WEEK 52, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES ARTSS CULTURE



OURTESY OF RUBEN BELLOSO ADORNA

"The Light of Your Life," 2016, by Rubén Belloso Adorna. Pastel on paper; 31 1/2 inches by 23 5/8 inches.

FINE ARTS

Pastel Painting's Gallant Global Ambassador

Spanish Artist Rubén Belloso Adorna

LORRAINE FERRIER

Spanish master pastel painter Rubén Belloso Adorna paints astonishing, lifelike paintings that often offer a glimpse into a Greek myth, a biblical tale, or even a faraway fairy tale. But each and every one of his paintings is based on his own life experience, and almost all of them rely on his family or friends as models.

Continued on Page 4



Behind the Subscription

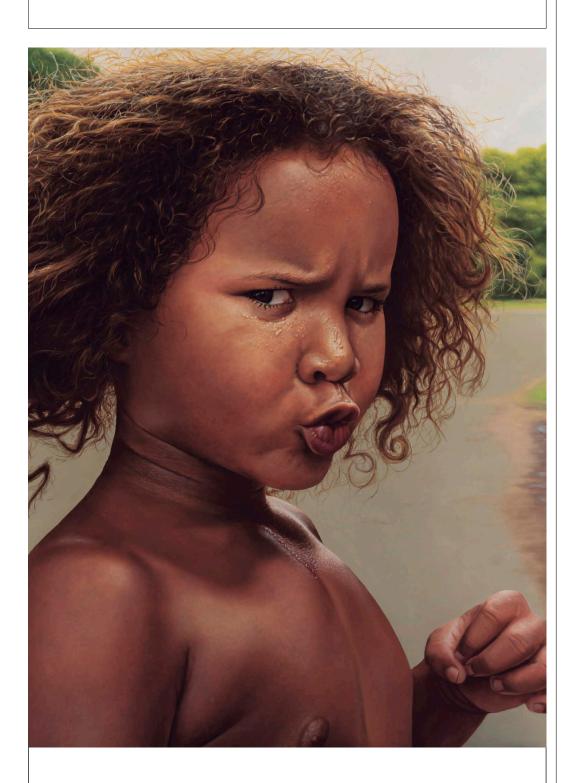
Your subscription will not only provide you with accurate news and features, but also contribute to the revival of American journalism and help safeguard our freedoms for future generations.

We aim to tell you what we see, not how to think; we strive to deliver you a factual picture of reality that lets you form your own opinions.

We believe that we live in truly epochal times, where the faithful representation of our current events won't just be important for the people of today, but also for the generations to come. The records we keep now will directly inform the foundations of the history they'll learn and the values they'll cherishand this knowledge is what drives us.

Learn more at EpochSubscription.com

THE EPOCH TIMES



Original artworks, canvas wraps, art posters, and framed prints of Award-winning oil paintings now available for purchase at

InspiredOriginal.Org



Selling Our Souls: Lessons From 'The Devil and Daniel Webster'

JEFF MINICK

LITERATURE

merica sports a pantheon of folk heroes, picturesque inventions of the imagination or real-life celebrities made mythical by time and the exaggerations of yarn spinners.

As children, most of us heard stories of the lumberjack Paul Bunyan and his blue ox Babe, of Johnny Appleseed planting orchards on the frontier, and of the "steel driving man" John Henry and his contest with a steam drill. Davy Crockett "kilt him a bear when he was only 3," wolves raised the cowboy Pecos Bill, and Casey Jones died as an engineer in a train accident saving his passengers "with a hand on a whistle and a hand on a brake." Mollie Pitcher was the nickname given to a woman who fought in the Revolutionary War and carried water to thirsty soldiers, and the Wild West's Calamity Jane had many tales told about her, some of which she created herself. From "Big Bad John" to Brer Rabbit, Americans have delighted in their folk heroes.

Many of these characters reflect the values and customs of America that differed from those of their European cousins at the time: a tendency to braggadocio, a willingness to singlehandedly tackle impossible tasks, and a belief in personal liberty that ran as deep as Lake Superior.

Which brings us to Stephen Vincent Benét's short story "The Devil and Daniel Webster."

The Plot

New Hampshire farmer Jabez Stone lives under such a cloud of bad luck— "If stones cropped up in his neighbor's field, boulders boiled up in his"—that after breaking a plowshare one morning, he says, "I vow it's enough to make a man sell his soul to the devil!"

The next day, "a soft-spoken, darkdressed stranger" drives up in a buggy and concludes a bargain with Stone. His cows fatten up, his crops multiply, and his community recognizes him as an increasingly important man, electing him to political offices and envying him his newfound wealth.

The stranger, of course, is the devil to whom Stone has sold his soul. After years have passed—by this time, Stone is a possible candidate for governor the time has come for him to keep his part of the bargain, to die and give the devil his due. In a panic, Stone seeks the help of Dan'l Webster, an attorney and United States senator, and one of the most famous men of his time.

Webster agrees to take up Stone's cause, accompanies him to his home, a predilection for drink and perhaps for and shares a jug of liquor with him while they await the stranger. On the stranger's arrival, Webster insists on a jury trial, and Scratch, as the stranger calls himself, provides a judge and jury **A Final Lesson** from hell, comprising infamous Americans of that time and earlier: murderers, made a country, and a man a man."

Walter Butler, the head juror and the loyalist who had spread "fire and horror through the Mohawk Valley in the times of the Revolution," then rises and announces that the jury has found for Jabez Stone. Webster defeats Scratch so badly that "whenever the devil comes near Marshfield, even now, he gives it a wide berth."

So what can we readers take away from this folk tale?

Patriotism

As in much of his poetry, Benét in "The Devil and Daniel Webster" injects an old-fashioned love of country into his story. When the devil demands Stone's soul, Webster answers in a voice of thunder: "Mr. Stone is an American citizen, and no American citizen may be forced into the services of a foreign prince. We fought England for that in twelve and we'll fight all hell for it again!"

Later, in addressing the infamous jurors, "he talked of the early days of America and the men who had made those days. It wasn't a spread-eagle speech, but he made you see it. He admitted all the wrong that had ever been done. But he showed how, out of the wrong and the right, the suffering and the starvations, something new had come. And everybody had played a part in it, even the traitors."

"The Devil and Daniel Webster" reprimands America in several places for those wrongs-it condemns slavery in particular-but it also reminds us that our history is filled with attempts to right those abuses.

Daniel Webster

Webster's nicknames were "The Great Orator," "The Godlike Daniel," and "The Defender of the Constitution," but his detractors called him "Black Dan" and "Prince of Traitors" for some of his political stances and for believing him a cruel man, a prodigious drinker, and possibly a libertine.

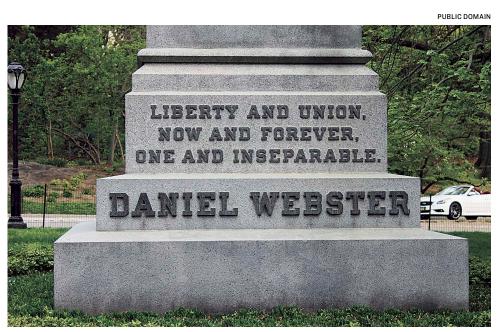
Benét appraises him in this way:

"You see, for a while, he was the biggest man in the country ... There were thousands that trusted in him right next to God Almighty, and they told stories about him and all the things that belonged to him that were like stories of patriarchs and such. They said, when he stood up to speak, stars and stripes came right out of the sky, and once he spoke against a river and made it sink into the ground ... A man with a mouth like a mastiff, a brow like a mountain, and eyes like burning anthracite—that was Dan'l Webster in his prime."

