

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL COWBOY & WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM



For over 50 years the “Prix de West Invitational Art Exhibition & Sale” has shown the world’s best Western art. James Earle Fraser Sculpture Award and Jackie L. Coles Buyers’ Choice Award: “Warrior Spirit, Crazy Horse” by John Coleman. Bronze; 8 feet 3 inches by 52 inches by 30 inches.

FINE ART

The Best of the West

The ‘Prix de West’ award-winning Western art

LORRAINE FERRIER

Since 1973, the world’s finest Western painters and sculptors have captured cowboy culture for the “Prix de West Invitational Art Exhibition & Sale,” preserving Western traditions and way of life far

beyond the plains, prairies, and mountains—and hopefully for generations to come. The 51st exhibition and sale is now open at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, in Oklahoma City until Aug. 6.

“Every work of art displayed in the show tells a story, and it’s amazing to see a visual representation of the artists’ experiences and relationship to this very special culture,” Museum President and CEO Pat Fitzgerald said in the exhibition press release.

“Prix de West” award winners have

been inspired by their Western upbringing, and all are dedicated to preserving and honoring not only the arts that they love but also the Western way of life itself. Through the fine artworks on display, exhibition visitors can glance across vast Western vistas, safely get close to wild animals, and enjoy a day on the ranch or at a festival, to name a few experiences.

Many of the artists at the award ceremony on June 10, have been exhibiting at the “Prix de West” for decades.

Continued on Page 4

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"Religious Procession in Kursk Province," between 1880–1883, by Ilya Repin. Oil on canvas. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

LITERATURE

Saints and Sinners: Leo Tolstoy's 'Twenty-Three Tales'

JEFF MINICK

"What am I asking?" he said to himself. "I'm asking about the relation to the Deity of all the various faiths of mankind. I'm asking about the general manifestation of God to the whole world with these nebulae. What am I doing? To me personally, to my heart, unquestionable knowledge is revealed, inconceivable to reason, and I stubbornly want to express this knowledge by means of words and reason."

So says Levin to himself at the end of Leo Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina," the work that followed "War and Peace," both of which are regarded by many critics and readers as two of the greatest novels in the history of literature.

Here, we suspect, Levin is speaking for Tolstoy (1828–1910). By the time he finished "Anna Karenina," the author had fallen into a state of despair, racked by questions about God, religion, and death. From this interior battle, Tolstoy emerged with a new belief in a higher power such as he witnessed in the peasants surrounding him, a faith outside the institutional forms of Christianity. He became particularly known for his doctrine of nonviolent resistance to evil, a pacifism later adopted by such figures as Gandhi.

Tolstoy continued writing works imbued with his singular and controversial religious philosophy. In "Confession," he grappled with spiritual questions. In fiction like "Resurrection" and "The Kreutzer Sonata," he continued to explore issues of life, death, and God.

His book "What Is Art?" in which he rejected the idea of beauty and works by artists like Shakespeare and Beethoven, and some of the tracts and essays he wrote later in life, reveals his nontraditional beliefs regarding Christian life and thought.

His short stories offer a gentler portrait of religious faith and humanity in general.

A Different Path

In 1907, the Funk & Wagnalls Company published a collection of these stories under the title "Twenty-Three Tales." That book remains in print, while an expanded version also includes his long story "Walk in the Light While There Is Light."

In the original edition of "Twenty-Three Tales," Aylmer Maude, who with his wife, Louise, translated the Russian's works into English, included in his Preface these words from Tolstoy's "What Is Art?" to explain the significance of these stories:

"The artist of the future will understand that to compose a fairy tale, a little song which will touch a lullaby or a riddle which will entertain, a jest

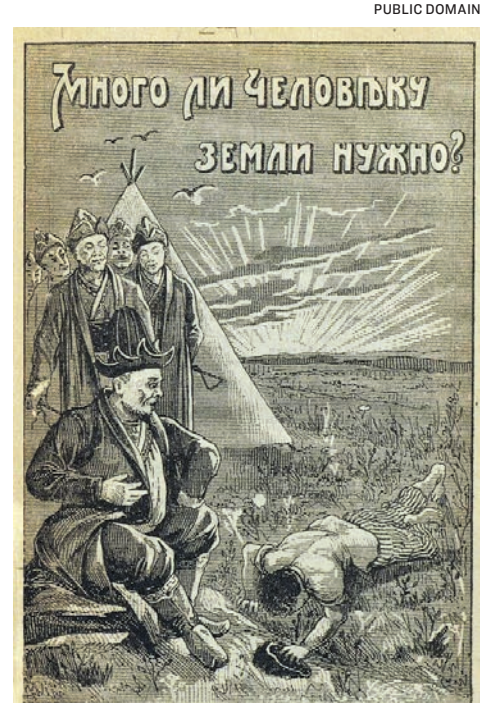
which will amuse, or to draw a sketch such as will delight dozens of generations or millions of children and adults, is incomparably more important and more fruitful than to compose a novel, or a symphony, or paint a picture, of the kind which diverts some members of the wealthy classes for a short time and is then for ever forgotten. The region of this art of the simplest feelings accessible to all is enormous, and it is as yet almost untouched."

