

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



"Moses Descends From Mount Sinai With the Ten Commandments," 1662, by Ferdinand Bol. Oil on canvas. Royal Palace of Amsterdam.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

What Rational Morality Is Based On

Morality, politics, and decline (part 1)

JAMES SALE

One of the most perplexing things in our Western society to many is how morality seems to have disappeared under the umbrella of politics. It seems, for example, to matter more whether one is a Democrat or a Republican than whether one is right or wrong. For that matter, being right or wrong has become synonymous with being either a Democrat or a Republican! We, in other words, have become tribal rather than rational.

However, as English moralist and essayist Samuel Johnson observed, "He who thinks rationally thinks morally." To think tribally—my country, my party, my family, my ideas, right or wrong—is a perversion of reason. Indeed, Dante's whole poem "The Divine Comedy" can be said to be about the perversion of reason (the intellect) that leads to hell, damnation, and the unending misery of so much of

the human condition in this life as well as the next.

Morality Is No Longer Acceptable

Morality is not really a popular topic these days; it is perhaps considered too opaque, too controversial, and most importantly by far, too judgmental. Did I say "judgmental"? As author Theodore Dalrymple, also called the "Orwell of our time," observed: "When young people want to praise themselves, they describe themselves as 'non-judgmental.' For them the highest form of morality is amorality." Not surprising, then, that New York Times writer David Brooks in his article "If It Feels Right..." talks about interviews conducted across America where "two-thirds of the young people either couldn't answer the question [about their moral lives] or described problems that are not moral at all."

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A statue of Gene Autry and his horse Champion at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles.

COUNTRY MUSIC

Gene Autry: How 'America's Favorite Singing Cowboy' Exemplified the Unique Entrepreneurial Spirit of America

REBECCA DAY

Gene Autry's life story reads like a great American novel. Known as "America's favorite singing cowboy," the country star paired his entrepreneurial spirit with his love of entertaining audiences and became one of the country-western genre's most unique and beloved figures.

After amassing an audience with a slew of performances throughout the 1920s, he signed with Columbia Records and made the "musical Western" a cinematic staple. Autry went on to star in almost 100 films featuring him on horseback, serenading a love interest or saloon patrons, throughout adventurous plots.

The television star was also no stranger to airwaves and hosted "Melody Ranch," his variety show, on the CBS Radio Network throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The opening theme song featured one of his most popular hits, "Back in the Saddle Again," a fiddle-laced tribute to traveling cowboys throughout the United States.

Autry's vocal delivery with his single "Don't Fence Me In" evokes feelings of romance: a cowboy so in love with the freedom he experiences out on the open plains that the song's title reads more like a declaration than a command.

'The Gene Autry Rodeo Show'
A member of organizations such as the ProRodeo Hall of Fame and the Texas Cowboy Rodeo Hall of Fame, Autry blazed a trail for future singing cowboys by combining his musical entertainment skills with his cowboying prowess for live audiences. Known as "The Gene Autry Rodeo Show," these live-action, one-of-a-kind events scored him the honor of being the first entertainer to sell out Madison Square Garden in New York.

Autry blazed a trail for future singing cowboys by combining his musical skills with his cowboying prowess.

At the height of his career, America entered World War II. Autry took a break from showbiz and enlisted in the military, serving in the Army Air Corps while overseas. His fearless, bold spirit carried over into his military career. His assignment involved transporting supplies to locations along an air route between India and China over part of the Himalayan Mountains known as "The Hump." This remote course was one of the most dangerous routes for Army airmen due to a lack of reliable maps of the area, unavailable radio transmission signals, and unpredictable weather systems often found above the mountain range.

After serving in the Army and traveling with the USO from 1942 to 1946, America's favorite singing cowboy was

ready to reignite his entertainment career. A visionary at heart, instead of falling back on his tried-and-true successful radio show and Western-themed films, he took his status as a "household name" literally and kick-started his career in television in the 1950s, something that no movie star before him had dared to do.

Not only did he star in 91 episodes of "The Gene Autry Show" on CBS, but he produced them, too, under his company Flying A Pictures. Through his production company, he kept the spirit of the Old West alive by producing specials featuring actor portrayals of folk heroes like Annie Oakley and the popular fictional outlaw Buffalo Bill Jr.

While garnering accolades over the years for his exhaustive work in the TV and film industry, the singer-songwriter also recorded over 600 songs, with many of his records ultimately being certified gold or platinum.

He even owned a few popular radio stations along the way.

Celebrating the American West

Perhaps the most evident accomplishment of Autry's entrepreneurial zeal was a milestone that came just a decade prior to his passing in 1998. Throughout his entertainment career, it had long been a dream of his to give back to the Western community that had been so hospitable to him since he was a young boy riding the rails from his home in Texas to the open pastures of Oklahoma.

In 1988, his dream finally came true when he opened the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum, with the purpose of celebrating the cultures of the American West that have poignantly influenced every part of the nation for decades.

Since its initial opening in the late '80s, the museum expanded substantially and is now the Autry Museum of the American West. Hosting close to 200,000 visitors annually, the Los Angeles museum is home to an expansive collection of historical Southwestern artifacts and ongoing art exhibitions like "The Silent West," which features some of the Western genre's earliest films, and "Western Frontiers: Stories of Fact and Fiction," which pays tribute to American heroes like the 26th U.S. president, Theodore Roosevelt.

Gene Autry was a true Renaissance man, even acquiring the California Angels baseball team in 1961 and holding the role of vice president for the American League until his passing. His eclectic legacy shows that he was more than an actor and musician. From his decades-long entertainment career to his service during World War II and final act as a museum founder, we see that Autry wasn't just "America's favorite singing cowboy." His pioneering spirit and entrepreneurial legacy show that he continues to be an irreplaceable icon of the American West.