Webster had many flaws-self-promotion, an inability to manage money, women-but he had one virtue some of our citizens lack.

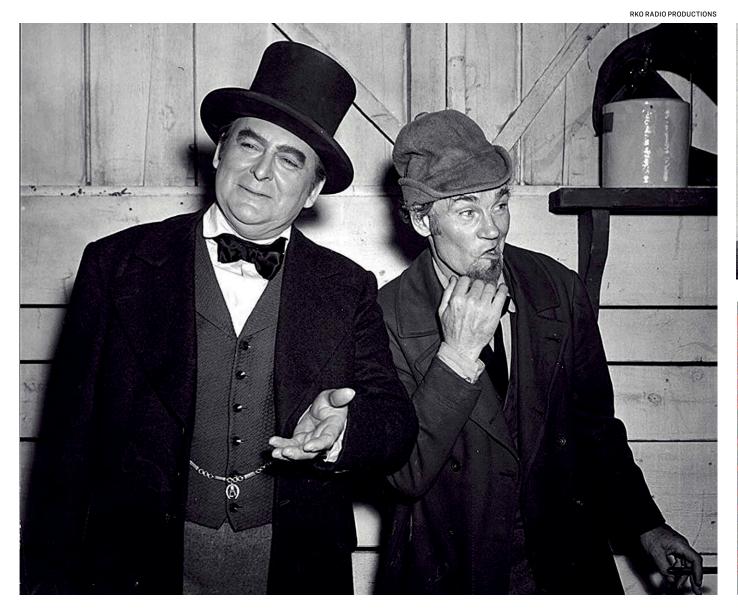
He loved his country.

The real Daniel Webster once spoke these words: "I apprehend no danger brigands, and thieves. Webster seems to our country from a foreign foe. Our on the verge of losing his case until he destruction, should it come at all, will begins "talking about the things that be from another quarter. From the inattention of the people to the concerns



The inscription on the base of Daniel Webster's monument in New York's Central Park.

ARTS & CULTURE | 3



of their government, from their carelessness and negligence, I must confess that I do apprehend some danger. I fear that they may place too implicit a confidence in their public servants, and fail properly to scrutinize their conduct; that in this way they may be made the dupes of designing men, and become the instruments of their own undoing."

Benét's Jabez Stone is an ordinary man struggling to make a living and provide for his wife and children. Millions of Americans today find themselves in the same boat.

When Scratch appears to Stone and promises him wealth and success beyond his wildest dreams, we might think of some today who make such promises. The devil to whom we sell our souls needn't come out of hell; he may just as well come out of Washington, D.C., offering us such gifts as canceled student loan debts, Medicare Edward Arnold (L) as **Daniel Webster and Walter** Huston as Mr. Scratch in the 1941 film "The Devil and Daniel Webster," originally titled "All That Money Can Buy."

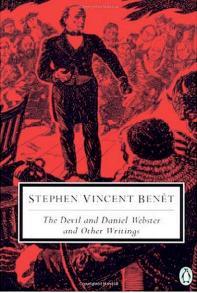
Dependence is not the American Way; it is instead a bargain with the devil and leads to slavery.

for all, more welfare benefits, and other handouts in exchange for our rights and liberties. All we have to do, as Jabez Stone did, is to put our blood signature on the contract, and we'll be taken care of.

In other words, we will become children. Fortunately, many Americans understand that such dependence is not the American Way, that it is instead a bargain with the devil and leads to slavery. These are the people—a few politicians, our neighbors, the mechanic with grease under his fingernails, a wife and mother I know who like Benét's Daniel Webster would say, "By the thirteen original colonies, I'd go to the Pit itself to save the Union!" By that proclamation, Webster means he would march into hell itself to preserve our nation and its Constitution. These are the people who stand for lib-

erty, and we must stand with them.



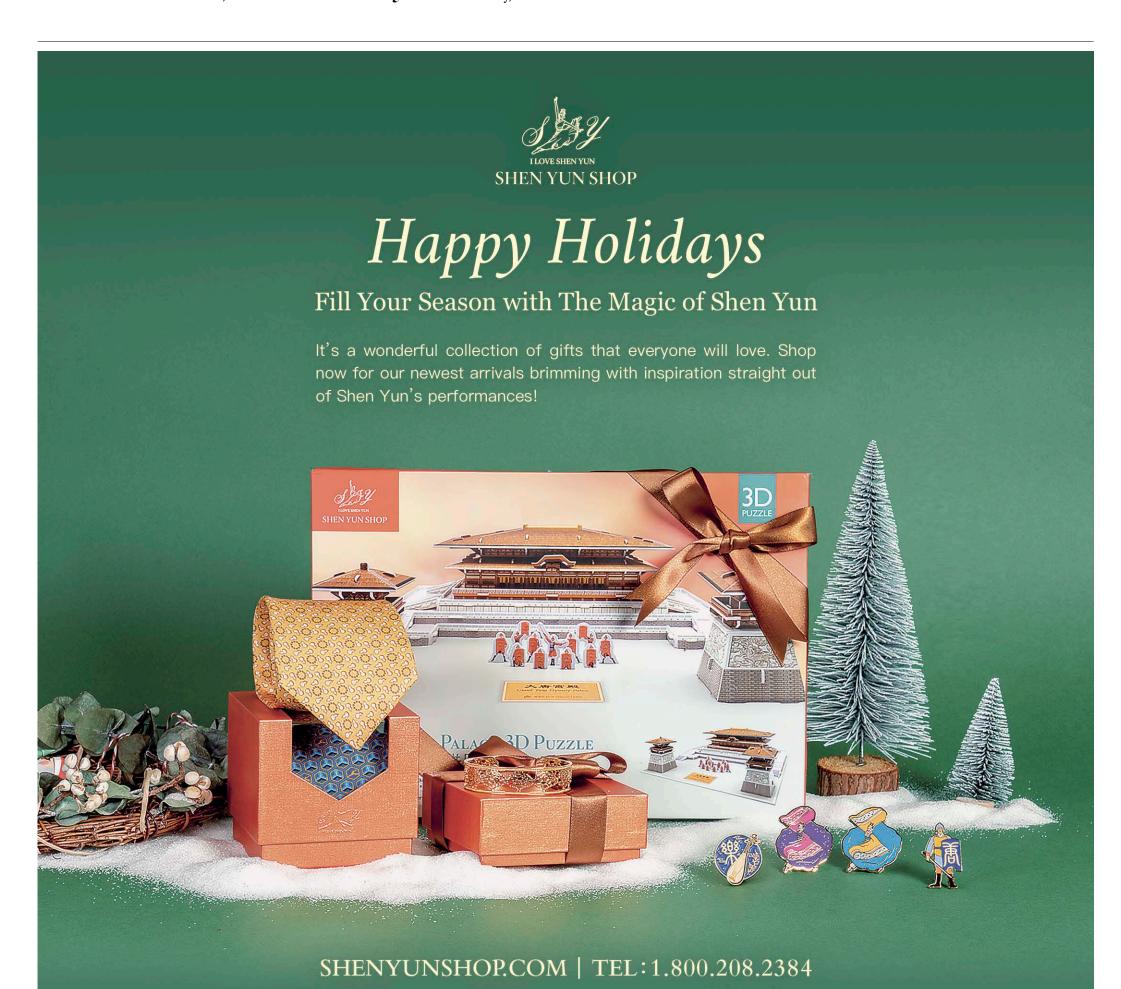


Stephen Vincent Benét's college yearbook photo of the Yale class of 1919.

