

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



## POETRY

## Winter Wonder Lands

Some poems for the season

## JEFF MINICK

Drive south down I-95 in the new year, and you'll join a fleet of cars with license plates from New York, Massachusetts, and Canada. These are the "snow birds," off to exchange winter's snow and frigid temperatures for the sunshine and balmy breezes of Miami and Key West. Drive north during this same season, and you'll see few travelers with Florida plates heading north to revel in the Arctic climate.

Many people take this dim view of winter. Spring is that long-awaited season when the earth unlocks and there's not a snowplow to be found. Summer brings the months of leisure, when school children have put aside their books and play backyard games while Dad fusses with

the grill and Mom fusses at him. Fall sports a coat of many colors, returns us to more stringent schedules and a busier pace, and ends with a day of thanksgiving for life's blessings.

But winter—poor winter is that unwelcome visitor many of us dread, that grouchy uncle or crotchety maiden aunt who chills the air and runs a shiver down one's spine and through the innards. For those who dislike this season of slippery roads and heavy coats, winter (which derives from an old German word meaning "time of water") constitutes a cold, damp purgatory between autumn and spring.

Like these shivering folks, poets have also lamented what Shakespeare described as "barren winter, with his wrathful nipping cold."

*Continued on Page 4*

Some poets have remarked on the quietude and stillness of a new snowfall. "Winter Landscape," 1882, by Wilhelm Schröter. Oil on canvas.



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

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"Diogenes Sitting in His Tub," 1860, by Jean-Léon Gérôme. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

BOOK REVIEW

# Perspectives on the Simple Life of a Cynic

The power of practicing restraint

DUSTIN BASS

Extravagance and comfort are placed on the chopping block in this collection of ancient Cynic works. M.D. Usher, the Lyman-Roberts professor of classical languages and literature at the University of Vermont, has assembled and translated numerous pieces from ancient Greek and Roman Cynics, as well as from those who defended the Cynics or at least applied some of their traits.

"How to Say No: An Ancient Guide to the Art of Cynicism" is part of Princeton University Press's ongoing Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers series and discusses less about saying no to others than it does about saying no to oneself. Perhaps I was channeling my own extravagance and desire for constant comfort when I misperceived the title. I was interested to know how the ancients told others no, but that would deal more with resisting personal inconveniences than promoting self-sacrifice. Indeed, the promotion of self-sacrifice is the purpose behind the book, and hence the practice of Cynicism.

**Diogenes: The Original Cynic**

The great Cynic Diogenes takes center stage in the book, starting with the works of Laertius. Laertius presents Diogenes as a rather bombastic individual, who could easily come across as a blow-hard—perhaps he was just that—and who was exiled by the Athenians. Known as a "moral watchdog," Diogenes didn't hide his feelings about his fellow Greeks, whom he viewed as living too extravagantly, and so constantly seemed to be offending people.

Laertius's work begins with several speculations on why Diogenes was exiled. Though it isn't mentioned, Diogenes's behavior earned him the ire of his fellow citizens and could have easily resulted in his ostracism (the practice of voting to exile an unlikable person). Diogenes is later noted by Dio Chrysostom for ridiculing the winner of a race by suggesting that he had actually won nothing. By the end of the festivities, everyone was in a sour mood and went home. Along with being known as a moral watchdog, he could also be considered the Original Buzzkill. A certain well-known Greek named Plato described Diogenes as an insane version of Socrates.

Diogenes undoubtedly rubbed people the wrong way, but he was also greatly respected because he practiced what he preached. He did with less, whether it be food, drink, clothing, or shelter. His affinity for simplicity rubbed off on many people, and simple living soon became the practice of the Cynics. It was the practice of the hard life without complaining, which was a mode of Stoicism; the writings of the Stoics also reflect this appreciation for the hard life.

In a modern first-world country like the United States, the plethora of luxuries makes the practice of Cynicism difficult, if not impractical. Thousands of years

ago, there were far fewer luxuries than we have today (like air conditioning, electricity, grocery stores, and smartphones, to name a few), so living the ultimate luxurious lifestyle then would seem like hardship today.

We often view the practice of simplicity as avoiding the drama and stress of social media or the news. But this is the wrong simplicity. The simple life, according to the book, is about avoiding things one wants, in order to practice restraint and self-control so that one does not become overcome by one's own desires.

**A Variety of Cynics**

Usher references later individuals who practiced Cynicism, or at least a form of it, from Roman Emperor Julian to the Christian saint Symeon Stylites. As he spans the centuries, we get a feel for the variations of Cynicism, like that of Demonax, who unlike Diogenes had people come "away variously affected by joy, far more composed, cheerful, and optimistic about the future. ... He was all the while helpful to his friends and made an enemy of none."

**The great Cynic Diogenes takes center stage in the book.**

The Christian theologian Theodoret wrote that Symeon was "as modest in spirit as if he were the last of all people in worth. In addition to his modest spirit he is very approachable, pleasant, and charming."

This collection of numerous works on the subject of Cynicism is revelatory in that it presents one's personal philosophy as a means of becoming a better person by saying "no" to certain niceties (or saying "yes" to certain things, like a beard in the comically expressed "Ode to the Beard" by Lucian of Samosata).

In a world and time where hardships are looked upon as curses, "How to Say No" suggests that hardships can be viewed as blessings and the quickest path to a virtuous life. From there, the reader can choose which type of Cynic he or she wishes to be: a Diogenes or a Demonax.

Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV's "About the Book," a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.

**"How to Say No: An Ancient Guide to the Art of Cynicism"**

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M.D. Usher  
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LITERATURE

# Raymond Chandler: Master of Mystery

STEPHEN OLES

The poet W.H. Auden shunned detective stories because, he wrote, "Once I begin one, I cannot work or sleep till I have finished it." Auden was not alone; 20th-century readers couldn't get enough of them, and authors struggled to keep up. Erle Stanley Gardner published over 80 novels featuring his lawyer-sleuth Perry Mason, while Agatha Christie's 66 mysteries made her the best-selling author of all time, after Shakespeare and the Bible.

