

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

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## More Dante Please, Now

PART 3

*Let Beauty Begin*

**JAMES SALE**

In our last article, we saw how the issue of human free will played out in Dante's Hell. Essentially, Hell is a place where people get what they want, but what they want traps them in their own addictions and compulsions. They are no longer free because they have chosen—freely—to obsess about themselves and their own self-importance and so can no longer see reality for what it really is.

In fact, people in Hell deny reality. They deny responsibility for their own actions, typically blaming others; they deny the possibility of communication with others, typically talking to themselves in self-justificatory circles; and they deny creation, that is to say, their subordination to a higher power.

Talking about reality, Christian writer

G.K. Chesterton observed that “facts as facts do not always create a spirit of reality, because reality is a spirit.” This “spirit” is exactly what those in Hell denied when in the flesh, since their prime concern was always their own material advantage. So, St. Augustine's point, “A man may lose the good things of this life against his will; but if he loses the eternal blessings, he does so with his own consent,” is precisely what Dante establishes in his depiction of Hell.

But what about Purgatory? How is this different from Hell?

**Una Lagrimetta: One Tear**

Clearly, when we study Dante's Purgatory, ostensibly there are similarities. First, the sins seem familiar: pride, envy, wrath, lust, and so on. Secondly, the inmates of Purgatory are all suffering too.

*Continued on Page 4*





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What can poetry offer us in cold and dark times?

## POETRY

# Miles to Go Before We Sleep

Winter poems, a dark season, and the power of verse

JEFF MINICK

Poets often celebrate the beauty of the four seasons in their verse or employ them as emblems, symbols in their exploration of the human condition. Spring offers new life: budding trees, green grass, flowers of all sorts decorating lawns and woodlands. Summer brings hot days and warm nights, a slower pace of living, the cries and laughter of children or birdsong when the windows are flung open, and the perfume of damp earth after a rain-storm. Autumn possesses its special magic as well: the crisp air, the scarlet and golden leaves, the slow descent of grass and flowers into sleep again.

In broad poetic terms, spring symbolizes rebirth and resurrection, summer youth with all its reckless pleasures and joys, and autumn old age and the inevitable journey to death.

But what about winter? In her essay "Examples of Seasonal Symbolism," Flora Richards-Gustafson writes that "references to winter in literature may refer to death, old age, pain, loneliness, despair, or an end," though she also briefly mentions that literary scenes set in winter can also offer "messages of renewal, rebirth, and hope." Despite that disclaimer, the literary symbolism associated with winter sounds grim.

Given that this winter, with its pandemic and its political turmoil, may be particularly hard on us, I began to look for some winter poems that give hope and comfort, a glimpse of the season's often austere beauty, and even some joy.

### Tranquility

For those of us who live in states like Virginia or North Carolina, the infrequent snowfall brings much of life to a standstill. We wake in the morning to an unaccustomed silence from the street outside, go to the window, and see the yards, houses, sidewalks, and roads wearing a mantle of white. The schools close, the evening's activities are canceled, and the world pauses as if to catch its breath.

Unless we have pressing obligations, we take delight in this change in the weather, slowing our pace, boiling water for tea, and enjoying the peace and quiet of our snowbound day.

In a poem familiar to most of us, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," Robert Frost captured this halcyon

mood as well as any poet. I include the full poem here to share that serenity with you readers:

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

Those two lines—"The only other sound's the sweep/ Of easy wind and downy flake"—speak to me every time I read them, reminding me of lovely evenings spent watching the snow fall through the light of a streetlamp outside of the apartment where I once lived. And though the last two lines of the poem possibly refer to death, the soft repetition implies that the event is far in the future, and Frost's use of "sleep" gentles that final end.

**Winter poems that give hope and comfort or a glimpse of the season's often austere beauty.**

### Solitude

Despite the distractions and comforts of their electronic devices, some people I know fear being by themselves, especially for long periods of time, and the confinements brought on by winter can deepen this sense of solitude. The elderly who live alone are particularly susceptible to feelings of isolation and depression.

Yet others, including myself, relish their seclusion, knowing that to be alone is not the same as being lonely.

In "Winter Solitude," haiku master Matsuo Basho creates a poem that speaks to both points of view:



MICHAELSPR/SHUTTERSTOCK

men and women with all their strengths and frailties are as familiar to us as our next-door neighbors.

Shakespeare's "Winter" affords us this sensation. When we first read these lines, we may feel as if we have stepped into a foreign country:

When icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When Blood is nipped and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-who;  
Tu-whit, tu-who: a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,  
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,  
And birds sit brooding in the snow,  
And Marian's nose looks red and raw  
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-who;  
Tu-whit, tu-who: a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

But are these people really so alien to us? Our milk no longer comes home frozen in a pail, true, but we still blow into our hands to warm our fingers, icicles dangle from porch roofs, we've all seen people with noses "red and raw," and in the kitchen someone, greasy or otherwise, is keeling, or stirring, a pot.

### Winter Nights

While writing this article, I searched online for "poems about winter," and was surprised and delighted by the number of sites that popped up. PoemHunter.com in particular offered an express load of verse about this season, a good number of which, again to my surprise, had to do with winter nights, verses as different as Robert Frost's "An Old Man's Winter Night," Robert Burns's "A Winter Night," and Boris Pasternak's "Winter Night."

I found particular pleasure in "A Winter Night" by Sara Teasdale.

My window-pane is starred with frost,  
The world is bitter cold to-night,  
The moon is cruel, and the wind  
Is like a two-edged sword to smite.

God pity all the homeless ones,  
The beggars pacing to and fro.  
God pity all the poor to-night  
Who walk the lamp-lit streets of snow.

My room is like a bit of June,  
Warm and close-curtained fold on fold,  
But somewhere, like a homeless child,  
My heart is crying in the cold.

"The moon is cruel" is a brilliant bit of personification, and Teasdale's description of the homeless reminds us that during the ordeal of wintertime, we must show greater charity toward our fellow human beings.

### Arctic Trails and Northern Lights

Let's conclude our look at winter poems with Robert Service's "The Cremation of Sam McGee," too long to include here.

Service tells the story of Sam McGee from Tennessee who is searching for gold in Alaska, but who can't bear the bitter cold of that land. Eventually, Sam realizes that he is freezing to death and entreats his friend to "cremate my last remains." After a series of trials, the friend, the narrator of the poem, manages to comply with Sam's request. What comes next, some may find a trifle gruesome, but for me it's one of the funniest endings to a poem, winter or otherwise.

