

# THE EPOCH TIMES ARTS & CULTURE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



(Left) "Girl With the Red Hat," circa 1669, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on panel; 9 inches by 7 1/16 inches. Andrew W. Mellon Collection; National Gallery of Art, Washington.

(Bottom Left) "Girl With a Flute" and "Girl With the Red Hat" hang side-by-side in the "Vermeer's Secrets" exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Experts confirmed that only one of these paintings is by Johannes Vermeer.

## Discovering Vermeer's Studio

How 'losing' a Vermeer led to invaluable new insights into his work

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

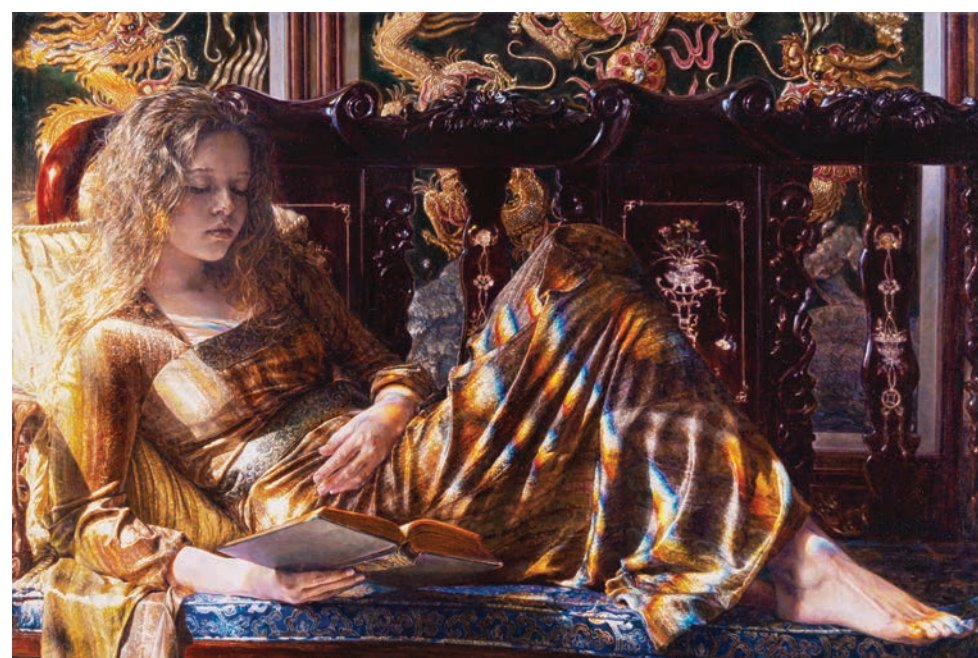
*Girl with a Flute & Girl with the Red Hat*



LORRAINE FERRIER

Oh! If only the "Girl With the Red Hat" could speak. In Johannes Vermeer's painting, she's turned around in her chair, gazing directly at us. Natural light streams across the side of her face, highlighting her open mouth and that mischievous glint in her right eye, as if she's known for centuries what curators, scientists, and researchers at the National Gallery of Art in Washington would discover: Vermeer had a studio, where he worked with assistants and taught students and apprentices.

Continued on Page 4



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

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INSPIRED ORIGINAL

# Author's Soviet Boyhood Helps Readers Appreciate Freedom

Book Review: Father Alexander Krylov's 'How I Became a Man'

JEFF MINICK

When Alexander Krylov was in elementary school, he and his classmates toured the Museum of the Revolution in Moscow. "The female museum guide told us that Communists are genuine heroes," he recollected years later. She said that "we no longer need to invent gods for ourselves; we divinize the proletarians next door."

The guide went on to explain that communists sacrifice themselves day and night for the people, undergoing privation and even death on their behalf. Here's what happened next: "The museum tour made such an impression on me that I ventured to ask carefully a very human question. 'Do Communists ever go to the bathroom, too?' The surprised museum guide first took a deep breath and then said, 'Yes, they have to go, too, but not as often.'" Throughout this memoir of his boyhood in the Soviet Union, "How I Became a Man: A Life With Communists, Atheists, and Other Nice People," Krylov relates incidents like this one that bring a chuckle and even outright laughter. Though today he is middle-aged—and a Catholic priest to boot!—he tells most of his story through the eyes of a child.

