

THE EPOCH TIMES
ARTS &
CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



“Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii,”
1853–54, carved 1859, by Randolph
Rogers. Carrara marble; 54 inches by 25
1/4 inches by 37 inches. Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New York.

TAKING YOU THERE

Love Amid Catastrophe With ‘Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii’

WAYNE A. BARNES

Several years ago, I commissioned a fine artist to paint my girlfriend’s favorite photo of her two teenage daughters. They were at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, one with her arm extended, tossing a coin into a large water bowl.

When the painting was completed, I was surprised that the artist had replaced the bowl with a statue. He said the sculpture added depth and enhanced the picture.

I had to agree. But what was the piece? Research revealed that it was “Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii.”

After nearly three decades in the FBI, my investigations have taken me to many cities. I always visit their museums. I finally saw the statue of Nydia in the Art Institute of Chicago, but it was 800 miles from The Met!

Another investigation took me to Birmingham, Alabama. In their Museum of Art, to my surprise, there was another statue of Nydia.

How was this possible? Was she on loan? How could there be more than one, even more than two?

The Birth of Nydia

Nydia was sculpted in 1853–54 by American Randolph Rogers. The quality and emotions portrayed in the piece are as riveting as the best of the ancient Greeks and, in the view of some, as Michelangelo had conceived.

Continued on Page 4

The quality and emotions portrayed in the piece are as riveting as the best of the ancient Greeks.

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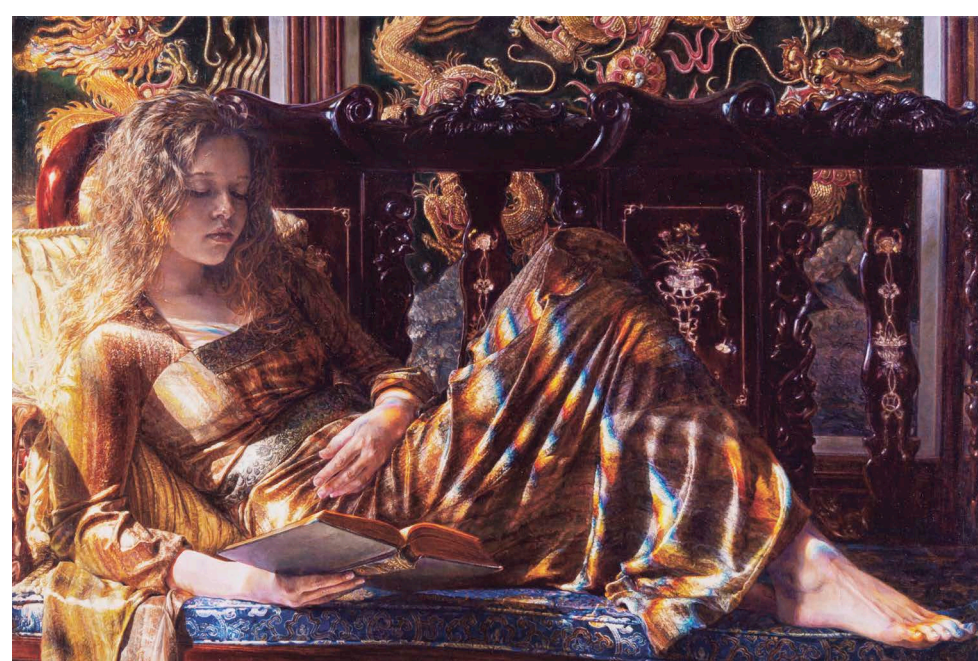
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LITERATURE

The Glad Game: An Old Guy Discovers 'Pollyanna'

JEFF MINICK

One of my best friends in high school was a teenage Shirley Temple. Just seeing this girl was to step into sunshine. A cheerleader, a budding actress and director, and a member of student government, she always carried a smile, listened to the woes of any number of her classmates, and looked on the bright side of life. She was one of the happiest people I've ever met.

Though we lost contact after graduation, I recently searched for her online and found a newspaper article describing her teaching career in the Highlands of Western North Carolina. She taught literature and drama to two generations of young people, and from her comments in the article and the praise of parents and former students, I knew she had never lost her optimism.

Like her, others have crossed my path over the years who possessed this joy and the ability, as the old song goes, to "keep on the sunny side of life." One of my sons always answers phone calls from me as if he were in the middle of a party. A teacher from my college days who became a friend never seemed daunted by any difficulty.

I'm not sure quite where I fit on this optimism-pessimism spectrum, but would guess that I'm more of a glass-half-full guy. I don't light up a room when I enter it, and like lots of people, I have my down days, but overall I try to maintain an upbeat attitude.

Which brings us to Pollyanna Whittier.

The Story
Published in 1913, Eleanor Porter's novel "Pollyanna" tells the story of an 11-year-old orphan who, after her father dies, travels to Beldingsville, Vermont, to live with her Aunt Polly, her deceased mother's sister. Aunt Polly accepts the young girl into her home not out of love, but from a sense of duty. Despite the grandeur of her house, she assigns Pollyanna to a tiny attic bedroom, demands correct behavior of her at all times, and sets her young charge a rigorous schedule.

But along with her luggage, Pollyanna has brought a defense against her aunt's rigidity, "The Glad Game." Taught to her by her father, a minister, she is an enthusiastic practitioner of this game in which the object is to find some sort of happiness and gratitude no matter how dire or sad the situation.

As she encounters various people in the town—a crusty, old bachelor; an invalid; Aunt Polly's servant Nancy—she teaches them the game as well, and soon they turn their lives around, becoming more appreciative of their blessings and able to pass that attitude on to others. Even Aunt Polly eventually has a change of heart regarding her niece's philosophy.

Pollyanna faces her greatest test when she is struck by a car and loses the use of her legs. She falls into a

depression in which she can find no gladness, but when the people she has encouraged visit her and she discovers how much she has helped others, she decides she can play "The Glad Game" with or without the ability to walk. (Spoiler alert: Aunt Polly marries her old flame, a doctor, and Pollyanna walks again.)

So how did it happen, some of you may be wondering, that an old man like me read "Pollyanna" for the first time?

In Need of Something Brighter and Lighter

In early March, I visited the public library and carried home Rachel Hollis's self-help book "Didn't See That Coming" to review for the Smoky Mountain News. At one point, Hollis recounted a conversation with a friend, Greg, in which she apologized for sounding "a bit like Pollyanna." Greg paused and asked whether she'd ever read "Pollyanna." When Hollis answered in the negative, her friend explained that his wife had read the novel to their young children and that he had listened to the story.

He then said, "Pollyanna turns a negative into a positive at least a hundred times in that book. ... That's not something to be ashamed of, that's something to be admired. A person who can turn a negative into a positive can never be defeated. It's a super-power."

At the same time I read this account, I was trudging through Dostoevsky's "Devils" and spending my usual hours online every day searching the news for ideas that might inspire good articles. This bleak goulash wasn't exactly the healthiest of dishes. When I read Hollis's account of her conversation, I thought "Why not?" and asked my editor if I might submit a piece on this children's classic.

With her stamp of approval, I found the unabridged "Pollyanna" at bartleby.com and set off on my adventure.

