

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

JURE BABNIK



Photographer
Erin Babnik
working on the
Italian side of the
Mont Blanc
massif.

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.

Continued on Page 4

LITERATURE

Prairie Rose: A Bold Defender of American Liberty

JEFF MINICK

the title “Young Pioneers.”

Today, Rose Wilder Lane (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 in public.

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: “Everyone 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 her political philosophy, we might take up her 1933 novel “Let the Hurricane Roar,” now published under

the title “Let the Hurricane Roar” 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 supply.

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 by themselves. Yet both Caroline and Charles were born to parents and into a culture that stressed, as did Rose, the importance of self-reliance.

On Her Own

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 circumstances, daily fearing some new calamity 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, 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 and victory.

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 fought for it even against her. He must not lose his pride; it was their most precious possession.”

Optimism

“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 freedom were considered radical, 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 American would talk like that. She said sharply, “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, self-reliance, and the burdens and glories of individualism.



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

men that make a country.”

The Legacy

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. Yet in this interview, Rose also said 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.”

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.

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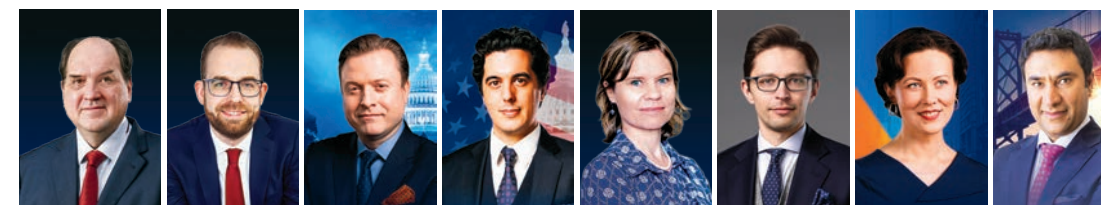
Rose Wilder Lane, circa 1905–1910. National Archives.

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

PHOTOGRAPHY

WILDERNESS PHOTOGRAPHER CREATES A SENSE OF PLACE

Continued from Page 1

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 post-processing.

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 metaphorical 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."

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 emerg-

ing 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 citizens.

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-



PUBLIC DOMAIN
A cropped 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.

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



"Blockbuster," 2018, by Erin Babnik. Photo taken in the Italian Dolomites.

HEAD SHOT STUDIO



“I saw the potential for photographs to be more than redundant renderings, imperfect records, or cheap souvenirs.”

Erin Babnik, photographer

strenuous hiking, tent or hut accommodations, early pre-sunrise equipment setups, and even stormy weather observations.

She further acknowledges that taking workshop students into the wilds of an area, maybe for the first time in their lives, can deepen their regard and respect for the outdoors. Spending so much time in nature certainly has had that effect on her.



(Above) "Enigma," 2017, by Erin Babnik. Photo taken in Death Valley National Park, California.

(Below) "Grand Opening," 2018, by Erin Babnik. Photo taken in the Dolomites, Italy.



A 30-plus-year writer/journalist, Deena C. Bouknight works from her Western North Carolina mountain cottage and has contributed articles on food culture, travel, people, and more to local, regional, national, and international publications. 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.

damistus into exile, forcing both him and Queen Zenobia to flee.

Instead of escaping with Rhadamistus 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 ren-

dered in a timeless manner, suggesting the universality of this ancient tale of salvation.

Pierre-Narcisse Guérin's Queen Dido

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

the Mediterranean, en route to Italy, Aeneas 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



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

best 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 ascendancy 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.

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 gazes 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, Vinicius 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 courtyard: 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.

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.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture and lives in India.

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



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