Christie's posh British style—the suspects in the drawing room, the body in the shrubbery—inspired TV hits like "Columbo" and "Murder She Wrote," and movies right up to the recent "Knives Out" (2019) and its upcoming sequel.

By the 1920s in America, pulp magazines like "Detective Story Magazine" were thrilling their readership with tales that were nearly as lurid as their cover art. The "pulp," along with novels like Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon" (1930), rejected the genteel conventions of British mysteries in favor of a new, "hard-boiled" style marked by fast-paced action, gritty urban settings, and tough, slangy dialogue.

**The Best in Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction**

Raymond Chandler (1888–1959) has been called the greatest of all mystery writers, though he only completed seven novels. This was in part because he started late. He published his first story at age 45 and his first novel at 51, proving that it's never too late to follow your dreams and do what you're meant to do.

Born in Chicago and then raised and classically educated in England, Chandler moved with his mother, Florence, to Los Angeles in 1913. The lazy little town with palm trees was just starting to expand into the sprawling, teeming metropolis that Chandler would portray in words more tellingly than any other writer.

Chandler's private eye, Philip Marlowe, is nothing like Hammett's amoral, promiscu-

ous Sam Spade or the gumshoes of more recent detective fiction, who can be just as cruel and violent as the bad guys. Chandler explained in his "The Simple Art of Murder":

"In everything that can be called art, there is a quality of redemption. ... Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. ... He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world."

Because Marlowe is honest, he is poor, charging little for his services and returning his clients' money if he can't solve their problems. He pays a steep price for his integrity, getting beat up, knocked unconscious, and even poisoned on a regular basis. He lives alone and has no apparent love life.

His plots, like life, are complicated and sometimes hard to follow. While filming "The Big Sleep" (1946), director Howard Hawks asked Chandler who killed the chauffeur. The author famously replied that he had no idea. His stories are intriguing and full of twists and turns. But above all, we read Chandler for his vivid characters, extraordinary powers of observation and description, sly sense of humor, and the beauty and precision of his prose.

**A Writer's Writer**

A while back, I started a well-reviewed novel set in Los Angeles. When I read "the heavy scent of bougainvillea" I threw the book in the trash. Bougainvillea is a gorgeous flower but it has no scent.

Chandler would never make that mistake. No one would put him on the same level as Shakespeare, but like our language's greatest poet, he seems to know everything about everything: geography, weather, plants, animals, chemistry, manufacturing, police procedure—even the particular color of a smoggy sunset over the ocean. It's especially fun, if you know L.A., to follow Marlowe through familiar neighborhoods, streets, and even buildings. He changes place names only occasionally, such as



**"In everything that can be called art, there is a quality of redemption."**

Raymond Chandler, writer



Raymond Chandler's famous character, Philip Marlowe, first appeared under that name in the novel "The Big Sleep." A movie poster for the 1978 film starring Robert Mitchum as Marlowe.

when he uses "Bay City" as a stand-in for Venice Beach and Santa Monica.

Chandler sees beneath the surface, too, of America's Paradise Lost. He finds the right words to express Los Angeles's particular moral and spiritual malaise, a critique even more valid today than it was 80 years ago.

Again like Shakespeare, Chandler adores metaphors and similes; both authors have been criticized for overusing them. For example, "His smile was as stiff as a frozen fish," "He looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food," and, "She smelled the way the Taj Mahal looks by moonlight." This habit makes Chandler easy to parody. Even a Broadway musical, "City of Angels," parodied his style. But parodies don't mean that a writer's style is bad, just that it's distinctive. I wouldn't want to lose a single one of Chandler's trademark figures of speech.

All of Chandler's novels, his early stories, and a good selection of essays and letters can be found in the two-volume Library of America Edition box set, which established his work as lasting literature, above and beyond the crime fiction genre.

Reading Chandler, we feel a kinship with Marlowe. Like him, we trudge through this fallen world: lied to, beaten down, misunderstood, given no credit or reward for doing good. The little lamp of our conscience and integrity is all we have to light our way in the darkness. It isn't much to go on but, God willing, it's enough.

Stephen Oles has worked as an inner city school teacher, a writer, actor, singer, and a playwright. His plays have been performed in London, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Long Beach, Calif. He lives in Seattle and is currently working on his second novel.

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Winter is the time for enjoying the warmth and comfort of hearth and home. "Woman Reading in Front of a Fireplace," 1735, by Pierre Parrocel. Oil on canvas. National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm.

## POETRY

# Winter Wonder Lands

Continued from Page 1

In her poem "In the Bleak Midwinter," best known today as a carol, Christina Rossetti deploys such harsh imagery—"earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone"—to set the background for the Christmas birth in a stable. Centuries earlier, an anonymous medieval poet wrote "Wynter Wakeneth Al My Care," or "Winter wakens all my sorrow," where winter serves, as it has done so often in poetry, as a metaphor for death.

On the other hand, however, are those poets who have celebrated this season, finding in its barren landscapes and bleak weather comforts, silence, and beauty.

## Hearth and Home

"Winter is the time for comfort," poet Edith Sitwell once wrote, "for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is time for home."

For many of us, just reading Sitwell's brief compendium of pleasures brings back our own "time for comfort," when we faced a winter storm in our home or apartment with plenty of heat, a well-stocked pantry, a special drink, and a good book or friends and family at hand.

