

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

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▲ "Harriet Beecher Stowe," 1853, by Alanson Fisher. Oil on canvas. National Portrait Gallery, Washington.

HISTORY

## Vindication for Trying to Speak Truth

Harriet Beecher Stowe and the 'Byron Scandal'

By Jeff Minick

"So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war."

Whether Abraham Lincoln greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe with those words during her 1862 visit to the White House is uncertain, but if so, they were accurate. Stowe was little—she stood less than five feet tall—and the novel she had written 10 years earlier had dumped gasoline on the smoldering issue of slavery.

Serialized first in a magazine and then published as a book in 1852, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" did more than any other

**Harriet Beecher Stowe risked her own reputation to protect the reputation of a dead friend.**

novel in American history to influence public events. This story of slavery caught fire, selling over 300,000 copies in the United States and more than a million in Great Britain. In the North, the abolitionist cause gained tens of thousands of fervent supporters. In the South, slave owners and newspapers raged against what they perceived as the injustices and inaccuracies of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and in certain places the book was banned outright.

Stowe had written her novel in hopes of encouraging people from all parts of the country to join together and abolish slavery. Assailed by a barrage of criticism that she had perverted the facts surrounding slavery, in 1853 she issued "A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," which

was a collection of letters, histories, legal cases, and other evidence demonstrating the cruelty and injustice of the "peculiar institution."

Most of us today are familiar with the general scope of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and the controversy it roused. Far fewer people know that nearly 20 years later Stowe would cause another upheaval, though on a lesser scale, and would again write a follow-up book to support her cause—a cause that honored truth and friendship.

### Hints of Things to Come

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896) grew up in a family accustomed to controversy. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a noted Presbyterian minister, and several

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▲ The theatrical masks of tragedy and comedy, 2nd century. Mosaic from Roman baths of Decius, Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums in Rome.

THEATER

## Staging the World Versus Restaging the World

Theater that supports reconciliation or theater that supports violence

By Robert Cooperman

Playwrights create worlds; this we all know. By “world,” I mean the conditions of time, space, and viewpoint depicted in the play that we must accept, if only temporarily, if we are to understand the characters who inhabit that world and the playwright’s point of view.

Most plays present either a world that needs to be overhauled or one that needs to be preserved (or variations thereof). What we tend to see today, not only on-stage but in film and television, is the presentation of the former—a world that demands the complacent reexamine their long-held traditional beliefs in favor of a new, enlightened utopia.

Less common is the depiction of a world that attempts to reclaim the lost (or, rather, discarded) values of the past, even within the context of a brave new world. I encountered both such world-views recently after witnessing two original plays and a touring production of an old classic staged in the Columbus, Ohio, area.

**Worlds Our Past Plays Examined**  
For a familiar frame of reference, let’s look at the worlds created in purported masterpieces of drama. In Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot,” we have a world that has been annihilated (a bare stage with one isolated tree), leaving two lonely, vulnerable tramps to wait out the fulfillment of a godless existence by playing games, chattering on, and hoping to make human contact. Here, any hope for the reclamation of days gone by is dashed, replaced not by a utopia but a dystopia of misery.

In “Hamlet,” Shakespeare presents a once great court that has decayed into something rotten, where deceitful or confused characters seem to be adrift in a world that needs to be destroyed before it can be made whole again. The hope here is that the newly redeemed world will retain its old glory with a new generation of characters.

Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town” shows us a self-contained world where the realities of existence (birth, marriage, death) are accepted—however sad at times—and understood as the joy and cost of being alive. There is no new world to look toward but rather the continuation of an existing world, which suits everyone just fine.

The key component of these created worlds is that their inhabitants recognize the conditions of their world and make the choice either to live within them (“Godot” and “Our Town”) or to fight against them (“Hamlet”). But the conditions during the course of the play rarely change and are accepted by most, even if the protagonist chooses not to accept them.

3 Plays

The original plays I saw presented the two very distinct worlds I’ve described above. The first play concerned a small, black-family-owned diner that has survived the last half-century of societal upheaval, even as the married owners have drifted apart. Let’s call this the “Diner Play,” as I’d rather use these as generic rather than specific examples.

The second play involved the frequent park bench meetings of two homosexual men (an older, cynical retiree and a young, idealistic government worker) whose conversations are framed by the ongoing unrest in our nation, on-stage protests and all. We’ll call this one the “Bench Play.”

