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## **The Luminous and The Hidden: Opposites in Robert Hupka’s Photograph of Toscanini—and In Us**

*by Vincent DiPietro*

Upon hearing of the passing on Tuesday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2001, of Robert Hupka, I was deeply moved as I thought of him not only as a photographer whose work sprung from a passionate love for the subjects he photographed, but as a man I knew personally, a dear and close friend of my father. Mr. Hupka’s photographs of the great conductor Arturo Toscanini as well as of the Pietà of Michelangelo, are inspired works of art.

The reason these photographs will, I believe endure is explained by Eli Siegel, the American poet, critic and founder of the philosophy Aesthetic Realism. Mr. Siegel defined beauty, and why it matters so much—whether in a work of art or in nature—when he stated that “All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.” There is that oneness of opposites in much of the work of Robert Hupka and notably in the photograph of Arturo Toscanini that I write about here.



I was in my early twenties when I first saw Robert Hupka's stirring series of photographs of Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. These photographs that have appeared in books, on record jackets and in numerous articles, are dramatic and moving in their stark black and white. I felt this photograph, in particular, was beautiful.

I have been thrilled to see that what affected me is the way opposites—light and dark, the visible and the hidden, work together in it.

In Eli Siegel's great 15 Questions "Is Beauty the Making One of Opposites?" he asks about Light and Dark:

Does all art present the world as visible, luminous, going forth?—does art, too, present the world as dark, hidden, having a meaning which seems to be beyond ordinary perception?—and is the technical problem of light and dark in painting related to the reality question of the luminous and hidden?

The world as "visible, luminous, going forth," and the world as "dark," which most people have seen as separate—and I very much did—are beautifully together in this photograph. Toscanini's face and hands emerge into light from the deep, black background—which I believe represents, "the world as dark, hidden, having a meaning which seems to be beyond ordinary perception." Yet, while in the light, Toscanini is also part of the dark background. His torso is not seen—it seems to have become one with all that black, unknown space. He, as an individual person, is continuous with the world as deep, mysterious, unknown.

I don't think this photograph would have been as successful had Toscanini been wearing a light, colored shirt, or if the background were lighter. All we see emerging from the blackness are the conductor's hands, face, and baton which are beautifully illuminated in a glowing light that seems to come simultaneously from within Toscanini and from without. I think the photographer has used darkness to reveal the character of Toscanini, and his profoundly illuminating way of conducting. Though we can't *see* sound, we see Toscanini's passionate reverence and exactitude about the music he cared for so greatly—the music of Beethoven, Brahms, Verdi.

I am tremendously grateful to Aesthetic Realism for explaining how the structure of art—painting, music, photography—has in outline the explanation of what every self is going for. This knowledge has made it possible for me to be the person I was longing to be. The way dark and light, hidden and shown are in this photograph is so different from how they were in my life!

### **I. Light and Dark in Myself**

Until I began to study Aesthetic Realism, I was suspicious of other people, and felt it was best to keep to myself. At work, for instance, I resented having to speak to anyone and kept my feelings hidden. I couldn't wait to get home to the dark apartment I saw as my sanctuary. Yet at the very same time I read works on economic justice and was politically active. Friends would notice my tendency to look impressively gloomy—and I must say it didn't endear me to them! All the while, I cared very much for music—I felt such a lift listening, often with my father, to Toscanini conducting Beethoven's 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony, in a

recording unmatched by any other conductor. But when I wasn't listening to music, light and dark fought very steeply in me, and a grim, dark view of people and the world was winning. And I see now I was representative of many people.

In the journal, *The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known* No.163 Eli Siegel wrote: "The self often triumphs in its own manufactured dimness, grayness, blackness." I had this feeling, and it was a tremendous relief to learn that this was the spurious triumph of contempt, which Mr. Siegel defined as "the lessening of what is different from oneself as a means of self-increase as one sees it." And I learned that this could change!

## **II. Art Resolves the Fight Between Light and Dark, Self and World**

I see this photograph as both beautiful and kind—it is critical of the contempt way of seeing which hurts lives—it shows that light and dark, so different from each other needn't fight but can deeply enhance one another. For example, the predominant tone is dark, but here, the dark background, dramatically different from the light, is friendly to it. Unlike how I used dimness to hide from the world, Hupka uses darkness to have Toscanini come forth in bright relief.

Look at how the eyes are a oneness of dark and light, the luminous and hidden. Just as the photographer uses dark to enhance Toscanini's bright head, a semi-circle of light on the conductor's eyelids accents the depth of his eyes. We get a sense of going deep into Toscanini's soul through his eyes to feel his passion, his intensity, in them. And directly above is the bright forehead, where a man's thought takes place. So striking is the diagonal of the baton, crossing his forehead and rising into the dark; it seems to send his thought forth out into the world.

I am grateful to study in the professional classes for Aesthetic Realism Consultants and Associates taught by Chairman of Education Ellen Reiss, and to have been asked questions that enabled me to change, to be more in the sunlight. Some years ago, when I said I felt I was too aloof from people, Miss Reiss asked me with critical humor: "Do you want to be a shadow or a person? Do you feel as you are by yourself, you are deeply proud of yourself, or something other than proud?" I answered, "Something other than proud." And Miss Reiss suggested I ask myself: "How much do I want to have good will? How much do I want to be a source of strength to another? How much do I want to be affected by other people and have them mean more to me?" I am so grateful to Ellen Reiss. These questions have been a means of bringing logical light to my life and increasing happiness.

The way the light accents the tip of Toscanini's finger and thumb of his left hand, adds to the effect of the photograph. I feel it is explained by a sentence Mr. Siegel wrote in his book, *Self and World* that is at the very center of the study of Aesthetic Realism, "The world begins where our fingertips end." The photographer has chosen just that moment when Toscanini's left fingertip points upward, straight toward the tip of the baton he is holding in his right hand, while his left thumb is parallel to the bottom of the baton. The structure here is that of an ever so delicate yet definite triangle which makes for a dramatic relation of the seen and unseen—it is he and what is not he completing each other—and stands for the way the outside world completes a person.

And the way Toscanini holds the baton—it begins from the depth of the dark palm of his hand and like a shaft of light, gracefully rises at a diagonal across his ear and forehead, continuing out into the dark space to merge with it at the tip. The baton is the instrument he used to express himself to the musicians in the orchestra, and here the baton clearly relates his mind and body—it crosses over the ear he so carefully listened with, and the bright forehead, seat of the thought he gave to how the music should be played.

The study of Aesthetic Realism has made for a deep, reasoned and lasting brightness in my life, as it can for every person. I am convinced that the purpose of my life is not to be hidden, morose and darkly maneuvering, but to have good will and to express what I have learned: that the deepest desire of every person is to like the world on an honest, accurate basis—and that art can show us how!

The Robert Hupka photograph of Arturo Toscanini is reproduced here for educational purposes only.