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PHOTOGRAPHY

# WILDERNESS PHOTOGRAPHER CREATES A SENSE OF PLACE

### An interview with photographer Erin Babnik

### DEENA C. BOUKNIGHT

Writer Henry David Thoreau said, "We can never have enough of nature," and landscape photographer Erin Babnik delivers on that sentiment through her painstakingly captured images.

Babnik hails from California, but she and her camera equipment travel all over the United States and the world with the goal of recording every jot and tittle of natural scenes through photography. Erin Babnik is regularly inspired by her art history foundation. In fact, Babnik's landscape photography is distinguished by the sensory qualities it exudes. In one of her online portfolios, "Feelings," we can certainly "feel" the dry heat in the close-up image of parched, cracked land.

In one of her shots from a different online portfolio, "Moving," water pours over a forest's wide falls and rushes toward the viewer in an ethereal stream.

Though Babnik cannot pinpoint an absolute favorite photograph, she does acknowledge that she never feels more creative than when she's photographing "atmospheric mountain scenes. There is something about mist and low clouds mingling with craggy peaks that makes me exceedingly happy to be behind a camera," she shared by phone.

### Trained as a Fine Artist

Babnik approaches photography from an artist's perspective. She has a doctoral education in art history from the University of California–Berkeley, but her dedication to photography grew from her need to photograph ruins at archaeological sites and artwork in museums for the purposes of teaching and research.

While she had experimented with photography creatively as an undergraduate art student, full immersion into the art came when she began moonlighting—while working on her doctorate—as an assignment photographer. She then transitioned into wilderness and landscape photography.

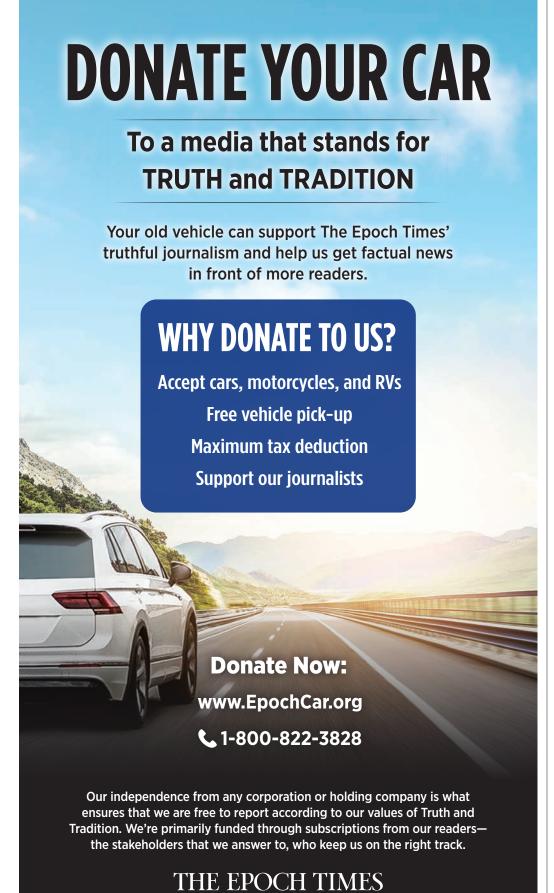
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# Prairie Rose: A Bold Defender of American Liberty

LITERATURE

**JEFF MINICK** 

oday, Rose Wilder Lane 'Let the Hurricane Roar' 1886–1968) is best remembered, if she is remembered at all, as the daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the beloved "Little House" books, children's stories that Rose helped shape and edit before they appeared

Yet Rose was a woman of accomplishment in her own right. Despite her rough childhood on the prairie and a hit-and-miss early education, she became a well-known and respected journalist, a world traveler, a novelist whose books made the bestseller lists, a political theorist, and a founder of the American Libertarian Party.

Among friends and acquaintances, she was also known for her wit, intelligence, and eloquence. As William Holtz writes in "The Ghost in the Little House," his biography of Rose: "Evervone I have interviewed who knew her testifies that she was a brilliant conversationalist and a compelling raconteur, her fine blue eyes flashing as she pursued an idea or a story to its furthest reaches and beyond." Holtz also finds this style and spark in her letters, which he judges as "among the best written in our century."

For much of her life, having turned her back on communism and fascism, and waging war through her writing with the Franklin Roosevelt administration, which she considered an incubator of dictatorship, Rose promoted quintessential American ideals: liberty, self-reliance, and the burdens

and glories of individualism. Two of her books, "The Discovery of Freedom: Man's Struggle Against Authority" and "Give Me Liberty," still inspire today's libertarians, and her beliefs are reflected in the "Little

House" books. If we wish to find an excellent blend of her storytelling talents along with by themselves. Yet both Caroline and her political philosophy, we might Charles were born to parents and into take up her 1933 novel "Let the Hur- a culture that stressed, as did Rose,

the title "Young Pioneers."

Within the first five pages of "Let the Hurricane Roar," a title derived from an old hymn, newlyweds 16-year-old Caroline and her husband, Charles, who is only two years her senior, load their belongings onto a wagon, bid farewell to their families, and head west to seek their fortune by homesteading. Eventually, they stake their claim. They turn the dugout abandoned by a previous tenant into a home and ride out the winter storms.

For a while, all is bliss in this primitive household. In the evenings, Caroline reads aloud from the Bible and from a volume of Tennyson's poems given to them by her mother.

She bears a son on her 17th birthday, and the wheat that Charles plants in the spring ripens and grows tall. Anticipating the cash he will earn from this crop, Charles goes to the nearby town and purchases on credit items like lumber, window panes, and treats for his wife.

Disaster strikes when an enormous swarm of grasshoppers darkens the sky, descends on the wheat field, and ravages their crop. To earn money to pay off his debts, Charles heads east to find work, promising to return in October. But, in an accident, he breaks his leg and finds his absence extended well into the winter.

Meanwhile, after failing to find work in town, Caroline finds herself forced to live alone in the dugout, facing blizzards, wolves, and a dwindling food

Rose based the plot of her novel on the real-life adventures of her maternal grandparents. (In "Young Pioneers" she changed their names, Caroline and Charles, to Molly and David.) It's difficult today to imagine a couple so young marrying, much less enduring such arduous trials largely ricane Roar," now published under the importance of self-reliance.



Rose Wilder Lane, circa 1905–1910. National Archives

On Her Own

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 30, 2022

Throughout that bitter winter of snowstorms, wild animals, and possible claim jumpers, Caroline cares for her infant son, keeps a gun close at hand, and heats the dugout as best she can by twisting hay into bundles to fuel the fire. Eventually, she breaks up and burns some of the furniture so that she and little Charles John have some semblance of warmth.

Meanwhile, she spends much of her time worried sick by her desperate circalamity or even death.

But in these tribulations comes a moment of transformation, of revelation. In this land of snow, "a world neither alive nor dead, and terrible because it was alien to life and death," Caroline suddenly perceives "the spark of warmth in a living heart" and "its indomitable existence among vast, freedom were considered radical, and incalculable, lifeless forces. It was invincible."

She becomes "aware of human dignity. She felt that she was alive, and that God was with life. She thought: 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against me.' She could feel what Charles felt, singing: 'Let the hurricane roar! We'll weather the blast."

The Value of Adversity

For Rose, such challenges as those faced by Caroline act on us like rotary tumblers, those machines that polish gemstones through constant friction. As William Holtz tells us of Rose, "a copybook maxim from school days ... became the determining condition of her life. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity." Years later, she wrote to a friend, "I am a—maybe fanatic—believer in the uses of adversity."

In her arguments for the older ideas and ways of liberty, before the advent of government social programs, Rose recognized that true freedom brings risks and hardships. It means standing on our own two feet and sometimes facing terrible odds, but the payoff for her and her characters in "Let the Hurricane Roar" is the pride and dignity that accompany both defeat ican would talk like that. She said

When Charles returns to the dugout after failing to find work on his first

attempt, he is bitter and short with Caroline, angry about his debts and his lack of money. As she listens to him, Caroline gains new insight into her young husband.

"Suddenly she was almost happy, because she understood why he hadn't come to her for comfort. It was his pride—his pride in taking care of her and the baby ... She wouldn't love him at all without that pride; he wouldn't be Charles without it. That was why he fought to save it; that was why he cumstances, daily fearing some new fought for it even against her. He must not lose his pride; it was their most precious possession."

"Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" were the guiding stars in Rose Wilder Lane's philosophy. In her own day, her beliefs in individualism and even more so now, when our lives are encumbered by a thicket of laws and regulations. She always remained well aware of the burdens and responsibilities that this freedom imposed on men and women, yet she also believed that one of the great rewards of true liberty was hope for the future.

In the depths of her dark winter, Caroline composes a letter to Charles in which she writes:

"We are having hard times now, but we should not dwell upon them but think of the future ... I trust that, like our own parents, we may live to see times more prosperous than they have been in the past, and we will then reflect with satisfaction that these hard times were not in vain."

In another scene, their closest neighbors—a Swedish immigrant and his wife who live a mile away—decide to abandon their claim and return east to Minnesota. When the man complains bitterly "Ta dam country. No tam goot," Rose has Caroline offer this response: "The country's all right, Mr. Svenson,' Caroline said. Suddenly she felt that he was a foreigner; no Amersharply, 'No country's going to feed you with a spoon."

A moment later, she tells him, "It's



Caroline and Charles Ingalls.

Rose promoted quintessential American ideals: liberty, selfreliance, and the burdens and glories of

individualism.

In 1965, at the age of 78, Rose flew to Vietnam to report on the war there. On her return, as William Holtz reports, she spoke to a local reporter not only about her impressions of that country, which were favorable, but also about the United States. Over 50 years ago, she identified problems that today have become acute, including our ruinous debt and the loss of state prerogatives to the federal government.

men that make a country."

The Legacy

of the future:

"The country will pull through. I may not be here to see it but we'll come through. We're that kind of people."

Yet in this interview, Rose also said

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 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.



"Let the Hurricane Roar," by Rose Wilder Lane, is a story based on the lives of the author's maternal grandparents.

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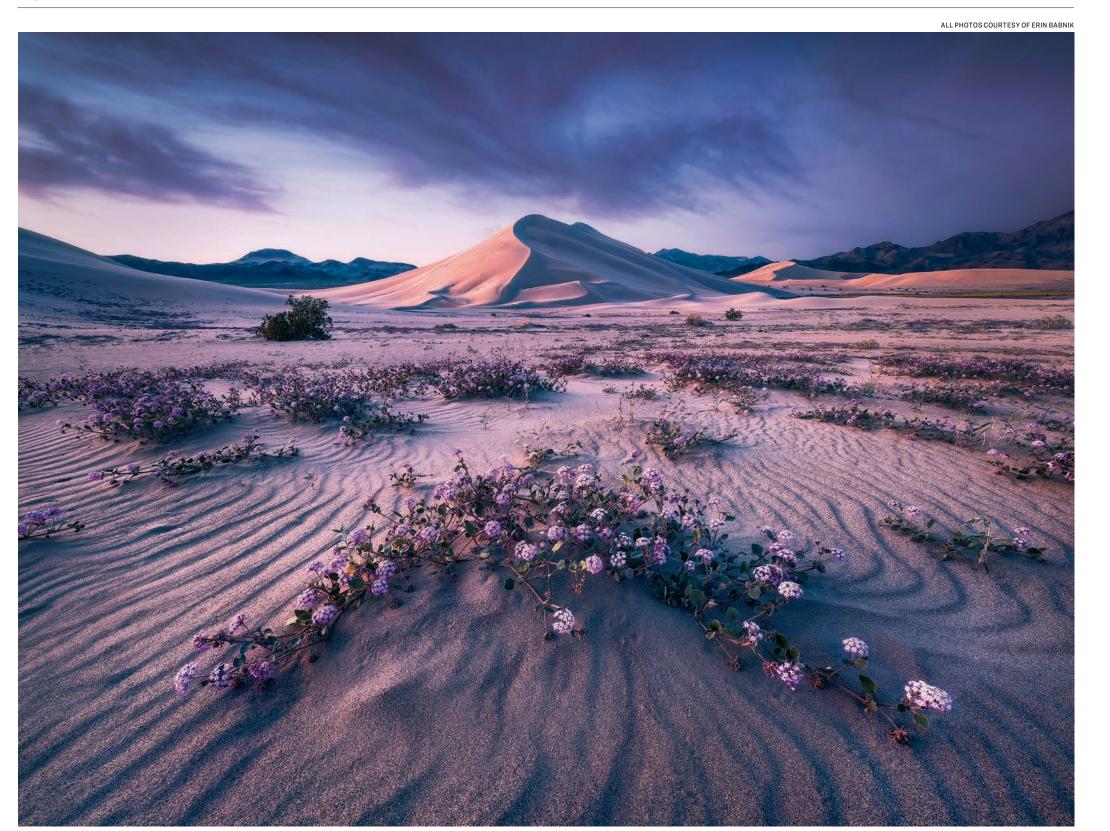
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THE EPOCH TIMES



"Arrow Dynamic," 2018, by Erin Babnik. Photo taken in Death Valley National Park.

**PHOTOGRAPHY** 

# WILDERNESS PHOTOGRAPHER CREATES A SENSE OF PLACE

At first, she didn't see the connection between photography and creating art.

"I had a real aha moment the first time that I experimented with a long exposure and realized that photography could be more about creating an image than 'capturing' some objective reality. ... Suddenly, I saw the potential for photographs to be more than redundant renderings, imperfect records, or cheap souvenirs. Once I understood that cameras are tools of an artistic medium. I wanted nothing more than to dedicate myself to that

outlet for creative expression."

Thus, she eventually was able to combine her artistic bent with her passion for art photography into a full-time profession. She is now a photographer with Canon's Explorer of Light program for talented creative artists.

### **Inspired by Traditional Art** Babnik is regularly inspired by her art

history foundation. She notes, "Art history instilled in me a tendency

toward interpretation that makes me see stories and metaphors in the landscapes that I photograph, and that tendency

constantly helps me to make decisions in everything from composition to postprocessing.

Indeed, some of the "Personal Favorites" on her website beg for a narrative: A seemingly layered wintry wonderland with a stream in the foreground is edged by towering snow-laden fir trees and a backdrop of white-capped, jagged peaks. Or, lilac-hued flowering vines sprout from a windswept desert.

In addition to the metaphoric and narrative elements influencing her, the subject of her dissertation was Hellenistic sculpture, and therefore she tends "to see

every tree, mountain, or plant as some kind of abstract sculpture in dialogue with its surroundings."

Also contributing to Babnik's ability for achieving striking images are her inquisitiveness, confidence, and acute awareness. And she's willing to experiment and take the time to get the photo just right:

"I'm ... quite compulsive about craftsmanship, which sometimes works against me in limiting my output, but erring on the side of quality over quantity has probably done me more good than harm over the years."

### The Challenges and Exhilaration of Nature

Babnik believes that being in nature benefits her in every way. There is the physical exercise as well as nourishment to her psyche that the outdoors provides. These bring her to "a level of emotional and spiritual clarity that is hard to engender any other way."

Into that mix, photography "brings about the highest levels of concentration and joy for me." The vaster and more majestic, the more freeing, she said.

Because she loves to photograph remote spots, she often must put in a great amount of effort to even reach a desired destination. Sometimes she has to hike for many miles or use skis or snowshoes to reach an intended destination.

"Very often, I have to hike steep ascents for days with a heavy pack, snowshoe in the dark, or endure seemingly endless ruts on rough dirt roads. On one occasion in the American Southwest, I ended up sloshing 10 miles through frigid water in a river canyon all for one photograph of dried mud that spanned only a few feet along the canyon wall."

These places far off the beaten path can present unique challenges. In fact, an impromptu rescue effort during a photography session in the Dolomites, which are in the Italian Alps, prompted her to pursue certification as a Wilderness First Responder.

Cries for help made her scramble to where she could see "two shadowy figures in the distance hobbling across a mountain saddle," she said.

"Upon reaching them, it became clear that one was very badly injured with numerous deep lacerations and two broken limbs. Since it was a stormy evening, there were no other people around at first, so I led the rescue effort. I had no medical training at the time, which made me feel quite anxious during the entire experience."