The rollicking lines and great descriptions of "The Cremation of Sam McGee" deserve to be read aloud and with some drama. If, like me, you're not a fan of the bitter cold or if you're just in need of a laugh, this poem is for you.

### A Final Note

A recent survey revealed that after years of decline in reading poetry, more Americans doing so once again. As poet Jane Hirshfield remarked, "When poetry is a backwater, it means times are okay. When times are dire, that is exactly when poetry is needed."

When we face such dire times, as we do today, and especially when we become downhearted, poetry can put us back on our feet, giving us the courage to keep moving forward in the face of storms and adversity, and lifting our hearts and minds. The words make good medicine and are particularly effective when we share them with others



Haiku master Matsuo Basho, late 18th century, by Katsushika Hokusai.

through social media or, best of all, in read-alouds with our family members and friends.

A couple of years ago, I resolved to read a poem a day. Though I failed to keep that resolution, I'm giving it another try this year. This winter promises to be colder and darker than usual in our country, and all of us are going to need strength and stamina if we are to return springtime to our land.

Let's make poetry our chicken soup for the soul.

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 non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](https://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.



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# More Dante Please, Now

PART 3

Let Beauty Begin

Continued from Page 1

However, the nature of the suffering is fundamentally different, and here we touch on the brilliance of Dante's psychological perceptions.

The essential difference between the suffering in Hell and Purgatory is twofold. Those who exist in Purgatory have developed the capacity to be self-aware. Instead of denying that they have a problem, they admit they are the problem. They have fallen short; they have done wrong.

Secondly, they are now sorry for it, genuinely sorry for it. Indeed, their "wrongness" becomes a matter of intense regret, as well as of focus. In Hell, suffering is resisted, resented, and not understood at all in terms of its connection with choices made in life; in Purgatory, this is reversed.

A particularly moving example of this regret occurs in Canto 5 of "Purgatorio." It describes the end of Buonconte da Montefeltro, a man of notorious evil. Having fought on the losing side in the battle of Campaldino, and being fatally wounded in the throat, he desperately tries to evade his enemies who pursue him through the marshes. Finally, exhausted, he falls—losing sight and speech—down in death.

But as Montefeltro falls, he explains, "I had the grace/ To end by naming Mary as I fell" (Clive James's version). And we know that this naming of Mary is no mere expletive, but rather a profound psychological shift. For as a devil claims his soul, which is how we know he is a man of evil, he is saved by an angel for a reason: as the devil puts it, of "una lagrimetta," one tear.

As Montefeltro invokes the Mother of God to save him, he does so with one tear, indicating that at the moment just before his actual death he has repented. He is sorry, because he is aware of what he has done, and this becomes his salvation.

In Purgatory now, Montefeltro will suffer, but there is hope. There is no hope in Hell, but once one has become self-aware and seen oneself for what one really is, a new dynamic operates.

This new psychological and spiritual dynamic operates throughout Purgatory as each of its inhabitants come understand themselves and their faults without self-deception. In Canto 5, the effects are particularly dramatic as each of the souls whom Dante meets has died a sudden and violent death, leaving repentance to the last moment.

This last-minute repentance is itself a cause for even more hope. It means that anybody, at any point, including the very last, can turn around their own dark fate if they but turn away from their own ego-obsessive self-justification.

## Back to the Beginning

Perhaps the most glorious manifestation of what this new hope comes to mean occurs at the very end of Purgatory proper—that is,



OVI COBVMCEGNIT MEDIMOVE: LAMOVE TRIBUNAL... LV STRAVIT QVE ANIMO CVNCTA POETA SVO... D OCTVS ADEST DANTES SVA QVEM FLORENTIA SAEPE... SENSIT CONSILIUS AC PRELATE PATRE... NIL POTUIT TANTO MORS SAENA NOCERE POLTA... QVEM VIVVM VIRTVS CARMEN I MAGO FACIT...

**In Hell, suffering is resisted, resented, and not understood at all in terms of its connection with choices made in life; in Purgatory, this is reversed.**



Buonconte da Montefeltro, slain in the battle of Campaldino. Illustration, 1861, by Gustave Doré for Dante's "Divine Comedy."

not the end of the "Purgatorio" poem, but in Canto 26 where the literal Purgatory ends.

Dante, for the remaining and last seven cantos, leaves human suffering and enters the terrestrial paradise. This is not the same as being in Heaven; instead, it takes mankind back to the place where we started—to the original Garden. All the "falling" down to Hell and all the climbing up through Purgatory only gets us back to where mankind started, where, if we had not fallen, we might have remained—blissfully innocent—forever.

In a profound sense, then, although it's Paradise of sorts, it's still a limitation

(hence, it's still being in Purgatory) on human nature and the human spirit. By "falling," paradoxically, a greater destiny awaits in Heaven, which is beyond and above Purgatory.

So, to return to the point of turning away from ego-obsession, as Dante ascends the purgatorial mount, the last person who is suffering whom Dante will meet on his journey is Arnaut Daniel, the poet. This poet is famously described by Dante as (il) "miglior fabbro," or "the better maker." (His expression was famously used by T.S. Eliot in homage to Ezra Pound in "The Wastland.")

Arnaut burns in a fire that terrifies Dante. What the fire is purging is lust. This is the last obstacle before reaching the terrestrial paradise, or Garden of Eden, as it originally was before the Fall.

'Counter to the Law of My Own Being' But before we comment on the meeting between Dante and Arnaut and its significance, we need to consider former vicar and British Member of Parliament Christopher Bryant's profound observation: "I came to understand that to resist God was to run counter to the law of my own being."

This understanding is a necessary antidote to thinking about God as a merely external and punitive force. On the contrary, another reason why those in Hell are in Hell is that they have violated not just others, but also themselves. To run counter to the law of one's own being is, ultimately, to lose one's soul. And this Arnaut understands.

What happens is that Arnaut graciously acknowledges Dante, explains his condition, and requests Dante to recall his sufferings in due time. In this, he is effectively warning Dante to heed Dante's own lust before it is too late. And then Arnaut immediately steps back into the purifying flames or, as some express it, the fire that refines.

The point is that Arnaut wants to go back into the flame, as painful as it is; he understands that the suffering is necessary to release him to the higher life he now craves.

