

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



"The Madonna and Child With the Infant Baptist ('The Garvagh Madonna')," circa 1509–10, by Raphael. Oil on wood; 15 1/4 inches by 13 inches. The National Gallery, London.

FINE ARTS

## What the World Needs Now

# Grace, Harmony, and Raphael

*'The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael' at The National Gallery, London*

LORRAINE FERRIER

When darkness seems to shroud the world, traditional art can help. Art's ultimate role is to uplift us by reminding us of how to be good, true, and the best we can be. When traditional artists create such enduring art, it can awaken our innate goodness. The works of Italian Renaissance master Raffaello Sanzio (better known as Raphael) reach the epitome of such art. And more

than five centuries after his death, Raphael's art is relevant now more than ever.

A new and ambitious exhibition at The National Gallery, London, highlights Raphael's oeuvre and shows how his sensibility and artistic brilliance in multiple mediums transcend time.

Opening on April 9, "The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael" is one of the first shows to concentrate on Raphael's entire career. Raphael is known by many as a painter, draftsman, and architect, but some may be surprised to learn that he was also a poet, an archaeologist and a keeper of antiquities, and a designer of prints, sculpture, tapestry, and applied arts.

Ninety exhibits will be on display, many by Raphael, and some works made from his

designs in media that he didn't practice in, such as bronze. Together the images and objects tell the story of Raphael's life, his art and designs, and his development as an artist.

**Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael** Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci have long been seen as the greatest artists of the High Renaissance. "What Raphael does, more than the others, is work with idealism," exhibition co-curator Matthias Wivel said in a phone interview. Raphael's idealism is not only in the religious sense; he invites us to be good, individually and together.

**Raphael's Madonnas may hold the key to why his work is universally affecting.**

*Continued on Page 4*

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POETRY

# The Power and Beauty of Great Verse: Celebrating National Poetry Month

JEFF MINICK

April, lovely April.

Scraggly March with its lion's entrance and lamb's departure has at last taken a final bow, and April now steps to the stage. Associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and derived from the Latin "aperire," meaning "to open," April waves her magic wand and turns lawns from brown to effervescent green, brings bursting buds to the trees, and surrounds us with flowering azaleas, peonies, and daffodils. The winds blow warmer, the evenings grow longer, neighbors enjoy backyard chats, and pedestrians walk upright rather than hunched over in heavy coats and scarves.

"Oh, to be in England now that April's there," wrote Robert Browning in his poem "Home Thoughts, From Abroad," and that sentiment rings true for most countries in the Northern Hemisphere. Some may dislike the gnawing chill of January or the griddle-hot afternoons of August, but who can complain of temperate April with her sweet perfumes, her dazzling array of blooms and blossoms, and her easy ways? And here's another reason to revel in the glories of this fourth chapter in our calendar. April is National Poetry Month.

### A Poetry Party

Founded by the Academy of American Poets in 1996, National Poetry Month "reminds the public that poets have an integral part to play in our culture and that poetry matters." It has grown into the largest literary celebration in the world, with tens of millions of students, teachers, and lovers of verse participating in a myriad of activities. The Academy sponsors readings, urges schools to have their young people read and write poetry, offers posters for the classroom, and uses the internet in creative ways to bring poetry direct to readers.

Whether we take advantage of the resources offered by the Academy or decide to institute our own programs for delving into poets and their verse is less important than giving ourselves the pleasures, emotions, and erudition that we can encounter in poems.

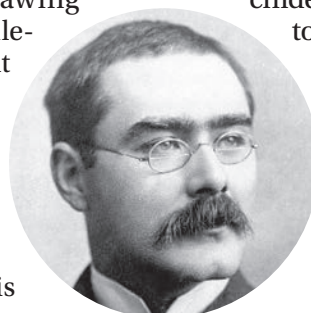
### Salutes to April

We might, for example, search online for "poemhunter.com" and then click on poemhunter.com, which offers

scores of such poems. Here we find the first lines from Chaucer's Prologue to "The Canterbury Tales": "Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote/The droghte of March hath perced to the roote," or "When that April with showers sweet/ The drought of March has pierced root deep." Centuries later, American poet Ogden Nash gave us "Always Marry an April Girl," a poem with which I was unfamiliar but which entranced me and brought a smile:

Praise the spells and bless the charms, I found April in my arms. April golden, April cloudy, Gracious, cruel, tender, rowdy; April soft in flowered languor, April cold with sudden anger, Ever changing, ever true—I love April, I love you.

Shakespeare salutes April in several of his sonnets, Edna St. Vincent Millay chides April for its indifference to death and which "comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers," and Robert Service speaks of "Cloud-dappled skies, the laugh of limpid springs,/ Drowned sunbeams and the perfume April blows."



A portrait of Rudyard Kipling from the biography on Rudyard Kipling, 1895, by John Palmer.

### Old Friends

Of course, we might also honor National Poetry Month by revisiting those works we have long revered. For some, these might be the verses of Elizabeth Barrett Browning or Alfred Lord Tennyson. Others may prefer sticking closer to home and reading American poets like Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, or Mary Oliver.

I am, for example, a fan of rollicking lyrics like those delivered by Robert Service or Rudyard Kipling. Some aesthetes and critics might condemn such affections as lowbrow or pedestrian; if so, I happily plead guilty on both counts. After many readings, I still get a kick out of Service's "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and find wisdom in Kipling's "If—." Here's just one sample of the pleasure these lively rhythms bring me: the first stanza of Kipling's poem about an ordinary soldier, "Tommy":

"I went into a public 'ouse to get a pint of beer, The publican 'e up an' sez, 'We serve no red-coats here.' The girls be'ind the bar they laughed an' giggled fit to die,



"Poetry," 1879, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.

ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN



"Poetry, from the 'Stanza della Segnatura,'" 1509–1511, by Raphael. Fresco; 70.9 inches by 70.9 inches. Palazzo Apostolico, Vatican.

him, "No," that she'd, somehow, still be his "one regret"? She put the book back down, and left the store, then calmly got in her car, heading for uptown, never reading in chapter twenty-four about "Marie" in quotes, who'd "turned him down," who was his "only, ever, perfect love," whom he was "still and always" thinking of.

"Bookstore" tells a complete story: a long-ago love, a man and a woman who after years apart might have reunited and found love and happiness, and the intervention of circumstance and fate that keeps them separated. A novelist—and I am, like so many others, a fan of fiction—would have taken tens of thousands of words to tell the same tale.

### The Heart of the Matter

Mostly, of course, we read poetry because of the power, the beauty, and the insights that the poet shares with us. We come to these fires of verse for the same reasons our ancestors did millennia ago when they gathered in caves or great halls, drawn to the warmth of words and stories, roused to listen around the flames of rhythm and rhyme, wanting truths from the bards that might sustain us, that remind us of all the good things: love, laughter, nobility, family, the importance of honor, human dignity, heroes and glory, and the passage of time.