The “Diner Play” creates a world where it is understood that God exists and plays a role in our lives, that the world changes but some things (like diners) withstand the march of time, and that people can reconcile under the most difficult circumstances. Racism has reared its ugly head throughout the years, but it is not what defines these characters, nor is it the source of major conflict in the play. The play’s message is one of hope for a better future, starting with the spiritual reunion of the diner’s mom-and-pop owners.

The “Bench Play” presents a world where violence is a given, but some violence represents a necessary response to injustice while other violence stems from bigotry and hatred. The hope in the world lies solely in the ability of others to understand the evil inherent in certain ways



▲ Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot.” This 1978 Avignon Festival production was directed by Otmár Krejca and starred Rufus (L) as Estragon and Georges Wilson as Vladimir.

of thinking; many characters are white supremacists, and jingoistic flag waving is pervasive in all situations. Even the two white homosexuals reject and bully a gay man of color. God, when mentioned, is a figure called upon to receive prayers, which, like slogans on motivational posters, sound great but are rarely given with any consequence.

This latter world, by the way, is the same as that created by Aaron Sorkin’s new take on “To Kill a Mockingbird.” I also recently saw it in Columbus, touring with Richard Thomas as Atticus Finch. Sorkin’s view is that racism is endemic and systemic, that there is no hope for those who perpetuate bigotry (presumably all of us), and that we must remove racism from society by any means necessary. Thus, Sorkin’s Finch is no longer the moral center of the “Mockingbird” universe but rather a foolish believer in the innate goodness of people, resigned to resorting to outright lies to further the cause of antiracism. He’s not your grandparents’ Atticus Finch.

Violence as the Answer

As a person who believes in the value of tradition and is viscerally opposed to contemporary attempts to extinguish it, I was disturbed by the insistence in the “Bench Play” that we can create a new world if only we get those pesky racists out of the way. (They’re everywhere!) Violence is now an acceptable way to rid the world of racism, the playwright reminds us.

Tellingly, this was the message of Sorkin’s “Mockingbird”: Racists are everywhere, even in a population consisting of allegedly good people. It presents a 1934 American South as a reflection of contemporary America, a false and unfair comparison in that we are a much better nation now for having removed the shackles of institutional racism 60 years ago.

Yet both “Bench Play” and “Mockingbird” tell us that our national values are inadequate and somehow as oppressive as ever. That’s because, I fear, as a nation we are discouraged from following a familiar set of fundamental values to create a standard for living. Our major institutions (family, school, church, government) have suffered a bombardment



▲ A scene from the original Broadway production of “Our Town” with Frank Craven (L) as the Stage Manager, Martha Scott as Emily Webb, and John Craven as George Gibbs.



▲ British actor John Gielgud (1904–2000) poses in costume for his lead role in “Hamlet” in 1936.

ridicule and dismantlement, so much so that we often have no model to compare with what we all once took for granted.

It would be wonderful to have a world with no racism, of course, but how obtainable is that when 1) racism is so broadly defined as to include any slight against anyone deemed marginalized by skin color, and 2) human nature being what it is (as the Founders surely knew) will inevitably cause us to respond in some self-ish ways that may appear to be racist.

The “Diner Play,” by contrast, shows an America that still has lessons to learn but can move forward, confronting the ugly, the unfortunate, and the disgraceful with a nod toward tradition (such as the nuclear family unit and heartfelt religious conviction).

All three playwrights, I’m certain, will tell you that we live in these two separate worlds now. And they may each have a point: There are, within each world, recognizable qualities that we all possess: There are protests, violence, and reconciliations in the plays, as in contemporary society. But as a barometer of what is good and what is lasting, the “Diner

Play” makes a much stronger case for the values that define us as a nation, even as we seem to have lost those values.

Theater Today

In contemporary American theater, all worlds are seen as equally real and equally true, but some are more equal, as Orwell first said, if they have progressive values in them. How, then, are we to present a universe that is both recognizable and embraceable by the vast majority of audiences?

We might start by returning to the idea that there are foundational principles that define our country, and these principles are true and good—precisely the principles that define

the Natural Theater (the theater movement that looks to the philosophy of our Founding Fathers and human nature to develop character and conflict).