Rebecca Day is an independent musician, freelance writer, and frontwoman of country group, *The Crazy Daysies*.

TRADITIONAL ART

An Abundant Table

Clara Peeters makes the ordinary to extraordinary

YVONNE MARCOTTE

The people of the Netherlands loved still lifes, from commoners, to merchants, to nobles; in fact, the name "still life" comes from the Dutch "still leven." Everyone wanted a still life in their home, especially in the 17th century, a time of unprecedented prosperity. Wealth came on the ships of the Dutch East India Company, which brought many new foods and spices to their tables.

One Flemish artist found great success painting still lifes: Clara Peeters. She chose foods and items for her paintings that were both familiar and exotic to her Dutch patrons. And she painted with such skill that one could almost touch the food she placed in her compositions.

Her painting "Still Life With Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels" (circa 1615) presents a feast of local and imported foods and drink that could have found a place on any affluent Dutch dinner table.

In the lower left of the painting, Peeters placed two pretzels. Said to have been invented in the early 600s, the crisp-on-the-outside and chewy-on-the-inside delicacy was very popular across Northern Europe, and each country had its own version. The Dutch called their sweeter version "zoute krakeling."

Above the pretzels, on a pewter platter, cheeses constitute a large part of the composition. Cheese was not imported but produced in the Netherlands, and it was a major export item. In front, the artist painted a grayish-green cheese that was darkened with parsley or horseradish juice, and may have come from the northern Dutch island of Texel.

Directly behind it is a half-wheel of Gouda. Peeters was known for her skill in painting detail, and she shows that here by painting the cavity when a cheese taster takes out a chunk of cheese and then puts back the small wedge on the top after testing. Atop the Gouda is a smaller piece of

sheep's milk cheese. Topping the cheeses is a plate of spooned butter.

At the lower right, the artist placed a Chinese porcelain dish from the period of Wanli, the 14th emperor of the Ming Dynasty. This dishware was named "Kraak porcelain" after the Portuguese carrack ships that imported it to the Netherlands. The plate holds almonds and raisins from around the Mediterranean, and dried figs, which were readily available in the Netherlands.

In the background on the right is a small loaf of bread, which was considered a luxury because it was made from

wheat. The lower classes made do with a heavier rye bread.

In front of the bread is a decorated wine glass with a cover, called "façon de Venise" glass and made by Italian glass blowers who made their living in Antwerp at the time. While commoners drank beer, wine imported from Germany, France, or Spain was a main part of the meal for the wealthy merchant and noble classes. Glassware that reflected light in still lifes allowed artists to demonstrate their technical skill in painting details.

In the center, the artist placed a stoneware Bellarmine container, on the lid of which she presented a reflection of herself. Peeters was one of the first artists in Northern Europe to paint self-portraits in reflective surfaces.

Peeters used the dark background of the

still life to highlight the food items. The composition was carefully designed to balance color, form, texture, and luster.

It was believed that she lived in Antwerp and is known to have made 40 signed paintings; she signed her paintings in unusual ways. In this painting, it's on the handle of the silver knife on the table.

She was known for "her meticulous brushwork, sophisticated arrangement of materials, low angle of perspective, and ability to capture precisely the textures of the varied objects she painted," according to the Britannica website.

Painting ordinary items with such skill gives a sense that everything we have is worth caring for, even the food that we eat. Peeters gave us a gift of abundance that will last beyond the expiration date of those delicious items.



A "vanitas" painting by Clara Peeters, circa 1610, which is likely a self-portrait.



Clara Peeters was a successful artist in 17th-century Netherlands, known for her still lifes. "Still Life With Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels," circa 1615, by Clara Peeters. Oil on oak panel; 13.6 inches by 19.5 inches. Maurice House in The Hague, Amsterdam.

TRUTH and TRADITION

In Our Own Words



“With diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.”

Petr Svab
Reporter

The World Through a Journalist's Eyes

Dear Epoch VIP,

Thank you for your continuing support—we are at your service.

My name is Petr Svab and I've been covering politics, courts, police, immigration, economy, and other topics during my 16 years at The Epoch Times.

It is my pleasure to work for a newspaper that stands for values I can wholeheartedly endorse and fittingly summed up in our motto of Truth and Tradition.

I believe that truth is the living world, and an infinite journey of exploration. The more topics I tackle, the more issues I delve into, the more I realize how complex, multifaceted, and enormous the world truly is. We can never dream of grasping it all, but, with diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.

Moreover, I've found, a journalist can open doors closed to others, give readers the facts of the story, the context that enlightens them, as well as the insights of the participants.

I remember walking the streets of West Baltimore a few years ago. My plan was just to interview some local business owners to see what the city was doing about some of its issues—from piles of trash and abandoned houses to homelessness and crime.

Within five minutes of my arrival, a man on the street noticed me and started to shout: "Guy with a camera! There's a guy with a camera here!" A group of young men further up the street took notice as I approached.

"Are you a cop?" asked one of them. He was a young man with wide eyes that looked like they'd already seen more than their share.

I introduced myself and my business of the day, handing the gentleman my card. The young man's expression softened as he realized I was here to report on a story—the story of his home.

As it turned out, the young man was not only ready to share with me his insights on the local issues, but also to offer advice on where to find what I was looking for. We parted ways with a handshake.

In all my experience talking directly to the people

involved in various events, **the truth seldom (if ever) favors partisan narratives—it's much more colorful: sometimes humorous, other times tragic.**

Consider the story, for example, of Trayvon Martin. According to some, an innocent child killed by a racist man. According to others, a thug killed in self-defense. But after filmmaker Joel Gilbert retraced Martin's last moments, weeks, and months, it turned out neither narrative was quite true. Gilbert told a story of a young man whose life was falling apart and ultimately plunged into a tragedy that nobody wanted.