"Poetry," remarked Thomas Gray, the author of the poetic masterpiece "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," "is thoughts that breathe, and words that burn." Precisely.

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](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

I outs into the street again an' to myself sez I: O it's Tommy this, and Tommy that, an' 'Tommy, go away;' But it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when the band begins to play, my boys, the band begins to play, O, it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when the band begins to play."

Those lines sing to me.

### Why Read Poetry?

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center poll, Americans on average read 12 books per year. That number is decep-

tive, as many Americans pick up four or fewer books per year. Many of those who do crack open a book go for bestsellers or treasured classics—novels, history, biography, and self-help guides—but according to figures from the National Endowment for the Arts, poetry has also become increasingly popular.

This growing interest in poets and their writing should not surprise us. In our world of bustle and hurry, when so many of us skim the news headlines online and sprint through social media, poems offer a way to touch base quickly with thoughts and emotions. Poems are a hundred-yard dash; the average novel is a marathon in comparison. A well-written sonnet, for

example, may express in the condensed power of its 14 lines what might require 300 pages from a novelist. Here, for example, is William Baer's "Bookstore" from his collection "Formal Salutations."

The "celebrity" memoir was moving fast, a Times bestseller. She opened a copy and checked the index for her names, both first and last. Neither was there. What did she expect? That he'd remember Lisbon from years ago, their weeks in Cascais, their lovers' pirouette? That he'd lament the one who'd told

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"The Madonna and Child With Saint John the Baptist and Saint Nicholas of Bari (The Ansidei Madonna)," 1505, by Raphael. Oil on poplar; 85 3/8 inches by 58 1/8 inches. The National Gallery, London.

FINE ARTS

What the World Needs Now

# Grace, Harmony, and Raphael

*'The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael' at The National Gallery, London*

Continued from Page 1

Wivel explained that that's why Raphael has been regarded as central to the Western canon of visual arts more than Michelangelo and Leonardo—a remarkable feat considering that Raphael died young, at 37 years old, and his career lasted just two decades, whereas Michelangelo, for instance, worked until his death at 88 years old.

Raphael first studied Leonardo's and Michelangelo's art in Florence, and he worked hard to refine their techniques. Raphael may have been seen in the shadows of his older and more established peers; Leonardo was 31 years Raphael's senior, and Michelangelo was 8 years older than Raphael. Raphael's peers differed in their styles. In general, Leonardo approached his art as a

**Raphael's idealism is not only in the religious sense; he invites us to be good, individually and together.**

"Portrait of Pope Julius II," 1511, by Raphael. Oil on poplar; 42 3/4 inches by 31 7/8 inches. The National Gallery, London.

scientist; he observed nature and tried to suppress the subjectivity when he worked. Whereas, Wivel explained, Michelangelo's art is the opposite. It's extremely emotion-



ally engaging and is about his experience of being embodied in the world and the problems that that entailed.

Besides observing his older peers' artistic style and technique, he learned from Leonardo's interest in human psychology and from Michelangelo's ability to articulate emotionally through his art.

Raphael integrated other artists' ideas into his works so well that he made them his own. That talent made him rivals, most notably Michelangelo's. For instance, before Michelangelo had a chance to paint his composition "The Creation of Adam" in the Sistine Chapel, Raphael adapted Michelangelo's preparatory drawing and included it in his fresco "The Parnassus" in the Vatican. Michelangelo must've been fuming.

Wivel believes that Leonardo had the most profound influence on Raphael. Exhibition visitors can see Raphael's sketch of "Leda and the Swan," the only surviving direct copy (except for a more sketchy form on a sheet with other studies) that he made of Leonardo's work. Leda's contrapposto pose, where the body weight is concentrated on one leg, comes from classical art.

Raphael referenced both ancient art and Leonardo's Leda in his "Saint Catherine of Alexandria," which is also in the exhibition.

## Oh! The Secret of Raphael's Sweet Madonnas

Raphael is popularly known as the painter of sweet Madonnas and for his painting "The School of Athens" at the Vatican. Raphael's Madonnas may hold the key to why his work is universally affecting.

In his painting "The Garvagh Madonna," Raphael rendered a confident Christ child. The child's mother, Mary, has just released him from her arms so that he can pass a carnation to the toddler who will later become St. John the Baptist. Mary pulls John close to her, encouraging him to take the flower. Take away the classical Roman costumes and we could simply be looking at a loving family portrait of a mother and her charges.

Raphael made the scene relatable to us all by its emotionality, but the image means more. It crosses the divide between heaven and earth. There are tender moments between a mother and child that, at the same time, reinforce the Christian message. "It is a way of communicating the Christian message through a quasi-universal experience, which everybody recognizes and which engages people emotionally more than anything else," Wivel said.

The Christ child appears wise beyond his years. He knows that he's on earth for something greater. He sits in his mother's lap but she doesn't support him. While John wears a fur for warmth, the Christ child is naked; he wants nothing of this world, except to teach others to follow God.

Clearly, Raphael's "The Garvagh Madonna" is a religious scene, but what seems to come forth, as in many of his paintings, is grace and also the harmonic tension between the spiritual and the earthly—the divine and the human realm.

## Raphael's Appealing Art

Raphael rendered beauty where graceful figures harmoniously gather. Whether he painted figures alone, or in small or complex groupings, each painting conveys solemnity and calls us to reflect. His art overflows with grace and harmony. Both qualities are inherent in the natural order of all things; one only has to look at nature to see that.

Raphael used grace and harmony throughout all his work, whether he was working as an architect, a designer, or a painter, Wivel said. That's what makes Raphael's art universally appealing and enduring.

For Christians, "Christ is the advent of grace," Wivel explained. But grace, in a general sense, pleases, harmonizes, and makes sense. "[Raphael's] very good at making things seem natural, even things that are really very contrived," he said. Wivel cited another aspect of grace:

"the idea of decorum and how a perfect gentleman is supposed to behave." Although orphaned at 11, Raphael had the gentlemanly ways instilled in him at the Urbino court by his father, a court painter, who introduced him to the court's humanist philosophy. The court was the center of humanist learning and aspiration. He was also dear friends with the courtier and scholar Baldassare Castiglione who went on to publish "The Book of the Courtier."

Raphael's charisma and good nature shines through the many accounts of his life. Artist and art historian Giorgio Vasari, who was about 9 years old when Raphael died, praised Raphael the most. Raphael enjoyed working with many artists and craftsmen, and it seemed they loved him. "He was never seen to go to court without having with him, as he left his house, some 50 painters, all able and excellent, who kept him company in order to do him honor. In short, he lived not like a painter but like a prince," Vasari wrote.

Direct accounts of Raphael's character are sparse. Only two personal letters written by him survive. Both are to his maternal uncle who raised him, and they reveal Raphael as an extremely ambitious and socially adept man, Wivel said.

