

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

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Telemachus stands by his father, Odysseus, to challenge those who have threatened his home. "Odysseus and Telemachus Killing the Suitors," 1812, by Thomas DeGeorge. Roger Quilliot Art Museum, Auvergne, France.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Fatherlessness in Homer's 'Odyssey'

Chaos reigns in Ithaca and in our modern times

WALKER LARSON

When we think of Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey," written in the late eighth or early seventh century B.C., we think of the monsters. We picture the raging Cyclops hurling stones at Odysseus's ship, each massive rock sending up towers of spray from the glinting surface of the Mediterranean. Or we think of the swirling waters around Charybdis as the creature swallows gulps of "the wine-dark sea," to use Homer's lovely epithet, while Odysseus struggles to stay out of the beast's reach. We might also question what an ancient swashbuckling tale like

The lack of fathers in homes bodes ill for us.

this could have to offer modern readers.

But Homer's main concern in the poem is not monsters, or magic, or adventure, though the story contains a generous helping of all these. He focuses, rather, on questions of home, family, and especially fatherhood—themes that certainly resonate with us today.

"The Odyssey" at its core is a domestic poem, concerned with what it means to have a nation, a household, a spouse, a child. "No finer, greater gift in the world than that... when man and woman possess their home, two minds, two hearts that work as one. Despair to their enemies, joy to all their friends," says Odysseus in Book VI (Robert Fagles's translation), and these words reflect his own desire to reunite with

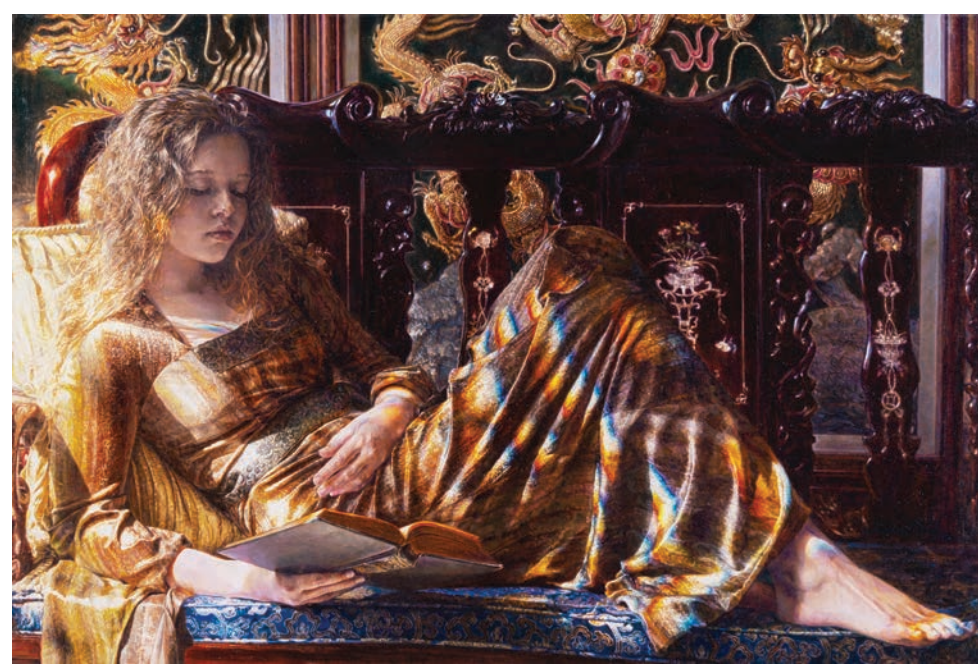
his wife and son. This deep passion drives him on through all the weariness and woes of his 20-year ordeal, first in the Trojan War, then in trying to return from it.

Homer calls him "long-enduring Odysseus." He endures for the sake of seeing home again.

Trouble at Home

Homer shows us, too, how easily the peace of the home can be disturbed. In "The Odyssey," we see what happens when the nation lacks its leader, when spouses are torn from each other, and when children grow up fatherless.

Continued on Page 4



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

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"The Poetry Reading," before 1938, by Vittorio Reggianini. Oil on canvas.

POETRY

The Playground of Poetry: Light Verse and Whimsy

JEFF MINICK

I never saw a Purple Cow,
I never hope to see one,
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one!

In 1895, American writer and humorist Frank Gelett Burgess penned those lines, which became one of the most famous American nonsense rhymes.

Afterward, Burgess expressed his regret for this verse in "Cinq Ans Apres," which for those whose French is rusty means "Five Years Later":

Ah, yes! I wrote the "Purple Cow"—
I'm Sorry, now, I Wrote it!
But I can Tell you, Anyhow,
I'll Kill you if you Quote it!

Burgess's original poem "The Purple Cow" has appeared in numerous children's anthologies and continues to be read and recited by the pre-school crew. What child wouldn't be attracted by such silliness, with its iambic beat (an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one) and word repetitions?

But that second piece, Burgess's rueful look in the rearview mirror, appeals to a more sophisticated audience, one that can understand the nuances as to why the poet regrets the original and why he jokes that "I'll Kill you if you Quote it!"

Such a comparison reveals on a miniature scale the divide between humorous children's poems and the wit and irony that attract adults.

The Children's Corner

Open a children's anthology of poetry, and odds are that you'll find old favorites meant to bring a smile or a laugh, like Laura Richards's "Etelephony" or A.A. Milne's "Now We Are Six." Despite their age, many of these rhymes have retained their place in children's literature, though their antiquated vocabulary and societal changes have exiled some

former popular children's poems.

In Hilaire Belloc's "Cautionary Tales for Children," for instance, many today may deem once well-known poems like "Jim, Who Ran Away From His Nurse, and Was Eaten by a Lion" and "Rebecca, Who Slammed Doors for Fun and Perished Miserably" as too violent for children, though they do remain in print.

More modern poets have also delivered a floral wreath of nonsense rhymes and goofy verse to children. Recent bards of juvenile comedy like Jack Prelutsky, Roald Dahl, and Shel Silverstein will no doubt find fans among the younger set for decades to come, entertaining them with poems like Prelutsky's "Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face" or Dahl's "Pig." For several years, when I served as a prompter for a homeschooling poetry night, Silverstein's "Sick" was always on the program. In this poem, until she realizes it's Saturday, a girl tries to escape her school day by claiming illness. Here's the first stanza:

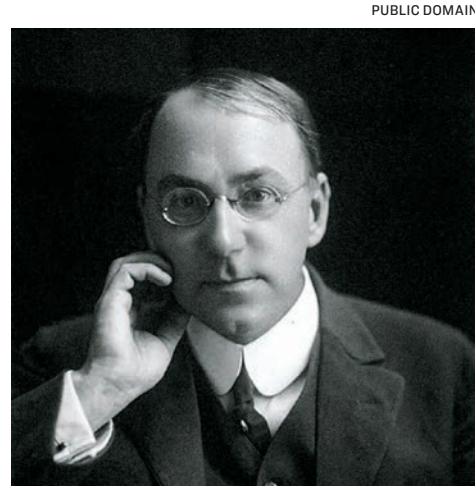
"I cannot go to school today,
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.
"I have the measles and the mumps,
A gash, a rash, and purple bumps.
My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,
I'm going blind in my right eye."

