

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



SACRED ART

A New World of Heavenly Art

New arts born from the Spanish colonization of the New World in an exhibition at the LA County Museum of Art

LORRAINE FERRIER

Oh heavens above! In a circular painting by 18th-century Mexican artist Antonio de Torres, a glorious Virgin hovers in heaven among a swirl of pastel clouds. As the Virgin looks up to God, she emanates divine light. A 12-starred halo crowns her head as she stands on a crescent moon, with a jolly sun peeking out from behind her; each of these motifs refers to Revelations 12:1 in the Bible. Saints surround her, with some gazing adoringly up at her, and others gazing out of the painting to encourage our faith.

De Torres's jubilant painting is packed

full of devout meaning, exquisite details, and a big surprise: It's only seven inches in diameter and is a Mexican nun's badge that Conceptionist and Hieronymite nuns pinned to their habits, at their throats. (Friars pinned similar badges to their capes.)

Nuns' and friars' badges are a unique Mexican tradition that began in the 17th century. Yet the badges' paintings connect to age-old European traditions. De Torres's circular painting harks back to the popular Florentine Renaissance tradition of tondo (circular) painting, which was itself inspired by ancient medals. An artist needed to be a skilled draftsman to conquer the circular composition.

Mexico's eminent artists created badges

that echoed the grandeur of their paintings. On each badge, the artist painted a central biblical scene, with popular choices being the Annunciation (where the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have a son, Jesus) or the Immaculate Conception (the Catholic belief that Jesus's mother was born without sin). The artists then filled the edges with flowers, cherubs, angels, and saints according to the badge owner's preference and religious order. For instance, Mexican painter José de Páez created a delightful rectangular friar's badge of the Nativity, with God watching over the Holy Family.

Continued on Page 4

▲ A nun's badge with the Immaculate Conception and saints, Mexico, circa 1720, attributed to Antonio de Torres. Oil on copper; diameter: 7 inches. Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

2022 NTD 8TH INTERNATIONAL CHINESE VOCAL COMPETITION



GOLD AWARD \$10,000
Merkin Hall-KMC
NEW YORK Sep. 2022

VOCAL.NTDTV.COM

REGISTER
+1-888-477-9228
VOCAL@GLOBALCOMPETITIONS.ORG



An illustration for "Uncle Tom's Cabin," from the novel that, as Lincoln put it, helped start the Civil War.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Under Construction: Repairing Western Civilization One Reader at a Time

JEFF MINICK

When we think of the world's most influential books, a host of titles might come to mind: the epics of the ancient world, the Bible, the Quran, the philosophies left to us by the likes of Plato, Aristotle, and Marcus Aurelius, and so on down through the centuries. The possibilities appear inexhaustible.

If we narrow our search to those most central to Western thought and literature, we could do worse than to point to the 54-volume set, "Great Books of the Western World," first published in 1952 and later issued in expanded editions. In this sturdy battalion, we meet such thinkers as Greek playwrights and mathematicians, Shakespeare and Cervantes, and Pascal and Newton.

Restrict our list to American authors who helped shape our nation, and Thomas Paine, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Upton Sinclair, Ida Tarbell, and William James are only a few of the grenadiers in these ranks.

If we select just one author from this company—let's pick Harriet Beecher Stowe—we find that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" contributed mightily to the abolitionist movement and the efforts to end slavery during the Civil War. In 1862, so the story goes, on meeting the diminutive Stowe, President Abraham Lincoln called her "the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." In 1852, the year it was published, Stowe's novel sold 300,000 copies in the United States and more than 1.5 million in the UK.

So there was truth in Lincoln's remark. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" did considerably affect Northern sensibilities and the war against slavery.

But let's not forget that the hundreds of thousands of readers who had visited that novel were those who helped that idea become reality. In the equation matching the impact of literature on the culture, we often forget that it is the spellbound reader who brings a book to life and into the public square. It is the man or woman sitting alone at a kitchen table or in a coffee shop—having absorbed the soul of a novel or some tome of philosophy, history, or science—who then gives blood, breath, and bone to the spirit found in paper and ink.

"The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783" by Alfred Thayer Mahan, whom renowned military historian John Keegan considered "the most important American strategist of the nineteenth century," was studied by politicians and military leaders in both Europe and America. Vladimir Lenin absorbed the works of Karl Marx and exercised those ideas with murderous effect following the Russian Revolution. Millions of men and women bought Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" and heeded the advice of that bestseller. In the last six years, sales of George Orwell's decades-old "1984" boomed as citizens concerned over political turmoil sought explanations and help from that dystopian novel.

In addition to swaying and affecting the culture at large, authors and books

can transform the hearts and minds of individual readers, shaping their personalities and rendering them the bearers of the best of our civilization.

An Old-School Reader

Several friends and family members always keep at least one book at hand and often interject its contents into our discussions. A retired college professor, a veterinarian, a hospice nurse, and a guy who plays the market and describes himself as a "dangerously underinformed put trader": These are some people I know who go through several books a month.

But the gentleman who hands down wins the gold crown as a reader was Mr. Robert Porter. A widower and a librarian long retired from a private New England school, Mr. Porter occasionally visited the bookshop I then operated in Waynesville, North Carolina. He spoke crisply, looked like an aged version of Mr. Peepers played long ago by actor Wally Cox, and rarely purchased anything, but one day he called the shop and asked me to come to his house and look at some books.

I had expected a few boxes of rough-looking books. Instead, I found myself standing beside a double row of fine books piled high as my knees that ran half the length of the garage. In these stacks were scores of the old blue Oxford Classics, scores more of Modern Library books, and a hundred other gems whose titles I knew and whose texts I loved.

The collection would not appeal to an antiquarian bookseller. The books were not rare, and most were marked in pen "Helen and Robert Porter" along with Mr. Porter's remarks in pencil, but I felt as if I had stumbled into a bookman's treasure trove.

When I told Mr. Porter that I lacked the money to pay for this vanload of literature, he informed me the books were a gift and that if I insisted on paying him, he would withdraw the offer. Of course, I took the books. There were so many inscribed with his name that some repeat customers to the store asked if we had gotten any more "Porters" in stock. Over the next year we became friends of a sort. I learned that he and his wife, Helen, had read to each other every day of their long marriage, often with one of them reading aloud while the other washed dishes or painted a porch. Though I considered myself a bibliophile, from his books and references in our conversations—he was a fan of English poets before the 20th century and seemed an expert on the New England transcendentalists—I knew I ranked as an amateur compared to his vast knowledge of literature.

