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ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



◀ “Hummingbird and Passionflowers,” circa 1875–85, by Martin Johnson Heade. Oil on canvas; 20 inches by 12 inches. Purchase, Gift of Albert Weatherby, 1946; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

FINE ART

Painting the Tiny Jewels of the Jungle: Hummingbirds

American artist Martin Johnson Heade’s love for the little bird

By Lorraine Ferrier

Flora covers every inch of land in American artist Martin Johnson Heade’s “Brazilian Forest” painting, creating a dense habitat for all manner of unseen fauna. In the center, a tree fern’s giant fronds fan out every which

way, appearing like a broken umbrella that Heade used to draw our attention to the gushing waterfall below and the vast, misty, mountainous forest beyond. Lichen- and creeper-covered trees in the middle ground climb skyward beyond the picture plane. Here, nature reigns supreme, and Heade put this into perspective by adding a hunter in a red

waistcoat and wide-brimmed hat who wades waist-deep through vegetation. His hunting dog follows along, ever alert to the choir of jungle animals.

Heade (1819–1904) completed “Brazilian Forest” in his London studio, fresh from his first trip to Brazil in 1864, during the American Civil War. Everything

Continued on Page 4




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BOOK REVIEW

Fading Away but Never Forgotten

Our World War II veterans and their stories

By Jeff Minick

Back in my school days, many of the men I knew were veterans of World War II. My dad had served as an infantry sergeant with the 88th Division in Northern Italy. Our minister was a navigator on a B-17. My dad's good friend had served in the Navy in the Pacific. One of my Boy Scout leaders in high school had parachuted into Normandy, and a graduate school professor at Wake Forest University flew some sort of bombing mission on the heavy water plants in Norway. "Get me drunk enough someday," this cultured gentleman told our class, "and maybe I'll talk about it." A college professor who became a good friend spent part of the war in prison as a conscientious objector.

There were plenty of other veterans, even in the small town of my boyhood, which is not surprising given that more than 16 million Americans, men and women, served in the armed forces during the war. More than 400,000 lost their lives, and 671,000 were wounded.

Of those millions, data from 2022 reveal that only some 167,000 remain alive. The average age of these men and women is 94. Approximately 180 of them die every day.

Which is why remembrances like "The Rifle" books by Andrew Biggio are so important.

'The Rifle 2'

A Marine Corps combat veteran in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr. Biggio bought a 1945 M1 Garand rifle to honor a great-uncle who died in Italy during World War II. Showing this classic weapon to veterans of that war sparked memories of their time in service, which Mr. Biggio recorded. He also asked them to sign their names on the walnut-stained weapon. This stories and their reminiscences appeared in Mr. Biggio's 2021 bestseller, "The Rifle."

But as Mr. Biggio would later write, "Readers demanded more, and there was plenty more to tell." More veterans inscribed their names on the M1 and told the stories of what they had witnessed and experienced fighting the Japanese in the Pacific and the Germans in Europe. Mr. Biggio recorded these memories, corroborated them when ever possible from official documents, and even arranged to fly some of these elderly vets overseas to the battlefields of their past. These encounters led to "The Rifle 2: Back to the Battlefield."

The Combatants

Vincent "Tag" Tagliamonte entered the Army the day after his high school graduation, trained for a few months, and was thrown into combat in February 1945. He entered Germany with the 80th Infantry Division, helped liberate the concentration camp at Buchenwald, and was stationed in Germany after the war's end, where he witnessed part of the Nuremberg Trials. He then returned home and married his girlfriend, Connie, a union that lasted more than six decades until her death.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, Emilio Magliacane enlisted in the Marines, fought the Japanese in the bloody fighting on Peleliu, and took part in the Battle of Okinawa. Unlike so many other Pacific veterans interviewed by Mr. Biggio, Emilio had no residual hatred for the Japanese. "I may be an exception," he

said, "but I would, and I do forgive them. ... They were just soldiers, like me."

Charles Ketcham of Massachusetts signed Mr. Biggio's rifle, but he refused to pick it up although many other veterans had done so. "I vowed I would never pick up a gun again," said the 95-year-old veteran of the chaotic and sometimes brutal fighting in Germany near the war's end. In the brutal battle for the German town of Crailsheim, the teenager was running ammo belts to his squad when he heard someone yell, "Here! Here!" Ketcham followed the cries and found a German soldier no older than himself whose "stomach was blown open entirely." The teen gestured to Ketcham to put him out of his misery. "Perhaps if I was older, I would have pulled the trigger. ... Instead I just cried with him," Charlie recalled.