Here we see many of Tolstoy's post-"Anna Karenina" strictures at work: a faith in the value of the ordinary, a distrust of novels in general and his own in particular, a distrust as well of wealth, and a belief that great art can be "accessible to all."

What We Live By

Nearly all the stories in "Twenty-Three Tales" center on a theme of morals or faith. Several of them are introduced with brief passages from the Bible, and a number of the stories are either folk tales retold or read like fables, such as "Esarhaddon, King of Assyria," "Work, Death, and Sickness: A Legend," and "Three Questions."

In the latter, for instance, a nameless king believes that if he can discern the proper time to begin everything, the best people to listen to, and the most important thing to do, "he would never fail in anything he might undertake." He seeks the advice of a hermit known for his wisdom. After the king helps the hermit with his garden and then saves the life of a wounded man who intends to assassinate him, the hermit interprets these events to answer the king's questions. "There is only one time that is important—Now!" he tells the king, and the most important person and task,



An illustration for the story by Leo Tolstoy "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" 1914.

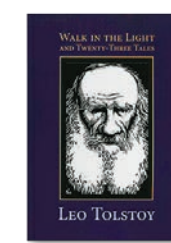


Tolstoy's short stories offer a gentle portrait of religious faith and humanity in general.



A detail of a portrait of Leo Tolstoy, 1873, by Ivan Kramskoi. Oil on canvas. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



'WALK IN THE LIGHT AND TWENTY-THREE TALES'
By Leo Tolstoy
Orbis Books
Nov. 20, 2003
Paperback
351 pages

though it seems to men that they live by care for themselves, in truth it is love alone by which they live." A key word here is "live." To truly live, to be alive, Tolstoy implicitly argues here and elsewhere, love is as necessary as food or water. Without it, we are not wholly alive.

Down to Earth

Not all of these tales are centered so heavily on heavenly matters.

Zhilin, an army officer and the protagonist of "A Prisoner in the Caucasus," and a fellow officer are captured by the Tartars, but they are spared death in hopes that their families will pay a ransom for them. His master gives Zhilin various chores, and he also makes friends with Dina, the master's daughter, making toys for her. In the end, it is she who helps him escape, and he makes his way back to Russian forces. It's an adventure story told in crisp, blunt prose. Significantly, "A Prisoner in the Caucasus" was written before Tolstoy's radical conversion.

A story regarded as one of Tolstoy's finest, and frequently anthologized, is "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" Pahom is a clever and hardworking peasant who wants more land. He attempts to buy some land but is always tempted by rumors of better bargains elsewhere. Eventually, he lands among the Bashkirs, whose chieftain offers him land for 1,000 rubles a day, meaning that however much land Pahom can walk in a day's journey will be his, so long as he arrives back at the starting line. He covers an enormous area, but at the end, exhausted, he must race to the hillock from which he left. As he runs, he remembers his dream of the previous night, when the devil had tempted him into this bargain. Pahom reaches the finish line just seconds away from sunset, but there he collapses and dies.

"His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed."

Irish novelist and short-story writer James Joyce called this parable of Pahom "the greatest story that the literature of the world knows." Here is high praise indeed from our culture's best-known modernist.

To Love Is to Be Alive

If we match these stories against Tolstoy's novels, or his shorter works such as "The Kreutzer Sonata" or "The Death of Ivan Ilyich," many would likely argue that these tales suffer by that comparison. Nonbelievers might regard the tales as too burdened by God and biblical beliefs. Others might consider them too didactical or lacking the psychological explorations of Tolstoy's earlier work.

Yet the gold in these tales far outweighs the dross. Considerations of religious faith aside, Tolstoy gives us valuable portraits of Russian men and women who 150 years ago scrambled to make a living from the land or their craftsmanship. The moral dilemmas he presents—greed versus generosity, truth versus lies, kindness versus indifference—are universal, valid conflicts now just as they were then. In most cases as well, his command of the language and his narrative skills are as much in place as in his earlier work.

And though Tolstoy is often accurately described as a master of realism in fiction, many of these stories have about them the quality of fairy tales, albeit for adults, in their simplicity and their sense of wonder at the mysteries of the world. Indeed, "The Story of Ivan the Fool" is categorized in the book as "A Fairy Tale."

One of these stories, "Two Old Men," tells of two neighbors going on a pilgrimage. It concludes with the reflection by one of the men that "he now understood that the best way to keep one's vows to God and to do His will, is for each man while he lives to show love and do good to others."

Found in several other of these stories, this idea is one final reason for reading "Twenty-Three Tales," if only because it differs so radically from the messages dispatched by our own culture.

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 nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

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Robert Lougheed Memorial Award: "A Watchful Gaze" by Huihan Liu. Oil on linen; 30 inches by 15 inches.



Robert Lougheed Memorial Award: "Golden Feather" by Huihan Liu. Oil on linen; 18 inches by 24 inches.



Robert Lougheed Memorial Award: "Autumn Breeze" by Huihan Liu. Oil on linen; 30 inches by 24 inches.

Express Ranches Great American Cowboy Award: "Risky Business" by Blair Buswell. Bronze; 18 inches by 33 inches by 15 inches.