Perhaps Stephen Vincent Benét's most famous work

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. See *JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.*

Jeff Minick has four children and





FINE ARTS

Pastel Painting's Gallant Global Ambassador

Spanish Artist Rubén Belloso Adorna

Continued from Page 1

For the past 12 years, Belloso Adorna has specialized in creating realistic images with pastels. It hasn't always been easy to learn or to promote the medium: Often his magical pastel paintings are mistaken for oil paintings. Yet, Belloso Adorna is determined to revive the once revered art of pastel painting.

"My goal is that pastel continues to grow as a technique and acquires the recognition it deserves," he said in an email.

Belloso Adorna teaches pastel painting masterclasses in Seville, Spain, where he is based, and across Europe, hoping to instill his love for this underused medium to others. In 2014, along with his Italian pastellist friends, he founded the Association of Italian Pastellists.

Belloso Adorna's pastel paintings are held in high esteem. He's exhibited them in half of Europe, according to his online artist statement, and his work can be found in private art collections in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

In 2015, the renowned Society of the Pastellists of France invited Belloso Adorna to be their guest of honor. In 2017, he became the first living painter to have a solo exhibition at the Antoine Lecuyer Museum in Saint Quentin, France.

In 2018, Belloso Adorna won the Kenneth Wellner Memorial Award at the Pastel Society of America's 46th Annual Exhibition. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, his work was selected and awarded by New York-based Art Renewal Center Salon. Most recently, in 2019, he won their American Legacy Fine Arts Award.

Pastel Painting

Although pastel had been around since the Renaissance, it wasn't until the 18th century, initially in France, that the medium became popular. Belloso Adorna credits French artists Maurice Quentin de La Tour, Jean-Baptiste Perronneau, and Jean-Bap-



Rubén Belloso Adorna at the 13th International Art Renewal Center Salon in New York, in 2018. His pastel painting "The Knight of the Sad Countenance" was awarded the Chairman's Choice Award.

66

artist

I think that in truth lies the authentic

beauty. Rubén Belloso Adorna, tiste-Siméon Chardin, along with Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera as exemplar pastel painters.

Pastels use the same pigments as oil paints but are mixed with a binder and made into sticks. They appealed to the growing middle-class clientele as a cheaper alternative to oil paints for the portrait paintings they commissioned.

Plus, the immediacy of pastels allows the artist to capture fleeting expressions almost as quickly as they happen, as opposed to waiting for a layer of oil paints to slowly dry.

The powdery nature of pastels make the paintings fragile, yet the refraction of light on the powder creates the most luminous pictures. Pastel paintings keep their color saturation longer than oil paintings, since pastel paintings cannot be varnished, which often discolors or damages oil paint.

Mastering an Astonishing Yet **Underrated Medium**

Belloso Adorna fell in love with pastel painting in 2003, when he was 17 years old. He admits his first forarys were disastrous. Learning the medium wasn't easy, keen eye for the play of light, and William

as quality information on the technique was scarce, he explained.

But Belloso Adorna desperately wanted to deepen his knowledge. He scoured books as well as the internet, and he asked his art teachers, but frequently the answers fell far short of his experience in using pastels.

He was often told that pastel was a messy, beginners' medium and a minor technique. But Belloso Adorna always saw pastel painting as a complete technique: "It combines the best of drawing and painting," he said.

He particularly enjoys the immediacy of the medium and the directness of the technique, whereby he can paint pastels with his hands straight onto the painting surface without the need for intermediary elements

His passion for the medium propelled him to persevere and teach himself.

In 2010, Belloso Adorna took to social media to promote his art. "People were very astonished with my results, but still some asked me if I also did other techniques, as if painting with pastel wasn't enough," he said. During that time, "an incredible interest arose to learn this 'new technique' that offered results similar to oil [painting]."

Duty-Bound to Teach Pastel Painting In the final year of his fine arts degree program, Belloso Adorna received many requests from different countries to teach pastel painting, along with invitations to be the guest of honor at prominent pastel painting exhibitions.

Belloso Adorna had never traveled outside of Spain, but as soon as he graduated from the University of Seville, he said, he summoned the courage to travel in order to teach pastel painting.

He felt compelled to teach it, believing that it was his duty to help people thoroughly understand the technique, for students to be able to use the medium correctly and thus value pastel painting, he explained.

Now, the comments he once received that undervalued the medium have disappeared, and Belloso Adorna is pleased that people appreciate pastel paintings and value what the technique offers.

Great and Everyday Inspiration

Belloso Adorna is inspired by many great artists. He greatly admires Caravaggio's characteristically dramatic paintings, Norman Rockwell's impressive storytelling and expressive characters, Rembrandt's exquisite rendering of gestures and his

ARTS & CULTURE 5

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUBÉN BELLOSO ADO

Bouguereau's ability to portray the human figure with naturalistic brilliance.

He particularly favors the subject matter of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and their Romantic style. And he also looks to Lawrence Alma-Tadema's art to study the array of different materials and mediums he used.

Belloso Adorna happens upon potential scenes in his everyday life. An idea could watching a movie as it could from visiting an art exhibition or a theater's costume shop.

Compositions naturally present themselves to him. He could be eating dinner with family, conversing by the fire with friends, or studying at a friend's art studio. He might notice someone's gaze or gesture bathed in a particular light. For instance, seeing his wife sleeping, and watching his wife and child play compelled him to paint "Dreams 2" and "Lucifer and the Temptation," respectively.

From Idea to Painting

Once he forms an idea for a painting, Belloso Adorna ponders how best to portray it. He thinks about the kind of emotion that needs to be conveyed, and the best model to express it. He then considers the setting of the painting and its composition.

Belloso Adorna relies on photos in his artistic process. He places the utmost importance on the natural light that illuminates the painting, adjusting the timing of his photoshoot accordingly.

These photo sessions can take hours. It's a planned yet spontaneous process, and it is a key part of his creative approach—when he takes photographs, new compositional ideas form in his mind. One shoot alone produces hundreds, sometimes thousands of images that he uses to create the best composition for his painting.

He meticulously studies each photo, selecting those with favored elements that are to be used in the final painting. For instance, one photo may have excellent light, another may convey the perfect facial expression, and yet another might have just the right hand gestures he's looking for. He compiles his final composition from the dozens of photos, a little like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle, creating the best picture for his idea.

Painting Traditional Themes With Flair

In some of his paintings, he uses traditional themes such as myth, allegory, and biblical stories, but he often presents them with a slight twist. His painting "Portrait of



Rubén Belloso Adorna hosts a workshop at the Antoine Lecuyer Museum, France, where he also held a solo exhibition.

66

My goal is that pastel continues to grow as a technique and acquires the recognition it deserves.

Rubén Belloso Adorna, artist

"Adoration of Magi," 2017, by Rubén Belloso Adorna. Pastel on paper; 59 inches by 39 3/4 inches.