Clearly, there's no shortage of humor in children's poetry. But what about the adults?

A Bash With Nash

Here, we have to dig a bit deeper for some smiles. Poems like Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" make some critics' lists as adult poetry, but such inclusions are more a consequence of sophisticated wordplay than any grownup theme.

But when we rummage around a bit, either online or in our libraries, we do find poetry tailor-made for those who are of legal age to buy a bottle of cabernet. One of the best and most prolific of these makers of rhythm and rhyme is that master of light verse Ogden Nash (1902–1971).



Frank Burgess, circa 1910. Selections from the Bancroft Library Portrait Collection.



American Poet Ogden Nash on a television quiz show panel, circa 1955.



"Sick" from the collection of children's poetry in Shel Silverstein's book, "Where the Sidewalk Ends," published in 1974.

Somewhat of a hypochondriac, Nash had this to say in the last stanza of "Common Cold," in which a doctor reassures him that he has only an ordinary case of the sniffles:

A common cold, gadzooks, forsooth!
Ah, yes. And Lincoln was jostled by Booth;
Don Juan was a budding gallant,
And Shakespeare's plays show signs of talent;
The Arctic winter is fairly coolish,
And your diagnosis is fairly foolish.
Oh what a derision history holds
For the man who belittled the Cold of Colds!

One of his most quoted poems, "Reflections on Ice Breaking," is only seven words long:

Candy
Is Dandy
But liquor
Is quicker.

Relevance

The humor of some poems from the past still strikes home today. William Crosswell Doane's "The Modern Baby" addresses the days when mothers were encouraged to avoid spoiling their new babies with affection. Though that practice has now thankfully vanished, quarrels over how best to manage infants remain. Here's Doane's first stanza:

"THE HAND that rocks the cradle"—but
there is no such hand;
It is bad to rock the baby, they would have us understand;
So the cradle's but a relic of the former foolish days
When mothers reared their children in

As a young man, Nash worked in advertising and publishing in New York City, and spent a short time at The New Yorker, but as his humorous and whimsical poems gained a following, he turned full-time to freelance writing. He kept his witty observations focused on the familiar and the mundane—minor illnesses, childrearing, marriage, quarrels. Here, for instance, is one of his takes on matrimony, "A Word to Husbands":

To keep your marriage brimming
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.

unscientific ways—
When they jounced them and they bounced them, these poor dwarfs of long ago—
The Washingtons and Jeffersons and Adamases, you know.

From that most prolific of poets, Unknown, we have advice that might still come into play today in "A Maxim Revised":

Ladies, to this advice give heed—
In controlling men:
If at first you don't succeed,
Why, cry, cry again.

Like sleep, laughter and smiles are natural physicians.

For those of us who wear that euphemistic crown of senior citizen, "Not My Age" relates a common experience that may bring a chuckle:

That's not my age; it's just not true.
My heart is young; the time just flew.
I'm staring at this strange old face,
And someone else is in my place!

And certainly our "selfie" culture might take both a smile and a lesson from Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?":

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you—Nobody-too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!
How dreary—to be—Somebody!
How public—like a Frog—
To tell one's name—the livelong June—
To an admiring Bog!

Lockdown Lyrics

In our search for humorous rhymes, we can even find verse that applies to the pandemic and the obsessions and fears it engendered, as in Arthur Guiterman's "Strictly Germ-Proof":

The Antiseptic Baby and the Prophylactic Pup
Were playing in the garden when the Bunny gamboled up;
They looked upon the Creature with a

loathing undisguised;
It wasn't Disinfected and it wasn't Sterilized.
The Baby and the Pup then rid the Micro of his germs until "There's not a Micrococcus in the garden where they play."

Here are a few of the poems from the 1918–1920 Spanish Flu epidemic that might ring true today. From one newspaper comes this first stanza:

Oh, we are quarantined, I guess
For 'bout a million years
But if we don't get out of here
We'll burst right out in tears.

And from Canada we have this verse that should remind us of how many symptoms were blamed on COVID-19:

The toothpaste didn't taste right—
Spanish Flu!
The bath soap burned my eyes—
Spanish Flu!
My beard seemed to have grown pretty fast and tough overnight—
Spanish Flu!

Children at Play

Like sleep, laughter and smiles are natural physicians. They are vitamins taken against our troubles, particularly those which, like the masks and lockdowns recently, are spurred on by public policies. As numerous online sources tell us, a good laugh and a cheerful attitude offer mental and physical benefits ranging from reduced stress to lower blood pressure.

We can find that laughter by reading poetry, or even better, sharing it with others. If we feel so inspired, we might also consider writing some lighthearted verse of our own, keeping always in mind that words in this case are playthings—and not just intended for children.

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.

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"The Odyssey" by Homer is about how a father puts his home in order. "A Reading From Homer, 1885," Lawrence Alma Tadema. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Fatherlessness in Homer's 'Odyssey'

Continued from Page 1

During Odysseus's long absence in fighting the Trojan War, all is not well on his home island of Ithaca. As the years pass, the people of Ithaca come to believe that Odysseus, their king, is dead.

As a result, a host of young suitors swarm around Odysseus's wife, Penelope, hoping to win her hand—and with it the kingdom. These men invade her estate and live off her and Odysseus's wealth. They lounge about Penelope's banquet hall, drinking and laughing, harassing the servant girls, apparently unconcerned with the insult they offer to Odysseus's memory and the dignity of his wife.

"The young men brimmed the mixing-bowls with wine. They reached out for the good things that lay

A whole generation of boys grew up without the guidance of the older and wiser men of Ithaca.

at hand, and when they'd put aside desire for food and drink the suitors set their minds on other pleasures, song and dancing, all that crowns a feast." (Book I)

The suitors think only of amusing themselves. They're the extreme form of the dinner guest who overstays his welcome. And such an abuse of hospitality was considered even more disgraceful in the ancient Greek world than it would be today.

The Greeks abided by "xenia," the sacred laws of hospitality that guided the relationship between guest and host. Hosts were supposed to welcome everyone, making sure guests had food and drink before even asking them their names. In return, guests were to respect and honor their hosts, offer

The importance of men mentoring men: Odysseus and his son, Telemachus, leave the palace to journey to Odysseus's father, Laertes. "Odysseus and Telemachus on Their Way to Laertes," 1632-1633, by Theodoor van Thulden after the painting by Francesco Primaticcio. Rijksmuseum.



gifts in return, and not impose for too long. The suitors have abandoned these sacred customs of their forefathers, but no one steps in to put an end to this behavior. Chaos reigns in Ithaca.

What has made these young men so shameless, so uncontrollable, and so ignorant of sacred traditions? The answer is fatherlessness.

Odysseus wasn't the only man of Ithaca who sailed to Troy; a whole generation of fathers left the island when they took up arms against the Trojans. And a whole generation of boys grew up without the guidance of the older and wiser men of Ithaca.

Is it any wonder that these boys failed to mature into men? Is it any wonder they never learned to seek anything besides childish pleasures? Is it any wonder they have forgotten the customs of their ancestors, such as xenia?

