THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS© CULTURE



In the Victorian era, the May Queen was usually dressed in white and crowned with flowers. "My Fair Lady," 1914, by Edmund Leighton.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Maypoles, Mary, Flowers, and Poets

The many enchantments of May

JEFF MINICK

"May is pretty, May is mild, Dances like a happy child; Sing out, robin; spring out, flowers; April went with all her showers And the world is green again..."

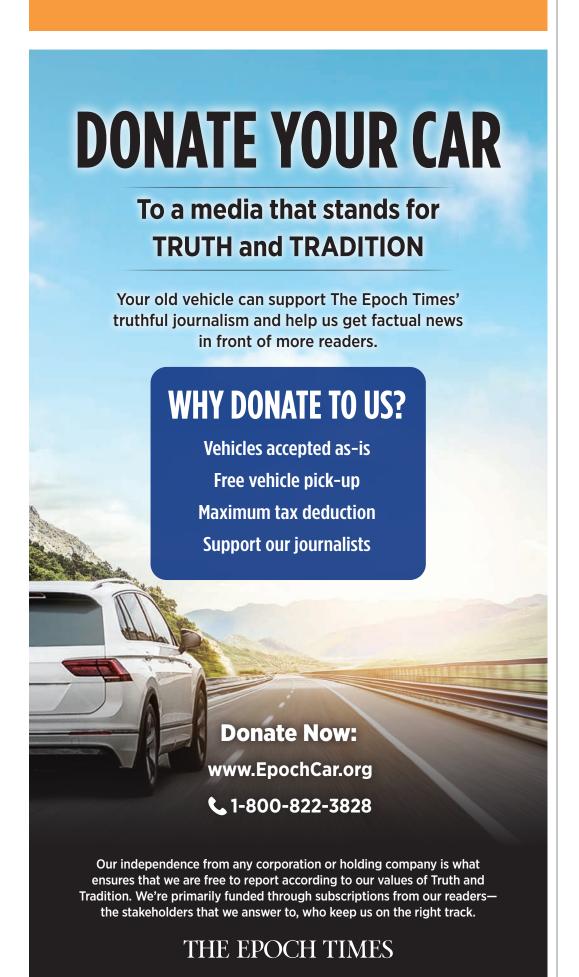
In many lands around the world, the fifth month of the calendar year signals the end of winter and heralds the arrival of summer. The trees sway in warm, sweet breezes, the lawns gown themselves in green, and the very air seems fresh as dawn all day.

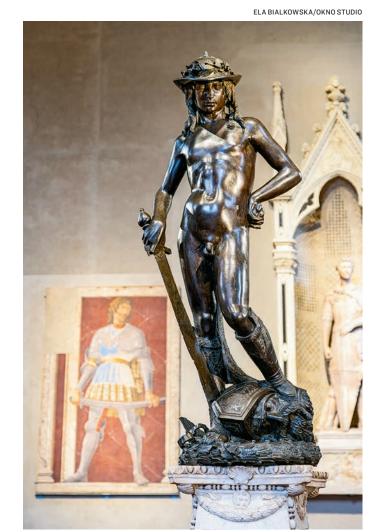
And those opening lines to Annette Wynne's poem for children are but one tiny bud in the great garden of literature, the arts, and custom itself that salutes this month.

In his vibrant painting "Spring," for example, artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema re-creates a marble city of the Roman Empire and a blossom-decked parade led by musicians and girls in white dresses. They may be celebrating Floralia, the holiday for Flora—the goddess of flowers, vegetation, and fertility—which occurred in late April. The quiet dignity we find in the faces of these men, women, and children is offset by the heralds of the season: the colorful boughs and bouquets they are carrying.

We moderns have a connection to these ancients, for May derives its name from Maia Majesta, a Greco-Roman goddess of fertility and springtime.

Continued on Page 4





Week 19, 2022 THE EPOCH TIMES

"David Victorious," circa 1435-40, by Donatello. Partly gilded bronze; 61 inches by 25 5/8 inches by 23 5/8 inches. The statue is one of the masterpieces in "Donatello: The Renaissance," an exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, Italy.

Celebrating Donatello: The Master's Master

The once-in-a-lifetime 'Donatello: The Renaissance' exhibition in Florence, Italy

To see more

images of

this exhibition

visit ept.ms/

DonatelloExhibit

LORRAINE FERRIER

Craftsmen should trace the greatness of art A New Perspective to one man, according to 16th-century art historian Giorgio Vasari in his book "The Lives of the Most Celebrated Painters, Sculptors, and Architects." That man is the Italian sculptor and architect Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, whom we know as Donatello.

Donatello, along with his friends and peers—the painter Masaccio, the architect Filippo Brunelleschi, and architect Leon Battista Alberti—created the Renaissance style

Donatello's work is still far-reaching. To put his prolific work into a comprehensive story is is tangible throughout, as Donatello's charone thing, but to put on a show that encomacters recoil in shock, horror, and disgust at asses his wide-ranging impact seems an impossibility. Yet the exhibition "Donatello: The Renaissance," at the Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo Nazionale Del Bargello in Florence, Italy, does just that.

Some 130 sculptures, paintings, and drawings lent from over 50 world-renowned museums and institutions are in the exhibition. There are some remarkable exhibits, such as the bronze doors from the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo Basilica, in Florence. It's the first time the doors have left the building.

here are a few key works of art showing

some of Donatello's innovations.

Drawings in Stone

The Victoria and Albert Museum's "Dudley Madonna" is one of the finest examples of Donatello's stiacciato technique. "Stiacciato" (Italian for "flattened out") is a low-relief sculpture with shallow carvings almost like a drawing.

Inspired by a woman carved on an ancient funerary stele, Donatello rendered the Virgin in her entirety on a plain, unframed background. It was the first time the Virgin's full figure had been made in marble for private devotion. Shown in profile view, she embraces the Christ child with a mother's love, but her gaze suggests that she knows of the sacrifice he will have to make as a man.

Figures in Clay

Pliny the Elder in his "Naturalis Historia" illustrated how the ancients once made terracotta artworks. Donatello and Brunelleschi, inspired by the medium, used terracotta to create figures.

Donatello tended to use terracotta to create madonnas for private devotion; some

examples can be seen in the exhibition. Such small-scale pieces differed from Donatello's terracotta statue of "Joshua" on the dome of Florence Cathedral. Over 16 feet tall, it was once the gold standard for all dome-buttress statues. Donatello was commissioned to create "Joshua" in place The exhibition will also be shown at the Staof his marble "David," which at less than 6 feet tall was deemed inadequate for the and Albert Museum, London. Each venue task. Exposed and beaten by the elements, will show a slightly different version of the

centuries before it disappeared.

Donatello rendered a remarkable narrative scene in "The Feast of Herod" for the Baptistery in Siena. For the first time since 1427, the gilded bronze work has been removed from its baptismal font, along with the gilded bronze figures of "Hope" and "Faith," which have all been restored for the exhibition.

For "The Feast of Herod," Donatello used Brunelleschi's new rules of perspective to heighten the drama and tension of the scene, which plays out through a series of boxes much like a storyboard. The violence gave each person character, gestures, and emotion—a bold step at a time when the graceful, and two-dimensional idealized figures of the International Gothic style of art reigned supreme.