Mary After Christ" is a fine example, and one that won him the American Legacy Fine Arts Award at the renowned New York-based 14th International Art Renew-

al Center Salon Competition (2019–2020). In the painting, he depicts not the young Mary so often seen in Christian art but a mature Mary graciously rendered with warm, weathered skin and an earthbrown veil. In his online artist statecome to him just as easily from a walk or ment, he notes that sometimes paintings depicting a mature Christ include Mary at a similar age as her son. "I wanted to give the portrait sincerity, far from artifice. I think that in truth lies the authentic beauty," he said.

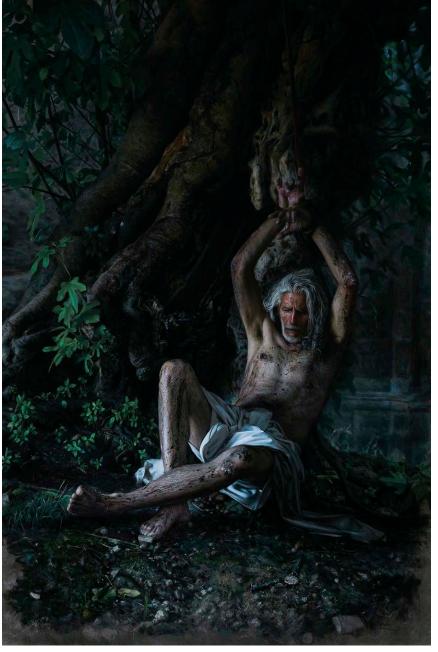
> Belloso Adorna's storytelling has been greatly influenced by his love of mythology, something that he's always enjoyed. His grandmother is the gracious model tenderly portrayed in his painting "Twilight of Venus." "I wanted to bring a new and profound vision of the goddess of beauty and at the same time pay tribute to my maternal grandmother," he said.

> In the painting "The Agony of Art," Belloso Adorna uses allegory to depict the plight of figurative and realist art today. In the painting, a dirty, bruised, and battlefatigued man (representing figurative and realist art) is slumped under a tree with his arms hung high above his head by a rope. He looks utterly bewildered. His hands are bound, and his broken wristwatch gives a sense of frozen time. He is modestly covered by a pure white cloth that depicts honesty, Belloso Adorna said in his online artist statement. "I wanted to represent him as a martyr who is dying, after being beaten, stripped of his clothes, and bound against his will," he said. He added that this downtrodden man represents the abuse that many sectors of the contemporary art world have carried out against realist art.

Even after so many years of pastel painting, Belloso Adorna continues to be surprised at the possibilities the medium brings to his art. Ultimately, he wants to keep revealing such surprises, and to preserve and revive pastel painting—a medium that he feels has, for too long, been underappreciated.

Perhaps we'll see Belloso Adorna paint an allegory of "The Joy of Pastel Painting." Regardless, that's a sentiment imbued in each and every one of his works and in his teaching.

To find out more about Rubén Belloso Adorna's art, visit Facebook.com/ RubénBellosoAdorna









'Once Upon a Time," 2016, by Rubén Belloso Adorna. Pastel on paper; 39 3/8 inches by 271/2 inches

Portrait of Mary After Christ,"2019, by Rubén Belloso Adorna. Pastel and gouache on paper; 16 3/4 inches by 143/4 inches.



FINE ARTS

Toward an Ideal Love: 'Love Dies in Time'

ERIC BESS

66

ove" is a term that we throw around without reserve. We all are guilty of using the term to refer to things we merely enjoy. "I love

that song!" we exclaim whenever the newest catchy tune comes on the radio. "I love (insert word here)" has come to mean that we, at this moment, merely enjoy something for the pleasure it provides us.

Traditionally, love was thought of as an eternal thing, as something that transcended the ways of the world. From Plato, for depicted as an older man with wings—but instance, we get the idea of Platonic Love, he could also be Charon, the man whose job a love that transcends base passion and it was to ferry the dead across the rivers Styx moves toward the contemplation of the and Acheron into the underworld. ideal. Have we lost interest in understanding a transcendent, ideal love?

I came across a painting titled "Love Dies in Time" by the French academic painter Édouard Bernard Debat-Ponsan, which serves as a visual stimulus for me into the woes of love when it's confused with mere passion. Debat-Ponsan depicts an oval composition with four figures in a ferry boat. Cupid leans against the far right of the boat. He

he is saddened by what's in front of him. In front of Cupid lies a lifeless young woman, who I believe represents Love since she's the only one dead. She holds her hand in her own as her hair and clothing fall from the boat into the water.

Behind the young woman, a young man, in anguish, desperately grabs at and pleads with the ferryman to return Love to him. The ferryman is unmoved by his pleading and fulfills his duty, which is to ferry the boat to its destination.

The ferryman is a representation of Time—a representation that is sometimes

Either way, the depiction is a clear one: Love dies.

Toward an Ideal Love

A specific type of love dying is referenced here: It is a love of passion that dies. The presence of Cupid (or Eros) alludes to the type of love addressed.

In Greek mythology, Cupid began as a primal, attractive force that was influential in covers his face with his right forearm as if creating the cosmos. Later, however, Cupid "Love Dies in Time," 1878, by Édouard Bernard Debat-Ponsan. Oil on canvas, 45 inches by 57.5 inches. Minneapolis Institute of Art.

What would it mean for us today to leave behind the woes of passionate love?

devolved into a lesser god who was commanded and manipulated by the gods and goddesses to alter the fate of both heaven and earth by making both the gods and humans uncontrollably and passionately infatuated with someone or something.

Here, the young man expresses his passion for the lifeless young woman-that is, for Love itself. He wants the passion that Cupid's love represents to continue, but it has died.

The depiction of the young man here is interesting to me. He does not look at the lifeless woman at all. He doesn't even seem aware of her; she is left holding her own hand. He is more concerned with the ferryman. The young man tries to stop the hand of the ferryman; it looks as if they're almost holding hands. His other hand is grabbing the ferryman's arm.

I think this is interesting because his passion is more concerned about the continued experience of pleasurable emotion than with the well-being of the woman toward whom his passion is directed.

And this is what our term "love" has devolved to mean. For instance, two who engage in a passionate love affair are often uninterested in the well-being of the other person—no matter how much they try to convince themselves that they are—but are instead interested in the pleasurable emotion that they believe the other person is providing for them, a pleasurable emotion that, if absent, would mean the end of the love affair.

In other words, what is often called "love" is a self-centered, self-serving desire for continued passion; it is to use another human being as a means, an object, to an end in satisfying our own pleasure.

I believe the same thing is happening here with the young man. He is not interested in the person who provides the intense and pleasurable emotion and passion, but just that the pleasure continues.

And this is why the young man pleads with the ferryman. The ferryman represents the end of the passion. It's inconsequential whether the ferryman is a representation of Time or Charon since both represent the end, the death of Love.

Passionate love, being emotional and ephemeral, is unable to stand the test of time and will always die. It's simply its nature as an emotion to do so. We can't maintain emotional states forever, and when we try, we cause ourselves the same type of anguish that the young man causes himself. What would it mean for us today to leave behind the woes of passionate love and contemplate again Ideal Love that can stand the test of time, that doesn't die with waning passion? How might we stimulate a broader, cultural development in these matters that, at one point or another, affect us all?

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart."