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FINE ART

The Best of the West

Continued from Page 1

In their acceptance speeches, every award winner acknowledged the peer support that they had gained from one another. Here, we share some of the award-winning artists and their art.

Native Traditions

According to his website, artist John Coleman's art influences come from eminent cowboy artists Frederic Remington and Charles Marion Russell. He hopes that the subjects of his drawings, paintings, and sculptures move people deeply, as if they were kindred spirits. Of his sculptures, he says: "Each piece tells a story in the three dimensional, a visual mythology written by my hands and spiritual imagination, somehow linking us to the past and bringing us to a greater understanding of our ancestors."

His imposing over-8-foot-tall bronze sculpture "Warrior Spirit, Crazy Horse," portraying Crazy Horse, a chief of the Oglala sub-tribe of the Native American Lakota people, won two awards: the Jackie L. Coles Buyers' Choice Award and the James Earle Fraser Sculpture Award.

In this monumental piece, the fearless chief looks far into the distance, across his shoulder, as if he's surveying the land. He rests a shotgun in the crook of his arm, and holds a skull cracker in his other hand. His weathered face speaks of wisdom, and

his dress and feathers of long-cherished traditions.

Artist Huihan Liu chose to depict Native American life, too, but in oil on linen. He won the Robert Lougheed Memorial Award for four of his paintings: "Autumn Breeze," "A Watchful Gaze," "Golden Feather," and "Heading to Ceremony." He painted a similar, but gentler, facial expression than Coleman's Crazy Horse for the Native American in his painting "A Watchful Gaze." The man stands with his horse, waiting. In "Autumn Breeze," two women are shown by a fire, wrapping themselves in colorful blankets for warmth. They, too, gaze off into the distance. Liu made this ordinary scene ethereal as fire gently lights the picture and smoke wafts away on the evening breeze.

Honoring Ancestors

Artist Gladys Roldan-de-Moras's canvases celebrate her Mexican heritage. She's particularly inspired by turn-of-the-century Spanish art. Her painting "Chinas Poblanas" features Mexican dancers and musicians wearing traditional dress. The "china poblana" is Mexico's national costume for women, as defined in the late 20th century. It consists of a white cotton blouse with a colorful, felted woolen skirt and a shawl, all embellished with a combination of beads, sequins, and prints.

Roldan-de-Moras created a festival feeling in her painting with a riot of color, dance, and

frolicking that almost has you tapping your toes to the beat.

She won the Frederic Remington Painting Award for the work and dedicated the award to her late grandfather, a charro (traditional horseman) who also preserved Mexican traditions. He successfully campaigned for "charrería," traditional herding of livestock using a horse, to be named Mexico's national sport.

Cowboy Showtime

Artist Blair Buswell won the Express Ranches Great American Cowboy Award for the best cowboy subject matter with his three bronze sculptures: "Showtime," "Risky Business," and "Hey, Over HERE!!!"

In "Risky Business," a bull charges a cowboy with such ferocity that one wonders who won that battle, man or beast. Buswell rendered the bull in midair, which is no easy feat, and it is reminiscent of the skill that 19th-century artist Frederic Remington required to execute his famous bronze "The Broncho Buster."

"Buswell breathes life into his art by design. "I learned that all great art starts with a strong composition that leads the viewer's eyes through the abstract shapes while keeping him engaged," he says on his website.

"I just love the opportunity to use our talents to better our world," he said in his award acceptance speech.

Appreciating the Everyday Beauty of the West

Artist Len Chmiel won the Wilson Hurley Award for Outstanding Landscape for his painting "West I Know: Summarizing Solitude, Utah." Chmiel captured a spectrum of pinks and ochers as the sun hits the distant sandstone, in contrast to the cool green grasses in the foreground of his painting.

On winning the award, Chmiel said: "It's really fulfilling because I love the landscape. It is a really important part of my life, ... and I try to translate my feelings about the landscape and all of its vari-

abilities to paint canvas." Artist Walter T. Matia's bronze sculpture "Molly Is a Working Girl" won the Prix de West Purchase Award, earning a place in the permanent collection of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum.

In his acceptance speech, Matia said that people experience the West in different ways: "I've always been behind a bird dog, or in a stream with a fly rod, or I've been

on some marsh, looking at birds with binoculars." These experiences placed him in good stead to create his convincing wildlife art. In his winning bronze, Molly, poised, seems to have spotted a bird as she looks up attentively, trying not to alert her prey.

Matia's sculpture represents the everyday West beyond the iconic cowboy scenes. He's happy that the judges chose the piece. "It spoke to a part of the West that I don't think is always acknowledged: the role of the hunter and fisherman in both opening up the West initially but also now conserving the West," he says.

The Prix de West celebrates all aspects of the West and the finest artists of the Western art genre for the world to see. But more than that, Prix de West committee chairman Susan J. Roeder stressed at the live auction the importance of these artworks beyond their aesthetic appeal. "Being surrounded by this kind of beauty on a daily basis can lift our moods, can elevate our thinking, [and] it informs our worldview, and the way that we move through life in a positive way without us even realizing it."