Despite the subtitle of his autobiography, Krylov is anti-communist and certainly not an atheist, yet many people he knew in the 1970s and '80s were, at least on the surface, fervent believers in the ideologies propounded by Marx and Lenin. His teachers and the youth leaders in the Pioneers, a Soviet version of the Boy Scouts, in particular touted the glories and benefits of collectivism. "How I Became a Man" offers several gifts to its readers. It's a fine coming-of-age memoir in its own right. It gives us communism as viewed through the eyes of a child. And finally, it demonstrates how that ideology makes inroads into a society.

## Boys Will Be Boys

In many ways, Krylov grew up like boys everywhere. He disliked school. He and his friends played games in the street and on sports fields, hiked, engaged in various kinds of mischief, joined or formed different clubs, and slowly became aware of the meaning and ramifications of the world in which they lived.

To these accounts, Krylov often brings dry humor and a gentle sense of irony. In his chapter "Harmful Chewing Gum," for instance, he recounts how he and his friends, who had seen people chewing gum only in the movies, would share rare sticks of Western gum whenever they became available. By share, Krylov means that they passed the same stick of gum from mouth to mouth.

When Soviet chewing gum became available for the first time, Krylov bought several packs and distributed it among his school friends. "People today can only imagine the feelings of the teacher who came into the class

afterward," he writes. "Never in her life had she herself seen chewing gum before, and at first she could not cope with us chomping, lip-smacking boys." The teacher then collected all the gum in a bag, and over the next few weeks the students received several lectures on the dangers of chewing gum, including one from a health inspector who told them that gum would rot out their stomachs and change the shape of their jaws to resemble those of horses.

Krylov also relates humorous stories of their growing interest in girls. For one celebration of Women's Day, for example, the boys in his class pooled their kopeks, went to a pharmacy, and bought soap and combs "with fine, thick teeth" as gifts for their female classmates. The girls responded by giving the boys the silent treatment, as it turned out that the combs were designed to remove head lice.

## The Other Side of Adolescence

The indoctrination into communism began in kindergarten and remained ongoing and relentless for all of Krylov's time in the classroom. The reverence for Lenin was ubiquitous—a visit to his tomb was at the top of the list for anyone traveling to Moscow—and teachers repeatedly stressed the ideas of the state and commonality. When someone forgot to flush a toilet in Krylov's school, for instance, the entire student body was summoned for a lecture on collective consciousness. In summer camp, the collective "We" was emphasized in all activities.

Despite the subtitle of his autobiography, Krylov is anti-Communist and certainly not an atheist.

Citizens kept an eye on each other, sometimes in a healthy way, as in helping a lost child, but often behaving more like spies. Sometimes these observations touched Krylov directly. One of the coworkers of Krylov's mother warned her that her son's "development was cause for great concern," meaning that while other boys played soccer, planted potatoes, and went fishing, he often wasted his time reading books.

Though the state had banned both his Catholic faith and the Bible, with the collapse of Soviet communism Krylov gradually discerned the "many parallels between the Communist Party and the Church." Marx, Engels, and Lenin were the Trinity; people sang what amounted to Party hymns; pictures of leaders were carried like icons in processions. Various rituals and certain holidays were set aside for celebration just like those in the Christian tradition.

"In the Soviet Union," Krylov notes, "we lived, therefore, in a deeply religious society, in which the government's world view was supposed to become opium for the people."



Krylov's grandmother was Catholic and continued as best she could to honor and observe her religious faith. "The Catholic Mass," 1869, by Fyodor Bonnikov.



OLEG GOLOVNEV/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Saving Graces

When Krylov was 7 years old, his father, ill for months in a hospital, died. Krylov continued living in the apartment with his mother and grandmother, who acted as a religious counterbalance to the ever-present atheism of the communist regime. His grandmother in particular, who was of German descent, which already set her apart from the others around them, was also Catholic and continued as best she could to honor and observe her religious faith.