He also used perspective to ensure that his works were accurate from any viewing point. Set high atop a column 6 feet, 6 inches tall, Donatello's bronze "David Victorious" must have been a sight to behold. The statue's original column was lost long ago in the 16th century, There's much to discover in the show, but but the exhibition curators have raised the

work up high, although lower than the original, so visitors can see the piece from below as Donatello intended.

A Breath of Humanity

As the father of modern sculpture, Donatello carved the impossible: humanity itself. He made static lifelike sculptures that were alive with movement, vitality, and

sensibility—something never before seen. Donatello's innovative ideas ran across multiple media in stone, wood, marble, bronze, stucco, terracotta, ceramics, papier mâché, glass paste, and embossed copper. While he made new discoveries, giving artists exciting new ways to work, he always looked to the past for inspiration: from the ancient Greeks and Romans to artists of the late Middle Ages, such as Giotto.

Donatello's art impacted artists across Italy from the regions of Tuscany, Veneto, and the Marche to the cities of Rome and Naples, a feat that only Giotto achieved before him.

The "Donatello: The Renaissance" exhibition runs until July 31, at the Palazzo Strozzi and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, Italy. To find out more, visit Palaz-

The exhibition is curated by Francesco Caglioti, professor of medieval art history at the Scuola Normale di Pisa.

atliche Museum in Berlin, and the Victoria "Joshua" stood on the dome for over two exhibition, with some loans differing.

Modern Superheroes Who Expose the Truth

LINDA WIEGENFELD

When I was young, my very favorite hero was Superman: Superman was good. I enjoyed the uplifting and patriotic stories of virtue triumphing over evil. Although Superman had a weakness (kryptonite), he never let this stop him from doing right. I adored his motto "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" and repeated it often.

Fast-forward to today. I have found a new, real-life hero to admire in the book "American Muckraker: Rethinking Journalism for the 21st Century" by James O'Keefe. Instead of struggling against some radioactive rock, the muckraker's task, while exposing the truth, is to struggle against corruption, censorship, and even physical intimidation. O'Keefe is one of these muckrakers who, like Superman, fights for good.

O'Keefe heads Project Veritas, which, on its website, says that it "investigates and exposes corruption, dishonesty, self-dealing, waste, fraud, and other misconduct in both public and private institutions to achieve a more ethical and transparent society." In his book O'Keefe talks about his organization, himself, and other muckrakers.

I found the book quite uplifting and I believe that my readers will, too.

Real News, Gripping Stories

O'Keefe's book gives an accurate account of what is really happening in the news. The public is constantly exposed to fake news and the morally corrupt who lie. There are sophisticated efforts by the government and powerful interests to censor ideas. Deep analysis has given way to the superficial glance, which makes it difficult for the United States to remain a republic, since an environment of trust is needed to make educated choices.

But in this book, readers get the satisfaction of seeing corrupt people exposed. As the muckrakers' triumph over the darker side of humanity is quite the coup, our sense of moral judgment is satisfied.

The book also enables readers to connect to people with inner strength and integrity. Richard Hopkins is a Marine veteran and a USPS worker from Erie, Pennsylvania. By accident, Hopkins overheard his postmaster talking about how ballots processed after

Election Day in 2020 needed to be backdated in order to be counted in the election. He reported this to Project Veritas, and then did an anonymous interview telling what he had

Later, Hopkins signed an affidavit attesting to what he had heard. Senator Lindsey Graham promised to use Hopkins's testimony in Senate hearings that would investigate voting irregularities in the 2020 election.

O'Keefe says the unelected government, or federal bureaucracy, sent a criminal investigator for the USPS Office of Inspector General to investigate Hopkins. The investigator tried to get Hopkins to recant his statement. No fool, Hopkins discreetly recorded the inter-

The tape was released and exposed how badly a federal officer treated a whistleblower. O'Keefe concluded this retelling by saying that one can only imagine the lies the media would be publishing today about Hopkins if the interrogation recording did not exist.

Throughout the book, O'Keefe seems at times to be talking directly to his readers.

GAGE SKIDMORE/ CC BY-SA 3.0

Readers

get the

satisfaction

corrupt people

of seeing

exposed.



'American Muckraker: Rethinking **Journalism** for the 21st Century'

Author James O'Keefe **Publisher** Post Hill Press, Jan. 25, 2022 Hardcover

288 pages

His thought-provoking discourse delivered in a sensitive style will make the reader think

Maintaining Integrity

For O'Keefe, a person's integrity is his or her capital. People can only lose it once, and they can lose it privately just as easily as publicly. How does O'Keefe, then, address the issue

of a reporter deceiving a subject in order to extract information? The muckraker must balance the urgency of the circumstances with the compelling public interest of what is being exposed. It is the American muckraker's job to expose the truth, O'Keefe believes. In an unjust society, power can be measured by one's ability to lie and get away with it. If the muckraker's story is important enough, the story will force its way into mainstream circulation. Therefore, the muckraker is the custodian of the public's conscience.

Because of this immense responsibility, the muckraker's job never ends. O'Keefe finds himself identifying with Sisyphus, the sufferer in Greek lore, consigned to push a rock up a hill for eternity only to see it roll back down every time.

Rethinking Journalism

O'Keefe feels that if in the 20th century, the medium was the message, then in the 21st century, the medium would seem to be the messenger. He goes on to say that, lest America become a nation of feckless cowards, citizens must fight for what is right, and exposure is the one thing the chronically dishonest fear.

The balance of political forces has now changed, O'Keefe says. The role of the oppressor is now reversed. "David assumes new strength, while Goliath is attacked on all sides. The hunter has become the quarry."

In the spirit of Superman, O'Keefe says, "The muckraker has learned one lesson time and again: When the truth is on your side, you don't back down." He concludes with the hope that others will join him. "The muckraker dreams of an army of truth-tellers, of people willing to fight, even to suffer, to expose the truth."

Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired teacher. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at lwiegenfeld@aol.com

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James O'Keefe, author of "American