As Mr. Biggio later notes, "Charlie's experience was another example of the lack of unalloyed glory in war. When the teen soldier died that day, both he and Charlie lost something. Both of these soldiers, American and German, were robbed of their youths."

These thumbnail sketches represent just three of the young soldiers we meet in "Rifle 2." Their generally detailed accounts and the memories that still sway their emotions reveal the enormous impact of the war on these 90-year-old and even older men. Mr. Biggio is an expert interviewer, asking good questions, listening carefully to the answers, and remaining acutely aware of the nuances of feelings that appear in the men's voices and pass across their faces.

A Liar and a Murderer

For "Rifle," Mr. Biggio "chose stories of valor." In "Rifle 2," we find similar accounts, but in this book he also has "purposely mixed in the poor, the criminals, and the liars for balance." Here, as he explicitly says, he is writing for those veterans of more recent wars who are not perfect, who "have fallen through the cracks, made mistakes, or suffered mentally."

Jay Raboin—Mr. Biggio uses pseudonyms for some of his subjects, and presumably did here—worked for the Mob even while in the Navy. His combat record on a destroyer escort in the Atlantic was satisfactory, but he was otherwise a rule-breaker aboard ship. Given shore duty in Boston while his shipmates headed for the Pacific, he entered into his life of organized crime. He



A U.S. Army infantryman with an M1 Garand in 1942.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

at Bastogne with a medical company, and even accompanies Mr. Biggio and some other veterans to Normandy. It was in France, finally, that Mel's lies became apparent, first by his failure to recognize at all the site of his first field hospital in a largely unchanged chateau, and then by the arrival of an email from the Massachusetts Veterans' Service revealing that he had never set foot in the 101st.

Yet the lies, Mr. Biggio notes, followed Mel into the grave: "He was buried with a chestful of medals he hadn't earned." In his travels and interviews, Mr. Biggio came across several other pretenders like Mel Harris. "I spent a few nights scrubbing phony signatures off the rifle with paint thinner, causing damage to the wood. I cursed myself."

In Memoriam

Many books have spotlighted the American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and medical personnel who fought against fascism. Stephen Ambrose's "Band of Brothers," James Fenelon's "Angels Against the Sun," and "With the Old Breed" by Eugene Sledge, which is mentioned by Mr. Biggio, are just a sample of the literature written about these warriors.

By adding additional actual accounts of the war by those who fought in it, Mr. Biggio has not only honored the memory of these veterans and their comrades, but he has also given future generations examples of heroism and patriotism with a human face.

Addendum in Black

"The Rifle 2" is told and written from the gut. The stories of these men—all of them, even the miscreants—can tug at the heart, bringing laughter and tears.

For me, however, it was a single page of "Rifle 2"—the book's "Dedication." Here, reproduced in full, are the words of Andrew Biggio:

"This book is dedicated to the thirteen U.S. service members who gave their lives on August 26, 2021, at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. Their bravery, dedication, and discipline in the face of chaos will never be forgotten. Semper Fi.

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza, 20

Marine Corps Sgt. Nicole L. Gee, 23

Marine Corps. Cpl. Hunter Lopez, 22

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Rylee J. McCollum, 20

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan R. Merola, 20

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Kareem M. Nikoui, 20

Marine Corps Sgt. Johanny Rosario Pichardo, 25

Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez, 22

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared M. Schmitz, 20

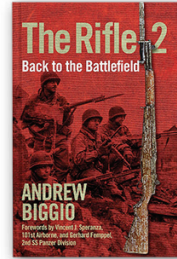
Marine Corps Cpl. Daegan W. Page, 23

Navy Hospital Corpsman Maxton W. Soviak, 22

Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss, 23

Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover, 31"

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.



'THE RIFLE 2: BACK TO THE BATTLEFIELD'

By Andrew Biggio
Regnery History,
Sept. 19, 2023
Hardcover
320 pages

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▲ “Orchid and Hummingbird Near a Mountain Waterfall,” 1902, by Martin Johnson Heade. Oil on canvas; 15 inches by 20 1/4 inches. Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid.

FINE ART

Painting the Tiny Jewels of the Jungle: Hummingbirds

Continued from Page 1

that he included in the scene he’d seen firsthand in its natural habitat. For instance, on the back of the painting, he inscribed “From Forest Studies in South America—Tree Fern.”

Although Heade was known for painting seascapes, salt marshes, and floral still life paintings, his trip to Brazil was the start of his lifelong penchant for painting the tropics and the hummingbird, his boyhood

love. “A few years after my first appearance in this breathing world I was attacked by the all-absorbing hummingbird craze, and it has never left me since,” he said, according to art dealer and art historian Robert G. McIntyre.