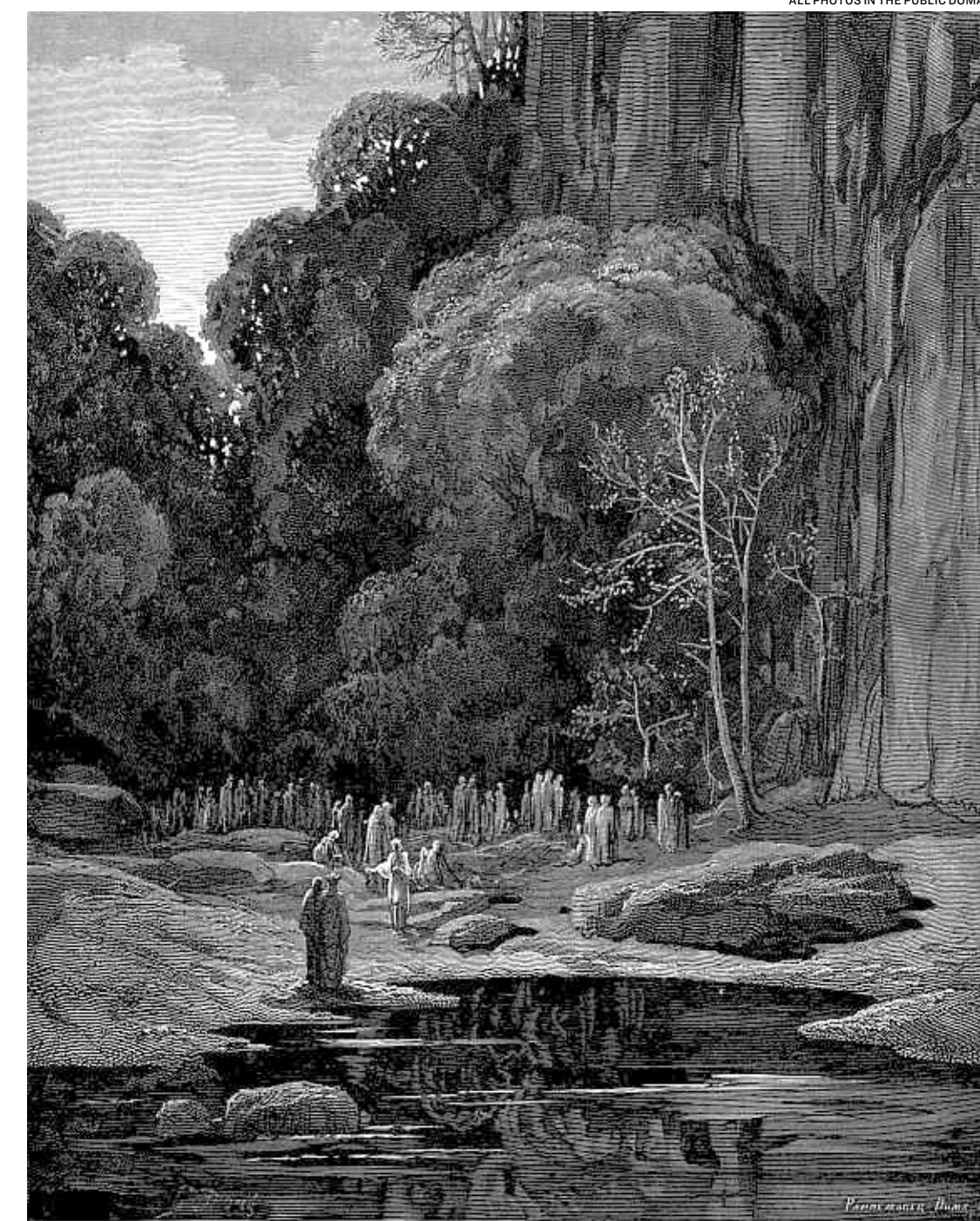
In other words, he wants to suffer in order to achieve the higher purpose. We can see that this behavior is exactly the opposite of the addicts and compulsives in Hell, where addiction itself is their method to blunt suffering. They do not experience the world except on artificially determined terms.

That Arnaut's position is psychologically, not to mention spiritually, healthy should be obvious. But lest we are in any doubt, consider Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's remark: "Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression, and addiction are not understandable unless we recognize the existential vacuum underlying them."

This leads to psychoanalyst James Hollis's thought: "A fundamental truth of psychology, from which our ego repeatedly flees, is that it's most commonly through suffering that we are stretched enough to grow spiritually. The road of continuous ease results in the circular trap of addiction."

**Purgatory and the Road to Beauty** Purgatory, then, is the place where we be-

(Above) Dante holding his "Divine Comedy," next to the entrance to Hell, the seven terraces of Mount Purgatory, and the city of Florence, with the spheres of Heaven above, 1465, in a fresco by Domenico di Michelino. Cathedral of St. Mary of Fiore,



(Above) "The Late Repenters," 1861, by Gustave Doré. Illustration for Canto 5 of Dante's "Divine Comedy."



"Terrestrial Paradise," 1861, by Gustave Doré. Illustration for Canto 28 of Dante's "Divine Comedy."

**People in Hell deny reality. They deny responsibility for their own actions, typically blaming others.**

gin to turn these addictions around and become the kind of people we were designed to be—people living according to the law of our own nature. In becoming self-aware, we are attempting to fulfill that law: to be who we really are.

And when that happens, something remarkable occurs. The suffering goes into remission and beauty appears. That is why in the West, Plotinus remarked that beauty was the first attribute of the soul; and in the East, they talk of the beauty of the essential self. The soul, in short, is always, when properly perceived, beautiful.

Thus, once the purgation is completed, one is—Dante is—enabled to enter the terrestrial paradise. Here in Canto 27, within the first few lines, an "angel of joy" appears singing "Beati mundo corde" ("Blessed are the pure in heart"), which the purged now are; but, significantly, in the Mark Musa translation, "the living beauty of his voice rang clear." Once the suffering is accomplished, we see beauty, we hear beauty, and our natural environment is beauty.