She then decided she needed to be prepared "both practically and mentally" in case anything happened to her or anyone accompanying her, or anyone she might come in contact with, while out of range of cell service and emergency services.

### A Positive Effect on the World

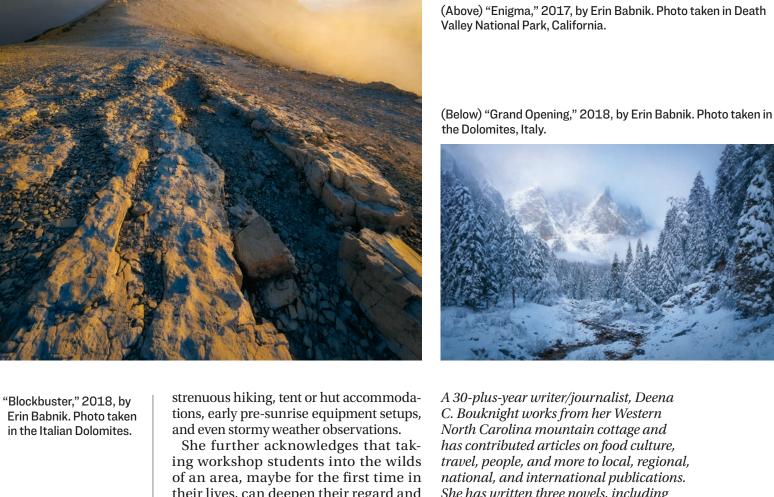
Babnik shares her academic teaching skills by offering intense photography workshops worldwide. With an office in Slovenia as well as in California, she spends as much time teaching photography as she does taking photographs.

Teaching is highly rewarding as she hopes to encourage students to find their own joy in the work.

"It may sound a bit grandiose, but I gain a lot from the feeling that I'm having some kind of positive knock-on effect in the world. Helping other people to bring out their best creative self is endlessly rewarding, not only as they produce compelling photographs, but also as they quite noticeably exude enthusiasm and inspiration with each small discovery or breakthrough."

In an interview as CaptureLandscape's 2019 Photographer of the Year, Babnik explained that the time she spends in the field is undeniably valuable for teaching. Besides classic lecture-style, PowerPoint instruction, she regularly leads workshop students into remote wilderness area and teaches "adventure style." This approach may involve their lives, can deepen their regard and respect for the outdoors. Spending so much time in nature certainly has had that effect on her.

has contributed articles on food culture, *She has written three novels, including* the only historical fiction about the East Coast's worst earthquake. Her website is DeenaBouknightWriting.com





"Sweet Emotion," 2016, by Erin Babnik. Photo taken in the French Alps.

### **FINE ARTS**

### Giving Hope to Post-Revolutionary France

Ancient queens in French Academic paintings

### **KARA BLAKLEY**

French academic art encompasses numerous traditional genres, from portraiture to still-life, but histories of grand events may be among the most noteworthy of the period. These paintings take inspiration from the past, as the name implies, but artists elaborated on source materials to create nobler, more compelling narratives. Ancient, legendary queens, along with the captivating stories surrounding them, became especially alluring to French artists.

By the 19th century, academies of art were well-established throughout Europe, and the Académie des Beaux-Arts in France was a particular leader in training emerging artists in traditional techniques and subjects. Young apprentices studied under the tutelage of master artists, who in turn ensured that their pupils had opportunities to find patronage.

Likewise, the academy sponsored exhibitions, connected artists and patrons, and influenced public taste. During the first half of the 19th century, artists and patrons alike favored ancient history. This was due to decades of conflict in France. The French Revolution (1789–1799) and Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) left the French people searching for inspiration further in the past as they rebuilt their new nation.

Among the triumphant ancients is Zenobia of Armenia. William-Adolphe Bouguereau's 1850 painting, "Zenobia Found by Shepherds on the Banks of the Araxes" exemplifies the emotion and drama of surviving trauma against the odds—a sentiment that resonated with war-weary French

Bouguereau (1825–1905) is among the most well-known artists of the period. His oeuvre has rightfully become synonymous with French academicism. Bouguereau exquisitely created dynamic compositions and utilized both form and color to achieve an emotional and intellectual reaction from viewers. This effortless marriage of form and color—rather than prioritizing one over the other—is a key tenet of French academic art.

### The Story of Zenobia

Rhadamistus was the eldest son of King Pharasmanes I of Iberia during the Pharnavazid dynasty (third century B.C. to the second century A.D.). Fearing his own usurpation by his ambitious and impatient son, King Pharasmanes persuaded Rhadamistus to declare war on his uncle, King Mithridates of Armenia.

Rather than declaring war, Rhadamistus deceived his uncle by feigning an escape from a "feud" between him and his father,

Pharasmanes. Rhadamistus did so in order to strategize an invasion of Armenia.

Prince Rhadamistus-known for his ambition, strength, good looks, and valor—charmed his way into the Armenian royal family and married Princess Zenobia, daughter of King Mithridates. Rhadamistus then massacred Zenobia's monarchical family to usurp the throne for himself and ruled over Armenia alongside her in the early 50s B.C. Their reign was brief; the Armenian people revolted and drove Rha-



image of "Zenobia Found by Shepherds on the Banks of the Araxes," circa 1850, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau. Oil on canvas. Beaux-Arts de Paris, Paris.

Queen Zenobia to flee. Instead of escaping with Rhadamistus

damistus into exile, forcing both him and

and risking a shameful captivity by his enemies, Zenobia begged him to mercifully kill her with an "honorable" death. Rhadamistus refused at first but then relented. After his ghastly task was complete, he threw her into the river. Miraculously, Zenobia survived and compassionate shepherds healed her with their rustic remedies. They took her to the city of Artaxata where she lived a royal and peaceful life.

### William-Adolphe **Bouguereau's painting** exemplifies the emotion and drama of surviving trauma against the odds.

Bouguereau captures the most dramatic—and uplifting—moment of Zenobia's saga: the peasants saving the queen's life. There is subtle irony at play as France's own queen Marie Antoinette did not meet the same merciful fate 60 years earlier, but Bouguereau chose to portray and embrace the notions of redemption and unification. His sculptural figures and composition are rendered in a timeless manner, suggesting the universality of this ancient tale of salvation.

### Pierre-Narcisse Guérin's Queen Dido

HEAD SHOT STUDIO

I saw the

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photographs

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renderings,

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records,

or cheap

Erin Babnik,

photographer

souvenirs.

Famed academician Pierre-Narcisse Guérin (1774–1833) also chose a queenly subject for his 1815 masterpiece, "Aeneas Tells Dido About the Fall of Troy," which became a tremendous success at the Paris Salon of 1817. The salon was the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and this was possibly the most significant art event of the Western hemisphere during the 19th century.

Guérin, renowned for his artistic range, became director of the French Academy in Rome in 1822. In addition to his own contributions to the French Academy, his students included Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault—two of the most influential painters that France has ever produced.

Guérin, like many of his contemporaries, borrowed from ancient historical-mythological sources. His 1815 artwork portrays events from Book IV of Virgil's "Aeneid" (written between 29 and 19 B.C.). Virgil, one of ancient Rome's most esteemed poets, synthesized history, mythology, and literary tradition.

The "Aeneid" follows the Trojan hero Aeneas, who has fled the fallen city of Troy in order to fulfill his destiny of founding the city of Rome. During his voyage across neas finds himself in the North African kingdom of Carthage. There, he meets the powerful Queen Dido. In exchange for her hospitality, she asks the young traveler to regale her with tales of the Trojan Wars and his maritime adventures. Aeneas obliges, and with the help of Cupid's arrow, the two soon fall in love.

Guérin captures Dido staring adoringly at her guest, while Aeneas energetically relays his stories. While the portrait of the lovers evokes sentimentality, the artist also depicts an appealing Carthaginian landscape in the background. The artist's palette is sun-drenched, warm, and welcoming. This is noteworthy, as academic artists typically chose colors that would



"Aeneas Tells Dido About The Fall of Troy," circa 1815, by Pierre-Narcisse Guérin. Oil on canvas. Louvre Museum, Paris.

the Mediterranean, en route to Italy, Aebest communicate emotion and atmosphere to their viewers.