So if that's truth, what is tradition, then? For me, it is the lessons of history. It's the distilled universal wisdom collected by our ancestors over millennia—the timeless lessons of the enlightened, the sages, and the saints. This treasure chest of the past is where we can turn to help us better understand the truth at present.

My work is to safeguard this treasure, let it live through the pages of The Epoch Times and the hearts of our readers.

While it may seem the foundations of the civilization itself are now under attack, I truly believe our readers will be best equipped to withstand the storm—through clarity and peace of heart. For whatever the future holds, I believe the path will be less treacherous for those who walk it steadily, making choices informed both by truth and tradition.

What I pledge to you is yet more meticulous research, analysis, and fact-finding. I'll do the digging for you, while letting you make up your own mind. Furthermore, I'll also hone my wit to give you an ever-better read along the way.

Yes, we strive to be an influential media in the world, but **I believe that our true success is measured in minds sharpened, hearts uplifted, and lives improved.**

Once again, thank you for joining us on this journey. We do live in truly epochal times, wouldn't you say?

In Truth and Tradition,

Petr Svab
The Epoch Times

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"Mankind's Eternal Dilemma—The Choice Between Virtue and Vice," 1633, by Frans Francken the Younger. Oil on panel. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

What Rational Morality Is Based On

Continued from Page 1

And it's not just young people. The key aspect of the abolition of nonjudgmentalism is linguistic. Despite the many people's almost daily experience of good and evil, we have had over 30 years now of a consistent effort by politicians, theologians, media outlets, and the rest, to cancel the words "good" and "evil" and replace them with an anodyne of words like "unacceptable." Vile behaviors and desires are no longer evil; they are unacceptable.

This switch, of course, relegates morality from an absolute to a social norm. And as author and psychiatrist Norman Doidge in his Foreword to Jordan B Peterson's "12 Rules for Life," noted: "The idea that human life can be free of moral

concerns is a fantasy."

Cultural commentator David Brooks explains further: "When modern culture tries to replace sin with ideas like error or insensitivity, or tries to banish words like 'virtue,' 'character,' 'evil,' and 'vice' altogether, that doesn't make life any less moral; it just means we have obscured the inescapable moral core of life with shallow language. ... Furthermore, the concept of sin is necessary because it is radically true."

Abolishing Evil

The problem with abolishing evil—or rather, attempting to pretend it isn't there and that it can be redefined—is that it is evil itself doing so, and this practice generates further evil. Ptahtotep, a vizier writing

From the Western perspective, each traditionally defined sin or error circumscribes the freedom of another.

over 4,000 years ago, noted that instead of trying to redefine evil, we needed to stop it, for "the act of stopping evil leads to the lasting establishment of virtue."

Stopping evil, of course, presupposes that we know what it is. When morality is based on a transcendental reality—on spiritual illumination (Buddhism), the gods (the Hammurabi code), or God himself (The Ten Commandments), we can understand evil as an opposite to the transcendental intentions. What we see from these examples of codes or laws is a massive overlap in the areas of core morality: adultery, theft, false witness, murder—to take four obvious examples—which are condemned. What the actual specifics are (the context), and what the punishments and consequences may be, might vary, but

the general direction is very clear.

Sadly, stopping evil is not what politicians and many today want. As Dalrymple says in "Our Culture, What's Left of It," "In the psychotherapeutic worldview ... there is no evil, only victimhood."

Nobody anymore is responsible for their actions; everyone, potentially, is in need of therapy—problem solved! This idea can be traced back to the Enlightenment and the thinkers it spawned. Marx would be a classic example, since economic factors, according to him, produced social ills not actual, real people. Ironically, as an amusing sidebar, his wife (or perhaps his mother) was alleged to have said: "I wish Karl would spend a little less time talking about capital and a little more accumulating it."

We could add Nietzsche and Freud to the list of thinkers, each explaining human nature away as owing to some other, simplistic factor. Change the economics, become the superman, understand your dreams, and utopia will be here any day!

Visiting Your Psychiatrist

The absurdity of all this becomes manifest when one considers what Dalrymple also noted in commenting on one of the most famous funerals of the late 20th century: "So universally accepted has the pathological-therapeutic approach to life become that the apostolic heir to St. Augustine—that is to say, the present Archbishop of Canterbury—offered up thanks to God at the funeral service for Princess Diana's vulnerability, as if an appointment with a psychiatrist were man's highest possible moral and cultural aspiration."

If Dalrymple's comment was perceptive then, it is 10 times more so now, since proclaiming one's vulnerability and/or fragile mental state seems to be the sine qua non of virtue, as any cursory examination of social media will reveal. See, for example, a major article on the BBC, "How LinkedIn Is Changing and Why Some Are Not Happy," questioning why in the last five years a major site for business contacts, LinkedIn, has turned into a sob-fest for vulnerable hearts.

What Morality Is Based On

But what is, then, the virtue or morality that we wish, and should be standing up for? I have mentioned its necessarily transcendental source if it is to have authority. Keep in mind here that rationality begins after one has established the relevant principles that are nonrational: Reason itself cannot be proved by reason. We have to assume that reason is rational in the first place before we invoke it.

That said, reason has specific applications to four areas of life: not committing adultery, not stealing (theft), not lying (false witness), and not killing others (murder). A clue to what we might be standing for might be found in considering what



these four crimes have in common. Quite obviously, each one of them injures other human beings, but how?

I think the answer to this—from the Western perspective—is that each of these activities circumscribes the freedom of another. In reverse order, murder takes away another's freedom to live; false witness takes away freedom of access to truth; stealing takes away freedom of access to tangible and intangible possessions; and adultery takes away the freedom of trust and intimacy with the most important person in another's life. In other words, the key moral principle—assumption, even—that we should be standing for is freedom, our individual freedoms and the respect we maintain for

the freedom of others.