The height of Heade’s work may just be his hummingbirds and tropical flowers that he loved to paint late in his 70-year career.

In Awe of Hummingbirds

Heade was known to carry a small

tube of sugar water to feed the hummingbirds. In his “Notebook on Hummingbirds,” he wrote: “For one who is in the least degree attuned to poetic feeling they [hummingbirds] have a singularly fascinating power, which the subtlest mind is unable to explain but which all who have studied them must acknowledge to have felt.”

He first painted them in 1863 in Brazil. Then, after traveling to Nicaragua and Colombia in 1866 and Colombia, Panama, and Jamaica in 1870, he rendered orchids in his hummingbird paintings, especially the Cattleya labiata, a pink blossom discovered in Brazil in the early 19th century.

“Although the orchid was a prized plant among travelers, naturalists, and illustrators, it was little known in both the fine arts and the popular flower books,” art historian Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. noted in his book “The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné.”

Heade built up a comprehensive library of field studies of both the birds that he loved and their natural habitat. Between 1880 and 1904, he shared this expertise, writing over 100 letters and articles on the hummingbird and related topics for Forest and Stream magazine.

According to Christie’s, Heade developed a specific style for his hummingbird and orchid paintings: “He usually emphasized foreground objects, contrasting them with a hazy vista in the background—and he contrasted the soft delicateness of the orchids with the pungent, bold hues of the birds.”

In one of his early orchid and hum-

mingbird works, “Cattleya Orchid and Three Hummingbirds,” the orchid takes up half the picture plane as three hummingbirds surround a nest. Two tiny Brazilian amethyst woodstar (Calliphlox amethystina) hummingbirds share the scene with a red-tailed comet (Sappho sparganurus) hummingbird. Lichen and mosses cover dead branches, and a blue-gray mist covers the vast, yet veiled, jungle backdrop. For Heade, including so many hummingbirds was unusual; the hummingbird, unless mating, is a rather solitary soul, and the artist echoed nature in his works.

“Heade’s later work included fewer hummingbirds—one or two, with a single pink Cattleya labiata blossom

amid the tropical mountains,” Mr. Stebbins Jr. noted in his book. We can see this in the artist’s 1902 painting “Orchid and Hummingbird Near a Mountain Waterfall,” which he created at 83 years old, just two years before he died. Here, Heade painted an overcast sky similar to his early work “Cattleya Orchid and Three Hummingbirds,” yet the later painting appears more refined. The ruby-throated hummingbird’s color pops against the fresh Cattleya labiata orchid bloom, a shimmering waterfall peeks through the dense vegetation, and pale pink flashes of flowers echo throughout the valley.

For one who is in the least degree attuned to poetic feeling [hummingbirds] have a singularly fascinating power.

Martin Johnson Heade, artist

Painting With Passion

Another outstanding work is Heade’s “Hummingbird and Passionflowers,” which scholars believe he painted over some 10 years.

Shaped like the sun, the brilliant scarlet passionflowers in his painting stand out against the overcast sky. Perhaps he rendered the dramatic sky to accentuate the blooms’ Christian message. Missionaries named the passionflower as such because they believed it symbolized the Passion of Christ: The corona filaments appear like the crown of thorns, the three stigmas appear like nails, and the 10 petals represent the number of apostles present at Christ’s crucifixion. The passionflower vines in the painting take on an almost snake-like appearance, the snake of course being symbolic of the fall of man, and the passionflower a sign of the sacrifice Christ made to save us.

Heade rendered the highest bloom hanging down like stage lighting, as if to shine a light on the star of the painting: the jewel-like emerald feathers of the black-eared fairy hummingbird (Heliophryx auritus auritus) with its white breast.

The last stanzas in Robert Frost’s poem “A Prayer of Spring” almost express Heade’s deep appreciation of the land and the hummingbird.

And make us happy in the darting bird
That suddenly above the bees is heard,
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.
For this is love and nothing else is love,
The which it is reserved for God above
To sanctify to what far ends He will,
But which it only needs that we fulfill.



▲ “Brazilian Forest,” 1864, by Martin Johnson Heade. Oil on canvas; 20 inches by 16 inches. RISD, Providence, R.I.



▲ American sculptor Daniel C. French in the Chesterwood studio. Library of Congress.