The gods commanded Aeneas to leave Carthage, however, as it was both his duty and his fate to establish Rome, and with it, the empire that would change the world forever. Grief stricken, Dido takes her own life once her suitor abandons her.

Although at first glance, the saga seems to have a tragic end, Guérin implies a more poignant, even optimistic, lesson: The founding of a great empire requires equally great sacrifices, but the faithful are rewarded for staying true to their course. After decades of upheaval in France—and sacrifice—Guérin's viewers could appreciate the promise of glorious times ahead.

Guérin, like Bouguereau, adapted stories of ancient queens for 19th-century audiences in order to celebrate the ascendance of the new French nation. Their academic style embraced a universality that would resonate with generations of viewers. Remarkably, they also developed a unique style that synthesized color and form, the emotional and the intellectual, and perhaps most importantly, beauty and purpose.

Dr. Kara Blakley is an independent art historian. She received her Ph.D. in Art History and Theory from the University of Melbourne in Australia and previously studied and taught in China and Germany.

FX

Dan Chase

Bridges)

and his

dogs, Dave

and Carol,

in "The Old

Elevation drawing of a villa project (recto), circa 1516, by Raphael; 97/8 inches by 141/4 inches. Presented by a body of subscribers, 1846; Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

**FINE ARTS** 

# Raphael: \_\_\_\_\_Architect, Archaeologist, and Protector of Ancient Rome

'The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael' at The National Gallery, London

### **LORRAINE FERRIER**

ONDON—Renaissance architects once used ancient Roman art as building materials. You read that right. In Rome, workmen quarried ancient sites and turned ancient sculptures and decorative arts into mortar. In a 1519 letter to Pope Leo X, Raphael and his friend the courtier and diplomat Baldassare Castiglione appealed to the pope Raphael "Prefect of Stones and Marbles." This to protect the city's ancient art. Both men latter role meant that he needed to be told of drafted the letter, but it's written as if it were any ancient ruins and that no inscribed stone from Raphael.

Rome, no matter grand she might be, or beau- **Understanding Antiquities** tiful, or adorned with palaces, churches and Raphael went to great lengths to study ancient other edifices, all was built with the mortar of ancient marbles!" Raphael wrote. Not only does Raphael lament the loss of

Italy's ancient art in his letter, but he also details his approach to architecture, archaeology, conservation, and techniques for his survey of ancient Rome, one of his most am-

The importance of this letter cannot be overstated. According to the website for the Palazzo Castiglioni (Castiglione's ancestral home), the "letter constitutes the founding document of the protection and conservation of Italy's historic and artistic heritage and of article 9 of the Italian Constitution."

### A Universal Artist

Visitors to The National Gallery, London, can see the letter, until July 31, in "The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael." They can also see on display more than 90 of Raphael's works across various media.

Exhibition visitors may be surprised at the depth of his work. Beyond his great paintings and drawings, he designed for print, tapestry, and applied arts. He was also an architect, an archaeologist, and an art theorist, the exhibition's co-curator Matthias Wivel said in a phone interview. Wivel hopes that visitors will be able to see that Raphael applied the same conceptual visual logic in all of his different activities.

Seeing the artist's letter on display in the exhibition with some of his architectural drawings puts his work as an architect and a protector of ancient art into context.

Raphael's architectural designs feature in many of his works, from large paneled altarpieces to his cartoons for the Sistine Chapel's tapestries. But a chance to see his original architecture, without additional structures (for instance) that have been added over the years, is rare. Even his tomb in the Pantheon has been added to. Anyone curious to see Raphael's original tomb that he designed can visit the Church of the Discalced Carmelites in Urbino, his birthplace. There, one can see a reconstruction that was made in 2020 for the "Raphael 1520–1483" exhibition at the Scuderie del Quirinale, in Rome.

Since a teenager, Raphael had been fascinated with architecture. Raphael the architect really blossomed in Rome after Pope Julius II invited him to the city on the recommendation of his architect Donato Bramante. Bramante came from Urbino, too, and knew of Raphael's work. In 1514, when Bramante died, Pope Leo X made Raphael the chief architect of St. Peter's Basilica and of the Vatican Palace; then in 1515, he made could be destroyed without his permission.

art and architecture. Renaissance architects climbed scaffolding to study, measure, and make their detailed architectural drawings of ancient buildings. He measured ancient structures up close, copying and comparing the architecture with treatises written by "the best authors," he noted in his letter. He even had humanist scholar Fabio Calvo stay in a room in his house while Calvo translated the 1st-century B.C. architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's "De Architectura" from Latin to Italian. (This was before Daniele Barbaro's and Andrea Palladio's famous translations.)

He wrote in his 1519 letter to the pope: "I believe that I have managed to acquire a certain understanding of the ancient architecture. This is something that gives me both the greatest pleasure, from the intellectual appreciation of such an excellent matter—and extreme pain—at the sight of what you could almost call the corpse of this great noble city, once queen of the world, so cruelly butchered."

### The Decline of Ancient Art

Raphael detailed the history of ancient architecture in his letter, and how "despite the fact that almost all the other arts had long been in decline, nonetheless architecture was respected and good theory was maintained."

He also saw how the architecture itself told the story of ancient art's demise. He wrote: "Of all the arts, it was architecture that was the last to be lost; this can be understood from the Arch of Constantine, whose design is beautiful and well executed as regards everything concerning its structure, while, on the other hand, the sculptures on this very arch have no taste, nor show any skill or redeeming qualities."

Perhaps seeing the pattern of ancient art's demise reemphasized to Raphael how important the practice of traditional art was. He wrote in the letter about how architects went about conducting his survey of ancient Rome: "Those who want to practice architecture ... be mindful that in our drafting of this work we did not allow ourselves to be governed by chance or practice alone, but we worked with well-informed theory."

### **Architectural Drawings**

In his letter, Raphael detailed the different types of architectural drawing needed for his survey. "Architectural drawing is divided into three types: ground plans (the building's footprint), elevations (the exterior wall and its ornaments) and sections (half the building inside, showing the correspondence of interior and exterior)," wrote Caroline Elam in the exhibition book. Architects created formal drawings in pen and ink, and washes.

Drawings that Raphael made of the Pantheon—"View Into the Pronaos (Entrance tones) under drawing in black chalk in some Portico)" and "Profile of the Entablature of the Main (Lower) Order of the Interior"—are in the exhibition but are artistic renderings rather than architectural drawings. For instance, for the profile of the entablature, he used perspective, so the quick sketches he made on the back of the paper are drawn as if viewed from below.

The catalog notes that the profile drawing may be a copy of an exact drawing: Raphael's or another architect's. Architects often copied other architectural drawings to save the time, effort, and probably danger of scaffold climbs. Raphael made several corrections to his drawing, perhaps after comparing it to the original building. One obvious change is the number of flower petals on a cornice.

His rare, finished drawing of a villa project, owned by the Ashmolean Museum, is an example of an elevation drawing that he would've presented to his patron to convey the project after extensive discussions.

It is an orthogonal drawing, which is a series of two-dimensional drawings used to show a three-dimensional object without perspective. But Raphael, like Michelangelo, used his artistic skills of perspective to add in details. He used a ruler, a "blind stylus" (a metal point), and a compass to plan the drawing. Yet he hastily added in the windows freehand.

Raphael's last surviving architectural drawing is a stage set: "Design for the right-hand wing of a stage set." He created light, shade, and solidity to the building in the drawing by layering diluted washes and then adding touches of white lead. At first glance, the drawing looks finished. But look closer and you'll notice that he left small unfinished details. He made a few marks suggesting an arm and the head of a person peering out of

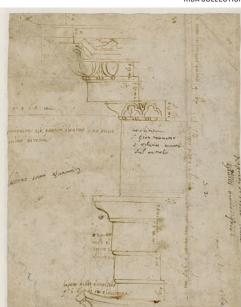
Exhibition visitors can now see only a copy of this drawing. Curators displayed the original work until June 20, but the copy protects the original from damage. This stresses the fragility of these works, and the expert considerations taken into account when works enter an exhibition. And indeed, what a rare treat it is to see some of these pieces.