Writer and newspaper columnist A.N. Wilson in his book "Dante in Love" noted similarly that "the story of Christian theology—and it could be said, the whole story of Western thought—has been an everlasting battle between determinism and some effort at declaring a belief in our freedom to make moral choices. If we are no more than the sum of our DNA, or no more than what the materialist forces of history have made us, or no more than the product of our social environment, then the courts of law—let alone Hell—are monstrous engines of injustice; for how can someone be held to account for his behavior if it is all preordained?"

Freedom is what we are fighting for, and

specifically, freedom of the will.

In part 2 of this article, we will dig down a little deeper into the notion of freedom and freedom of the will, and how it is currently imperiled.

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, "Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams" (Routledge, 2021). He has been nominated for the 2022 poetry Pushcart Prize, won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is "StairWell." For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit EnglishCantos.home.blog



"Saint Michael and the Angels at War With the Devil," 1448, by Domenico Ghirlandaio. Tempera on panel. Detroit Institute of Arts.

LITERATURE

The Enemy Within

Jean Raspail's 'The Camp of the Saints' 50 years later

JEFF MINICK

From the terrace of his home on the crest of a hill, an old professor peers through a spyglass at the scene unfolding below on the sand and waters of the Riviera. Calgues is his name—his ancestors built this house 300 years earlier—and he is studying the beginning of an extraordinary invasion: 100 ships and hundreds of thousands, perhaps a million, refugees from Calcutta and other cities in India. Soldiers have lighted bonfires on the beaches to dispose of the dead cast overboard from the ships, but the French army stationed there to guard against the coming invasion is melting away.

Then a young French radical appears on the terrace—"Feet bare, hair long and dirty, flowered tunic, Hindu collar, Afghan vest." In his ensuing conversation with the professor, he spews venom on Western civilization, France, the middle class, his family. The professor replies with a few counterarguments and questions, but his visitor remains undeterred in his bitter hatred of the culture that made him.

Finally, the professor says, "When they go smashing everything to bits, they won't know any better. But why you?"

"Why? Because I've learned to hate all this. Because the conscience of the world makes me hate all this, that's why."

At that point, Professor Calgues politely excuses himself, disappears inside his house, and returns to the terrace with his shotgun. "What's that for?" the young man asks. "Why, I'm going to kill you, of course!" And after delivering a little speech on past battles fought by the West against invaders, Calgues keeps his word and pulls the trigger.

The Big Picture

This confrontation opens Jean Raspail's apocalyptic novel "The Camp of the Saints," first published 1973. Here we learn that political radicals, the Catholic Church, sympathetic officials, and those who blithely support them, whom Raspail calls "fellow travelers," have hammered together and supported this flotilla of the poor and wretched. They spill onto the French beaches, sweeping the last vestiges of resistance before them as they make their way inland. European culture and government are soon eradicated, with little Switzerland being the last domino to fall before this tidal wave of immigrants.

The "incursion," as the French president euphemistically terms this invasion, has consequences worldwide. Hordes of Chinese swarm into Siberia, resisted only by one drunken Russian soldier. America becomes a land of mob rule. South Africa, still apartheid in this novel, swiftly falls to a massive people's army from the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

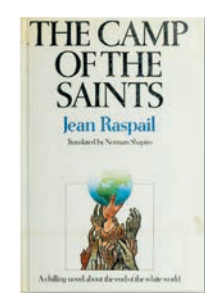
Critics have either viciously assailed or vigorously applauded "The Camp of the Saints." The former call it a racist tract, a handbook for white supremacists, a novel of xenophobic hatred and fear. Its defenders salute the author's courage in speaking out against mass immigration into Europe, for turning the spotlight on the gulf between the world's rich and poor, and for underscoring the ongoing destruction of the customs and beliefs of the West.

STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN/GETTY IMAGES



Jean Raspail, the author of "The Camp of the Saints," in 2005.

Critics have either viciously assailed or vigorously applauded 'The Camp of the Saints.'



Take your pick. This dystopian novel provides ample evidence supporting both sides. And yet both sides often miss the more profound points of this highly controversial story.

The Masters of Disaster

"The Camp of the Saints" is no casual read, and not just because of its take on race and immigration. The paragraphs are plump and thick with detail, in some cases extending to a page or more. Though the real action takes place in a relatively short time, Raspail references historical events, heroes, and old wars that may be unfamiliar to readers. Finally, even in its English translation the novel retains a Gallic flair for polemics, intellectual wit, irony, and satire. The dozen or more characters who play major roles in this drama are primarily distinguished one from the other by their politics and ideology.

On the side of the young man killed by the professor, for example, are fanatics like Ballan, the atheist who initiates the idea of the fleet and is trampled to death when the mob rushes to board the ships. Jean Orelle, official voice of the French government, uses "liberty, equality, fraternity" as a propaganda tool, welcoming immigrants and condemning those opposed until the full import of the impending disaster finally makes itself evident. Just before the president's address to France, in which he leaves it to the conscience of each soldier whether to resist the invasion, and so assures the utter collapse of the military, the despairing Orelle commits suicide.

Perhaps worst of all is the pompous and repulsive Clément Dio, a journalist with a huge following who for personal reasons bitterly condemns racism while promoting hatred for the West. Both he and his wife perish in the violent chaos that his rhetoric has helped bring into existence.

Opposed to this bunch is a small band of

soldiers and civilians, not all of them white, who end the novel under the command of a Colonel Dragasès. This tiny remnant includes Machefer, publisher and editor for a newspaper that aimed to speak the truth about French politics. These men wind up encamped at the professor's villa, where they create a last bastion of civilization in miniature, awarding each other titles like mayor, minister, and commander-in-chief, keeping up their spirits with rough jokes and songs, and partaking of the wine and gourmet foods supplied to them by Professor Calgues. After wreaking death and destruction on the radicals, fellow travelers, and migrants surrounding them, they die under the bombardment of a revived air force.