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

THEATER REVIEW A One-Man Take on the Dickens Classic 'A Christmas Carol'

JUDD HOLLANDER

There's a reason that Charles Dickens's novella "A Christmas Carol" has never been out of print since it first appeared in 1843. Elements of holiday magic, the supernatural, and social commentary all combine to tell the story of the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge—quite possibly the most miserable man in all of London. Until, on the evening of December 24, he is visited by the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley, as well as the spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come. These otherworldly beings force Scrooge to examine the way he has lived his life; they also offer him a chance of redemption. If only he can be convinced to change his ways.

The tale has been adapted for an ever-growing host of mediums, with each new presentation offering its own take on the material. Usually these retain the story's core essence—something evident in a production currently streaming through the end of the 2020 holiday season.

"Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol" was filmed on Oct. 28 of this year on the stage of New York City's United Palace and stars Jefferson Mays in what is basically a oneperson show.

The actor gives a tour-de-force performance as he assumes over 50 different characters, including Mr. Scrooge, his clerk, nephew, long-lost love, various spectral visitors, and an "indignant potato" at a Christmas dinner. Each characterization (and accompanying vocal inflection) fits perfectly into the story's narrative.

Most important of all, however, is the passion that Mays imbues as the tale's narrator. His words are filled with energy and emotion, causing the viewer to be swept up in the story almost from the moment it starts.

Especially fascinating is the sense of wonder that Scrooge feels when he first finds himself journeying into the past. His descriptions of the event are punctuated by appearances of those who attended. A scene where Scrooge happily observes a Christmas party from his youth is particularly effective.



Jefferson Mays as one of 50 or so characters in the streaming of "Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol."

'Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol'

Tickets AChristmasCarolLive.com **Running Time**

1 hour, 31 minutes Closes

Streaming through Jan. 3, 2021

Though as the story progresses, his initial delight at seeing long-faded memories come to life is tempered with the bitter realization of how much he has lost.

It also delivers more than a few unexpected moments of surprise, as when Scrooge suddenly spies Marley's face peering at him from a door knocker. Another riveting sequence occurs during an atmospheric confrontation in a graveyard, where Scrooge comes faceto-face with his final fate.

A scene where the family of Scrooge's clerk Bob Cratchit prepares for a Christmas dinner drags a bit in the beginning, but it quickly becomes one of the most poignant scenes of all. As they make the most of their meager meal, the Cratchits make a valiant effort to forget their desperate straits, financial or otherwise. Each puts on a brave face as they talk about the love they have for one another, while giving thanks for what they do have.

The adaptation by Mays, Susan Lyons, and the show's director Michael Arden emphasizes the story's supernatural aspects. And the excellent technicalworkwhenitcomestolight, shadow, and sound helps to provide

a sensory feast for the audience. Seamlessly blending the mediums of theater and film, this "Christmas Carol" is a deeply enjoyable and profoundly moving holiday treat. The show originally had its world premiere at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles in 2018.

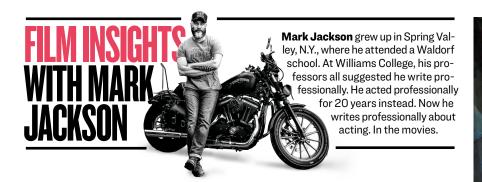
(As a side note, keep watching until the very end of the closing credits.)

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle.



What Sandra **Bullock does is** show us the toll that all this betrayal of the truth can have on an individual.

(Left) Spinning a political campaign is crushing to the soul. Sandra Bullock as Jane and Anthony Mackie as Ben in the satirical comedy "Our Brand Is Crisis." (Below) (L-R) Buckley (Scoot McNairy), Ben (Anthony Mackie). Nell (Ann Dowd), Jane (Sandra Bullock), and LeBlanc (Zoe Kazan) work as a team



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE How Much Political Spin Is Too Much Political Spin?

MARK JACKSON

"Our Brand Is Crisis" is an interesting movie to rewatch in this political-crisis time of President Trump versus "President-elect" Biden, as the mainstream media is currently spinning Biden. (The Epoch Times chooses to think of Biden more as "Possible-president-elect" Biden.)

It's a good reminder of the behind-thescenes chess matches of professional political handlers, spin doctors, and puppet masters. Campaigns are showbiz, Oz the Great and Terrible, hair and makeup.

Campaigns need to have a "brand" (like "MAGA"), and marketing experts abound. But political spin goes back to ancient Rome: 64 B.C., to be exact. The following is from a letter written to Marcus Tullius Cicero by his younger brother Quintus. Quintus outlined campaign strategies that are still used to this day.

- 1. Flatter voters shamelessly. Quintus warns his brother: "You can be rather stiff at times. You desperately need to learn the art of flattery—a disgraceful thing in normal life but essential when you are running for office." A candidate must make voters believe that he thinks they're important. Shake their hands, look them in the eye, listen to their problems.
- 2. Give people hope. Even the most cynical voter wants to believe in someone: "The



(Left) Jane (Sandra Bullock) and Pat Candy (Billy Bob Thornton) in "Our Brand Is Crisis." (Below) Bolivian politician Castillo (Joaquim

de Almeida) is playing

the crowd.

'Our Brand Is Crisis'

David Gordon Green

Sandra Bullock, Billy Bob

Joaquim de Almeida, Ann

Dowd, Scoot McNairy,

Thornton, Anthony Mackie,

Director

Starring

Rated

Running Time

Release Date

Oct. 30, 2015

1 hour. 47 minutes

* * * * *



most important part of your campaign is to bring hope to people and a feeling of goodwill toward you." Voters who are persuaded that you can make their world better will be your most devoted followers-at least until after the election, when you will inevitably let them down.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC./RATPAC-DUNE ENTERTAINMENT LL

True Story

Based on a 2005 documentary by Rachel Boynton, Bullock plays "Calamity" Jane Bodine, a clean and sober, six-years-making-pottery-in-her-mountain-shack, former campaign strategist, who comes out of retirement for a high-noon showdown with her erstwhile ultra-unctuous nemesis Pat Candy (Billy Bob Thornton). But not in the United States. No. They have, in the immortal words of Mike Tyson—"faded into Bolivian." The Bolivian presidential election, that is.

Down Bolivia way, one Castillo (Joaquim de Almeida) has fallen far behind frontrunner candidate Rivera (Louis Arcella), so Castillo's bought himself some hotshot American spin docs.

"Crisis" features a solid Sandra Bullock performance, utilizing her clown-level comedic talent as well as her dramatic gravitas, and while the goings-on are soul-damage-level cynical, she anchors the movie in the idea that ultimately human beings have a true-north of hope and kindness.

In addition to "Calamity" Jane, the rest of the consulting group consists of Washington-connected Nell (Ann Dowd); former "Free Tibet" do-gooder spin-doc Ben (Anthony Mackie); director of campaign commercials Rich Buckley (Scoot Mc-Nairy); and lastly, whiz kid LeBlanc (Zoe Kazan), whom Jane brings on to dig into the oppositions' backgrounds like a class valedictorian, fresh-faced tapeworm.

Rolling Up Sleeves

Jane's wiped out by jet lag and in need of an oxygen tank to deal with the elevation of La Paz, Bolivia, but she eventually reenergizes for a little scenery chewing. She's nicknamed "Calamity," after all.

Billy Bob's character throws the first punch by having someone publicly egg Castillo, causing a punch-down ruckus, which Jane spins into Castillo being a no-nonsense, manly-man fighter for the people.

And what does a manly fighter need? A cause to fight! Therefore, Bolivia must be in ... some kind of crisis? We're never sure which crisis that might be, and neither, probably, are the good people of Bolivia. But it gives this "fighter" (read: short-tempered, self-centered, lying, predatory politician) Castillo, something to, you know, fight for the people for.