The Natural Theater features protagonists who look to themselves for the cause of (or at least contributing factors to) their failures and struggles and then work to remedy these flaws before going out to take on the world. Harper Lee’s Atticus Finch was such a man. Sorkin’s Finch

recognizes his failings but ultimately finds himself condemning the people of Maycomb en masse, reversing his previous stance that there is good in everyone.

However, we can use the arts to reinforce the values that Americans used to take for granted, even when those rights are under attack.

Both the “Bench Play” and Sorkin’s “Mockingbird” tell us there’s something mighty wrong with society that ultimately must be fought and defeated. Both point to a particular segment of our population as the source of this sin. But it is the “Diner Play” that takes the higher road, going beyond condemnation and finger-pointing and showing that simple acts of reconciliation can have ramifications on a larger scale.

Seems to me, we need more Diner Plays and their worlds of hope than Bench Plays with their worlds of blaming and vengeance.

Robert Cooperman is the founder of Stage Right Theatrics, a theater company dedicated to the preservation of our Founding Fathers’ vision through the arts. Originally from Queens, New York, he now lives in Columbus, Ohio, where he earned his doctorate at The Ohio State University.

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THE EPOCH TIMES



▲ After reading Stowe's article, thousands of outraged readers canceled their subscription to the magazine *Atlantic Monthly*. "Reading the News," by W. John Taylor. Yale Center for British Art.

## HISTORY

## Vindication for Trying to Speak Truth

Continued from Page 1

of his 11 children embraced the causes of abolition and social reform. Beecher saw to the education of his daughters as well as his sons, and Harriet read freely from his extensive library. Like many of her day, she particularly admired the verse of the popular Lord Byron (1788–1824), a celebrity, a sort of rock star in his day, and a man who would deeply affect Stowe's life decades after his death.

After working as a teacher and on her way to becoming a writer, Harriet married Calvin Stowe, professor and biblical scholar, and a widower formerly married to one of Harriet's close friends. To-

gether they had seven children. Even as the couple struggled financially, Calvin encouraged his wife in her writing, and with the publication of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," their money troubles vanished. Stowe continued writing until old age took its toll, and eventually published more than 30 books.

In 1853, on a trip to England promoting her bestseller, Stowe met and befriended Anne Isabella Milbanke (1792–1860), the much-maligned and long-separated wife of Lord Byron, and the mother of his only legitimate child.

### A Call to Battle

In her youth, like so many others, Stowe had heard the innuendo and gossip

about Lady Byron, her chilly temperament and her abandonment of her husband, and how his consequent despair resulted in his reckless living abroad, gambling, drinking, and pursuing other women. Many years later, she would write: "It is within the writer's recollection, how, in the obscure mountain town where she spent her early days, Lord Byron's separation from his wife was for a season the all-engrossing topic."

Pity for Byron gave way to horror when in 1856 Stowe again visited her friend Lady Byron and learned of the poet's violent temper, his reckless drinking and womanizing, and most shocking of all, the story of his intimate relations



▲ Anne Isabella Byron (4th row back on the far R) in the painting "The Anti-Slavery Society Convention," 1840, by Benjamin Haydon. Oil on canvas. National Portrait Gallery, London.

with his half-sister Augusta and the child produced by that passion.

Others as well knew these sordid details of Byron's secret life, and Stowe would have left Lady Byron's secrets untold, as she herself publicly noted, until in 1869 she stumbled across the recently published memoirs of Countess Teresa Guiccioli, Byron's last mistress. Guiccioli's reminiscences savaged Lady Byron, blaming her cold manner and religious zealotry for the poet's tempestuous behavior and early death.

In defense of her deceased friend's impugned honor, Stowe took up her pen.

### The Battle Begins

In September 1869, *The Atlantic Monthly* published Stowe's "The True Story of Lady Byron's Life." In this long article, Stowe first appraises Lord Byron as the public knew him: "a human being endowed with every natural charm, gift, and grace, who by the one false step of an unsuitable marriage wrecked his whole life."

She then relates that the countess's slanderous portrait of Lady Byron had sparked this rebuttal. She cites Byron's poetry at length, recollects discussions around him from her own childhood, details the courtship that led to the marriage of Byron and Anne, and writes of his life as a rake.

Then comes this bombshell: "He fell into the depths of a secret adulterous intrigue with a blood relation, so near in consanguinity that discovery must have been utter ruin and expulsion from civilized society."

That charge of incest set off an explosion rarely seen in the field of literature.