Unforeseen Consequences

"Tenderness leads to the gas chambers," Flannery O'Connor once wrote. Later, Walker Percy used her words in his novel "The Thanatos Syndrome," which demonstrates the truth of this shocking aphorism.

O'Connor and Percy knew that tenderness, the kindness and gentle love we show to others, can have unexpected and dire consequences—including death—when unaccompanied by such virtues as prudence and wisdom. To cite an example from today's news, the mother of an opioid addict may shower her son with affection and sympathy, but unless she insists that he seek treatment or otherwise abandon his habit, her compassion is false and useless, and is in fact enabling his death.

This idea that goodwill and generosity unbuttressed by prudence can lead to evil and death is key to fully understanding "The Camp of the Saints." Many of the fellow travelers who welcome their invaders with open arms, the soldiers who from pity throw away their weapons rather than defending their country, and the politicians and media who have spurred this mass migration act from

motives of guilt and sympathy. Unfortunately, they are blind to the consequences. The migrants they welcome care nothing for "liberté, égalité, fraternité," nor for the churches, libraries, monuments, universities, and courts given birth under that banner. They pack their own set of beliefs, and they are in search of a better material life and the goods they so appallingly lack.

Moreover, with the exception of men like Professor Calgues, most of the characters make only a vague connection between their customs and institutions, and the wealth these have created. They fail to understand that when this avalanche of humanity buries rights, laws, and customs, it will kill off the very sources that produce these commodities and goods they seek. Soon the lives of the

invaders will be no better than when they first set sail from Calcutta.

In his 1982 Afterword to the book, Raspail described this Western phenomenon as "the cancerous progression of compassion."

And the Debate Rages On

In a 2005 appraisal of "The Camp of the Saints," the reviewer concludes that it's "so loony that it's impossible to take very seriously, like the worst of colonialist- or Nazi-fiction." Oddly, however, this same review begins by citing a clip from another analysis that reaches an entirely different conclusion.

In their digital Atlantic Monthly article "Must It Be the Rest Against the West?" Yale University professor of history Paul Kennedy and Ph.D. candidate Matthew Connelly



The complexities regarding emigration of social class, race, and gender in "The Parting Cheer," 1861, by Henry Nelson O'Neill. Oil on canvas. Royal Museums Greenwich, London.

offer a lengthy, balanced look at Raspail's novel. Moreover, using the novel as a springboard, the two scholars examine as well the global issues of race, migration, and wealth raised by "The Camp of the Saints." Here is their conclusion:

"For the remainder of this century, we suspect, the debate will rage over what and how much should be done to improve the condition of humankind in the face of the mounting pressures described here and in other analyses. One thing seems to us fairly certain. However the debate unfolds, it is, alas, likely that a large part of it—on issues of population, migration, rich versus poor, race against race—will have advanced little beyond the considerations and themes that are at the heart of one of the most disturbing novels of the late twentieth century, Jean Raspail's The Camp of the Saints. It will take more than talk to prove the prophet wrong."

Kennedy and Connelly published their essay in 1994.

Notes: "The Camp of the Saints" is no longer in print in English, but it may be found in secondhand online bookstores. Furthermore, were I to rate this book as we do films, it would receive an "R" for profanity, some scenes with sexual content, and violence. Given its explosive subject matter, I would also rate its general content as suitable for Mature Adults Only.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin in seminars of homeschooled students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.



From the first moment of his reign, Charles, almost alone among European leaders at the time, desired peace. Portrait of Charles at his induction into the Order of St. Stephen, 1916, by Arpad Pasch.

HISTORY

The Emperor Who Tried to Stop World War I: CHARLES OF AUSTRIA

WALKER LARSON

He knelt there beside the emperor's bed, forehead pressed into palms, as the murmuring of the prayers for the dying filled the stillness of the room. And as his lips moved in supplication for his granduncle, his thoughts drifted to the overwhelming possibility of what could soon be.

As Emperor Franz Joseph I's worsening condition became clear, the weight of immense responsibility settled on the 29-year-old heir's shoulders like a shadow. The earnest young archduke wrestled with the reality that he would soon be emperor of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

When he rose to his feet beside the monarch's deathbed, he was rising to face a world wracked with woe and seemingly insurmountable challenges: His own country was torn by nationalist and ethnic tensions, while the wider world was engaged in the bloodiest and most destructive war humanity had ever seen, World War I—or as it was then called, simply "The Great War."

The Chain of Command

Charles von Habsburg (1887–1922) was never meant to be monarch. Growing up, he remained several layers removed from the throne, but a series of tragedies brought him rapidly to it. First, Crown Prince Rudolf (son of the reigning emperor Franz Joseph) committed suicide in 1889, thus making his cousin, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir. Franz Ferdinand contracted a morganatic marriage, which meant that his children could not inherit the throne. Instead, once the future emperor Franz Ferdinand died, his nephew, Charles, would become ruler.

But Charles still believed that he had many years ahead of him before he would be called on to lead the empire since Franz Ferdinand was still a relatively young man. Then came the bullet from the Serbian's gun, the heat of which set the world ablaze and changed Charles's life—and the lives of millions of others—forever. Franz Ferdinand was killed, World War I had broken out, and Franz Joseph's health was declining. Charles was suddenly on the brink of assuming the crowns of Austria and Hungary, with their ancient traditions, expectations, and responsibilities.