This is the setting for "Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl," the masterpiece of John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). Here, the poet describes a New England blizzard of his youth and offers readers a nostalgic look back at the family members who gathered around the fireplace. "So all night long the storm roared on; the morning broke without a sun," and as the long storm continued unabated throughout the day and into the

next night, we see the narrator and his family going about their chores, swapping stories, and reading books. Images of these "winter joys" occur throughout the poem, as in this description of the treats waiting by the fire:

*And, for the winter fireside meet,  
Between the andirons' straddling feet,  
The mug of cider simmered slow,  
The apples sputtered in a row,  
And, close at hand, the basket stood  
With nuts from brown October's wood.  
Though Whittier writes of a blinding storm,  
even a modest snowfall can muffle the noise  
of the world.*

## Stillness

I have lived much of my life in Western North Carolina and parts of Virginia. In these places, which lack the snow removal equipment of many other states, even a few inches of snow bring the world to an abrupt and pleasant halt. Other than a few adventurous owners of vehicles with four-wheel drive, no one ventures onto the roads. And until the children rouse themselves from sleep and head out to make snowmen or find some hill for sledding, the world is as quiet as you'll ever hear it in these parts.

Some poets have remarked on this great

quietude. In Robert Frost's famous poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," this silence is strongly inferred. We can feel that hush in these lines about the narrator's horse:

*He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

And the lullaby rhythm and diction of the last stanza enhance this sensation of peace and quiet:

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.*

During my online explorations of winter verse and tranquility, an unfamiliar poem by an unfamiliar poet, Ruth Velenski, snared my attention. The first two stanzas of "The Silence of the Snow" encapsulate my own experience of waking to a new snowfall and feeling the lovely stillness it brings:

*The night sky is a dull grey white.  
An opaque dust sheet floats so light*

*Upon the roofs and lamps and cars.  
It settles so softly like falling stars.  
It sneaks in crevices and onto window sills.  
Piles up in soft layers over roads and hills,  
Weighs down branches, envelopes bark,  
Skips and flutters across the depth of dark.*

## Many poets have given way to this spell cast by wintertime's charms.

### A Beauty Clean and Pure

In Western North Carolina, the Smoky Mountains in the summer ride the landscape like enormous green waves, while in the fall they are blanketed by vibrant red-and-gold quilts. Stripped of their foliage by late autumn's cold temperatures, however, these mountains become a barebones extravaganza of nooks and crannies, crevices, and naked stone, displaying a beauty all their own, particularly when crested by frost or snow.

Many poets have given way to this spell cast by wintertime's charms, its darkness, its skies, its stark, stripped-down landscapes, its ice and frost. In "It Sifts From Leaden Sieves," Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) never mentions the words "snow" or "winter," but beautifully describes how this season alters the landscape. Here are the first two stanzas:

*It sifts from Leaden Sieves -  
It powders all the Wood.  
It fills with Alabaster Wool  
The Wrinkles of the Road -  
It makes an Even Face  
Of Mountain, and of Plain -  
Unbroken Forehead from the East  
Unto the East again -*

In "Winter's Beauty," W.H. Davies (1871-1940) of the United Kingdom begins his poem by briefly describing the joys provided by spring, summer, and fall; he then shifts to an appreciation of winter, ending his verse with this word painting of the season:

*Then welcome, winter, with thy power  
To make this tree a big white flower;  
To make this tree a lovely sight,*

*With fifty brown arms draped in white,  
While thousands of small fingers show  
In soft white gloves of purest snow.*

The last two lines beautifully capture those hours before the sun melts away those soft white gloves.

### Stopping by Sofa on a Snowy Evening

As I observed earlier, more than the other seasons, our feelings about winter sharply divide us into two camps. Some relish the pleasures brought by stiff winds and cold temperatures, while others (perhaps the majority) abhor the iron grip of winter's handshake. The former often enter the house red-cheeked, bright-eyed, and clapping their hands together, while the latter return from work or errands hunched over in coats, scarves, and caps, looking as if they'd just stepped in from the January wastes of Siberia.

Yet beauty is in the eye of the beholder, not in the temperature of the skin. Those readers who delve into winter poetry will discover that some of these poets contemplated the frozen landscape from the window of a warm kitchen or den. Clearly, we can appreciate winter's allure without contracting pneumonia or even a case of the shivers.

Poetry—good poetry—allows us to experience people, places, and things through the senses of another. The poets allow us to see the world through a different pair of eyes. And so it is with their verses of winter. Their imagery, their metaphors, and their word paintings open up the landscape for us and broaden our horizons.

So, while the winds howl and the snow falls, snuggle up in a blanket, pour yourself a mug of Whittier's cider, and enjoy some winter verses.

*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.*



A close-up of a group of angels gaze in awe at the holy family below, in the Neapolitan crèche at the Art Institute of Chicago.

## SACRED ART

## Celebrating the Sacred Crèche Tradition

Introducing the Art Institute of Chicago's 18th-century Neapolitan crèche

LORRAINE FERRIER

For centuries at Christmas, Christians have set up devotional crèches, three-dimensional Nativity scenes that they normally display in their homes, churches, and stores until Jan. 6. That day, Epiphany, is celebrated as the time when the divinity of Jesus was revealed to the Magi, or wise men. These three wise men were the first Gentiles (non-Jews) to meet him.

St. Francis of Assisi (circa 1182-1226) popularized the crèche tradition, which experts believe originated much earlier.

Each year, staff at the Art Institute of Chicago continue this tradition when they set up an 18th-century Neapolitan crèche of over 200 terracotta figures, including 50 animals and 41 still-life objects. Since 2013, visitors have been able to delight in the Nativity display, which is on show for only a few weeks due to the figures' fragile silk and embroidered costumes.

Traditionally, the crèche genre of sacred art sets biblical scenes in a contemporary environment. In the Institute's crèche, angels, shepherds, and the three wise men greet the holy family of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus among ancient ruins while 18th-century Neapolitan locals go about their daily lives.