How to Be a Man

More than anyone else, fathers bestow on boys a knowledge of the traditions of a society and why they matter. Good fathers also teach their sons to use their masculinity to serve and protect others, rather than to take advantage of them.

Without these teachers, boys do not know how to be men, and they fail to discover the links they must maintain to the past or, worse still, they scorn those links. If a boy does not see his father take cultural traditions seriously, he will often conclude that those traditions aren't important.

Homer's wisdom echoes down to us through the ages, and what was true of the importance of father-son relationships then remains true now. That thought should worry us, given that in the United States 18.4 million, or 1 in 4 children, live without a father in the home.

Is it any wonder that young men today, like the suitors in Odysseus's halls, have lost touch with their own cultural traditions? And that, lacking any high ideals, they often turn to video games and pornography; they "set their minds on other pleasures"? The lack of fathers in homes bodes ill for us. And the same notion applies on a cultural level, too.

Since our society has largely discarded Homer and other fathers of Western civilization, we shouldn't be too shocked that the treasures and wisdom of our culture are endangered.

But despite the grim picture that Homer paints of a disordered, fatherless society, the poem ends on a profoundly hopeful note. When Odysseus returns, he immediately combats the chaos. And his greatest ally is his son, Telemachus. Telemachus was just a baby when Odysseus left for Troy, but he is now 20 years old and has done his best to



Odysseus was away from his wife and son for 10 years. "Penelope Reading a Letter From Odysseus," 18th century, by Louis-Jean-Francois Lagrenée. Oil on panel.

avoid the faults of his generation. Under the influence of his father, Telemachus blooms into manhood. He grows strong enough to stand by his father's side when Odysseus challenges those who have threatened and hounded his wife and servants.

Glancing into each other's eyes, father and son feel the surge of love, strength, and trust needed to face the suitors together, and the damage of Telemachus's fatherless childhood heals almost instantly.

Homer put hope for the restoration and defense of the home in this filial bond. And if the Greeks saw hope for civilization in that most fundamental of relationships, between father and son, perhaps we can too.

Walker Larson teaches literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife. He holds a Master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in *The Hemingway Review*, *Intellectual Takeout*, and his *Substack*, "The Hazelnut."



Chaos reigns in Ithaca, but no one steps in to put an end to this behavior. "Penelope and the Suitors," 1911-12, John William Waterhouse.

When we think of "The Odyssey," we remember the monsters and adventure, but Homer's main concern was the story of Odysseus returning to reclaim his home, enduring for the sake of seeing his wife and son again. "Ulysses and the Sirens," 1891, by John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.



In her allegorical short story "Maine to the Rescue," Laura E. Richards highlights the courageous perseverance of the young girl Maine during a terrible blizzard. "The Blizzard," circa 1860, by Cornelius Krieghoff. Private Collection.

Determination and Grit

Laura E. Richards's Short Story 'Maine to the Rescue'

KATE VIDIMOS

Whether figurative or literal, storms are the strongest forces that test mental and physical ability. When we courageously persevere and fight through these storms, we can conquer our fears and prove our strength.

In her allegorical short story "Maine to the Rescue," Laura E. Richards highlights the courageous perseverance of the young girl Maine during a terrible blizzard. Though it is not clear when she wrote this story, it seems that Richards based it on the Great Blizzard of 1888 that plagued the northeastern coast of the United States.

All the girls at Miss Wayland's School discuss the intense snow outside. Virginia complains that it should not be snowing in March, while Massachusetts "is as calm as usual, and Maine is jubilant" to see such substantial snowfall.

However, the storm soon grows worse. All the girls, except Massachusetts and Maine, grow anxious. Even Miss Wayland says, "There has never been such a storm [in New York] in my lifetime!" Despite the heavy snowfall, incredible winds, and dropping temperatures, the school is a safe haven against this blizzard.

As they sit at tea, they recognize a sound behind the wind. It is a child! But no one can tell where the cry is coming from, due to the heavy snow.

Enduring the harshest winds, snow, and ice, the girl remains steadfast.

Without hesitation, Maine volunteers herself to go find the child: "It is a child! [...] I am going of course [...] If [the weather] were freezing, I wouldn't cry." She dresses herself in the warmest clothes and snowshoes. Then, with a ball of twine, she flashes out the door.

Once outside, Maine is confronted by a strong wind. The wind throws her, but with determination she stands up, "sets her teeth, folds her arms tightly, and stooping forward, measures her strength once more with that of the gale."

Maine fights the wind, snow, and confusion until she stumbles upon little Benny Withers. Though she cannot see much through the blinding snow, she puts him on her back and trudges forward.

Against All Odds

Walking blind with a child on her back, Maine, against all odds, returns the boy to his home. Yet she does not stay in the Withers' warm house. She plunges back out into the blinding blizzard.

Using her twine, Maine successfully tracks her steps backward to the school, where the girls welcome her back with joy! She is covered in snow, her face is scarred, and she is stiff. Nevertheless, she is cheerful and ready to go back out again.

Richards shows that even though Maine endures the harshest winds, snow, and ice, she remains steadfast. She remains cheerful and hopeful all the time, never allowing her courage or perseverance to fail.

In his novel "Pudd'nhead Wilson," Mark Twain writes: "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear." We must not be afraid to test our strength and face our fears.

When we are confronted by the many seemingly impossible storms in our lives, we must have courage like Maine. For with such courage, we can fight, persevere, and conquer our fears. We can battle storms and achieve the impossible.

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate from the liberal arts college at the University of Dallas, where she received her bachelor's degree in English. She plans on pursuing all forms of storytelling (specifically film) and is currently working on finishing and illustrating a children's book.

BOOK REVIEW

A Glimpse at Moments in the Life of a Genius

ANITA L. SHERMAN

For centuries, Isaac Newton was the man when it came to our understanding of how the universe works. And then came Albert Einstein, who forever changed the dynamics of space, time, energy, and gravity.

"Einstein: The Man and His Mind" is not a scholarly, theoretical tome. It is not an in-depth biography of this man who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and became an American citizen in 1940, spending his last decades at Princeton University. Readers won't be overwhelmed trying to grasp the complexities and genius of his theories.

Authors Gary S. Berger and Michael DiRuggiero are longtime admirers of Albert Einstein. Berger is not a physicist or historian. He is a physician and a collector for 25 years has gathered original documents and photographs. From an early age, Berger was fascinated with Einstein and his mind, a mind so curious that he accomplished what no one had before him. Einstein's grasp of physical reality and its incomprehensible simplicity was a world-changing discovery that has had ripple effects in myriad sciences.

Michael DiRuggiero is co-founder and current owner of The Manhattan Rare Book Company. He specializes in the history of science, with a notable emphasis on the work of Albert Einstein.

Together, their collaboration has created a very unique and user-friendly volume. It is for the scholar and novice alike. It is for anyone who has an interest in Einstein, but even more than that, it is an invitation to glimpse moments in the life of a genius.

A Heavy Lift

Let me share my initial visceral reaction. This is a big book in all aspects. It measures 10 by 13 inches and is more than an inch thick. It's also weighty, coming in at 4.6 pounds. This is a substantial, what I could call "coffee table" book. I smiled to myself as I picked it up, thinking, "This is a heavy book ... fitting for a man who delved into the mysteries of the universe."