The Emperor's Greatest Wish

Franz Joseph died in 1916, and Charles became Charles I, emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. That was no easy year to become a head of state. Along with the throne, Charles inherited a war, of which he had personal, frontline experience. From the first moment of his reign, Charles, almost alone among European leaders at the time, desired peace.

As the official website for Charles's canonization puts it: "As emperor he understood peace to be his absolute, kingly duty. In his ascension manifesto, therefore, he named peace as his central goal. Only [Charles] took up the peace proposal of Pope Benedict XV, incorporating its principles in a set of proposed peace accords (which historians have evaluated as thoroughly realistic and having had great potential)." Charles further made peace overtures to the Allies through his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus von Bourbon-Parma. Tragically, these attempts proved unsuccessful due to the "peace-through-victory"

policy of Charles's German allies and because of the antipeace factions among the Entente (the international military coalition of countries led by France, the United Kingdom, Russia, the United States, Italy, and Japan). As Charles Coulombe describes in his 2020 biography of the emperor, Charles's liaison Sixtus waited for some time in Westminster for a response from the British, which was not forthcoming. Eventually, he had to return to his regiment.

As related in "A Heart for Europe" by Joanna and James Bogle, Sixtus later recalled: "The young emperor was innocent of his predecessor's faults and had come to the throne with only one desire, which was to put an end to the universal slaughter. ... He could not uselessly sacrifice his people to the obstinacy of an ally [Germany] whose pride was causing his coming destruction." Had Charles's peace attempts been successful, wrote Sixtus, "The lives of thousands, nay millions of men would have been saved."

Charles's desire for the good of his subjects extended beyond peace efforts. Coulombe tells us that the young monarch created a ministry of social welfare in his domains to address hunger and disease, as well as child and youth protection, family rights, and social insurance. This ministry was the first of its kind in Europe. Charles also planned to transform part of the empire into a federated state to give his peoples more independence and help resolve nationalist problems in the multinational empire, but he faced too much opposition from his cabinet, according to Coulombe.

The emperor and king was also a dedicated husband and father. He remained deeply in love with his wife, the lively and loyal Zita of Bourbon-Parma, and they had eight children together. He discussed important matters of state with her, relying on her advice and support as he labored for his peoples. After Charles's death, Zita wore black for the rest of her life.

The young emperor had an appealing character, according to Coloumbe:

"[H]e was both logical and practical, with a well-developed sense of right and wrong. ... He was not 'intellectual' rather, his empress recalled, he would arrive at conclusions by instinct and common sense. ... Charles's tastes were quite simple; he preferred folk music to symphonies and operas, and histories and travel books to fiction. ... Charles was an avid hunter and horseman. He was particularly attentive to other people's views, attempting to understand them even if he disagreed."

In 1918, after the armistice, the Austrian parliament demanded Charles's abdication. He refused, instead renouncing participation in state affairs without formally abdicating. The Allies exiled him first to Switzerland, and then, after he attempted twice to recover the throne, to the island of Madeira. The royal couple and their children lived in poverty and poor conditions on the island. Charles contracted pneumonia and died on April 1, 1922, at the age of 34. His last words to Zita were "I love you so much."

Assessments of Charles and his accomplishments vary. Some call him weak and ineffective. Some call him a villain. Others see him as a hero who tried to save his country from the horrors of war; in the Catholic Church, for instance, he is considered "Blessed."

One thing we know for sure: With his death came the end of the centuries-old Habsburg dynasty, and perhaps something more. The old monarchies of Europe had once been associated with tradition, custom, and old-fashioned European culture. Old Europe was bound up with the monarchies. The death of the young emperor marked the end of that Europe.

Walker Larson teaches literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife. He holds a Master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in The Hemingway Review, Intellectual Takeout, and his Substack, "TheHazelnut."



Charles was a dedicated father to his eight children, shown here with Zita in exile at Hertenstein, Switzerland, in 1921.

FILM REVIEW

'BlackBerry': How BlackBerry's Hubris Paved Way for iPhone Dominance

MARK JACKSON

The biopic "BlackBerry" is the story of the rise and fall of the BlackBerry smartphone and its titular company, without which you would not be reading this review on your iPhone or Android phone.

It's 1996, and the geek-flag-flying co-founder of Canadian-based company Research In Motion (RIM), Doug Fregin (played by director Matt Johnson), and his beyond-nebbishy best buddy, tech wizard and co-founding entrepreneur Mike Lazaridis (Jay Baruchel), are in trouble regarding their company.

Which is why they're preparing a cringey, abundantly nerd-rich sales pitch in the office of one Jim Balsillie (Glenn Howerton), about why he should invest in their tech product phone-thingie. It's a concept that's far more wishful thinking than reality based.

It definitely sounds like a pie-in-the-sky gizmo to the ruthless, mean, Harvard grad Balsillie, with his shiny, predatory baldness, who thinks that these two geeks are idiots. (He's not wrong.) Balsillie is more preoccupied at the moment with lying and cheating his way to a promotion at his current company (and subsequently getting booted).

However, being a classic shark, Balsillie has subconsciously smelled blood in the water surrounding RIM's Nerd Nation—which is why, after getting fired, he shows up at RIM's goofball workspace the next day. He announces that he wants to work with them (read: take over everything). He wants to apply his considerable business skills to guide them in getting their gizmo into the tech Hall of Fame (read: get insanely rich).

BlackBerry

Due to Mike's tech prowess, RIM creates something that the world hadn't seen before—a phone with a full-fledged keyboard on it, providing quick, secure email

and texting capabilities, to be used while on the go, with no added cost to users. And thus the BlackBerry, purporting itself to be the first smartphone, is born.

The winning combination of Mike's expert engineering and Jim's laser-like, indefatigable business savvy grows RIM from a tiny group of "Revenge-of-the-nerds" über-geeks who play Doom together on LAN and who live for movie night—into a billion-dollar company.

