

## *The Write Place At the Write Time*

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### ***The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review- Hot off the Presses***



Cover Image of Joy for Beginners by Erica Bauermeister

### **The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review Presents: *Joy for Beginners* by Erica Bauermeister**

Author bio: Erica Bauermeister is the author of *The School of Essential Ingredients*, *500 Great Books by Women: A Reader's Guide* and *Let's Hear It For the Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*. She received a Ph.D. in literature from the University of Washington and has taught at both the U.W. and Antioch. Her love of slow food and slow living was inspired during

the two years she spent living with her husband and two children in northern Italy. She currently lives in Seattle with her family.

***For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~***

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### **Review~**

*Joy for Beginners* opens with a victory dinner party where seven friends are gathered to celebrate the fact that one of them, Kate, has recovered from cancer. Kate's daughter wants her mother to go with her to the Grand Canyon on a rafting adventure, as a life-affirming mission, hoping to return their lives to some semblance of normalcy. Kate is terrified, yet on that fateful night, one of Kate's friends proposes that if Kate agrees to go, they'll each promise to do one thing in the next year that is challenging or that they've always said they were going to do but never did. "Alright," replies Kate, "...but here's the deal, I didn't get to choose mine so I get to choose yours."

In time, it becomes apparent that as these women have been caring daily for their friend, she has been watching them closely and also caring for them in her thoughts. She has really seen each one, for she chooses their challenges well, as you'll discover when what unfolds changes the quality and direction of each woman's life.

Yet again, Bauermeister delights with her sensual descriptions of food and draws you in from the first. Her keen insights into the well-rounded characters' personas and lives give you brilliant glimpses into the larger culture of women as a whole, such as:

"Things held on to Caroline- the ends of her sleeves caught by door knobs, her coat in a car door, the knit of her Irish sweater snagged on an errant nail that no one had ever remembered sticking out of the wall. But she had never been as good at catching, holding on to things- taxi cabs, elevator doors, a

husband, slipping closed and past, already on their way to another floor, another life."

Caroline's mission, was to get rid of her ex-husband Jack's books and in essence, finally make room for a life of her own. As she clears her bookcases both at home and at her beloved cottage, the reader is offered glimpses into a marriage and what was right as well as what may have pushed the other away.

Throughout the book the beauty of the women's interwoven stories lies in the description and the psychological insights. I offer another one of my favorites:

"She would watch Jack get dressed, buttoning, zipping, buckling, while she lay cocooned in bed with the baby. What could touch you in a land of metal elevators, wooden desks, when all that was uncovered were hands, a face? She, who spent her days in bare feet and a bathrobe, living skin to skin with another human being could not imagine at the time."

As Caroline clears the last shelves, she sees how much room she now has for herself leaving her as open as the shelves themselves.

We travel with Sarah, mother of three young children and delight in the gift from her husband, a camera with the directions 'go find a smell, a touch, a taste, a sound...' as she goes alone to Venice, Italy:

"Through the huge windows of the elegantly decaying buildings she could just glimpse sculpted ceilings and chandeliers dripping glass."

Near the end of her trip she takes a picture of the incredibly blue sky with a flock of birds rising in the piazza and recalls that she's been so busy that she's forgotten to look up. Sarah has learned once again how to fly solo.

Daria is single and works in her potter's studio all day. She lives in a cold world without the love of a mother who always made her feel that she could have done something with her own artist talent had Daria never been born. Her challenge is to learn to bake bread with the intention of learning to care for herself. Here we are taken into the world of underground restaurants where "smells lingered in the air, sliding across bare shoulders, nestling into the curls of hair." Daria meets a baker and finally is warmed from the inside by a man who truly loves her.

Hadley, whose young husband has passed away must learn to care for a garden but it becomes a magical and mysterious thing as it begins to take care of her as she begins to bloom again.

With Ava, we travel through the sensory world of smell and are enchanted by her ability to know what scent becomes a person. Her challenge was a three day walk for breast cancer in honor of her mother's passing to provide closure which finally leads her home again.