I don't normally talk about the physical characteristics of books reviewed, but the sheer elegance of this book is worth noting. The text is broken apart by many of his famous quotes. The paper stock is heavy, the typestyle easy on the eyes, and

several of the pages fold out to reveal Einstein's handwritten equations.

What is particularly engaging are the photographs, many of them signed by Einstein. They are large and compelling, whether he is pictured in a dapper suit or his preferred relaxed mode in a Levi leather bomber jacket. Most photos have him holding his pipe and sporting longish and unkempt hair.

A Lifetime of Learning

Readers will no doubt establish a kinship with this esteemed physicist as they gaze into his penetrating eyes and see depth and wisdom, often a tinge of sadness, a hint of humor, and always caring and kindness.

Einstein was a pacifist. He disdained what was happening in his native Germany. He was a lover of music and respected children for their energy and curiosity about life. He enjoyed sailing and hours of quiet thinking.

He made America his home, as did many of his professional and personal friends. He was at home with intellectuals—from other scientists to authors, artists, photographers, and writers.

When his theories were first introduced in papers in the early 1900s, few initially recognized the future consequences of his discoveries. His brilliance would eventually shine among his peers as well as the general populace. He was loved and adored by many, even though his accomplishments were barely understood.

An avalanche of books has been written about Albert Einstein, a household name for most of us. This book, written from the perspective of lifelong admirers who want his legacy to remain intact, invites readers to take a close look at his equations, photos of him working, and portrayals of him as more than a scientist—also as a man with deep convictions and emotions, endless curiosity and passion, and a devotion to imagination and knowledge.

Einstein's legacy stems from his fundamental and earthshaking contributions to science. His universal appeal and status in the world go well beyond the fame acquired through the worlds of art and literature, movies, or digital media. Decency, attacks on discrimination, human rights, war, and peace—these were all topics he

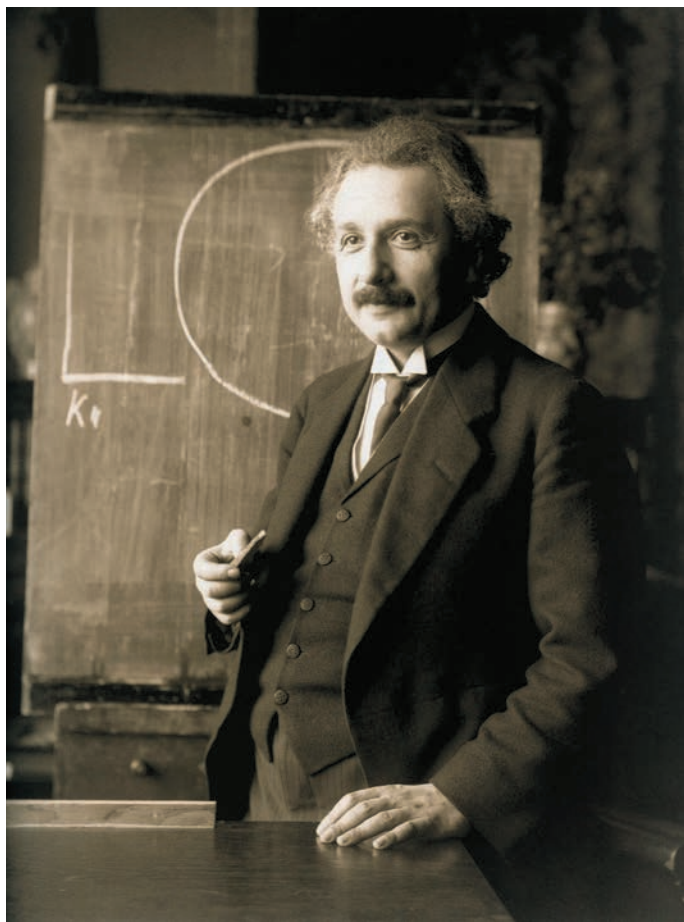
The book is light, airy, refreshing, and deeply satisfying.



Author
Gary S. Berger and
Michael DiRuggiero

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Albert Einstein during a lecture in Vienna in 1921, where he began to develop his theories.

explored beyond science, and all with the same gusto and drive.

With legacy in mind, the book is dedicated to the memory of Albert Einstein. All royalties will be contributed to the Albert Einstein Archives at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Einstein was one of the founding fathers of this institution.

It's a weighty book, literally. Yet it is light, airy, refreshing, and deeply satisfying to touch briefly on the Einstein phenomena and to experience this incredible man's life up close and personal.

A volume worth holding, reading, viewing, and relishing.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. She can be reached at anitajusturite@gmail.com

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

Finding Faith in Lost River, Alabama

ANITA L. SHERMAN

The Northern Cardinal is the state bird of Virginia and several other states. Many of these redbirds make regular appearances in our backyard, snatching up sunflower seeds and occasionally building nests in our maple trees. They are beautiful birds and, when it snows, their striking red color creates a brilliant winter painting.

In author Fannie Flagg's "A Redbird Christmas" (2005), it is a redbird, a Northern Cardinal, that is one of the main characters in this enchanting Christmas classic. Flagg is known for her inviting and warm voice, drawing readers into a world of Southern charm complete with quirky and memorable characters. Other notable works include "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe," "I Still Dream About You," and "The Whole Town's Talking."

The book opens with readers meeting 52-year-old Oswald T. Campbell, who has been given a dire prognosis by his doctor. He leaves chilly Chicago, where he is slugging around in ankle-deep slush, and heads for a small rural community called Lost River in Alabama. There, he hopes to find some peace and restoration during what he believes are his remaining days.

Meeting the Neighbors

He's given little time to feel sorry for himself, as he is quickly embraced by a former Army nurse who rents him a room in her charming bungalow. Not only does he find himself in spacious, airy, and warm accommodations, but he also has three hot meals a day. And then there are the chirping birds and heady fragrance of garden flowers.

Taking daily walks, he soon meets the grocery store owner, who is nursing a broken heart. He also meets an injured redbird named Jack. Jack can't fly, but he hops around hilariously and learns to do tricks.

Jack also becomes the favorite friend of a young, crippled girl named Patsy who has her own sad story, a story that is slowly discovered by those in the community who wish to adopt her as their own.



Yes, a Northern Cardinal is one of the main characters in this enchanting Christmas classic.

The mail in Lost River is delivered by boat. The postman takes daily runs up and down the river, and Campbell eventually secures a ride. The fresh air is invigorating and the scenery spectacular. And then there is the wildlife, particularly the birds, and Campbell decides that identifying them is a good way to fill his days. It also inspires him to start painting them.

The postman is also a keen fisherman. He knows the currents, the winds, the shallows, the places where fish lurk, and the lures that attract them. His sage and wry remarks, as well as his huge and caring heart, have him delivering more than the daily mail.

Lost River has a preponderance of eligible ladies. Many of them are members of the Mystic Order of the Royal Polka Dots Secret Society. When they aren't gossiping, they find ways to do clandestine good works. Campbell, long divorced, now finds himself at the center of feminine attention, from dinner party invitations to dances.