HISTORY

Sculpting America’s Reconstruction

Daniel Chester French, the preeminent sculptor of public monuments

By Da Yan

Since its official dedication on May 30, 1922, the monumental seated statue of Abraham Lincoln has become one of our country’s most iconic images—a symbol of America. For many, this is the image we associate with the beloved president: the eminent figure whose heroism impressed itself upon American history in a critical time of national crisis. Yet few of us today are familiar with the humble sculptor who took on the challenging task of commemorating the great leader.

Daniel Chester French was at the height of his artistic career when he designed the Lincoln statue. Born in New Hampshire and raised in Massachusetts, he spent his childhood between Cambridge and Concord. These two intellectual capitals of New England were cultivated by such literary giants as Henry Wadsworth

and helped launch his fame as a capable artist. Yet on that day, French was absent from the dedication ceremony, having already left for Florence, Italy, to hone his skills in the studio of the American sculptor Thomas Ball.

Upon returning to the United States, French established his own studio and worked on numerous commissions in Washington, Boston, and New York. With his fame growing, he also sent monumental pieces in 1893 to the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and as far as the state Capitol buildings of Lincoln, Nebraska; and Madison, Wisconsin. By the turn of the century, French had become America’s preeminent sculptor of public monuments.

The Lincoln Memorial

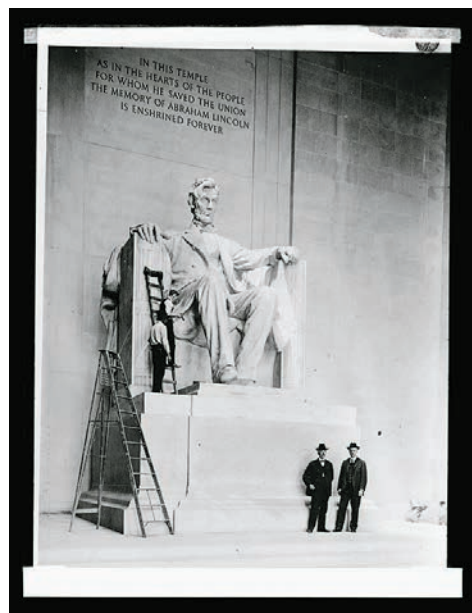
At the tail end of a long and successful career came his most important commission. In 1914, the Lincoln Memorial Committee selected the 64-year-old

At the end of a successful career came his most important commission.

artist to create a statue as the centerpiece of a Beaux-Arts temple dedicated to the Civil War president. For six years, he worked with the architect Henry Bacon, his longtime friend and collaborator, to devise the design. They seated the colossal, 19-foot-high figure on a regal chair of state, under the soaring roofs of the classical architecture. The statue’s towering presence has continued to awe the millions of visitors who come to stand in front of the monument each year.

Reaching success during the Reconstruction era, the life and career of Daniel Chester French paralleled a period of intensified building of national memory in the United States. And by commemorating the achievement of others, he carved out a permanent space for himself among the great figures who made America.

Da Yan is a doctoral student of European art history. Raised in Shanghai, he lives and works in the Northeastern United States.



▲ Daniel Chester French working on the colossal, 19-foot-high statue of Lincoln. Library of Congress.

Tucker Carlson at the Student Action Summit in West Palm Beach, Fla., in 2020.



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BOOK REVIEW

Off-Camera, a Man of Fun and Forthright Honesty

A behind-the-scenes view of the journalist fired by Fox News

By Anita L. Sherman

Tucker Carlson always wanted to be a writer. He wanted to follow in his journalist father's footsteps in a life he saw as romantic and adventuresome. He wanted to be free to follow stories that interested him, and he wasn't afraid to be brutally transparent if he felt it was in the interest of truth. These are some of the characteristics about Mr. Carlson, the man, that readers will learn in this latest narrative by author and journalist Chadwick Moore. He was prime time's media magnet, hated and heralded for his unbounded monologues and often assertive and aggressive interviews with guests on a myriad of topics.

Off the Air Until April of this year, Mr. Carlson was one of the most polarizing cable news hosts regularly garnering over 3 million viewers. His media impact was seemingly unrivaled. When Fox News let him go, friends and foes alike were in shock.

