

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



LITERATURE

A Literary Thanksgiving: 3 Stories, 3 Children's Books, and a Compendium

JEFF MINICK

Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," Robert May's "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," which later became a song most of us recognize, and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" by Dr. Seuss—these and other stories are now classics of the Christmas season.

As for Thanksgiving, well, that beloved holiday definitely plays literary second-string to the Yuletide season. Most likely, if someone asked us to name any novel or short story written about that fourth Thursday in November, we'd furrow our brow, shrug, and

Complement your Thanksgiving feast with good stories. Norman Rockwell's illustration "Freedom From Want," appearing in the March 6, 1943, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, has become emblematic of our Thanksgiving celebration. National Archives and Records Administration.

say "I don't know." Even the Thanksgiving poem, later made into a song, "Over the River and Through the Wood," is often mistaken for a piece about Christmas, probably because it mentions a sleigh and snow.

Wishing to find some fiction about Thanksgiving, I recently ransacked my public library for novels and short stories about this holiday. I found more than 20 picture books for youngsters with the word "Thanksgiving" in the title (some of which were quite good), a couple of contemporary romance novels set around Turkey Day, and four books about the history of Thanksgiving and its traditions, one of which we'll consider later.

But no classic tales about our quintessential American holiday.

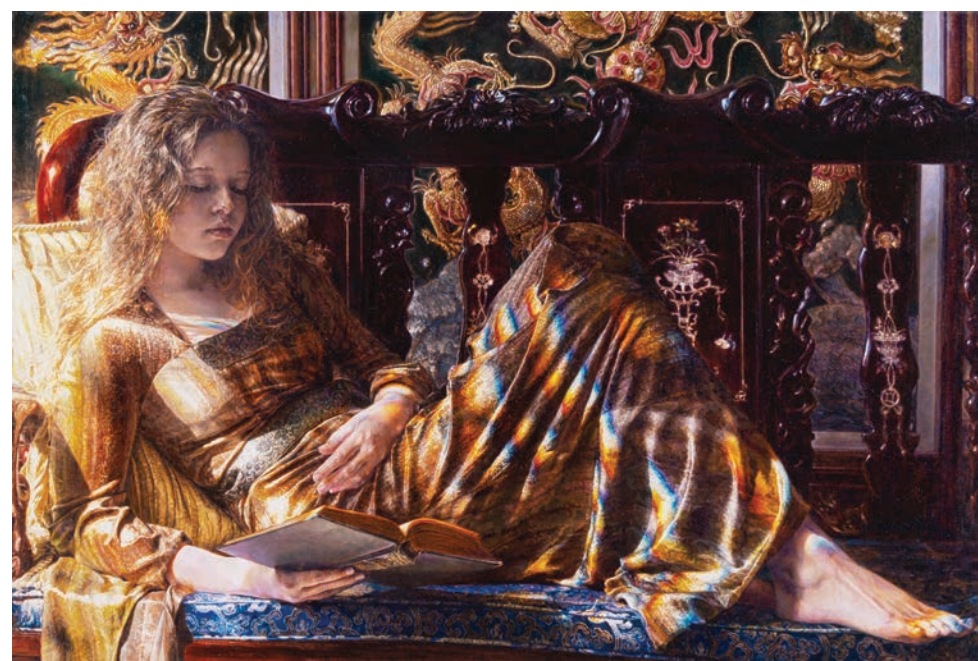
On arriving home, I opened my laptop and searched for "classic Thanksgiving short stories." Here I finally struck... well, I won't call it gold. Or even silver.

But I did find some old, worthy stories by known authors that shared some common themes.

Helping the Downtrodden

Several of these tales centered on the poor and those who brought them gifts and comfort on Thanksgiving Day.

Continued on Page 4



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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Elijah and Critical Race Theory: The Rhyming of History

JAMES SALE

It was King Solomon, the reputed writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, who observed that there was nothing new under the sun; and so there seems not to be. Perhaps more accurately, Mark Twain expressed it this way: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." Some sort of echo chamber exists whereby the events of the past repeat themselves in new guises. The guises conceal what the real issue (or issues) is about, usually by creating a new term or language that sounds exciting and fresh but really is as stale as old, moldy toast.

The only people likely to spot these strange reoccurrences are those who have studied one of a number of disciplines: namely history, mythology, theology, literature, and a few others. In general, these disciplines are what used to be called "the humanities."