A Cultural Icon

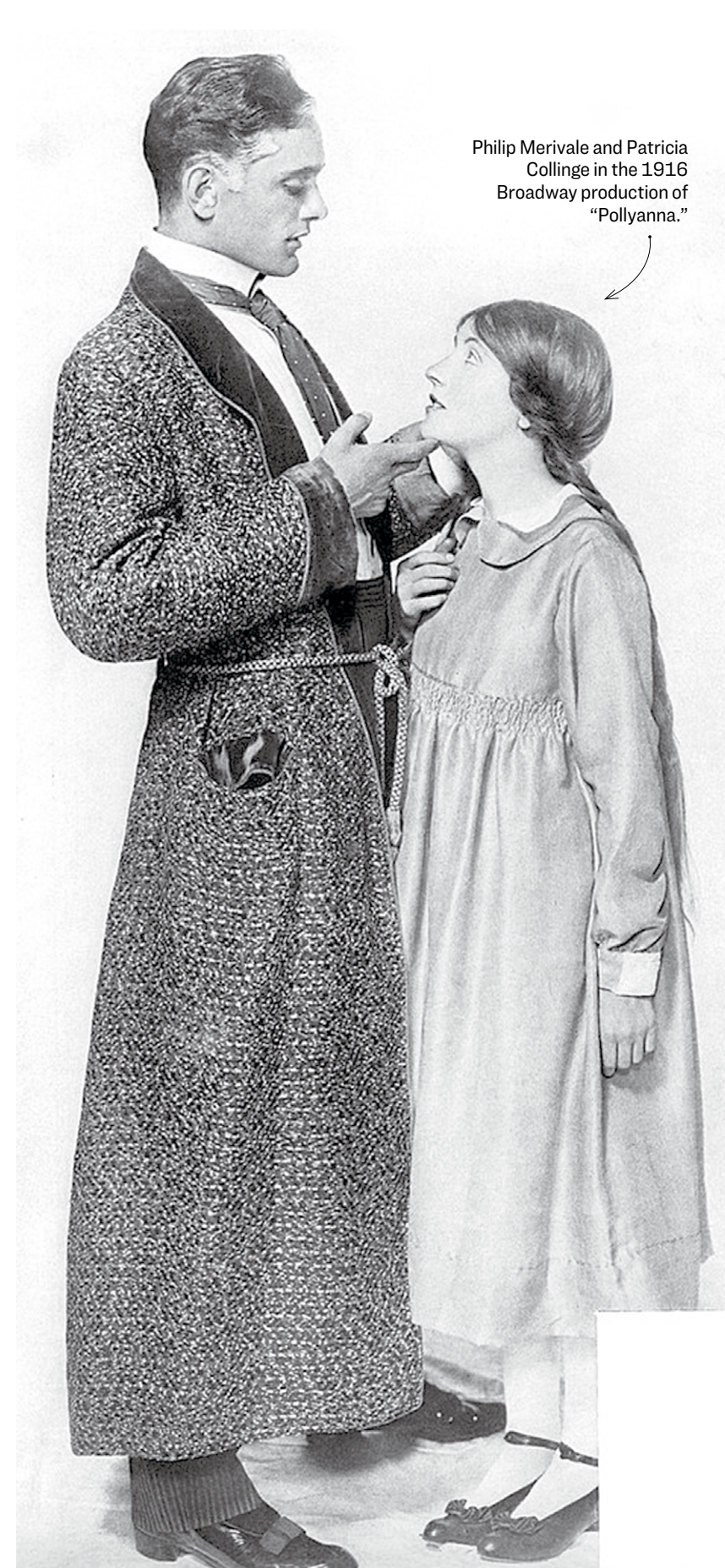
During my reading, I investigated the impact of "Pollyanna" on our culture. Many sequels to this novel, only a few of them penned by Porter, fed the public's appetite for this girl and her "Glad Game."

Several movies have brought the story to the big screen, including Mary Pickford in a 1920 silent film, Hayley Mills in the Disney version I saw as a kid, and the 2003 adaptation recommended by my editor, which I watched and thoroughly enjoyed. Only three years after the book's publication, Helen Hayes starred in a Broadway production based on "Pollyanna."

Though Porter's story clearly had a major impact on American culture, that word "Pollyanna" has served in my own lifetime mostly as a pejorative directed at someone who is foolishly optimistic. Call someone a "Pollyanna," and you may as well call him a fool. These negative connotations have even infiltrated the field of



Hayley Mills (center L) as Pollyanna, surrounded by Beldingsville townsfolk who love her.



Philip Merivale and Patricia Collinge in the 1916 Broadway production of "Pollyanna."

PUBLIC DOMAIN

psychology. "Pollyanna syndrome" denotes "an excessively or blindly optimistic person," and the "Pollyanna principle" is "the tendency for people to remember pleasant items more accurately than unpleasant ones."

Most of us, I suspect, would agree that careless optimism can be dangerous. A man who packs for a camping trip but brings no slicker or waterproof tent may likely end up spending a long night shivering in cold rain.

Yet I wonder: Could we use a little more Pollyannaism in our daily lives?

Our Current Mood

Americans were once known around the world for their can-do spirit, their confidence in themselves, and their hope in the future. That attitude led to many accomplishments. In the 20th century alone, we defeated fascism abroad and polio at home, we won the Cold War, we built airplanes, automobiles, and roads on a scale never before seen in the world, and we sent men to the moon and invented computers and the internet. And that's only scratching the surface of a very long list of achievements.

Lately, however, a sour pessimism seems to have overshadowed that American spirit. Some of the articles I read online are full of doom and gloom, and some people in our culture and the political sphere are always wagging their fingers at us like Aunt Polly writ large, reprimanding us for past wrongs, warning us to toe the mark they've set, and predicting dire events in the future unless we change our ways.

Seeking the Good

Few of us have the power or the ability to influence national events, but we can take charge of our own lives and so influence those around us. Near the end of "Pollyanna," when Aunt Polly finally understands The Glad Game, she goes alone to her crippled niece, tells her of her many visitors, expresses her desire to play the game, and then says, "The whole town is playing the game, and the whole town is wonderfully happier—and all because of one little girl who taught the people a new game, and how to play it."

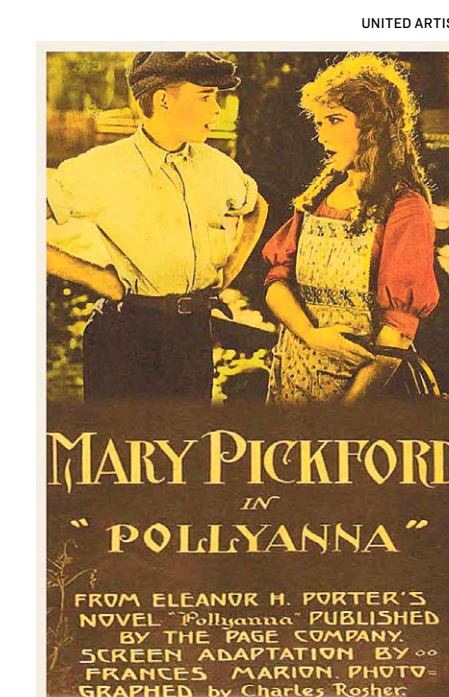
At one point, Eleanor Porter writes: "When you look for the bad, expecting it, you will get it. When you know you will find the good—you will get that."

We don't have to become Pollyanna or play The Glad Game as relentlessly as she does. I'm not sure that's advisable anyway. But we can look for the good in this fallen world and remember to feel gratitude even in the midst of our trials. By doing so, we may not make everyone around us "wonderfully happier," but with any luck we can help them become stronger, braver, and better people.

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 to follow his blog.



The book that made being glad popular.



Mary Pickford starred in the 1920 film "Pollyanna."



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Karl Bryullov's "The Last Day of Pompeii" was exhibited in Milan in 1833. It inspired Edward Bulwer-Lytton to write his 1834 novel "The Last Days of Pompeii," which, in turn, inspired Randolph Rogers to create the statue "Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii" in 1853–54.

TAKING YOU THERE

Love Amid Catastrophe With 'Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii'

Continued from Page 1

An important facet of the industrial revolution was the ability to mass produce. Eli Whitney, of cotton gin fame, created a musket with interchangeable parts and contracted to sell 10,000 of them to the young American government in 1798. Before, if a part broke, a whole new musket was needed. But not anymore.

Rogers was not dealing with a weapon of war. He stood in front of a good-sized chunk of marble, and there was only one way to make what he produced: the old-fashioned way, with a mallet and chisel.

Rogers was born in 1825 in New York. He enjoyed wood carving but was unable to find work as an engraver. While he was working as a clerk in a dry-goods store, his employer recognized his natural ability for sculpting and paid the young man's way to Italy. He studied in Florence and opened his own studio in Rome in 1851. He lived there the rest of his life, producing dozens of works for European and American commissions.

Had he remained in America, his stone of choice might have been New England granite. But living in Italy, his blocks came from the same mountain where Michelangelo had chosen his raw material to make "David," "Moses," and "La Pietà."

"Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii" in the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Nydia and Her Siblings

Rogers's "Nydia" is three feet tall, sitting on a raised two-foot base. There is great detail, with the lean of her body, a back toe barely touching the ground, the lavish folds of her tunic, the curls in her hair, and the distraught expression on her lovely face. She was so well-received that there would have been a market for more. Yet there was only one. Why should that have been so?

Anyone who has strolled the museums of the world would realize that Rogers did something previously unimaginable. He and his studio of assistants created 167 images of Nydia in two sizes, each seemingly matching the original piece perfectly. It was an enormous quantity of art, but not mass produced, for each one had to be carved from a block of marble, carefully and lovingly chipped away. We can never know how many hours and days it took to bring each new flower girl to life.

Rogers didn't particularly like working with marble, but he made the first one the model for all the rest. After sculpting just so many pieces, he left it to his studio assistants to carry on with the work. No record was found of their names, but how many exceptional artisans with such talent could there have been? It sounds like it means the earth and art lovers have the ability to travel to a local museum. Even the wealthy in the mid-19th century could have an "original" Nydia on their palatial estate.

Had this ever been done before—creating a large and intricate piece of art, a seemingly unique design, and then replicating it again, and again, and again?