His riveting rhetoric echoed the sentiments of conservatives in particular. His meteoric rise from a contributor to masterminding his own talk show had catapulted him to be more than a media giant. For many, he was emblematic of a movement. His disappearance from prime time was a death of sorts. As you'll learn from the read, when Mr. Carlson was notified that the show was being taken off the air, it was on April 24, 2023. This day also marked the six-year anniversary of "Tucker Carlson Tonight" moving into the 8 p.m. time slot on the Fox News Channel. He relates that he thought it was a congratulatory call. Speculations as to why Mr. Carlson's show was abruptly canceled remain, swirling from his position on Ukraine, his unbridled profanity, or perhaps his supposed involvement in the Dominion Voting Systems defamation lawsuit against Fox News, which was ultimately settled earlier in April with a price tag of \$787.5 million. Both parties deny that was the reason. Three days before his firing, he made a speech at the Heritage Foundation (where he had worked as a fact checker early in his career). He heralded the foundation

and its founder as good people with high standards of intellectual honesty. He also shared that he believes the country is going in the wrong direction, and that people are breaking under downward pressure. He talked of good and evil. His rhetoric at the Heritage Foundation would be his last speech made under the Fox News umbrella. If you're a Tucker Carlson fan, you're familiar with his on-camera presence, his

At the Heritage Foundation, Tucker Carlson said the country was going in the wrong direction.

gutsy bravado, and his straightforward conversation with his audience. He is at times caustic, and usually clever, but never uncomfortable in his skin. He's confident, dauntless, defiant, and determined to make a

difference—a man on a mission. What the author reveals, although not surprising, is how misinformation and rumor can create a monster that then has to be dealt with. Words said can be twisted, remarks made taken out of context with dire consequences, particularly for those in the public spotlight. This is the media maze to be navigated.

Off-Camera Mr. Moore explores and shares with readers who Tucker Carlson is off-camera.

era. What are the influences in his life that molded the man he is today? What was his childhood like? Was he good in school? Did he have many friends? What were his first jobs? Does he consider himself necessarily a political animal? Mr. Carlson and his brother were raised ruggedly: loving the outdoors, hunting, being with family, and always fostering an atmosphere of fun and forthright honesty. Like his father, he was not a fan of authority and rules that went against staunch individuality. This is America—land of the free. Mr. Carlson is forgiving, often of himself, when he realizes that he may have been wrong about an issue or person. He'll be quick to admit that.

The author, Chadwick Moore, is himself an author and fellow journalist. When this book came out, I wondered how it could have been put together so quickly with Mr. Carlson's firing happening just a few months before its release. Mr. Moore shares that he had been working on this biography months earlier, and it was ready to go to press when the news of Mr. Carlson's firing was announced. With that startling news, Mr. Moore was able to add to the narrative, but the bulk of the book chronicles Mr. Carlson's life, his encounters with the likes of former President Donald J. Trump, or political strategist James Carville, or political satirist P.J. O'Rourke. When the patriarch of Hells Angels, Ralph "Sonny" Barger died, Mr. Carlson attended his funeral in California. He is at home with the rich and famous as well as countless middle Americans who text him regularly and think of him as a friend.

His love of family is unquestioned. His wife reads all his monologues. Their marriage has lasted decades. They aren't fanciers of social media. I particularly like that most chapters end with a QR Code that will take you to an interactive link where you can hear Tucker for yourself on a subject referenced in that chapter.

Mr. Moore was given access to Mr. Carlson's professional and personal life. He spent hours interviewing Mr. Carlson and his family, friends, and foes. His narrative is well-crafted and written with a journalist's eye for compelling detail and heart.

He tells a story worth sharing about a man worth knowing.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. She can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com



FILM REVIEW

An Uplifting Feline Film Without the Kitsch

By Michael Clark

As the days begin to grow shorter and the early morning temperatures start to dip, the movie industry, both domestic and foreign, does the annual shift from profit-generating popcorn fare to often loss-leader, awards-seeking prestige product.

"Prestige," as it applies to many of the titles on the unfolding fall roster, equates to frequently depressing, usually overlong dramas that all but scream out "I'm Oscar bait. Notice me!" "Cats of Malta" is neither typical popcorn fare nor a prestige project, although it could certainly appeal to fans of both. It has no hidden agenda or subliminal underlying message. The movie's biggest success is that it achieves what it sets out to do, which isn't as easy as that may sound.

Chill Outlook

As the title implies, the film takes place in the European nation of Malta, which is located about 80 miles south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea. Photographed on all three Maltese islands, it is a visual feast. Buildings nearly 8,000 years old sit alongside modern skyscrapers, and all of it overlooks hypnotic turquoise waters. It's no wonder that the 450,000 inhabitants have such a collective "chill" approach to life.

Sculptor Matthew Pandolfino creates a cat sculpture in "Cats of Malta."