### Counterattacks

The outrage that followed Stowe's "True Story" makes today's cancel culture seem but a whisper in the wind. Thousands of *Atlantic Monthly* readers canceled their subscriptions, nearly sinking the magazine, and opprobrium poured in from all sides. Many of Stowe's detractors were shocked that such a revelation regarding sexual impropriety had appeared in print. Admirers of Byron also responded with vituperation, buttressing the accepted view that Lady Byron had ruined the marriage, and contending that she had then lied to Stowe about Byron's past and that Stowe herself was nothing more than a hack.

In her biography "Harriet Beecher

Stowe," Suzanne Coil tells us that a congressman apologized to Britain—"nothing from her pen is considered reliable by the American public"—and the House of Commons debated whether she should be barred for life from the British Isles.

One of the few who came to Stowe's defense was her Hartford neighbor, Mark Twain. He wrote six editorials about the "Byron scandal," backing both Stowe and Lady Byron. Of Lord Byron, he observed that he was "a bad man, so bad perhaps, as a man with a great intellect, a passionate animal nature, intense egotism and selfishness, and little or no moral principle to restrain or govern either of those, could be."

And Harriet Stowe's response? As she had done with "Uncle Tom's Cabin," she followed up these smears with a book, "Lady Byron Vindicated," a history of the scandal from 1815—the year of the Byrons' marriage—up to her own time. This vindication failed to sway the public, and though it attracted the attention of suffragettes and feminists, it was largely a failure.

### Honor and Friendship

Some writers contend with justification that by protesting the defamation of Lady Byron, Stowe intended as well to push for women's rights, that she may have hoped to advance that cause as she had abolition. In "Vindication," we find plenty of material to support that view. Here is just one sample, taken from "Chapter III. The Résumé of the Conspiracy":

"The lesson to woman in this pathetic piece of special pleading is, that man may sink himself below the brute, may wallow in filth like the swine, may turn his home into a hell, beat and torture his children, forsake the marriage-bed for foul rivals; yet all this does *not* dissolve the marriage-vow on her part, nor free his bounden serf from her obligation to honour his memory."

On the other hand, Stowe was not



Detail of a portrait of Anne Isabella, Lady Byron, 1812, by Charles Hayter.



Detail of a portrait of British poet Lord Byron (1788–1824), 1813, by Thomas Phillips. Oil on canvas. Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, England.

among the most ardent feminists of her time. Moreover, she was well aware of the hornet's nest that her public revelations about Byron might stir up. Had she wished to write advocating for the rights of women, she could as easily have devised a much less controversial approach.

Instead of speculating as to Stowe's motives behind "The True Story of Lady Byron's Life," perhaps we should simply read her own explanation, which we find in the first paragraphs of "Vindication":

"And, first, why have I made this disclosure at all?"

"To this I answer briefly, Because I considered it my duty to make it."

"I made it in defence of a beloved, revered friend, whose memory stood forth in the eyes of the civilised world charged with most repulsive crimes, of which I *certainly* knew her innocent."

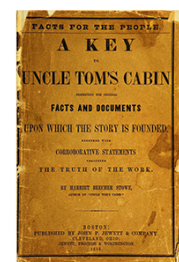
In short, Harriet Beecher Stowe risked her own reputation to protect the reputation of a dead friend. Her courage and self-sacrifice in that regard should serve as an example for the rest of us.

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.

▲ A bronze memorial commemorating the 1862 meeting of Lincoln and Stowe located on Columbus Boulevard and State Street in Hartford, Conn.



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"A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," 1853, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library.



"Lady Byron Vindicated: A History of the Byron Controversy," 1870, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Library of Congress.



▲ Michelangelo's "David." Gallery of the Academy of Florence, Italy.



▲ "Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy," circa 1594, by Caravaggio. Oil on canvas; 36.3 inches by 50.1 inches. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.



▲ "Ecstasy of Saint Teresa," 1647-1652, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.

FINE ART

# Michelangelo's Baroque Rival

The touching sculptures of Gian Lorenzo Bernini

By James Baresel

If artists as brilliant as Michelangelo and artworks as definitive as his "David" are rare, the year marking the 120th anniversary of that sculpture's unveiling saw an event almost unparalleled in artistic history. For the first and maybe the last time, there was an artist who could rival Michelangelo both as a sculptor and a master of multiple art mediums. And in 1624, that artist—Gian Lorenzo Bernini—unveiled a "David" of his own. Born in 1598, Bernini benefited from a combination of genius and excellent artistic foundation. His father, Pietro, was among the better sculptors of his generation. Like Michelangelo, Pietro was originally from Florence, Italy, and learned his trade in that city. By 1606, he moved to Rome to fulfill a papal commission and would remain there for the rest of his life.