For educated Romans of the upper class, Raphael's sudden death in 1520 (a



Week 30, 2022 THE EPOCH TIMES

Design for the right-hand wing of a stage set, 1519, by Raphael. Pen and ink with brown wash and white heightening on three pieces of paper, joined, over extensive stylus indentation preparation, with use of ruler and compass; 245/8 inches by 113/8 inches. Cabinet of Drawings and Prints, The Uffizi Gallery,



Profile of the entablature of the main (lower) order of the interior of the Pantheon, Rome (recto), circa 1515, by Raphael. Freehand drawing in iron gall ink in pen (two different Collections/Burlington-Devonshire Collection.

GABINETTO FOTOGRAFICO DELLE GALLERIE DEGLI UFFIZI



Interior of the Pantheon (recto), circa 1506-7, by Raphael. Pen and two different shades of brown ink, over traces of stylus indentation and limited use of a ruler; 10 7/8 inches by 16 inches. Cabinet of Drawings and Prints, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

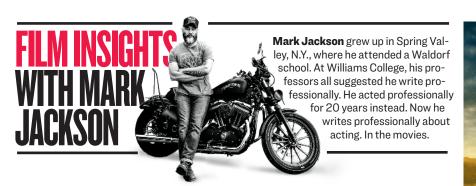
year after he wrote his letter to the pope) also meant the death of his ambitious survey of ancient Rome and a reconstruction of its architecture.

In Raphael's day, no formal architecture training existed. The marriage of ancient Rome and Renaissance Rome bred architectural professionalism. "[T]he Rome of Julius II, Leo X and their successors saw an increasing professionalisation of the practice of architecture," Elam wrote in the exhibition book. Architects, keen to learn from the past, made measured, detailed drawings of the ancient buildings that were constantly being excavated. And architects working on the new St. Peter's Basilica used ancient buildings for inspiration.

Elam wrote: "Raphael had a central part in all of this."

"The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael" at The National Gallery, London, runs through July 31. To find out more, visit NationalGallery.org.uk

The exhibition is curated by David Ekserdjian, professor of history of art and film at the University of Leicester; Tom Henry, professor of history of art (Emeritus) at the University of Kent; and Matthias Wivel, the Aud Jebsen curator of 16th-century Italian paintings at The National Gallery, London.



**TV SERIES REVIEW** 

# 'The Old Man': Decrepit, Deadly, and Downright Watchable

### **MARK JACKSON**

There are dead zones of un-hire-ability that actors need to navigate in order to extend a career that's inherently, constantly in jeopardy of drying up and blowing away. For example, a particularly difficult age is 28: too old to be the teen heartthrob, but too young to be the young dad.

Old age of course is the mother of all dead zones for actors of both genders, albeit much worse for women. Hollywood is ageist only if it can't figure out a way to make money off aging actors, and so former leading men have to figure out how to repackage themselves. Liam Neeson did it by becoming an aging action star in "Taken"; Tommy Lee Jones did the same as U.S. Marshal Sam Gerard in "The Fugitive."

Now that the senior-citizen-man-of-action king, Bruce Willis, has been by sidelined by illness, here comes Jeff Bridges, long past his "Dude" prime, playing Dan Chase (not his real name), an off-the-grid former CIA agent on the run from the FBI, in "The Old Man," a TV series based on the 2017 novel by Thomas Perry. It's definitely top-shelf, and Bridges's career is clearly in no danger of disappearing anytime soon.

Bridges, 72, plays Dan Chase, whom we first meet during a night of frequently interrupted sleep, featuring both enlarged prostategenerated bathroom trips and flashback nightmares about his deceased wife.

Relating this to his daughter Angela (Alia Shawkat) on the phone, she fondly recalls her youth, when it seemed that no one could ever hurt him. "Where did that guy go?" she wonders. "You weren't very bright as a kid," he jokingly replies. "I just got good at lying to you.'

bill of health, his gut instinct regarding his repeatedly disturbed sleep causes him to eventually jury-rig a homemade tripwire from some fishing line and empty tin cans, which, along with his two Rottweilers Dave and Carol, catches a man with a gun sneaking into his house. Now Dan may be old, but Dan knows jiujitsu, and Dan know guns, and forthwith dispatches the intruder with a choke and a bullet.

When Dan's 911 call brings the cops sniffing around, and he, appropriating a fake senior quaver, explains how he plans to go stay with family for a while—he has an actual senior moment. He forgets to remove the silencer from the intruder's gun, thus inadvertently allowing the cops to surmise that this was no common intruder but an assassin. And what the cops know, the FBI knows.

Dan tells Angela to prepare for a lengthy period of radio silence—he needs to hole up someplace for a while, which causes her anguish. But Dan can't manage to stay off the phone with her for long, and while he thought he was talking to her on an untraceable burner phone, he soon gets a call from former military teammate-turned-nemesis Harold Harper (John Lithgow), the assistant director for FBI counterintelligence.

Harper's been called out of retirement specifically to deal with Dan's situation.

'The Old Man' is a TV series based on the 2017 novel by Thomas Perry.



Dan Chase's daughter Angela (Alia Shawkat) is a major part of his life.

### 'The Old Man'

Director:

Jon Watts Starring: Jeff Bridges, Jon Lithgow, Alia Shawkat, Bill Heck. Amy Brenneman, Leem Lubany, Joel Grey **MPAA Rating:** 

Running Time: TV Series, 5 episodes: 1 hour, 1 minute **Release Date:** June 16, 2022

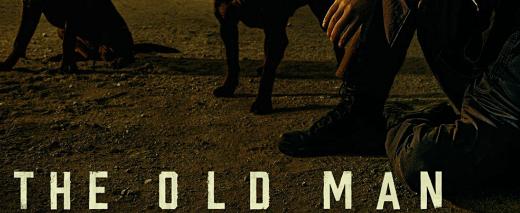
This man, Dan Chase

(Jeff Bridges) doesn't

look like a dangerous

operative, but he is.

\*\*\*\*



Harper chastises Dan for being so decrepit as to forget to hide a hitman's silencer.

The two old warriors are clueless as to why Dan is suddenly a subject of interest again (not entirely clueless). But Harper also wants their shared past to stay buried. Harper's willing to look the other way while Dan exits stage left, but warns Dan that he has no idea how much the spy game has evolved. He suggests Dan simply disappear and let his daughter go forever.

Dan, again, wants no part of that. He threatens Harper that he'll sing and inculpate him, to which the unfazed Harper replies, "I've got 10,000 agents and a billiondollar budget to make up for whatever edge I've lost—what do you have?"

Basically, the back story (told convincingly in flashbacks by actor Bill Heck as the younger Dan Chase) is that when Chase was in Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War, he got on a warlord's (Pej Vahdat) hitlist due to attracting the warlord's wife's emotions (Leem Lubany) like iron filings to a magnet. And that warlord wants payback.

### The Good Stuff

This dude may be grizzled, but he's also deadly. That's the satisfying hook that makes this show such an invigorating and surprising thriller. That, plus the mysterious dynamic between these two national-treasure-status American actors. Bridges's and Lithgow's cat-and-mouse game is highly reminiscent of Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones in "The Fugitive." The difference from "The Fugitive" is that

'The Old Man" is more complicated. Harrison Ford's character, Dr. Richard Kimble, was a moral titan, whereas it's not entirely clear whether Dan Chase is a hero or a villain. It's OK, because we always enjoy an old man who's still very much a lethal force of nature not to be messed with.

Similar to Ford's Kimble is Dan Chase's chivalry toward his daughter (who's also got an extremely complex and fascinating twist). However, the brutal hand-to-hand combat scenes come out of nowhere and catch you off guard.

The Hostage Has Teeth Chase is also chivalrous to Zoe (Amy

no dogs allowed.

Brenneman), an older, bitter, and initially prickly divorced woman into whose guesthouse Chase moves after shooting the would-be hit man. Dan makes Zoe food a couple of times to help calm her nerves and, after watching this strapping older man with excellent hair act dad-like and chef-like in her kitchen with a cozy air of caretaking, Zoe asks Dan on a date. It may also be the case that he thusly, calculatedly, schmoozed her into letting go of her guest-deal-breaker of

After witnessing one of Dan's handto-hand combat scenes with a new assailant take place on her kitchen floor, however, she's suddenly seen too much and, in mob vernacular, she's gotta go. Or be schlepped along as cumbersome hostage baggage. Dan's inclined toward the latter option, so perhaps that's also chivalrous in a limited sense.