Will they succeed in spinning Castillo to victory? Will Jane's manic-depressiveness derail her, especially when Thornton's Pat Candy reminds her of the near-fatal consequences that her previously all-or-none level of commitment to winning had on her, which was why she gave up the political life, moved to mountain seclusion, and, careerwise, faded into Bolivian, er, oblivion?

All in All The movie is enjoyably fast-paced but never quite fever-pitch, edge-of-your-seat engaging. The cinematography captures a lot of white, as in the lighting of places of high elevation, which adds a certain coldness to the proceedings.

All performances are satisfactory, although given the subject matter, it's hard to care for any of the characters, with the exception of Bullock and the character of Eddie (Reynaldo Pacheco), a star-struck young teen overcome with idealism and awe for candidate Castillo, whose trust and fealty is dashed in a truly heartbreaking manner.

Turning Over the Rock

"Crisis" is similar to 2015's "Sicario" in that it offers a chance to look at the dirty tricks, morally gray areas, and the rationalizing of how ethically ambiguous means might appear to justify the end, delivering a "greater good." But that is not what they actually deliver.

Good governing in politics always contains an inhibiting factor of corruption; elections can be bought, and as we've now extensively experienced in the current American election-voting machines can be tampered with. And those willing to say anything to get elected, like, for example, "president-elect," once in office can betray the electorate.

What "Crisis" does and, more importantly, what Sandra Bullock does is show us the toll that all this betraval of the truth can have on an individual. And even better, through her character arc, it reveals the evolving, up out of the pit of cynicism, that her sobriety and mountain retreat ultimately bring to bear.

Bullock gets to show her full range. Her brand is still funny (if somewhat muted here); it's why we always like her, still, here, at the "advanced" age of 51, when Hollywood becomes a place where older actresses go to die. Bullock's exceptionally likeable. You never don't like Sandra Bullock.

Spin Versus Color Revolution

In a recent Epoch Times article by a former Special Forces officer, he warned: "What I see happening is a Marxist insurgency that's using a color revolution to affect regime change."

That's, of course, a whole different ball of wax; that's "spin" on steroids. He goes on to say:

"What you're getting from me, this is supported in all older unconventional warfare doctrines," the officer said. "You could go to our manuals and pull from them the information I'm telling you. This isn't from someone who's a rabid Trump supporter. This is what's happening."

Watch "Our Brand Is Crisis," and let us remind ourselves that if the above scenario is truly happening, then America's brand is truly in crisis, with the distinct possibility of America's former greatness fading into Bolivian.

However, all across this great nation, people who value the American Constitution are focusing on hope, and prayers float skyward like sparks of a great bonfire. Kind of like former President Bush Sr.'s "Thousand points of light." But in the millions.

ALL IMAGES IN PUBLIC DOMAIN

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Remembering the Sacred at Christmas: 'The Adoration of the Magi'

ERIC BESS

t's easy to forget the purpose of Christmas with the hustle and bustle that comes with holiday shopping. This holiday season, I wish to use Jan Gossaert's L painting "The Adoration of the Magi" to remind us why Christmas is so special.

The Birth of Jesus

"The Adoration of the Magi," also known as "The Adoration of the Kings," depicts the biblical story presented in Matthew 2 in which three wise men, guided by a star, travel from the East to see the newly born Jesus Christ.

On their way, the three wise men ask where they can find the newborn who was prophesied to be king, for they journey to give gifts to and worship the young one.

King Herod hears that the wise men are searching for Jesus, and he is troubled. He believes that his power is threatened and gathers all of his chief priests and scribes together to ask them where Jesus will be born. They tell him that it was prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

After hearing this, Herod sends the three wise men into Bethlehem and orders them to search for the newborn under the false premise that he will worship him also. The three wise men take Herod's order and depart.

As they leave Herod, the wise men are led by the star again, and they all rejoice. The star leads them to the place that holds Jesus. They see Mary and Jesus and fall down to worship them, and they give gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

After celebrating the birth of Jesus, the three wise men sleep and have a dream that warns them to not return to Herod. Upon awakening, they take another route home. Mary's husband, Joseph, is also warned

in a dream to take the newborn Jesus and flee into Egypt until Herod dies. Herod becomes angry when he realizes

that the wise men aren't returning. He still doesn't know the prophesied king's location. So Herod decides to have all of the little boys in Bethlehem murdered, and he causes great pain until his death.

Upon Herod's death, and upon the advice of an angel and the warning of God, into this composition. He successfully tells Joseph and his family travel to Nazareth an unfolding story with a still image. and dwell there

'The Adoration of the Magi'

Gossaert's "The Adoration of the Magi" is a complex painting with plenty of symbolism. Mary and Jesus are the focal point and are located in the center of the lower half of the composition. Mary sits in the middle of what appears to be the ruins of a once great place, and far in the distance appears a

great town in which sheep are shepherded. Mary is wearing a blue robe and holds the baby Jesus on her lap. To the right of Mary and Jesus is one of the three wise men, Caspar, who is offering a gift of gold coins in a golden goblet to Jesus. Jesus looks at Caspar and takes one of the coins in his left hand. Caspar has taken off his hat out of respect. The lid to the goblet is next to his hat and is inscribed with Caspar's name [L]E ROII IASPAR in ornate, gold lettering at the base

of the lid near the rim. The second wise man, Melchior, is standing behind Caspar with his attendants. Melchior is waiting to present his gift of frankincense, kept in the elaborate golden vessel he holds in his hand.

The third wise man, Balthasar, is on the left side of Mary and Jesus. Balthasar is also surrounded by his attendants. His hat is inscribed with both his name, BALTAZAR, and the artist's name, GOSSAERT. He carries a golden vessel containing the gift of myrrh, which he waits to present to Jesus.

The third wise man, Balthasar, is on the left side of Mary and Jesus. Balthasar, like Melchior, is also surrounded by his attendants. Balthasar's crown is inscribed with both his name, BALTAZAR, and the artist's name, GOSSAERT. The Balthasar's name is written in ornate, gold lettering with a red background at the very top of his crown. GOSSAERT is also in ornate, gold lettering with a red background on the fabric hanging from Balthasar's crown. This king carries a golden vessel containing the gift of myrrh that he waits to present to Jesus. Balthasar also has a fringed stole that is inscribed with the opening words of a

prayer to Mary: "Salve regina misericordiae" [Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy]. Joseph is shown dressed in a red robe, standing in the background between Mary



and Balthasar. Joseph looks up at the nine angels floating above. The nine angels may represent the nine orders of angels.

All of the angels but one have their hands clasped, as if they are praying to honor the sacred event. The angel who does not hold its hands in prayer instead holds a scroll that reads "Gloria in excelsis deo" [Glory to God in the Highest].

Off in the distance in the upper center of the composition are a bright star and a dove. The star may potentially represent God or the star that guided the wise men to Jesus. The dove typically represents the Holy Ghost.

Remembering a Sacred Christmas

Gossaert does a great job of packing a lot

Gossaert depicts Mary and Jesus sitting in the middle of ruins, with a great town in the background. Does the ruinous city represent the moral law of the Old Testament—the law that Jesus, through his heart, mind, and actions, is to fulfill? Is this why there are sheep being shepherded in the background to the beautiful city? If so, does the beautiful city represent heaven? Or are the shepherds leaving the city so they also can witness the sacred event?