It is in the humanities that, one way or another, we come to master language and the patterns of human experience. What that means is that we learn to think. And we get to understand the distinctive patterns of human thought and activities.

This is the general point. But what is the specific example to which I am referring when I say that history rhymes?

Marxism by Another Name

Perhaps, as one looks back on 2020, the biggest event that has impacted lives after the pandemic is Critical Race Theory. Its influence seems to grow apace with every passing year. While it's very important that theories are generated, and if these theories animadvert on how others are treated—and in particular how everyone is entitled to respect, opportunity, and achievement—then that is good. However, not all theories are good, much less equal. What did Karl Marx's theories, for all their talk of social justice and equality, actually lead to? They led to mass extermination, in fact, in the USSR, China, and wherever communism held sway.

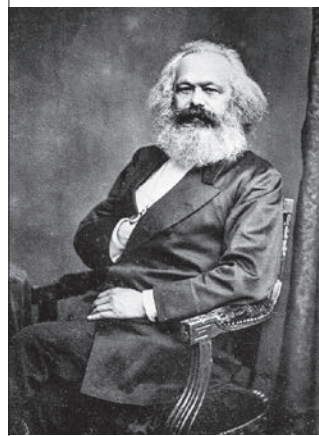
But secondly, as with King Solomon (and nothing new under the sun), we see old heresies—that is, theories—resurfacing in new guises. It's rather like COVID-19: There is the original virus, but then variants pop up, and some are more deadly than the original.

A theory is usually thought to be a system of ideas intended to explain something, to account for reality or some portion of reality. With Marx, as English cultural critic Theodore Dalrymple in City Journal observes, it is different: "Marx's eschatology, lacking all common sense, all knowledge of human nature, rested on abstractions that were to him more real than the actual people around him." In other words, the whole theory rests not even on ideas but on abstractions entirely devoid of common sense and empirical testing.

So what am I driving at? This: Critical Race Theory is very much like (rhymes with) Marxism, and is not remotely helpful in achieving any meaningful goals—goals like peoples in a given society living together in harmony, for example. Instead, I see a strange rhyming with the Marxist projects of the 20th century as well as its more recent ventures.

Taking the knee is essentially a negation of one's freedom.

ROGER VIOUET COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES



The followers of Karl Marx bowed to one idea and interpreted events from that perspective alone. Photo circa 1875.

Communism has always led to mass killings. A visitor at the Memorial Stupa to Choeung Ek Killing Fields, with thousands of skulls of those killed during the Pol Pot regime, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

OMAR HAVANA/GETTY IMAGES



"Prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb," 1550–1560, by Daniele da Volterra. Collection of Pannocchieschi d'Elci, Siena, Italy.

In essence, all perverse philosophies lead to perverse actions. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "The ancestor of every action is a thought." Marx spent a lot of his life in the British Museum Reading Room; hardly, one might think, a prelude for creating the Stalinist gulags, yet one followed the other. Similarly, at the other extreme, with Nietzsche we end up with admirers who are Nazis, the "supermen." And "value judgments are a precondition for action," said Jordan B. Peterson—how right he is. I have not enough space here to do a detailed critique of Critical Race Theory, and besides it's already been done by experts such as Daniel A. Farber and Suzanna Sherry. But we can look at one small perverse action that derives from the theory.

Taking a Knee to Baal

You may remember in Kings I, chapter 19, the incredible adventures of Elijah, the prophet of Israel. He had slain the false

prophets of Baal, and then ran in fear for his life; indeed, despaired of his life and requested God to take it. Then he'd hidden in a cave on Mount Horeb and told God, with a hint of self-pity: "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thy altars and killed the prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Only he is left, he opines to God. All the good people have been killed. All dead, except him.

What is God's response to this? Several things, but concluding with this remarkable statement: "Yet I will leave 7000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." Clearly, Elijah hadn't anticipated that! The trouble with being overly conscious of one's virtue is that it may lead to virtue signaling, a state wherein one thinks that one is the only virtuous person!

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently "Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams" (Routledge, 2021). He won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is "HellWard." For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit TheWiderCircle.webs.com

But there we have it. The bowing the knee to Baal is significant. And it can be compared, without too much of a stretch, with today's "taking the knee." Taking or bowing the knee has never been an act of mere solidarity. It has always been primarily a sign of worship, or secondarily an act of deference before an emperor or king.