It was Krylov's grandmother who prayed her rosary, kept track of the dates of the Catholic Church's movable feasts, talked of Jesus to the boy, and frequently sprinkled the apartment with "home-made holy water," once with hilarious results when in the night she confused the holy water with a bottle of blue ink. The family also gathered with Christians of other denominations, Orthodox and Protestant, for secretive celebrations of banned holidays.

At one point, wishing to learn more about the Bible, Krylov read the anti-Christian books he found in the library, which critiqued, often sarcastically,

Christian beliefs. He ignored the criticisms and instead focused on the passages where the authors had found it necessary to quote Scripture.

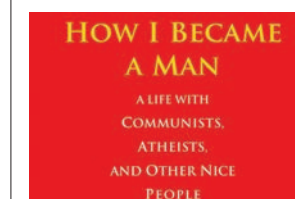
These influences may seem insignificant, but they allowed the boy to maintain his faith in a god other than Lenin.

## Mirror Images

Though Krylov makes few direct comparisons between the beliefs and practices of Soviet communism and those of the Left in the West, the similarities are plain to see. Thought control, censorship, school classrooms as bastions of propaganda and indoctrination, the belief that the government knows what's best for all, the mantra "We're all in this together"—these ideas were core to the Soviet state at that time, and they live on, in mutated forms, in the West today.

Here is just one example of this likeness. In his chapter "Dangerous Courage," Krylov describes a school meeting where he defended a classmate for unruly behavior. The class spokesperson denounced Krylov as socially immature for this viewpoint, by which she meant that his socialist ideals were flawed, and

Alexander Krylov was taught at every level of school the so-called glories and benefits of collectivism. First-graders in a classroom in Kursk, USSR, circa 1976.



**'How I Became a Man: A Life With Communists, Atheists, and Other Nice People'**

Author Alexander N. Krylov

Publisher Ignatius Press, Oct. 20, 2022

Kindle 158 pages

he was summoned to face the class, where several of the others criticized him for his faults. Krylov writes: "An altogether ordinary class meeting taught me how fast it can happen and how it feels to be judged and abandoned by everyone." This same practice of shaming regularly occurs on today's social media.

Several times, Krylov writes that a society which provides for all wants of its citizens and strictly controls speech and thought creates a nation of kindergartners, that is, grown men and women who exchange individuality and independence for security. This is the primary reason why "all over the world, there are people who find socialist ideas, Communism, or other authoritarian or totalitarian world views attractive and would like certain ideological concepts to be adopted."

To see those ideas at work, Americans need look no further than many of our universities, our social media, and the daily news from certain politicians and media outlets.

## A Book for the Young

Krylov ends "How I Became a Man" with this thought: "May the encounters with Communists, atheists, and also nice people that are related in this book help us to become grown up, to learn to appreciate freedom and democracy, and to give God more room in our lives."

In his poignant memoir, Krylov achieves those goals. With its many amusing takes on Soviet life and its insights into communist ideology, "How I Became a Man" offers an excellent education about the evils and banality of totalitarianism. Its simple prose and short chapters should appeal to teenagers as well as to adults, providing a much-needed corrective to today's collectivist philosophies.

If you're looking for a holiday gift for the young person in your life, try Alexander Krylov's "How I Became a Man."

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.

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ALL PHOTOS BY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



A composite image of a color photograph of "Girl With the Red Hat," circa 1669, by Johannes Vermeer and an infrared reflectance image showing that Vermeer underpainted his finely finished painting with bold, broad brushstrokes.



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

## FINE ARTS

## Discovering Vermeer's Studio

Continued from Page 1

The existence of Vermeer's studio is a remarkable new discovery, which can only shed more light on the 17th-century Dutch artist, who only came to fame in the late 19th century.

"The existence of other artists working with Johannes Vermeer is perhaps one of the most significant new findings about the artist to be discovered in decades. It fundamentally changes our understanding of Vermeer," said

the gallery's director Kaywin Feldman, in a press release.

Up until recently, experts believed that Vermeer worked alone. No written documents exist to confirm that he had a studio. Only about 35 of a possible 45 Vermeer paintings survive, and thus experts long believed that output to be too small a number were he to have had a studio.