The "Prix de West Invitational Art Exhibition & Sale" at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, in Oklahoma City, runs through Aug. 6. Available artworks can be purchased online. To find out more, visit PDW.NationalCowboyMuseum.org

“Being surrounded by this kind of beauty on a daily basis can lift our moods.”

Susan J. Roeder, Prix de West committee chairman

Prix de West Purchase Award: "Molly Is a Working Girl," by Walter T. Matia. Bronze; 38 inches by 25 inches by 16 1/2 inches.



Frederic Remington Painting Award: "Chinas Poblanas," by Gladys Roldan-de-Moras. Oil on Belgian linen; 48 inches by 36 inches.



Donald Teague Memorial Award: "Prairie Rose" by Joseph Bohler. Transparent watercolor; 24 inches by 34 inches.

Wilson Hurley Award for Outstanding Landscape: "West I Know: Summarizing Solitude, Utah," by Len Chmiel. Oil on canvas; 32 inches by 45 inches.





Part of an assault brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine, on April 21, 2023.

BOOK REVIEW

A Must-Read on the Russo-Ukrainian War

A must-read on the Russo-Ukrainian War and where it leaves Europe and the world

DUSTIN BASS

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War has been a twofold conflict. It has been a physical military conflict within the borders of Ukraine, while at the same time it has been a propaganda war within and beyond those borders, reaching (or “overreaching”) across Europe and across the Pacific into America. Owen Matthews has been covering the fight in Ukraine and the reactions in Russia; in fact, he has been working in Moscow as a journalist for more than a quarter century. His book “Overreach: The Inside Story of Putin’s War Against Ukraine” is a tour de force that provides a historical synopsis of the geopolitical power struggle between the two nations, insight into why the Ukraine government (along with other European nations) didn’t believe an attack was imminent, and how and why Vladimir Putin did the unthinkable.

A Brief Personal History

Matthews’s history of Russo-Ukrainian tensions includes his familial ties that go back more than a century with the Bibikov family of Ukraine. The reader gets the sense that the author is not merely a hawk for Russian and Ukrainian affairs, but is in many ways similar to American historian George F. Kennan in his ability to connect and explore these complex matters. It is Matthews’s gift for, and expertise in, telling both sides of the story (in Russia and Ukraine) that separates him from most others.

The author focuses predominantly on the

post-Khrushchev era, specifically right before and right after the fall of communism in 1991. The era of Joseph Stalin is mentioned, but only peripherally. Matthews discusses the economic, military, and even emotional fallout of the collapse of the Soviet Union. “Overreach” provides the reader an insight into Russia’s plight of the 1990s—a plight that has been underdiscussed and even dismissed by global leaders when considering modern affairs in Eastern Europe. Matthews marks the importance of this decade by tying the recourse of this collapse with the rise of Putin.

Putin brought prestige and promise back to Russia via military victories in Chechnya, Georgia, and Crimea. The author makes it unmistakable how important these victories—starting with the Chechen War—were to the Russian people. It not only brought a sense of global self-worth back to Russia after the humiliation of the Soviet collapse, but it also placed Putin on a pedestal. With Putin heralded so highly among his countrymen, his decrying of NATO’s expansion could be seen by the Russians as everything he believed it to be: a threat to Russian sovereignty.

Matthews contrasts the West’s late-1990s promises that NATO was not expanding with the early 21st-century NATO additions of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. NATO’s expansion along with Georgia’s Rose Revolution soured NATO’s relations

with Russia. A fatal collision seemed inevitable. The inevitability seemed to hinge on Ukraine.

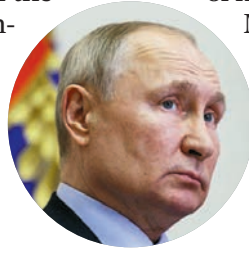
The Ukraine Invasion

Russia’s dependence on Ukraine has created strife around Ukraine’s independence. As Ukraine seemed to move closer to NATO, Putin believed himself obligated to move in on Ukraine. Under the ruse of a “special military operation,” he made a claim of “Russian genocide,” which was a mere echo of his reason for invading Chechnya, Matthews says.

According to Matthews, the plan for a Ukraine invasion had been in place for decades. It came down to timing. The author lists a number of reasons why the timing seemed perfect: Russia’s military effectiveness, a seemingly weak leader in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, the Afghanistan disaster demonstrating U.S. military ineptness, the United Nations’ seemingly lack of enthusiasm

about coming to the aid of Ukraine (this proved true in the early days of the war), the ongoing chaos and uncertainty of the pandemic, an inner circle of Putin yes-men, and a \$650 billion war chest readied for inevitable sanctions.

Along with a historical analysis, Matthews pores over contemporary intelligence commentary from Russia, Ukraine, NATO, and the United States. He cites numerous pro- and anti-Russia leaders and citizens to provide the reader with a sense of the war’s reception. In so many ways, Matthews has assembled the quintessential journalistic view. It’s a view from many angles rather than a single narrative.



Russian President Vladimir Putin in April 2023.