## Rome's Foundations

In the 17th century, Rome was an ideal place for the younger Bernini to be educated in art. A century earlier, the masters of the Renaissance had still been refining their techniques, learning from recently discovered ancient relics, and creating works that would serve as models for the next generation of masters. By Bernini's day, those works were at the top of the artistic canon. Increasingly, however, artists were building on those foundations in creative and original ways rather than merely imitating earlier works. Paintings by Caravaggio and Rubens even performed the almost impossible feat of matching those of the Renaissance masters. In sculpture, Michelangelo continued to tower above all others until Bernini appeared on the scene.

It did not take artists and patrons long to see Bernini as, in the words of Pope Paul V, "the Michelangelo of his age." At one point Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, later Pope Urban VIII, even considered hiring the 19-year-old prodigy to complete a sculpture left unfinished by Michelangelo himself—which nobody had previously dared to touch. Unfortunately, we have no record of what the sculpture was or if Bernini ever completed it. If Bernini did complete that sculpture, it would be of particular interest not just as the joint work of two great artists but because of the differences between them. Both artists possessed similar aesthetic genius, and both had an ability to make stone come alive and express the softness and suppleness of flesh and cloth. With the many Michelangelo sculptures in Rome to reference, including the "Pietà," Bernini took his stylistic lead from the early Baroque painters, particularly Caravaggio.

## The 2 Davids

Classical Renaissance art, as exemplified by Michelangelo and Raphael, leans toward intellect and restrained emotions, whereas the Baroque art of Caravaggio and Bernini veers more toward emotional intensity. In narrative works, classicists depicted figures paused before or after an action has occurred. Baroque artists generally preferred expressing figures in the middle of dramatic action. Even sharper differences mark the schools' approaches to religious and historical figures of earlier eras. Classicists would illustrate their figures exemplifying physical perfection as a metaphor for their moral qualities, using their subjects as archetypes of virtues. Baroque artists instead focused on their sub-

"David," between 1623 and 1624, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Marble; 67 inches. Borghese Gallery, Italy.



James Baresel is a freelance writer who has contributed to periodicals as varied as *Fine Art Connoisseur*, *Military History*, *Claremont Review of Books*, and *New Eastern Europe*.

jects as individuals, trying to capture accurate emotions in action.

While comparable in their beauty, Bernini's and Michelangelo's sculptures of David exemplify these contrasts. Michelangelo's "David" is static, with a muscular body that conforms to Greek and Roman notions of perfection, symbolizing his heroism. Bernini depicted a somewhat diminutive David in motion: running in the act of throwing a stone with his sling, his raised hair suggesting that he is using the wind at his back to aid the stone's propulsion, and his face showing concentration, determination and, perhaps, controlled concern.

## Bernini and Caravaggio

The similarities between Bernini's statue and Caravaggio's painting "David With the Head of Goliath," are just as notable as the differences between the two carved Davids. Taking place just after Goliath's death, Caravaggio's painting has David's face suggesting relief and mental recuperation. It can even seem as though David is in the act of lifting Goliath's head rather than holding it still—an impression that would accord with most of Caravaggio's work. And if such similarities do not go beyond the broad contours of Baroque art, the relationship between the styles of the two artists is made clearer in comparisons of further works.

Caravaggio's painting "Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy" and Bernini's sculpture "Ecstasy of Saint Teresa" have a closely themed relationship. Both artworks depict saints collapsing in ecstasy while in the presence of an angel, and both have strong emotional qualities—whereas Caravaggio chose tenderness and Bernini dramatic intensity. St. Francis had a vision of an angel at the time he received the stigmata: five wounds in his hands, feet, and on the side near his heart, the parts of the body where Christ was nailed to the cross and pierced with a lance. During Saint Teresa's vision, an angel used a lance to pierce her heart several times.

Even closer similarities exist between Caravaggio's artistry and Bernini's often-forgotten work as a painter. Caravaggio's "The Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew" and Bernini's "Saint Andrew and Saint Thomas" could be mistaken as paintings by the same artist. These paintings have the same naturalistic depiction of their figures' features and detailed hair and similar muted colors and tenebrism (dramatic contrast between light and dark).