Raphael embodied decorum in his art by not exaggerating the emotions. "He doesn't become expressive in the way Michelangelo does. He is quite restrained," Wivel said.

Some people see Raphael's work as too sentimental. But Wivel sees Raphael's restraint throughout his work, something the artist learned from classical forms and art. Raphael's restraint was to use sentiment righteously in his works rather than using emotions for manipulative purposes. His art had to be authentic to be so affecting.

Raphael excelled in creating subjects where restraint is necessary, such as in painting the Virgin and Child or the complex figure groupings in his "School of Athens" composition, as opposed to Michelangelo who excelled at expressive compositions, Wivel explained. Michelangelo's



influence can be seen in Raphael's "Study for the Massacre of the Innocents," and both the drawing and the finished print are in the exhibition. For Wivel, "Raphael's Massacre of the Innocents" is an impressive composition, but overall Raphael's a little out of his element.

Raphael's work is appealing because he reminds us of the best in ourselves and who we might aspire to be. "He provides us with an ideal of civilization that we may aspire toward," he said. Raphael's "The School of Athens" shows this well, Wivel said of the fresco. "It really is about the building of knowledge in the way that enlightenment is furthered by communication and exchange. ... And ultimately, that's what we depend on for our survival."

▲ "Saint Catherine of Alexandria," circa 1507, by Raphael. Oil on poplar; 28 3/8 inches by 21 7/8 inches. The National Gallery, London.

▼ "The Virgin and Child With the Infant Saint John the Baptist (The Alba Madonna)," circa 1510, by Raphael. Oil on wood transferred to canvas; 37 3/16 inches diameter. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The long awaited "The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Raphael" at The National Gallery, London, was meant to open in 2020, to commemorate 500 years since Raphael's death in 1520, but the pandemic led to its postponement. The exhibition opens on April 9 and runs through July 31. To find out more, visit [NationalGallery.org.uk](http://NationalGallery.org.uk)

The exhibition is curated by David Ekserdjian, professor of history of art and film at the University of Leicester; Tom Henry, professor of history of art (Emeritus) at the University of Kent; and Matthias Wivel, the Aud Jepsen curator of 16th-century Italian paintings at The National Gallery, London.



COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



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The third spiritual question is “How can I be saved?” “The Hay Wagon Triptych,” 1510–1516, Hieronymus Bosch or workshop. Oil on panel; 57.9 inches by 83.4 inches. Prado Museum.



At the root of ancient wisdom is the curtailment of our appetites. “The Penitent Magdalene,” circa 1635, by Guido Reni. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum, Mount Vernon-Belvedere, Baltimore, Maryland.

## TRADITIONAL CULTURE

## Reviewing 2021, Part 4: Asking the Delicate Question of ‘How?’

JAMES SALE

What is the last question that every thinking person needs to address if they are to live a full and fulfilling life?

So far, we first considered where our culture stands today on spiritual matters. Then, we considered some questions: In the second article, we looked at why existence exists; then in the third article, we discussed a more personal question—What is the purpose of my life?

We may notice that the first question asks a “why” question and the second asks a “what” question; unsurprisingly, perhaps, the third and final vital question is a “how” question. Indeed, this question is often the first for many people because it is so very personal—more so than the rather impersonal and philosophical question of why existence exists, and even the generic personal meaning-of-life inquiry.

What is this question, then? First, I must put in a disclaimer: The language I am about to use to describe this question is framed in seemingly Christian terms, but this is because the Christian faith has so impacted Western culture. What I am drawing together here is the observation that all religions in the world seek to provide an answer to this question; in fact, all religions not only seek but also exist to provide an answer to this question. If they did not, it is scarcely conceivable that they could or would survive for as long as they have.

### A Question of ‘How’

Most directly, the question is expressed in this way: How can I be saved? Since the dawn of human time, we’ve had a feeling, a notion, a profound horror that the world is not what it should be, that human life is not what it could be, that in some way we have fallen from the ideal and perfect world we should be in, into a mess—COVID, the Ukraine, fractious politics, and much else besides—that we experience now but which every age eventually experiences.

The gods may live in some perfect Olympian world, but not we humans. One common property of mythologies around the world is that they contain some version of the idea of a Golden Age that soon fell away to a Silver, to a Bronze, and last of all to the most wicked age of all, the Iron Age, where we are now. According to Hindu scriptures, the ages are cyclical but there are four of them and these correspond to the Greek view. And even the Bible talks of the degeneration of empires in this fourfold way (Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel chapter 2, for example).

The question of “how can I be saved” cuts to the root of what it means to be a human, for it implies in its very formulation that human beings cannot save themselves. There is no infinite progress through which we are destined to conquer disease, death, or even our own human natures. Some, such as Elon Musk and those in Silicon

Valley, seem to think they can (in what they view as “transhumanism”).

Yet the brilliant atheist philosopher John Gray expressed it this way in his book “Heresies”:

“We inherit from Greek philosophy the belief that knowledge is liberating, but the biblical myth of the Fall is closer to the truth.”

In other words, the heuristic or explanatory power of myths of the Fall—be they the Garden of Eden, most famously, or the various forms of the Ages of Man—are far more compelling in accounting for why the world is as it is. Knowledge, learning, education, and such things are not going to save the world or even the individual.

Religions, on the other hand, force individuals to go inside themselves and confront themselves. And those who sincerely do this find themselves wanting.

### How do we get to the Isles of the Blessed?

This is, essentially, the human condition; and in secular, materialistic, and atheistic terms, it is hopeless. Thinker Thomas Hobbes’s said that life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” If we accept that statement, then all secular remedies for that fact are unconvincing for the vast majority of people. But we must remember that around the world, the majority have religious beliefs, and these people experience profound psychological and physiological benefits. For example, sociology professor Phil Zuckerman, citing the 2003 World Health Organization, stated: “Concerning suicide rates... it is interesting to note... that of the top remaining nine nations [excluding Sri Lanka] leading the world in male suicide rates, all are former Soviet/Communist nations, such as Belarus, Ukraine, and Latvia. Of the bottom ten nations with the lowest male suicide rates, all are highly religious nations with statistically insignificant levels of organic atheism.”

In “Our Culture, What’s Left of It,” English cultural critic Theodore Dalrymple writes: “The loss of the religious understanding of the human condition—that man is a fallen creature for whom virtue is necessary but never fully attainable—is a loss, not a gain, in true sophistication.” And this loss of understanding will lead more and more people to the calamity of the loss of their own souls; it’s surely the most calamitous thing that could happen to anybody, ever.