Each of Frederic Remington's bronze statues was cast from a single clay model. Lithographs and silkscreens mass produced two-dimensional replicas. But would Leonardo da Vinci have painted a second "Mona Lisa"? The ancient Greeks created nearly identical statues, known as caryatids, ornate columns holding up tons of stone pediment on the Acropolis—but there were only six.

In today's age of 3D technology, layers of space-age plastic could create a full-sized knockoff of the blind flower girl. But it would be just that, more of a curio-shop purchase and not a truly magnificent image in marble. In the strictest capitalistic sense, Rogers was providing a unique supply for an obviously broad demand.

She Was Given Birth in a Book

"Nydia" was the most popular marble sculpture of the 1800s. She is based on a character in the 1834 novel "The Last Days of Pompeii," penned by British author Edward Bulwer-Lytton. His inspiration had come from a painting he saw in Milan in 1833, "The Last Day of Pompeii," by Karl Bryullov, showing the epic catastrophe of the Mt. Vesuvius eruption.

Had Bryullov not visited early excavations of Pompeii the year before, this sequence of events from the painting to the book, and then the creation of a blind flower girl in marble, would have remained a story relegated to the ashes of Pompeii. Rogers captured a crushing moment of anguish, which we now look back on as a wonderful yet devastating representation of one individual's plight when an entire city was lost through natural disaster.

The book was published nearly 1,800 years after the eruption, but the event was described at the time by Pliny the Younger. So there was accuracy to the backstory of



(Left) Anguish on Nydia's face that she might not be able to save Glaucus from the inferno.

(Right) Detail of a downed column's Corinthian capital by Nydia's foot, representing the destruction all around her.

life at the foot of Mt. Vesuvius, even if the tale was fictional.

Pompeii was a thriving metropolis of 20,000 people. It was the seaside showpiece of the Roman Empire, but volcanoes show no discretion for when and where they erupt.

In one of the greatest excavation projects ever initiated, hollow chambers were discovered in the volcanic rock. Holes were drilled into them and filled with plaster of paris, then left to set. When the pumice was chipped away, they revealed preserved, but disturbing, images of many individuals. One cast was of a dog. Now on display near the archeological dig, it will forever reveal how this four-legged creature suffered in agony when overcome by the deadly hot ash that blanketed the city.

Taking You There

Nydia would walk to the fields on the outskirts of the city where flowers grew. Many pick them for their color, but Nydia was drawn by their fragrance.

She played a three-string lyre on a busy street corner, singing a lovely song and selling colorful and sweet-smelling garlands from her basket. Passersby would give her money.

Glaucus was a handsome nobleman, said to be a bit of a first-century gadabout, who threw the best parties and was known for enjoying wine and dice. He learned that Nydia, a slave girl, was being abused by her owners and tried to save her. She had always admired Glaucus, his robust voice and assertive ways. Though not jealous of Ione, his betrothed, Nydia still fell in love with him, knowing it would be unrequited.

At noon on Aug. 24 in the year A.D. 79, the earth began to rumble and the ground shook. A glowing red appeared to the north, the mountain spouting fire and ash, sending a plume 10,000 feet into the sky. While it was traveling heavenward, people realized it was coming from a hellish place deep within the earth.

Lava moved down the five-mile hill, covering everything in its path. Above the flow were sulfuric fumes that strangled the breath of all living creatures.

Ash fell for many hours, not like a light winter's snow, but layer upon layer of weight and pressure. The red-hot flakes fluttered down, paralyzing its victims in the permanence of how they had fallen in their torment at the moment of death.

Blazing projectiles were impossible to avoid. Vulcan was pitching an unending supply of fiery fragments skyward, which arced to the land with no consideration for wealthy or poor, master or slave, all racing to escape the inferno.

The streets were filled with smoke and death. It's estimated that more than 12,000 would die in the next few hours. Walking wounded could not see their hands in front of their faces and stumbled through a suffocating gray-orange cloud.



Caryatids on the Acropolis, the ancient Greek temple in Athens.

Nydia's first thought was of Glaucus, and how she could save him. In moments, they were together, with his lover, Ione, close by.

Thousands of people were trapped as the earth spewed its liquid death. It was only Nydia, whose blindness for all her years, placed her at an unexpected advantage in the smoke-filled streets.

She told Glaucus to follow her, and he did, holding Ione's hand tightly behind him. Just ahead, Nydia dashed down the street, weaving through the sounds of people rushing and the injured screaming. She knew her way well through the darkness. The grief and the fear on her face, the anguish of the moment, and the dread that she might not succeed in saving Glaucus brought her to tears.

Down the streets they went, the wailing of so many nearby. Finally, they reached a place far enough away from the conflagration to be safe, but she knew Glaucus would never return the love of a slave girl. Later on, without peace, she drowned herself at sea.

The moment that Randolph Rogers chose to depict—this one scene from a lengthy book—brings us right there, with natural destruction at its worst. Yet it was through the eyes of a young, blind flower girl that all of this would be seen.

Wayne A. Barnes was an FBI agent for 29 years working counterintelligence. He had many undercover assignments, including as a member of the Black Panthers. His first spy stories were from debriefing Soviet KGB defectors. He now investigates privately in South Florida.



A commissioned painting that included the statue "Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii."

FINE ARTS

Just Divine: A Florentine Wedding and a Renaissance Ceramic

LORRAINE FERRIER

A few years ago, I flew to Florence, Italy, for a friend's wedding. Not only was I fortunate in seeing my dear friend marry in one of the city's oldest churches, but I experienced a whole host of hearty Italian wedding traditions, hospitality, and more.

You'll have to wait for an article on Italian wedding traditions. In this article, I want to share my surprise and delight at the sacred art in the church.

The plain facade of the Church of Santi Apostoli defies what's inside. Built in the 11th century, the church still maintains characteristics of the High Middle Ages (1000–1250), even though it was remodeled during the Renaissance.

Many believe that Michelangelo saved the church from being demolished when he suggested to the banker Bindo Altoviti that it be preserved rather than rebuilt.

Entering the church, I was first struck by the semicircular arches, typical of the Romanesque architecture of medieval Europe. Next, I noticed the golden altarpiece, but there wasn't much time to take in more.

I sat near the front of the church, on the end of a pew. While waiting for the bride's arrival, I noticed a glint of white behind a column to my left. Curious, I stretched my neck to peer around the column and saw a splendid polychrome, terracotta tabernacle, where communion vessels are traditionally stored.

I was captivated. A number of divine figures were depicted in white-glazed terracotta on a largely blue background, but I was too far away to understand the scene.



Eucharistic tabernacle, circa 1512, by Andrea della Robbia.

Sacred art and music is made to deepen our connection to God.

The ceramic work looked similar to that of the Italian Renaissance sculptor Luca della Robbia, but I'd only ever seen his art in books.

Della Robbia pioneered a tin glaze that gave terracotta a colorful shine. It was that shine that caught my attention, before I'd even seen the sculptural relief.

Art's Divine Purpose

Sacred art and music is made to deepen our connection to God. Even though I'm not Roman Catholic, on that day, I felt like I truly experienced the purpose of art in the setting of a sacred service. Through the wedding, I kept getting drawn to the

tabernacle, even more so when the Italian mezzo-soprano sang the most sublime rendition of "Ave Maria" that I'd ever heard.

As the wedding guests left the church, I lingered at the tabernacle. In the sculpture, against a blue starry sky, two angels (on the far left and right) draw open a pair of curtains, introducing us to the Trinity. Angels and cherubs are in abundance. At the top, God holds his right hand in a gesture of blessing. Directly below God, a dove represents the Holy Spirit. Farther down, on the tabernacle door, Christ can be seen ascending from his tomb. Below Christ, at the center-bottom of the tabernacle, two angels venerate a goblet of wine and a piece of bread: the elements of the Eucharist.

Everything in the ceramic has a sacred purpose, and worshipers, especially in the past, would have known that. Even the glorious, colorful garland over the arch is not just decorative; it is abundant with meaning. Lemons represent salvation, cucumbers and grapes represent the resurrection, and quinces and pine cones symbolize virtue and immortality, according to the Victoria and Albert Museum website.

I chatted briefly with the priest as he was locking up the church. The tabernacle wasn't created by Luca della Robbia but by his nephew and one-time apprentice Andrea della Robbia. I thought to myself, "More della Robbias to discover. How heavenly!"

To find out more about the Church of Santi Apostoli, visit SantiApostoli.com

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony: Do You Hear What I Hear?

KENNETH LAFAVE

On Jan. 28, 1936, Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich picked up a copy of the newspaper Pravda and found that he had been labeled anathema to the USSR.

Shostakovich's 1934 opera, "Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District," was "cacophonous" and "an insult to Soviet women," Pravda claimed. His ballet of the same year, "The Limpid Stream," was "infected with cynicism." If Comrade Shostakovich did not change his ways, the article concluded, "things could end badly."