There are banner years of excessive success. They poach top engineers from Google, Sony, and other cutting-edge companies (and they do it illegally). They put models in fancy suits in restaurants, talking loudly on their BlackBerrys and looking like the exclusive, cool, in-crowd types who own a tech advantage and who generate instantaneous, virulent covetousness in all who see them. They scuttle a hostile takeover by competitor PalmPilot's CEO Carl Yankowski (Cary Elwes).

Then, in 2007, the iPhone—like the purple Almighty Thanos in "Avengers: Infinity War"—snapped its fingers and disintegrated BlackBerry's universe into dust.

A Big Battle of Small Phones

"BlackBerry" lends itself well to an underdog story, and works hard to get us to root for its success. In telling that story, the film vacillates between broad bromance comedy and intimate character study, especially of the two very different BlackBerry CEOs for whom the small, black piece of plastic functions as Icarus's wings and flies them both too close to the sun. And plastic, like wax, melts.

Fregin and Lazaridis's friendship, on the other hand, doesn't quite work as a narrative pillar. Doug's motor-mouthed, confrontational, overprotective bluster often functions as a self-aggrandizing roadblock to both his company and his best bud's success, and not a real act of

FILM REVIEW

Too Much Too Soon Sabotages This French Crime Thriller

An otherwise gripping and engaging crime thriller

MICHAEL CLARK

The winner of six César Awards (the French equivalent of the Oscars), including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay, "The Night of the 12th" ("La nuit du 12") is one of the most unorthodox and original police procedurals I've ever seen. It eschews convention and steadfastly ignores the recognized tropes of the crime mystery blueprint. For those reasons alone, it should be seen by all fans of that genre.

Adapted from Pauline Guéna's fact-inspired novel "18.3 - Une année à la PJ" by director Dominik Moll and his co-writer Gilles Marchand, "12th" is very good on a number of levels. Moll's composition skills are perfect for the material. The movie has an appropriate claustrophobic feel; even the exterior shots come off as restricted and confining.

Moll gets the most out of his performers as well. Newcomer lead Bastien Bouillon (as Yohan) won the César for Most Promising Actor, and his co-star Bouli Lanners (as Marceau) took home another for Best Supporting Actor.

That's (Most of) the Good News

The filmmakers make two mistakes within the first five minutes: one of them minor and excusable, the other gargantuan and nearly fatal. Regarding the former, text appears after the opening credits. The first sentence reads: "There are 800 murders committed in France every year." If you exclude the 2021 number of 1,175, that figure (an average from 2011 through 2020) is fairly accurate. No harm, no foul there.

I choose not to reveal the wording of the second sentence here because it, in every way possible, totally spoils the ending. We're told of what ultimately happens (or doesn't happen) in the end before the first

word of dialogue is uttered or an on-screen crime is depicted. The filmmakers steal every last boom of their own thunder in fewer than two steps out of the starting gate. Had these sentences appeared at the end of the live-action and before the closing credits, they would have had a monumentally throttling effect.

Beginning very specifically at 9:36 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2016, the film opens with the retirement party of a police captain. This scene serves no purpose other than introducing Yohan as the new captain.

Following this is a quick cut to Clara Royer (Lula Cotton-Frapier) leaving a party and walking toward her parents' home. She shoots and sends a video on the way to her friend (and party host) Stéphanie (Pauline Serieys). In an effort to preserve as much surprise as possible, I won't reveal how Clara is murdered, but it is quick and effectively disturbing. Presenting the murder halfway through and in flashback form instead of revealing it so early on would have greatly increased its impact.

Following the logical laws of police investigation, Yohan and Marceau begin to look into Clara's personal life and, in particular, her romantic interests. Although not speci-

Yohan (Bastien Bouillon, L) and Marceau (Bouli Lanners) search for a killer, in "The Night of the 12th."



Mike Lazaridis (Jay Baruchel, C) is not quite grasping the fact that the familiar and comforting clicking noise of the BlackBerry keyboard is not going to be enough to keep the deadly iPhone at bay, in the tech biopic "BlackBerry."

'BlackBerry'

Director
Matt Johnson
Starring
Jay Baruchel, Glenn Howerton, Matt Johnson, Rich Sommer, Martin Donovan, Saul Rubinek, Cary Elwes, Michael Ironside

Running Time
1 hour, 59 minutes

MPAA Rating
R

Release Date
May 12, 2023

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

friendship. He's basically constantly annoying, if amusing.

"BlackBerry" is not a Social Network-style dramedy, wherein the friendship-turned-business relationship of the tech geniuses in question is a slo-mo emotional and professional train wreck. Johnson's performance has more of a whiff of Seth Rogen or Paul Rudd in an Apatow bromance, but as mentioned—more annoying and less funny.

Regardless, the film is steady and engrossing. The foregone conclusion of where RIM and BlackBerry end up remains tense, thrilling, and slightly tragic, with Balsillie and Lazaridis giving in to their worst impulses, as many fast-ascending businessmen will do.

Pride can get the best of the most creative nerds as easily as it can the ruthless sharks, and so "BlackBerry" is as much about self-immolation as it is deterioration of relationships at the hands of hubris. It's this tragedy at the heart of it that makes it more interesting than simply another entry in the growing tech-company biopic genre. The overarching message of "BlackBerry," in the end, feels like a warning signal and a wake-up call to the tech business captains of industry.

The film steadfastly ignores the recognized tropes of the crime mystery blueprint.

'The Night of the 12th'

Director
Dominik Moll
Starring
Bastien Bouillon, Bouli Lanners, Pauline Serieys, Anouk Grinberg, Lula Cotton-Frapier

Running Time
1 hour, 54 minutes

MPAA Rating
Not Rated

Release Date
May 19, 2023

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

fied, Clara appears to be in her late teens or early 20s and was, to be polite, regarded by those who knew her as being somewhat promiscuous.