Marion, is a journalist who wants to be a fiction writer. Here, the author takes you through Marion's emergence from what I like to refer to as the "facts only" state of journalism into the foreign country of her imagination where she can run wild as never before. Marion has always wanted a tattoo, something she was not allowed as a young girl. Her mother often told her that "she simply didn't understand the concept of permanence". Her mission then is to finally get this tattoo. When she relays this to a stranger on the way into the tattoo convention, he tells her "irreversible decisions are good for the soul, word lady."

Finally, Kate, the breast cancer survivor and the friend whom everyone else's life revolves around, takes up her challenge of riding the rapids of the Grand Canyon. She's unsure if she can carry out the dangerous feat. To her surprise, the river embraces her and shows her remarkable sights in nature, rarely seen. "The

river must want you to be here,' her guide says, '...to show you that."

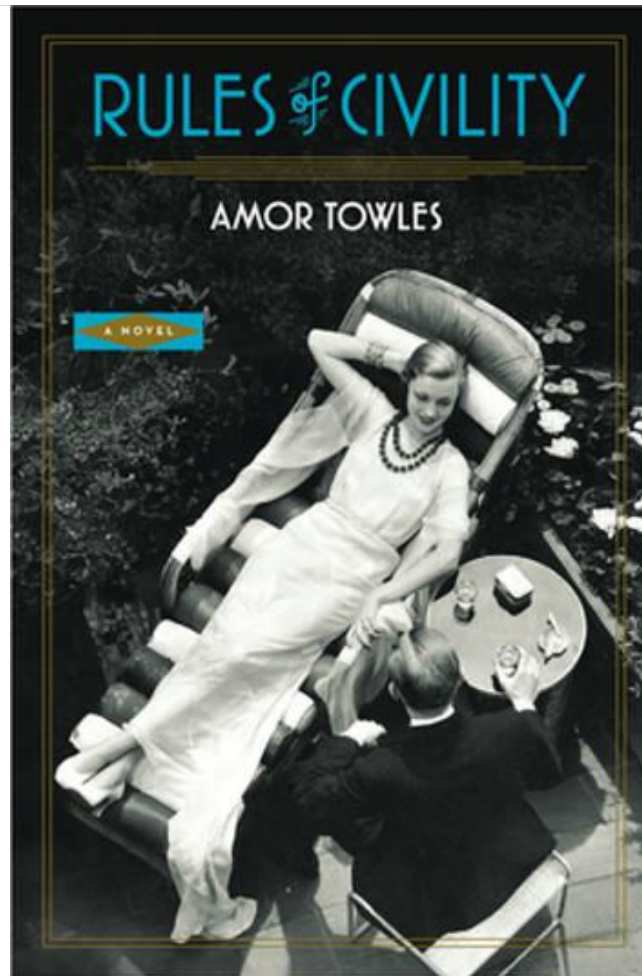
She slowly begins to feel life coming back to her again. Her body grows stronger and the river is preparing her for the rest of her life. As she remembers the words of her husband before he walked out of her life for good, "When was the last time you ever did anything for yourself, done anything you weren't supposed to do?" She thinks, "Well, I didn't die."

During this last passage the author soars the reader over the rapids and we are privy to the amazing sights and sounds of the canyon by an author who was clearly there. As you turn the last page you feel the exhilaration of the ending, thinking 'Wow- that was a hell of a ride' and you're looking forward to the next book by this wonderful new author; you just may want to give a beloved friend not only this life-enhancing book but sometime during the summer solstice, may also want to throw a party where pacts are made that may well change your own lives.

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### **Featured Excerpt~**

<http://www.ericabauermeister.com/joy-excerpt>



Rules of Civility Cover Image

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review  
Presents: *Rules of Civility* by Amor Towles**

**Author bio:** *Amor Towles, 46, was born and raised just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. He graduated from Yale University and received an MA in English from Stanford University, where he was a Scowcroft Fellow. He is a principal at an investment firm in*

*Manhattan, where he lives with his wife and two children.*

**For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~**

### **Review~**

In Amor Towles' debut novel, *Rules of Civility*, Towles reminds us that when it comes to complex human relationships, there are no such rules- the old adage 'all's fair in love and war' stands uncontended. A lover's ode to New York, the novel glitters in the city lights from the late 1930s to the 1960s amongst feast and famine, passion and pretense.