While Bernini took his stylistic lead from Caravaggio, it will always be Michelangelo to whom he will be compared. Michelangelo and Bernini were both history's greatest sculptors and the only well-known artists to have achieved the highest excellence in all three fields of art: architecture, painting, and sculpture. In that combination of height, breadth of achievement, and brilliance, Bernini was Michelangelo's only successor.



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

# The Father of the Atomic Bomb and His Promethean Struggle

By Mark Jackson

Who would have thought a three-hour biopic (with thriller intent) about atomic physics would turn out to be 2023's summer blockbuster? A blockbuster for adults. You'll be on the edge of your seat the entire time because here, finally, is pithy, challenging, exciting, mind-expanding, engrossing, quality educational cinema at its best.

The film opens with a reminder that the new-universe Greek gods punished Prometheus, a god from the previous universe, by chaining him to a rock for all eternity. He was sentenced to having his continually regrowing liver ripped out daily by birds of prey. Why? Because he'd given the forbidden gift of fire to humankind.

Julius Robert Oppenheimer gave humankind the atomic bomb—enough firepower to destroy the entire planet many times over. This thriller-biopic leads from Oppenheimer's student days up to his emotional confession of devastating guilt before President Truman, who dismissed him from the Oval Office with the parting shot of "Don't let that crybaby back in here!"

## 'Oppenheimer'

Native New Yorker J.R. Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) studied quantum mechanics at England's Cambridge University. (Quantum wasn't being taught in America yet.) There, he was encouraged by rock star Danish physicist Niels Bohr (Kenneth Branagh) to ditch lab work and head to Germany's University of Göttingen in 1926 and really let his mind expand.

Oppenheimer's British professor scoffs at the suggestion, saying that Oppenheimer's math isn't up to par. Bohr counters by saying that math is to physics what reading music is to musicians—the important thing is to be able to hear the music in one's head. Can Oppenheimer hear the music? He can.

His research and reputation soon get him the job of heading up University of California-Berkeley's theoretical physics program, where, as one of those geniuses whose brilliance is close to madness, his sanity is threatened by haunting astrophysicist visions of stars collapsing into black holes and the mind-boggling size of the cosmos. At the urging of his sometimes mistress (Florence Pugh), he also starts attending labor party meetings and taking a prolonged whiff of communism.

## If You Build It, America Wins

With a mandate from Lt. Gen. Leslie Groves (Matt Damon), Oppenheimer directs the famed Manhattan Project nuclear weapon program for the United States.

The fruit of his labors eventually levels the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II, which begets Oppenheimer international fame, whereupon he seeks to turn his involvement into a platform urging nuclear armistice. The revoking of his security clearance as a U.S. Energy Commission adviser crushes his drive and activism.

Inventing the atomic bomb and then campaigning against nuclear weapons appears to have been the all-time best example of trying to "close the barn door after the cow got out." One imagines that had Oppenheimer been born later, he might have heeded "Jurassic Park" character Ian Malcolm's warning: "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should." But since it's highly probable that that very line is based on Oppenheimer

himself, that's too much silly "Back to the Future" chicken-or-egg conjecture to contemplate.

But the fact of the matter is, Oppenheimer was already worried about using a weapon of mass destruction. It was his keen realization that the Nazis wouldn't hesitate to nuke the Jewish people living in America that drove him—along with the knowledge that the Russians could easily beat America to the punch and create a nuke first—which ultimately drowned out his doubts.

## Other Story Lines

Based on Martin J. Sherwin and Kai Bird's 2005 biography, "American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer," Christopher Nolan's film is basically a lot of procedural scenes containing brilliant-minded men talking, such as theoretical physicist Edward Teller (Bennie Safdie) and nuclear scientist Ernest Lawrence (Josh Hartnett), and of course Albert Einstein (Tom Conti).

Running alongside the main narrative is one of Robert Downey Jr.'s better performances as Rear Adm. Lewis Strauss. Strauss's much-publicized 1959 Senate confirmation hearing and his morbid jealousy of Oppenheimer lends the film some of its finest scenes. (To differentiate this storyline, these scenes are shot in grainy black-and-white.)

Another related timeline involves, as mentioned, Oppenheimer's 1954 security clearance hearing—a kangaroo court intended to railroad Oppenheimer—via a committee spearheaded by predatory special counsel Roger Robb (Jason Clarke).