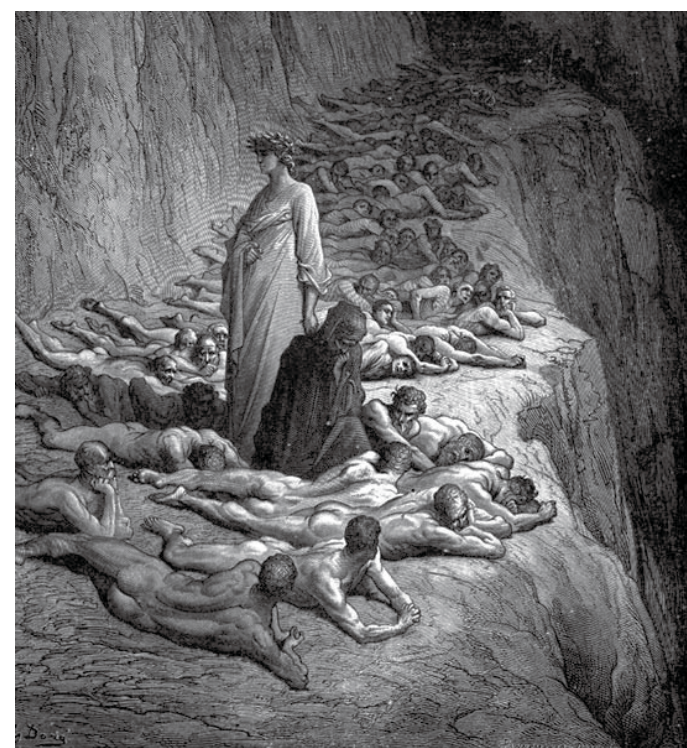
And this takes us back to the Bryant quotation, "I came to understand that to resist God was to run counter to the law of my own being," and to one final point about freedom of the will.

Free will is not some random "do whatever you fancy, whenever you feel like it"; it is following the "law of my own being." In order to be free, we follow a law!

Sounds highly paradoxical, but common sense informs us that it does in fact make sense. All creatures are happier when they follow the law of their own natures, which is why seeing them in zoos can be so upsetting. If so for an animal, then how much more for us who have "reason"?

As we step beyond the terrestrial paradise toward the heavenly one, what has Dante to teach us about its psychology for now? This is the topic of our fourth and final article on Dante's ever topical masterpiece, "The Divine Comedy."

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.



Gustave Doré's illustration of Purgatory for Canto 19 of Dante's "Divine Comedy."



## FINE ARTS

# Painting With Sincerity and Devotion

The biblical art of Dutch artist Egbert Modderman

LORRAINE FERRIER

As biblical artist Egbert Modderman paints, he strives to be sincere by staying true to himself and his orthodox Protestant heritage.

It's a successful approach for the 31-year-old Dutchman. He's only been painting professionally since 2016, yet he's had a Dutch-American patron, and a solo show at the Bible Museum in Washington where his works are periodically on display. And this year, Modderman won the prestigious BP Young Artist Award 2020 at the National Portrait Gallery in London for his painting "Restless."

For Modderman, painting is not just about how the finished product appears but also about approaching the subject with a heart of honesty. "In Dutch, we have this word 'oprecht,' and that's a word I really favor when it comes down to my work because it's a word that combines honesty, genuineness, but also it's kind of a sober word," he said in a telephone interview.

Modderman feels lucky to do what he does; it's a sentiment he says that keeps him humble.

## A Life of Purpose

For the first two years of his working life, Modderman worked at an interior design company. He seemed destined to become an interior designer, but he found the work unfulfilling. He envied medical and law enforcement professionals, and that jealousy created a sense of urgency for him to find his own life purpose.

"I felt that if I had to work for 40 or 50 years, I really wouldn't be able to persist and keep doing that if I didn't have that sense of value in what I did," he said.

Painting had always captivated him, so he decided—even though he had no painting skills—to try painting for two years to see if it gave him the sense of purpose he sorely sought.

In 2014, he began learning to paint by attending local classes at a classical art gallery for a year, and then in the summer of 2015, he had a short stint at the Florence Academy of Art in Florence, Italy. Despite his training, Modderman says he's largely learned to paint through the painting process itself, something he continues to do.

## Protestant Art

In 2016, St. Martin's Church in Groningen, Netherlands, which is a traditional Protestant church, commissioned Modderman to paint St. Martin. He felt a distinct tension between how to acknowledge the story of St. Martin (a specifically Catholic story) and how to present the painting from a Protestant perspective, he said.

"And that really got me thinking, because the Protestant church doesn't really have a very strong tradition when it comes down to the combination of art and the church itself. Of course, there is Rembrandt, who painted biblical stories, but it really wasn't from a strictly Protestant mindset," Modderman explained.

Painting St. Martin made Modderman realize that his orthodox Protestant faith offered a unique perspective for biblical art. "There's a world of biblical stories out there. And if I make Protestant paintings about them, then I will add another version of all these types of paintings, instead of just simply replicating how they've already been depicted so many times," he said.

## 'The Beauty of Religion'

Modderman believes there's been a decline of Christianity in the Netherlands for last 30 to 40 years. He believes that the declining number of Dutch Christians is a culmination of the past 50 or 60 years of negative attitudes toward the church. In the 1950s and 1960s, some saw the traditional church with its strict Christian doctrines as something that holds society back rather than

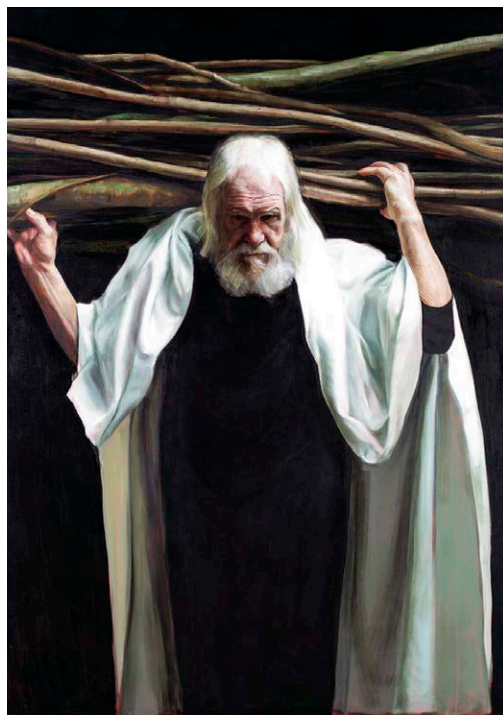


"St. Martin of Tours," 2016, by Egbert Modderman. Oil on canvas; 78 3/4 inches by 59 inches.



"Restless," 2019, by Egbert Modderman. Oil on panel; 27 1/2 inches by 43 1/4 inches.

(Above) "Ruth and Boaz," 2016, by Egbert Modderman; 68 1/2 inches by 60 1/4 inches. (Right) "Abraham," 2016, by Egbert Modderman. Oil on canvas; 78 3/4 inches by 59 inches. (Below) "The Widow of Nain," 2018, by Egbert Modderman. Oil on panel; 59 inches by 39 3/8 inches.



what helps society progress.