Muckraker: Rethinking Journalism in the 21st















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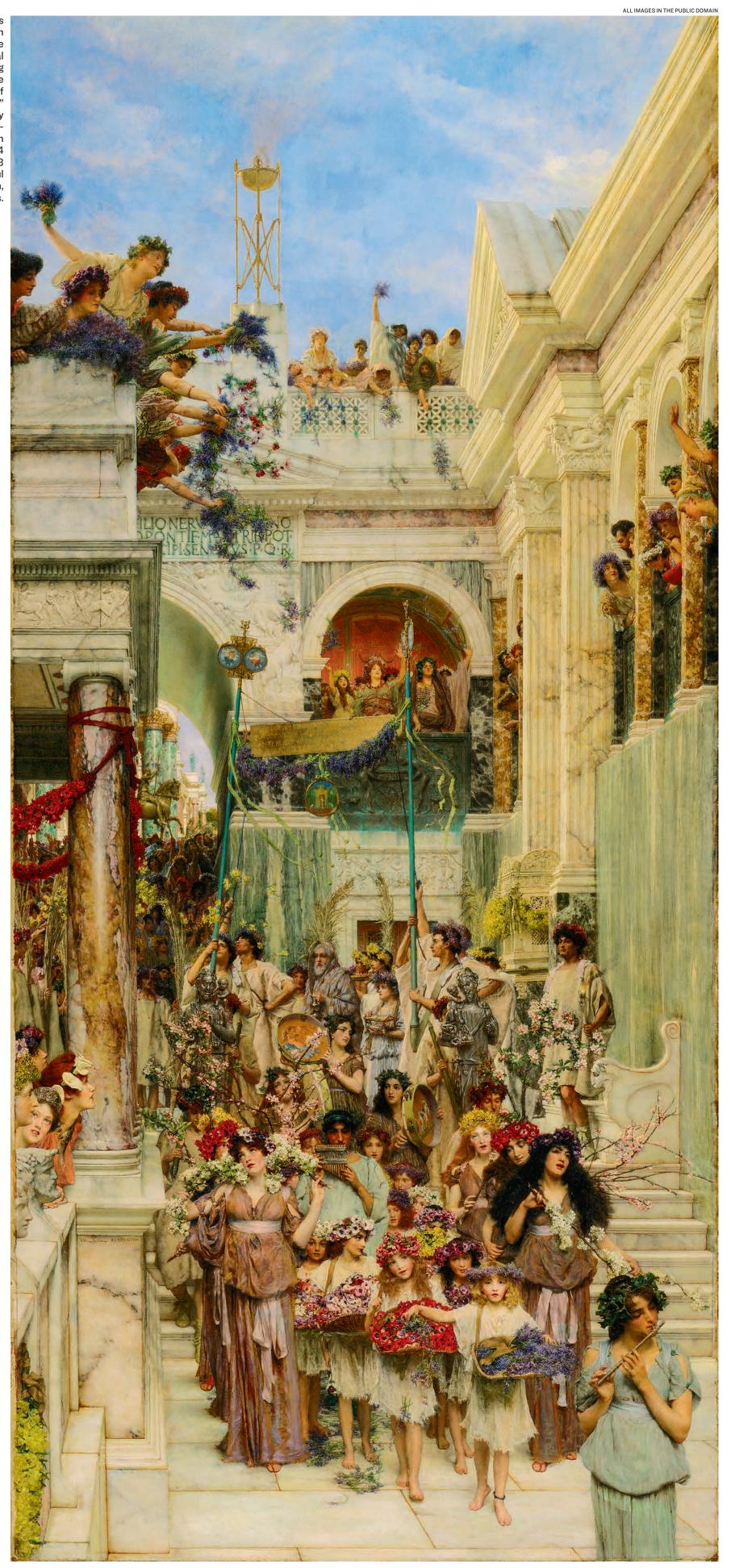
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Late April was celebrated in ancient Rome with a festival celebrating Floralia, the goddess of flowers. "Spring," 1894, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Oil on canvas; 70 1/4 inches by 315/8inches. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Maypoles, Mary, Flowers, and Poets

The many enchantments of May

Continued from Page 1

And long after the collapse of Rome and the end of celebrations like the one depicted by Alma-Tadema, other festivities and rituals continued to mark May as special.

A-Maying We Will Go

To "go a-Maying," which is an expression we can trace back to the 14th century, was to celebrate this month, to "fetche the flowres fresh," and often to seek romance and revelry. Here's just one example. Basing some of his verse on Sir Thomas Malory's Arthurian works, Alfred Lord Tennyson in "Idylls of the King" at one point describes Queen Guinevere and her attendants in this fashion:

"For thus it chanced one morn when all the court, *Green-suited, but with plumes* that mocked the may, Had been, their wont, a-maying and returned...."

To go a-Maying might also mean romance. In his 1595 song "Now Is the Month of Maying," called a ballet, Thomas Morley writes:

"Now is the month of maying, When merry lads are playing ... Each with his bonny lass Upon the greeny grass. Fa la la la la la la la la."

Round and Round They Go Allied to these dalliances with the month of Maia are maypoles and May Queens.

Writers of verse have also employed May as a metaphor for youth and love.

The origins of the maypole are lost in the mists of history—many believe these ancient rituals began in Germany—but this ceremony is almost certainly a fertility dance, a whirling pagan prayer for fecundity and healthy crops. Men and women in those long-ago times first danced around a live tree, sometimes decorated. As the custom evolved, the object of their frolic became a cut tree shorn of its branches and plugged into the earth, around which dancers spun in circled patterns, weaving around one another while adorning the pole in complicated tangles of foliage and ribbons.

Not everyone was enamored of these festivities. In 1644, for example, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, and his government banned maypoles and ordered those standing to be torn down, describing them as "a Heathenish vanity, generally abused to superstition and wickedness." Following his death and the dissolution of his government, maypoles once again became popular in England.

During the Victorian era, the maypole dance became much tamer, with young girls dressed in their finery dancing and decorating the pole. As we learn from John Chu of Britain's National Trust, the May Queen, another old custom of these celebrations, was "embodied by a young girl decorously dressed in white and crowned with flowers. Accompanied by a 'court' of other girls, the May Queen had become a symbol of purity and the promise of spring."

These customs continue to this day in many different places, with men and women erecting these poles, decorating them with bright ribbons, and weaving in and out of the dance.

The Month of Mary

The Roman Catholic Church kicks off May with the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, but otherwise devotes the entire month to his earthly spouse, Mary, who in many places is honored with the title "Queen of May." Churches frequently feature Marian hymns during Mass, she is the subject of homilies and the center of special devotions, and parishioners are encouraged to pray the rosary. Usually, May is the month for Catholic children to receive their first communion. Often, this occasion includes a brief ceremony in which a young woman, dressed in her white gown, places a crown of flowers on the head of Mary's statue.

The Poets Also Go A-Maying

Poets like Robert Herrick, William Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, and Emily Dickinson have all paid homage to the gentle beauties and passing joys of May. In "May and the Poets," Leigh Hunt remembers some of the earlier bards of this merry month:

There is May in books forever; May will part from Spenser never; May's in Milton, May's in Prior, May's in Chaucer, Thomson, Dyer; May's in all the Italian books:— She has old and modern nooks, Where she sleeps with nymphs and elves, In happy places they call shelves, And will rise and dress your rooms With a drapery thick with blooms. Come, ye rains, then if ye will, May's at home, and with me still; But come rather, thou, good weather, And find us in the fields together.

Writers of verse have also employed May as a metaphor for youth and love. In these lines from "It Is Not Always May," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow advocates for "carpe diem" as he urges a young woman to make the most of this Maytime of her life:

"Maiden, that read'st this simple rhyme, *Enjoy thy youth, it will not stay;* Enjoy the fragrance of thy prime, For oh, it is not always May!"

On the other hand, another poet, Christina Rossetti, reminds us in this truncated sonnet that despite the season, the world goes on spinning, and we go on spinning with it. Not all in May is merriment.

"I cannot tell you how it was, But this I know: it came to pass Upon a bright and sunny day When May was young; ah, pleasant May! As yet the poppies were not born Between the blades of tender corn; The last egg had not hatched as yet, Nor any bird foregone its mate. I cannot tell you what it was, But this I know: it did but pass. It passed away with sunny May, Like all sweet things it passed away, And left me old, and cold, and gray."

A Toast to the Month of Flowers

That last line hits the reader like an unexpected punch. But another of Rossetti's poems offers a more tender view of the month of merriment and gaiety:

"There is but one May in the year, And sometimes May is wet and cold; There is but one May in the year Before the year grows old. Yet though it be the chilliest May, With least of sun and most of showers, Its wind and dew, its night and day, Bring up the flowers."

Here, Rossetti reminds us that though May might not be the month of sunshine and soft winds as so many other poets have proclaimed, it nevertheless bestows on us its lilies, lilacs, and other bursts of color and blossom.

