



N.C. Wyeth

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Title

And putting their mouths to the level of a starry pool, they drank their fill

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

1916

Catalogue Number

81.13

Credit Line

Anonymous gift, 1981

Web Description

Stevenson's tale of murder and romance is set in 15th century England. The hero, Dick Shelton (depicted on the right), and heroine Joanna Sedley, disguised as John Matcham, drink from a pool in a clearing as they make their way through Tunstall Forest. Dick carries news of an uprising to his guardian Sir Daniel Brackley, while Joanna hopes to escape the marriage Brackley has arranged for her. For a commission such as *The Black Arrow*, Wyeth would begin by reading the story in an earlier edition; in this case, an unillustrated 1915 Scribner's edition in which he made notes on the endsheets and markings throughout (Brandywine Museum of Art, NCWS.95.163). He would continue with in-depth research. For the *Black Arrow* pictures, he wrote to his mother, "I spent some of the time in the [New York Public] library looking up medieval data concerning my forthcoming book." That was only a part of his creative process, however. As he gathered facts, he wove them with impulses from his own imagination. The resulting mindset caught him up, sometimes overwhelmed him, and yielded the lush, romantic images he produced on canvas. "The medieval period is gradually drawing me down," he wrote, "into its tremendous confusion of customs, costumes, and its singular spirit. I feel all pent up with the crowding impressions of an age rich in picturesqueness but black with infamy. The history of those times is after all rather suffocating...my head is clogged with long-bows, spears, salets, doublets, mail, quarter-staffs, jousting bouts, ferries, skerries, and moats..." (Betsy James Wyeth, ed., *The Wyeths, The Letters of N. C. Wyeth, 1901-1945*. Boston: Gambit, 1971, p. 522)