GAVRIL ORIGOROV/SPUTNIK/APP

LITERATURE

What a Gentle Touch Can Do

KATE VIDIMOS

Too often, when someone disagrees or opposes us, we respond with force or harsh words. Yet in her short story “Gentle Hand,” Mary Roberts Rinehart demonstrates that gentleness is far more persuasive and moving than any amount of force that we can conjure up.

In this story, as the day draws to a close, a weary traveler seeks to find refuge for the night. He approaches a house that has warm light emanating from its windows.

A Harsh Welcome

As the gate latches shut behind him, the traveler is greeted by a slender girl and an extremely ferocious dog. The immense dog barks and gets ready to spring upon this intruder. But as the dog prepares to lunge, the small girl gently passes her hand over the dog’s fur and whispers to him. In the same instant, the dog stops his attack.



One’s soul is seen through tenderness. A detail of “Never Mind,” 1884, by Frederick Morgan.

ty rests her hand on his shoulder. In response to this touch, “there was a change in the man’s voice,” and he welcomed in the weary traveler.

When the mother hears that they have a visitor who wants to stay the night, she objects that they don’t run a boarding house. The little girl subsequently approaches her angry mother and places a gentle hand on her mother’s hand and whispers. The mother’s demeanor changes with the touch.

Seeing so much change, the visitor wonders: “Was there magic in that gentle touch?” The mother changes from repulsion to kindness. She welcomes the visitor and inquires whether he has eaten, to which he responds that he hasn’t. Without saying another word, the woman gives him a good meal.

Peace Maker

While the traveler eats his food, he notices two of the other children quarreling. The father angrily tells one of them, John, to go to bed, but John looks “the very image of rebellion.” He doesn’t attempt to obey his father.

Before the argument reaches the climax,

This book, a tour de force, provides a historical synopsis of the geopolitical power struggle between the two nations.

Putin had done well to position Russia where it needed to be on the world stage. But his aggression, stemming from either resentment, hubris, or both, is summed up quite well when Matthews writes: “Putin’s tragedy—in the literal, Greek-drama sense where the hero is the author of his own downfall—was that his every move accelerated and precipitated the very thing he feared the most, which was a flight of his frightened neighbors into the arms of NATO.”

That tragedy began on Feb. 24, 2022, when Putin signaled the invasion.

A Strange War

The author demonstrates how his 25-plus years’ experience in the region has connected him with locals in Russia and Ukraine, intelligence agencies around the globe, and the network of power in the Kremlin. The war began as a “denazification” campaign to rid Ukraine of Nazis and end “Russian genocide.” According to Matthews, Putin and his Russian troops anticipated a welcoming Ukrainian public and a comedian-turned-president to turn coward.

The opposite, however, proved true. Matthews takes the reader through the skirmishes, battles, and random executions during the war. He expresses the dismay of citizens and power players alike at the sudden attack. He also shows the determination with which the Ukrainian people fought back and how European leaders, along with American leaders, threw their support behind Zelensky after expecting the war to end with a Russian victory in a matter of days, if not hours.

Social media usage, citizen soldiers, and the threat of nuclear weapons are just some of the strange and interesting elements of this ongoing conflict. Matthews captures so much of it by being the man on the ground. His work, “Overreach,” is the eyes and ears for a populace relatively close and very far away from the conflict. While individuals across the globe are fed propaganda from Russia, Ukraine, their own governments, and media outlets—as well as from social media influencers and viral videos—Matthews has done a service to provide a clear-eyed perspective on the war, the tensions that will more than likely go unresolved even after the war, and the future of Putin. (Matthews notes that he more than likely is Russia’s indispensable man.)

“Overreach” is an insightful read, full of a nuanced understanding of both the Russian and Ukrainian perspective. It is sure to be an important source for years to come about what happened on Feb. 24, 2022, and the years that followed. It is a must-read.

Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of *The Sons of History* podcast.



‘OVERREACH: THE INSIDE STORY OF PUTIN’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE’
By Owen Matthews
Mudlark
April 25, 2023
Hardcover
432 pages

the little girl takes John’s hands and, with her gentle hands, “the young rebel is instantly subdued.” Humbly and obediently, John follows the girl to bed.

Before the night ends, the traveler witnesses the girl’s gentle touch turn her family away from anger, violent words, and actions several more times.

In this story, Rinehart shows that the girl’s soul is manifested in the gentle touch of her hand. The little girl proves, as Shakespeare says in “As You Like It,” that “your gentleness shall force/More than your force move us to gentleness.”

When we’re gentle, we not only demonstrate the disposition of our souls, but we also act in the most persuasive manner. For gentleness acknowledges our neighbor’s tendency and ability to be civil and gentle as well. Gentleness cultivates in us the ability to be good.

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 REVIEW

A Stunning Neo-Western Thriller

MICHAEL CLARK

When I hear the word “Western” as it applies to movies, I don’t think of location as such, but rather of era and attitude. As much as I love it, the TV show “Yellowstone” is not a Western. Yes, it features feuding cowboys and Native Americans and is set in the West, but in the end, it’s a well-executed, high-end soap opera set in the present day.

Director Anthony Mandler’s brilliant “Surrounded” is everything and more than dedicated fans of Westerns could possibly want or expect. It is a throwback in every sense of the word and could have been produced at any point in the last 70 or so years by the likes of John Ford, Howard Hawks, or Clint Eastwood.