Humankind all recognizes this possibility, and always has: Our Faustian stories, pacts with the devil or demons, resonate across all ages and all places across the globe. But more than Faustian pacts, we see and meet people—sometimes in our own families and among our friends—whom we realize, tragically, are “lost.” They have taken a wrong road, and it seems

as if they cannot recover or get back to a right path. Dante expressed this most powerfully in the opening stanza of his famous “Divine Comedy,” where he talked of “our life’s journey” and being lost in “a dark wood.”

### The Most Important Question

Then if this is the case, which I sincerely believe it is, the question “How can I be saved?” is critically important for all of us. In Buddhist terms, we need to be able to go from samsara, which is a cycle of aimless drifting, wandering, or mundane existence, to nirvana, generally understood as perfect quietude, freedom, and highest happiness. This doesn’t happen automatically at death. Similarly, for every religion, including those that no longer exist (like the ancient Egyptian religion or the Norse beliefs about Odin and Valhalla), there is the question of how we are to be saved and avoid hell. More positively framed, it is: How do we get to the Isles of the Blessed?

In a funny sort of way, this question, expressed as a positive, actually captures where we currently are in Western culture, because billion-dollar industries supply endless answers to a slightly different question: How can I be happy in this life?

And everyone wants to know how! A fascinating survey of all this activity is contained in social critic William Davies’s 2016 book, “The Happiness Industry.” Its title says it all: Seizing on people’s desire to be blessed, also known as “happy,” is an industry. What we get is a sort of do-it-yourself mishmash of ideas. As Davies puts it: “The psychology of motivation blends into the physiology of health, drawing occasionally on insights from sports coaches and nutritionists, to which is added a cocktail of neuroscientific rumours and Bud-



The very question of “How can I be saved?” implies that human beings cannot save themselves. “Assumption of Mary,” circa 1637, by Peter Paul Rubens. Liechtenstein Collections; Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna, Austria

dhist meditation practices.”

This takes us full circle to our first article in this series, where I noted that attempting to answer the question only in this life—avoiding spiritual and existential questions—was the very cause of our suffering. Ironically, then, as we move to avoid suffering, it increases!

The theologian Henri Nouwen in his book “The Wounded Healer” correctly observed: “Who can take away suffering without entering it?”

The question of how we can be saved, then, can only be answered by “entering it.” Suffering seems to be the opposite of the happy, successful lives we all really want. Yet “without more conscious suffering, we can never find depth or meaning, never really grow, and never really change our lives,” American psychoanalyst James Hollis said in “Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life.”

To accept suffering, of course, to believe in something that seems madness, goes against the grain of all that our current culture stands for. Yet when we reflect on the ancient traditions and the wisdom to be found in all major world religions—whether taking up the cross and following Jesus, following the eightfold path of Buddhism, embracing the discipline of Mosaic Law, and the rest besides—we find that self-discipline, the curtailment of our appetites, and the sacrifice of self for others is at the root of what they all teach. And through that teaching and faith in it (be “it” the founder, the writings, the practice), we do indeed become “saved” people.

However, my coda must be that, while I am not saying that all religions are the same or equal or that all roads lead to Rome, I am saying that to be saved we have to wrestle with the suffering in life, we each have to exercise our heart and mind to examine what is true, and having done so, we have to believe, commit, and act accordingly.

To be “saved” is to go on the road less traveled.

Part 1, “Reviewing 2021 in the Month of Janus: Abandoning Purpose in Life for Our Feelings,” looks at how we tend to focus on our physical and emotional states rather than our spiritual one. Part 2, “The Importance of the Question: Why Do We Exist?” discusses that if we truly ponder this question, we realize that creation itself is self-evidently good. Part 3, looks at the question of our lives’ purpose.

James Sale has had over 50 books published, most recently, “Mapping Motivation for Top Performing Teams” (Routledge, 2021). He has been nominated for the 2022 poetry Pushcart Prize, won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets 2017 annual competition, performing in New York in 2019. His most recent poetry collection is “Hellward.” For more information about the author, and about his Dante project, visit [EnglishCantos.home.blog](http://EnglishCantos.home.blog)

## FILM REVIEW

## Director Richard Linklater’s Animated Walk Down Memory Lane

MICHAEL CLARK

Over the last three-plus decades, filmmaker Richard Linklater has made 20 movies covering a number of genres, a few of which he likes to revisit. The most notable of these is the “Before” franchise, starring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy, which follows a couple over the space of almost two decades wherein they meet, get hitched, break up, and find a tolerable middle ground as friends. Linklater’s breakout feature stoner-comedy “Dazed and Confused” (1993) found a bookend in 2016 with “Everybody Wants Some!”

Linklater was nominated for multiple Oscars for “Boyhood” (also featuring Hawke), a film that took a dozen years to shoot, mostly because he wanted to present the performers aging naturally. He’s doing this again with his next project “Merrily We Roll Along,” the second film adaptation of the musical stage play by Stephen Sondheim and George Furth. Linklater will spend 20 years on that production. This is a clear sign of extreme patience, artistic dedication, OCD, mad genius, or all of the above.

### Linklater’s 3rd ‘Rotoscope’ Movie

“Apollo 10½: A Space Age Childhood” is Linklater’s third foray into something called rotoscoping. It’s a process whereby a live-action film is shot and retouched in postproduction to make it look like animation. Every frame is hand-painted by illustrators, and the result is reality as viewed through a prism or looking glass. The technique works half-heartedly with “Apollo 10 1/2,” not so much due to the technical execution (which is superb) but rather for the often-undisciplinary screenplay.

The concept itself is interesting and original. The lead character Stan (Milo Coy) is a preteen, the youngest of six and the only member of his family born in the 1960s. Like many people in the Houston area during this time, Stan’s dad (Bill Wise) works

for NASA—not as a cool and admired astronaut but instead as a boring statistician, something Stan views as patently lame. His mom (Lee Eddy) favors polyester chinos and knotted blouses, and is rarely seen without a cigarette dangling from her lips. She also dislikes hippies.

Stan’s siblings (no surprise) taunt and rib him, and his upbringing is about what every kid who grew up in the suburbs during that era experienced. They played outside until dark, destroyed some clothing, had a few broken bones, and all of the electronic stimulation was provided by three channels on a terrestrial tube TV (via rabbit-ear antennae) for two hours a night, max. It was pure torture by today’s standards.

### A Simpler Time

This portion of the film is admittedly engaging as it paints a simpler time in the United States, when optimism and capitalism reigned supreme and neighborhoods were tightly knit communities where everyone knew each other. Had Linklater presented this at the very start, it would have provided a much better lead-in for the final 30 minutes, but instead he bookended it with the supposed principal plot.

The movie opens with Stan, a model student and talented athlete, being approached by two ominous G-Men types (Zachary Levi and Glen Powell) dressed as “Men in Black” extras who offer him a dream assignment. The lunar module for the upcoming Apollo 11 launch is “too small” to accommodate grown men, and they need just the right-sized young man to do a cover “test run” to the moon.