**From Adversity to Opportunity**  
The pandemic-enforced gallery closures of



"Girl With a Flute," circa 1669 or 1675, by Johannes Vermeer's studio. Oil on panel; 7 7/8 inches by 7 inches. Widener Collection; National Gallery of Art, Washington.

2020 and 2021 gave in-house experts (curators, scientists, and conservators) of the National Gallery of Art an excuse to study all four of its Vermeer paintings: "A Lady Writing," "Girl With a Flute," "Girl With the Red Hat," and "Woman Holding a Balance."

The seven-person team drew on decades of the gallery's research about the paintings and used new, advanced technology to analyze them. The experts learned more about Vermeer's painting technique, which resulted in one of the gallery's paintings being attributed to an associate in Vermeer's studio rather than to the artist himself.

The gallery's "Vermeer's Secrets" exhibition presents the four paintings and the team's findings. Also on display are two Vermeer forgeries, "The Lacemaker" and "The Smiling Girl," created around 1925.

### Genre and 'Tronie' Paintings

In Vermeer's day, the Dutch Republic, in what's now the Northern Netherlands, was Calvinistic. The southern part of the Netherlands was Roman Catholic under the reign of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy.

Vermeer lived in the North, in Delft, where many painters specialized in genre paintings. The painters in the surrounding towns of Leiden, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Dordrecht also specialized in that same subject matter.

Each of the gallery's four Vermeer paintings features a solitary woman. "A Lady Writing" and "Woman Holding a Balance" both show the classic Vermeer composition: the subject sitting or standing in the light of an open window, usually to the left. These

types of genre paintings, with a single figure or a couple inside a room, were modern at the time, around 1650-1670. (Previously, multiple-figure paintings of militia groups, for instance, were more common, such as Rembrandt's "The Night Watch.")

“The existence of other artists working with Johannes Vermeer is perhaps one of the most significant new findings about the artist to be discovered in decades.”

Kaywin Feldman, director of the National Gallery of Art.

The gallery's "Girl With a Flute" and "Girl With the Red Hat" are small, intimate character works called "tronies," which Dutch artists created as studies. The subjects of these tronies might be based on real models but were dressed in exotic clothing, placed in imagined settings, and might show piety, old age, bravery, and the like. (Rembrandt created many tronies, including some of his self-portraits.) "Girl With a Pearl Earring," Vermeer's best-known work, and "Study of a Young Woman" are some other examples of Vermeer's tronies (held at the Mauritshuis in The Hague, and The Metropolitan Museum

of Art in New York, respectively).

### Microscopically and Characteristically Vermeer

Experts had already established that Vermeer began his paintings with a monochrome sketch. The gallery's researchers used microscopic analysis and advanced imaging techniques on the four paintings and found that Vermeer underpainted them with bold, broad brushstrokes to plot the forms, colors, and light in the compositions. In "Woman Holding a Balance" the team even pinpointed that Vermeer added a compound containing copper to his black underpaint to quicken the drying process.

Scientists studied paint samples and mapped the pigments to the minutest degree by using imaging spectroscopy. In "A Lady Writing," they found that Vermeer used as many as four different yellow pigments to create the lady's shimmering gold sleeve.

The most startling findings came when they studied "Girl With a Flute" and "Girl With the Red Hat." The same model appears to peer out of the two small paintings that Vermeer, rather unusually, had painted on wooden panels.

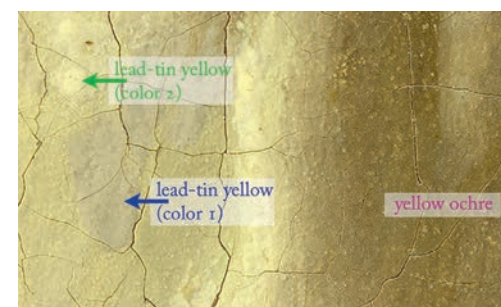
Comparing the two, the team could see that Vermeer used many of the same pigments and materials in each painting. However, there were marked differences in the artist's technique and the finished paintings. Vermeer underpainted "Girl With the Red Hat" using coarsely ground pigments, and finished the work by using finely ground pigments. In "Girl With a Flute," the artist reversed the process, giving the painting a



"A Lady Writing," circa 1665, by Johannes Vermeer. Oil on canvas; 17 11/16 inches by 15 11/16 inches. Gift of Harry Waldron Havemeyer and Horace Havemeyer Jr., in memory of their father, Horace Havemeyer; National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Johannes Vermeer used three different yellow pigments in the sleeve.