It may not be a good idea to read this delightful novel while you are hungry. The women in Lost River produce a great amount of food, from fresh biscuits and macaroni and cheese to tomato aspic and fried chicken. Adding to the whimsy, Flagg includes several recipes at the end of the book to tempt your palate, like Claude Underwood's Fried Mullet or Mildred's Key Lime Pie.

As the months pass, Campbell learns of long-standing feuds, unbreakable friend-

Fannie Flagg's engaging and compelling story surely ranks among classic Christmas tales.



'A Redbird Christmas'

Author
Fannie Flagg

Publisher
Random House, Oct. 25, 2005

Hardcover
240 pages

ships, and hearts still healing from lost loves. As a newcomer, but fast becoming a solid member, he starts to care deeply for his newfound home away from the windy city. And he starts to feel better.

A child's vulnerability and innocence, along with her feathery friend, dominate much of the suspense, leading to an unforgettable and heartwarming finale.

As an Alabama native, Flagg knows well the Southerner's love of eccentric characters and unusual traditions. She is deft at giving readers a cleverly crafted and wonderfully woven narrative that will keep readers turning the pages and, occasionally, letting out a laugh or two. Family is family—warts, weirdness, and all.

Flagg also likes to include bits of historical information as well. Lost River is a fictional town, but its inspiration is Magnolia Springs. Unique as it is, it's the only place in the country where mail is delivered year-round by boat.

Christmastime has its classic reads: Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," or perhaps Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory" or "One Christmas." Flagg's engaging and compelling story surely ranks among classic Christmas tales.

Something very amazing and magical happens in Lost River. It's an event that leaves those who witness it forever changed. I suspect that you, as a reader, will leave the last page with a smile on your face, equally touched and uplifted.

Treat yourself or someone else with a lively and lovely read. We can all use a good dose of cheer, faith, and hope at this very special time of the year.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. She can be reached at anitajusturite@gmail.com



English nurse Lib Wright (Florence Pugh) is hired to find out whether a girl is actually surviving without food, in "The Wonder."

A Tale of Religious Fasting in 1800s Ireland

MARK JACKSON

Aspire, Irish tale much akin to 1990's "The Field" is "The Wonder." It features the Emerald Isle's patchwork of multigreen-hued fields, barren windswept heights, and soggy footpaths stretching as far as the eye can see, where the billowing blue skirts of bonneted women who walk those paths are turned brown with mud.

Set in 1862, the script is based on the novel by Emma Donoghue. It's not the Middle Ages Ireland that Irish Stephen of "Braveheart" claimed belonged entirely to him ("It's my Island!"), but it might as well be: There's no electricity, acres of mud, sheep, and Christianity reigns supreme.

What's at stake in a small village here is faith being questioned in the name of science. It's also another bare-knuckled punch to the face of traditional patriarchal societies and the apparently downtrodden, oppressed, and acquiescent women trapped in them.

The Good Nurse

English nurse Lib Wright (Florence Pugh) travels to Ireland, having accepted a mysterious job offer for which she is to be handsomely paid, the details of which she'll be informed of upon arrival.

She's been hired by a black-clad group of village elders, who include medical doctor McBreaty (Toby Jones) and man-of-the-cloth Father Thaddeus (Ciarán Hinds). She'll be living with the O'Donnell family for two weeks.

Her job is to observe the O'Donnells' 11-year-old daughter, Anna (Kila Lord Cassidy). It would appear to all and sundry that the child hasn't eaten a bite of food in four months, yet remains strong of limb and rosy of visage.

Local clergymen and doctors, while stymied, are very much in love with the romantic idea of her subsisting solely on "manna from heaven" (which is the girl's personal claim). A nun is also assigned to keep vigil over Anna when nurse Lib is unavailable.

The elders hold nurse Lib's outsider status to be essential. And while their desire to appear impartial has them importing someone with no vested interest in their situation, they themselves are somewhat unresolved as to how they hope the outcome will be interpreted. Would the potential tourist attraction-like aspect of the incipient local saintliness benefit their town in terms of commerce? Or might it bring unwanted attention that could undermine their power structure?

Nurse's Back Story

Nurse Lib is recently returned from the Crimean War, and while she certainly seems professional and untouched by any snowballing PTSD effects from having witnessed the horrors of war, she's got prodigious trauma in the form of a mother's loss. A single pair of tiny crocheted booties, a bottle of morphine, and the ritual pricking of her finger for a bead of ruby-red blood to suck reveal an 1800s version of substance abuse to bury grief.

Now, nurse Lib is a steadfast believer in medical science; she'll not be having any of this manna twaddle. Much less will she entertain Dr. McBreaty's hopeful and hazarded guess (much like ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's "scientific" declaration that the action of sunlight upon mud produces frogs) that Anna is somehow converting sunlight into nourishment and thereby photosynthesizing herself into sainthood.

And so there is much very serious eyeball examining, neck gland manipulating, heartbeat listening via brass ear trumpet, "Say Aaaahh ...," blood pressure taking, and such. She also accompanies the girl on long walks in the green fields, on footpaths, where Anna desires to kneel down and pray 30 times a day. Which accounts for her muddy skirt.

The Reporter

As word spreads far and wide about the so-called miracle girl, it naturally, eventually, draws the attention of the press. Journalist Will Byrne (Tom Burke) shows up, covering the story for a London newspaper, listening to gossip in local bars, and poking around with a high degree of cynicism, hoping to discredit the fervorous rumors.

Will and Lib also find themselves involved in a bit of fervorous physicality, arising more due to availability than passion. Both being ultimately dedicated to getting to the truth of the matter, they become uneasy allies in the investigation.

The Evil at the Bottom of It All

As Lib begins to unravel the mystery, she realizes how desperate the situation is for Anna, and ultimately for herself. A dramatic revelation lays bare the drastic family sin that diabolically bequeathed the child with a form of Stockholm syndrome, as well as fostering virulent codependency. Her religious zealotry stems from all of the above, and we soon see the health of this long-fasting child deteriorate.

"The Wonder" calls into question religious dogma, zealotry, and the fear-based herd mentality that would prefer to avoid painful truths. And in that capacity, "The Wonder" shares much in common with "The Good Nurse," about a serial-killing nurse and the hospital bureaucracies that covered up his murders.

Both movies examine a world in which some would rather watch people die than admit that they'd made mistakes. Both examine the petty-minded bureaucracies and indoctrinated committees that hide in their ignorance, horde power, and manipulate public opinion to maintain a status quo.

Much of "The Wonder" is largely driven by the high-quality acting chemistry both between Cassidy and Pugh, and between Pugh and Burke. Chilean director Sebastián Lelio also enlivens the dark visual atmospherics of a sans-electricity society throughout by embracing the rugged beauty of the unforgiving Irish landscape.

The dramatic scenes make up, slightly, for the peripatetic pacing permeating "The

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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.

'The Wonder' calls into question religious dogma, zealotry, and fear-based herd mentality.

Wonder" (so much perambulating of muddy paths!) as days and nights meld together with only minor moments of conversational dialogue. That said, "The Wonder" is, among other things, a movie that puts Florence Pugh back in period dress, where she often seems most comfortable.