The Blame Game

When this type of character—a young woman practicing a multiple partner lifestyle—is assaulted or murdered, far too many movie detectives take a "blame the victim" position. Think of the main plot in "The Accused." This is certainly not the case in "12th."

Moll and Marchand's crowning achievement here is just how authentically they write the detectives. Yohan, Marceau, and the half-dozen or so other investigators don't view Clara as just another statistic. They follow through on every lead, and most of them go nowhere. Their frustration is palpable, and their dedication to finding the perpetrator is beyond moving.

One particular scene taking place after the identification of Clara's body is especially telling and not something you usually find in most crime procedurals. Just prior to informing Clara's parents, one agent asks another to be the one to give her mother the bad news. While looking down and shuffling his feet, the agent says that investigating a graphic crime scene is far easier than telling parents their child has been murdered.

Despite its strengths, "The Night of the 12th" is a supreme example of what can happen to a movie when a filmmaker takes all the wind out of his own sails before even leaving the dock.

The movie is presented in French with English subtitles.

"The Night of the 12th" opened in theaters on May 19.

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.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

The Family Ties That Bind

By Michael Clark

There are quite a few movies adapted from Japanese manga (think Western-based graphic novels) but few of them of quality ever reach our shores and when they do, it's usually blood-soaked, action-based stuff ("Ghost in the Shell," "Oldboy," "Alita: Battle Angel").

"Our Little Sister" is different in that it's very (surface) tame and comes from a sub-genre called "josei," which is the Eastern equivalent of a young adult novel geared toward female teens. The Eastern title for this film and its source material is "Umi-machi Diary."

It is worth noting that the word "graphic" as it is used here isn't describing violent or disturbing content (although sometimes it does as in "Sin City," "300," "The Old Guard," or "Road to Perdition") but rather animation in block or panel form that is far more intricate, detailed, and longer than garden-variety comic books.

No Storytelling Fat

"Our Little Sister" is full-blown Eastern art house in its approach and methodology. It is spare, depends on a lot of narrative shorthand, and condenses a great deal of material into a small space. The film does what the most successful adaptations of American novellas do: It distills a larger work into a story with no missed beats and all of the emotional high points—it's a near-perfect movie.

After the death of their divorced-and-remarried father, three 20-something sisters attend his funeral, where they meet their teen half-sister Suzu (Suzu Hirose) for the first time. BEYOND polite, mature, and soft-spoken, Suzu is understandably confused about how to interact with the others, a situation made worse because of her fractured relationship with all of the girls' largely unfit biological mothers.

In what can be described as a calculated whim, eldest sibling Sachi (Haruka Ayase) invites Suzu to move in with all of them: herself, the middle child Yoshino (Masami Nagasawa), and now the no-longer-



Three 20-something sisters attend their father's funeral, where they meet their teen half-sister Suzu (Suzu Hirose, 2nd L) for the first time, in "Our Little Sister."

the-youngest-sibling Chika (Indou Kaho). After a perfectly timed pregnant pause at a train station, Suzu accepts the offer providing the first of many emotional crescendos.

A nurse and the de facto den mother of the bunch, Sachi is also the principal cook and is constantly at odds with Yoshino, a party girl with iffy taste in men and a tendency to imbibe too much.

Not quite ditsy, Chika is a free-spirit type and the one Suzu bonds with first. Initially tentative, the new living dynamic soon finds a comfortable groove although it's not without a few hiccups and bits of friction.

Lemons to Lemonade

In adapting the manga by Akimi Yoshida, director Hirokazu Kore-eda strikes an adroit balance between joyous and bittersweet. To some degree or another, all

the girls harbor resentment toward their parents yet rechannel their anger and sorrow into positive energy that cements their bond even further.

Avoiding obvious emotional peaks and valleys, Kore-eda never strays far from a narrative comfort zone that some may perceive as unchallenging and too safe, but it is ultimately the correct tone for the story.

Hirokazu Kore-eda strikes an adroit balance between joyous and bittersweet.

Less of a typical three-act narrative, the screenplay is more of a collection of short films (roughly three dozen of them), which, while presented in chronological order, frequently take on the feel of loosely connected allegories.

In one such passage, Suzu is on the back of bicycle driven by a boy who is beyond smitten with her. They leisurely make their way down a road lined on each side with towering cherry trees in full bloom. Pulled together from multiple cameras, the seg-

ment zeros in on the look of utter joy and wonderment on Suzu's face and it is sublimely infectious.

Sisterhood of the Eastern Palate

For serious and casual foodies, the film also includes the preparation and consumption of many southern Japanese regional dishes I'd never heard of, including but not limited to whitebait and toast and homemade plum wine. Some batches of this coveted beverage take decades to fully ferment.

Viewers looking for the tumult and the often caustic edge of "The Joy Luck Club," "Catfish in Black Bean Sauce," or "The Namesake" might be disappointed and could consider "Our Little Sister" to be a little too uneventful, pedestrian, and ho-hum.

Kore-eda's film could prove to be too safe for a few, but for those seeking a true reflection of real life in a foreign land and want to witness a fractured family repairing itself under unorthodox circumstances, "Our Little Sister" is an uplifting and endearing must-see.

It is a story that transcends region, ethnicity, gender, time frame, and whatever your own definition of "family" might be.

Presented in Japanese with English subtitles.

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

'Our Little Sister'

Director
Hirokazu Kore-eda

Starring
Suzu Hirose, Haruka Ayase,
Masami Nagasawa, Indou Kaho

Running Time
2 hours, 7 minutes

MPAA Rating
PG

Release Date
July 8, 2016 (USA)

★★★★★

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