Compared to the likes of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, Towles asserts himself as a contemporary voice reflective of the changed attitudes of our times. Towles cautions, yet does not admonish completely his characters in their flawed pursuits of wealth and stature. He makes his characters absent from extremes; part of their charm is that they are neither all good nor all bad, not idyllically virtuous nor villainously corrupt.

Masterfully opened in the preface at a photography exhibit entitled, *Many Were Called*, at the Museum of Modern Art, the protagonist, Katey Content, walks past the portraits of unwitting subjects photographed by hidden cameras on New York subways. In much the same fashion, the characters of this novel are viewed raw, without judgment, without their knowledge, so that what is seen is real and given without apology. Coming across a portrait of a past love, Content is submerged thirty years into the past to relive all that altered the course of her life and brought her to this point. The two images of Tinker Grey, one in pristine luxury, the other in poor disarray, are dated only a year apart. Ghosts of what had been or could have been, welcome or otherwise, cause Content, a graceful, pragmatic woman, to reflect upon the short space of time between 1938 and 1939 with all its twists, turns and choices that swooped up her, her friends and loves into a hurricane that spun them out again in all different



directions that, aside from their bonds, would remain separate.

Katey begins as something of a novice, unsure of her feelings and awkward on her feet as she reaches twenty-five in the city that makes or breaks destinies. Vivacious Eve, hungry for glamor and independence lives in the fast lane, ready, despite her love for Katey, to compromise friendship for an affair that affords a brush with high society. Tinker, well-meaning and well-bred aims to reverse his unfortunate turn of events at the price of being true to his heart and his pride. Tinker embodies the Peter Pan archetype, as he never takes on manly roles of responsibility and seems ever at 'play'- seeking adventure, though not ever reaching its shore. The three converge one night on New Year's Eve in a triangle that will take hold and reform the very foundations of each of their characters. In the aftermath of a tragic accident, Eve is taken in by Tinker and in spite of his growing feelings for Katey, lets himself fall into the seductive sway Eve emits in their close proximity. At odds with her identity and on the outskirts of the triangle, Katey takes a dynamic turn and quits her secretarial job with the intention of integrating herself into the higher ranks of intellectual New York society. Chance encounters with the magnetic Anne Grandin influence her circumstances more than she realizes and soon Mason Tate from Conde Nast is asking for her services as an assistant. Entrenching herself with a social circle of up-and-comers, her spheres of influence begin to merge and include the other men who will come to bear significance in her life- including the genuine Wallace Wolcott and fun-loving Dicky Vanderwhile.

The modern views of wealth and success oppose those of the post -1920s authors in the way that absolute power does not corrupt absolutely; instead, the strain of disillusionment and the fair warning of price and consequence inspire a more balanced view that says to reach for something higher isn't the issue; it's how far we're willing to go to get it that becomes the paramount factor. No character is free from high ambition and each, depending on how they chose to pursue that end, pays a sort of

price. The protagonist, whose surname is "Content", with points in the book stressing that it should be pronounced like the feeling rather than the noun denoting objects, is anything but. Even she rearranges her social circle like pawns on a chessboard and yet her ultimate vocation is to work at a magazine that exposes the upper classes, a rank which she later happily joins through marriage. This bit of seeming hypocrisy might be her way of being able to accept the gilded life- to live among it yet be not of it. Eve rejects her family's money only to clamor for Tinker's means; however she ends up rejecting Tinker's proposal, feeling that she wants to be under no one's thumb and races to the sparkle of Hollywood lights instead. Eve's constant need for control of her circumstances is how she deals with her drive for the golden idol. Tinker, who had given his physical form for a life of grandeur, redeems himself by abandoning his worldly goods. Anne Grandin uses physical pleasure to escape the gilded cage and Wallace, a friend of Tinker and Katey who was born into privilege, escapes the weight of luxury by joining the war; his life is his sacrifice. Dicky, as well as the other up-and-comers, soon to receive their birthright of wealth, go through a rebellious period before accepting their responsibilities; his affair with Katey leaves an impression which inspires his character's growth as he puts down his paper airplanes in pursuit of his adult life- she in effect, is his price.