Robert and Helen had shared their love of the written word with the students at school and later, when they moved south, with the community in Waynesville, joining the arts council and supporting the community theater. They left their mark on the culture.

And when Mr. Porter died, he carried a library into the grave.

Bridges in Need of Repair

Being familiar with so many authors—

Lamb and Emerson, Keats and Dickinson, Conrad, Dickens, and Melville—Mr. Porter was one of many who acted as a bridge between the past and the 20th century.

Today that bridge, if not destroyed, is nonetheless in shambles for several reasons. First, American literacy rates, particularly those whose reading levels are eighth grade and below, have remained stagnant or falling for years. A majority of U.S. citizens would be unable to untangle the meaning of a Shakespeare sonnet or draw out the meaning of a passage from Thoreau.

In addition, our educational system and our culture at large have over time removed planking and girders from that bridge. Many secondary schools and universities have abandoned the classics for contemporary works. Neglecting Scripture, a source for so much of our literature, has also left a void. Most readers once understood references to terms like the trumpets' blast at Jericho or the widow's mite, whereas today they might be left scratching their heads in their puzzled ignorance.

Moreover, as Anthony Esolen makes clear in his online essay "A Greater Nationalism," the culture has erased other common markers from the past. For part of his evidence, he cites reviews that appeared in American papers of the novels by Polish writer Henryk Sienkiewicz, winner of the 1905 Nobel Prize for Literature. Of Sienkiewicz's "With Fire and Sword," a reviewer from The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote: "A great novel. He exhibits the sustained power and sweep of narrative of Walter Scott, and the humor of Cervantes. A greater novelist than Tolstoy." A number of Americans may still recognize those icons of Western literature, but far fewer have actually read their works.

Wanted: Readers of Literature

Twenty years ago, poet and essayist Dana Gioia, then chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, commented on a report from that agency:

Reading at Risk is not a report that the National Endowment for the Arts is happy to issue. This comprehensive survey of American literary reading presents a detailed assessment of the decline of reading's role in the nation's culture. For

the first time in modern history, less than half the adult population now reads literature. Anyone who loves literature or values the cultural, intellectual, and political importance of active and engaged literacy in American society will respond to this report with grave concern.

To these thoughts, Gioia added that "literary reading in America is not only declining among all groups, but the rate of decline has accelerated, especially among the young."

"You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture," Ray Bradbury once stated. "Just get people to stop reading them." Mr. Porter, Gioia, Esolen, and others like them understand well that literacy, reading, and a shared literary past deeply affect our culture and our politics. With more people today deficient in literacy, fewer people reading books (new or old), and educators often neglecting the classics of Western civilization, our society is, as Gioia wrote, on the precipice of "a vast cultural impoverishment" and is in a "retreat from participation in civic and cultural life." Unfortunately, that is water under the bridge. The damage is done, and for the present, the odds are likely that nothing will alter the course of these trends.

But all is not lost. (It rarely is.) We as individuals can help repair that bridge of books to the past. We can read the classics, and no matter what school our children attend, we can share those old tomes with them. We can create book clubs with friends and family members, groups aimed at reading the venerable writers, or we can join online clubs featuring well-known works of literature.

In a famous scene from his "Confessions," weeping and in the depths of a spiritual crisis, St. Augustine suddenly hears a child's voice chanting "Tolle lege, tolle lege," meaning "Take up and read, take up and read." He turns to the Scriptures he'd been reading and discovers the words that start him on the road to his conversion.

For those who want to help repair the bridge to the past and add nourishing foods to their own pantry of wisdom, it's that simple: "Tolle lege, tolle lege."

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20



The reader's importance is often overlooked. "Man Reading at Lamplight," 1814, by Georg Friedrich Kersting. Kunst Museum Winterthur, Reinhardt am Stadtgarten.

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.

It is the spellbound reader who brings a book to life and into the public square.

DONATE YOUR CAR

To a media that stands for
TRUTH and TRADITION

Your old vehicle can support The Epoch Times' truthful journalism and help us get factual news in front of more readers.

WHY DONATE TO US?

Accept cars, motorcycles, and RVs
Free vehicle pick-up
Maximum tax deduction
Support our journalists

Donate Now:

www.EpochCar.org

1-800-822-3828

Our independence from any corporation or holding company is what ensures that we are free to report according to our values of Truth and Tradition. We're primarily funded through subscriptions from our readers—the stakeholders that we answer to, who keep us on the right track.

THE EPOCH TIMES

THE REAL STORY OF JAN. 6

AN EPOCH TIMES DOCUMENTARY

LIMITED TIME OFFER

PRE-ORDER DVD, SAVE 20%

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON JAN. 6, 2021?
It's been over a year since Jan. 6, 2021, and the events that happened at the Capitol that day have once again been brought before the court of public opinion. However, in many discussions of the events, key information is omitted. The Epoch Times takes a look at the whole story, from the origins of the chaos to the police's use of force against protesters, in an effort to present an objective view of what truly transpired.

~~\$19.99~~
ONLY \$15.99

Buy Now at EpochShop.com

WATCH IT ONLINE AT EPOCHTV.COM



1



2



3

(1) "The Holy Family," Mexico, late 17th to early 18th century, by Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez. Oil on panel; 12 7/8 inches by 17 3/4 inches. Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

(2) "The Adoration of the Kings With Viceroy Pedro de Castro y Figueroa, Duke of La Conquista," Mexico, 1741, by Nicolás Enriquez. Oil on copper; 41 3/8 inches by 32 7/8 inches. Purchased with funds provided by Kelvin Davis, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Kathy and Frank Baxter, Beth and Josh Friedman, and Jane and Terry Semel through the 2012 Collectors Committee. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

(3) "Sacred Conversation With the Immaculate Conception and the Divine Shepherd," Mexico, 1719, by Antonio de Torres. Oil on canvas; 22 7/8 inches by 33 inches. Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

SACRED ART

A New World of Heavenly Art

New arts born from the Spanish colonization of the New World in an exhibition at the LA County Museum of Art

Continued from Page 1

These badges were one of the new arts born from the Spanish colonization of the New World, and both examples above are in the "Archive of the World: Art and Imagination in Spanish America, 1500-1800" exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The exhibition explores this complex yet fascinating period of art history through over 90 paintings, sculptures, textiles, and decorative arts from LACMA's collection.