Dominic Raab, the UK's former foreign secretary (the British equivalent of the United State's Anthony J. Blinken at the time of writing this), commented in a radio interview in June 2020 that the taking the knee gesture "feels to me like a symbol of subjugation and subordination, rather than one of liberation and emancipation." He went on to suggest that the idea may have originated in the TV series "Game of Thrones."

Taking the knee is essentially a negation of one's freedom because one is putting a principle on a godlike pedestal beyond one's reason. And this is where we come back to the need for real teachings in history, mythology, theology, literature, and so on, to begin the process of inoculating the young—especially, the young—against simplistic ideas or ideals dressed up in fancy titles like "Critical Race Theory." The theory is actually a golden calf to be worshiped.

When we talk here about inoculating, we are referring to developing the ability to think effectively, which is what a real humanities education provides.

If we were to turn our critical thinking on Western culture, then we could say that over the last 70 years or so, the West has been worshipping its own golden calf: namely, Mammon or money. This worship, too, restricts rather than enables freedom—all false gods do this.

However, in the West there is still plenty of choice. We don't have to bow the knee to Mammon in the way that, say, North Koreans have to bow the knee to their political god. But once a bow-the-knee culture starts, who knows how far it will spread?

We are free people, and like Elijah and 7,000 other Israelites, we must resist this false worship. By their fruits you will know them, said one great leader, and we can easily see the "fruits" of Critical Race Theory.

The biblical quotes are all from the New American Standard Bible.

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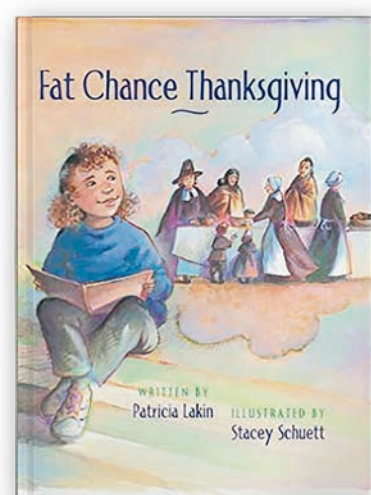
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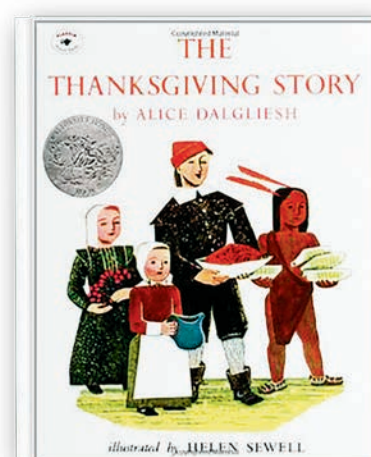
(Right) Thanksgiving has always been about sharing, and that's just what these stories present. "The First Thanksgiving 1621," circa 1932, by Jean Leon Jerome Ferris. Private Collection. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



In this book for children, a girl inspired by the Pilgrims decides to have a real Thanksgiving feast.

'Fat Chance Thanksgiving'

Author
Patricia Lakin
Publisher
Albert Whitman & Company, 2001
Pages
32

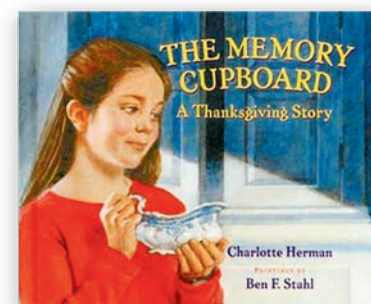


"The Thanksgiving Story" is an award-winning children's book that tells the story of the very first Thanksgiving.

'The Thanksgiving Story'

Author
Alice Dalgliesh
Publisher
Atheneum Books, 1954

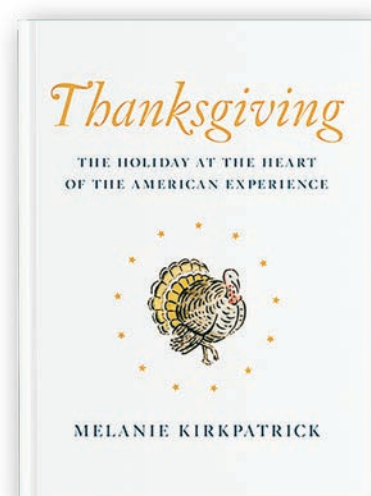
Pages
32



In "The Memory Cupboard," a girl learns to see beyond a mishap to the value of memories and special relationships.