An extreme close-up of the sleeve with a pigment map of the yellows used.

coarse, almost granular finish.

By closely studying "Girl With the Red Hat," the researchers saw how Vermeer used a green-earth pigment to carefully modulate the flesh color, blending it right to the edges. But in "Girl With a Flute," the artist applied the same pigment in a heavy-handed manner, as seen on the blotchy nose and jawline. Vermeer used green-earth pigments to create flesh tones, a technique distinctive to the artist and rarely seen in Dutch painting.

Experts realized that the rough finish of "Girl With a Flute" made it unlikely that

Vermeer painted it, and that the use of the green-earth pigment in the flesh tones suggested that the artist who painted it must have known Vermeer's painting process intimately.

The team confirmed what experts had long suspected: Vermeer didn't paint the gallery's "Girl With a Flute." The mystery artist who painted it is yet to be identified; he could have been a pupil, apprentice, an amateur who paid Vermeer for lessons, a freelance painter hired on a project-by-project basis, or even a member of Vermeer's family.

Moreover, the gallery's curators found that Vermeer created his "Girl With the Red Hat" later than they had previously thought, around 1669 instead of 1666-1667, making the piece a pivotal point in his career after which he produced bolder paint applications.

The gallery's "loss" of "Girl With a Flute" as a Vermeer painting has meant an exciting gain in understanding the master's work.

*The "Vermeer's Secrets" exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington runs until Jan. 8, 2023. To find out more, visit NGA.gov*

*The exhibition is organized by Marjorie E. Wiseman, curator and head of the department of northern European paintings; Alexandra Libby, associate curator, department of northern European paintings; Kathryn A. Dooley, imaging scientist; John K. Delaney, senior imaging scientist; and Dina Anchin, associate paintings conservator, all of the National Gallery of Art.*

## MUSIC

## A Mainstay of the Violin Repertoire

Tchaikovsky's 'Valse-Scherzo' in C Major, Op. 34

### ARIANE TRIEBSWETTER

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky wrote music for more than ballets and operas. The famous Romantic composer also completed numerous instrumental pieces that continue to be interpreted and recorded today, as is the case with "Valse-Scherzo" in C Major, Op. 34 (circa 1877). The piece requires a performer's virtuosity; that, as well as its shimmering quality, makes it one of the mainstays of the violin repertoire.

However, initially, this showpiece wasn't as popular as Tchaikovsky's other compositions, and its origins are tainted with mystery.