But Brenneman's Zoe's sudden refusal of victimhood is startling. She pulls a legal fast one that Dan didn't see coming, and says, "I want to amount to more than just a complication in your story."

The elder Mr. Chase, while initially cursing this out-of-the-blue entanglement, eventually warms to the fact that, although this random woman is not a highly trained CIA operative, she has every bit of the talent required to be just that, and then some. She's a match for him. Can you say "eventual soul mate"?

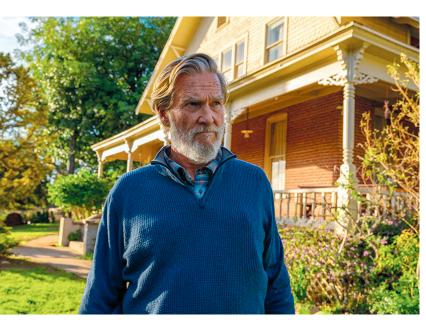
T-Bone Burnett, who produced "Crazy Heart" and the music for Bridge's char ter Bad Blake therein, is also heavily on the soundtrack for "The Old Man," enhancing what is already absorbing, addictive viewing.

But again, it's the dynamic of Harper's effectiveness (due to extensive FBI resources) being undercut by his ambivalence about letting skeletons out of the closet, versus Chase's somewhat deteriorated but still highly uncanny instincts for self-preservation, that provides a delicious tension.

"The Old Man" is now available to stream on Disney+ and Hulu.



Dan Chase Bridges) and Brenneman) on a date.





Bridges) pretends to be doddering in the presence of two policemen.

**TV DOCUSERIES REVIEW** 

### Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward Get the Deserved Royal Treatment

MICHAEL CLARK

In the mid-1980s, Paul Newman recorded over 100 interviews with his friends, family, film industry associates, and even his ex-wife Jackie Witte, for the purpose of preparing a memoir to be co-penned by Stewart Stern (the screenwriter of "Rebel Without a Cause" and "Rachel, Rachel" among others). For reasons known only to him, Newman abandoned the project and burned the recordings.

It's never made clear if Stern had transcribed the tapes before Newman destroyed them, but the voluminous pages ultimately landed in the hands of Newman's daughter Clea, a friend of Ethan Hawke.

A devotee of Newman's since seeing him in "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" as a child, Hawke enthusiastically accepted Clea's request to make better use of the transcripts. And the end result is the HBO Max docuseries "The Last Movie Stars."

**Not All Unicorns and Rainbows** 

The happiest

(L-R) Guido

of families:

(Roberto

Benigni),

(Nicoletta

and Giosuè

Braschi),

(Giorgio Cantarini),

in "Life Is

Beautiful.'

Dora

Newman and Joanne Woodward, his second wife of over 50 years, were the rarest of Hollywood couples. While there are dozens of other celebrities who were or have been married longer, none of these pairings include two acting legends. Like practically every other married couple in history, the Newmans had their ebbs and flows. At one point she threatened to divorce him over his ever-increasing alcohol intake, and his smart-aleck retort was that he'd give up hard liquor and drink only beer and wine. She agreed to the terms and they moved on.

This wasn't the first or last bump in their long journey. In a 1968 interview with "Playboy," when asked about the temptation of straying, Newman replied:

"There's no reason to roam. I have steak at home. Why should I go out

Something that the established Newman-Woodward base is keenly aware of (but perhaps not casual viewers) is the misconception that his career always overshadowed and Lose the Zoom eclipsed hers. From the time they'd met in the 1953 stage play "Picnic" to beyond her Oscar win for the 1957 film "The Three Faces of Eve," Newthe know considered Woodward to be a far more talented thespian.

She was a follower of "the method" and he over-thought his craft. Newthe studios as a second-rate version of James Dean or Marlon Brando.

car nominations for "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (1958) and "The Hustler" (1961), it was with the titular role in "Hud" in 1963 that Newman's career hit full stride. At the same time, Woodward chose to put her career on the back burner and devoted the bulk of her efforts to child rearing (the three she had with Newman and three he'd

The couple's career pendulum had swung fully and permanently in Newman's direction. He became and remained the top male box office draw

Had the series been solely about the two leads' courtship, marriage, and parallel careers, Hawke could've covered it all

three or so hours. Yet, while these their son Scott.

Appearing in but not alongside his father in "The Towering Inferno," Scott inherited Newman's gene for alcohol overuse (and on top of that, substance abuse), but nary an iota of his acting talent. He wasn't the first child to try and emulate a famous parent and he

of him. Scott died of a drug and alcohol overdose in 1978.

for hamburger?"

For many, this would be received as a compliment and an unwavering declaration of love and commitment, yet Woodward took umbrage at being compared to a piece of meat.

Most Newman-Woodward fans later, the "Hole in the weren't aware of her displeasure over this and the "drinking ultimatum" incident. The fact that Hawke includes them here is testament to his desire to avoid sycophantic fawning or cranking out biased, pure rose-coloredglasses fan service.

man was regarded by his peers and

The Pendulum Swings

Although he'd previously received Osfathered with Witte).

for slightly beyond the next

and done so thoroughly in

subplots have threads running for the entire length of the production, the final two installments put the focus on what transpired after the death of

won't be the last, and it eventually got the best

A man who stated

that his only parental achievement was in teaching his children how to drive, Newman was shaken to the core over his son's death, which he took to his grave. In 1980, he founded a drug treatment center in Scott's name and,

Wall Gang" camp serving child cancer patients and their

Arguably, Newman's greatest latein-life achievement was the 1982 creation of the "Newman's Own" brand of retail food products, which to date has donated in excess of \$550 million after-tax and post-production cost profits to assorted charities.

While Hawke and editor Barry Poltermann masterfully assembled the nuts and bolts of the production (the interview re-creations, still photos, man and practically everyone else in news reels, film and TV excerpts), they also made the iffy decision to include what, in any other instance, would be considered to be B-roll or home video bonus content.

The opening title sequence in the

actors (via Zoom calls) "geeking out" over Newman and Woodward, who are first seen in the "bankvault" scene from "Mr. & Mrs. Bridge" (their last of 16 movies together). This, in itself, isn't

series features Hawke and the voice

a bad thing as all are fans of the Golden Age of Hollywood they're about to celebrate, but the continuity of the series as a whole suffers because of it. It doesn't help matters that the visual quality of the Zoom footage ranges from mediocre to downright awful.

In total, these informative but

distracting back-and-forths

(peppered throughout

the entire production)

take up roughly 20 percent of the almost six-hour running time. Had these passages been excised and put together as a stand-alone "making of" featurette, the overall quality of the docuseries would easily go from a

soft four to a solid five stars.

**Last Power Couple** 

Director

Ethan Hawke in

2020.

Last Movie Stars"? Some would say Clint Eastwood, Harrison Ford, Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, and George Clooney (who voices Newman here) are indeed "movie stars," but they are all solo acts.

Were Newman and Woodward "The

Julia Roberts, Jessica Lang, and Cate Blanchett may not be single, but their partners do not share the same limelight. As for married acting teams, none have before or since ever achieved the same legacy and stay-

ing power on and off the screen more than Newman and Woodward.