A Real Version

Can one actually subsist on "manna from heaven," what the Chinese call "Bigu," otherwise known as breatharianism? Breatharianism (or inedia—Latin for "fasting") is the claimed ability for a person to live without consuming food, and in some cases water. Indian breatharian Giri Bala gave the following information about herself:

"I have never had any children; many years ago I became a widow. I sleep very little, as sleep and waking are the same to me. I meditate at night, attending to my domestic duties in the daytime. I slightly feel the change in climate from season to season. I have never been sick or experienced any disease. I feel only slight pain when accidentally injured. I have no bodily excretions. I can control my heart and breathing. I often see my guru as well as other great souls, in vision."

"Mother" I asked ("Mother" is a term of respect for holy women in many south Indian languages) 'Why don't you teach others the method of living without food?'

"No.' She shook her head. 'I was strictly commanded by my guru not to divulge the secret. It is not his wish to tamper with God's drama of creation. The farmers would not thank me if I taught many people to live without eating! The luscious fruits would lie uselessly on the ground. It appears that misery, starvation, and disease are whips of our karma which ultimately drive us to seek the true meaning of life.'"

Maybe that'll be Sebastián Lelio's next movie.

"The Wonder" is available on Netflix as of November 16.



Events play out in the rugged Irish landscape. (L–R) Sister Michael (Josie Walker), Dr. McBreaty (Toby Jones), Anna O'Donnell (Kila Lord Cassidy), Maggie Ryan (Ruth Bradley), and nurse Lib Wright (Florence Pugh).

Great Stories Found in Rare Manuscripts

The New York Public Library's Polonsky Exhibition

DA YAN

Usually, we think of a library as a place filled with just books: bestselling novels, biographies of politicians, maybe the plays of Shakespeare. But when a library has been collecting for a long time, especially when given a wealth of resources, a kind of miracle occurs.

Rare manuscripts may be gathered together with a variety of artifacts to tell a once-buried history of our culture. Such is the fabulous collection now on view at the New York Public Library's Polonsky Exhibition.

A Letter From Columbus

Among photographic ephemera of the recent past, a few objects from the exhibition chart an especially interesting history of early America. First and foremost is a unique letter by Christopher Columbus.

In 1492, Columbus reached the West Indies, islands in the Caribbean that he mistook for Asia. Marveling at their fertile fields, curious-looking people, and gold mines, he claimed the territory for the Spanish crown and declared his discovery in a letter written on Feb. 25, 1493, to the king of Spain's treasurer.

Publication in numerous outlets immediately caused a sensation across Europe. The sheet held at the New York Public Library, printed in Barcelona in early April of that year, was the first publicized edition of the text to circulate widely among Spanish readers.

A few hundred copies were issued originally, but this is the only one to survive. It now stands as the sole testament to the great impact of America's discovery on the European worldview, as well as the crucial role of the printing press (invented just four decades earlier) in spreading that significant piece of news.

In the century that followed, Spain and Portugal remained the major forces of colonization in the Americas, until the early 1600s when English colonists began making settlements on the Atlantic coast.

Sacred Verses

Among the first English colonists were persecuted Puritans, who separated from the Church of England and sought refuge in northeast America. Their intensely religious life soon called for the making of suitable texts for ritual and educational use. In 1640, the printer Stephen Day of the Massachusetts Bay Colony took the lead in publishing the "Whole Book of Psalms" in the town of Cambridge.

Containing sacred verses sung during the liturgy, this so-called "Bay Psalm Book" was the first volume of text printed in British North America. It bears witness to the importance of reading and learning in the Puritan way of life. Indeed, to bring a complete printing press operation from England to the nascent colonies was no easy feat.

Though filled with typographical errors and of subpar workmanship, the "Bay Psalm Book" went through several edi-



The Polonsky Exhibition at the New York Public Library has a treasure chest of rare documents that tell a great history.

tions and remained in use for well over a century. An estimated 1,700 copies of this first edition were initially printed, but only 11 now survive as treasures of public and private libraries.

Its publication reflects the emerging concepts of freedom of expression and of the press in colonial America, which fed into the revolutionary impulse that gave rise years later to the founding of the United States.

The exhibition carries a trove of print material around the American Revolution.

Founding Fathers

Of course, the exhibition carries a trove of print material around the American Revolution. From Benjamin Franklin's annotations about the Stamp Act to George Washington's handwritten "Farewell Address," the precious autographs and printed sheets sketch out a heroic moment when great men and great ideas crucially shaped the course of a nation.

A Special Poet

But here, a seemingly small and insignificant booklet must not be overlooked. Published in London three years before the Revolutionary War, the "Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral" (1773) announces its extraordinary author with an engraved portrait: She sits in profile with a hand on her chin, as her pensive pose momentarily suspends her act of

writing. This is the poet Phillis Wheatley, a "negro servant to Mr. John Wheatley of Boston, in New England."

Enslaved in West Africa at the age of 7, the girl was transported to America and sold to a wealthy Bostonian merchant as a maid for his wife. First taught by the Wheatley children, the girl showed a

literary talent early on, reading Greek and Latin classics and composing poems by the age of 14. Recognizing her literary ability, the Wheatley family afforded Phillis an extraordinary education that was especially unprecedented for an enslaved woman. Her much-celebrated verses, such as "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth" contained in this volume, draws from her own traumatic experience to forcefully convey the revolutionary sentiment of the day:

No more, America, in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd
complain,
No longer shalt thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant 't enslave the land.
Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom
sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate

Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:

What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?



A page from the "Whole Book of Psalms" printed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony by Puritans.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Founding Fathers of the United States, including Franklin and Washington.

These are but a sampling of the great stories these rare documents tell. If you happen to be in New York, be sure not to miss this fabulous exhibition. But even at your local libraries or old bookstores, know that some unnoticed treasure may be lying in an obscure corner, beyond the latest bestseller, waiting for you to discover.

The Polonsky Exhibition is ongoing at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building of the New York Public Library. To explore the exhibits online, visit nypl.org/events/exhibitions/treasures

Da Yan is a doctoral student of European art history. Raised in Shanghai, he lives and works in the Northeastern United States.



Artwork for "Nation of Victims." In his book, Vivek Ramaswamy sees the country being destroyed by self-pity.

BOOK REVIEW

'Nation of Victims: Identity Politics, the Death of Merit, and the Path Back to Excellence'

LINDA WIEGENFELD

Underdogs in any situation feel they can affect their own destiny. They actively take responsibility for their actions and believe they have the power to change their tomorrows. Victims, on the other hand, see themselves as having no control; they are at the mercy of others. They look outside of themselves for help.

In his book "Nation of Victims: Identity Politics, the Death of Merit, and the Path Back to Excellence," Vivek Ramaswamy sees the country being destroyed by victimhood, as both progressives and conservatives have largely adopted a victim mentality. Ramaswamy calls for the return of America the Underdog, which once prided itself on beating the odds and obtaining excellence.

Underdog Solutions, or Not

The author explains that the conflict between Carthage and Rome tells us that wars are not necessarily won or lost with great generals or decisive battles. Carthage's losses in the First Punic War were

the result of being out-built by Rome. China has already out-built the United States. The United States, rather than being a victim, should take a page from Rome's playbook when it faced Carthage as a seemingly unbeatable military power. The United States should avoid open conflict and wait out its opponent, all the while rebuilding its diminished industrial capabilities.