Modderman hopes that by portraying the "good and moral good" in the biblical stories, he might counteract some of this past negativity. "Because here I am, a fairly young man, still drawing inspiration from it, so there's just a real beauty to those stories," he said.

In addition, he sees his biblical paintings as a fairly neutral medium that segues viewers to openly talk about the story depicted. Whereas "if you were to have a discussion about religion, a lot of people tend to get very emotional because they bring a lot of their own personal baggage into the conversation," he said.

For his first solo show, "The Beauty of Religion," at St. Martin's Church in Groningen, Modderman created 10 tall biblical paintings.

"I miraculously sold everything, and quite a lot of them were actually sold to people who weren't Christian at all. And I was really pleased about that because that means that they can be appreciated, not simply because somebody shares a certain idea about Christianity but because the theme itself is relatable to a lot of people," he said.

One of the exhibition visitors was a Dutch-American gentleman who had been showing his wife around Groningen, the city where he was born. The man later called Modderman, offering to promote his paintings in the United States. Over the next few years, he became Modderman's patron, and Modderman periodically visited him, spending a few months painting in North Carolina.

“There's a world of biblical stories out there. And if I make Protestant paintings about them, then I will add another version of all these types of paintings.”

Egbert Modderman, painter

## Finding Local Biblical Characters

For his paintings, Modderman first figures out the most interesting, intense moment in the biblical story he's going to paint. Then he scours his hometown of Groningen to find the right models to convey the characters.

Oetze, a bricklayer, posed for Modderman's award-winning painting "Restless." Modderman was drinking tea at home when he spotted Oetze working just 200 yards or so away. "He had a big orange vest and helmet on, but he had a magnificent beard and this kind of aged face. I really felt he was the perfect person to paint for the story I had in mind," he said.

Immediately, Modderman walked up to Oetze, showed him a selection of his paintings on his phone, and explained that he'd very much like to paint him. That same day, Oetze visited Modderman's studio during his lunch break and agreed to pose for the painting.

Modderman dresses his models in pieces of fabric, allowing viewers to focus on the story itself rather than have any hint of the time period to distract them. He then sketches a variety of poses, and only when he's happy with the composition that conveys the strongest emotion does he paint.

## Confronting Limitations

Whenever Modderman starts a painting, he has a certain idea of how the painting is going to feel and look, but the painting process always surprises him.

"Every painting is a confrontation with my limitations," he said.

He spends the first few weeks setting up the foundational paint layers. But not until the last week does he "accidentally start making all the right choices," he said. "So there's never really a feeling of much control involved. You're always kind of surprising yourself, like, 'Oh, just a little dab of lightness here and a little dab of darkness here. Oh, wow! That actually seems to work out.'"

Modderman gets really enthusiastic painting this way, as the painting eventually approaches his goal. But he says that it never quite matches his original intent or feeling. "For me, the moment when I finish a painting, at a certain point, I think this is the best I can do. I have to let it go, [and] I'm kind of left with this almost itch that needs to be scratched. ... So as soon as possible, so usually within a day or two, I start another one," he said.

To find out more about Egbert Modderman's art, visit [www.EgbertModderman.NL](http://www.EgbertModderman.NL)

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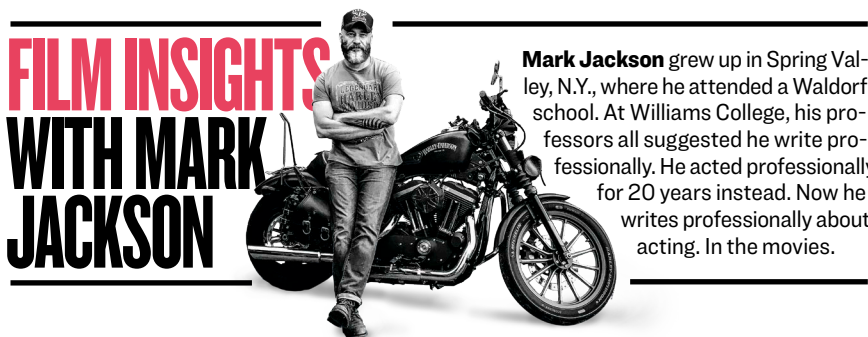


Frank Nitti (Billy Drago), an assassin for Al Capone.



Kevin Costner as Eliot Ness.

(Above) (L-R) Charles Martin Smith, Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, and Andy Garcia play incorruptible lawmen in "The Untouchables." (Below) A bomb planted by Al Capone's men goes off in a pharmacy, killing a little girl in "The Untouchables."



POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## Where Are They When You Need Them?

### MARK JACKSON

According to former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, the 2020 presidential election may be the biggest presidential theft since 1824. Where is the spirit of "The Untouchables" now? That is, where are the incorruptible warriors who won't sit idly by while the hallowed American Constitution drowns in the tide of socialism currently washing over America from the redwood forest to the New York island?

"The Untouchables" (1987) was a big hit when it came out. Set in Prohibition-era Chicago, with then rising star Kevin Costner playing Eliot Ness, the morally upright (almost to the point of caricature) young Fed is tasked with a mission impossible: stopping the murderous Al Capone (Robert De Niro), along with a Capone-pocket-dwelling Chicago police department so corrupt that it stinks to high heaven.

### Streamlining

In moviegoers' minds, director Brian De Palma was mostly known at the time for searing the unfolding image of Sissy Spacek as a blood-drenched prom queen, in Stephen King's high-school gore fest "Carrie." Using much dramatic license, De Palma whittles "The Untouchables" actual, historical federal task force down to a bite-sized team of four men.

Who are they? Dogged and incorruptible Irish beat cop Jimmy Malone (Sean Connery); George Stone (Andy Garcia), a tough-as-nails Italian police academy hotshot who changed his last name because he didn't want to be associated with Capone's Mafia; and Oscar Wallace (Charles Martin Smith, most famous for playing "Toad" in "American Graffiti")—a normally nerdy numbers-spewing government accountant who, surprisingly, has no problem blasting bad guys with a shotgun.

### The Fundamental Issue

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Da-

### 'The Untouchables'

Director  
Brian De Palma

Starring  
Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, Charles Martin Smith, Andy Garcia, Robert De Niro, Patricia Clarkson, Billy Drago

Rated  
R

Running Time  
1 hour, 59 minutes

Release Date  
June 3, 1987

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Robert De Niro as Al Capone.



vid Mamet scripted "The Untouchables." While it doesn't bear the stamp of Mamet's iconoclastic, hyperintelligent, barebones, hemming-and-having-while-inferring-extensive-information-during-pauses style, he highlights the fact that Prohibition came about due to America's deciding that alcohol caused social problems.