The three wise men bring their gifts to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The gold is for tribute, the frankincense represents sacrifice, and the myrrh is for burying the dead. These represent Jesus as king, God, and man.

Joseph looks to the heavens as if he's receiving the message from the angels to take Jesus from this place in order to avoid the dangers of King Herod.

What's most significant, however, is how both heaven and earth have come to witness the sacred event. People are coming from all over the world to see the divine manifest itself on earth and to pay the appropriate respect.

Even all of heaven has come to witness: the nine angels—which, if they do represent the nine orders of angels, would include all of God's help in heaven; the dove as the Holy Ghost; and the star, which may represent God. Everything has stopped to witness the sacrality of this event.

This holiday season, fraught as the year has been, can still offer us human comforts: for some, the exchanging of gifts, the sharing of food and traditions, and the gathering with loved ones or at least touching base with them. But maybe it also offers us a chance to appreciate the divine here on earth.

Maybe we can recapture the deeper meaning of Christmas beyond buying things that we can't take with us upon death. By simply stopping and taking a moment in our hearts and minds, we can pay homage to the sacred and remember that the divine manifests in our midst on earth-sometimes when and where we do not expect it. With this recognition, maybe our minds will quiet, our expectations of others will diminish, and our hearts will be full of kindness and joy.









Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart."

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

King Balthasar wearing his inscribed crown, in a detail of "Adoration of the Magi."

King Melchior with his

attendants, behind Cas-

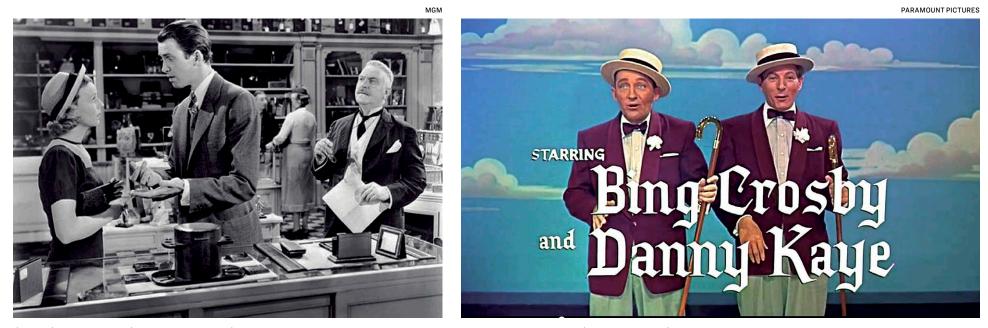
bar, in a detail of "Adora-

tion of the Magi."

King Caspar's red hat and the goblet lid inscribed with his name, in a detail of "Adoration of the Magi."

A fringed stole embroidered with a prayer, in a detail of "Adoration of the Magi."

Mary and Jesus are the focal point and are located in the center of the lower half of the composition.



(Above) Klara Novak (Margaret Sullavan) asks for a job at Matuschek and Co., but salesman Alfred Kralik (James Stewart) tells her that they aren't hiring, while Mr. Matuschek (Frank Morgan) eavesdrops, in "The Shop Around the Corner." (Above right) A moment in the trailer of the 1954 hit "White Christmas.'

FILM

3 Classic Christmas Films: A Musical, a Romance, and a Christmas Surprise

TIFFANY BRANNAN

The holiday season is the most sentimental time of the year. Yuletide customs, songs, and decorations that remain popular today originated decades or centuries ago. Perhaps that's why Christmastime seems like the perfect season for discovering old movies. While many holiday traditions have been changed or canceled this year, we can recapture those feelings with holiday movies from the Golden Era of Hollywood: musicals introducing standard Christmas songs, dramas bringing tears amid festive settings, and comedies inspiring laughter even while warming hearts. There also are those that don't seem like Christmas films but surprise viewers with holiday scenes.

For your holiday viewing this year, let us recommend three Christmas classics: a musical, a romance, and a Christmas surprise.

A Musical: 'White Christmas'

One of the greatest Christmas musicals is "White Christmas" (1954). Starring Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Vera-Ellen, and Rosemary Clooney, this Technicolor musical is two hours of impressive singing and dancing to Irving Berlin classics. This film is a loose remake of "Holiday Inn" (1942), Berlin's musical holiday celebration starring Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire, which introduced the hit song "White Christmas." Although Astaire was originally slated to be reteamed with Crosby for the 1954 film, his role was eventually rewritten for comic Danny Kaye.

"White Christmas" is almost exclusively a Christmas film, beginning and many years later ending on Christmas Eve with a rendition of the title song. During World War II, Capt. Bob Wallace (Crosby) and Pvt. Phil Davis (Kaye) give a Christmas show for their division, finishing with a farewell song for their retiring general. Afterward, Phil saves Bob from being crushed by a falling wall. Out of gratitude, Bob, a Broadway star, agrees to perform after the war a duet that Phil wrote. They become a highly successful song and dance duo, and eventually they become powerful show producers.

Ten years later, Phil schemes to get Bob married, so Phil can enjoy some leisure time. When they meet a sister act with beautiful and talented siblings (Ellen and Clooney), Phil decides to fix Bob up with older sister Betty (Clooney). He convinces Bob to visit the Vermont inn where the sisters are booked over the holidays. The producers are shocked to discover that the ski lodge is owned by their former general, whose business is failing. They decide to perform their show at the lodge to draw customers in order to help out the general. Meanwhile, each man feels himself falling for a different sister.

When Bing Crosby first sang "White Christmas," it became an instant holiday hit. During World War II, the lyrics carried deeper meaning than wishing for winter weather. This song set to music servicemen's longing to be home for the holidays. That wistful concept inspired the 1954 film, which begins with Bing Crosby singing it for a division of homesick soldiers. Although the war had been over for years, the feelings were still palpable. This sentiment carries throughout the rest of the film to create a perfect holiday celebration.

The Vermont setting is like a postcard. The musical numbers are full of warmth

A comic poster for the 1949 romance "Holiday Affair.'



and sentiment, and the costumes are as vibrant as Christmas ornaments. The messages of generosity, kindness, selfless giving, and honoring our elders and veterans are full of the Christmas spirit.

A Romance: 'Holiday Affair' A wonderful but forgotten Christmas romance is "Holiday Affair" Robert Mitchum, this postwar story is both funny and heart- proving that Matuschek is right. warming. It takes place during the weeks leading up to Christmas, shows a charming family on Christmas Day, and ends on New Year's Eve. Both a romance and a family film, it

portrays a woman's love triangle with two men as well as her tender relationship with her son. It shows the importance of generosity, love, and believing in dreams coming true.

Young widow Connie Ennis (Leigh) is a comparison shopper in New York City. After she buys an expensive toy train for her job, her 6-year-old son, Timmy (Gordon Gebert), is devastated to learn it isn't for him. When she returns the train the next day, salesman Steve Mason (Mitchum) infers that she is a comparison shopper, who buys items only to examine them for her store and then return them the next day. After learning that she is a war widow, Steve doesn't report her to his boss, which gets him fired.