In the middle of his training, while Stan is experiencing a “technical yawn,” the frame freezes and the older Stan (narrator Jack Black) begins waxing nostalgic about his glorious childhood. Wisely avoiding the many exaggerated voices that often mar his live-action performances, Black instead adopts a lower-register, slight Texas



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.

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## Canadian Actress Sophie Nélisse Steals Books and Hearts

MARK JACKSON

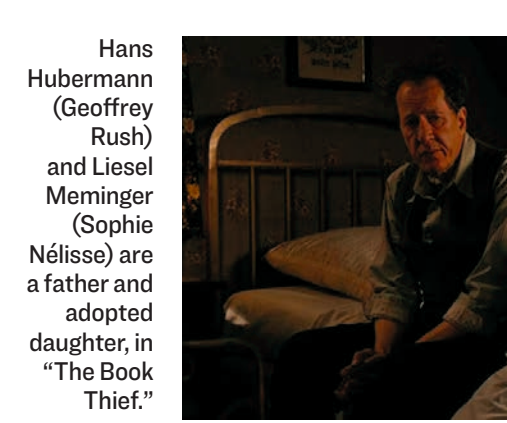
Nélisse and the unpeered Geoffrey Rush.

When called up to the blackboard of her new school and ordered to write her name, little Liesel (Sophie Nélisse) chalks up three X’s. “Dummkopfl!” shriek her classmates, later, during recess. It is this illiteracy that prompts Liesel (the book thief) to thieve books. But this Liesel is no shrinking violet. She promptly pummels the ridiculing recess leader.

“The Book Thief” is derived from the most popular novel of Australian author Markus Zusak. Published in 2005, it became an international bestseller, was translated into 63 languages, and sold 16 million copies. The sweet, if somewhat overly long film version, tells of one Liesel Meminger, who was sent to live with a foster family in Hitler’s Germany when her communist mother was sent to the death camps.

The main two reasons to see “The Book Thief” are the French Canadian Sophie

Hans Hubermann (Geoffrey Rush) and Liesel Meminger (Sophie Nélisse) are a father and adopted daughter, in “The Book Thief.”



NETFLIX

### The film’s the accurate recollection of that magical evening in July of 1969.

### ‘Apollo 10½: A Space Age Childhood’

Director:  
Richard Linklater

Starring:  
Milo Coy, Jack Black,  
Zachary Levi, Glen Powell,  
Bill Wise, Lee Eddy

Running Time:  
1 hour, 38 minutes

MPAA Rating:  
PG-13

Release Date:  
April 1, 2022

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

twang. This would have all worked out fine had Black been given less copy to read, but the ever-present voice-over eventually becomes more of a distraction than an infrequent storytelling aid.

To Linklater’s immense credit, younger members of the audience will have a difficult time determining whether Stan is dreaming what is unfolding on the screen or if it actually happened. Adversely, the movie’s PG-13 rating is entirely warranted as some of the material—the report of daily U.S. casualties in Vietnam and the nationwide riots of 1968, for instance—is intense and really has no place in what is, otherwise, an upbeat and inspiring family film.

### The Everyman Filmmaker

Unlike many filmmakers, both past and present, Linklater comes with no lofty airs and likely doesn’t consider himself to be an “artiste,” but rather an everyman storyteller whose rough edges aren’t and never will be fully worn. Given Linklater’s age (60) and the fact that he’s from Houston, it’s a good bet that there are some, if not many, autobiographical elements included in the story and, as such, “Apollo 10½” is his most personal movie to date.

What throws the production into positive territory is the accurate recollection of that magical evening in July of 1969 where 650 million people around the globe put aside any and all of their ideological, religious, and territorial differences and watched Neil Armstrong take mankind’s first step on the Moon. It might be the closest so many souls the world over will ever come to being unified.

Milo Coy appears as Stan, but the film’s frames are then handpainted to appear as an illustration, in “Apollo 10½: A Space Age Childhood.”

“Yes.”  
“The Gravedigger’s Handbook??”  
“Yes.”

(Raised eyebrow)

After they painstakingly work their way through the book, Hans proclaims solemnly (twinkle, twinkle) that when he dies, Liesel must make sure that the proper procedures are observed in accordance with their newly acquired expertise regarding the burial process.

He also turns their basement into a magical wraparound blackboard, with enormous letters of the alphabet, under which she can write down her favorite new words.

### A Houseguest

Around about the time of the unholy “Kristallnacht” (a pogrom against Jews throughout Nazi Germany on Nov. 9–10, 1938), the family takes on a new guest, Max (Ben Schnetzer). The Jewish Max is a friend of the family, and Hans happens to be indebted to Max’s family for his life. They hide Max in the basement. Liesel later describes him as the “boy who lived under the stairs like an owl with no wings.”

### The main two reasons to see ‘The Book Thief’ French Canadian Sophie Nélisse and the unpeered Geoffrey Rush.

At school, Liesel’s best friend (and hopeful seeker of a kiss from her), little tow-headed Rudy (German child actor Nico Liersch) supports her in all endeavors. At one point, he dives into a wintry river to retrieve one of her lost books. Playing alone, Rudy adorably smears black shoe polish on his face and torso to better represent his hero, African American 1936 Olympic track-star Jesse Owens, in the 100-meter dash. His Nazi father is naturally not terribly thrilled.

Liesel’s family does laundry for the local Bürgermeister (mayor) whose lonely wife, Ilse (Barbara Auer), reveals to Liesel her secret library, which is, of course, heaven to the child. But the Bürgermeister (Rainer Bock) is suspicious of Liesel, and the family loses him as a client. They now need to

make do with two meals a day to accommodate the wingless owl under the stairs.

At Christmas, the family bring in lots of snow down to the basement and have a snowball fight and make a Christmas snowman. Even the “verkleimtt” (“uptight”) Rosa joins in the fun. Max gives Liesel a journal to write in. Liesel thinks it’s the best Christmas ever. They’re all freezing.

Over the next six years, Hitler rises. Former-friends-turned-Nazis bring terror in the form of basement inspections (harboring Jews is a sure death sentence), and Hans eventually gets conscripted to the war effort.

### Highlights

Director Brian Percival of “Downton Abbey” fame mixes British actors using German accents, a few German actors, and the occasional German word. It creates a highly enjoyable, playfully successful illusion of German-ness. As mentioned, Nélisse’s Liesel and Rush’s Hans are outstanding.

The story, however, is set in World War II, so it does not have the happiest of endings. The entire movie is narrated by the unseen voice of that scythe-holding, hooded, black-cloaked, skeletal character we all know (voiced by Roger Allam). Much like the ending of 1992’s fly-fishing movie “A River Runs Through It,” where Norman Maclean says, “I am haunted by waters,” so also does the scythe-holder say, “I am haunted by humans.” Who knew that one could feel compassion for the Grim Reaper’s tough job?