Few of us moderns go a-maying or wend our way around a maypole, but like our agrarian ancestors we can enjoy the bounties of May and raise a glass to its beauty. And we can, as the hoary old cliché goes, stop and smell the flowers.

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. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



The month of May is also associated with courting. "May Day Morning," 1890-1894, by Edwin Austin Abbey. Oil on canvas; 42 inches by 68 inches. Yale University Art



May is often the time for a Catholic's first communion. Painting of a "First Communion" by Laszlo Pataky.



The maypole may have German origins. Maypole festival in front of a forest farm, 1848, by Carl Millner. Oil on canvas.



"May-Day in the Country," from Harper's Weekly, April 30, 1859, by Winslow Homer. Wood engraving; 11 1/4 inches by 16 1/8 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, Yale.

A scene from 2011's "Hugo," a wonderful family film from a

master director.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

hen it was revealed that

Martin Scorsese was

making a 3D children's

movie, most of his loyal

fan base recoiled a tad

more than slightly. The same man who

made some of the greatest films of the last

40 years—all of them with decidedly adult

content—is going to make a 3D kids' movie?!

guarded optimism took over and glass-half-

empty types finally took to rationalization.

If anyone can make a 3D movie that looks

good and comes with a great, well-told story,

it's Scorsese. And if he succeeds—if he really

Just because a movie features child actors

as the leads, which children will love, doesn't

mean its appeal is limited to that demographic. There are plenty of adults who will be en-

Superb doesn't begin to describe "Hugo."

ing, costume and set designs, the little details,

the special effects, the direction, everything.

Yes, even the 3D is impeccable. Critics and

mass audiences—groups of people who

rarely agree on anything—are blessed with

a movie such as "Hugo," if they're real lucky,

once every decade or so. Three months af-

ter its release, "Hugo" was nominated for 11

Academy Awards (more than any other 2011

While going into the details of the plot

might prod some on the fence into giving

"Hugo" a shot, it would be a disservice to truly

interested viewers, remove elements of sur-

prise, and squash the myriad of twists. In this

instance, being vague about what happens

Once you get past the imagined

"children/3D" stumbling block, the story

begins to dovetail and mushroom in the

most unexpected, joyous, and sometimes

The automaton surrounded by Hugo (Asa

Inspector Dasté (Sacha Baron Cohen) in a

title), eventually winning five.

is infinitely preferable.

nails it—it will be superb.

thralled by this amazing film.

Critics and Audiences Agree

After the initial shock wore off, an air of

MICHAEL CLARK

Connecting Stalin and Mao With Threats Today

How the death of ballerina Anna Pavlova is important

DUSTIN BASS

Immense cruelty was the order of the day for much of the 20th century, especially in parts of Europe and the East through fascism and communism. Among the many dictators known throughout that bloody century, none are more notable or bloody than Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong.

In the new book "The Dancer and the Devil: Stalin, Pavlova, and the Road to the Great Pandemic," authors John E. O'Neill and Sarah C. Wynne cover a century of wickedness in the then-USSR and now-Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The focus, though, is not on the famines or the mass exterminations and imprisonments. The focus is on the use of poisons on political enemies, or perceived potential enemies.

The authors begin with the story of Anna Pavlova, Russia's (if not the world's, and history's) greatest ballerina, and how she presumably met her demise in Paris at the hands of Stalin's poison assassins. Pavlova had risen to stardom the world over, even in the United States where she appeared in a motion picture (and would later have a motion picture made of her life).

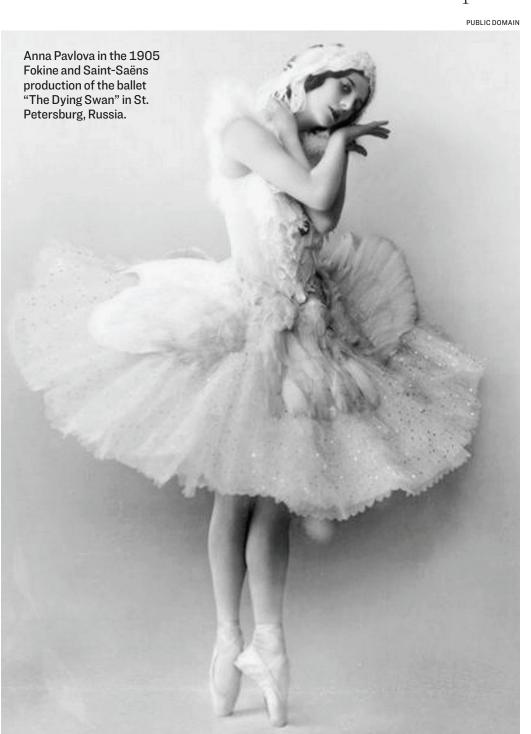
Her fame and influence, however, was a threat to Stalin, and the authors make a rather convincing argument that he had her killed. The murder of a most graceful and peaceful figure sets the tone for the book's discussion of Stalin's and Mao's disdain for enemies, dissidents, and fellow compatriots alike.

A Focus on Poison

The authors discuss the creation of numerous bioweapon labs in the USSR, in particular Lab One. The book journeys through the various scientists involved in poison experiments on animals and humans, and how those poisons were eventually used on some of those very scientists, and eventually Stalin himself.

timeline of Lab One, from its start to its modern-day usage. There is also a breakdown of Pavlova's poisoning and other suspicious poisonings of prominent Russian figures.

The book soon pulls in Mao and the rise of the PRC's bioweapon labs, ultimately culminating with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. authors note that the current regime in China



At the end of the book, the authors provide a Ma), humiliated by trumped-up scandals, and imprisoned (like the former president of Interpol Meng Hongwei), or murdered.

Along with the Wuhan connection is the connection with the World Health Organization. The book makes many connections, some of which may be circumstantial, many more highly probable, and too many that Regarding graceful and peaceful figures, the are definite. One of the primary tasks that seems to be undertaken in the book is to give ensures that individuals do not become too the reader an understanding of the evil eminfluential. And if they do, they are either mobiled in these former and current regimes. for life (and that is putting it mildly), and the mentarily removed (like Fan Bingbing or Jack And although not all of these deaths can be ultimate goal of extending their power, influ-

positively attributed to murder and assassination, it posits into the reader's mind that any type of evil has been, and is, possible.

An Alarming and Disturbing Read

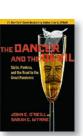
O'Neill and Wynne suggest to the reader that although much has changed in Russia and China compared to the times of Stalin and Mao, the heart of the leadership has not. The regimes are still bent on complete totalitarian rule of their own people with a negligence ence, and domination well past their borders. This extension includes the use of bioweaponry, which the authors note has been used numerous times, especially by China.

The book points out that both Putin and Xi wish to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, Stalin and Mao. Perplexingly, Russia has witnessed an increase in the favorable view of Stalin, which the book discusses. The use of media control and the rewriting of history have contributed to this positive view of a bloody past.

The book leaves the reader little doubt that Putin has total control over Russia and Xi over China. With plenty of evidence provided that the COVID of 2019 was leaked from the Wuhan lab, it leaves the stark question of what is next. The authors indicate that the answer could be anything, as long as it is destructive to its enemies or fellow citizens, as history has shown that these regimes care the same for both.