Towles' brilliant description and capacity for simile and metaphor enrich the novel as powerfully as the subject matter:

*"With Tate at the helm, the work of Gotham wasn't some vague agrarian battle with the seasons in which the outcomes of one's efforts were held hostage to time and temperature; it wasn't the drudgery of the firetrap seamstress needling the same loop over and over until it's one's sanity that's being stitched into a seam; nor was it the life of the seafarer exposed to the elements for a year at a time, returning like Odysseus, older, weaker, nearly forgotten- unrecognizable to all but one's dog. Ours was the work of a demolition expert. Having carefully studied the*

*architecture of a building, we were to install an array of charges around its foundation set to go off in an orchestrated sequence such that the building would collapse of its own infrastructure- simultaneously inspiring gawkers with awe and clearing the way for something new."*

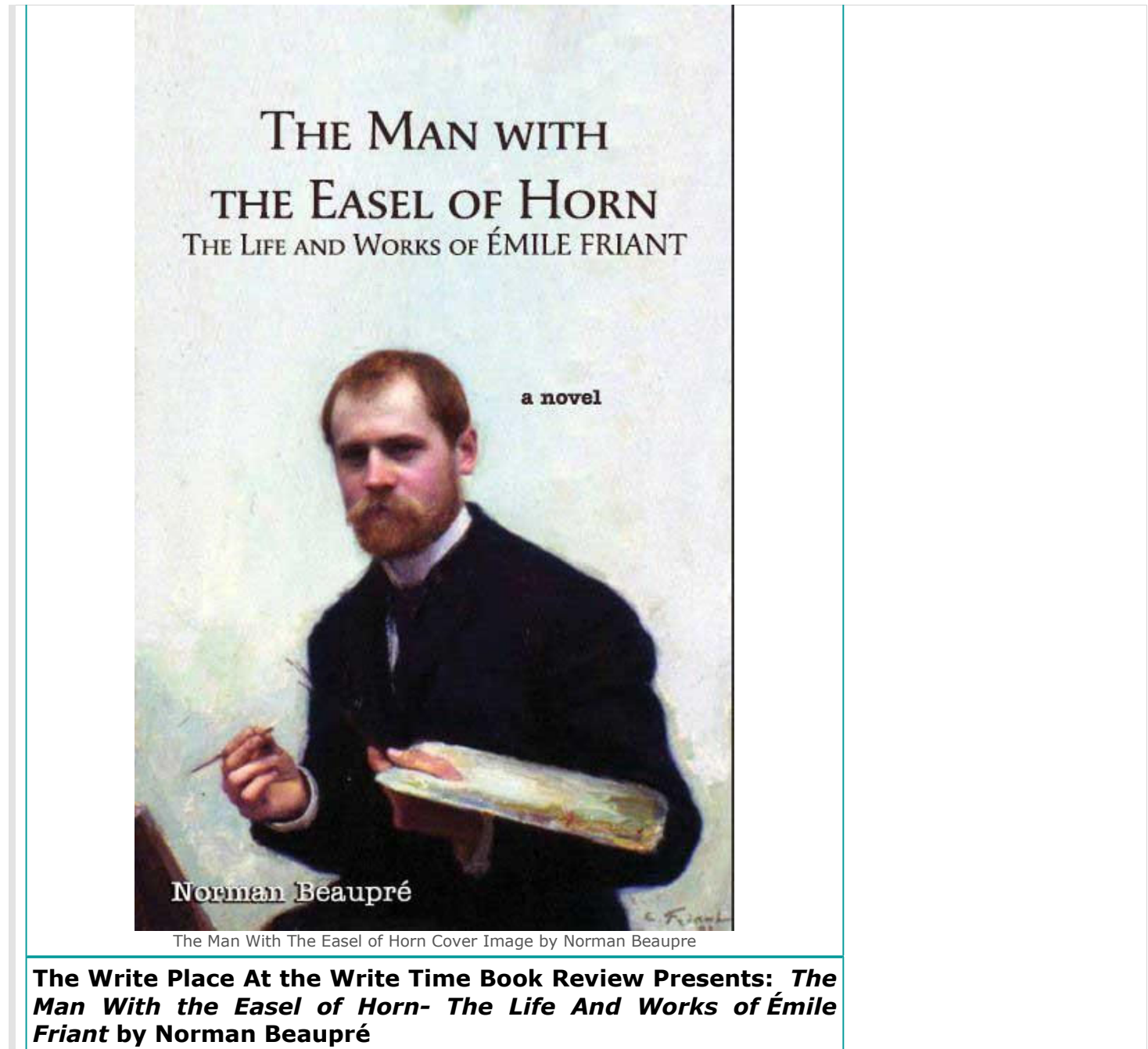
It is a strong, thought-provoking debut novel, though there are minor growing pains that with the author's experience will likely dim. In terms of prose, Towles' description is nothing short of incredible in many instances- so many in fact, that it sometimes takes away from the story line, dialogue and characters by holding the spotlight. Similes, all too constant companions in the text, exhaust the use of the word "like". In dialogue, particularly throughout the first half of the book, "he said" or "she said" appear in nearly every speech fragment, repeatedly. Variation on both points would do a great deal to smooth the reading experience.