Well, supply and demand: Capone filled the alcohol vacuum brought about by America's moral conservatism. But that was only possible due to what I mentioned in a review of "Spotlight." America's collective subconscious is akin to a tut-tutting elderly church lady, and the reality of America is often that our puritanical roots and public do-good façade, while strong and admirable in the time of the Shakers and George Washington, have long since eroded. America, generally speaking, had no intention whatsoever of giving up drinking.

And so, it's much like the storyline of "Mississippi Burning" (1988): Willem Dafoe's by-the-book FBI agent is stymied by the Ku Klux Klan until he's convinced by Gene Hackman's salty lawman that they need to stoop to the level of the KKK's dirty tricks in order to nab the evildoers. Here, Connery's salty cop has to convince Costner's extremely law-abiding treasury agent that they'll need to bend the rules and play dirty to get Capone.

The main example of this is when Ness's crew nab a team of mobsters sneaking liquor over the border from Canada. The mob boss refuses to talk. He doesn't real-

ize that in the skirmish leading to his capture, one of his boys already got killed out on the porch. Connery's Malone goes out, snatches up the dead man, props him next to the window where his boss can see the back of his head, sticks a shotgun barrel in the man's mouth, hollers that he'll shoot if he doesn't talk, and then "Blam!" the mob boss starts singing like a canary.

### Capone

Throughout, Capone rules Chicago from his hyperluxurious Hotel Lexington suite, where he uses the time-honored method of meting out gangster punishment at sumptuous banquets. He lectures about shortcomings challenging the business, all the while stalking around the banquet table twirling a baseball bat. You can guess the rest.

Robert De Niro's Al Capone—it's not one of his better creations. There's a lot of attitude, some yelling, some smirking, but no insight into Capone's mythic, psychopathic genius.

Little by little, The Untouchables (they couldn't be bought, hence the name) erode Capone's power like pulling sticks out of a Jenga tower, until eventually they get him on income tax charges.

While Costner anchors the film with his powerful moral core, Connery steals every scene he's in. And more than Connery, it's actor Billy Drago, playing Capone's main henchman, with his creepy, utterly evil sneer and immaculate white suit and fedora, who leaves the impression that your mind will reference whenever you think of this film.

"The Untouchables" felt untouchable in '87; it felt cutting-edge, one of those movies you saw multiple times, and not just due to the fact that in '87 there was not yet the deluge of Hollywood entertainment "product" as there is in 2020. Make that 2019 (you know why). Today, it feels ever-so-slightly innocent and boy-scout-like. But that's not a bad thing.

So, again—Where are the Untouchables in 2020, when the galleon of the American Constitution is beset by the canons of socialism? Because while America may not have enjoyed Prohibition, if we get usurped by socialism (which is by definition merely a way station to communism), we can count on a whole more being prohibited than alcohol.

Where are the Untouchables in 2020?





The Choir of King's College, Cambridge, at rehearsal for their Christmas Eve service of "A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" in King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England, in this file photo.

## MUSIC

# Keeping the Great Christmas Choral Tradition Alive

MICHAEL KUREK

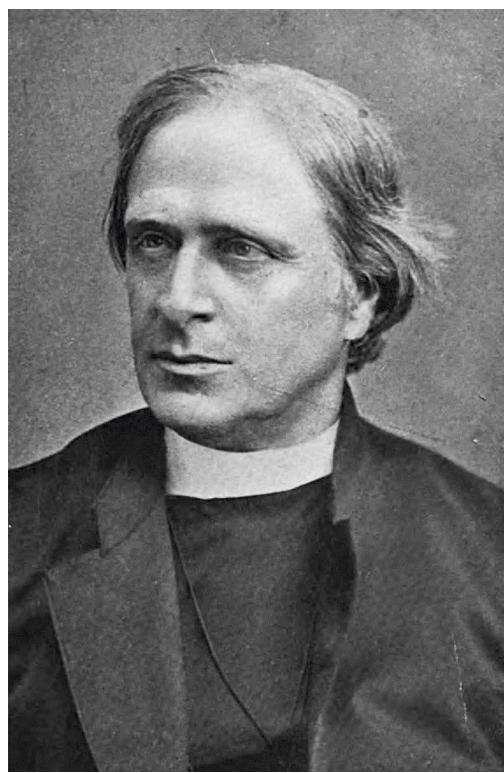
Most people acknowledge that phrases like "the Christmas spirit" and "the magic of Christmas" describe real phenomena, but precisely how to define them is another matter. Perhaps we could say that a whole array of traditions creates something more meaningful than the sum of its parts. These traditions include not only exterior decorations and gifts but also the interior, haunting sensibilities of childhood, a nostalgia for long-gone people and places, and even the sentimental associations we feel from revisiting, yet again, long-cherished and beautiful music.

The centuries-old tradition of choral music, or more generally of people singing together as a group in many forms, must certainly also hold a place deep in our collective cultural consciousness. One choral focal point (or, pardon me, vocal point) for many people is the Christmas Eve tradition of "Nine Lessons and Carols," especially as it has been established at King's College, one of the colleges of the University of Cambridge, in England.

King's College annual performances of that service began in 1918 and have been broadcast every Christmas Eve (but one, 1930) since 1928, and worldwide since World War II. This year, in spite of the pandemic, the performance and broadcast will go on, although without a live audience present.

Perhaps we cling to the stability of tradition more than ever in unstable or unpredictable times and circumstances. So, if you haven't yet joined the millions who make this broadcast part of their own Christmas tradition, you may enjoy tuning in online to BBC Radio 4 this year and every Christmas Eve Day at 10 a.m. EST or to the rebroadcast on BBC Radio 3 on Christmas Day at 9 a.m. EST. Or check with your local classical music radio station, as many of them carry the broadcast (for example, WQXR-FM 105.9 in New York). Of course, the concept has also been adopted, sometimes with variations in format, by local churches of various denominations, which you might be able to attend live (and usually on earlier days in December) in your own town.

Edward White Benson, credited with devising the "Service of Nine Lessons and Carols" in 1880.



## The Performance

The traditional version still performed at King's College is only slightly varied from year to year. In a nutshell, after the choir processes in to a solo boy chorister singing "Once in David's Royal City," there are nine parts to the service, each of which begins with a short Scripture reading, done by nine different people associated with the choir, college, or community, followed by two "carols" sung by the choir.