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Journey to the Mystical Valley Called Shangri-La

The fantasy adventure about living a long life in harmony

By Ian Kane

While many of today's fantasy and adventure movies emphasize CGI effects over threadbare storylines and are often accompanied by hollow dialogue, films from Hollywood's Golden Age sometimes delivered sagas of epic proportions along with highly inventive, handcrafted effects. Legendary director Frank Capra helmed the 1937 film, "Lost Horizon" that serves as a perfect example; the grand-scale set designs and beautiful costuming in this film are reminiscent of other epics such as 1956's "The Ten Commandments" and 1959's "Ben-Hur."

"Lost Horizon" is based on a book of the same title published in 1933 by English author and screenwriter James Hilton (who co-wrote the screenplay for "Mrs. Miniver").

A Plane Crash

The film opens in dramatic fashion, as adventurer and English diplomat Robert Conway (Ronald Colman) is helping to rescue a large group of Westerners from a violent revolution taking place in Baskul, China. After the evacuees are safe, he departs on one of the last planes off an embattled airstrip with four other passengers: his younger brother George (John Howard), an American Gloria (Isabel Jewell), a paleontologist named Lovett (Edward Everett Horton), and a businessman Barnard (Thomas Mitchell).

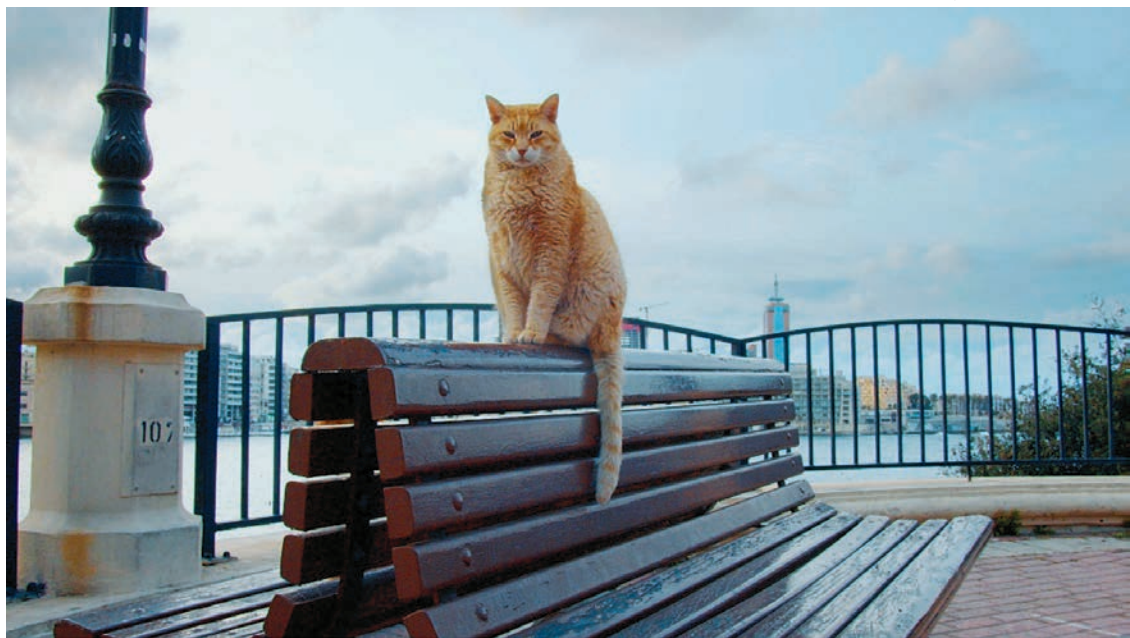
As the passengers settle into their seats

Malta is also the home to over 100,000 stray cats, most of whom are treated as spiritual equals by their human neighbors. If someone isn't a cat lover, they also do no harm to them. It's a live-and-let-live situation not dissimilar to that of the treatment of cows in certain parts of India.

Divided up into four quarters, the 58-minute-long "Cats of Malta" was directed by Sarah Jayne Portelli, and shot and edited by Ivan Malekin. The husband-and-wife team also serve as co-producers on this, their first feature documentary.

There is no denying that Ms. Portelli and Mr. Malekin are aiming for a warm and fuzzy, feel-good vibe with "Cats of Malta," but neither do they shy away from pointing out the occasional pitfalls and roadblocks facing the handful of humanitarian natives who spend all of their free time and considerable amounts of money rescuing, feeding, doctoring, and fostering the throngs of felines that cross their paths.

The filmmakers open with the story of Nano, a white shorthair that was involved in a tussle with a dog and lost a leg in the process. Already hampered by advancing age (it is estimated that he is close to 20 years old), Nano does himself no favors by taking an adversarial position with the very person (Karmen



ALL PHOTOS BY IVAN MALEKIN, SARAH JAYNE PORTELLI

Colerio) trying to save him. This segment also includes the first of many inclusions of angular animation accompaniment (credited to "Mehroz A.")