Art of the New Spanish America

In the late 15th century, Spain began colonizing the New World; subsequently, the art of the Americas altered. Local artists, while staying true to their traditions, were influenced by European, Asian, and African imports and styles, thus creating new styles and types of art.

The development of Catholic art in the Americas is one fascinating aspect of the exhibition. When the Spanish came to the New World, religious paintings and sculptures were important in converting the indigenous population to Catholicism. Wherever possible, Spanish artists passed on their Western techniques to

local artists, resulting in Latin American devotional works acquiring a Spanish style.

Other European styles were also passed on. For instance, in the 1530s, after the Spanish colonized Cuzco, high in the Andean mountains of Peru, European artists shared their skills with locals. Indigenous and European artists working in the town from the 16th to the 18th century became known as the Cuzco School, which spread across the Andes and to Bolivia and Ecuador.

Often in early Spanish American paintings, there's a naiveté to the artists' techniques, but the divine message conveyed in those paintings is just as potent as any of the more technically accomplished High Renaissance religious works. It's an important reminder that the artist's intent behind a painting is powerful.

A small icon titled "The Holy Family" by Mexican artist Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez illustrates this point well. Juárez depicted Mary and the Christ child gazing directly at us, while Joseph gazes at Christ who raises his hand and blesses us. All three figures emanate divine light, and the call to connect to our faith shines so bright. We forget that these figures aren't quite



"Virgin of the Rosary," Guatemala, circa 1750-1800, by an unidentified sculptor. Polychromed by Felipe de Estrada. Sculpture; polychromed and gilded wood, and glass; 11 4/8 inches by 5 3/4 inches by 4 inches. Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

anatomically correct, with their wide eyes, chubby cheeks, and plump hands.

Hispanic artists took their inspiration from European compositions while staying true to their own artistic traditions. For instance, one member of Mexico's newly established (1722) academy of painters, the artist Nicolás Enriquez, looked to the Jesuit book of engravings titled "Evangelicae Historiae Imagines" ("Images of Evangelical History") by Jerónimo Nadal for inspiration when he painted "The Adoration of the Kings With Viceroy Pedro de Castro y Figueroa, Duke of La Conquista." In the same painting, Enriquez also referenced a work in Mexico City's cathedral by Mexican painter Juan Rodríguez Juárez.

Hispanic artists referenced European compositions while staying true to their own artistic traditions.

A prime example of Spanish style converging with local sensibilities is de Torres's painting "Sacred Conversation With the Immaculate Conception and the Divine Shepherd." In the painting, a Conceptionist nun converses with the Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross. She wears a sacred badge on her habit, and bows as she passes her divinely awakened heart to the saint.

On the left side of the painting, the Virgin stands atop a white lily, a symbol of purity. Christ appears as the good shepherd standing on the middle of the bridge, in the center of the painting. According to the LACMA website, the bridge links all four figures in the painting and symbolizes that the nun's sacred communion with the saint could take place due only to the divine intervention of the Virgin and Christ.

De Torres painted the bridge from a bird's-eye perspective, a view popular in

Flemish paintings by the likes of Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

Miracle Paintings

The familiar "Our Lady of Guadalupe" motif surrounded by four vignettes has been reproduced many times. Many of these paintings appear similar but their styles differ. This was due to the artists' copying the paintings of famed artists. For instance, Mexican artist Juan Correa made a wax template for painters to copy his works.

In the exhibition, Manuel de Arellano's and Antonio de Arellano's 1691 "Virgin of Guadalupe" painting is signed "touched to the original" to acknowledge the master copy. In the painting, four vignettes show how the Virgin appeared to Indian Juan Diego in 1531 asking him to request that the bishop build a church on the hill in her honor. Legend has it that the bishop didn't believe him. The Virgin appeared to Diego three times with the same request, but the bishop didn't budge. On her fourth visit, the Virgin told Diego to go to the hill and pick Castille roses and give them to the bishop. Diego gathered the roses in his cloak and then presented them to the shocked bishop; Castille roses don't grow in the region. When Diego emptied all the roses from his cloak, miraculously the Virgin's image was imprinted on it. The final vignette in the painting shows the miracle.

Miguel González also depicted the legend in using "enconchado," a new technique that peaked around 1680 to 1700, whereby mother-of-pearl inlays enhanced a painting. The iridescent nature of mother-of-pearl adds a further touch of transcendence to his "Virgin of Guadalupe" painting.

Devotional Sculptures

In the Hispanic world, sacred sculptures are polychromatic—colorfully painted.

Oftentimes, pieces by the same sculptor could appear very different, due to the involvement of different artisans. Patrons often received their commissioned statues unpainted. It was up to them to arrange for



A friar's badge with the Nativity, Mexico, circa 1768, by José de Páez. Oil on copper; 4 1/2 inches by 3 1/2 inches. Purchased with funds provided by the Joseph B. Gould Foundation, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



"The Virgin of Guadalupe," Mexico, circa 1698, by Miguel González. Oil on canvas on wood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl (enconchado painting); 39 inches by 27 1/2 inches. Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

a painter to embellish the works and make the pieces as lifelike as possible. For naturalistic appeal, artists often added glass eyes, ivory teeth, and real eyelashes to the sculptures. In some cases, the works were dressed in costumes.

A small, late-18th century, private devotional sculpture of the "Virgin of the Rosary" from Guatemala is on display in the exhibition. The painter of the devotional sculpture, Felipe de Estrada, signed the work, which artists rarely did. He decorated the Virgin's robes with fine fabric; such works of art were called "estofados." Hispanic artists adapted some Spanish decorative techniques, and the sculptures took on a distinctly local flair. For instance, in Spain gold was commonly used as a ground, a base layer on the sculptures to which paint was applied. Artists would then scratch designs through parts of the painted surface to reveal the gold beneath. Some of the gold remained concealed under the paint, which further enhanced the paint pigments. Artists in Quito, Ecuador, used gold and silver grounds for their statues. This practice had existed in Spain, but the Ecuadorian sculptors used it to more dramatic effect, frequently juxtaposing it with gold.

The sacred paintings and sculptures of Spanish America acted as instruments of faith: to inspire devotion. Believers developed intimate relationships with these sublime, functional pieces. Artists repainting pieces to align with popular sensibilities was a common practice in sculpture and in painting. Hispanic artists infused each of their works with intense emotions, gestures, and vitality—all explicitly designed to teach Scripture and to inspire contemplation and devotion to God.