Shostakovich had been handed a public threat at the direction of Joseph Stalin. His capital crime: "formalism." Of course, no one knew what constituted "formalism" anymore than anyone knew what made someone a "right-winger." All that was known for certain was that a formalist was an artist disliked by Stalin, just as a right-winger was anybody Stalin wanted dead.

Shostakovich Versus Stalin—or Not

What followed constitutes one of the greatest controversies in the history of Western music. Shostakovich either acquiesced to Stalin's demands, or he pulled off an artistic sleight of hand unparalleled in history.

The piece Shostakovich had originally planned as his next opus was a mammoth, complex sonic structure he called Symphony No. 4, a score that consciously turned away from socialist realism, the officially optimistic, quasi-heroic aesthetic of Stalin's USSR.

The music of socialist realism was expected to be squarely optimistic for the future of the State, eschewing "negative" elements from the bourgeois past. By contrast, Shostakovich's Symphony No. 4 was tumultuous, mercurial, and sardonic. After the Pravda article, Shostakovich thought it best to withdraw the work.

Rather than invite further attacks, he came up with a cunning way to deal with his demagogic critics. He would compose a symphony that had all the elements of socialist realism, thus avoiding the gulag. But such general terms as "optimism" and "heroism," mainstays of the socialist realist aesthetic, were open to interpretation. In a musical work lacking words or visuals, the identity of a hero was not a given, and "optimism" has many shades of meaning. Shostakovich would write a symphony seemingly aligned with socialist realism, but in actuality critical of it and of the Soviet Union itself. A tall order, but one within the capabilities of a young genius whose first symphony had put him on the musical map at age 19.

This, at least, was what Shostakovich accomplished according to many observers. But to mainstream Marxists, the work Shostakovich produced after his dressing-down from Pravda really was what it claimed to be on the official subtitle of the printed score: "A Soviet artist's response to just criticism."

Struggle and Tragedy

The work at controversy is Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47. Listen and decide for yourself. The first movement opens Moderato with menacing, dotted-rhythm gestures in the strings countered by a plaintive theme from the first violins. The stage is set for a great struggle, which culminates in an Allegro non troppo dominated by aggressive writing and, ultimately, a sense of defeat.

The second movement is a scherzo of unbridled physical exuberance. It is the only truly "heroic" music of the piece, and yet ... Are the scherzo's militaristic rhythms and brass salvos truly heroic, or are they merely the strident exterior of heroism, a brilliant but vapid show of force?

And then, the emotional core of the symphony: a Largo of such deeply felt tragedy



Dmitri Shostakovich in the audience of the Bach Festival in Leipzig on July 28, 1950.

Shostakovich either acquiesced to Stalin's demands, or he pulled off an artistic sleight of hand unparalleled in history.

that members of the audience at the premiere in Leningrad, on Nov. 21, 1937, wept in open defiance of the Soviet edict that condemned tragedy as counterrevolutionary.

In his book "The New Shostakovich," Ian McDonald writes: "The commonest reaction the Fifth seems to have called from contemporary Russian listeners was simple relief at hearing tragic emotion expressed during a time when genuine feeling was being systematically destroyed by the Terror." Shostakovich composed the movement in the weeks following the execution of one of his teachers.

Smile, or Else

The finale, averred by Shostakovich in official statements attributed to him to represent the triumph of the optimistic socialist State over the Largo's inexorable tragedy, was, ironically, precisely that. Only, consider: What has triumphed? The imposition of an impersonal ethos over the inner lives of individuals. Authentic feeling has been replaced by robotic "happiness."

As the Shostakovich of author Solomon Volkov's "Testimony," published after the composer's death, said of it: "The rejoicing is forced, created under threat. ... It's as if someone were beating you with a stick saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing.'"

The official Soviet culture machine heard what it wanted to hear and proclaimed the symphony a masterpiece of socialist realism. Strangely, we can agree. For anyone with ears to hear, Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 expresses life under Stalin with hair-raising accuracy.

Former music critic for the Arizona Republic and The Kansas City Star, Kenneth LaFave recently earned a doctorate in philosophy, art, and critical thought from the European Graduate School. He is the author of three books, including "Experiencing Film Music" (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).

John Keats: How His Poems of Death and Lost Youth Are Resonating During COVID-19

RICHARD MARGGRAF-TURLEY

In John Keats's poems, death crops up 100 times more than the future, a word that appears just once in the entirety of his work. This might seem appropriate on the 200th anniversary of the death of Keats, who was popularly viewed as the young Romantic poet "half in love with easeful death."

Death certainly touched Keats and his family. At the age of 14, he lost his mother to tuberculosis. In 1818, he nursed his younger brother Tom as he lay dying of the same disease.

After such experiences, when Ludolph, the hero of Keats's tragedy, "Otho the Great," imagines succumbing to "a bitter death, a suffocating death," Keats knew what he was writing about. And then, aged just 25, on Feb. 23, 1821, Keats himself died of tuberculosis in Rome.

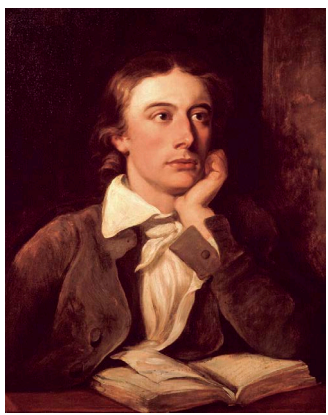
Life Sliding By

His preoccupation with death doesn't tell the whole story, however. In life, Keats was vivacious, funny, bawdy, pugnacious, poetically experimental, politically active, and above all forward-looking.

He was a young man in a hurry, eager to make a mark on the literary world, even if—as a trained doctor—he was all too conscious of the body's vulnerability to mortal shocks. These two very different energies coalesce in one of his best-loved poems, written in January 1818 when the poet was in the bloom of health.

"When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" is a poem of personal worry, according to biographer Nicholas Roe. In it, Keats is anxious that he won't have time to achieve poetic fame or fall in "unreflecting love," and these fears and self-doubts take him to the brink.

But as brinks go, this one doesn't seem all that bad. The poem is romantic with a small "r"—wide-eyed, dramatic, sentimental—its vision of finality, of nothingness, gorgeous in its desolation, and all-importantly painless. Who can read the poem's final lines without themselves feeling a pull



A portrait of John Keats by William Hilton, after Joseph Severn. Keats lost most of his family members to tuberculosis, the disease that would eventually take his own life on Feb. 23, 1821.

John Keats's grave in Rome.



to swooning death, half in love with it, as Keats professed to be?

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;

And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

That's what I used to think, at any rate. Later, in the pandemic, I've begun to read this poem rather differently. Lensed through long months of lockdown, the sonnet's existential anxieties seem less abstract, grand, and performative, and more, well, human.

It's a poem that will resonate with the youth who are cooped up indoors, physically isolated, unable to meet and mingle, agonizingly aware of weeks slipping by, opportunities missed, disappointments mounting. This poem has made me almost painfully empathetic toward their plight.

The sonnet's fears of a future laid to waste are shared by whole generations whose collective mental health is under siege. In his last surviving letter, written two years after the sonnet while dying in Rome, Keats records a "feeling of my real life having past," a conviction that he was "leading a posthumous existence." How many of us are experiencing similar thoughts at the moment?

Illness and Isolation

Of all the Romantics, Keats perhaps knew most about mental suffering. He grew up in Moorgate, just across from Bethlem Hos-

pital, which was known to London and the world as Bedlam. Before he turned to poetry, Keats trained at Guy's Hospital, London, where he not only witnessed firsthand the horrors of surgery in a preanesthetic age but also tended to patients in what was called the lunatic ward.

It was all too much for him. Traumatized by the misery and pain he felt he could do little to alleviate, in 1816 he threw medicine in for the pen. His experiences at Guy's, though, and the empathy he developed there, found their way into his writing. For instance, in "Hyperion," his medical knowledge helps him to inhabit the cata-tonic state of "gray-hair'd Saturn," who sits in solitude, "deep in the shady sadness of a vale," despairing after being deposed by the Olympian gods. The vignette is a moving image of isolation and enervation that speaks to us today.

As for lockdown, Keats was no stranger to its pressures and deprivations. During periods of illness in Hampstead in 1819—precursor symptoms of tuberculosis—he was reluctant to venture out, isolating himself. In October 1820, he set sail for Italy in the hope that warmer climes would save his lungs. On arrival, his ship was put into strict quarantine for ten days. In letters to his friends, Keats described being "in a sort of desperation," adding, "we cannot be created for this sort of suffering."

