiful: Essays and Ephemera* Hardcover: \$37.19 (List price on Amazon)**

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*Tell Them Something Beautiful* is written by Dr. Samuel Rocha, a professor in the Department of Educational Studies. The book is a literary-philosophical deliberation of the author's encounter, experiences, and views of life, and the reality of day-to-day life in North America. The book is organized into a forward, an introduction, and four parts- namely, Diagnosis and Discontents, The Ordo Amoris, Teaching as Deschooling, and Funk Phenomenology, followed by a conclusion section. It also presents the author's interview with journalist Max Lindman, a bibliography, and indices all of which span over 225 pages altogether. Literary experts often discuss a concept termed as *the Death of the Author* to discuss the need to leave the author unmentioned. In works like *Tell Them Something Beautiful*, to neglect the author and the finite linguistic choices s/he had to make from infinite possibilities in language would only be to deny the author and his authority. Hence, I mention the author and the work interchangeably and repeatedly both for the sake of convenience as well as to acknowledge that the current work is not a purely literary one. However hard we try to avoid the author, there seems no escape from the authority of the author and hence we see Rocha's religious and professional authority including notions of the philosophy of education, and Catholicism, among others.

The issues raised in this book present the life journeys and encounters of the author ranging from stories of his parents to being a caring father, from being a graduate student to being a professor, among others. In this sense, the book also

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feels like a memoir for its craft as well as for its use of novelistic devices (Karr, 2015). The book feels more like a work of art, an imaginative product that integrates creativity and philosophy with real-life phenomena. In the book, readers certainly come across a number of instances where the author re-creates his past phenomenologically. The book is not a mere creative work of art. It is rather an intellectual endeavor to address one's responsibility of responding to the metaphysical demands (to use Rocha's own words), of acknowledging intergenerational social injustices, and of finding one's voice to make the world a better place. As an intellectual engagement in issues that concern our society, the book discusses crucial topics that have significantly impacted our day-to-day life ranging from gun violence to racism, from the failure of institutions to issues of solidarity in North America, to mention but few. As a Phenomenologist, the author also critically reflects on brutal social phenomena and the phenomena that such phenomena leave our humanity into question. It is a philosophical deliberation of the author which is based on the philosophy of folk phenomenology but taking it a step further in a critical-reflective way.

The beauty of the work begins with the title itself which mentions telling something beautiful. Moreover, the diction, the style of the author and effective use of antonyms and other features make the work memorable. It seems to me that the book is not actually telling something beautiful. Rather it is telling ugly truth in a beautiful way. I learned this as I dived into the book where it says: "Truth-speaking...is impoverished unless it pays deference to beauty" "Truth spoken with total disregard for beauty is rendered sterile. Sterile truth cannot bear fruit. It cannot love. Even these "truths" I have spoken here are null and void if they are not perceived as sufficiently beautiful"

*Tell Them Something Beautiful* remains in the minds of its readers for its craft and literariness. For example, the book narrates the experience of the author, mentions his family and parents in various contexts from the way he grew up to the way he is helping his kids grow up intellectually as well. It uses the first person point of view to establish proximity with the reader which makes it feel like the reader is actually engaged in a genuine conversation and story hearing with the writer at the same plane of real-life situation than the imaginative fictional aspect of life.

Many critics argue that mixing memoir with the analysis is somehow challenging. To control one's emotions and feelings and to limit one's personal experiences and subjectivities so that the equally important analysis of events and reflections- be it philosophical or social-scientific- will not be overshadowed with

one's first-person points of view is mostly a challenge for writers. Rocha successfully achieved this in this work. He provides historically important facts and incidents to substantiate his arguments and advance his claims in many parts of the book. Effective use of extra-literary conditions such as historical figures and social incidents foregrounds the author's phenomenological percept of the world and other day-to-day happenings surrounding us.

*Tell Them Something Beautiful* may not help those who are products of school and who are always looking for books that discuss specific issues, definitions, and theories. But it is a favorite bite for those who wonder about life and seek not the order out of the disorder but see it just as something full of phenomena which need to be told in beautiful art and craft. In the essays and ephemera, the school itself is depicted as something which couldn't escape ephemerality. It is evaluated in what it offers to its subjects. In his book *Toward a History of Needs*, Ivan Illich argued that schools trap children within a compulsory bureaucracy of ever "more subtle and more pervasive social control". Well, it is much better not to send your kids to school, or simply homeschooling, than having the news of the active shooter, especially if you are living in some parts of North America. For such and other reasons, it may make sense for responsible citizens to opt for such moves that we need to de-school our society.

What makes the contribution of Rocha uniquely significant with regards to De-schooling is the fact that he came up with a de-schooling framework that lays the basis for those who are interested to practice it. In this sense, it is possible to argue that *Tell Them Something Beautiful* presents an alternative phenomenological praxis to what some writers once perceived as a mere intellectual exercise (Jandric, 2014). What is more interesting is, however, the explanations given with real-life evidence which Rocha shares with readers about the implementation of de-schooling he practices at home to help his own kids educate themselves without going to school. I would like to pose a question about the title of the book. Would the title *Tell Them Something Beautifully* be more convenient? I was so happy and excited reading this book. I strongly recommend the book. It made me ask myself how to write a critique of this book beautifully so that its truth will not appear "sterile" [to use Rocha's word]. It is the strong side of the book that it firmly instills that question in writers' minds whether every story is written and/or told beautifully or not. Another strong side of the book is the fact that it presents readers with ideas that beautifully challenge the Western social imaginaries. Some examples from the book are the essays entitled White History Month (the world knows Black History Month), Black Messiah (We know of the white messiah), Dead White Guys.

The book is accessible/comprehensible for the humanist reader as well as the trained philosopher, for beginner readers as well as the experienced journalists. It is beautifully written in a language full of de-familiarization or what Russian formalists call estrangement. *Tell Them Something Beautiful* is not easy to identify as a book that belongs to a particular category or to associate it with a particular theme. It is comprehensible but sometimes assumes prior knowledge of a particular context. Its meaning is accessible for a beginner but is also elevated and sufficiently complicated for those who wish to engage in some thought experiment as well. It would certainly make for the taste of those who identify themselves as belonging somewhere in the middle of philosopher- critique, too.

In general, the book is an excellent reference to enlighten readers with current situations, to keep themselves up to date about some social justice issues and perspectives, how we could alternatively see and practice education, race relations as well as religion to resolve issues of social malpractice, among others. Thus, I recommend reading the book.

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