Each of the 18th- and 19th-century crèche pieces in the Institute's display was made for devotion. But look closely and you'll see that the size, style, and quality of the figures differ; fine craftsmen



A close-up of the divine baby Jesus sits on his mother's lap, surrounded by jubilant well-wishers.

made some figures, while artisans crafted others. Often, many hands made each crèche figure. Sometimes, well-known artists created the terracotta head and shoulders, and the rest of the figure was completed by lesser artists, artisans, or even nuns. Artists painted the clay to animate each character. They then created bodies from twine and wire, adding many materials—from wax and cork to the finest embroidered silk—to bring each figure to life. For instance, artists stitched fine copper wire into the hems of the angels' costumes to give the appearance of an angel fluttering in flight.

Many of the figures' fine costumes were handmade and embroidered by the families who collected them. These collectors also added accessories to the figures, such as gilded censers, daggers, and silver filigree baskets.

Institute visitors can see the crèche in an authentic setting created by Alfredo Laino, a renowned Neapolitan crèche scenographer, who was commissioned in 2011 by the crèche's former owner, Naples art dealer Vincenzo Porcini.

*The Art Institute of Chicago's 18th-century Neapolitan crèche is on display until Jan. 8, 2023. To find out more, visit ArtC.edu*



The Neapolitan crèche, 1725-1775, by various artists. Mixed media including wax, cork, cloth, metal, moss, straw, wood, gouache, watercolor, papier-mâché, and polychrome terracotta; 14 feet 1 1/4 inches, by 15 feet 3 1/8 inches, by 4 feet 7 1/8 inches. Purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. James N. Bay and Linda and Vincent Buonanno and family; Eloise W. Martin Legacy Fund; Ruth Ann Gillis and Michael McGuinnis and Mrs. Robert O. Levitt; Charles H. and Mary F. Worcester Collection Fund. Art Institute of Chicago.



"Winter Night in a Forest," 1853, by Vilhelm Kyhn. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen.

## COUNTRY MUSIC

# Love, Work, and Jimmy Webb's 'Wichita Lineman'

KENNETH LAFAYE

Life is hard. It's also beautiful. It's made of love and work and more love. And even though you know it's going to end, you also know a part of it will somehow go on.

I didn't get the theme above from a wise teacher or an ancient book. I got it from a 1968 pop-country song that has been called "the greatest song ever written."

Jimmy Webb wrote "Wichita Lineman" for Glen Campbell following Campbell's hit cover of Webb's "By the Time I Get to Phoenix." Campbell wanted a "song about a town." Little did he know that he would get a masterpiece.

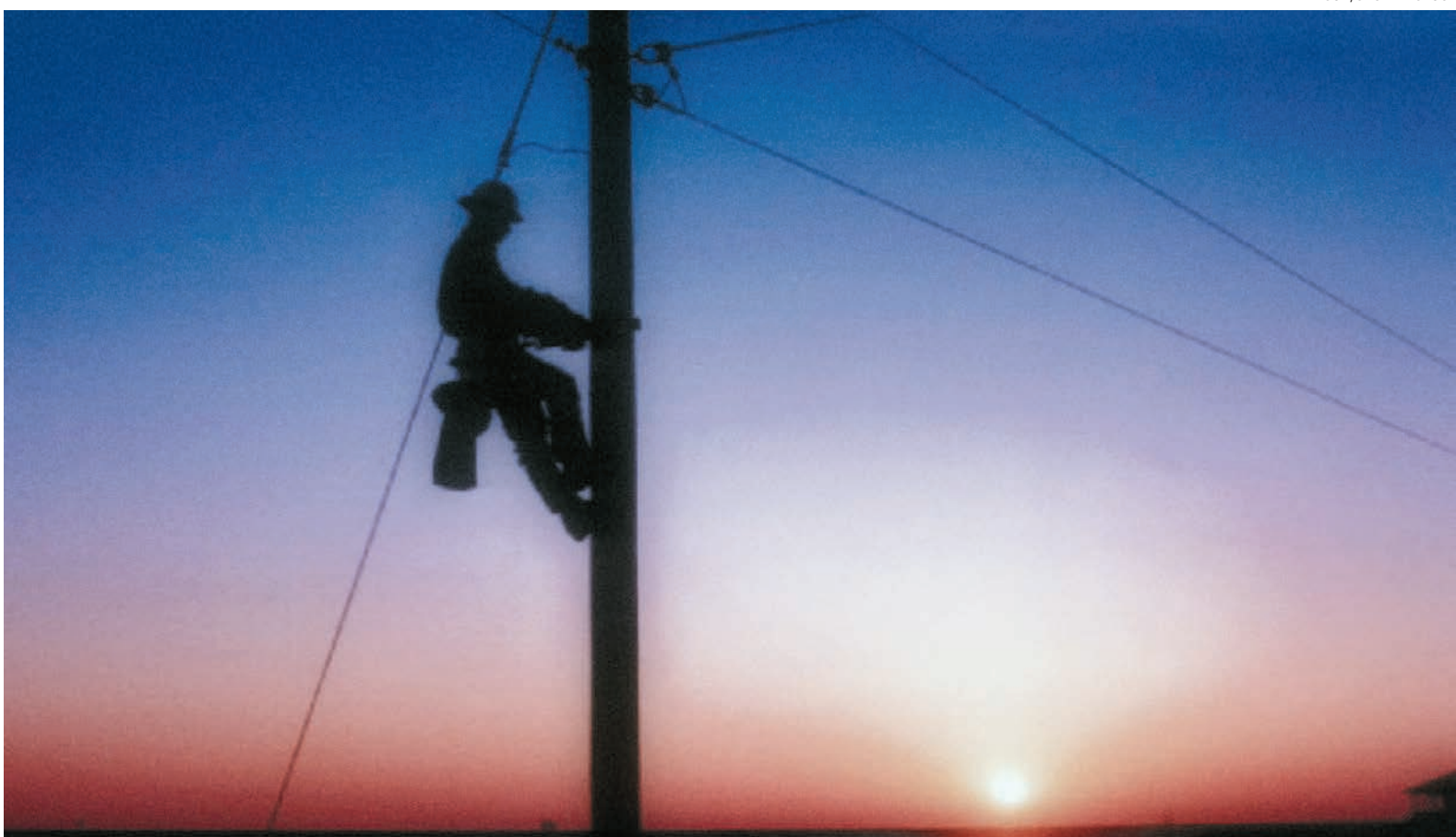
The singer and the songwriter had never met, but "Phoenix" was such a colossal hit that Campbell was sure Webb could pull it off a second time. Webb was a 21-year-old wunderkind whose vibrant "Up, Up and Away" had helped launch a group called "The Fifth Dimension" and whose other oeuvre included the cinematic orchestral pop of "MacArthur Park."