Feeling guilty, Connie agrees to lunch with Steve in Central Park, where they exchange ideas and become friends. He then helps her shop for the rest of the day. After they get separated in a crowd, Steve visits her apartment that evening, where he surprises her fiancé, lawyer Carl Davis (Wendell Corey). Timmy immediately likes Steve, but Carl does not. After Carl leaves, Steve tells Connie that she can never find true happiness until she accepts her husband's death. As coincidences keep bringing them together, Connie struggles to choose between the safe, secure Carl

and the impetuous, passionate Steve. Set in New York City in the late 1940s, this heartwarming movie captures the magic of Christmas in a big city. The department stores decorated with festive cheer, the snowy city, and the bustling sidewalks make us long for the normal holiday rush. The movie shows the importance of holding on to your dreams and of believing in the wonder of surprises and the magic of Christmas.

It also inspires with examples of selfless giving, generosity, and openly welcoming others into one's home. If you give as

freely as Steve does, you may, like him, get a wonderful surprise in return.

A Christmas Surprise:

'The Shop Around the Corner' Some movies take place primarily around the holidays, so we immediately know they are Christmas films. Others begin long before December and then surprise us by later including Christmas scenes. One such film is "The Shop Around the Corner" (1940). This Ernst Lubitsch romantic comedy, starring James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan, depicts the lives and loves of the employees at Matuschek and Co., a leather goods store in Budapest, Hungary.

The latter part of the film takes place in the weeks leading up to Christmas, retail's busiest time, and the story ends on a beautifully snowy Christmas Eve. The premise may sound familiar, since the story was remade in 1949 as the musical "In the Good Old Summertime" and again as "You've Got Mail" in 1998.

Klara Novak (Sullavan) looks for a job at Matuschek and Co. Head salesman Alfred Kralik (Stewart) tells her that they aren't hiring, and the bombastic owner, Mr. Matuschek (Frank Morgan), reluctantly agrees with him. Matuschek and Kralik have just disagreed about purchasing a large order of musical cigarette boxes, which Kralik believes won't sell. Klara earns a position when, seizing the (1949). Starring Janet Leigh and opportunity to prove herself, she manages to sell one of the boxes, seem

As Klara and Alfred become sworn enemies at the store, both live for the letters they receive from their anonymous pen pals. Little do the feuding employees know that each is the other's "Dear Friend," who is quickly becoming a romantic interest.

Meanwhile, in the time leading up to Christmas, Mr. Matuschek becomes increasingly short-tempered and suspicious of Kralik, and something is obviously troubling him.

This film shows the retail perspective during the holidays. From decorating store windows to busily waiting on customers and trying to sell out the merchandise, the employees of Matuschek and Co. face the same struggles and joys that anyone who has worked in retail during the holidays has experienced. Even more wonderful than the Christmas bonus all the workers receive is the satisfaction that they have brought joy and pride to a generous, kind employer. As snowflakes fill the air and snow covers the ground in Budapest, romance and kindness warm the hearts of everyone at Matuschek and Co.

Christmas Present

Even if you are not normally a classic film fan, these movies set in Christmas Past have nostalgic charm that endures in Christmas Present. You don't have to celebrate Christmas's religious aspect to appreciate each film's valuable lessons about generosity, selflessness, and the spirit of giving. No matter where or how you celebrate this year, we guarantee that your holidays will be "merry and bright" if you include these movies—even if your Christmas isn't white.

Tiffany Brannan is a 19-year-old opera singer, Hollywood historian, travel writer, film blogger, vintage fashion expert, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.



PUBLIC DOMAI

While many holiday traditions have been changed or canceled this year, we can recapture those feelings with holiday movies from the Golden Era of Hollywood.



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

A Decently Good-Natured Modern Spin on Christmas

IAN KANE

nlike the films of the 1940s and '50s, most of the more modern Hollywood Christmas movies tend to have a pervading sense of cynicism and are sometimes even mean-spirited, the opposite of what the venerated holiday is all about. However, a few recent attempts convey the festive nature of Christmas, with director Jon Favreau's (of Marvel film fame) 2003 "Elf" being one such effort.

The main protagonist is an oddball named Buddy the Elf (Will Ferrell), who just doesn't fit in with the other elves of the North Pole. For one thing, he's massively larger than the typical elf, and he also stinks at making toys.

Thirty years prior, Santa Claus (Edward Asner) was making his rounds in an orphanage. One of the orphans, Buddy, a baby at the time, who had been put up for adoption by his mother (his father wasn't even aware that he'd been born), clandestinely crawls into Santa's toy bag.

When Santa returns to the North Pole, Buddy emerges from his toy bag, and in all of his famous generosity—Santa decides to keep the child instead of returning him to the orphanage. One of the senior elves, Papa Elf (Bob Newhart), had always wanted a child and so seizes the opportunity to raise Buddy as his adopted son. Several amusing scenes ensue that show a quickly growing Buddy dwarfing his elven father.

Buddy grows up to be a good-natured, naïve young man who begins to feel alienated by the elves—thus spurring a natural curiosity as to why he is so different. He soon discovers that his peculiarities are attributed to the fact that he's, well, ... a human being. He also learns that his sole surviving parent is his father, a man named Walter Hobbs (James Caan).

Furthermore, Santa reveals to Buddy that Walter is on his "Naughty List," a sign that all is not well.



Big "elf" Buddy (Will Ferrell, L) and Santa (Ed Asner) in "Elf."

Although cowed by all of these sudden revelations and somewhat apprehensive, Buddy decides to both learn what he can about what it is to be human, and find out more about his father. Therefore, Buddy travels from the North Pole to the mean streets of New York City.

After arriving in the Big Apple, Buddy discovers that Walter already has a family—he's married and has a son.

The viewers are also acutely aware that Walter is pretty much a big jerk who doesn't want to have anything to do with Buddy, partly because Walter considers Buddy to be demented and partly because Walter's extremely cynical.

Buddy, ever the optimist, doubles down on his desire to break through his father's rigid shell and have some sort of relationship with him.

Being Christmastime, Buddy lands a job at a local department store where his North Pole skills turn out to be invaluable. Soon, a romantic subplot develops involving Buddy and a young saleswoman named Jovie (Zooey Deschanel).

However, the main thrust of the film continues to revolve around Buddy and Walter and their fragmented father-son relationship. Will (no pun intended) Buddy be able to change Walter for the better, or will the latter continue to be a grade-A butthead?

Can Christmas Survive 'Saturday Night Live'?

As a film that is dependent on Ferrell of "Saturday Night Live" ("SNL") fame, I was a little skeptical going into it—after all, most "SNL"-related movies are total flops. However, I was pleasantly surprised that there wasn't much of the bawdy, juvenile "humor" that comes with the other "SNL"-related films, including lots of potty-mouthed cursing and such.

In fact, Ferrell plays his role with goodnatured, festive zest that fits well with the season. The only glaringly missing element is that there is no mention of Christianity, let alone Jesus Christ, something that the older Christmas films didn't shy away from.

As a film, "Elf" is generally a good-natured and funny modern take on Christmas that should cheer people in these ... erm ... "interesting" times. For the most part, it deftly explores the themes of generosity versus selfishness and innocence versus cynicism.

Walter Hobbs (James Caan, L) is being driven nutty by the son (Will Ferrell) he never knew he had.

'Elf'

Director Jon Favreau

Starring Will Ferrell, James Caan, Bob Newhart

Running Time 1 hour, 37 minutes

Rated PG

Release Date Nov. 7, 2003 (USA)



Will Ferrell plays his role with goodnatured, festive zest.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To learn more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com



Original artworks, canvas wraps, art posters, and framed prints of Award-winning oil paintings now available for purchase at

InspiredOriginal.Org