The "Archive of the World: Art and Imagination in Spanish America, 1500-1800" exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is curated by the museum's head of Latin American art, Ilona Katzev. The exhibition runs until Oct. 30. To find out more, visit LACMA.org

BOOK REVIEW

An Insightful Critique of How Politicians Ruined a Republic

How destructive infighting between Caesar and Cato led to civil war

DUSTIN BASS

For those interested in the history of statecraft, there are few topics more compelling than the Roman Republic, and in particular the reasons for its fall. Josiah Osgood, professor of classics at Georgetown University, has written an insightful and important work on this topic.

His book “Uncommon Wrath: How Caesar and Cato’s Deadly Rivalry Destroyed the Roman Republic” delves into the political warfare waged between two of Rome’s leading men of the first two B.C.—Julius Caesar and Cato the Younger.

Osgood is one of the leading historians on ancient Rome. His scholarship is made evident by his ability to present in clear order what led to the destructive infighting between the allies of Caesar and Cato, and ultimately the destructive civil war known famously as Caesar’s Civil War.

Osgood states early on in the book that “war broke out not because of enduring hatreds in large swathes of the populace. It broke out because of the fighting between politicians. Years of demonization and threats, of violence and obstruction, by Caesar, Cato, and their respective allies, meant that each side feared to back down.”

Cato and Caesar were (and are) the personifications of political movements colliding.

Setting the Stage for Disaster

The author succeeds in presenting these two leading figures as both appealing and repellent. Caesar and Cato are, unfortunately, appealing and repellent for polar opposite reasons. Cato is appealing because of his strong moral character, while at the same time, his stoic lifestyle and morality lead him to be most uncompromising and quite prickly.

Cato the Younger is a man above reproach, who has taken it upon himself to lead Rome out of the darkness of bribery and corruption, though in a republic where politicians thrive on bribery and corruption, his demands are severe, difficult to abide by, and even more difficult to enforce. Caesar is presented as a man on the make. His ambitious spirit is counter to Cato’s, though his qualities, like generosity and mercy, as well as his charismatic personality make him a rather sympathetic figure. He has no issue with bending the rules, living lavishly, and breaking from tradition, and it is this lifestyle that endears him more to the citizens of the city-state than it does to members of the Senate.

The Fight for the Consulship

Cato’s control of the Roman Senate, his affinity for filibustering, and his disdain for man’s ambition (particularly Caesar’s) lead to constant scheming between the two politicians. As Caesar rises through



Bust of Caesar, first century A.D., Altes Museum, Berlin.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



PRIORITYMAN/CC-BY-SA 3.0

Bust of Cato the Younger, Archaeological Museum of Rabat, Morocco.

trying to plug a ship with too many holes. Caesar, on the other hand, is at the rudder.

A Political Warning

In Cato and Caesar, we see the ultimate in partisanship. This was more than two personalities conflicting. Cato and Caesar were (and are) the personifications of political movements colliding. Two sides that “feared to back down” chose war over compromise.

After the assassination of Caesar, another civil war, and the rise of Gaius Octavius (eventually known as Caesar Augustus), we see the best of Caesar and Cato converge, but at the expense of the Republic. Osgood further iterates that later Romans, as well as non-Roman statesmen, were influenced heavily by Cato and his staunch pursuit of moral politics and stoicism.

“Uncommon Wrath” is a powerful work of political analysis on a grand scale. It indicates what can happen to even the mightiest of nations when politics becomes too partisan and strong personalities champion their preferred factions.

Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV’s “About the Book,” a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.



‘Uncommon Wrath: How Caesar and Cato’s Deadly Rivalry Destroyed the Roman Republic’

Author
Josiah Osgood

Publisher
Basic Books

Date
Nov. 29, 2022

Hardcover
352 pages

the ranks, he utilizes various methods to achieve prominence in Roman politics with the goal of becoming consul. Bribery, marriage alliances (whom he marries and whom he gives in marriage), and the eventual triumvirate (Caesar, Gnaeus Pompeius “Pompey” Magnus, and Marcus Licinius Crassus) help maneuver him to that goal.

Cato attempts to pull as many political levers as possible to keep Caesar at bay, but eventually Caesar claims the consulship in 59 B.C. along with Cato’s son-in-law, Bibulus, an obvious anti-Caesar politician.

The author points out that the year Caesar’s consulship began spelled the dismantling of the Roman Republic: “In trying to throttle Caesar, Cato had throttled compromise, an essential feature in politics. Both sides had reasons for what they were doing, but together they were undermining the Republic.” Osgood’s point is an insightful one, and it can be attributed throughout the history

of statecraft. Political opponents have their “reasons” though they often falter on reasoning together, which results in negative ends. Those ends are often the undermining of the established government or “large swathes of the populace.”

The distrust between Caesar and Cato had built up so extensively that neither trusted each other’s motives. Caesar had an army on the outskirts of Rome, his military victories were demanding of much praise, but his desire was to become consul again. Cato would not abide Caesar’s return to consulship, and most definitely not a return to Rome with an army at his command. Therefore, Cato ironically allowed Pompey to assemble his own army and, even more ironically, to be installed as dictator.

As the story progresses, Caesar gains more power, while Cato, and therefore the Senate, loses power. Cato’s warnings of Caesar’s dictatorial goals come to light, at times violently. The author shows Cato as a man

DUSTIN BASS

What is the true story of how the Olympic Games began? John A. Martino and Michael P. O’Kane, authors of “Olympia: The Birth of the Games,” have endeavored to tell that story in their new novel. This historical fiction account takes the reader back to the year 776 B.C., in the Greek city of Olympia.

The story revolves around the exhilarating and often bloody adventures of Pelops, the son of the priest of Olympia. Pelops is a man of peace in a world of continual wars. The authors express a cycle of violence that no one believes can be—and most don’t want to be—stopped.

“Olympia” is a fun read with interesting characters who are colorful in various ways, whether they be kind, vicious, humorous, serious, redemptive, or unredeemable. The pacing of the read is hardly slow. There is constant action of some kind,

starting with a battle scene, moving to a suicidal rescue mission, and ending with the high pressure of competing in the first Olympic Games (which prove more violent than modern games).

From a historical perspective, the players, time, and location are familiar and accurate, though the players are often enshrined in mythology. The temperament of the political and military leaders is often unforgiving and ruthless. Taking into consideration how leaders of Greek city-states treated their enemies, and at times their own people, those attributes aren’t too implausible (though at times they do feel over-the-top).