Originally from Wash-

ington, D.C., Michael

film content to over 30

print and online media

outlets. He co-founded

the Atlanta Film Critics

Clark has provided

misconception that Paul Newman's career always overshadowed Circle in 2017 and is and eclipsed

a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaMan-Joanne Radio.com. Since 1995, Woodward's. Mr. Clark has writ-

> reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

### 'The Last Movie Stars'

**Director:** 

Ethan Hawke **Docuseries** 

Voice actors: George Clooney, Laura Linney, Sam Rockwell, Zoe Kazan, Vincent D'Onofrio

**Running Time:** 5 hours, 58 minutes

July 21, 2022

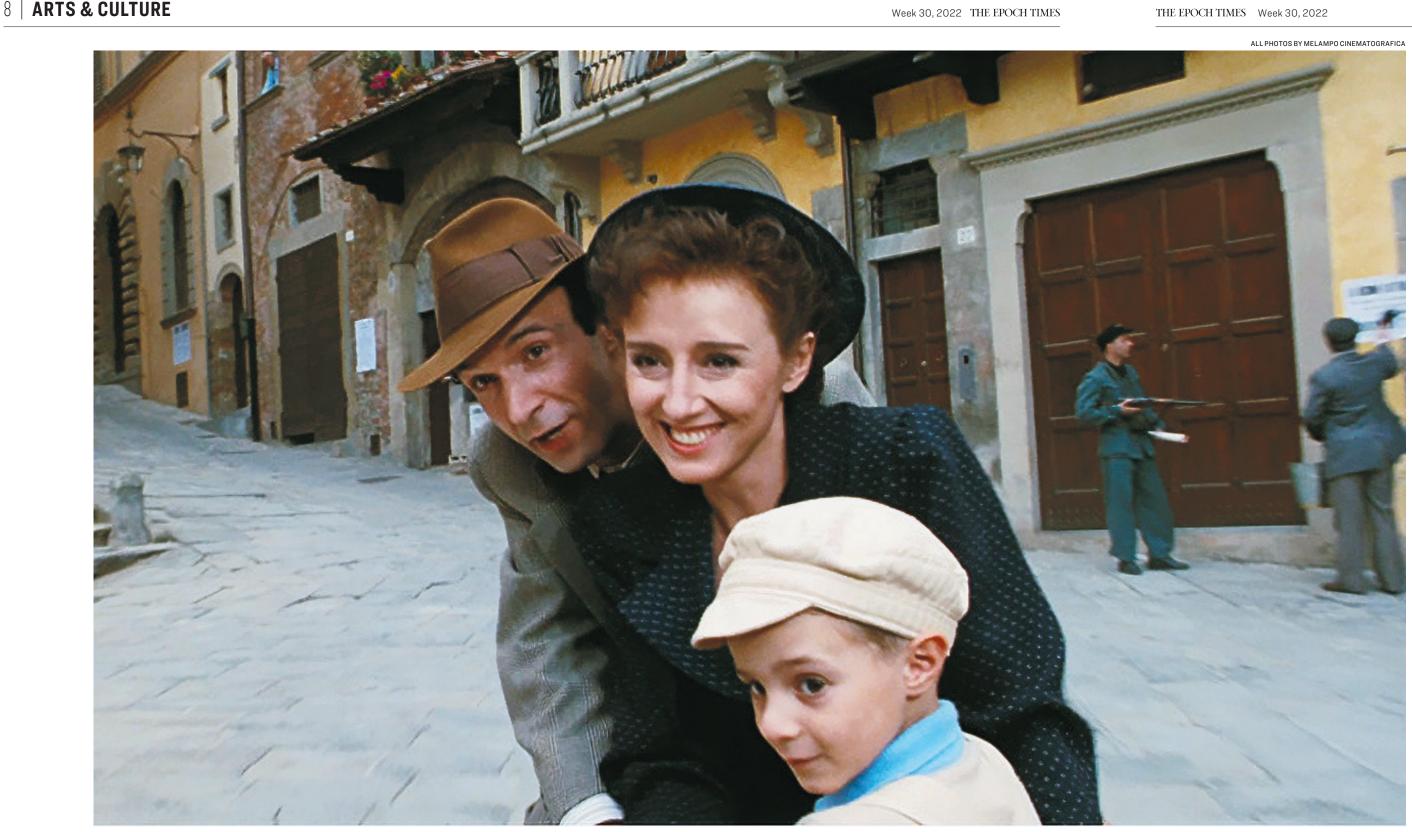








1. Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward on the red carpet at the 41st Academy Awards, April 14, 1969. 2. Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman attend a reception for a special screening of "The Woodsman" in New York City on Jan. 10, 2004. 3. Joanne Woodward on March 27, 1958, with her husband, Paul Newman, after winning the Academy Award for Best Actress.



**POPCORN AND INSPIRATION** 

# A Fable of Love and Truth

Love's truth creates the hope to endure suffering

### **RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ**

his year marks the 25th anniversary of Roberto Benigni's classic "Life Is Beautiful" (1997), which eign Language Film, and Score). spared. More on that later. This tragi-comedy is about an early 20th century Italian-Jewish waiter, a Chaplin- camp, a smilingly defiant Guido conjures esque Guido (Roberto Benigni who writes, a game that requires a still-playful Giosuè acts in, and directs the film). He marries a to stay quiet and stay hidden, not even cryschoolteacher, Dora (Benigni's wife Nicoletta Braschi), and they live a blissful life with their 5-year-old boy, Giosuè (Giorgio

Cantarini). Guido's slapstick actions, often silly, turn tank beyond his dreams. every mundane moment into something magical. So, their ordinary lives feel extract his son, and possibly himself. Guido traordinary. His gift for concocting coincidences mid-conversation sweeps his some chance of surviving camp atrocities. listeners off their feet, sometimes quite literally. In wooing Dora for instance, he

gate-crashes her school, goofing around

as a school inspector, and he shows up at the opera and steals her from her fiancé, in pouring rain.

Then, Nazis destroy their little heaven, condemning father and son to a concentrawon three Oscars (Best Actor, Fortion camp. Dora, not being Jewish, is first

Facing hard labor and hunger in the ing for food or water or to see his mother. For if he plays by his father's "rules," he'll "win" enough "points" for a prize: Not the toy army tank of his dreams, but a real-life

In reality, that's just Guido's ruse to disfigures that, thus cocooned, they'll stand

The film is still, unfairly, accused of spoofing or softening the Holocaust. It

does nothing of the sort. On the contrary,

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The stoic

anguish of

those who

survived real

Nazi camps

influenced

screenplay.

Benigni's

(Left) Dora (Nicoletta Braschi) chooses to endure a Nazi concentration camp to share the fate of her nusband and son.

(Bottom left) Roberto Benigni as Guido in one of the imaginative scenes in the comic first half of the film.

'Life Is Beautiful'

PG-13 Release Date: Dec. 20, 1997

Director: Roberto Benigni Roberto Benigni, Nicoletta Braschi MPAA Rating: Running Time: 1 hour, 56 minutes it condemns inhumanity. It starts out as a cheery romantic farce, but suddenly it turns into a mournful reflection on hope and its flip side, despair.

Benigni doesn't care for scenes of sadism, torture, or gore; audiences already have that from other filmmakers. The Holocaust here is a backdrop, not the main event. Benigni's camera doesn't show us much of it, but we see enough in the troubled eyes of

his beloved trio. Benigni's eyes are elsewhere: on love and truth. His film argues that love is easy to spot. Find sacrifice, and you'll find love. Falsehood? It accompanies every display of selfishness, every hatred, every pride. Love? Even when playing hide-and-seek from

falsehood, love itself can never be false. A refugee, even one hiding in plain sight, isn't deceitful if he's merely fleeing tyranny or shielding his family or protecting their freedom. And it is love's truth that, seemingly magically, creates the hope to endure suffering.

### Love Is Not Blind or Weak, But Clear-Sighted and Strong

At one point, Dora rushes to the train that's taking Guido and Giosuè to a camp. She pleads with the commandant. There must be some error. He checks. There is none. Father and son are on the list. She isn't. Smoke billowing from the train's chimney feels like a threat, a harbinger of furnaces awaiting them at camp.

In spite of sensing, however faintly, that horrific fate ahead, Dora "chooses" to board with them. A stunned commandant complies. But Dora is clear. Their life is hers. If there's anything to be endured, they'll endure it together.

utter dependence on giving and receiving love make her weak? Or strong? To Benigni, it's the supremacists who are "blind" to humanity around them, denying

Is she blind? Or clear-sighted? Does her

truth and worshiping falsehood. As a waiter, Guido entertains restaurant customer Dr. Lessing (Horst Buchholz), whose genial fondness for Guido is a re-

ward for indulging his weakness for riddles. As a prisoner at camp, however, Guido discovers to his horror that Lessing, as a Nazi captain, fails to "see" his favorite waiter. He sees nothing more than a riddlesolver and, eventually, not even that. A rare moment when the usually smiling Guido

is serious, speechless, stunned. In touching irony, the captain, imprisoned in his own mind, pleads with his Jewish prisoner: "Help me, please, for heaven's sake, help me!"