Keats was a poet of his age, his own social, cultural, and medical milieu. And yet, on the bicentenary of his death, he's also—more than ever, perhaps—a poet of ours. A poet of lockdown, frustration, disappointment, fears ... and even hope.

Because even in those last, scarcely imaginable weeks in Rome, 200 years ago, holed up in a little apartment at the foot of the Spanish Steps, he never quite gave up on the future, never relinquished his dreams of love and fame.

Richard Marggraf-Turley is a professor of English literature at Aberystwyth University in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.



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

'Boss Level': A 'No Pain, No Gain' Time-Looper Movie

MARK JACKSON

Remember when the 1960s zombies used to stagger around, real slow-like? And 2000's "28 Days" gave us 100-yard-dash zombies—that was very scary. When an idea makes money in Hollywood, every last permutation and combination of that new genre gets mined for more ducats.

Now time-loop movies abound; it's rapidly approaching the oversaturation point. Kicked off by 1993's now-legendary "Groundhog Day," we just reviewed the teen rom-com time-looper "The Map of Tiny Perfect Things" and now here comes a sci-fi action thriller version already, "Boss Level," for the demographic of boys-who-love-video-games.

Why Grillo?

Frank Grillo's fun. What's Grillo got? Amazing pompadour'd hair. If ever there was an actor who could make that ubiquitous male actor statement about a given role: "I've got the hair for it"—it's him. He's also got a Wolverine-type ripped torso, a commanding screen presence, and he's action-hero quippy, with a New York-accented, Italian flair. He's best known for playing the Marvel villain Brock Rumlow.

"Boss Level" is similar to "The Map of Tiny Perfect Things" in that Roy Pulver (Grillo) doesn't have the buildup to the time loop in "Groundhog Day"; he's already waking up with his repeating day's choreographed moves already in full swing.

But whereas the male lead in "The Map of ..." keeps waking up just as his mom is pulling away in a car, former Delta Force operative (what else?) Roy's first move after opening his eyes in bed is ducking a machete whack to the head delivered by an assassin.

While dispatching said assassin using a variety of hand-to-hand options, one of which includes the scalding-coffee-to-the-face splash, a helicopter pulls up outside Roy's window, the door gunner of which opens up on him with a 50-caliber lead shower. The gunner looks familiar. No, it can't be! It is. It's none other than Super

'Boss Level'

Director
Joe Carnahan

Starring
Frank Grillo, Naomi Watts,
Mel Gibson, Michelle Yeoh,
Selina Lo, Rio Grillo

Rated
TV-MA

Running Time
1 hour, 34 minutes

Release Date
March 5, 2021,
streaming on Hulu

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Some of the assassins after Roy Pulver played by (L-R) Quinton "Rampage" Jackson, Selina Lo, Michael Tourek, Aaron Beelner, Meadow Williams, Eric Etebari, and Rashad Evans in "Boss Level."

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Witherspoon's Walkabout Warrants Watching

MARK JACKSON

The Appalachian Trail is 2,174 miles long. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) is 479 miles longer. Why do people brave hunger, thirst, heat, cold, pain, bugs, cougars, rattlesnakes, and thieves to hike these things? Especially alone? Especially single women, alone?

Because these mega-hikes are modern, secular cousins of the sacred, peripatetic rites of passage known as the pilgrimage and the Aboriginal Walkabout. All that nature walking, sacred or secular, accomplishes roughly the same thing: purging and healing by way of physical hardship, loneliness, silence, and beauty. Based on a true story, the very fine "Wild" depicts one woman's inner transformation, out on the PCT.

Hitting Bottom

Following the 1991 cancer death of her mother (Laura Dern), Cheryl Strayed (Reese Witherspoon) wrecks her marriage with hard drugs and cheating. She hits the PCT in '95, with no previous hiking experience. The Pacific Crest Trail is for black-belt-level hikers.

There are things that one really needs to know. Like, how even slightly-too-small hiking boots will rasp the toenails right off your feet when you're crunching across the Mojave Desert, and how duct-tape-

wrapped Tevas make a poor substitute. Had Cheryl known what she was getting herself into, she might never have started.

Packing gear at the trailhead, in her motel room, her first lesson is that the water bladder for her pack weighs a million pounds after filling it in the bathtub. It takes a 10-minute wrestling match just to stand upright with it. Still, she's clearly thinking "How hard could it be?"

The PCT

Finally she's out there. It's scorching; deadly, the thought of quitting is all-pervading and the trial-and-error learning starts: She bought the wrong gas canister for the stove. Now she gets to eat cold mush for weeks on end.

Bolting from her sleeping bag, she



Frank Grillo plays ex-U.S. Delta Force operator Roy Pulver in "Boss Level."

Bowl LV winner, Buccaneer wide receiver Rob Gronkowski being an actor. Awesome.

And then a motley crew of assassins chase Roy around all day, two of whom are an unlikely pair of hulking black men speaking German. They look familiar ... No! It can't be! It is. They are UFC cage-fighting legends Quinton "Rampage" Jackson and Rashad Evans being actors. Awesome.

Here's the thing ... what thing? You know ... the thing. We hold these truths to be self-evident that, per the time-loop law, no matter what Roy does, he'll be killed exactly at 12:47 p.m. daily. And then he'll wake up in bed having to duck that machete whack, ad infinitum.

Roy meets his Maker many different ways; there's not a lot of margin for error in his day. If his timing is off by a split second, he gets whacked.

He's beheaded several times by the katana-wielding assassin Guan Yin (Selina Lo), who, with the vigorous compulsiveness of a kitty-litter-scratching cat, proclaims, "I am Guan Yin, and Guan Yin has done this." When katan-loving Quentin Tarantino sees "Boss Level," he'll likely spit his beer through his nose, brush Dorito crumbs off his T-shirt, and do a raise-the-rooftoast to director and co-writer Carnahan, wishing he'd coined the Roy Yin line for Lucy Liu in "Kill Bill."

How'd Roy Get Here Anyway?

Without spoiling it, let's just say that Roy's being used as lab rat in a scientific experiment run by his ex-wife, Dr. Jemma Wells (Naomi Watts), all of which starts to come to light when Roy runs into his estranged son Joe (played by Grillo's real-life young son Rio) competing in a 1980s-style arcade game tournament.

Which suddenly explains the movie title. "Boss Level" means a time loop is like a video game! And you rise in levels until you get so good at it, you reach Boss level!

His wife is working on a top-secret military project, and her boss, Col. Clive Ventor (Mel Gibson), decapitates the relentless, pesky Roy a few times himself. This would be where "Boss Level" marries up with military-tinged time-loop movies "Source Code" and "Edge of Tomorrow."

'Wild'

Director
Jean-Marc Vallée

Starring
Reese Witherspoon,
Laura Dern, Gaby Hoffmann

Rated
R

Running Time
1 hour, 55 minutes

Release Date
Dec. 19, 2014

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Cheryl Strayed (Reese Witherspoon) fording a stream, in "Wild."

FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

blows her giant red trail-whistle (it looks like Wile E. Coyote ordered it from the ACME Whistle Company).

After much frantic bag-shaking, a tiny woolly bear caterpillar is ejected.

All of this is absolutely no fun for her but is often funny for us, experiencing her tribulations from the safety of our couches. Everything hurts constantly. As a fellow hiker says, "All the prep and training in the world can't prepare you for the pain and the heat." But Cheryl's committed.

There are many flashbacks of Cheryl's downward spiral into depression; a classic spiral for someone with an abusive alcoholic father, codependent mother, and an addictive personality.

However, the upside of the addictive personality is that people who have it tend to be able to work harder and endure more pain than the average person. Cheryl has the grit to be able to move through (hike through) the daunting amounts of pain needed to free herself of the ghosts of her past.

Reese

Reese Witherspoon had already left her ditz "Legally Blonde" period behind via an Oscar win as June Carter in "Walk the Line," but "Wild" solidified her serious-leading-lady status.

Despite there being too much playing of the Simon & Garfunkel version of "I'd rather be a hammer

It's a stellar cast for such a silly movie, most of whom are understandably underused: Naomi Watts blathering "time-space continuum" jargon is a waste of talent.

What You Get

The thing that's fun about time-loop movies is that they're metaphors for human reincarnation, with each repeating day standing in as an accelerated version of a lifetime. And we enjoy seeing the characters work toward a specific goal by using the practice-makes-perfect opportunity of day do-overs. Roy's do-overs are seriously painful. But funny, too.

The thing that time-loop movies get wrong, when compared to actual writings by various sages on the topic of reincarnation, is that the characters always remember what they learned the previous day. According to reincarnation literature, however, when humans reincarnate, our memories are always erased—very few people can remember past lives.