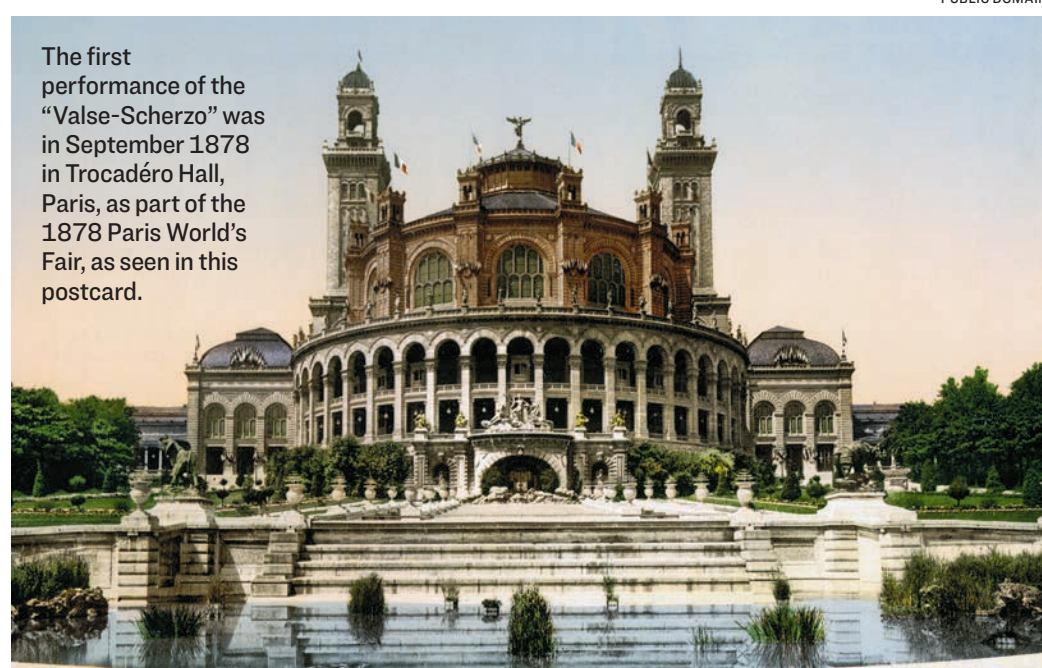
### Mysterious Origins

Not much information survives about how

the "Valse-Scherzo" was composed. The little we do know comes from the letters exchanged between the Russian composer and his close friend and former student, violinist Iosif Kotek, to whom he dedicated the piece.

The first mention of the piece was in one of these letters, in February 1877. It is thought that Tchaikovsky composed his "Valse-Scherzo" early in the same year, and that he finished it before he wrote his Fourth Symphony and the opera "Eugene Onegin." The full score of "Valse-Scherzo" was published in 1895, two years after the composer's death.

The first performance of "Valse-Scherzo" was in September 1878 by Polish violinist Stanislaw Barcewicz in the Trocadéro concert hall in Paris, as part of the 1878



Paris World's Fair. Kotek's letters hint that he composed the orchestral part for the occasion, transforming the piece into a composition for violin and orchestra. The

orchestration was written for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two horns, two bassoons, and strings.

Barcewicz also played the same piece a

little over a year later, under the direction of Nikolai Rubinstein at a Russian symphony concert.

### More Popular Shorter Version

Despite these two performances, the work wasn't as popular in Tchaikovsky's lifetime as his other pieces, possibly because of its long length (569 bars). It was only in 1914 that it first found its place in the violin repertoire, in an extensively revised version by violinist Vasily Bezekirsky. The violinist shortened the "Valse-Scherzo" to 332 bars and made some changes to make the violin part even more virtuosic. His arrangement is still a point of reference and often played.

"Valse-Scherzo" has become a mainstay of the violin repertoire, mainly to showcase the technical prowess of talented solo violinists. Although it lasts only about six to eight minutes, the piece is written in an A-B-A format, which gives it a rich complexity. The A-B-A form is known as ternary or song form, consisting of an opening section (A), a contrasting section (B), and a repeti-

**This piece combines uplifting emotions of liveliness, lightness, and playfulness with intensity.**

tion of the opening section (A). It also has a cadenza that makes great demands on the soloist.

But technical difficulty is nothing without passion, which the composition delivers. This piece combines uplifting emotions of liveliness, lightness, and playfulness with intensity.

Contrasting emotions, which can be heard when the violin takes over the melody from the piano or orchestra, are typical of the Romantic style. This musical style was popular toward the end of the 18th century and celebrated emotions through new musical forms and languages. In this piece, emotions are celebrated through technical virtuosity, another prominent feature of the Romantic style.

Much more than a piece of technical prowess, the "Valse-Scherzo" exhilarates and sparkles, giving it an undeniable presence in the violin repertoire.

*Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.*



The first we hear of "Valse-Scherzo" is in letters exchanged between violinist Iosif Kotek (L), a close friend and former student of the Russian composer.





FILM REVIEW

# Hostile Haute Cuisine Versus Pretentious One-Percenters

SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

MICHAEL CLARK

The second film last week to feature a maniacal, uber-obsessive “artiste” chef, “The Menu” is a searing satirical thriller that lacerates and skewers both those who conceive and create impossibly ornate and fussy dishes and those who view eating them as gastronomical nirvana.

In a manner not unlike that of the non-fictional Chef Charlie Trotter in “Love, Charlie,” the fictional Julian Slowik (Ralph Fiennes) demands nothing less than absolute, unerring perfection from himself and his sycophantic staff, all of whom approach their work with the zest, zeal, and intensity of Navy SEALs.