An Underlying Meaning

“Olympia” tends to do more than try to tell the story of the origin of the Olympic Games. The book also looks to be an antiwar historical fiction novel, not that that isn’t a

When the Olympic Games Began: A Historical Novel

ARIS MESSINIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



A reenactment of Olympians competing at the Temple of Hera, the sanctuary where the Olympic Games were born in 776 B.C.

FILM REVIEW

A Western for the Ages

Rookie director Isaiah Washington delivers and then some

MICHAEL CLARK

Having never officially fallen out of favor with audiences, Westerns went from a genre behemoth in the mid-20th century to what is now a compartmented specialty with a modest but fervent cult following.

If not for the efforts of Clint Eastwood, Kevin Costner, Quentin Tarantino, and Taylor Sheridan over the last 50 years, Westerns might have been reduced to direct-to-video, B-Film status.

Best Western Since ‘Unforgiven’

Containing elements of all the above filmmakers (and maybe some of John Ford and Howard Hawks), visceral “Corsicana” is an instant classic. First-time director Isaiah Washington’s mesmerizing, mythical film is the best revisionist Western since Eastwood’s “Unforgiven” from 1992. As of this writing, it is also my favorite movie of 2022.

Based on the career of 19th-century lawman Bass Reeves (Washington), the film shares its name with the Texas town where it was shot and is partially set. The first black U.S. Marshal west of the Mississippi River, Reeves captured over 3,000 criminals (while killing 14 of them in self-defense) in his over-35-year career covering three states (Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma).

The Lone Ranger

For those unaware, Reeves was, according to historian Art Burton, the inspiration for the radio, TV, and film character the Lone Ranger, and he has been depicted in nearly a dozen TV shows and now four features in the last decade, including last year’s highly overrated “The Harder They Fall.”

The first image shown in the movie is a title card reading “Be Not Caught by the Cunning of Those Who Disappear in Disguise,” prefacing a scene preceding the opening credits. In it, Reeves stumbles into the fire-lit camp of two understandably leery outlaws.

Claiming to be a bootlegger on the run from a posse, Reeves appears to be intoxicated on his own brew and bombards the men with copious amounts of wit and charm. They drop their guard, down some whiskey, and wake up the next morning cuffed and bound with the stone-cold sober Reeves smiling and offering them coffee.

Things kick off in earnest with the introduction of Jack Donner (Lew Temple), the leader of a band of truly psychotic hangers who have been commissioned to “obtain” the leases of oil-rich land by any means necessary.

Tarot Cards

Donner’s only concern is not in slaughtering anyone in his path, but rather being chased by Reeves. Donner does himself no favors by leaving Tarot cards pinned to the corpses he leaves in his wake, not unlike what the real-life “Beltway snipers” John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo would do over a century later.

Literally obliterating anyone in their path whether a threat or not, the Donner gang terrorize an innocent family of four for the better part of an entire day before dispatching them with no pity or quarter.

In the wrong hands, this ghastly sequence, which includes an abhorrent physical assault, would have been impossible

noble aim. Through Pelops, and a few other good-hearted characters in the book, the purpose of the games is to unify the Greek city-states and bring the known world together through nonmilitary means.

The competition held in Olympia, in the western part of the Peloponnese, in 776 B.C. was a moment for citizens of various countries like Carthage, Sparta, Nubia, and others to demonstrate their strengths and talents against each other.

In the story, the effort for unification, eliminating bad alliances, and bringing about peace is somewhat successful. I say “somewhat” because the story ends before those elements are fully known. But historically, after the games, wars and strife continued.

Fun With a Few Fables

As mentioned earlier, “Olympia” is a fast-paced book with plenty of action and suspenseful scenarios. There is no shortage of heroes and villains, and the story allows those characters to face off in a singular event. And it doesn’t always go the way the reader might expect, which is a pleasant

For any first-time feature director to craft a film this assured, spellbinding, and watertight is in itself a major accomplishment.

‘Corsicana’

Director:
Isaiah Washington

Starring:
Isaiah Washington, Thomas Q. Jones, Jason Johnson, Hank Slaughterer, Lew Temple

Running Time:
1 hour, 46 minutes

MPAA Rating:
R

Release Date:
Aug. 26, 2022

★★★★★



to watch and would’ve certainly resulted in the movie getting slapped with an NC-17 rating. It’s just the first of many scenes where Washington and screenwriter Robert Johnson (who also plays a member of the Donner gang) employ a less-is-more approach to violence.

Realizing that he can’t apprehend Donner on his own, Reeves enlists the aid of his former deputy turned preacher, Sam Tanner (Jason Johnson), and a sharpshooter identified only as “California” (Hank Slaughterer). It was California, as we are to find out later, who was instrumental in aiding Reeves to flee from a lifetime of certain servitude decades earlier.

This event and other bits of Reeves’s early life are sprinkled throughout the second half of the narrative via flashback (with Thomas Q. Jones as the younger Reeves). It comes with such a wealth of rich material that it could easily be made into a stand-alone origin or prequel film.

There are close to a dozen deaths depicted in the film, yet all but three take place off-screen or are strategically blocked. Of those, two are done with a blade and only one by a bullet. This approach might annoy those always on the lookout for bloodbaths posing as movies, but from a pure storytelling perspective, it is brilliant.

It’s What You Don’t See

Spoon-feeding the audience graphic and gory violence takes little skill and even less imagination. It’s what we don’t see—what is implied—that really haunts us, gets under our skin, and gives us the willies.

Washington also doesn’t shy away from including still, distant, long shots. There are two identical-looking scenes that take place near an oak tree in an open field. In each instance, Washington and cinematographer Joshua Shreve never zoom in on

the characters as they speak. The dialogue is clear and audible, yet seeing the actors as barely moving specks in the distance adds to and deepens the already palpable sense of dread.

For any first-time feature director to craft a film this assured, spellbinding, and watertight is in itself a major accomplishment. In Washington’s case, it was miraculous as he had just 48 hours to prepare. A creative difference between the producers and the original unnamed director led to the latter’s departure right before shooting was to start. Washington more than filled the void, and the end result is this breathtaking, awe-inspiring, and mystical masterpiece.

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



Thomas Q. Jones as young Bass Reeves, who becomes the first black U.S. Marshal west of the Mississippi.



A scene near an oak tree in an open field. The distance of the scene, with the characters as barely moving specks, adds to and deepens the already palpable dread.



Director Isaiah Washington on the set of “Corsicana.”