For a short read, "The Dancer and the Devil" packs an extensive amount of historical information about figureheads, and the creation and use of poisons and bioweaponry. For readers uncertain about just how deadly and ambitious these current regimes are, this book is highly recommended.

Dustin Bass is the host of Epoch TV's "About the Book: A Show about New *Books With the Authors Who Wrote* Them." He is an author and co-host of *The Sons of History podcast.*



The Dancer and the Devil" packs amount of historical information about figureheads.

'The Dancer and the Devil: Stalin, Pavlova, and the Road to the Great

Author John E. O'Neill and Sarah C. Wynne

April 26, 2022

BOOK REVIEW

'The Ride of Her Life:

The True Story of a Woman, Her Horse, and Their Last-Chance Journey Across America'

ANITA L. SHERMAN

Igrew up on the West Coast, so I am familiar with the blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. I haven't been to Maine, but I have traveled as far north from Virginia to New Hampshire. For me, the idea of traveling a scenic land route from one end of the United States to the other is enchanting if done by train or

car—but via horse? And I am a horse lover. This true, triumphal tale takes the reader right along with 63-year-old Annie Wilkins, who in 1954 decides that she would do what her mother hadn't been able to accomplish in her lifetime: see the Pacific Ocean. She's now living on a fragile farm in Minot, Maine.

Recently hospitalized, Annie is alone; what farm animals she had have been sold to help pay her medical expenses. Her health prognosis by the local doctor is to "live restfully" in the couple of years she has left.

Guts and More

A county charity home does not seem the answer. While she hasn't ridden in many years, Annie buys a sturdy brown gelding named Tarzan (we learn later that he has Morgan blood flowing through his stalwart veins) and, together with her French-named pooch Depeche Toi, embarks on a remarkable journey. This unlikely entourage travel from their rural roots into a world rapidly changing, as it is being transformed by modern highways and an abundance of speedy automobiles.

This was a time when televisions were in nearly every home, car ownership had nearly tripled, and many were suspicious of strangers.

Annie is one gutsy gal as she leaves the security of the close-knit farming community that she has called home. Dressed in several layers of men's clothing and with little money, she packs blankets, cooking utensils, dog treats, and grain. What drives her on day after day—often through snowstorms, freezing rain, and searing heat—is her gut feeling that all is right with the world and that Americans would treat a stranger well.

Hospitality on the Road

Perhaps an angel travels along with the group as kindhearted people invite her in for a meal, an overnight place to stay, and a barn where her steeds (she eventually acquires a Tennessee Walker named Rex to lighten Tarzan's load) will be warm and safe from harm.

Dodging traffic is dangerous. There are descriptions of harrowing moments when readers will hold their breath at the outcome. The journey has its share of joys and sorrows as the group gingerly makes its way across some 4,000 miles through America's big cities and small towns.

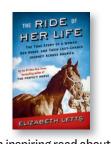
As she carries her own hopes and undying faith in humanity, Annie is convinced through her interactions with the myriad of people she meets (from ordinary folks to celebrities) that she is carrying all of their combined dreams: Her pioneer spirit is theirs.

Meeting her, shaking her hand, and patting her horses become a cherished memory of something good, sturdy, rugged, fearless, faith-filled, and wholesome. People want to be a part of that.

As soon as the local and national media hear of her story, the popularity of the unlikely trek grows. She often has to stop for a reporter's questions or to pose for the camera. She takes it all in stride, finding it curious but nonetheless helpful.

Author Elizabeth **Letts crafts** the story in its own graceful

gait.



An inspiring read about a gutsy woman.

'The Ride of Her Life: The True Story of a Woman, Her Horse, and Their Last-**Chance Journey Across America**'

Author Elizabeth Letts **Publisher** Ballentine Books

Date June 7, 2022 Hardcover

336 pages

Along the way, she is given offers of work, permanent places to stay, and even a marriage proposal from a Wyoming sheep

At Its Own Pace

Author Elizabeth Letts crafts the story in its own graceful gait. Readers will enjoy the grand vistas, shiver when the snows fall, and cringe when a flash flood threatens their stamina. Much of the story is taken from Annie's own diaries as well as heavily researched material incorporating much of the history of that time period from 1954 to 1956.

Annie's navigational skills will probably be questioned, as there are times when taking the road not traveled proves daunting. But the more they accomplish, the more her confidence grows. She muses at one point, "You can be so worried about the challenge in front of you that you fail to realize that you've been chipping away at it all along."

Annie's spirit is indomitable. She finds her own independent voice. She is more than a "tramp of fate." Her homespun, commonsense approach to living her best life is poignant and powerful. Hers is a pilgrim's tale told eloquently and with much heart.

Annie and her animal friends tugged at America's heartstrings, perhaps for a nostalgic age that many thought was being lost. Together they inspired an overwhelming outpouring of affection and neighborliness. The reader will find many eager to support, lift up, and celebrate this woman and her nevergive-up spirit. It echoes what many want to believe today.

Americana is at its purest in this story.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. *She is the mother of three grown children* and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. Anita can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com

(Asa Butterfield) and Isabelle (Chloe Grace Moretz) are orphans and are in possession of the kind of artistic talents that children their age don't usually have, but not excessively so. They're not wunderkinds or freaks or tortured geniuses in training; they're just inquisitive, smart, and appropriately drawn to each other.

Director Martin Scorsese's

More Than Just Puppy Love

Classic Family Film

While Isabelle is a voracious reader, Hugo prefers movies, which he used to attend with his late father (Jude Law). She introduces him to the classics, and he takes her to see her first film (Harold Lloyd's "Safety Last!"). To call what is developing between them "puppy love" would be accurate but also a huge generalization. The relationship between Hugo and Isabelle, like all the others in film, is multilayered yet firmly grounded in reality. There are two hypnotic, back-to-back dream sequences, but no elements of fantasy or magic. Everything that takes place in the movie could actually happen in real life.

Showing up in the first scene after the opening credits and weaved throughout the With one teeny-tiny exception, every facet of this movie achieves a level of perfection remaining narrative is an automaton that never previously seen in any motion picture. The premise, the writing, the acting, the edit-Man played by Brigitte Helm in Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" (1927).

Currently broken, the automaton was a project that Hugo and his dad were working on just prior to the latter's death. When not tending to the many clocks in the train station, Hugo devotes every second of his free time trying to fixit, which includes scrounging around for missing parts.

In the opinion of shopkeeper Georges (Ben Kingsley), Hugo is stealing these items, a position shared by Inspector Dasté (Sacha Baron Cohen). Dasté is a World War I veteran with a bum leg, who polices the station with a Doberman Pinscher and appears to take great pleasure in snatching up vagrant children and dispatching them to the local orphanage.

As it turns out, Georges turns out to be Isabelle's godfather and as such, once she becomes aware of exactly what transpired in his first confrontation with her newfound friend, she intervenes on Hugo's behalf.





Hugo (Asa Butterfield) learns from toymaker moment when he is not policing the train station.



Isabelle (Chloe Grace Moretz) and Hugo (Asa Butterfield) form a deep bond and learn what their gifts are, in "Hugo."

We get a most welcomed, highly informative, and entertaining lesson on the origins of film.