Accompanied by an Erik Satie-like score, “The Book Thief” is especially wonderful for 10-year-olds, and pretty wonderful for adults too.

### ‘The Book Thief’

Director:  
Brian Percival

Starring:  
Geoffrey Rush, Emily Watson, Sophie Nélisse,  
Nico Liersch, Ben Schnetzer

Running Time:  
2 hours, 11 minutes

MPAA Rating:  
PG-13

Release Date:  
Nov. 8, 2013

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



"The Flower Market" (also known as "A Roman Flower Market in Pompeii"), 1868, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Oil on panel; 16.57 inches by 22.83 inches. Manchester Art Gallery.

## FINE ARTS

## PAINTING THE PAST:

# Dutch Artist Brings Ancient Rome to Life

Art travels through time to show how life might have been

## YVONNE MARCOTTE

Like a bulldozer, industrialization plowed into Victorian England in the 19th century. Along with its positive impacts, such as rising incomes for some, new consumer goods for those who could afford them, and automated services for the rich, there were drawbacks.

The Industrial Revolution changed the way Victorian society lived and worked as people moved from pastoral settings to overcrowded cities. Charles Dickens and others wrote about the downside. To make a living and feed their families, people who farmed or ran their own shops were forced to work in factories. They were asked to accept great change. This was Victorian England's version of the "new normal."

Many in Victorian society yearned for a return to a simpler way of life. A Dutch painter arrived in England around 1870 who imagined an ancient culture that gave just that. With a mastery of carefully researched details and scenes of what life might have been like millennia ago, Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) showed daily life during the Roman Empire that Victorian England could relate to.

## Roman Life

The artist understood that people need to satisfy basic physical needs, but he was also aware that people needed more for a happy life. He painted people in communities who moved about freely, enjoying the pleasures of daily life. He painted scenes of people interacting socially and culturally. He made paintings of people working in the arts, such as painters, sculptors, and poets, as well as people who supported and appreciated them.

Instead of a worker maintaining a printing press, his piece "A Roman Scribe Writing Dispatches" shows the importance of the skill of writing. Writers were important to society, even those who could only transcribe or write what they were told to write. The scribe was the pipeline between thought and speech, between the one who hired the scribe and those who read what the scribe had written.

A factory worker in the Victorian era would labor for hours and then return to crowded quarters to sleep, only to begin the same grind the next day. "The Discourse," on the other hand, depicts a scene showing how Romans may have used the hours in their day. In a comfortable domestic setting, two men discuss some important topic of the day. They sit forward, giving their full attention to each other, their minds actively involved in working out a problem. They appear healthy, rested, and well-dressed. Their time is their own. An exchange of ideas is happening and this is what makes the scene vibrant and alive.

Alma-Tadema's painting "The Sculptor" shows a sculptor chiseling a monument. With his own hands, he is able to create a work of art that is greater than himself. Each day for a sculptor is different, unlike the days wherein a Victorian worker does the same work for hours on end. Each stroke of his tool puts his imprint on the sculpture. Factory workers do not experience the satisfaction of adding a piece to a day's worth of many finished products, but the painting shows the sculptor and his assistants working together to make something that they and the public can see when finished.

The 19th century changed the position of women in society. Factory own-

ers wanted to hire women for their perceived dexterity and willingness to work for less money. But Alma-Tadema presented scenes of women given respect and honor in society. "Boating" shows a man ready to assist his lady into a boat for a ride. He brings his boat to the edge, waiting for her to descend. Victorians could see a culture in this painting that honored and protected women rather than profited from them.

"The Flower Market" shows a shopkeeper open for business. This contrasts with a flower girl of the Victorian era, like a fictional Eliza Doolittle, pressing people to buy a clump of flowers from her basket. The shopkeeper beams as shop visitors admire his rich assortment of plants. The sun shines in the open area. The environment in this Roman community is clean, sunny, warm, and welcoming—a big difference from the dreary English city where the flower girl sells her small blooms.

## 'Marvellous Artist'

In his paintings, Alma-Tadema presented Romans in light-filled structures of marble and stone. At an early age, he apprenticed to a former instructor at the Royal Academy of Antwerp (Belgium), Louis Jan de Taeye, who trained him in historical accuracy in painting on hard substances. The artist then worked with a highly regarded Belgian painter, Baron Jan August Hendrik Leys, who encouraged him to master the painting of marble and granite.

The publication *Punch* called Alma-Tadema a "marvellous artist" for his mastery of painting marble. The "Interior of Caius Martius House" gives a wonderful insight into the look of marble and how it was used in a Roman house. The hard surfaces used for dwellings were marked by exactness and a smooth finish.

Movie makers in the early 20th century also noticed. Directors and set designers looked to Alma-Tadema's paintings for source material in constructing the sets for "Ben-Hur" (1925), *Cleopatra* (1934), and most notably of all, Cecil B. DeMille's epic remake of "The Ten Commandments" (1956). Two modern blockbusters show the influence of his architectural accuracy: "Gladiator" (2000) and 2005's "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" (in the set design of Cair Paravel castle).

The Roman society of Alma-Tadema's paintings did not rely on the fortunes of factories, much less on computers or smartphones. His Romans enjoyed the good life. Their homes were great places to live. Worthington Galleries' website states that Alma-Tadema "imagined a Rome of splendor, sunlight, and gentle sentiment." Victorians loved how Alma-Tadema



"Boating" (also known as "The Embarkation") 1868, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Oil on canvas; 32.48 inches by 22.17 inches. The Mesdag Collection, Netherlands, The Hague.



"The Discourse" (also known as "A Chat"), 1865, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Oil on panel. Private Collection.

brought them a time when people lived free of poverty and want. His paintings were hugely popular and made him a wealthy man.

With a gentle sweep of his brush, Lawrence Alma-Tadema scraped away the dirt and cleared the smog of the Industrial Revolution to show Victorians, and us, what life could have been like in the "old normal" of ancient Rome.

# Flowers, Hope, and a Technicolor Spring

## TIFFANY BRANNAN

Spring brings the promise of rebirth, so it's no wonder that many people claim it as their favorite season. As COVID restrictions are finally eased around the world, the spring of 2022 offers the real hope of a new beginning for the first time in two years.

One of the most iconic classic tales about rebirth in the spring is Frances Hodgson Burnett's "The Secret Garden." This 1911 novel has been made into many films over the years, and in numerous languages and styles. A lesser-known adaptation is the 1949 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) film based on this story. Unlike other classic novels, such as "Little Women," "Pride and Prejudice," and "The Adventures of Robin Hood," the Golden Era film adaption is not famous as a version of this novel.

This is surprising since it features several noteworthy performers, including child stars Margaret O'Brien and Dean Stockwell and veteran British actor Herbert Marshall. Supporting actors include many recognizable names for those familiar with MGM's glory days, such as Gladys Cooper, Reginald Owen, and Elsa Lanchester. Although some of the story's details are omitted for conciseness, this is a charming rendition of a beautiful story.