Known mostly as the Shuri character in the Marvel flicks, an unadorned Letitia Wright (also the co-producer) stars as Moses “Mo” Washington, a woman disguising herself as a man, planning to travel from New Mexico to Colorado and settle the land she purchased with earnings as a Union soldier in the Civil War.

Cathay Williams

You might think that Mandler and screenwriters Andrew Pagana and Justin Thomas are pushing the bounds of believability regarding Mo’s tenure in the Army, but there

was a real woman (Cathay Williams) who posed as a man and served not only as a buffalo soldier in the Civil War but also in the Indian Wars. It is entirely possible the filmmakers based the Mo character on Williams.

It’s clear early on as to why Mo is paranoid and perpetually on guard. At a saloon, she’s forced to temporarily relinquish her pistol. The same thing happens when boarding the coach bound for Colorado. Adding insult to injury, the bigoted driver Curly (Kevin Wiggins) orders Mo to ride in the back with the luggage even though there’s room for her in the coach.

This turns out to be something of a blessing as Mo sees an approaching band of outlaws long before Curly does, which, of course, is too late. Led by the infamous Tommy Walsh (Jamie Bell), the marauders are looking only to steal, but as things often did in the Wild West, the situation escalates and brief mayhem ensues.

When the dust settles, Mo and fellow passenger Wheeler (Jeffrey Donovan) are able to subdue Walsh just long enough to chain him to a tree. A veiled threat delivered by Curly essentially forces Mo to guard Walsh for the night while he and Wheeler can get back to town and return with the law and a doctor.

Chamber Piece



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

‘Surrounded’ is everything and more than dedicated fans of Westerns could possibly want or expect.

‘Surrounded’

Director

Anthony Mandler

Starring

Letitia Wright, Jamie Bell, Jeffrey Donovan, Michael K. Williams, Brett Gelman

Running Time

1 hour, 41 minutes

MPAA Rating

R

Release Date

June 20, 2023

★★★★★

Mo Washington

(Letitia Wright)

confronts the bandit

Tommy Walsh (Jamie

Bell), in “Surrounded.”

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Cartoonist Rises Above His Disability

Older films that can speak to us today

MICHAEL CLARK

Based in part on the memoir of the same name by John Callahan, writer and director Gus Van Sant’s sometimes overstylized “Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot” (“On Foot”) hits a few narrative bumps on its way to a triumphant third act, making this the filmmaker’s finest effort since “Good Will Hunting” in 1997.

A native of Portland, Oregon, the single-panel cartoonist John Callahan (Joaquin Phoenix) found his calling late in life and only after becoming a quadriplegic and recovering alcoholic. With two hands clutching a Flair pen, Callahan drew primitive panels that were decidedly conceived and executed in purposefully bad taste. By comparison, Callahan’s barbed black humor made Gary Larson’s “Far Side” come off looking as tame and safe as Bil Keane’s “Family Circus.”

Stock Characters

The weakest link in the narrative is the time spent with the therapy group, which is overpopulated with too-easy stock characters (an overweight girl, the angry veteran, the fey senior guy, and the privileged housewife). The exception here is a slimmed-down and bearded Jonah Hill as Donnie, a wealthy trust fund baby, who hosts the meetings in his house, which could best be described as decorated in Liberace light.

Instead of the usual namby-pamby, there, treacle coating, Donnie speaks to his AA members (whom he lovingly refers to as “piglets”) with blunt, face-smacking directness. It is arguably the finest performance of Hill’s career.

Van Sant allows the story to breathe, never relying on the bells and whistles, and lets Phoenix strut his righteous stuff. “On Foot” has an organic and relaxed (not to be confused with safe) air.

many panels, some of them animated, are dotted throughout the film.

For the first 45 or so minutes, Van Sant’s movie more resembles a bebop jazz composition, which is aided greatly by an atypical score from composer Danny Elfman. Presented wildly out of sequence, this stretch covers the last few hazy, booze-fueled days prior to the car wreck that changed the 21-year-old Callahan’s life forever. In the years following the accident, he hit the bottle even harder, eventually bottoming out, before addressing his disease in group therapy.

Van Sant keeps things interesting during this period by employing some tricked-out visuals, including vertical elliptical screen panning and single passages of dialogue delivered in multiple locations over the space of decades.



AMAZON STUDIOS

John Callahan (Joaquin Phoenix) deals with a physical disability, in “Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot.”

Cartoonist Callahan found his calling late in life.

For over an hour, we see the story go into the narrative meat grinder and finally get to taste the finished fire-grilled product, along with the peppers, onions, and mozzarella. Make no mistake, the narrative grinder is needed, but for an artist as conflicted, polarizing, and complex as Callahan, the final result demands further attention, and Van Sant ultimately delivers the goods.

Played by Phoenix’s off-screen love interest, Rooney Mara, the Swedish therapist-turned-flight-attendant Annu may or may not even be real, but it makes no difference as none of the other characters fit the same bill. It’s worth mentioning that Mara also appeared in the below-the-radar “Mary Magdalene” as the title character alongside Phoenix who portrayed Jesus Christ.