Director:

Starring:

Martin Scorsese

Running Time:

MPAA Rating:

Release Date:

Nov. 23, 2011

2 hours, 6 minutes

Asa Butterfield, Chloe Grace

Moretz, Ben Kingsley, Sacha

Baron Cohen, Jude Law

About halfway through, it becomes clear that Scorsese's dogged dedication to movie preservation (he founded "The Film Foundation" in 1990) starts working its way into the plot, and writer John Logan ("Gladiator," "The Aviator," "Rango") brilliantly does so without any type of force-fitting.

Employing the most modern, up-to-date technology, Scorsese and Logan give everyone a most welcomed, highly informative, and entertaining lesson on the origins of film without ever preaching or drifting into dry, listless, yawn-inducing minutiae.

Now Back to That Teeny-Tiny Exception The movie (based on the novel by Brian Selznick, a twice-removed first cousin of movie pioneer David O. Selznick) is set in post-World War I Paris where nobody speaks French and everyone talks with a British accent.

While it's very nice, looking at the Paris skyline and taking in the accordion-based score, there's nothing contained in the details of the story itself that would have prevented the filmmakers from changing the setting to London. It would have served everyone so much better and easily removed the movie's only facet of artificiality.

To suggest that it might be better than, say, "The Departed," "Raging Bull" or "GoodFellas" would be like comparing apples to oranges and patently unfair to Scorsese. The fact that the same person could have made all of those films and "Hugo" is testimony to his talent and range. "Hugo" provides the proof, if any was still needed, that Scorsese doesn't just make mob movies. It's safe to say that "Hugo" is Scorsese's best film that isn't rated "R."

This film is the work of a genius at the top of his game. It exceeds all expectations and is literally a movie for anyone with a pulse. By anyone's standards, this is quite simply one of the finest motion pictures

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.



Asa Butterfield stars as the titular figure.



Georges Méliès (Ben Kingsley).

Liszt giving

a concert

Joseph I,

1890, by

an unknown

for Emperor

Week 19, 2022 THE EPOCH TIMES

Who is the center of attention? A detail from "Las Meninas" ("Maids of Honor"), 1656, by Diego Velázquez. Oil on canvas; 126 3/16 inches by 110 53/64 inches. Prado Museum, Madrid.

A Charming Gift for His King: Las Meninas'

Velázquez paints a delightful domestic scene

YVONNE MARCOTTE

child's soft giggle echoes down the palace hall. Heavy skirts rustle. A lady-in-waiting enters and holds the door of the Cuarto del Principe ("Prince's Room") in the Alcázar Palace in Madrid, Spain.

sure, to the spacious studio of the court's Margarita's parents, Philip IV and Mariana chief painter, the eminent Diego Velázquez of Austria, who seem to be watching the

activity and his court painter was part of considered part of the family. this. In his most famous painting, Velázquez sure to please his king.

How could it not, when the central figure in the painting was the king's own daughter and heir, the Infanta Margarita Theresa. The painting, considered the artist's masterpiece, presents a casual scene of the infanta and her entourage that today we call "Las Meninas" ("Maids of Honor").

But we'll soon notice that there is much more to this great work of art.

Scene of Royal Family Life

As the king's friend, Velázquez wanted to please Philip, who was weighed down by the problems of state, and make him smile. Conscious of his kingly dignity, Philip was said to have been seen to laugh only three times in public, but he was known to be naturally kind, gentle, and affable.

And the king had a keen sense of fun; he was known to attend lighthearted literary salons in Madrid featuring readings of humorous poetry. The artist shared this affability, and he and the king developed a strong bond and relaxed relationship, just as the king's grandfather, Philip II, had befriended the great Venetian artist Titian.

A story on the website TheArtStory relates that "the royal parents were weary of posing for Velázquez and sent for the princess to amuse them. King Philip IV was an amateur artist and a good friend of Velázquez, and he recognized this busy gathering as a special moment."

The painting shows the infanta, who seemingly makes an unplanned visit to the artist's studio with her attendants: two the palace in 1628. attentive lady's maids, two companions, and her mastiff. To the left of the child, her royal maid Maria Agustina Sarmiento offers the child a drink. The other "menina," Isabella de Velasco, watches over

the child solicitously. the child's companions, the German dwarf Maribarbola and the long-haired Italian dwarf Nicolasito Pertusato who mischielady-in-waiting, Marcela de Ulloa, con-

verses with the infanta's "guardadama" (royal attendant), in a low-lit area behind the child.

There are more figures in the background. Standing in a lighted doorway on the right, the chamberlain and relative of Velázquez, Jose Nieto, looks intently at the scene. Then there is a mirror on the left in In comes a 5-year-old child, royal to be the background that reflects the figures of scene. So, here is grouped in one painting Like any palace of a 17th-century mon-all the most intimate family members of the arch, the court of Philip IV bustled with king, as these personal servants were also

In a sense, Velázquez was also part of the royal family, and the artist tells us this by putting himself in this private royal gathering. His self-portrait, on the left in the foreground, shows a very good likeness of the

Velázquez passed away about two years after completing the painting. Philip posthumously honored him as a Knight of Santiago in 1658. The badge of office was added later to the self-portrait in "Las Meninas." Legend has it that Philip, who considered himself an amateur painter, personally added in red the symbol of the order on the chest of the artist's self-portrait.

Analysts of the painting today allude to the status of the artist in 17th-century Spanish culture: "By placing a rendition of himself as artist into an intensely private scene with his royal subjects, he remarked not only upon the position of the painter as one who is allowed to glimpse moments of intimacy that viewers would not ordinarily be privy to, but to then authentically portray them armed with the artist's signature tools and techniques of the trade. It is a great testament to the role of the painter."

Tribute to Rubens

Even the darkened paintings on the walls celebrate the art of painting by acknowledging Velázquez's good friend, Flemish Baroque artist Peter Paul Rubens. The artist met and became good friends with Rubens when he worked for six months at

The paintings, although barely discernible, are scenes from Ovid's "Metamorphosis," episodes about Minerva and Arachne, and Pan and Apollo. Not only do they honor Rubens but they also allude to the monarch's bond with heaven. Velázquez had access to On the far right side of the painting are the palace's vast art collection, which held many of Rubens's paintings.

Realistic Technique

vously puts his foot on the sleepy dog. The The painting, 7 by 10 feet, shows Velázquez's intensely direct style of painting truth that

'Las Meninas' is not a royal portrait, but a domestic scene that people outside the palace normally see.



Servants in the king's intimate circle. A detail from "Las Meninas" ("Maids of Honor"), 1656, by Diego Velázquez.

For more arts and culture articles, visit TheEpochTimes com

was photorealistic in nature and far ahead of its time. He infused various techniques toward accurately depicting detail and its many nuances—including free, loose brushstrokes; the use of gradients of light, color, and form; and an eye for detail that

was unsurpassed by his peers. Velázquez masterfully used the technique of chiaroscuro, the treatment of light and shadow in a painting to create high contrast, especially on the infanta who receives the most direct light from the only window.

The artist composed the painting to draw the viewer's eye in and around the composition. His use of diagonals, in the strong line of the canvas edge, for example, draws us in toward the infanta. Vertical planes create a foreground, middle ground, and background to draw our eyes up, then back down, and to create a strong sense of movement.

The Art of Painting a Royal Family

"Las Meninas" is not a royal portrait, but a domestic scene that people outside the palace would not normally see. This painting now allowed the king's subjects (and viewers today) to see what goes on in the king's private quarters.