## A Classic Tale

The story begins in India, where young Mary Lennox (O'Brien) has been orphaned by a cholera outbreak. The disagreeable girl is shipped back to her native England, where she is to live with her wealthy uncle, Archibald Craven (Marshall). There, she is greeted by a stern housekeeper, Mrs. Medlock (Cooper), whose coldness foreshadows the treatment she will receive at her uncle's gloomy mansion on the moors.

Once she arrives at her new home, her uncle doesn't want to see her, so her only companions are sullen servants. As she goes to her room, Mary thinks she hears crying, but Mrs. Medlock insists that the distant walls are only the wind and forbids her from exploring the house. The next day, Mary meets her whimsical Yorkshire maid, Martha (Lanchester), who is jolly and friendly but incredulous about Mary's willful personality and ignorance of life outside of India.

At first, Mary rejects the attempts at friendliness that she receives from Martha and her nature-loving brother, Dickon (Brian Roper). The girl prides herself on being superior and on not needing anyone. However, when she journeys into the off-limits part of the house, she meets her uncle's crippled son, Colin (Stockwell), whose bitterness and hatred for others may surpass even her own. In him, she sees some of her own troubling tendencies.

Mary is fascinated by the mysterious estate garden, which is surrounded by four seemingly impenetrable walls. She questions Dickon, Colin, and the gardener (Owen) to learn the truth about the baffling place. As she and Dickon become friends, they make it their project to discover the entrance to the secret garden, which they realize is the key to the dark past of the gloomy manor and its tortured inhabitants.

## The Garden

The titular garden in this novel is much more than a collection of plants. It's a natural representation of the lives of many of the main characters. Mr. Craven locked up the garden and buried the key after his wife died 10 years earlier, just as he locked up his heart and buried all his happy memories. Colin, his son, grew like the plants in the restricted garden: neglected, untrained, and shriveling for lack of care. Mary's heart is like the garden's soil; it's overgrown with strong, rebellious weeds that choke out the flowers of good impulses, which have lacked encouragement. No garden can flourish without the discipline of pruning as well as loving nourishment.

As soon as he meets her, Dickon sees hope for Mary that she clearly doesn't see in herself. Time and again, other characters express disappointment that she is not beautiful. Although at first she seems just like a spoiled brat, we quickly realize that her hostile attitude is a defense against the poor treatment she always received. When they lived in India, her own mother would never let her see visitors in the parlor because she wasn't pretty.

Similarly, Mr. Craven keeps his son hidden away in the vast manor. These children's lives are being wasted through neglect—just like the garden—yet Dickon's merry young soul may be sunny enough to brighten their gloom, just as he cares for wild animals and plants. He helps heal the withered garden and proves to be the best medicine in the world for Mary's tormented cousin and for her own broken heart.

Obviously, all black-and-white film is



The film features several noteworthy performers, including child stars Margaret O'Brien and Dean Stockwell.



"The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Published in 1911. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

composed of varying shades of gray. However, "The Secret Garden" is one of the grayest films you will find. Although the real-life colors of the scenery aren't easily detected without color film, you can see that all the tones are muted, drab, and dark. The landscape of the moors is barren. The house is dark, sinister, and stony. The people's attire is very somber. The lighting is usually dim, since the sky is always cloudy outside and few candles are lit inside. This morose color scheme matches the outlooks of the primary characters. The entire gray aesthetic provides the perfect backdrop for the hopelessness that rules these characters' lives and haunts the house.

## The Colors of Hope

Many lesser-known old film versions of classic tales are surprisingly enjoyable movies, like this one. Several of these films took considerable liberties with the source material's stories, but "The Secret Garden" remained quite true to the book's original plot. It was then brought to life by some of Hollywood's finest actors of the late 1940s, including impressive young talent in the juvenile roles.

In her final role while under contract with MGM, Margaret O'Brien is fiery and believable as the troubled Mary, making us root for her as she reforms. Dean Stockwell is every inch her match as the spoiled yet neglected Colin, bringing the tortured boy to believable life onscreen.

Then there is the lovable, happy Dickon, a welcome jolly counterpart to the other two children. Believe it or not, the Yorkshire Brian Roper was almost 20 years old when he played the boyish Dickon. Add to these wonderful main players the incurably morose yet compelling Herbert Marshall, who used the pain of his own

World War I injuries to add depth to his interpretation of men who were suffering, like Archibald Craven.

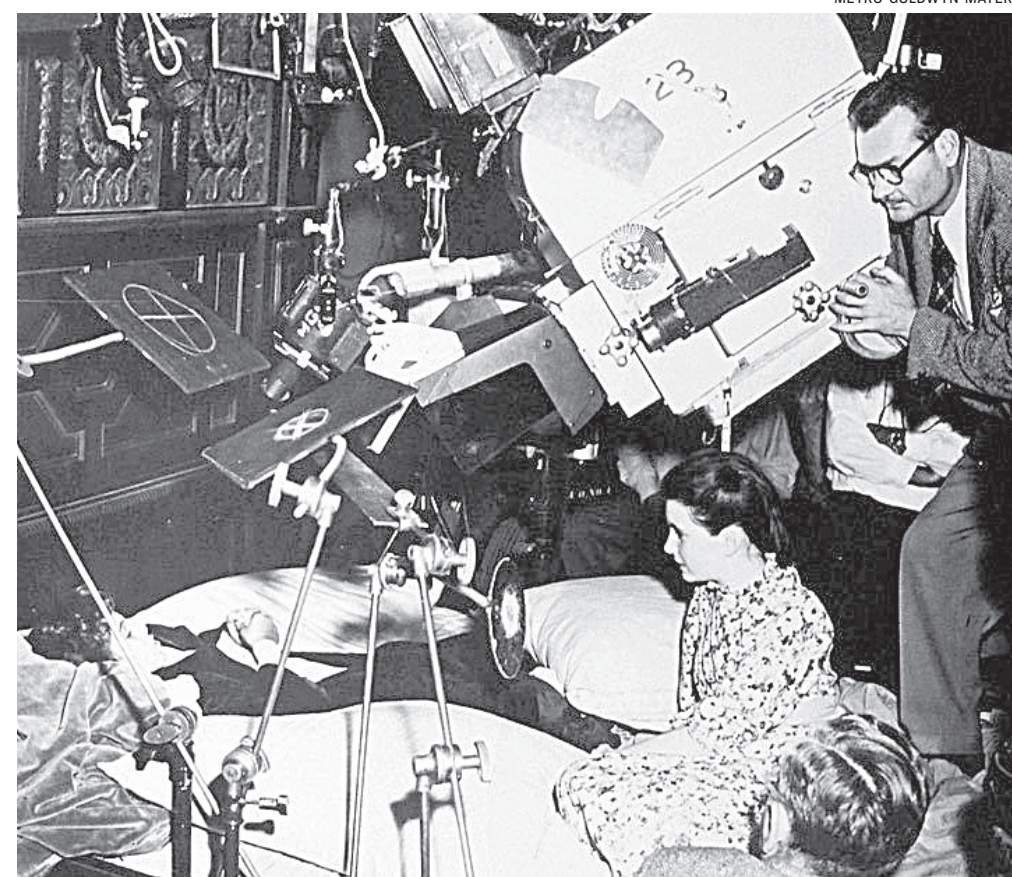
Fortunately, "The Secret Garden" doesn't remain in the gray gloom of despair. Ultimately, it is a story of hope and rebirth. This hope is vividly displayed on the screen by one of the most magical special effects used in old movies: Technicolor. When the children enter the flourishing garden, having tended it back to health, it is photographed in the most glorious, vibrant Technicolor film. The green practically glows, and the flowers bloom in every color of the rainbow, creating a magnificent picture of spring. No recent film's color can compare to the beauty of these sequences,