Benigni's cinematic tool is irony. And he wields it to unveil his sense of truth, of love. Showing his nephew around the house, Guido's Uncle Eliseo says in mock indifference, "That's the bed. Legend has it Garibaldi slept there. ... Nothing is more necessary than the unnecessary."

That's Benigni playing on what can be likened to the typical high-society dinner table discussion of the time. For, only minutes later, his camera captures Dora at the table, hearing her elite hosts hotly discussing the "savings" the state would make if "unnecessary" cripples, lunatics, and epileptics were eliminated.

Benigni plays on truth and falsehood, too. The "truthful" but brutal state acts in broad daylight: ransacking homes, arresting innocents, and openly brainwashing schoolchildren in a classroom. The "lying" Guido, however, keeps disguising himself: as a surprises for his son, and in a futile attempt to reach Dora, even as a woman prisoner. Who is lying? Who is truthful?

### Love Is Nothing If It Isn't Shared

One night at camp, Guido, as temp-waiter at the Nazi officers' quarters, is serving officers and their families. If only for a few hours away from the squalor of the camp, he's amid fine clothes, exotic food, wine.

And music on a gramophone. He uses that chance to turn on the soul-stirring "Barcarolle" by Jacques Offenbach, which first brought him and Dora together. Guido isn't playing music. He's trying to reach Dora in a distant prison-dorm. As Benigni's camera soars up and across the yard, you feel each melancholic chord uniting them in an invisible bond, unscarred by the brick walls and barbed wires.

Here, it isn't shared joy that unites them but shared sorrow. Their love doesn't mind what life throws their way. As long as they can share it, it won't matter, even if it's sorrow.

### **When Moral Darkness Overwhelms**

The stoic anguish of those who survived real Nazi camps (Rubino Romeo Salmoni who wrote the book "In the End, I Beat Hitler," and Benigni's father, Luigi) influenced Benigni's screenplay. It appears that renowned therapist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl did, too. Frankl's landmark book, "Man's Search for Meaning" (1946), draws on his years in a camp. His psychotherapeutic path affirms that a "purposeful" life becomes its own incentive to endure life's tragedies.

For Guido, it's simpler. His life's highest "purpose" is to love and be loved. Anything less and he wilts.

Frankl died the year this film was released. As if in tribute, Guido adamantly celebrates every sliver of sunny light, even in the face of overwhelming moral darkness. In the indescribable desolation of that concentration camp, Guido treasured but two slivers of light: Dora and Giosuè. For him, they were enough.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture. **REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE** 

### Rome Burns Under Nero, While Early Christians Teach Love

'Where are you going?' is a question for us today

### **RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ**

The film "Quo Vadis" ("QV"), directed by Mervyn LeRoy, centers around the love of Commander Marcus Vinicius (Robert Taylor) for a former slave, Lygia (an incandescent Deborah Kerr), now an adopted daughter of a Roman family. This story is set during the reign of Nero (an astonishingly young Peter Ustinov, in his 20s), who burns Rome for his own purposes and blames Christians, who are thrown into the Colosseum to be martyred.

Sienkiewicz's story pits ancient Rome against early Christians.

### Nero's Rome

Who embodies Rome in director LeRoy's film? The mad—and maddening—Emperor Nero, Cmdr. Vinicius, and Nero's adviser Petronius (an impeccable Leo Genn).

Who embodies the Christians? Slave girl Lygia and her giant bodyguard Ursus (6 1/2 foot tall American boxer Buddy Baer). From the bath in which Vinicius sits, the camera gapes up at the mighty Ursus as he fills the doorway, bearing a giant cauldron of water that even three men would struggle with.

Like earlier emperors, Nero treats Rome as his property. Only, he's worse. He lights a city up with about as much thought as a chain-smoker lights up a cigarette, never mind that the city houses thousands of citizens. Likewise, Vincius treats Lygia as his property.

Conquest is Rome's "truth," the language it understands and transacts in. Lygia gently repels that "truth" with a more powerful truth: love.

Love conquers too, just differently. Unlike the flame of lust, love's fire doesn't consume, doesn't burn up, doesn't burn down, doesn't burn out. Love endures.

### Lust for Blood

Nero, like modern-day Neros, is whimsical and wicked. Petronius wields just enough wit to match the emperor's waffle. Together, they form a grimly funny political satire team not too different from those in White House films such as "Dave" or "My Fellow Americans," or in TV farces such as "Parks and Recreation" or "Three's Company"; only one of two speakers is ever serious.

The minute citizens realize that Nero's lust for power has lit up Rome, they charge his palace, just as his terrified advisers cut to the chase.

Nero (frantic): "What do they want? Justice?"

Nero's Advisers: "No mob ever wants justice. They want vengeance. A victim!"

Cornered, they conjure a minority—Christians—who can serve as bait for the mob's lust for blood. Frankly, any minority will satiate, as long as those chosen can't defend themselves.

As Rome burns, a belatedly conscientious Petronius chastises himself. He should have spoken the truth and exposed Nero for the walking corpse that he is: "I could have gone to the mob and told them that Nero burned Rome.... But I did not... because out of force of long habit, I've become content only to be an amused cynic, a selfish onlooker, leaving others to shape the world."

Stunned, a desperate Vinicius turns to Petronius.

Petronius: "Did you not hear his orators at the street corners? Already the people are being given the story, along with grain and wine, that it was the Christians and not Nero who set fire to Rome."

Vinicius: "They won't believe such a lie!" Petronius: "But they are believing it. People will believe any lie if it is fantastic enough."

### Of Its Time

LeRoy is in no hurry to show off the grandeur of his sets. It isn't until a full half hour that you see (in a scene lasting over seven minutes) the spectacle that Rome is used to. Crowds in the thousands, in a stadium-sized court-yard: dancers, musicians, roaring spectators, pagan priests, skyscraper-sized statues of the gods. Pan and tracking shots of horse-drawn chariots thundering through the country-



Director and producer Mervyn LeRoy puts a crown on actor Peter Ustinov during the filming of "Quo Vadis." Ustinov is dressed in costume as the Roman Emperor Nero.

The script bristles with conversations that wouldn't be out of place in the corridors of contemporary power.

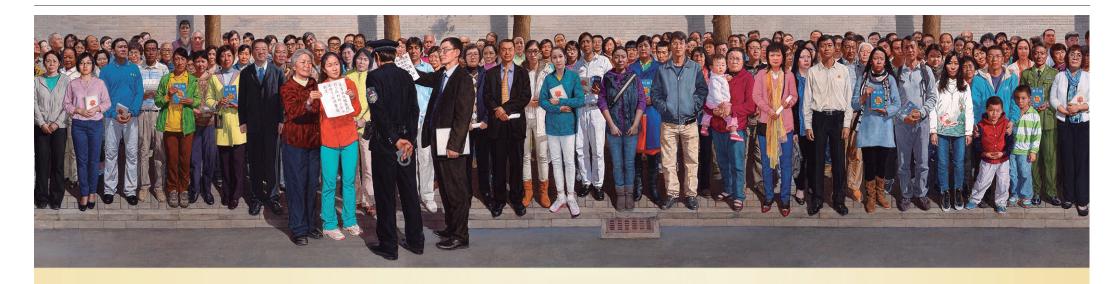
side. And some 30,000 costumes.

In light of the totalitarianism in parts of the world today, only occasionally does producer Sam Zimbalist's "Quo Vadis" look and feel like satire. Though set in A.D. 64, the script bristles with conversations that wouldn't be out of place in the corridors of contemporary power; you can almost hear them echo through some air-conditioned corridor, as if from last evening, or last week.

You'll need to be patient with the film's leisurely pace, its indulgences, its distractions, unwieldy romantic subplots, and English accents jostling with those of Italian, American, and Scottish. But MGM had been wrestling with a screen version of Sienkiewicz's novel from as far back as 1925; their fits and starts straddled a bruising six-year world war. Pared-down storytelling may have helped endear it to wider, younger audiences, but "QV" is a product of its time.

You've seen the CGI-pumped "Gladiator" (2000) and "Troy" (2004)? Now imagine the audacity of filming "QV" so realistically, decades before special effects and CGI overwhelmed Hollywood. "QV" must be judged by its ambition: to show moral decay full-scale. By that yardstick, it's outstanding.

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