Also worth noting was the heavy protest levied against the production from the

At this point, we’re less than 25 minutes into the movie and the next 50 minutes more or less is presented as a two-person chamber piece. In the wrong hands, this type of scenario can grow tiresome in quick order, yet Mandler (whose résumé is populated mostly with music video credits) and editor Ron Patane never let things stall.

Even though he has a seemingly endless desert panorama with which to work, Mandler rarely strays more than 20 feet away from the tree. Multiple camera angles and sharp, concise dialogue certainly help, but showing two people talking for close to an hour (with one of them not having much to say) is (in theory) as anticinematic as it can get, yet the exact opposite is the case here.

Far more astute and perceptive than he may initially appear, Tommy is a master at reading Mo and even better at pushing her buttons. He preys on her emotions and fears, tries to bribe her, then charms her, and comes close to succeeding on one occasion to having her free him.

Showing up in the middle of the night and attempting essentially what Tommy has been doing for hours on end is Will Clay (the late Michael K. Williams in his final screen role). Well-dressed and possessing a silver tongue, Will makes several claims during his stay, but makes the dire mistake of straying just slightly from his initially believable story.

A Great Role

For Wright, a role such as Mo is something every performer relishes. Yes, it’s great appearing in high-profile, high-paying comic book flicks, but these movies offer little room to actually hone and improve one’s acting chops. Wright’s performance as Mo could be the role that might catapult her onto Hollywood’s A-list.

What’s that phrase? It’s preferable to be a big fish in a small pond than the other way around.

You better believe it.

“Surrounded” is presented in English with brief subtitles in Comanche and is available on multiple streaming platforms.

New England-based Ruderman Family Foundation, which had major (largely uninformed) issues with Callahan being portrayed by Phoenix rather than a real-life disabled actor.

“On Foot” is the politically correct crowd’s worst possible nightmare and will send them into a nosedive, tailspin tizzy. A man disowned at birth by his mother drifts into a life of substance abuse and then becomes a quadriplegic, only to make a mockery of acceptable social decorum while finding roaring success as a member of the press within the very bastion of staunch Blue State territory.

The irony of this particular situation is thoroughly off the charts.

You can watch “Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot” on Vudu, Amazon Prime, and Apple TV.

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.

‘Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot’

Director

Gus Van Sant

Starring

Joaquin Phoenix, Jonah Hill, Rooney Mara, Jack Black

Running Time

1 hour, 54 minutes

MPAA Rating

R

Release Date

July 13, 2018

★★★★★

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

A Stinging Critique of Nazism

The horror when fascism takes hold of a single soul

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Frank Borzage's prescient film, set in early 1930s Germany, stands out even in the subgenre of anti-fascism war films.

Academia loves and respects Professor Roth (Frank Morgan) for his distinguished contribution to science, teaching, and research. But with Hitler's rise, Roth finds himself distinguished for another reason: being "non-Aryan" (Borzage's code for Jew).

Roth's wife Amelie, his stepsons Erich and Otto, his daughter Freya (Margaret Sullavan), his students Martin (James Stewart) and Fritz (Robert Young) love him, too. But Nazi propaganda around Aryan superiority polarizes Roth's family and friends. Some pick a side; others are forced to.

Lovely Freya symbolizes what's worth preserving in civilized society (tolerance, humor, courage, love). Both Fritz and Martin eye her as a bride, but only Martin wins her because he doesn't want to fashion her after himself and his ideals. He loves her for herself.

This MGM production proved so stinging a critique of Nazism that the ideologue Joseph Goebbels shut the Berlin office of MGM's parent firm and prohibited screening of MGM movies in German territories.

It boasts a rare Western European authenticity. Phyllis Bottome, who wrote the novel that inspired the film, studied under Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler. One of Borzage's screenwriters, Georg Froeschel, was the son of a Jewish banker in Austria. Morgan's father grew up in Germany. And Borzage's father was born in what was once the Austrian Empire.

To Bottome, horror is not what happens once fascism marches, but when it first takes hold of a single soul. She's not gazing at a ruinous fire or its billowing smoke. Instead, she's looking for the hands that light the first flame, and for



A convivial meal turns into a moment of truth, when Nazis require everyone to sing a patriotic song. (L-R) Otto von Rohn (Robert Stack), Erich von Rohn (Robert T. Orr), Martin Breitner (James Stewart), Freya Roth (Margaret Sullavan), and Fritz Marberg (Robert Young), in "The Mortal Storm."

those that'll work through the night to put it out. Borzage builds on that to show how fascism is no different from a cult that eats you from the inside out.

Sage-looking Morgan looks and sounds professorial even while complaining that his 60th birthday's been overlooked. Maria Ouspenskaya, playing Martin's mother, depicts nerves of steel when facing Nazi intruders. Sullavan is perfect as the prized Freya. And Stewart just needs to stand; you know he's standing his ground.

Being True to Oneself

To Borzage, divisiveness doesn't begin in fascist party meetings, but in homes, at birthday parties, during fireside chats, on dates, on train rides. Dinner-table conversation during Roth's anniversary shows how Hitler's "new" Germany promises

a share in "glory" predicated on three falsehoods: Glory lies in the past, it's been usurped by the present, and it must be restored in the future by cornering perceived threats with a false "with us or against us" choice.