The book also looks to be an antiwar historical fiction novel.

surprise. The authors show that they aren’t afraid to sacrifice some of their characters to keep the reader engaged.

The authors rely heavily on dialogue, which can be hit-or-miss. They utilize swears or oaths for their characters, like “Who in Hades is this?” and “Oh, gods!” which feels rather contrived. The authors also use the ellipsis for dramatic effect at an almost haphazard level.

There were a few confusing parts at the end. At one point, all the royalty from the other nations and city-states left in anger before the games ended, but then were seated to watch the final event. The father of the protagonist takes his vengeance out on someone who poisoned his son, but the authors make it clear (at least, it was clear to this reader) that the father knew of the poisoning before it took place. And as mentioned before, sometimes the dialogue is hit-or-miss and descriptions of the characters’ temperament (predominantly the villains) are over-the-top.

For readers with an affinity for ancient Greek stories and myths, “Olympia”

should prove to be a fun read.

Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV’s “About the Book,” a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.



‘Olympia: The Birth of the Games’

Author
John A. Martino and Michael P. O’Kane

Publisher
Histria Books

Date
July 1, 2021

Hardcover
228 pages

Turning Our Gaze Within: A Higher Purpose for Our Capacity to Judge

Reaching Within: What traditional art offers the heart

ERIC BESS

As human beings, our capacity for making judgments seems to be innate. We judge what we like, what we don't like, what's good, what's bad, what's ugly, and what's beautiful. Arguably, our judgments determine how our lives unfold, for we won't adopt the beliefs that guide our lives without first judging them to be true.

But why are we so prone to judge? Is it really a tendency innate to human life? Is it just the way that our brains work? Or maybe it's a cultural thing?

Until recently, world religions determined the traditions of their respective cultures, and many of these world religions warn of a Last Judgment of human souls. In this sense, judging is inseparable from the deep concerns about our fate.

As an act within society, however, judging can reveal a desire for power; it can be a way for some to force their truths on others. History is full of examples in which a person or group judges another person or group as "bad" when they are merely different. The consequences of these judgments are often detrimental to a free society, for there cannot be freedom without difference.

Yet, to be afraid to judge something as bad when all of the evidence suggests that it is so can also be detrimental. Herein lies the difference between judging how someone looks versus judging how someone behaves, which is derived from the philosophical debate about the primacy of form versus content. Martin Luther King Jr. summarized this debate well when he dreamed that his children would "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Decades later, the contest between form and content continues, and it appears that mainstream media still judges form as primary over content. That is, what matters more is how we look and not how we behave, and even this judgment is made with the belief that it is a moral one based in empathy and freedom. But is this the best use of our capacity to judge?

Vermeer's 'Woman Holding a Balance'

Johannes Vermeer's painting "Woman Holding a Balance" presents an answer to our question. Vermeer painted a lone woman illuminated by a single light source from the window at the top left of the composition. She is dressed in a yellow skirt and a blue velvet jacket with a white hood and white fur trim.

She stands in a room, at the edge of a table. On the table sits a jewelry box with gold chains and pearl necklaces, and there are coins near the corner of the table. Against the wall and table rests a blue cloth that frames the left side of the composition.

The woman looks with deep concentration at a balance that she holds in her hand. The balance is so delicate and painted so subtly that it is almost difficult to see her holding it. The balance is also empty, but none of this seems to affect its importance.

There is a painting on the wall behind the woman. It depicts a scene of the Last Judgment. A figure surrounded by a yellow halo floats at the top with arms outstretched. Other figures flank both sides of the central figure. Below, there are figures reaching out toward the haloed figure, and these figures flank both sides of the woman's head.

Turning Our Gaze Within

What does Vermeer's painting tell us about the purpose of our capacity to judge?

The table contains items that represent the woman's wealth. The fine cloth, the gold, the pearls, and the coins all allude to her high status in society. And her outfit, the yellow skirt and velvet jacket with fur trim, suggests that she is able to afford a certain lifestyle. Even the painting on her wall reveals that she is of an elite class.

She holds the balance in front of the items as if to judge their worth, but there is nothing on the balance. The balance is painted as if it is ethereal; that is, it is painted as if it is of the spiritual realm. This might suggest that she is not judging the items themselves but her attitude toward them. She has turned her gaze



▲ "Woman Holding a Balance," circa 1664, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 15 5/8 inches by 14 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

For more arts and culture articles, visit [TheEpochTimes.com](https://www.theepochtimes.com)

Maybe our capacity to judge is a pathway to the divine; that is, if we use it to turn our gaze within.



(Left) Detail of the scale and jewels in Johannes Vermeer's painting. (Right) Detail of Johannes Vermeer's painting, showing the Last Judgment in a painting on the wall in the background.

ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

within to judge herself in relation to her environment.

Turning her gaze within hasn't resulted in her discarding her items, nor has she replaced her fur-lined jacket with a potato sack. Again, this suggests that it is not the items that are to be judged as good or bad, but her attitude toward them. What is more consequential for a soul on its way to heaven: the riches in heaven, or the soul's attitude toward them?

And we can presume that her soul is on its way to heaven. The content of her soul is revealed by the form of her outfit: The yellow of her skirt could represent the renewal of her faith in God; the blue of her jacket, a color often associated with the Virgin Mary, could represent truth and heavenly love; and the white of her hood most likely represents her purity of mind.

The spiritual effort of her soul is revealed by way of her position in relation to the painting behind her. We must consider that this is a painting of the Last Judgment, and the figures at the bottom of most depictions of the Last Judgment are struggling to get to heaven.

The figures in the bottom section of this depiction flank both sides of her head. This suggests that acquiring the purity of mind represented by her white hood is a difficult journey, but she endures it nonetheless. And in the painting, God hovers above her head as if watching her progress.

Vermeer painted a simple scene of a woman discovering the purpose of judging. She turned her capacity to judge on herself. Her riches don't matter; it does not matter if she has them or she doesn't. What matters is that the content of her heart and mind is pure, loving, and on God.

This provides us with an answer to our initial question: Why are we so prone to judge? Maybe our capacity to judge is a pathway to the divine. That is, if we use it in the way it is intended to be used, turn our gaze within, and subtly judge the content of our character, the heavens will rejoice at our presence and God will be pleased to see us.

Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart," we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see how our historical creations might inspire within us our own innate goodness.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist, and a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).