The women in the picture, underutilized yet mesmerizing, include Florence Pugh as free-spirited, communist psychiatrist and Oppenheimer's lover, Jean Tatlock; and Emily Blunt as Oppenheimer's Bay Area socialite wife, Kitty, who later comes to her husband's defense and gives special counsel Robb more than he bargained for.

A choice was clearly made not to try and depict existing photos of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that followed the actual bombing. A good thing, too; I've read the accounts of the "ant-walking alligator people." I'd prefer not to have that particular visual scorching my retinas.

Approximately 199,000 people were injured or died from the bombs ordered by President Harry S. Truman (Gary Oldman), who didn't have a problem with taking full credit. The aftermath ignited the Cold War with Russia and the subsequent Red Scare,

J.R. Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) witnessing the first atomic bomb explode.



## 'Oppenheimer'

**Director**  
Christopher Nolan

**Starring**  
Cillian Murphy, Emily Blunt, Matt Damon, Robert Downey Jr., Florence Pugh, Gary Oldman, Casey Affleck, Kenneth Branagh, Josh Hartnett, Rami Malek, Dane DeHaan, Matthew Modine, Alex Wolff, Jason Clarke, Tony Goldwyn

**Running Time**  
3 hours

**MPAA Rating**  
R

**Release Date**  
July 21, 2023

★★★★★



▲ J.R. Oppenheimer celebrates a successful project of the atomic bomb in "Oppenheimer."



▲ Albert Einstein (Tom Conti, L) and J.R. Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) in "Oppenheimer."



▲ (L-R) J.R. Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy), Edward Condon (Olli Haaskivi), Leslie Groves (Matt Damon), and Kenneth Nichols (Dane DeHaan) in "Oppenheimer."

which was Oppenheimer's undoing. In a film featuring advanced math and theoretical sciences, most of the movie-going public won't understand the minutiae, but Nolan demonstrates that good storytelling trumps the details.

I found "Oppenheimer" to ultimately underline with vehemence the philosophical concept that mind and matter are the same. Out of mere mathematical scribbles and hieroglyphs on paper, concerning things that the human eye cannot perceive let alone prove, evolved the titanic power to incinerate 199,000 humans. Thoughts are supremely powerful, and when they manifest tangibly in the world, like this, in forms such as beyond-deadly atomic and hydrogen bombs, it's usually a sign that humans have somewhere along the line cast out the divine.

## FILM REVIEW

## A Dangerous Extreme Sport

Freediving treads a fine line between derring-do and bonkers insanity

By Michael Clark

Before watching the new documentary “The Deepest Breath,” I’d never heard of “freediving,” and I would consider myself reasonably well-informed when it comes to sports. After watching “The Deepest Breath,” I wouldn’t under any circumstances whatsoever ever attempt to try it, and would go far in trying to dissuade others to avoid it as well.

An extreme sport in every sense of the word, it has resulted (according to the film) in more fatalities than those who have died trying to climb Mt. Everest. Freediving regularly pushes the bounds of human endurance beyond their breaking points.

Rookie writer-director Laura McGann knows she’s working with pure gold here. The only thing more compelling than witnessing individuals succeed in conquering the elements is watching them fail, and McGann offers up a hearty mix of both for the duration.

It’s kind of like why people watch the Indy 500 every year. Half of them want to see who wins and the other half wants to see who fails to go the distance, and McGann gets this without turning the film into a tawdry, gawking, rubbernecking, wreck-on-the-highway production. It’s clear that she wants everyone featured in the film to succeed, but she doesn’t shy away from giving failure equal screen time.

The first five minutes are a perfect indicator of how the rest of the film will play out. Italian-born diver Alessia Zecchini is shown descending far below the surface of the water in real time. For two-plus minutes, Ms. Zecchini is seen going farther and farther down a lead rope to a certain point, then turning around and returning to the surface for a round trip between 623 and 656 feet.

To put this into perspective, that’s over

four times as far as the Statue of Liberty is tall.

**Hold Your Breath**

The catch here is—and this is the crux of freediving—Ms. Zecchini and all of those involved in the sport are doing this while holding their breath. The Guinness World Record for holding one’s breath underwater belongs to Budimir Sobat, a Croatian freediver who did so for 24 minutes and 37 seconds; however, he was stationary while doing so.