'The Memory Cupboard: A Thanksgiving Story'

Author
Charlotte Herman
Publisher
Albert Whitman & Company, 2003
Pages
32



Melanie Kirkpatrick's book gives us all things Thanksgiving.

'Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience'

Author
Melanie Kirkpatrick
Publisher
Encounter Books, 2016
Pages
272



LITERATURE

A Literary Thanksgiving: 3 Stories, 3 Children's Books, and a Compendium

Continued from Page 1

"The Night Before Thanksgiving" by Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) features the frail and elderly Mary Ann Robb, who lives alone in a small house that she's on the verge of losing. Though she has spent her younger years helping her neighbors when she could, they've now largely abandoned her, encouraging her to go to the poor house where she might receive better care.

But not everyone has forgotten her. On the night before Thanksgiving, when she's out of food and with only enough firewood to last the night, John Harris comes knocking on the door. This orphaned boy whom she had once welcomed into her home has returned from the Dakotas, bringing her gifts and food, and the promise that with his newly acquired wealth, he'll be able to provide for her and keep her in her house. "And you're going to have everything you need to make you comfortable long's you live, Mother Robb!"

"She looked at him again and nodded, but she did not even try to speak. There was a good hot supper ready, and a happy guest had come: It was the night before Thanksgiving."

Turnabout

In "Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen," William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), who wrote under the pen name O. Henry, reversed the situation found in Jewett's story. Here we meet the down-and-out Stuffey Pete and the Old Gentleman, who for years has annually treated Pete to a Thanksgiving dinner in a restaurant while refraining himself from partaking of the food.

On this particular occasion, Stuffey Pete has already stuffed himself with turkey and fixings, the recipient of charity provided by two elderly women who always feed one poor person on this special day. When the Old Gentleman arrives, Stuffey Pete is so overloaded from his feast that



Novelist and short story writer Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of home-schooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two books of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

he can barely move from his park bench, but he gamely follows his benefactor to the restaurant and downs another gargantuan meal while the Old Gentleman looks on with satisfaction. Within a few minutes of leaving the establishment, Pete crashes to the sidewalk, and his indigestion sends him to the hospital.

Unbeknownst to Pete, the Old Gentleman is also admitted to the hospital, half dead from starvation as a result of his own poverty.

As in most of his stories, we can find entertainment and pleasure not only in O. Henry's surprise endings to his stories, but also in his prose. Here's a sample from the opening paragraph:

"There is one day that is ours. There is one day when all we Americans who are not self-made go back to the old home to eat saleratus biscuits and marvel how much nearer to the porch the old pump looks than it used to. Bless the day."

A Good Deed Rewarded

"Bert's Thanksgiving" by J.T. Trowbridge (1827-1916) also ends with a twist.

Young newsboy Bert Hampton is trying to sell his papers on Thanksgiving Day when he meets an old man who seems hungry and poor but buys one of his papers. The boy "was a generous little fellow, and any kindness shown him, no matter how trifling, made his heart overflow," and so he invites the stranger to dine with him in a restaurant.

During their meal of chicken soup followed by squash pie, Bert reveals that his father has recently died, leaving the family penniless. His mother is working as a nurse in hopes of someday buying a home, and his two sisters are "boarded at a good place" and still in school. But given their situation, Bert has left school to earn money and try to help his mother.

At the end of the meal, the old man writes out an address on a scrap of paper and invites Bert to come and see him

Several tales centered on the poor and those who brought them gifts and comfort on Thanksgiving Day.

soon, telling him he knows a few people in business. When in the next week Bert pays him a visit, the boy discovers that Mr. Crooker, his dinner companion, is actually a well-to-do real estate mogul. He gives Bert a job in the office, with the idea of someday turning the business over to him, and after meeting Bert's mother, this lonely old man offers her a house if she will make it a home not just for her family but will allow him to live there as well.

When first meeting Mr. Crooker in his office, Bert stammers, "I—I thought—you was a poor man."

"I am a poor man," said Mr. Crooker, locking his safe. "Money doesn't make a man rich. I've money enough. I own houses in the city. They give me something to think of, and so keep me alive. I had truer riches once, but I lost them long ago."

Crooker's words "I am a poor man ... Money doesn't make a man rich" lie at the heart of "Bert's Thanksgiving."

Lit Picks for the Younger Set

The above stories are relatively short and ideal for a family read-aloud, but the little ones may have trouble following them. Here are three picture books suitable for the K-3 gang.