And the human quest would appear to always be about spiritual enlightenment. Roy's time-loop quest is that he wants to get his son and wife back. But the ultimate human quest throughout repeating incarnations is to jettison all karma and ascend to a heavenly paradise, and finally get some peace and quiet.

Which is where the phrase "If not now, when?" comes from, because we might not remember what earthly existence is meant for the next incarnation. It might take us a thousand lifetimes to figure out that human life is not for making money and buying stuff, but about exiting the reincarnation cycle with alacrity. And because our memories are automatically erased each time, another enlightenment quote says: "A man who seeks enlightenment should seek it like a man whose hair is on fire seeks a pond." Because it could take forever before we figure it out again.

I'm waiting for the time-loop movie where the lead character can't remember what happened the day before. It's potentially a long movie. But they could solve that by using those screen updates, like, "7,428,563 lifetimes later ..."

than a nail," the story is captivating and the Pacific Northwest and desert scenery are stunning.

The only thing that feels amiss is the anticlimactic ending—the trail just sort of peters out. Cheryl says "Thank you for everything the trail taught," but something more revelatory feels called for, something like Aron Raalston's (James Franco) harrowing escape from his forced vision quest in "127 Hours," but that's just my Pavlov's dog-like conditioning wanting a Hollywood ending.

A vision quest is different. It's a stationary pilgrimage of the soul: Four days and four nights in a 10-foot-diameter circle in the wilderness with no people, food, phone, computer, books, writing utensils, or tent. The outfits that run quests tell you (I've done four of them) that the most powerful visions are where you don't feel like you had one.

These types of life-changing experiences don't need to end with a bang. If you focus on the trail, or on the rocks, ants, pine needles, and whippoorwill birdsong in the night—you'll get where you're going. A profound change is a given.

Before renting "Wild," watch "The Way" (Martin Sheen on a pilgrimage). If you compare these two ambulatory quests—the secular PCT hike and the "sacred" pilgrim's way—you'll see they're almost exactly the same thing.

If you try one yourself someday, learn all you can beforehand instead of running out the door like Bilbo Baggins. He was another initially clueless long-distance hiker who came back profoundly changed.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Divine Guidance to True Freedom: The ‘Liberation of Saint Peter’

ERIC BESS

The Renaissance painter Raphael Sanzio was born on April 6, 1483; he would die on his birthday, April 6, 1520. In 37 short years, Raphael created some of the greatest paintings known to the Western world. Approximately 500 years after his death, we celebrate and interpret one of his great paintings.

Raphael is well-known for his frescoes that decorate the walls of four papal apartments at the Vatican. Today, we will look at a fresco that illustrates the second room called the “Room of Heliodorus” (Stanza d’Eliodoro). Created in 1514, the fresco is titled “Liberation of Saint Peter.”

The Arrest and Liberation of St. Peter

As the story goes, King Herod was persecuting those who belonged to the followers of Christ. Peter was one of those whom Herod arrested and imprisoned.

Peter was bound with chains and watched by guards. He slept through the night until an angel arrived and woke him. The light of the angel filled the cell, and Peter was released from his chains without the guards awakening. He thought that he imagined the angel, but nonetheless he got dressed and followed the angel out of the cell.

Outside the cell, the angel and Peter passed, unnoticed, by two more guards before they came to the city gate, which opened by itself. The angel left when Peter departed the city, and Peter no longer thought the angel was a hallucination. He knew that God had sent the angel to assist him.

The guards searched for Peter the next day but were unable to find him. King Herod, angry, ordered the guards to be executed.

Raphael is well known for his frescoes that decorate the walls of four papal apartments at the Vatican.

Raphael’s Fresco

Raphael depicted the first part of the story in the center of the wall above the doorway. The scene is shown behind metal bars that are painted as if they are part of the wall.

With simple clothing and a halo above his head, Peter is shown asleep at the bottom left of the composition. Two guards leaning against the wall, one behind him and the other in front of him, are asleep as well. His hands and feet are chained to the two guards.

The angel has just appeared and fills the room with heavenly light. The angel reaches with one hand to heaven and uses the other to awaken Peter.

The wall to the right of the doorway shows the angel leading Peter out of his cell. The angel’s light still shines brightly and illuminates Peter, the walls, and the two sleeping guards whom they are about to pass.

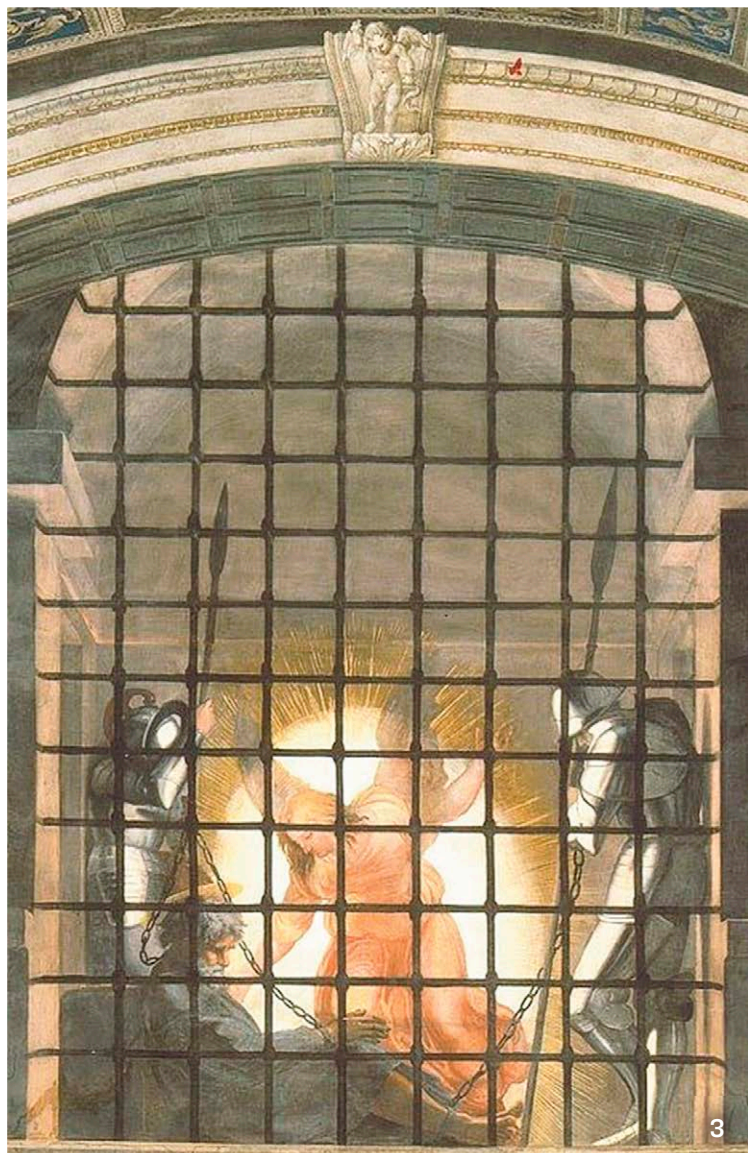
The part of the wall to the left of the doorway depicts the final scene of the story. Peter and the angel are gone, and the guards are chastised for allowing Peter to escape.

One guard is sitting on a step, at the bottom right of the composition. A soldier hovers over him and points in the direction of the cell, which would now be empty. Toward the upper left of the composition appears another soldier who is about to strike a guard.

True Freedom Comes From the Divine

Peter is shown imprisoned and chained to two guards in the first scene. By whom was Peter imprisoned? He was imprisoned by King Herod. For me, Herod represents a resistance to the divine, to God, and his guards represent the chains that keep us imprisoned by our base desires. Is it then the case that resisting the divine imprisons us?

Some of us believe ourselves to be wholly devoted to divine things, concepts, and so on, in our daily lives. Quite often, however, if we go deeper into our spirits, we find that there’s more resis-



PUBLIC DOMAIN

1. “Liberation of Saint Peter,” 1514, by Raphael. Fresco. Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

2–4. Details from the “Liberation of Saint Peter.”

tance to the divine than we would like to admit. Interestingly enough, our initial assuredness regarding our devotion prevents us from finding and removing such resistance.

By resistance to the divine, I mean everyday desires that distract us from concentrating on spiritual progress, on God. I mean the selfishness that obscures, by darkness, our ability to be honest with ourselves and others, to love our fellow human beings, and be patient during our troubles.

Are these everyday, selfish desires the very things that keep us imprisoned and distant from true freedom? Is it this subtle resistance to the divine, often escaping our awareness, that causes us to remain asleep and chained to our desires?

The divine, however, can lead us to freedom. Raphael depicts the angel as a source of light that awakens Peter. Without the divine, Peter remains asleep and will most likely be executed by King Herod, which suggests that Peter’s life will be undermined and taken by the very thing that resists the divine.