The overall verdict? *Rules of Civility*, is a landmark novel reminiscent of the charm of eras gone by and a highly-recommended read.

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**Featured Excerpt~**

<http://amortowles.com/excerpt/>



**Author bio:** *Norman Beaupré was born in Southern Maine. He did his undergraduate studies at St. Francis College and then moved on to Brown University for graduate work and received his Ph.D. in French literature in 1974.*

*In 2000, he became Professor Emeritus after 30 years of teaching Francophone and World Literature at the University of New England. Traveling extensively, he spent two sabbaticals in Europe where he got the inspiration for several of his books. Beaupré writes in French and in English and has published thirteen works.*

*The author received the honor of being decorated by the French Government with the rank of Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres for his outstanding contributions to French culture.*

**For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~**

### **Review~**

Having discovered little information about the life of French artist, Émile Friant (1863-1932), author Norman Beaupré sought to paint a picture of the man behind the easel in *The Man With The Easel of Horn- The Life And Works of Émile Friant*. The reader becomes endeared to Émile from the onset as he studies the world around him with an artistic curiosity at nine years old. His mother and father lost their other children and have a particular affection for Émile, though they do not completely understand his loves of day-dreaming, reading and art. Suspecting the inherent talent in her son, Adrienne does her best to ensure his future along with his uncle, Mathieu Delaconte. Set amidst the political unrest of the Franco-Prussian War and World War I, the story travels out of the annexed zone of Lorraine to Nancy and eventually Paris.

Émile undergoes the struggles of the artist- the search for inspiration that flows naturally as opposed to forced subject matter and academia, the quest to understand the eternal as well as coming to

know his own style as intricately as his identity. The time period demonstrates how small the world once was in terms of prolific artists in varied circles being able to easily come in contact with one another. Though it was not a period of peace in Europe, the artistic strains of creation were dynamically in bloom. Émile learns about life and craft through his professional and personal relationships that include artists, John Singer Sargent, Aimé Morot, Alexandre Cabanel, actor Bernard Coquelin and Palaisson, his first art teacher. Witness to betrayal and valor, Émile is shaped by the tumultuous times and derives a stronger sense of himself as a result.

Though Friant's story is told in novel form, the style and voice in which it is written is closer to that of a non-fiction work, such as *Marie Antoinette- The Journey* by Antonia Fraser. It seems that a great deal of thought and fact are condensed in Beaupré's work so that transitions are less graceful in a rush to go topic to topic along the course of one thread in a chapter and there is a good deal of repetition as though trying to instill certain elements in the reader as well as modern language fragments. That said, the work to bring the artist's world and his paintings to life is remarkably in-depth.

When Émile assembles the series of panels for the Maracajou Hotel towards the close of the book, it is a tender reflection on his life, reconciling and rejoicing in his roots with the colors of Lorraine, the contributions of his mother, the help of his life-long friend and a longing for the home of Dieuze that was long denied him due to the annex.

The overall effect is an intricate look at a mysterious artist whose life was much like a painting with hidden theme, allegory and the sort of realism that shatters the dreamer. Beaupré does the artist much credit by giving readers a glimpse through a window of his world in his (Friant's) eyes, reminiscent of the frankness with which the artist stares out of his 1878 youthful self-portrait.

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Visit <http://www.nrbeaupre.com/writings/easel-of-horn.html> to learn more about the book and it's origins.

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