A few of the carols are replaced by a "hymn," which by definition is sung by the congregation with the choir. The carols can vary from year to year and may be recent or several centuries old, such as "Angels From the Realms of Glory," "In Dulci Jubilo," and "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming." Every year since 1982, a new carol has been commissioned for inclusion, from composers including John Tavener and James MacMillan.

The "Service of Nine Lessons and Carols" actually predates King's College. It was devised in 1880 by one Edward White Benson in Truro, England, in Cornwall.

At the end of World War I, a former chaplain who had become dean of King's College, Eric Milner-White, decided that after the horrors of the war it would be more up-

lifting to celebrate the "Lessons and Carols" on Christmas Eve, rather than the usual Evensong (the early evening Anglican service that takes place around the same time as Catholic Vespers).

In America today, such a tradition might seem very attractive to our many recent Anglophiles and "Downton Abbey" fans. But it should be observed that with church attendance down generally, and with many churches now even foregoing traditional choirs in favor of "praise and worship bands," choral music by large choirs is no longer such a visible part of American life in the way it was even 50 years ago. A remnant of that culture can be seen in school choirs and "a cappella" pop singing groups, even some choral singing in many Broadway shows. It seems fundamental to human social life that many people will continue to want to sing in groups, so the genre is probably safe.

However, those of us of a certain age can remember a bit more singing by the public generally than we notice in popular culture now, whether around the campfire or on a hayride, in kids' clubs, or around a home piano. More people then, it seems to this writer, could sing "Happy Birthday" in tune than can now. A check with the American Choral Directors' Choral Journal does not confirm any statistics on this speculation, but anecdotal observation would suggest that the month of December may be the most likely month that many people hear a choir at all.

So, thanks to classic Christmas recordings and live holiday concerts, December is a month to celebrate the genre and perhaps to add the "Lessons and Carols" to our annual playlist, if it is not already there.

American composer Michael Kurek is the author of the recently released book "The Sound of Beauty: A Composer on Music in the Spiritual Life" and the composer of the Billboard No. 1 classical album "The Sea Knows." The winner of numerous composition awards, including the prestigious Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has served on the Nominations Committee of the Recording Academy for the classical Grammy Awards. He is a professor emeritus of composition at Vanderbilt University. For more information and music, visit MichaelKurek.com

# A Remarkable Love Story and Family Legacy: A Tribute to the Talented Betsy Wyeth

The wife, partner, muse, and great love of the late realist artist Andrew Wyeth

LORRAINE FERRIER

The Brandywine River Museum of Art in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, presents 20 drawings and paintings by the late American realist painter Andrew Wyeth. All of the art exhibited depicts Andrew's wife, Betsy, or the places and objects she held dear. The small exhibition is a tender tribute to Betsy, who passed away on April 21.

The majority of the works on display have never been publicly shown; they weren't created to be sold or exhibited, and they all come from Andrew and Betsy Wyeth's private collection, Brandywine associate curator Audrey Lewis explained in a telephone interview.

Lewis curated works that best conveyed the Wyeths' nearly 70 years of marriage. Her small selection thus evokes a sense of intimacy and captures the couple's relationship.

"For instance, we have early drawings in the show that were created shortly after their marriage, and they really tell a story of Betsy's domestic life and Betsy's personality. ... They really convey her elusiveness in a way, and also her dedication to Andrew Wyeth's career and his body of work," she said.

## Betsy and Andrew's Artful Marriage

Betsy's influence on Andrew and his art was immense and enduring. She met Andrew in Cushing, Maine, on July 12, 1939, on Andrew's 22nd birthday, when she was 17 years old. On that first meeting, Betsy took Andrew to meet her friend Christina Olsen, the lady in one of Andrew's most famous works "Christina's World." For Andrew, Christina "was someone who had a kind of great dignity, and he was interested in portraying her," Lewis said.

Little under a year later, Betsy and Andrew were married.

“She really was a partner in his career: a muse, a partner, and also of course his great love.”

Audrey Lewis, curator

The couple settled in Chadds Ford, where Andrew's father, the illustrator N.C. Wyeth, had built the family home on a hill. Lewis explained that, as a teenager, Andrew began to paint the everyday farming motifs of Chadds Ford. It was here that he discovered two of his most famous subjects: a local farmer and his wife, Karl and Anna Kuerner, after he happened upon their home during one of his walks near the family home.

Betsy took on the role of Andrew's business manager and cataloged every work he created in a catalogue raisonné (a comprehensive, annotated record of his artwork). "That was a massive undertaking because he was prolific. I couldn't tell you the number of works ... throughout the years, but it's large because he did many studies for his tempera paintings," Lewis said.

Betsy encouraged Andrew to persevere with tempera painting, something he'd learned from his brother-in-law, the artist Peter Hurd. It may have been on their first meeting that Andrew showed Betsy some of his tempera paintings and watercolor paintings, Lewis explained. Betsy pointed to the tempera paintings and said, "That's what you should be doing."

"She had very strong opinions, as did he.



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COURTESY OF THE WYETH FAMILY ARCHIVES

I think they had this great symbiotic relationship where he would bring his paintings home when he was ready to show them. He wouldn't show them before that. But he would bring the paintings home, and she would critique them and eventually give them titles. He valued her opinion," she said. "They were intelligent critiques. They were not just passing critiques; they were worthy. They were meant to help him see something that maybe he didn't see in this work. So she really was a partner in his career: a muse, a partner, and also of course his great love," she said.

In 1966, Andrew credited Betsy with galvanizing him and his work, shaping him into the artist that he became. Many years later, he told his granddaughter Victoria Browning Wyeth: "She made me the artist that I am; without her I would be nothing," a sentiment Browning Wyeth recounts in a touching personal video tribute on the Brandywine Museum website.

## Architect and Homemaker

"Another interesting thing about this exhibition is that you see her in her own setting," Lewis said. Betsy created endless inspiration for Andrew's compositions through her interior and architectural designs. She "understood architecture and created these homes both in Chadds Ford and in Maine that were more or less designed by her. She envisioned and created these worlds." And Andrew happily painted those homes many times with their beautiful but sparse interiors throughout.

In Chadds Ford, Betsy found a dilapidated mill and worked with architects to restore and redesign it to become the family home. The home, Lewis believes, reflects the Wyeths' sensibilities: "It's kind of minimalist, very 'artist, I'd guess you'd say."