which are all the lovelier because of their contrast with the rest of the film's grayness.

This spring, why not celebrate the season of rebirth with your whole family by watching "The Secret Garden"? It is sophisticated enough to intrigue the most mature, discerning film viewers, yet it also has charms that the young will enjoy. Whether as a first introduction to this beloved tale or yet another way to enjoy it, this film can bring Frances Hodgson Burnett's masterpiece to life for young readers. It may also encourage children to grow a garden this year! Children, plants, and other growing things provide hope for a brighter spring.

Tiffany Brannan is a 20-year-old opera singer, Hollywood history/vintage beauty copywriter, film reviewer, fashion historian, travel writer, 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.

(L-R) Colin Craven (Dean Stockwell), Mary Lennox (Margaret O'Brien), and Dickon (Brian Roper), in "The Secret Garden."



Dean Stockwell and Margaret O'Brien on the set of "The Secret Garden."



Margaret O'Brien, star of "The Secret Garden."

## FILM REVIEW

# 'Not to Forget'

An outstanding film about loss, forgiveness, faith, and family

IAN KANE

Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, affects so many people yet there aren't a whole lot of narrative films that focus on it. The only one I recall in recent memory was the excellent 2020 "The Father" starring Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman. It's sort of a shame since it's such an important topic that touches so many lives.

So, it was quite a nice surprise to discover that a new film, titled "Not to Forget," is being screened right now at film festivals. The movie not only brings awareness to Alzheimer's but also infuses its emotionally impactful narrative with some wholesome messages that have to do with faith and family.

## Troubled Youth

The film begins unusually, with a young con artist named Chris (Tate Dewey) scamming some men out of their money in a seedy New York City bar. When the bouncer sends him on the run, he meets up with two equally troubled youngsters, pals Jerry (Jared Egusa) and Kim (Taylor Cook), who have been busy pulling their own scams.

The cops show up and a chase ensues. Chris gets arrested and ends up in court before a stern but insightful judge (Olympia Dukakis). Chris's nonchalant attitude is evident as he rolls his eyes and answers his cellphone during his hearing. But the judge still thinks that he should get a shot at rehabilitation rather than receive punishment. Therefore, she sentences him to house arrest for four weeks at his grandmother Melody's (Karen Grasse) farm in Kentucky. Melody happens to suffer from Alzheimer's.

## House (Farm) Arrest

Melody's helper, Joe (Kevin Hardesty), picks Chris up and takes him to Melody's sprawling farm, one of the biggest in the South. Although the farm used to be one of the largest corn producers in America,

the farm has fallen into neglect and Joe barely manages to keep it going.

When Chris meets Melody, he seems rather unaffected by her radiant energy and infectious smile. As a millennial, he's much more interested in finding the Wi-Fi password so that he can get cellphone service. Needless to say, he becomes completely discombobulated when Joe tells him that "there ain't no internet here."

Joe attempts to instill some discipline into Chris by setting strict mealtimes, a curfew (he is under house arrest, after all), and showing him the importance of work by having the youth help him around the farm. But nothing seems to move Chris.

Melody tends to talk about her and Chris's family history and dwell on things that happened in the past, but sometimes she forgets certain details. However, it is quite evident that she has always been a kindhearted and caring soul. Fortunately, Joe is always on hand to watch over and inspire her.

## A Trio's Scam

Soon, Chris comes up with a dastardly plan to fool Melody into transferring her power of attorney over to him instead of to Joe. But to pull off his little caper, he'll need his fellow con artists Jerry and Kim. Will the troublesome trio's hornswoggle be successful?

Right off the bat, I must say that this film is perfectly paced. We get to see a young man and his friends at a crossroads in their lives. Temporarily confined to a decidedly low-tech environment, Chris at first doesn't see any value in the beautiful natural environment surrounding him, let alone appreciate the folks who genuinely care about him.

In other words, Chris is still holding on to some internal issues that prevent him from being close to others.

This is a film with a script devoid of any fat or fluffery, with just the right number of supporting characters to keep things peppy and insightful. There's the local town's spiritual guide, Pastor John (Louis Gossett Jr.), who is on hand to gently drop hints of faith for Chris to ponder. George Chakiris also appears in a few scenes as the local bank manager who oversees Melody's will



**The film has food for the mind, heart, and soul.**

and finances. All of the supporting characters have some sort of meaningful input that drives the narrative forward.

## Invaluable Life Lessons

The positive messages of the importance of faith and family are there, but they never feel intrusive or preachy; instead, they are food for the mind, heart, and soul, even if one isn't religious. Both Christians and nonbelievers alike can take away some invaluable and timeless life lessons from this movie.

There's also a big twist (no spoilers) that happens during the onset of the film's third and final act. Usually, I can see plot twists coming, but this one was quite a surprise and made the film ascend to new emotional heights.

"Not to Forget" is a powerful film that raises awareness about a very important topic while featuring strong performances by its incredible cast of veteran performers (including five Oscar winners) and newcomers alike. Karen Grasse is particularly superb as a kindhearted, elderly woman suffering from Alzheimer's.

The tale involves some trauma and pain but ultimately has to do with forgiveness, recovering from adversity, and appreciating the finite time you have with your loved ones—particularly family members. After all, we have only one shot to enjoy our time with them while they're still here, at least physically.

*Ian Kane is a U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. To see more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

Alzheimer's sufferer Melody (Karen Grasse) and her grandson Chris (Tate Dewey), in "Not to Forget."

## 'Not to Forget'

**Director:**  
Valerio Zanolli

**Starring:**  
Tate Dewey, Karen Grasse, Louis Gossett Jr., Tatum O'Neal

**Rated:**  
Not Rated

**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 24 minutes

**Release Date:**  
Nov. 26, 2021

★★★★★



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