Alice Dalgliesh's "The Thanksgiving Story" won a Caldecott Honor and is an excellent account of the first Thanksgiving. We follow the Hopkins family as they sail on the Mayflower to present-day Massachusetts and with the help of an Indian tribe survive as a colony.

"Fat Chance Thanksgiving" tells the story of Carla, an inner-city girl whose apartment house is destroyed by a fire. The book she saves from the flames, "A Pilgrim Thanksgiving," inspires her to face tribulations as did the Pilgrims. When they move into another apartment, Carla organizes the tenants to throw a Thanksgiving feast in the building's lobby. From all sorts of ethnic backgrounds, they bring fried okra, arroz con pollo, Irish stew, lasagna, and

other dishes to this meal, but even more they share all-American camaraderie.

In Charlotte Herman's "The Memory Cupboard: A Thanksgiving Story," young Katie and her parents travel to Grandma's house for Thanksgiving. While Katie's admiring a gravy boat treasured by her grandmother, it slips from her fingers and smashes into pieces on the floor. Katie breaks into tears, but wise old Grandma escorts her to what she calls her memory cupboard, where she keeps other broken objects with special meaning for her. She tells Katie a few stories about these possessions, and then says: "Sometimes, no matter how careful we are, things we're fond of get broken. But things are just things. People are more important, especially granddaughters."

Time for Some Festivity

Finally, if you're looking for a potpourri of all things Thanksgiving, try Melanie Kirkpatrick's "Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience." Here are chapters devoted to the first Thanksgiving, to Massachusetts before the arrival of the Pilgrims, to the wild enthusiasm more than a century ago for Thanksgiving Day football games—"In 1893, about one hundred twenty thousand athletes played in five thousand Thanksgiving games across the country...."—and all manner of anecdotes about this unique holiday.

At the end of her book, Kirkpatrick includes a chapter on old-fashioned recipes and menus as well as "Readings for Thanksgiving Day," a chapter rich in letters, speeches, and books from times past. Some of these Thanksgiving ruminations are ideal for sharing with your guests before carving up that turkey.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving. As we celebrate, let's pause to count our blessings for friends and family. And if we add a bit of literary spice to this menu of gratitude and food, we'll only improve the flavor of this feast.



"Lamentation With Saints," by Plautilla Nelli. Oil on canvas; 113.3 inches by 75.5 inches. Museum of San Marco. Restored in 2006 by the American not-for-profit organization Advancing Women Artists.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

How Painter Sister Plautilla Nelli Persevered Against the Odds

LORRAINE FERRIER

Great artists converse with our hearts without uttering a word. They animate the greatest and most tragic moments in life, from battlefields that appear gut-wrenchingly real to divine jubiliations that make our souls sing. But seldom do we celebrate the way these artists lived in the world: how they overcame challenges, how they stayed true to their values, or how they treated their fellow man. Yet these stories are as inspiring as the artworks these artists made.

Italian Sister Plautilla Nelli (1524-1588) persevered against the odds to become a sought-after devotional painter. She created her paintings in the confines of a convent workshop, which meant that she was limited in her artistic experiences.

Nelli overcame these challenges. For example, as a nun she couldn't study anatomy. In addition, apart from her own hair, she may not have been able to closely study other examples of hair that would be hidden under habits.

In his 1568 publication, "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects," the art historian and artist Giorgio Vasari noted that Nelli "had no great practice in her art." What he meant was that women were unable to apprentice in a workshop alongside a master. Nelli could not have learned to study, draw, and copy living and natural objects as men did.

“[Plautilla Nelli] has executed some works with such diligence that she has caused the craftsmen to marvel.”

Giorgio Vasari, art historian

Nelli worked with what she had. As Vasari attested to in his "Lives," she taught herself art through the first book of meditations on the rules of drawing by Alessandro Allori and M. Agnolo Bronzino, and simply through copying great art.

Nelli was surrounded by remarkable devotional works. Besides the great art inside the convent, she had inherited 500 of Fra Bartolomeo's drawings.

Bartolomeo was a preeminent devotional painter who followed in the tradition of the celebrated, pious painter Fra Angelico. Bartolomeo also owned a collection of wooden models that the sisters at the convent may have also inherited.

"She, beginning little by little to draw and to imitate in colors pictures and paintings by excellent masters, has executed some works with such diligence, that she has caused the craftsmen to marvel," Vasari wrote.

Indeed, they did marvel. Nelli's art was highly regarded by noblemen, who believed that her paintings held a mystical quality. Her paintings, Vasari wrote, were "in the houses of gentlemen throughout Florence."