Although it is rare for a single freedive to last longer than four or five minutes, the oxygen being held in the diver’s lungs quickly turns into carbon dioxide and the pressure of the deepening waters causes the lungs to shrink to the size (again, as stated in the film) of a softball. This is referred to as “lung squeeze.”

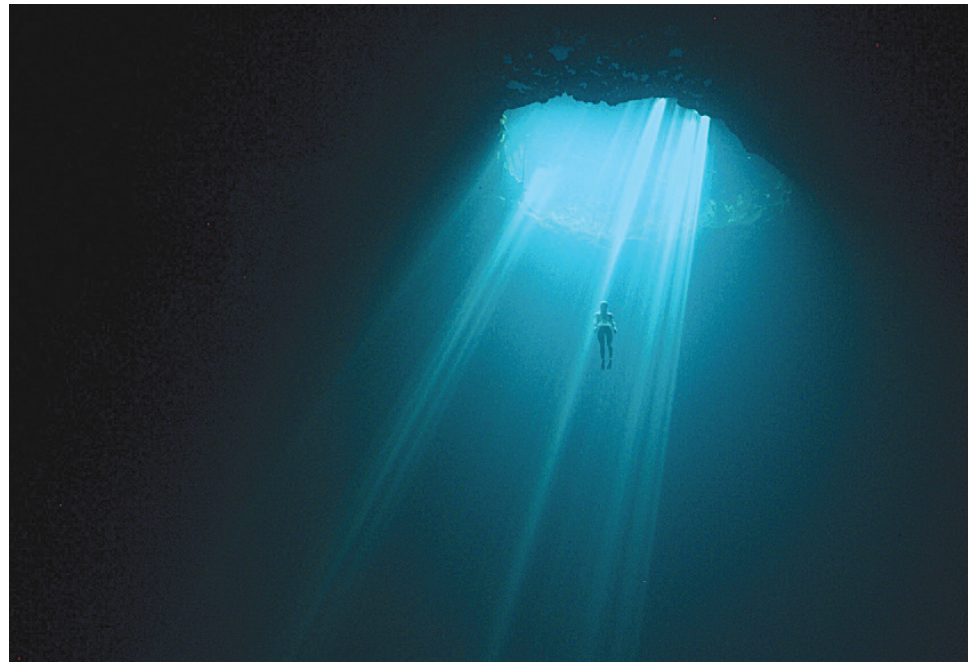
Descending is the easy part. It is the ascension where things start to get sticky, oftentimes resulting in blackouts and, in some cases, death.

**Parallel Paths**

At the heart of Ms. McGann’s narrative are the parallel paths being followed by Ms. Zecchini and the Irish-born and raised Stephen Keenan. While Ms. Zecchini knew she was destined to become a star freediver since she was a toddler, Mr. Keenan had no idea of his life’s calling until he was well into his 20s.

Diving competitively since 2005 at the age of 13, Ms. Zecchini began competing professionally as soon as she could do so legally (age 21). She went on to amass a staggering 37 world freediving records, including the deepest female dive in history (351 feet).

During much of this same time, Mr. Keenan was aimlessly traipsing across the African continent, absorbing the various cultures and enjoying himself thoroughly. But he was still unable to identify his life’s mission.



NETFLIX

◀ The Mecca of global dive locations: the “Blue Hole,” in “The Deepest Breath.”

This all changed toward the end of his long trek with his arrival in Dahab, Egypt, a small town on the coast of the Red Sea. This is also the location of the “Blue Hole,” the “Mecca” of global dive locations. In short order, Mr. Keenan took up the sport, opened his own dive shop, and later began offering lessons and training. One of his training clients turned out to be Ms. Zecchini.

At about the 75-minute mark, Ms. McGann somewhat departs from the traditional documentary template by taking it in a mystery-thriller direction with romantic overtones, and most of it works.

She is able to capture the cheery and unselfish attitude of the tightly knit freedive community with touching delicacy and ends the movie on a bittersweet, supremely inspirational, life-affirming note.

Prepare to be deeply moved.

“The Deepest Breath” is presented in English and multiple subtitled foreign languages, and debuted on Netflix on July 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.

**‘The Deepest Breath’****Documentary****Director**

Laura McGann

**Running Time**

1 hour, 48 minutes

**MPAA Rating**

PG

**Release Date**

July 19, 2023

★★★★☆

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](mailto: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](mailto: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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