Rejecting Nazism's deceptive dichotomy, Professor Roth, Freya, and Martin prove how a culture of individuality unites; one is true to himself and others. Fritz, Erich, and Otto prove how a cult of individualism divides; one is true to an idea of himself and others, never mind that it's distorted. With astonishing lack of self-awareness, a Nazi officer warns those hesitant to incriminate free-thinking family and friends as traitors: "In the service of your country, there are no human relationships."

Roth's scenes at the university show

how anti-intellectualism turns havens of learning into battlegrounds. He's arrested because he believes that classrooms are places for ideas, not insidious ideology. When Amelie begs the imprisoned Roth to feign obedience to avoid further reprisal, he says: "It would be unworthy of the love that we have for each other, for me to be less than myself."

Borzage captures how fascists, hollow on the inside, cling to whiffs of shared "glory" on the outside (swastikas, salutes, sworn loyalty). Freya and Martin draw power from loyalty, too, but their loyalty is to truth. Fritz, who swears by Nazism, is powerless because he's condemned to proving his loyalty, repeatedly. He longs for the power that's his but which eludes him. When Freya seeks help to find her imprisoned father, Fritz pretends to look down at his desk, but like a proxy, the camera steals a glance at her reflection in a glass-framed swastika above him.

One electrifying scene shows Nazis breaking up friendly revelry in a bar. Nearly to a man, the patrons stand ramrod straight, saluting robotically, swearing allegiance in words and song to "glory": Hitler's, the Party's, Germany's, their own. Not swearing or saluting, Freya and Martin exchange stunned glances; even in the crowd, they're alone. Borzage's camera tracks the frozen couple, enveloped by a colony of outstretched arms sticking out like the barbed-wire fenceposts that would soon envelop the world.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

'The Mortal Storm'

Director
Frank Borzage

Starring
Starring: James Stewart, Margaret Sullavan, Frank Morgan

Running Time
1 hour, 40 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
June 14, 1940

★★★★★

TRUTH and TRADITION

In Our Own Words

From the Desk of Our Puzzle Master



“I've benefited greatly from the many relationships and friendships formed making the puzzle pages better and better with each passing year.

Tom Houston
Puzzle Master



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Dear Epoch VIP (and Puzzler!),

Thank you for subscribing to The Epoch Times and for supporting our journey of providing the world with truthful, uncensored journalism as well as analysis of world events, especially in China.

My journey with The Epoch Times actually began in 2009 when I discovered the publication's outstanding coverage of events in China, something of which I had studied for over 30 years principally as a linguist and China analyst. The Epoch Times' coverage was unique and included many aspects and facets of Chinese life under the Chinese Communist Party that were either not covered or were entirely avoided by the mainstream press. After reading this coverage, I felt compelled to "climb aboard" and support The Epoch Times on its journey toward truthful reporting that would not be beholden to any kind of censorship, whether it's from a government or commercial entity.

After discussions with the editor-in-chief on what the newspaper actually most needed and what I personally could do to support the paper, I published my first puzzle page on Jan. 4, 2010—over 12 years ago. Since then, my Epoch Times journey has been eventful, to say the least. I have learned and grown a great deal, and so has our puzzle page! It's grown from a single page of puzzles in a 16-page edition to two pages of puzzles (and a half page on the Wednesday "For Kids Only" page) in what is now a 52-page paper!

Along the way, hundreds of puzzlers have reached out through our feedback@epochtimes.com email to comment on the puzzles, send me pictures of their unique solutions, ask questions, point out my mistakes (I've made many!), pass along a compliment or constructive criticism and offer to help. I've benefited greatly from the many relationships and friendships formed making the puzzle pages better

and better with each passing year.

Thank you, readers! We wouldn't be where we are today without you! **Each and every one of you who has subscribed, advertised, or who has sent in encouraging words, constructive comments, or ideas has helped to make The Epoch Times what it is today.**

A number of Epoch Times readers (and puzzle fans) actually contribute to our puzzle pages! "Coder Chang" developed a "4 Numbers" puzzle tool (4Nums.com) that we have been using since January 2018. Our skydiving chess master, Michael Gibbs, began donating "Chess Challenges" to The Epoch Times over two years ago. Liz Ball, an accomplished puzzle developer whose work has appeared in more than 300 publications (HiddenPicturePuzzles.com) began donating her popular "Hidden Picture" puzzles to The Epoch Times' kids page over a year ago.

We sincerely appreciate these puzzles, and for me, they are a kind reminder of the community that has built up around this newspaper.

In short, seeing people genuinely moved by The Epoch Times' commitment to journalism and truthful reporting of events, often glossed over or "slanted" by other media outlets, has been a heartwarming experience for me.

I hope that your journey with The Epoch Times will be as educational, satisfying, and fulfilling as mine has been. And, please, always feel free to drop us a line at feedback@epochtimes.com. We appreciate your insight, and who knows—I could always use a few more hands in the puzzle workshop.

In truth and tradition,

Tom Houston
The Epoch Times

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