In answer to Campbell's request, Webb dug into a memory he had of traveling through Kansas: "By the Kansas border the terrain absolutely flattens out. ... It goes on that way for about fifty miles," he told the BBC. "In the heat of summer, the heat rises off the road in this shimmering mirage and the telephone poles gradually materialize out of this far distant perspective and they become large and rush towards you."

"As it happened, I suddenly looked up at one of these telephone poles and there was a man on top talking on the telephone and he was gone very quickly and I had another 25 miles of solitude to meditate on this apparition. It was a splendidly vivid cinematic image that I lifted out of my memory when I was writing this song about an ordinary guy, a working-class type of dude."

**Words, Plain and Otherwise**  
Webb's sparse lyric is made of 93 simple words:

"I am a lineman for the county  
And I drive the main roads  
Searching in the sun for another overload  
I hear you singing in the wires  
I can hear you through the whine  
And the Wichita lineman  
Is still on the line



TAD DENDON/SHUTTERSTOCK

**The key change underlines the difference of the work language from the love language.**

"I know I need a small vacation  
But it don't look like rain  
And if it snows that stretch down south  
won't ever stand the strain  
And I need you more than want you  
And I want you for all time  
And the Wichita lineman  
Is still on the line"

It's a simple enough situation: A lineman, a man working to install and repair power lines, is working hard with little opportunity for time off, let alone a vacation. His work is important and meaningful.

But something else, someone else, is also present as he thinks about "that stretch down south": the woman he loves, the love that somehow makes the work meaningful. And though he is "still on the line," it is she who shines in his heart all the while.

In a sense, it is an unremarkable lyric, save for one thing: The language of the lineman's work and that of his thoughts of love are in striking contrast. "But it don't look like rain" could be said by a real lineman. But "And I need you more than want you/ And I want you for all time"? Probably not, unless the lineman is a part-time poet. We use everyday language for everyday events. But the language of the heart is spoken by the heart alone. We don't say the words, we feel them. And when a great songwriter catches them in music, we can sing them.

It is the music, more than the words, that makes this song what it is. The lyrics give us the premise. The music paints the emotional condition. How does it do that?

**How Music Works Its Magic**  
The opening key is F major. The song continues in F through the words "another overload," and then switches to a surprising yet surprisingly right D major with "I hear you singing in the wires." Back to F for

"I know I need a small vacation," and then to D again with those amazing words "And I need you more than want you." The key change not only underlines the difference of the work language from the love language, but it also supplies a relationship not heard in most pop songs—a fresh progression from one key to another only distantly connected, a tonal picture of the physical distance between the lineman and his woman, a picture both of his loneliness and the depth of his love.

I don't know if I agree about "Wichita Lineman" being the greatest song ever. A ranking like that begs to be narrowed a bit. This "best song" of what genre, what age, which country, what style? But if a single song were to be named No. 1, the nominees would certainly include one or two by Schubert, "Shenandoah," and Jimmy Webb's magical paean to the permanence of our impermanent lives.

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

Jimmy Webb wrote "Wichita Lineman" for Glen Campbell following Campbell's hit cover of "By the Time I Get to Phoenix." Campbell wanted a "song about a town." Little did he know that he would get a masterpiece.

RUSTY RUSSELL/GETTY IMAGES



Country singer Glen Campbell, shown here performing in 2004.

TORESAETRE/CCBY-SA 4.0



Jimmy Webb (shown here in Oslo, Norway, in 2016) wrote "Wichita Lineman" after being inspired along a Kansas highway.

## PROFILES IN HISTORY

## Jimmy Durante: The Man With a Nose for Show Business

DUSTIN BASS

When Jimmy Durante was born into an Italian immigrant family in Manhattan's Lower East Side, he was cursed and blessed with a physical curiosity: a bulbous nose. In his early years, he hated his nose because it was often the center of ridicule. One day, several bullies beat him up and broke his nose. When it didn't heal correctly, his anomalous nose became more pronounced. Despite often being the brunt of jokes, Durante never lost his sense of humor; it was his humor, along with his nose, that would make him a 20th-century entertainment icon.

When Durante's father bought him a piano at the age of 12, he took to it like a fish to water. He soon dropped out of school and began playing ragtime tunes in local saloons, earning the moniker "Ragtime Jimmy." In his early 20s, he performed at the Club Alamo in Harlem with his band, Jimmy Durante's Original Jazz Novelty Band. It was during this time that he obtained a new nickname: "The Schnozzola." The name in reference to his nose would not only stick, but it would also become a prominent part of his schtick.

Durante and his "Schnozzola" were quite the pair. When he joined the famous Original New Orleans Jazz Band as its only non-New Orleans member, the band be-

gan inserting Durante jokes into the show with orchestral emphasis.

As one critic noted, Durante "acted like a heckler from an audience who had finally decided he could do a better job himself and, upsetting all conventional show business decorum, had snuck into the spotlight."

His dynamic piano playing and perfect comedic timing rocketed him to vaudeville stardom. His rise convinced him to open his own club. He and his two best friends, Lou Clayton and Eddie Jackson, opened Club Durant (lore has it that the three ran out of money for the "E" on the neon sign), performing their own vaudeville acts. Club Durant, however, was short-lived with Prohibition.