ONLINE SERIES REVIEW

A Country Caught in the Crossfire of Tyranny

A film studio mirrors Nazi and communist domination of Czechoslovakia

JOE BENDEL

Big Hollywood blockbusters like "Casino Royale" and "The Bourne Identity" were filmed at Prague's Barrandov Studios, but didactic propaganda films were also made there during the German occupation and under the communist regime.

The history of the studio and of its founder, Milos Havel (the great playwright and uncle of the former president of the Czech Republic), are both quite complicated, but they lend themselves to some grand historical drama in the six-part "Private Lives," which premiered on Aug. 25.

Thanks to the policy of appeasement, the then Czechoslovakia was left to face Germany on its own. However, the Germans consider Czech Bohemia to be relatively pure-of-blood and closely akin to their great Teutonic race. Therefore, they promise Czechoslovakia a benign occupation in exchange for their cooperation.

Willy Sohnel, the newly appointed German censor and general cultural gatekeeper, considers Havel one of the key leaders of the film industry, who can help facilitate their new unequal coexistence, so he is quite enraged when the Gestapo arrests him on a morals charge.

The one truth that emerges in 'Private Lives' is art's incompatibility with ideologies of a totalitarian state.

Of course, when Sohnel manages to smooth things over, it means that Havel is even more indebted to him. Nevertheless, the studio head will do his best to protect his employees from the Germans, even Jewish filmmakers like the promising young director Jiri Weiss.

Sohnel will also reward his favorites, like ethnic German starlet Lilli Krallova and Vlasta Burian, a sad-faced Buster Keaton-like comedian who made several popular films in Germany before Hitler rose to power. Even though neither believes in the National Socialist ideology, they both agree to participate in collaborationist films and propaganda, to help their friends and colleagues.

Actor-screenwriter Zdenek Stepanek is even recruited to serve as the literal mouthpiece of the regime, to read the statements



Vladimir Javosky as Burian, a sad-faced comedian.

of submission from figurehead-president Emil Hacha over national radio. However, the experience so disgusts Stepanek that he approaches the underground resistance.

Armost Zak, a pleasant but ambitious script editor, is perfectly placed to observe it all. For a while, he was Krallova's lover, but he will fall for Eliska Novotna, a colleague in the studio press office, who is also deeply embedded in the Resistance. As a result, the disillusioned Zak can tell the entire story in flashbacks to his grown daughter in 1968, with a small platoon of Soviet troops ominously camped outside in the courtyard of his apartment building.

Tyrannical Regimes

The backdrop of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is no coincidence or accident. Time after time, screenwriter Tereza Brdeckova draws parallels between the occupying Nazi and communist regimes.

In later episodes, characters make the direct comparisons themselves, suggesting there was more hope that things might improve during the early years of communism, but the Germans had the virtue of being more predictable.

Indeed, the surviving Barrandov filmmakers are often bedeviled by last-minute script revisions, thanks to the constantly changing official "party line." The one truth that emerges in "Private Lives" is art's incompatibility with ideologies of a totalitarian

LITERATURE

A Story About a Little Church

KATE VIDIMOS

"Each according to the dictates of his own conscience." This phrase, attributed to George Washington, illuminates the top of Norman Rockwell's painting "Freedom of Worship," which shows eight people praying. These individuals show their own form of worship, whether it is pensive, thankful, patient, sad, petitioning, or filled with wonder. Some look upward, others bow their heads, while others firmly shut their eyes. And despite the difficulties, fatigue, and sadness that show on the faces, overall a sense of hope remains.

The Saturday Evening Post commissioned author Will Durant in 1943 to write an essay to accompany Rockwell's painting "Freedom of Worship." In his short essay, also titled "Freedom of Worship," Durant highlights the true value of this freedom by contemplating the little white church that he passes by on his walks.

Durant considers the "wonder and the longing that had built such chapels—temples and mosques and great cathedrals—everywhere on the earth." He shows that this awe and yearning differentiate humans from animals, for a human being, unlike animals, prays and laughs.

A World Beyond Words

When people enter a place of prayer, they enter a special place to worship, each in their own way. Durant says that worshippers seem to know something that is not found in books. They cannot describe what they know and believe, for their religion "lives in a world be-



Judit Bardos as starlet Lili Krallova.

'Private Lives'

Director: Robert Sedlacek

Starring: Jaroslav Plesl, Judit Bardos, Ondrej Pavelka, Michal Dlouhy

Running Time: 6 episodes

MPAA Rating: R

Release Date: Aug. 25, 2022

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ian state.

There is also a good deal of scandalous drama, which makes "Private Lives" quite bingeable. Unfaithful lovers frequently get roaring drunk at wild parties and have it out with their jealous spouses. Eventually, Havel tells his communist interrogators that kind of lifestyle comes with a career in show business.

There is also a lot of intrigue involving studio politics, the occupying powers, and the Resistance, so the series provides quite a broad perspective on the nation's tragic World War II and Cold War history.

Even though he is only in the 1968 sequences, Ondrej Pavelka sets an appropriately mournful and regretful tone for the series as old, reflective Zak. Michael Balcar is somewhat less compelling as the younger Zak, because he is written as a largely passive figure.

Moral Failings Explored

In contrast, Michal Dlouhy's performance as Stepanek is richly complex in ways that fully explore his moral failings. Likewise, Judit Bardos portrays all of Krallova's flaws but also humanizes her.

Jaroslav Plesl's Havel is shrewd but sympathetic. Ultimately, the series positions him as someone who made a deal with the devil—out of both selfish and altruistic motivations. Yet, there is something especially sad and haunting about Vladimir Javosky's work as the childlike Burian, who despite his fame and wealth, is particularly ill-equipped to navigate the politics of the occupying regimes.

Each episode runs well over an hour, and the entire series spans roughly 30 years of Czech history, so viewers really feel like they have been through a lot by the time series director Robert Sedlacek brings the epic story to a conclusion.

The investment pays off. It is a tragedy that unfolds, but a compulsively watchable one. Highly recommended.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit [JBSpins.blogspot.com](https://www.jbspins.blogspot.com)

a divine drama, and their harassed lives take on a scope and dignity that cannot be canceled out by death."

Freedom for the Soul

Durant says that the little church is the ultimate symbol of America and the freedom of worship. Families crossed the sea to build such churches. They sought to escape from those who would take away their freedom of worship in order to "win freedom of their souls, to think and speak and worship as they would."

Religious persecution challenges and steals this freedom from humankind. Without the freedom to practice their faith, people are left with war and the state as their God. Without religion and faith to guide and enlighten the people of the world, the world will fall to the basic definitions, laws, and rules that force humankind to live against its conscience.

