

[Spirituality](#)  
[Soul Seeing](#)



(Unsplash/Henry Be)

by Pierre Eau Claire

[View Author Profile](#)

## [\*\*Join the Conversation\*\*](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

May 4, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

All my life I have been searching for the "thing" called beauty. Were it not for poets and philosophers, prophets and artists, various faith traditions, I would come up empty. But along the way, beauty keeps surfacing and manifests itself in all kinds of ways. My journal is filled with these random notes, sans a method.

Philosophers, poets and novelists tell us that truth, goodness and beauty are the three great transcendentals. Emerson sees beauty as "the flowering of virtue." Emily Dickinson warns us that chasing beauty makes it vanish; leave it alone and "it abides" (I'm trying to figure that out).

Simone Weil asserts that "to love beauty is the trap God most frequently uses," a way to capture our soul. I've experienced beauty in the roundness of an apple and the full moon, in the compassion of hospice workers, in Michelangelo's "Pietà." G.K. Chesterton suggests that "one branch of the beautiful is the ugly" — how so, I do not know.



Michelangelo's "Pietà" is seen in St. Peter's Basilica May 30, 2023, at the Vatican.  
(CNS/Lola Gomez)

Then we hear St. Augustine's anguished cry: that he loved God, whom he called beauty, so late in his life. Me too, so late in realizing that God is beauty, as well as love and mercy. Look into the mirror. Do you see beauty? Malcolm Muggeridge called Mother Teresa of Kolkata "something beautiful for God" though physically, she would not have qualified for the Miss India beauty contest.

At a nursing home I recently visited, a notice proclaimed that the beautician would arrive at 2 o'clock on Tuesday and Thursday. What a vocation! Did you know that Anwar el-Sadat said that beauty came to be his presiding ideal? My presiding ideal is the Packers winning the Super Bowl (again).

In Philosophy 101, the professor told us ignorant sophomores that Hegel maintained that "beauty is merely the spiritual making itself known sensuously." My classmate Nancy, sitting next to me, was a living example in my eyes.

George Eliot saw beauty in kittens, small downy ducks, toddling babies and, yes, in [Hetty Sorrel](#). I find beauty in snowflakes on the winter window, the cobweb on the porch, in double rainbows. If the failure to appreciate beauty is a crime then I'm guilty, your honor.

Rainer Maria Rilke delighted in the beauty of a birch leaf, the feather of a peacock, a great mountain range, a splendid palace. Yes, all things great and small.



(Unsplash/Kacper Szczechla)

Is there such a thing as a "long beauty"? This was a question I asked of the autumn maple tree. Does embracing someone with love make them beautiful? I would vote yes.

Robert McAfee Brown challenges all of us to enjoy beauty when it is present, to unveil beauty where it is hidden, to restore beauty where it is defaced, to create beauty where it is absent. Is it true that beauty can lead us to the truth? Is beauty magnetic, drawing us into God?

Many artists and poets are missionaries of beauty. Have you ever been confused and dumbfounded by beauty, disturbing the soul in a good way? Appreciation of beauty is blocked and short-circuited if we are greedy and egotistical. Sometimes the obscurity of beauty holds an overpowering attraction.

Why does the month of May have more beauty than February? Why is ["Gabriel's Oboe"](#) so beautiful, so haunting, so glorious? Thank you, Ennio Morricone (go listen

to it now). G.M. Hopkins writes that "Nothing is so beautiful as Spring" but my grandma said nothing is so beautiful as autumn, uncle Joe said summer, cousin Jim voted for winter. Who am I to believe?

## Advertisement

Sight and sound give us access to beauty, what about touch, taste and smell? If we don't find beauty in ourselves, chances are we will not find it in Ireland or China or in our home. For some adventurers, beauty is found in danger (I'm not one of them). Shelley speaks of "the enchantment of the heart" and it sounds to me that beauty embraces this experience.

Wait a minute, what about love and beauty? Are they not twins, almost identical? Can you have one without the other?

Another question: If beauty is captivating, could it be taken to court for kidnapping? Could God be charged with squandering and prodigality as we ponder the sounds of silence and the multiplicity of stars? While traveling in the Alps, I twice heard the echo of beauty.

In the end, maybe beauty is an eternal mystery, never to be fathomed by our limited intelligence and unstable intuition (yet, we must continue the hunt).

[Tweet this](#)

The artist who paints beauty deserves a gold medal. It's strange how deep sadness can radiate beauty. An offensive thought: Beauty is capable of deceit. Lord, forgive me for thinking that. The beauty of the body, the beauty of the soul; is there a correspondence here?

In the end, maybe beauty is an eternal mystery, never to be fathomed by our limited intelligence and unstable intuition (yet, we must continue the hunt). A byproduct of beauty draws us out of ourselves, no small miracle. There is a danger of harshness and starkness when beauty is not appreciated.

Finally, the children in beauty's family: elegance, sublimity, splendor, glory, irresistibility, harmony, wholeness, symmetry, grace. And the hunt goes on.

A version of this story appeared in the **June 7-20, 2024** print issue under the headline: Searching for the 'thing' called beauty.