The trio took their show on the road, where they performed on Broadway and on the Silver Screen. But it was Durante who stood out the most, for more reasons than the obvious. He became a radio star and a major draw on stage and screen. He signed a contract with MGM, where he featured in over 40 films.

Durante and Jackson brought back Club Durant as a variety show on the new medium of television. He would sing, dance, and joke his way into the hearts of the American public.

"He didn't sing good, he didn't look good, and he had the audacity to keep bringing it

**Durante and his 'Schnozzola' were quite the pair.**

MGM



Jimmy Durante in the 1947 film "It Happened in Brooklyn," starring Frank Sinatra.

up," wrote music critic Michael Koda. "[But] no one won the hearts of his audience by simply being himself—a comic Everyman from the poor side of town—than did one Jimmy Durante."

Durante understood that his appearance was unique, and everything he did followed suit. The way he talked, the way he sang, the way he smiled and made a joke: all unique. Durante never let his nose get in his way. In fact, it helped lead the way for him to become the definitive character among 20th-century characters.

*Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV's "About the Book," a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.*

## FILM REVIEW

## Shakespeare Like You've Never Seen Him

MICHAEL CLARK

According to the movie site IMDb.com, there have been 1,675 movies and TV shows based on the works of William Shakespeare and another 45 in some form of preproduction—the most of any writer in history. To put those numbers in perspective, the person behind Shakespeare in second place, Charles Dickens, has a total of 454 past projects plus three upcoming, well over 2.5 times less than the Bard.

As far as movies featuring Shakespeare as a character, there are 38 thus far, the most notable being "Shakespeare in Love," arguably the most overrated Best Picture Oscar winner in history.

**Delayed Release**

On the shelf for over two years, "The Scottish Play" is unlike any other Shakespeare movie ever made. It's not an adaptation, but rather a story about a stage troupe in the planning phase of a "Macbeth" revival in modern-day Massachusetts.

At the first table reading, greenhorn director Adam (Peter Mark Kendall) tells his cast that he in no way subscribes to the "Macbeth" curse. The curse? Unless it is during a performance or formal rehearsal, the name "Macbeth" must not be spoken. You either say "Macb," "Mackers," or—"the Scottish play."

This "curse" does have some level of validity. And if someone fails to adhere to this basic, simple rule, they will almost certainly be met with some type of mishap or misfortune.

For the acid-tongued, can't-be-bothered stage manager Lauren (Ali Ahn), Adam's proclamation is barely acknowledged. But this isn't the case for grizzled vets Hugh (Benny Hill doppelgänger Geraint Wyn Davies) and Sydney (Tina Benko), cast as the doomed married characters.

The full-of-himself Hugh and the world-weary Sydney go back decades, and each have been around the block more than either would like to admit. While Hugh never left the way-off-off-Broadway B-circuit, Sydney was plucked for stardom by the Hollywood machine only to be, as Hugh so indelicately puts it, "chewed up

and spit out." Sydney is "returning to her roots" but not on the terms she'd like.

As the rehearsal process progresses, unfortunate things do start to occur. And had this been the entirety of the narrative, the film would have ended up being an interesting yet likely ephemeral curio, but writer-director Keith Boynton adds on a few more layers, transforming it into an unforgettable example of experimental filmmaking.

In the lesser of these two subplots, three of the principal characters oh-so-subtly flirt with their co-workers, which could lead to a love triangle. The dialogue and body language are provocative without being remotely explicit, and sophisticated without projecting artsy elitism. All too often, modern movies treat romantic entanglements as blunt objects absent of any hint of finesse or decorum.

**A Mystery Man**

The second plot point: After three nights of seeing a shadowy figure darting in and out of a garden outside her hotel room, Sydney dons a robe and decides to investigate further. The man she encounters is not a lurker or deviant, but rather a smiling, engaging man in period dress with well-manicured hair both above and on his face. He speaks only in verse and, within seconds, Sydney is thoroughly disarmed, smitten, and returns his charms in iambic pentameter.

He (Will Brill) identifies himself as Will, the ghost of Shakespeare, and he exhibits no signs of danger, mental instability, charlatanism, or romantic designs on Sydney; he's the perfect gentleman. When Sydney tells him that he's the most popular, most adapted playwright in history, he responds with surprise, thinking that person would have been either (Christopher) Marlowe or (Ben) Jonson.

After her second encounter with the mystery man, Sydney tells Adam that she thinks Will is the genuine article. He responds with some gentle, there-there patronizing and writes it off to stress. His attitude changes when she gives him Will's rewrites of the play.

Adam is impressed with what he thinks



MULTICOM ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

**This film is a tremendous example of the fluid nature of creativity in the performing arts.**

**'The Scottish Play'**

**Director:**  
Keith Boynton

**Starring:**  
Tina Benko, Peter Mark Kendall, Will Brill, Ali Ahn, Geraint Wyn Davies

**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 49 minutes

**MPAA Rating:**  
PG-13

**Release Date:**  
Dec. 6, 2022

★★★★★

are her writing talents, but when she insists that these new additions to the play (which Will states was not "his best") were written by Shakespeare, he calls her out and believes she's losing her mind. He's also a purist and has no intention of augmenting the production with the rewrites.

This film is a tremendous example of the fluid nature regarding creativity as it applies to performance arts. There have been many adaptations of "Macbeth" set in modern times, and most are quite good, offering testament to its staying power and universal application.

How Boynton wraps it all up and leaves the viewer with the feeling they've just shared an overlooked ancient book with an old friend makes it as welcoming as those slippers beneath your nightstand.

*Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.*

A mystery man appears and identifies himself as Will, the ghost of Shakespeare, in "The Scottish Play."

## REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

## 'My Fair Lady': 'I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face'

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

For a musical, 1964's "My Fair Lady" isn't about music at all. It's about speech. It isn't about singing. It's about speaking. Yet magically, director George Cukor and producer Jack L. Warner make this magnificent British-American film about all these things, bringing to film the musical that first landed on Broadway in 1956.

Set in the early 20th century, the story revolves around a seemingly trivial bet, based on a fundamental belief.

London's famed phonetics professor Henry Higgins (Rex Harrison) believes that the art of speaking well defines success, and that anyone, regardless of upbringing, can be made to master that art.

**Classy Flower Girl**

So Higgins places a bet with his friend Colonel Pickering (Wilfrid Hyde-White): Not only will Higgins train and turn an uncouth flower girl from the market, Eliza (Audrey Hepburn), into a lady, but he'll also pass her off as an aristocrat.

A gamely Pickering sponsors Eliza's tutelage under Higgins, but all three of them are in for surprises. In some of the funniest scenes, Eliza nearly wilts under Higgins' brutal schooling in vowels and pronunciation, before his bet takes on a bewildering twist.

This witty cinematic critique of elitism is based on Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play "Pygmalion." In the ancient Greek myth that inspired Shaw's play, Pygmalion's sculpture of a woman comes alive once he falls in love with it.

In the play, Shaw's spoofing of English upper-class snootiness tells us that most aristocracy is inherited, seldom earned. And offered opportunity, even working classes can prove they're no less.

In the film, Higgins's exasperated cry "Why can't a woman be like me?" is his aristocratic conceit that he has power to breathe "life" into the "lifeless" (the so-called uncultured working class). How? Simply by wishing that they become like him: superior, mannered, alive. Or by pouring into their mouths his life-giving nectar of artful language.



MOVIESTILLSDB

(L-R) Professor Higgins (Rex Harrison) thinks Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn) has got it, while Higgins's friend Pickering (Wilfrid Hyde-White) cheers her, and they all sing "The Rain in Spain."

The film's point is that "difference" doesn't imply superiority any more than it implies inferiority. So it skewers our hypocrisies by examining stereotypical battles, real and imagined. Battles between the sexes, between the educated and unlettered, between those who are single and married.

Faithful to Shaw's satirizing spirit, except in tone and tenor, screenwriter Alan Jay Lerner uses language as a metaphorical key. Language can unlock new knowledge, grant access to new privileges, and promise new freedoms. It can also blind and enslave.

The film first asks us to ponder: What if we allow language to perform its prophetic role, to unravel uncomfortable new truths about ourselves, about others? It then delivers a serious message, but tongue-in-cheek, almost as an aside: Only by honestly accepting our faults can we more truthfully acknowledge the strengths in others and ourselves.

**An All-Time Great Musical**

Frederick Loewe's music is a delightful

play of melody and mischief, elevating the viewing experience of audiences. Every track in the soundtrack album is enjoyable, but some stand out.

The deliberately less melodic tracks led by Harrison, such as "Why Can't the English Learn to Speak?," "An Ordinary Man," "You Did It," and "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face," stand out for their wit even if some of the lines themselves are sheer nonsense.

The pedantic might point out that Harrison's "singing" is actually a form of German expressionist voicing, "Sprechgesang" or "Sprechstimme," which is a canny mix of singing while speaking. To ordinary listeners it won't matter. Master of the phrase and pause, Harrison holds your attention every time he opens his mouth; sometimes, even when he closes it.

No one would ever accuse Harrison of being a singer, but listen to how he makes every syllable ring out. Expectedly, Harrison won an Oscar for Best Actor, and Sound Director George Groves won an Oscar for Sound.

American soprano Marni Nixon sings most songs for the very British Hepburn, including the sweet "Wouldn't It Be Lovely?" and the dreamy "I Could Have Danced All Night." American baritone-tenor Bill Shirley sings the near-operatic "On the Street Where You Live" for a character played by the very British Jeremy Brett. The chorus sings the electrifying "Ascot Gavotte."

Alexander Walker can't be faulted for naming his biography of Harrison "Fatal Charm." Harrison's charisma is unlike Hepburn's. His is imposing, hers incandescent. His forbidding aura is perfect for the austere Higgins, but her easy grace doesn't quite sit with a rustic Eliza. However, as she morphs from rustic to refined Eliza, Hepburn's queenly class dazzles just in time.

In 1964, Warner Bros. brought a little more than magic to this monumental musical. The eight Oscars it won are the least of it.

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

**Frederick Loewe's music is a delightful play of melody and mischief.**

**'My Fair Lady'**

**Director:**  
George Cukor

**Starring:**  
Rex Harrison, Audrey Hepburn, Wilfrid Hyde-White, Jeremy Brett

**MPAA Rating:**  
G

**Running Time:**  
2 hours, 50 minutes

**Release Date:**  
Oct. 21, 1964

★★★★★

ILLUSTRIOUS IDEAS AND ILLUSTRATIONS: THE IMAGERY OF GUSTAV DORÉ

# Satan, Sin, and Death: Transcending the Monsters

ERIC BESS

In this series, we've focused on Gustav Doré's illustrations for John Milton's 17th-century epic poem "Paradise Lost." So far, we've covered Satan and the rebel angels being expelled from heaven for waging war against God. We also covered Satan rallying his troops and becoming the king of hell. In this article, we ask: Why does Satan leave hell, and what does he discover at its gate?

After the rebel angels built an empire called Pandemonium, Satan takes the throne and begins to discuss future plans of rebellion with his cohorts. Everyone agrees that fighting God in heaven is an exercise in futility, for they know they cannot win. Some of the angels, however, suggest that they would rather be eliminated from existence than continue to endure the horrors of hell.

The idea of asking for God's forgiveness is an option, but they don't want to live under the rule of God. They believe that asking God's forgiveness is the same as being subordinate to God, and in their hatred they refuse to see any wisdom in submitting.