At the beginning of Plato's "Republic," when Socrates speaks for Plato in the dialogue on the nature of justice, he was immediately met with a challenge from the sophist Thrasymachus, who claimed that

there's no point in wondering what justice is. Justice is just the rule of the stronger.

Today, Ramaswamy says that many who believe in critical race theory have concluded that Thrasymachus was right: What we call justice is nothing more than the rules of the privileged. There is a belief that the criminal justice system is biased against black people. This narrative of black victimhood is called "the New Jim Crow." As the victimhood narrative becomes more accepted, it replaces the voices of black people themselves. Eventually, well-educated white people end up making policy

Author Vivek Ramaswamy says that America's real strength is the culture of freedom and individuality.

MUSIC

Yuletide Serendipity: 'Christmas Bells in the Steeple'

DEAN GEORGE

More music is played during Christmas than any other holiday. A lesser-known song called "Christmas Bells in the Steeple" was penned for singing legend Perry Como by a young Nashville, Tennessee, songwriter in 1967. The song is a subtle reminder about the true meaning of Christmas.

"Christmas Bells," as it is commonly known, was released as a 45-single, and its two-time Grammy Award-winning composer rereleased the song in 2016 on his own Christmas album.

Mr. C: The Back Story

Readers under 50 years old may not know that Como was an iconic American singer and television personality whose career spanned seven decades from the 1930s to the 1990s. In the 1950s, Como sold more records than anyone but Elvis Presley.

Known affectionately as "Mr. C," Perry Como recorded over 700 songs between 1936 and 1987. During the quarter century from 1945 to 1970, he sold over 100 million records, with only Bing Crosby, Elvis, and The Beatles selling more.

In 1945, the popular music magazine *Metronome* presented Como with its Outstanding Achievement Award for popular singing. That same year, *Picture News* voted him the outstanding male vocalist of 1945, and the National Veterans of America named him their favorite singer.

Considering Como's competition at the time was Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, that was impressive for a 32-year-old who previously sang for his barbershop customers while cutting their hair.

Como's TV History

Como's early notoriety came from record sales and hosting a short weekly radio show from 7:00 to 7:15 called the "Chesterfield Supper Club." In late 1948, he decided to dip his toe in the waters of a new medium: television.

Few families owned TV sets at the time, but that quickly changed during the prosperous Eisenhower years. As more households grew attuned to television, thousands more people welcomed the casual, affable man with the cozy cardigan sweaters and warm baritone voice into their living rooms.

In their 2009 book, "Perry Como—A Biography and Complete Career Record," authors Malcolm MacFarlane and Ken Crossland wrote of Como during this time:

"Through the 1950s, he was the incarnation of Eisenhower's America. Cool and casual, his appeal crossed generations, time zones and seasons. His weekly TV show became an institution, 'Saturday Night with Mr. C,' the TV show that everyone watched and everyone remembered."

Como hosted 1,049 television shows over the next 13 years. His annual Christmas specials were family favorites and always ranked high in viewership.

Como signed what was believed to be the largest deal in show business in 1959, when Kraft Foods Company offered him a two-year contract worth \$25 million. During the period from October 1961 through June 1963, he performed in a total of 66 of Kraft's Wednesday primetime shows.

Back to the Studio

After three decades of doing records, radio, and television in New York City, Como was ready for a change of scene and type of music. In the 1960s, he began reducing his TV appearances and refocusing his energies on recording.

Como saw guitarist Chet Atkins, pianist Floyd Cramer, and saxophonist Boots Randolph at a celebrity golf tournament that Como promoted in 1962. When RCA executive Steve Sholes suggested that Como record some popular country music songs in 1965, they thought: What better place to do that than Music City—Nashville, Tennessee?

Stevens decided to record 'Christmas Bells' on his own Christmas album.

Como was offered some country music standards by Atkins to record on the appropriately named LP record, "The Scene Changes." Some call the four-day Nashville sessions produced by Atkins some of Como's best work. He melded seamlessly with his country cousins whom he had never worked with before.

For Atkins and arranger-background singer Anita Kerr, it was critical that Como be allowed to sing his own way. "He didn't have to change his style," Kerr said in the MacFarlane and Crossland biography. "That was the idea. Perry Como, singing his usual style with a Nashville musical background." That approach paid off. "Como took to Nashville as if he had been recording there all his life," MacFarlane and Crossland wrote. "Kerr found him 'relaxed, pleasant and quite at home.'"

The Nashville recording experience went so well that Como returned there in 1968 to record his third Christmas album, "The Perry Como Christmas Album."

Christmas Serendipity

Atkins had successfully chosen the songs for "The Scene Changes" and was also asked to help select material for the new Christmas album. He reached out to a young local songwriter he'd known since 1957 to see if he had written any Christmas



Perry Como in New York City, circa October 1946. Library of Congress.

songs that could be used on Como's album.

Known primarily for his funny repertoire of music like "Ahab, the Arab" and "Jeremiah Peabody's Polyunsaturated Quick-Dissolving Fast-Acting Pleasant-Tasting Green and Purple Pills," Atkins's friend did not disappoint with the request.

"Chet was recording Perry in Nashville and he asked me did I have any Christmas songs," Harold Ray Ragsdale recalled in a 2016 YouTube clip. "I didn't, but I said, 'No, but I'll get you one real soon,' and I went home and wrote this and Chet cut it with Perry." A short time later, Ragsdale, better known as two-time Grammy Award-winner Ray Stevens, sent Atkins "Christmas Bells" with lyrics that highlighted the real meaning of Christmas:

Christmas bells in the steeple,
Ringing out on Christmas morn,
But where are all the people,
Where has everybody gone?
They're all busy with their presents,
Snug and warm behind their doors
Thinkin' no one was forgotten,
Empty shelves in all the stores!
Doesn't anyone remember,
As they wake up Christmas morn
The 25th day of December,
Little Baby Jesus was born?
Christmas bells in the steeple,
How their ringing seems to say
O come all ye faithful,
Get down on your knees and pray
Don't you know it's Christmas Day?

When I asked via email how he composed such a moving melody and lyrics on such short notice, Stevens admitted, "It just came to me and I went with it!"

Stevens said that he was impressed when hearing the studio recording for the first time. "I liked the recording a lot. Cam Mullins did it as a simple string arrangement and did a great job with it." When asked about Como and Atkins's reaction to his composition, Stevens deadpanned, "They must have liked it!"

"I don't think it was widely known I wrote the song," Stevens modestly noted when asked if his fans were surprised that he

wrote a Christmas ballad. A couple years later, though, everyone knew Stevens after he recorded his international hit "Everything is Beautiful." That song won Stevens a Grammy Award for Best Male Contemporary Vocal Performance in 1971, along with four other Grammy nominations. The Georgia native who signed his first record contract at age 18 with Capitol Records also notched another Grammy win in 1976 for Best Arrangement Accompanying Vocalist(s) for "Misty," and another nomination for the same song.