"She almost created a sense of paradise for her husband to work in—not a paradise



(Top) "Maga's Daughter," 1966, by Andrew Wyeth. Tempera on panel. The Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection.

(Above) Andrew and Betsy Wyeth in Chadds Ford, circa 1940.

(Bottom left) Andrew and Betsy Wyeth at dinner in "That Hour," 1988, by Peter Ralston. Photograph.

(Below) Betsy James Wyeth, 1968, photographer unknown.

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To find out more about the Brandywine River Museum of Art's small exhibition, "Betsy James Wyeth: A Tribute," which runs until Jan. 10, 2021, visit Brandywine.org

in the sense of beautiful—but a place where he could focus on his art," she said.

## A Sense of Legacy

Both Andrew and Betsy were committed to promoting American art, and they set up a fund, now called the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.

Betsy also contributed to the preservation of the Wyeth family legacy by researching the family's genealogy and publishing books of the family's art.

For instance, after N.C. Wyeth's tragic death from a car accident, Betsy took it upon herself to collate and publish his letters, Lewis explained. "She took it on as a project, and I think that gives you a sense of how important she thought legacy was in the family. She really helped to move N.C. Wyeth's career further after his death and keep him in the public eye, in a sense."

In the late 1960s, Betsy encouraged conservationist and artist George A. Weymouth to transform what was a 19th-century gristmill, on the Brandywine River, into an art museum. Betsy promised to lend and donate artworks to the new museum from the three generations of the Wyeth family, including N.C., Andrew, along with art from Betsy and Andrew's son Jamie, and also Andrew's sisters Carolyn and Henriette, and other family members.

For a long time, both Betsy and Andrew were regular visitors to the museum, and Betsy helped curate and install many of Andrew's exhibitions there. It's fitting that the Brandywine River Museum of Art's intimate tribute to Betsy, painted by her husband's hand, should be exhibited where her much-loved family's art often resides.

In the 2017 documentary "Betsy's World," by the Farnsworth Museum, Jamie spoke about how he was struck by his parents' remarkable partnership. "They both were two halves of this remarkable whole and, to the point, I feel that really she should have also signed his paintings. I mean she was that integrally a part of it, and she's as responsible for the paintings as he is."



COURTESY OF PETER RALSTON/RALSTON GALLERY



## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## Sometimes Only Divine Intervention Helps

IAN KANE

Christmas is not only a time of joyousness but also for moral and spiritual reflection. In that regard, although director Henry Koster's 1948 Christmas tale "The Bishop's Wife" contains plenty of whimsy and comic notes, there is also an undercurrent of moral meditations and virtuous musings that one might say even verge on the divine.

The film begins with tall, dapper angel Dudley (Cary Grant) walking through the urban streets of an unnamed city. It's snowing and everyone—both young and old—is caught up in the Christmas spirit. As Dudley roams about, he performs various good deeds, such as helping a blind man across a busy street and saving a baby stroller and its occupant from rolling into the path of a speeding truck.

Dudley suddenly sees Julia Brougham (Loretta Young) as she is window shopping and is instantly drawn to her beautiful yet sad countenance. Before he can approach her, she walks off across a busy street and into a shop selling Christmas trees. There she sees her old friend, Professor Wutheridge (Monty Woolley), who is also shopping for a tree.

### 'The Bishop's Wife' is an enchanting film with delightful performances.

After witnessing Julia's interaction with the professor, Dudley later approaches Wutheridge and slyly manages to find out more about her, including the fact that she's married to Bishop Henry Brougham (David Niven). Wutheridge also reveals



Bishop Brougham (David Niven, front L) and his wife (Loretta Young) discuss the day's plans while Dudley (Cary Grant) eavesdrops, in "The Bishop's Wife."

that Henry now keeps company with the "vulgar rich" of society—including Mrs. Hamilton (Gladys Cooper), who had the professor fired from his teaching job under false pretenses.

Julia returns home to find Henry consulting with Mrs. Hamilton, along with her cadre of wealthy, elderly sycophants. She and the bishop are discussing the design of a new cathedral in which she has plans to have Henry installed. Henry gently points out that the cathedral should be for the benefit of all people. However, Mrs. Hamilton immediately admonishes him—she's funding the entire operation and wants the cathedral to be a monument to her late husband. With that, Mrs. Hamilton and her associates depart.

Henry, stressed out about the new cathedral project, retreats to his office and in a beautiful scene, prays for God's help. In answer to his prayer, Dudley appears and asks how he can be of service. The angel

says that he's assigned to Henry's "district." Dudley tells Henry to keep his otherworldly identity a secret, and therefore Henry introduces him to the household as his new assistant.

After meeting Dudley and spending some time around him, Julia and the Broughams' young daughter Debby (Karolyn Grimes) grow increasingly fond of him. Meanwhile, Henry becomes fanatically consumed with arranging for and planning out the cathedral's construction. It quickly becomes apparent that he is simply too busy to interact with his family. It's a matter of his priorities.

Despite Dudley's offer to help with the cathedral plans, Henry stubbornly insists on taking care of most matters on his own, even though he knows he is neglecting his beloved wife.

Dudley, concerned about Julia's loneliness, takes her out about town, as well as lunching at a fine eatery. And, in one famous scene, Dudley takes Julia and their

leathery old cab driver Sylvester (James Gleason) out on an ice skating excursion. As Sylvester comically struggles to stay upright on the sidelines, Dudley and Julia glide over the ice gracefully together. Compassionately, Dudley (with the touch of an angel) manages to get Sylvester out on the ice, and the trio end the evening gleefully together.

As time goes on, the more Dudley shows Julia attention, the more jealous Henry becomes until a great rift grows between Henry and Dudley. But how will the bishop deal with the divine guest that he himself prayed for? Will Henry realize that, in his quest for fame in building a great cathedral, he may lose the things that are most precious to him?

"The Bishop's Wife" is an enchanting film with some delightful performances by its stars Cary Grant, Loretta Young, David Niven, and brilliant character actor Monty Woolley. One of the things that is most ingenious about this film is that, while it touches on some timeless biblical themes, it never comes off as preachy or pretentious. Instead, the must-see holiday classic is a heartwarming, family-friendly tale about the meaning and celebration of Christmas.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To learn more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

#### 'The Bishop's Wife'

##### Director

Henry Koster

##### Starring

Cary Grant, Loretta Young, David Niven

##### Running Time

1 hour, 49 minutes

##### Not Rated

##### Release Date

Feb. 16, 1948 (USA)

★★★★★



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