By way of the divine, Peter is “awakened” and led to freedom. With little effort, the angel—the very thing that seemed imagined initially—calmly walks Peter not only out of prison but also out of the very city that imprisons him.

All of the sleeping guards in the center

and right side of the fresco appear docile. On the fresco’s left side, the guards are afraid, and the soldiers are angry. There’s a sense of fear and confusion, which suggests the true weakness of selfishness and base desire compared to the calm and effortless power of the divine.

How might we closely examine ourselves for resistance to the divine things in our lives? How might we navigate our way through and away from our selfish mindsets and tendencies? How might we allow the heavens to guide us on our journey to true freedom?

The traditional arts often contain spiritual representations and symbols the meanings of which can be lost to our modern minds. In our series “Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart,” we interpret visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We do not assume to provide absolute answers to questions generations have wrestled with, but hope that our questions will inspire a reflective journey toward our becoming more authentic, compassionate, and courageous human beings.

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

MUSIC

What Does It Mean to Be a ‘Vessel’ for Music?

MICHAEL KUREK

A phrase one hears from time to time among instrumentalists, but especially singers, is their desire to “be a vessel” when performing. As a composer, I have my own version of this sentiment, too, but wondered what it really means. First of all, behind this idea is a certain psychology that goes with performing or creating music, especially in public. Part of that is the same vulnerability that any lecturer or actor feels when walking out in front of a crowd of people to speak words.

It is true that one must gain the confidence to make any kind of public presentation, but I will not go into that here, other than to say that I count among the most valuable components of my own elementary education, back in the dark ages, that I was made to memorize poems like “Hiawatha” and “Jabberwocky” and the “Gettysburg Address” and stand, terrified, in front of the class alone and recite them. We thought it was great, once we had accomplished it.

We can observe that before it can, in some spiritual sense, be filled it must be empty.

Once the basic fear of doing anything alone and in front of a crowd has been conquered, the “vessel” question comes in. Just as preachers pray before their sermons that God will use them to say the right things, so musicians often express the hope that somehow they will not be a source unto themselves but a conduit for some greater spiritual force. And when they do “lose themselves” in their performance, which perhaps is to say lose all inhibiting self-consciousness and are “in the zone,” they believe that they are indeed serving as a vessel.

A Vessel Described

The word “vessel” is a decidedly biblical metaphor, especially in the King James translation, with synonyms like “container” used in more modern translations. The former frequently speaks of vessels of sanctification, vessels of honor, vessels of lofty use, vessels of mercy, and so on. Saint Paul was called “a chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15). So let us examine what a biblical vessel, the object of that metaphor, actually was.

A clay vessel in biblical times was a container, usually for transporting either liquid or grain. First, we can observe that before it can, in some spiritual sense, be filled it must be empty. By that, I mean that if the musician is preoccupied with any kind of distraction, like a personal conflict with someone, vanity, or jealousy toward another performer, fear, or insecurity, then the container is already full and has no room for the things you want to pour out upon the audience.

So, one might first need to be “emptied” of all these things and then “filled” with things that will serve the end of a great performance: a clear mind, a spirit of humble gratitude for the opportunity to do it, a sense of inward peace, and even a love for the people who will hear the performance.

Second, we are used to seeing rows of vessels in the store, like flowerpots that came off of an assembly line looking exactly alike. But biblical vessels were individually handmade, with no two exactly alike. So, I have been known to coach a singer or two to “remember that no one else sounds, or is supposed to sound, exactly like you, so please stop comparing yourself to other singers. God wants to use who you are.”

Third, a vessel is different from a “channel,” because it is filled up, stores its contents for some period of time, and is transported to some location before being poured out. A channel, by contrast, such as a garden hose or a telephone, conveys its contents in real time, without storing or transporting it.

A so-called medium, who claims to “channel” the words of some departed souls and even speaks in their voices, does not contribute anything of his own personality but only conveys theirs. A vessel, however, like a mother carrying a child in the womb for a period of time, is a profound contributor to the nature of the thing being carried. A musical vessel’s contents, the compositions being performed, are fundamentally influenced by that carrier’s personal interpretation.

Finally, when the contents of a vessel are at last dispensed, the vessel itself has no further control over what happens to them. Likewise, when a performer walks out on stage, he or she can have no assurance whether even the most inspired of performances will be appreciated or fall on deaf ears. Therefore, performers must completely let go of what people will think before walking out there, for such concerns will only be a distraction to performing well. Their job is just to perform the best they can and let the chips fall where they may.

In spiritual terms, we could say that once



Musicians, especially singers, sometimes talk about being vessels for the music. What do they mean? U.S. opera singer Michael Spyrer performs during the 2021 annual French classical music awards ceremony, Victoires de la Musique Classique, at the Auditorium venue, in Lyon, France.

the vessel’s contents are poured out upon the audience, it is God’s job, not the performer’s, to use it or not use it in the hearer’s soul, depending on whether the hearer is open to receive that gift of beauty.

For more on this topic and others like it, see the author’s 2019 book, “The Sound of Beauty: A Composer on Music in the Spiritual Life,” Ignatius Press.

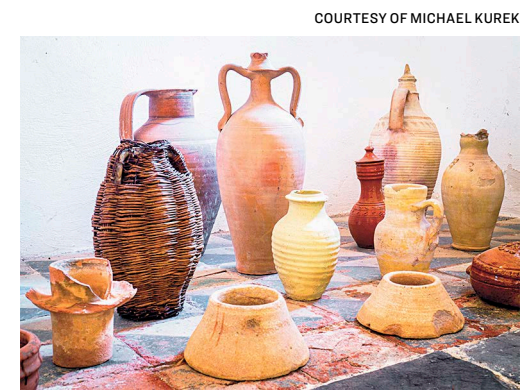
The Matter of ‘Detachment’

Another way of explaining the last point, not worrying over whether people will like what one does, is addressed in different philosophies and traditions, including Buddhism, as a matter of losing attachments, often called simply “detachment.” Saint Francis de Sales discussed this at length in his spiritual classic book, “Introduction to the Devout Life” (1609), appreciated by both Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The essence of detachment is freedom from the tyranny of such things as material possessions, to be sure that they do not possess you instead of the reverse. If a performer’s sense of self-esteem or value as a person is dependent upon how good or bad his last performance was, or upon what a newspaper reviewer wrote about it, his life will be a roller coaster of highs and lows.

For that reason, even when one is a “vessel,” it is important to find one’s self-esteem elsewhere. It is entirely possible to do an excellent job as a performer (and ironically, perhaps an even better job) while maintaining a perspective of healthy detachment from one’s ego.

American composer Michael Kurek is 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



No two ancient vessels were ever alike, any more than a performer can ever interpret a piece of music exactly as another might.

Book Review: ‘What Are the Odds?’ From Crack Addict to CEO

An interview with Mike Lindell about his current plans

LINDA WIEGENFELD

With the hubbub about Mike Lindell as yet another victim of cancel culture, I decided to read his autobiography, “What Are the Odds?” From Crack Addict to CEO, released in 2019. Not the typical business memoir on leadership and management, the book follows the outer journey of a man living on the edge and the inner journey of a man sabotaging himself.

Lindell dedicates this book “to anyone looking for hope.”

Living on the Edge

From his early life, Lindell fell into a destructive pattern. When quite young, he placed bets with money he didn’t have, starting at first with \$20 or \$50 bets, but eventually wagering hundreds or even thousands of dollars at a time, regardless of what was in his bank account.

As he got older, Lindell began dealing with organized crime. When his gambling debts shot to \$25,000 and the mob threatened his family, Lindell’s response was to get himself arrested to protect his family. He was sentenced to five years of probation and five work-release weekends in jail. The worst part of this episode was that his character was publicly ruined, and he couldn’t get a loan to pay off his debts.

Later, Lindell found success with his ownership of Schmitty’s Tavern in Victoria, Minnesota. Due to his ingenuity, the bar became known as a fun place where customers could dance on the bar, spray each other with Super Soakers, hang upside down from the rafters, and so on. He also created men’s and women’s sports leagues and set up pool and dart leagues. He was selling fun and a sense of belonging.

However, Lindell entered a new, perilous time in his life when he got hooked on crack cocaine, which cost him the tavern. At his worst point, a drug deal in Mexico went awry, and he thought he would die. He states: “But now the game was over. The house had won. I was going to die right here on this dark, deserted street, a small item in the news.”

How he managed to save himself is incredible and says everything about Lindell’s belief that God was looking out for him.

The Comeback

Lindell launched several business ideas: cleaning carpets, raising pigs, and running a lunch wagon. Then there was MyPillow. In 2004, he had a dream that he was going to invent a superior pillow. It gave him a new purpose as he mulled over the pillow he wanted to create. Slowly, he built up his business while still on crack cocaine. Of course, he came close to losing his company more than once.