In her "Memoirs," a daughter of a gentleman of the king's chamber, Madame de Motteville, who was present at the scene, writes of the young princess: "She is waited on with great respect, few have access to her and it was a special favor that we were allowed to linger at the door of her

Something like Johannes Vermeer's "The Art of Painting," this masterpiece shows us the importance of the painter's art, and its value and position in a society's culture. "This work is a visual argument to the virtue of painting, the role of an artist in finding the jewels of an intimate moment, giving them a sense of life, and expressing them visually for the world to enjoy," according to TheArtStory.

The painting has had several names. In 1666, shortly after its completion, it was called "Portrait of the Empress With Her Ladies and a Dwarf," in 1734 "The Family of King Philip IV," and before its present name, "The Family."

Dreams of Love

The Poetic Significance of Franz Liszt's 'Liebestraum'

JEFF PERKIN

Hungarian composer Franz Liszt (1811-1886) was a virtuoso pianist of the Romantic movement. The prolific composer, performer, and teacher composed 700 pieces in his lifetime. A child prodigy of a musical family, he performed for well-known musicians and royalty by the time he was 9 years old. Regular traveling and performing in his youth led Liszt to develop nervous exhaustion and to consider spiritual alternatives. Young Liszt told his father, Adam Liszt, that he wanted to become a priest.

To improve young Franz's health, Adam took him to the sea in Boulogne, France, where Adam died of typhoid fever. The traumatic death of his father led Franz at age 15 to turn away from music for several years while he focused his inquisitive mind on the study of religion and art.

Poetic Nocturnes

In his early 20s, Liszt returned to composing and performing. He was a virtuoso performer who gave solo recitals completely on his own. The devoted pianist delivered piano music to innovative new places by creating chromatic harmony. He also developed what he called a "symphonic poem," a single movement that encapsulated the dramatic complexity of a literary work and combined all the compositional elements of a traditional, four-movement symphony.

The death of his friend and fellow composer Frederic Chopin inspired Liszt to briefly create works in genres that Chopin made famous, such as the nocturne. Liszt's threepart "Liebestraum," meaning "Dreams of Love," is a series of three nocturnes that rep-

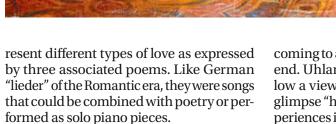
Liszt's three-part 'Liebestraum,' meaning **'Dreams of** Love,' is a series of three nocturnes.



A portrait of composer and pianist Franz Liszt, 1839, by Henri Lehmann. Oil on canvas. Carnavalet Museum, History of Paris.

CARNAVALET MUSEUM/CC BY-SA 1.0





'Liebestraum' in 3 Parts

The first nocturne in "Dreams of Love," "Liebestraum No.1," is based on Johann Ludwig Uhland's poem titled "Hohe Liebe" or "Exalted Love." The poem is about spiritual exaltation in which a person "gladly disowns" the "joys of Earth" in favor of the "golden beyond." Of the three pieces, this nocturne is the most peaceful and restrained. Pensive notes are held at length while layered arpeggios and rapidly ascending notes allude to the "heavens above" that "have parted."

"Liebestraum No. 2" is based on Uhland's poem "Seliger Tod" or "Blessed Death." Liszt's second nocturne in the series intentionally exists in stark contrast to the first. The piece is about humanity's experience of love born out of fleeting physical intimacy. The piece flares up dramatically, eventually coming to an abrupt and somewhat dismal end. Uhland hints that this "love" may allow a viewer to be "awakened" or even to glimpse "heaven," and yet, like all of our experiences in the flesh, it is not meant to last.

Ferdinand Freiligrath's poem "O Lieb, so Lang du Lieben Kannst," or "O Love, as Long as You Can," is the basis for Lizst's third and final nocturne of the series, "Liebestraum No. 3." This final piece speaks of a love that transcends the "death" of the previous poem. It is a bittersweet reminder to love those we hold dear because "the time will come" when we may no longer have them. The song emotionally builds to an intense crescendo, but it ends in a peaceful feeling reminiscent of the first nocturne. It seems to hold the hopeful message that through gratitude and cultivation, love is ever-present. Although loved ones depart,

Jeff Perkin is a graphic artist and integrative nutrition health coach available at WholySelf.com.

we may continue to seek the "exalted love"

that only the divine can provide.

FILM REVIEW

Documentary of Communist Suppression in Hong Kong

JOE BENDEL

"Las

Meninas"

("Maids of

Honor"),

by Diego

Velázquez.

1656,

When it comes to the Chinese Communist learned that lesson by watching the mainland from afar, whereas the younger generation learned it firsthand during the 2019 Extradition Law protests.

The Umbrella generation of activists come together with their elder dissenters for dialogue and to re-create defining incidents from the latter's lives in Chan Tzewoon's hybrid documentary "Blue Island."

The film first introduces us to Chan Hakchi, who is like a Hong Kong Jack Lalanne. The septuagenarian has the physique of a man one quarter of his age, partly due to his daily habit of swimming in Victoria Harbor. In addition to exercise, the practice has personal meaning, since he twice tried to flee the Cultural Revolution by swimming.

More than 200,000 Mainlanders escaped the Gang of Four's madness, mostly via water. Regrettably, 20-something activists Anson Sham and the Mainland-born Siu Ying are starting to understand the motivation behind their desperate flight, which helps them relate to the eternally-fit Chan and his wife (almost like method actors) when recreating scenes from their escape."

Fleeing Mainland's Madness

More than 200,000 mainlanders escaped the Gang of Four's madness, mostly via water. Regrettably, 20-something activists Anson Sham and the mainland-born Siu Ying are starting to understand the motivation behind their desperate flight, which helps them relate (almost like method actors) to Chan and his wife when re-creating scenes from their escape.

Ironically, Kenneth Lam made the opposite journey to mainland China and back again. Inspired by the student protesters, he traveled to Beijing in 1989 to join them. Although he survived the Tiananmen Square massacre, the experience left him deeply scarred and disillusioned. Keith Fong Chung-yin understands, since he is facing potential jail time for a bogus weapons charge.

He is not the only one. So many of the activists, young and old, featured in "Blue Island" are currently facing pending indictments, serving sentences, or living in exile.

Yet, of all director Chan's participants, Raymond Young is perhaps the most conflicted. He is also the exception among the Party cracking down on dissent, you can older activists, whose experiences still bear always count on history repeating itself, out the truth of Hong Kong's subservient over and over again. Older Hongkongers position, with respects to the CCP. During his idealistic youth, Young was imprisoned by the British for his anti-colonialist, communist-allied activism.

> He still honors his old comrades, but he is bitterly aware that they have received no recognition from the CCP or those who do its bidding in Hong Kong.

> However, Young can offer counsel and consolation to Kelvin Tam Kwan-long, a 21-year-old social worker facing a prison sentence of his own. Fittingly, the film also visits with "Long Hair" Leung Kwak-hung, whose distinctive look always livens up HK documentaries. A former Marxist who transitioned to the democracy movement, Leung was elected to the Legislative Council as a reformer, but he was subsequently convicted of multiple dubious charges, along with many of his colleagues.

Dramatized Sequences

"Blue Island" is a radical departure from Chan's "Yellowing," which documented the 2014 Umbrella protests, as they happened, from the streets and amid the tear gas. However, the dramatized sequences in his latest film help both generations of activists express the truth of Hong Kong and China, as they know it.