What this and the following segment featuring Roza Zammit Salinos shows us is that these people are not "fair-weather" types. They don't rescue for PR purposes or to raise money, but because they consider it their calling. If they can save such a hard case as Nano, no order is too tall.

The Cat Village

By her own admission, Ms. Salinos has been running the "Cat Village" near her home for over half a century. At any given time, Ms. Salinos will be looking after 200 cats, but she faces the biggest challenge of her life when the property housing the "Village" is purchased by an unnamed corporation. She must either close up shop or establish a new location with ever-dwindling funds.

Not so much a cat steward as he is a cat enthusiast, sculptor Matthew Pandolfino took it upon himself to produce a nearly two-story-tall plaster and fiberglass-based cat statue that overlooks Independence Park, also known as, surprise—Cat Park.

Not all of the segments work. One in the second half, profiling a preteen named Isaac Muscat, plays out more like a self-promoting TikTok video than a humanitarian mission statement. "Cats of Malta" succeeds by going into detail explaining the need for the continuing neutering and spaying of cats, which goes much further than mere population control. As a lifetime cat owner, I was completely unaware of this informa-

tion prior to watching the film.

It is said that there are cat people and there are dog people, and in some ways, I'll reluctantly agree. But one thing all pet owners can agree on: We're all better people with them in our lives.

If you're in the market for another movie with almost identical uplifting content, check out "Kedi," the 2016 Turkish documentary focusing on cats in Istanbul. "Kedi" is available to stream on Vudu, Amazon Prime, and Apple TV+.

"Cats of Malta" will be available to stream on Prime Video on Oct. 3.

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.

'Cats of Malta'

Documentary

Director Sarah Jayne Portelli
Running Time 58 minutes
MPAA Rating Not Rated
Release Date Oct. 3, 2023
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LITERATURE

Contentment Means Different Things to People

Those with the simplest needs may be the happiest

By Kate Vidimos

In his short story "What You Want," O. Henry contemplates the true meaning of contentment. The author sets up the story as if it will be a fairy godmother tale, but he shatters those expectations with a moral that is truly meaningful. Millionaire Tom Crowley lives and prospers in Bagdad-on-the-Subway (better known as New York City), and calls himself a caliph. The author notes: "In these times, to be called a caliph you must have money." Crowley possesses "\$42,000,000 in preferred stocks and bonds with solid gold edges." Yet even with all of this wealth, he is unsatisfied. He has grown tired of his usual clubs, friends, restaurants, and entertainment, and decides to go on an adventure in the city. Disguising himself in plain clothes, he heads out, hoping he can bestow a monetary gift. Like a sultan with immeasurable riches, Crowley strides out among

the populous seeking to share some of his trinkets with a worthy subject.

A Contented Life Meanwhile, a young worker, James Turner, nears the close of his workday at a hat-cleaning business. After standing all day, his feet are tired, and he thinks about home, where he can take his shoes off, put his feet up on his cool iron bed, and read a nautical tale by Clark Russell. Though he only makes 12 dollars a week, Turner is perfectly content. Today, as he heads home, he decides to stop at a local bookshop. He hopes to find at least one book by his favorite author in the sales rack. However, Turner's perusal of titles in the shop is interrupted when Crowley passes by. Seeing this poor young man searching through the bookstands, Crowley assumes he would like some money. He descends on the young man, "a worthy object of his caliphanous mood."

The millionaire greets Turner, but Turner immediately looks upon him with a suspicious eye and tells him that he does not want to buy anything. Crowley, though a little taken aback by this harsh response, assures Turner that he is, in fact, a millionaire who is very willing to give Turner money and a paid education.

Turner, annoyed that this so-called caliph will not leave him alone, turns and hits him with a strong left hook. This assault infuriates the generous caliph, who quickly retaliates. Before either knows what is going on, both Turner and Crowley end up in jail. This is where the young man teaches Crowley the true meaning of contentment.

Through this rather comical story, O. Henry shows that many people think that being happy has to do with money and achieving all that money can buy. And yet the happiest and most contented person is one with the simplest needs. As Socrates says in a collection called, "Essential Thinkers—Socrates": "Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty." When we learn to be content

with the simple things in life, we become richer than any millionaire caliph. As life fills our lungs and the sun shines on our faces, let us be thankful for the simple things. With a good book, a good cup of coffee, a beautiful garden, and a contented heart, we are richer than caliphs.