Throughout the book, readers see Lindell struggling with the idea of getting clean. He was able to talk other addicts off the ledge but not himself. After his wife’s 50th birthday, Lindell’s world really fell apart. His wife left him, his relationships with his children were failing, and he began suffering from debilitating fatigue of body and mind.

Finally, one day he decided to leave his trance-like state and quit crack. He was convinced that God needed him for a purpose.

His success story includes meeting a wonderful Christian woman, growing as a person through new friendships, eventually meeting President Trump when he was

presidential candidate, and, importantly, connecting addicts with an effective recovery program on a large scale.

The last words of his book are “to be continued.”

Lindell Continues

In my short interview with Lindell, he explained that the negative publicity he’s received hasn’t affected his ability to help addicts. He is proud of the Lindell Recovery Network (LRN), which he sees as the most revolutionary platform for addiction ever, one that keeps getting bigger and bigger.

LRN is faith-based and is a way to connect those struggling with drug addictions to recovery organizations. He sees this group as a means to restoring people’s hearts and setting them free from addiction.

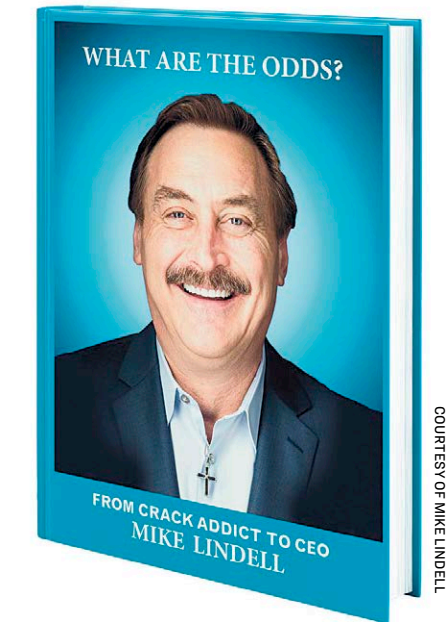
To deal with the cancel culture, Lindell suggests that those interested go to “Frank,” his new platform that is coming soon. This platform is “for Americans who want to defend life, liberty, and all the freedoms that have marked America as the longest running Constitutional Republic in the history of the world.” (See the webpage FrankSpeech.com for information about the new platform.)

He sees Frank as a combination of YouTube and Twitter, and it cannot be canceled because it won’t rely on servers run by Amazon, Apple, or Google. “It’s going to be the safest, secure platform, and it was built expecting to be attacked,” he said.

Will he write another book? “Probably, but first I want to see a motion picture made of my current book,” he said.

Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired teacher. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at lwiegenfeld@aol.com

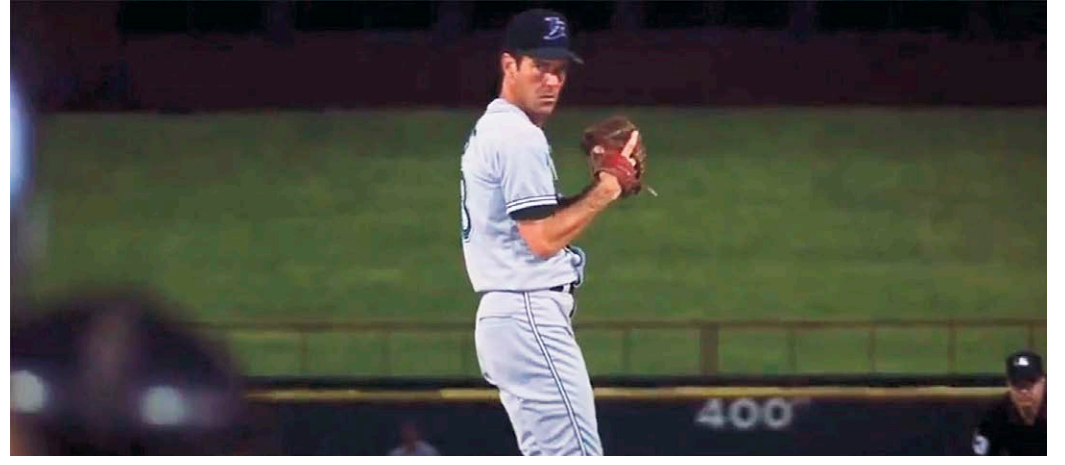
Mike Lindell’s autobiography, released in 2019, highlights his road to recovery.



‘What Are the Odds?’ From Crack Addict to CEO
Mike Lindell
Lindell Publishing
Dec. 27, 2019
325 pages, hardcover

Correction

The article “Zack Snyder’s Justice League”: The Postmodern Struggle for the Mythic,” published on April 7, misstated the cost of the theatrical cut of the film, “Justice League.” The film cost an estimated \$300 million to produce. The Epoch Times regrets the error.



Sometimes dreams do come true. Dennis Quaid plays Jim Morris (L), a science teacher, who (R), thanks to his lightning-speed fastball makes it to the big league in "The Rookie."

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

It's Never Too Late to Realize Your Dreams

IAN KANE

Movies that tell the tales of underdogs who, against all odds, manage to make incredible comebacks and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat can be some of the most inspiring films. But when you infuse that winning formula with the "never too late" subgenre, the film can rise to an even higher level of feel-good loftiness. There's just something about seeing middle-aged or older folks who have settled into mundane lives becoming motivated enough to give their dreams one last shot.

This powerful combination is on full display (as well as capably executed) in the 2002 sports drama "The Rookie." It's based on the real-life trials and tribulations of Jim Morris (Dennis Quaid), who wrote his autobiography in 2001 titled "The Oldest Rookie."

The film's opening scenes show Jim as a young boy (Trevor Morgan) living with his family in Connecticut. His father, Jim Morris Sr. (Brian Cox), is a Navy man and, as such, tends to move his family around quite a bit. As they move from state to state, Jim's fascination with baseball grows but is largely ignored by his father, who believes that the boy should have more practical ambitions.

By the time Jim Sr. is assigned as a Navy

recruiter in Big Lake, Texas, he's had enough of young Jim's obsession with baseball, telling him: "There are more important things in life than baseball. The sooner you figure that out, the better."

Dennis Quaid steps into the cleats of Jim Morris with a highly understated, yet powerful performance.

Things zip forward in time to 1999 when Jim has settled into Big Lake with a loving wife, Lorri (Rachel Griffiths), three kids, and a stable job as a high school science teacher. As a way of keeping baseball in his life, he also coaches the local high school team, the Big Lake Owls.

Jim had previously been drafted by the Major League's Milwaukee Brewers, but severely injured his arm—thus ending his dreams of playing in the big leagues.

But when his high school team notices how fast he can throw a fastball during practice, they give him a challenge—if the Owls can manage to win the district championship, Jim will do his best to pass a big-league tryout. A humble man, Jim is

uncertain at first, but the kids compel him to accept their challenge and go after the dream he's kept buried for years.

The Owls do indeed win the district competition, and Jim gets his chance to perform in front of some important baseball scouts. He soon finds out that his arm has made a miraculous recovery: He's throwing pitches at 98 miles per hour via radar guns, and the scouts realize that they have a hot prospect on their hands, even at the relatively older age of 35.

Jim had been keeping his rekindled ambitions a secret from Lorri. And after some initial reluctance (she's afraid of him being hurt again), she finally backs him in his aspirations. With his family's support, Jim goes on the warpath and climbs the league ladder. Within a mere few months, he gets the call—the Tampa Bay Devil Rays team has a spot for him on their roster.

But will Jim's arm hold up long enough for him to live out his childhood dreams? And will he finally gain the support and love of his father?

Terrific Acting

Dennis Quaid steps into the cleats of Jim Morris with a highly understated, yet powerful performance. Although he portrays Jim as a humble and gracious everyman, Quaid is gifted enough as an actor to convey genuine emotions, especially in the moodier, quieter scenes where he's going

through inner struggles.

The supporting cast is very capable as well. Cox is detached as the frigid father, and Griffiths is believable as the loving wife who just wants the best for her husband.

Although the great American pastime of baseball is used as a worthy vehicle, this film transcends its sports drama moorings. Due to the strong and earnest performances by its cast, excellent direction by John Lee Hancock, and "go for your dreams no matter what" messages (St. Rita, the saint of impossible dreams, is alluded to throughout the film), "The Rookie" is an uplifting and inspirational movie that is perfect to view with both friends and family.

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

'The Rookie'

Director
John Lee Hancock

Starring
Dennis Quaid, Angus T. Jones, Rachel Griffiths

Running Time
2 hours, 7 minutes

Rated
G

Release Date
March 29, 2002

★★★★★

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