Still, both documentaries very definitely personalize the young Hong Kong protesters, giving them names and faces. Hopefully, that will help protect them. On the other hand, it is understandable why 2,645 of the film's crowd-funders donated anonymously.

Those dramatic interludes are better described as evocative or impressionistic than melodramatic. They are more about creating a mood, usually of fear, than developing character or narrative. Chan and company definitely convey a sense of life in Hong Kong today and the People's Republic, during the Cultural Revolution and the ill-fated "Beijing Spring." He and cinematographer Szeto Yat-lui create many images that would be absolutely beautiful if they weren't so sad.

Given the recurring motif of water, "Blue Island" pairs up well, both thematically and aesthetically, with Olivia Martin-Mc-Guire's partly animated short documen**Hong Kong** was once literally and **figuratively** a safe harbor but can no longer be considered so. tary, "Freedom Swimmer." Both films vividly illustrate the point that

Hong Kong was once literally and figuratively a safe harbor but can no longer be considered so, after Beijing imposed the Orwellian "National Security Law." Consequently, each film serves as a meditative elegy to the freedoms and way of life that Hongkongers have lost as a result.

Many of the young activists openly question whether they must eventually follow Chan Hak-choi's example and flee Hong Kong if they wish to continue to identify as Hongkongers, or risk following Young's footsteps into prison. It is a remarkably empathic film and an unusually artistically composed documentary.

Very highly recommended, "Blue Island" had its U.S. premiere during this year's New Directors/New Films and next screens as part of CAAMfest in San Francisco.

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



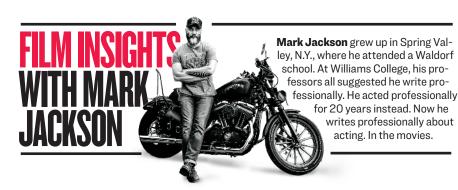
Promotional poster for "Blue Island."

'Blue Island' Director: Chan Tze-woon

Running Time: MPAA Rating: Release Date: April 30, 2022

10 | ARTS & CULTURE

NEW LINE CINEMA



Don Juan DeMarco (Johnny Depp) tells his tale, in 1995's "Don Juan DeMarco."

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

When Johnny Depp Was Johnny Depp

MARK JACKSON

Mega-move star Johnny Depp is currently all over the news due to a courtroom showdown with his ex-wife Amber Heard for defamation of character. (She claims she was a victim of spousal abuse; he claims her alleged lies ruined his career.) So it seemed like a perfect time to take a look at 1995's "Don Juan De-Marco" and Johnny Depp of the '90s, whose star was then on the rise.

People always took him seriously as an actor, even while his stock in trade was shaping up to be odd characters in movies of fantasy and whimsy, like Willy Wonka, Edward Scissorhands, and later Captain Jack Sparrow in Disney's massive franchise "Pirates of the Caribbean."

In "Don Juan DeMarco," Depp plays an eccentric young man who's convinced that he's the world's greatest lover. Marlon Brando plays the psychiatrist assigned to divest him of his delusions. The results are hysterical.

'Now I Must Die'

As the film opens, a young man in a Zorro mask, cape, and fencing sword has climbed to the top of a billboard, about to jump to his death. The cops call in Dr. Jack Mickler (Marlon Brando) to talk him down from the ledge. Mickler goes up in a cherry picker to the top of the billboard. When the psychiatrist is asked his identity by the potential jumper (who himself claims to be the real Don Juan), Mickler decides to play along and improvises, "Iam... Don... umm... Octavio... de Flores."

Young Mr. Don Juan is promptly hustled off to a mental asylum. However, his presence very soon has all the nurses in a romantic tizzy and absconding with more Valium than the patients are taking.

Mickler, burned-out as he is, and ready to retire, is intrigued by the young man's serious demeanor, sincerity, and by the ring of truth and wisdom underlying his outrageous claims and statements. He asks his reluctant supervisor for 10 days to evaluate the young man.

Don Juan regales Dr. "de Flores" with fantastical stories about his adventures and vast history of female conquests. Mickler listens intently. The reason, it turns out, that Don Juan was about to jump to his death was because, while he had successfully seduced in excess of 1,000 women, he could not win the woman of his dreams, the beautiful Doña Julia (Talisa Soto)—the one whom, when he looked into her eyes, he could see his unborn children there. And so life was therefore no longer worth living.

The stories, told in flashback, become ever more fantastical—there's a Mexican hacienda! His father dies in a sword duel! There's a desert island called Eros, with yet another true love, and an Arabian seraglio with thousands of women!

Depp plays it all completely straight-faced, and soon Dr. Mickler is so fired up that he rushes home to romance his wife (Faye Dunaway) and their stale marriage with flowers (he is after all Don Octavio de Flores), jewelry, champagne, and a mariachi band.

People always took Johnny Depp seriously as an actor.

'Don Juan DeMarco'

Director: Jeremy Leven

Starring:

Marlon Brando, Johnny Depp, Faye Dunaway, Rachel Ticotin, Talisa Soto

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Release Date: April 7, 1995

Running Time:

1 hour, 37 minutes

Rating:

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ for delightfulness

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ for execution

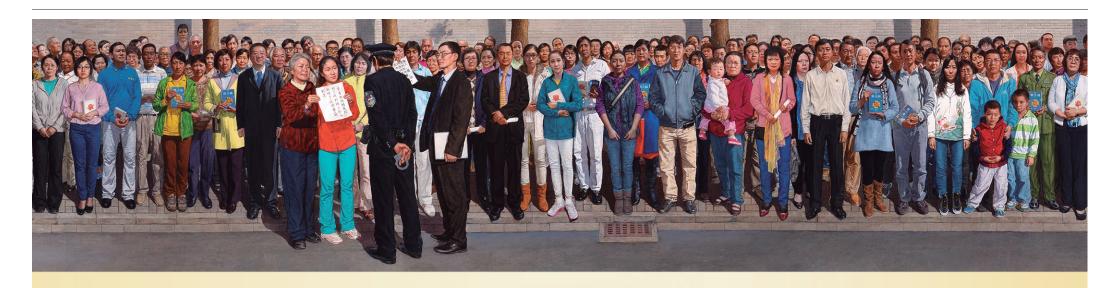
Director Jeremy Leven

Jeremy Leven, a novelist who once made his living as a clinical psychiatrist, wrote and directed this impressive debut, and having scored a hat trick of three powerhouse leads, delivered a hilarious comedy that's remarkably believable and unpredictable. Depp agreed to work with Leven on condition that his hero, Marlon Brando, be his co-star.

"Don Juan DeMarco" is, of course, a variation on the old theme of the shrink who learns from his patient, like "Awakenings." It's also a celebration of romance, poetry, love, and adventure. Its fragile illusion wouldn't stand up to close scrutiny, of course, but Depp—who at the time had evolved as America's most unpredictable and interesting young star—read all his lines with complete sincerity and not a hint of camp (which is really the most powerful and effective way to play most kinds of comedy).

In these times of political correctness, the concept and stereotype of the hotblooded Latin lover (as represented by, say, Valentino) has become an endangered species. Which is an excellent reason in and of itself to watch Depp try on Valentino's mantle. The other reason is that you will laugh yourself silly. Or at least find the proceedings highly amusing.

Ultimately, though, the inspiration that underlies the whole film is the magic of discovering the sublime in the superficial by dedicating one's life to living perfectly in the moment.



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