Students watch on TV the news that Falun Gong, a practice to improve the mind and body, is being threatened by China's communist regime.



FLYING CLOUD PRODUCTIONS

FILM REVIEW

Real-Life Thriller About the CCP's Campaign Against Falun Gong

IAN KANE

Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, is an ancient, peaceful spiritual discipline from China that is practiced by a considerable number of people—not only the Chinese but also many other folk—worldwide. Falun Gong has graceful exercises and meditation for health, but unlike tai chi or other forms of qigong, it teaches people how to be kinder and to lead more virtuous lives.

Indeed, Falun Gong seeks to cultivate its practitioners' hearts in accordance with its core tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance. Since the time of its humble introduction in the early 1990s by a man named Li Hongzhi, it has always been a peaceful movement and quickly experienced a meteoric rise in popularity.

Directed by human rights maverick Leon Lee (who also directed 2014's "Human Harvest" about illegal organ harvesting), "Unsilenced" is a film that is based on the real-life events of two Chinese couples: Wang (Ting Wu) and Li (He Tao), and Jun (Shih Cheng-Hao) and Xia (Chen Ying-Yu).

The film begins in 1999. The couples are students at the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing. While Wang, Li, and Xia

practice Falun Gong at a local park, Jun is resistant to joining them because of past run-ins that his family has had with the Chinese regime. In other words, he wants to stay out of trouble. But Wang believes that the regime is fine with Falun Gong, and his revelations of the practice's numerous benefits convince Jun to join in.

As their group is practicing in the park, a limo carrying a couple of prominent Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members—Director Zhu (James Yi) and his boss, Secretary Yang (Tzu-Chiang Wang)—pulls up. The two believe that Falun Gong's exploding popularity is a direct threat to the CCP since, as Yang later points out, more people joining Falun Gong equals fewer members for the Party.

Film recordings of people practicing Falun Gong in parks are shown at a meeting of the CCP's higher-ups, which results in Yang's being tasked to come down hard on the nascent spiritual practice. Although as stone-faced as a psychopath, Yang dives into his mission with glee. He utilizes the full powers of the state (mainly the police and prison system) and encourages snitching (Stasi-like citizens tattling on each other) to round up proponents of Falun Gong and imprison them.

A brilliant engineering student, Wang is

'Unsilenced' plays like a Tom Clancy thriller.

'Unsilenced'

Director: Leon Lee

Starring: Sam Trammell, James Yi, Anastasia Lin

Running Time: 1 hour, 48 minutes

Release Date: Oct. 22, 2021

★★★★★

one of Tsinghua University's top students and a natural leader. When Wang, Li, Jun, and Xia show up at the next Falun Gong practice session, they discover that it's been disrupted by the authorities. Wang suggests that they lodge complaints at the local government office.

After the students show up at the office and peacefully file their complaints, they conclude that the authorities merely made a mistake in their disrupting the Falun Gong sessions. But later, as they watch a news broadcast, they realize that they walked into a trap—the regime, through the mass media, describes the complaint filers as a violent mob who have threatened the authorities. From there, the infamous and formidable CCP propaganda machine kicks into high gear.

Meanwhile, Daniel Davis (Sam Trammell), an intrepid newspaper journalist stationed in China, catches wind of the regime's sudden oppression of Falun Gong. Similar to Wang, he believes in seeking the truth (in his case through journalism) and begins to dig deeper into the matter. But as Daniel's investigations begin to uncover possible regime corruption, his new assistant Min Xu (Anastasia Lin) expresses her concern for him. She tells him that some things aren't worth risking one's personal safety for.

As the CCP's vigorous roundup of Falun Gong practitioners reaches a feverish pitch, its propaganda techniques reach levels of true absurdity, such as when they record convicts unassociated with Falun Gong posing as practitioners, in order to discredit it through media outlets. Through fear, intimidation, and media manipulation, things begin to look increasingly dire for Falun Gong.

Will both Daniel's investigations and Wang and his friends' faith in truth and justice (and of course Falun Gong) be enough to see them through all of the rampant corruption and political persecution?

One of the things that impressed me the most about this film is its pacing. Sometimes films that are based on real events can drag or be recounted in lackluster ways. Not so with "Unsilenced." It plays like a Tom Clancy thriller and engages the viewer to constantly anticipate its next scenes. It also encourages the curious to launch their own investigations into the rampant persecution of Falun Gong in China.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To learn more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

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