Stevens decided to record "Christmas Bells" on his own Christmas album, "Mary and Joseph and the Baby and Me," in 2016. While promoting the album on a YouTube clip, he said, "I decided heck, I'll record it myself; it's been 50 years or so since Perry had it out."

It may not have been a Christmas miracle in August 1967 when a country music comic performer penned an obscure holiday song for one of America's singing legends, but it could certainly be called Christmas serendipity.

Dean George is a freelance writer based in Indiana, and he and his wife have two sons, three grandchildren, and one bodacious American Eskimo puppy. Dean's personal blog is DeanRiffs.com and he may be reached at johnnydeadline@gmail.com



Singer and songwriter Ray Stevens at the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum on July 19, 2014, in Nashville, Tenn. Stevens wrote "Christmas Bells."

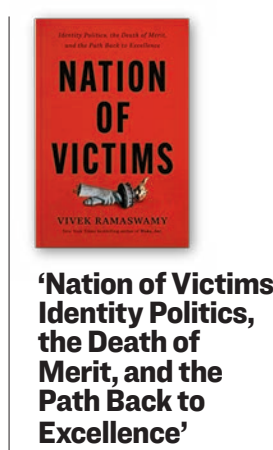
cans have gone through rough times before. Today, Americans hurl competing tales of victimhood at each other, trying desperately to grab as much as they can before the nation falls apart, not caring that it is division that keeps us from moving forward.

Ramaswamy believes in the reincarnation of our nation. He doesn't feel that Americans are ready to give up on the country. He says that Americans "are not ready to take their place at Rome's side as an idea in the fabric of human thought." He wants to see America the Underdog striving for excellence again.

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



Vivek Ramaswamy at a conference in 2017.



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POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Lessons on the Spirit of the Season

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Director Henry Koster's film "The Bishop's Wife" (1947) is based on American writer Robert Nathan's eponymous 1928 novella. Starring Cary Grant, it's about how love helps us see ourselves and others better, and how a lack of love can rob us of that sight.

At Christmastime, Bishop Henry Brougham (David Niven) agonizes over the funding for a new cathedral. He'll stop at almost nothing, even if he has to crawl, to please wealthy and worldly sponsors like Mrs. Hamilton (Gladys Cooper).

Henry's wife, Julia (Loretta Young), worries that his dollars-and-cents anxiety is drawing him away from her and their little daughter, Debby. At the family table, Henry and Julia find themselves apart, physically and emotionally. Instead of opening their hearts to each other, they end up merely speaking their minds.

Both long for the time when they used to be happy and used to make others happy.

Angelic Arrival

As willful Mrs. Hamilton imposes her whims over what the new cathedral should look like, frantic Henry prays for a miracle. In walks angel Dudley (Cary Grant), who turns everyone's world upside down. His divine, and occasionally less-divine, ways unveil the treasures before them. His hope? They'll rediscover themselves, the people they love, and the meaning of Christmas.

Sadly, Henry's preoccupation with pastoral matters makes him blind. He can't "see" the miracles around him: the devotion of his wife, the playfulness of little Debby, the concern of his secretary and maids, or the empathy of friends like Professor Wutheridge (Monty Woolley).

What's interesting isn't that Henry is "blind" but that his "blindness" is so complete. He doesn't notice his wife, let alone her fancy new hat. He doesn't believe Dudley is an angel, in spite of incontrovertible proof before him. Even when this fact finally dawns on him, he doesn't quite grasp the significance that God, through Dudley, might be telling

him something about his misplaced priorities. Henry doesn't realize that he's more like the my-way-or-the-highway Mrs. Hamilton than he thinks.

Dudley's entry is mysterious but meaningful. In the opening scene, you see him look past lit-up trees and dangling festoons to the innocence of children staring through shop windows or up at falling snow. He relishes their readiness to believe, their willingness to wonder, their utter lack of guile.

Koster's message is about the ego. We all have it. But if it's so big that it blinds us, then we have little hope of loving or feeling loved. And we shouldn't blame others if they'd rather spend time with someone else.

Naturally, everyone but Henry finds Dudley and his mysterious ways endearing. Sometimes Dudley alters events through direct (miraculous) intervention: helping little Debby throw a well-aimed snowball, speed-typing a speech, or playing a harp. At other times, he's indirect: changing people's minds just by smiling, stepping forward, nudging them to follow their heart rather than their head.

As it happens, the beautiful Julia can't get enough of Dudley. She finds his charm irresistible, much to Henry's displeasure, most of it for comic effect, of course.

The Stars Shine

Koster plays to the strengths of his stars, as both Grant and Niven get to show off their comedic craft.

Furious over Mrs. Hamilton's endless list of demands, a humorous scene has Henry sitting with her to iron out differences over the design, while Dudley (with Julia) proxies for Henry on a pastoral errand elsewhere. Mrs. Hamilton wants her late husband's likeness woven into the cathedral window that'll depict St. George and the dragon. She haughtily insists, "I should like that the countenance of St. George suggests my late husband." Without missing a beat, Henry looks straight at her, "Who do you see as the dragon?"

Grant is brilliant. He's kind to the commoner (taxi driver, secretary, maid, obscure



(L-R) Cary Grant as the mysterious visitor Dudley, David Niven as Bishop Henry Brougham, and Loretta Young as the bishop's wife.

Both Cary Grant and David Niven get to show off their comedic craft.

'The Bishop's Wife'

Director:
Henry Koster

Starring:
Cary Grant, Loretta Young, David Niven, Gladys Cooper, Monty Woolley

MPPAA Rating:
G

Running Time:
1 hour, 49 minutes

Release Date:
Dec. 9, 1947

★★★★★

academic) and compassionate toward the highbrow. He wears his angelic nature lightly, carries his exquisitely tailored suit better than most leading men do, and seems able to light up a Christmas tree with his smile. You almost wonder why the camera isn't always pointing at him.

Grant never allows Dudley's "powers" to dominate, or degenerate into slapstick. The miracles, when they appear, are brief. When Henry testily dares him to perform a miracle to prove that he's an angel, Dudley refuses to play street magician, yet subtly makes his point. And his impromptu conducting of a boys choir is sublime.

Some Misses

For all its many hits, Koster's film has a few misses. Perhaps too many screenwriters made it harder for him to satisfactorily resolve some of his character arcs. Perhaps he overplayed the romantic tension between Dudley and Julia, making it tougher for him to balance his thematic treatment.

Dudley nods at the artist's image of the cathedral hanging over Henry's hearth as he says to Henry, "That big roof could make so many little roofs." Dudley's point to Henry is that a new cathedral, desirable as it may be, isn't essential in lean years when poor folk are still short of food and shelter. But Koster never shows us that world, not even a glimpse.

Happily, Grant's obvious charisma and his chemistry with Young dazzle enough to make the movie a memorable seasonal watch.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.



'THE FINAL WAR' is a film about the REAL existential threat to the United States

It's not climate change. It's not raging inflation or even the national debt. The real threat to the United States and to the world is the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 100-year plan to defeat America and establish world domination. There's no urgency in the Mainstream Media. That's why "THE FINAL WAR" had to be made. Anchored by senior investigative reporter Joshua Philipp, and one-and-a-half years in the making, "THE

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