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.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

▲ "Contentment" by Jules Breton (cropped).

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Freeing Themselves From the Prison of Bigotry

Chain-gang prisoners find their common humanity in a daring escape

By Rudolph Lambert Fernandez

Courts in early 20th-century America used chain-gang prison labor to help build state roads, highways, bridges, and railroads. This phenomenon, of largely black prisoners pounding rock and shoveling dirt while chained to each other, died out with the Great Depression, although some southern states used these gangs until the mid-20th century.

Stanley Kramer’s film, set in the 1950s, imagines the fates of two escapees, black Noah Cullen (Sidney Poitier) and white John “Joker” Jackson (Tony Curtis), who have little to distinguish them except their color and nothing to unite them except their chain. They find a way to escape, but because they mutually despise each other, Sheriff Max Muller (Theodore Bikel) figures that “they’ll probably kill each other before they go five miles.”

Collaborating merely for survival, they half-run, half-stagger through towns looking for food, shelter, and a tool that’ll cut them free from each other, if not from the reach of Muller’s posse. When a breathless Cullen thanks Joker for rescuing him from roiling river rapids, Joker snaps, “I didn’t pull you out, I kept you from pulling me in!” When they’re nearly killed by a racist mob, “Big” Sam (Lon Chaney Jr.) rescues them; although white, he was once in a chain gang himself.

Amid their bickering, Cullen and Joker develop a grudging mutual regard. Cullen reluctantly agrees with Noah: They’re better off hopping on a northbound train than taking their chances in the racially charged South.

Briefly, little Billy (Kevin Coughlin) and his single mother (Cara Williams), both white, end up hosting the duo in a deserted farmhouse. Lonely, and conspiring to drive off with Joker whom



▲ Noah Cullen (Sidney Poitier, L) and John “Joker” Jackson (Tony Curtis) escape from a chain gang, in 1958’s “The Defiant Ones.”

she fancies, the mother coaxes Cullen to make a run for it. As they part, the men must contend with each other’s obvious capacity for cruelty and less obvious capacity for compassion.

Their physicality and their grueling flight from the law allow the men’s character arcs to develop spontaneously. You see them rage against wild fields, swamps, and hunting dogs. You see them rage in a giant mud pit, beneath a rainstorm, a riveting three-minute sequence with barely any dialogue. But as the fatigue of fighting and fleeing drains them, they see themselves and each other with fresh eyes. That insight signifies a death to their warring selves, a resurrection to their new selves, now better, if not fully, reconciled.

Kramer dwells more on what his duo is feeling than on what they’re thinking. Shorn of niceties, words drip from their

mouths as easily as the beads of sweat from their foreheads. With barely any background music even in more dramatic scenes, all you hear are the sound of their bare fists, the metal of their chain squealing in protest as it’s jerked in fury and pain, and their labored grunts ringing out over hostile grasslands.

Running From Racism

Poitier saluted Kramer’s bold take on racism when he told Kramer’s biographer: “There were powerful Hollywood columnists who could break careers. He knew this, and he said to himself ... ‘either I do it or I can’t live with myself.’ For that attitude, we’re all in ... Kramer’s debt, ... an example of the very best of a certain type of filmmaker.” Then the bigger star, Curtis ensured that Poitier got top billing alongside him. Both were nominated but lost the Best Actor Oscar—they were so excellent on screen that they split the vote.

The film’s images are among the most stirring from that era. In one, a white

man’s hand helpfully reaches down to grasp that of a black man; in another, that positioning is tellingly reversed. Equality, Kramer’s saying, is stillborn without justice, and justice is stillborn without brotherhood. Kramer’s point is that ignorance about another race or group triggers fear, and excessive fear triggers contempt.

When he first stumbles upon the pair he’s never met, Billy blacks out in a scuffle. When he comes to, he rushes to Joker’s side, assuming that danger can come only from a black man and that defense against such danger can come only from a white man. “Big” Sam’s empathy seems to come from the common ground he finds with the two escapees. He was once in a chain gang, and can’t bear to see either of them killed or recaptured.

But Kramer is saying that finding common ground isn’t an end in itself. In fact, it may be nothing more than a starting point. He asks: Can someone’s fate matter for its own sake, not only because it’s chained to our own? Cullen and Joker show that it can.

You can watch “The Defiant Ones” on Vudu and Apple TV.

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

‘The Defiant Ones’

Director
Stanley Kramer
Starring
Tony Curtis, Sidney Poitier
Running Time
1 hour, 36 minutes
Not Rated
Release Date
Sept. 27, 1958
★★★★★

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