For years people have fought to keep or win back their freedom of worship—they have proven the most admirable martyrs. Through their deaths, they prove to us all that prayer and worship is sacred and inviolate. They have been exemplary images of gentleness and charity, rather than struggle and violence. As Shakespeare says in "As You Like It": "Your gentleness shall force. More than your force move us to gentleness."

Durant says that those who leave that little church should respect those who worship differently or practice a different religion. They know that every person is trying to follow the direction of his conscience and better himself accordingly.

By encouraging ourselves and those around us to seek virtue and live lives in the poetry



"Freedom of Worship," 1943, by Norman Rockwell. In his short essay "Freedom of Worship," Will Durant highlights the true value of this freedom by contemplating the little white church that he passes by on his walks. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

and song of our hope, we keep the freedom of worship alive. When we practice charity and gentleness toward our neighbor, we help each other live according to our consciences and we uphold the human spirit that strives to surpass life's prose.

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate from the liberal arts college at the University of Dallas, where she received her bachelor's degree in English. She plans on pursuing all forms of storytelling (specifically film) and is currently working on finishing and illustrating a children's book.

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

Creeping Communism Creates Criminals

MARK JACKSON

"Emily the Criminal" is reminiscent of "Thelma & Louise." Thelma (Geena Davis), a mousy woman suffocated by a lousy husband, learns how to rob people at gunpoint after watching J.D. (Brad Pitt) demo his armed-robbery pitch in a motel room. When later financially backed into a corner, she tries it on for size and discovers the method fits her like a glove. "Thelma & Louise" was a fun movie, though.

Dreary but Important Social Commentary

"Emily" turns out to be more of a dark, dreary, depressing tale, located in and around catering kitchens and parking lots. It's got some cocaine partying in club bathroom stalls, some aloof Korean roommates, and involves a racially cacophonous band of citizens and undocumented workers living lives of financial precarity.

The feature film debut of writer-director John Patton Ford (shot on a low budget over three weeks during the pandemic), "Emily the Criminal" tracks art-school grad Emily (Aubrey Plaza). She's from New Jersey and she punches the clock, delivering work lunches to downtown corporations and sketching portraits in her car between shifts. Her existence is every artist's worst nightmare.

However, her life is made exponentially worse by her collegiate DUI criminal record, and her defensive attitude about having to talk about that little situation—the drunk driving—to potential employers.

Eventually meeting up with Liz, her college bestie (Megalyn Echikunwoke) at a trendy bar, Emily offhandedly confesses, "I need a job, a good job." Liz is well situated. She's

headed to Portugal on an all-expenses-paid work trip, whereas Emily can't afford her rent, much less buy paint for painting.

Liz arranges an interview for Emily with her boss, the graphic design firm's president, Alice (Gina Gershon), for a position, which turns out to be an unpaid, full-time internship with no benefits. The desperate Emily is not about to pay these kinds of life-destroying dues.

Like one in five Americans, Emily is buried in debt.

Crime Pays

On a tip from a catering coworker, Emily stumbles on a "dummy shopper" gig, which involves buying up high-end electronics and luxury cars with fake credit cards, for resale. In a world of unmarked warehouses, Emily soon finds herself immersed in an underworld of savvy Middle Eastern immigrants, nondescript outlaws, and desperate single parents, all motivated by one desire—survival. It's the logical outcome of a society in which socialism has begun financially squeezing the middle class with a pair of vice-grips.

As Emily's new "boss," the mild-mannered middleman Libyan ex-pat Youcef (Theo Rossi) explains about buying sports cars: "With a purchase of this size, the bank will call the vendor, but that takes eight minutes. You have eight minutes to leave, or they know it's fake."

As mentioned, each time Emily ingests

these "wisdoms" and chooses the easy wrong instead of the hard right of legal employment, they take root in her soul. Each new criminal event fertilizes a quickly burgeoning latent destiny as Emily the Criminal, as opposed to the destiny of Emily the Painter.

Plaza as Emily appears in every scene, whether hauling containers of pasta or tasting a would-be thief, her quietly charismatic performance demonstrates that she's not just a quirky comic but a very well-rounded actress with a lot of range.

Overview

"Emily the Criminal" is both a character study and an indictment of the U.S. carceral system. As demonstrated by this movie, a criminal record sets up a vicious cycle of crime necessitated by a completely overwhelming load of debt.

"Emily the Criminal" also speaks to the ongoing Great Resignation, which journalist Stefan Ellerbeck defines on World Economics Forum thusly:

"The Great Resignation ... describes the record number of people leaving their jobs since the beginning of the pandemic. After an extended period of working from home with no commute, many people have decided their work-life balance has become more important to them.

"This revolution in the world of work appears to be continuing apace, with one in five workers globally planning to quit in 2022. That's the key finding of consultancy firm PwC's Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey. ... It says pay is unsurprisingly the main factor in people wanting to change

jobs, with 71% citing it as a key reason."

Record numbers of low-wage employees have voluntarily quit their jobs, because working a demeaning job that can't ever pay your bills is one of the steps on the road to communism. You give up and let the state take care of you.

The final scene suggests that escape from the rat race is possible. But also criminal. And that's too facile. The film needed to find a way to explain that Karl Marx planned the lawless phase ("Defund the police!").

Like one in five Americans, Emily is buried in debt. And like nearly a third of her compatriots, she has a rap sheet that effectively precludes gaining the means to pay it off. So she should be recognizable, if not relatable. But she's not really likable. And so while "Emily the Criminal" is a good reminder of where things stand today, the film ultimately grates on the nerves; it carries a high degree of tension generated by a character it's difficult to care about—thrillers are only really thrilling if you care.

'Emily the Criminal'

Director:
John Patton Ford

Starring:
Aubrey Plaza, Theo Rossi, Gina Gershon, Megalyn Echikunwoke

MPAA Rating:
R

Running Time:
1 hour, 33 minutes

Release Date:
Aug. 12, 2022

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Emily (Aubrey Plaza) after having been robbed of a lot of cash, in "Emily the Criminal."



THE 6TH NTD INTERNATIONAL FIGURE PAINTING COMPETITION

Reviving the pure authenticity, beauty, and goodness in art

June 2023 | New York City

Call for Global Entries / Deadline : 1/15/2023 / US\$25,000+ in Awards

NTD

1-888-477-9228 | Oilpainting@globalcompetitions.org

OILPAINTING.NTDTV.COM