Julian owns “Hawthorne,” a private island restaurant that seats only a dozen patrons per night. For \$1,250.00 a pop, diners are presented with never-repeated seven-course meals over the span of four hours. He considers his creations to be edible plot devices that propel a themed narrative that he hopes the consumers will “get” but rarely do. This won’t be the case this evening.

**Eclectic Guest List**

On this night, the guests include three hotshot money managers with severe haircuts; restaurant critic Lillian (Janet McTeer) and her editor; a has-been actor (John Leguizamo) whose ego dwarfs his talent, and his female assistant; Julian’s mother; and an elderly couple who are “regulars” yet can’t seem to recall a single dish from past visits.

In addition, there’s a final duo, who are the most interesting as they appear to have nothing in common with each other, and we later find out why. Tyler (Nicholas Hoult) knows every detail of Julian’s life and considers dining at Hawthorne be to a metaphoric journey to Mecca. He’s also fond of using snooty foodie lingo such as “mouth feel.” The indifferent Margot (Anya Taylor-Joy) can barely cloak her boredom with everything and barely eats anything, something that both fascinates and infuriates Julian.

Rounding out the cast is Hong Chau as Elsa, Julian’s right hand, who also acts as maître d’and floor manager. Also sporting

a severe haircut, Elsa is professional and polite, smiles only when necessary, and isn’t beyond delivering stern admonishments to customers who interfere with the rigid, orchestrated flow of the evening.

Working with a screenplay from first-timers Seth Reiss and Will Tracy, British director Mark Mylod is beyond fully committed to the throttling material. A veteran of prestige cable television (“Entourage,” “Game of Thrones,” “Shameless,” “Succession”), Mylod lends the production an episodic pace and feel.

**Christie and le Carré**

“The Menu” plays out not as a traditional three-act story but rather as two distinct halves. The first is all character development, in which just the right amount of time is dedicated to establishing the personalities of the 14 principals without doing so in a rushed or overly condensed manner. It’s not all that different from your standard issue Agatha Christie or John le Carré adaptation.

The final 50 minutes are dedicated to the elaborate presentation of the meal itself, with each course being introduced with “Chef’s Table” inspired title cards and dish-origin commentary by Julian. By the time the third portion of the night is presented, the overarching theme is made clear, aided along the way by what Lillian nervously describes as “theater.”

The problem in going into plot detail from this point forward is that every bit of it also acts as a spoiler. On the upside, each morsel (pun intended) is unexpected and inches the narrative into social and class warfare allegories.

As much as he hates to admit it, Julian proclaims that his creations are not art in the same manner as a painting, sculpture, or piece of music, but something short-lived and ephemeral. He’s resigned to the fact that his “masterpieces” eventually end up in the same place as the contents of a fast-food combo meal, and it pains him.

**There’s the Rub**

It is also made clear that all of the diners (save for Margot) are there for different reasons, but each is similar in that they have rubbed Julian the wrong way. It’s



**The film is not all that different from your standard issue Agatha Christie or John le Carré adaptation.**

**‘The Menu’**

**Director:** Mark Mylod  
**Starring:** Ralph Fiennes, Anya Taylor-Joy, Nicholas Hoult, Janet McTeer, Hong Chau  
**Running Time:** 1 hour, 46 minutes  
**MPAA Rating:** R  
**Release Date:** Nov. 18, 2022  
 ★★★★★

a perplexing Catch-22 for him; the very people wealthy enough to afford his food (or influence those who could) annoy him to no end.

To a degree, Julian is correct; the lion’s share of haute cuisine consumers is as pretentious and above-it-all as the food they eat. Margot is dead on the mark when she states that Julian and those like him have taken all of the fun out of eating, words tantamount to shooting an arrow through his heart, followed by more words that melt it.

This movie isn’t for everyone. It’s intense, unforgiving, and pulls no punches. The filmmakers attack the anti-hoi polloi here with the precision of a brain surgeon’s scalpel and show no quarter in the process.

*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.*

Margot Mills (Anya Taylor-Joy) speaks to Julian Slowik (Ralph Fiennes), the uber-chef, in “The Menu.”

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