It is Beelzebub, the rebel angel Milton refers to as second in command to Satan, who comes up with a different idea for getting back at God. This is what Beelzebub proposes to the rest of the fallen angels:

"Some advantageous act may be achieved  
By sudden onset, either with Hell fire  
To waste his whole Creation, or possess  
All as our own, and drive as we were  
driven,  
The puny inhabitants, or if not drive,  
Seduce them to our party, that their  
God  
May prove their foe, and with repent-  
ing hand  
Abolish his own works." (Book II, Lines  
363-370)

Beelzebub proposes that the rebel angels get back at God by attacking God's new creation: human beings on earth. The rebels should study these humans and figure out the best way to attack them, and either kill them all outright or make them oppose God. This is how they can hurt God.

## The Children of Satan

Satan agrees that this is an excellent idea and decides that he alone will endure the horrors of hell in order to find earth. He travels throughout hell until he comes to its gate. Milton described the scene as follows:

"Before the gates there sat  
On either side a formidable shape;  
The one seemed woman to the waist,  
and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fold  
Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed  
With mortal sting: about her middle round  
A cry of Hell-Hounds never ceased barked  
With wide Cerberian mouths full loud,  
and rung  
A hideous peal: yet, when they list, would creep,  
If aught disturbed their noise into her  
womb,  
And kennel there, yet there still barked  
and howled  
Within unseen ... (Book II, Lines 648-  
659)

The other shape,  
If shape it might be called that shape  
had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or  
limb,  
Or substance might be called that shadow  
seemed,  
For each member seemed either; black it  
stood as Night,  
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,  
And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed  
his head  
The likeness of a kingly crown had on."  
(Book II, Lines 666-674)

Who are these two beings that guard the gate of hell? One is half woman and half serpent; she holds within her womb the hellhound Cerberus who repeatedly tears out of her abdomen and barks furiously. The other is a shapeless specter that moves violently toward Satan.



"Before the gates there sat/ On either side a formidable shape" (ll. 648, 649), 1866, by Gustav Doré for John Milton's "Paradise Lost." Engraving.

Satan looks upon both of them with disgust, for they are horrid creatures. He warns the violent specter to halt its transgressions lest it feels his wrath. The creature that is half-woman, half-serpent explains the situation.

She identifies herself as Sin, the daughter of Satan, born from his head while he was conspiring against God in heaven. In heaven, she was considered beautiful and was adored by the other conspirators. Satan fell in love with what he saw of himself in her and impregnated her with the specter, Death.

## In heaven, Sin was beautiful, but in hell, Sin is half beautiful and half serpent.

They were all thrown into hell after the war, and Sin was given a key to guard the gates. It was then that Death was born from the womb of Sin as the son of Satan. Death chased Sin around hell until it could force itself upon her, impregnating her with the multi-headed dog that tortures her every hour. After sharing their stories, Satan, Sin, and Death agree to work together to harm God's new creation, and Sin and Death let Satan leave through the gates of hell.

## Doré's 2 Monsters

In his illustration, Doré etched a mild version of the moment when Satan reached the gates of hell. Satan is positioned in a pose similar to the one he's been in across several of the illustrations discussed so far: He stands elevated above the other

figures, holds a spear in one hand, and holds his other hand straight out as if he is addressing the figures below him.

Even though Satan is elevated above the other figures, a position that exhibits his power, the area of highest contrast between light and dark lets us know what is most important. Here, that would be the two figures in front of the gate.

Doré depicts the figure on the right as half woman and half serpent, which tells us that this is Sin. Sin reaches out to Satan as if she is communicating with him. The other figure, Death, is supposed to be a formless shape of darkness, but Doré depicts Death with wings.

Interestingly, Satan and Sin are depicted as if they are pointing at each other. Milton tells us that they are communicating, but Doré's illustration has their arms almost match up in a direct line as if Sin is a direct line to Satan and Satan to Sin.

Yet it is not quite clear which figure Satan points to. Maybe Satan is not pointing at Sin but at Death. If that is the case, then Sin leads to Satan and Satan leads to Death.

## Satan, Sin, and Death: Transcending the Monsters

Milton gives us insight into his interpretation of what this might mean. Sin is born from the head of Satan when Satan is conspiring against God. This immediately lets us know the nature of Sin: Sin is born as the resistance to God and, therefore, embodies resistance to God. In heaven, Sin was beautiful, but in hell, Sin is half beautiful and half serpent. This informs us of another of Sin's characteristics: Sin may appear to be beautiful, but there's ugliness below the beauty.

What about Death? Death is born when Satan conceives with Sin because Satan sees his own beauty in Sin. Thus, Death is

the torturous combination of Sin's characteristics—resistance to God cloaked in beauty—and Satan's vanity. In the previous article of this series, I referred to the ancient creed "as above, so below," and here it is presented again, for this scene in hell is an inversion of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity in heaven represents the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the evil trinity in hell has a father (Satan), a daughter (Sin), and the ghost is Death.

What does all of this mean for us? The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster." To accomplish this, we must know what a monster is, and we must safeguard ourselves against those characteristics that would make us monsters.

Here, Milton's monsters are Satan, Sin, and Death. Together, their characteristics are the resistance to the goodness of God: something beautiful yet strokes our vanity. It is the beautiful shape, the alluring sound, and the appealing thought that pulls us away from our ability to deeply love God and our fellow human beings. Is it possible that recognizing the monster as a monster is one of the first steps in transcending it?

*Gustav Doré was a prolific illustrator of the 19th century. He created images for some of the greatest classical literature of the Western world, including "The Bible," "Paradise Lost," and "The Divine Comedy." In this series, we will take a deep dive into the thoughts that inspired Doré and the imagery those thoughts provoked.*

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



Some highlights of 2022's children's books.

## CHILDRENS BOOKS

# Children's Books in 2022 That Come With Positive Messages

LINDA WIEGENFELD

For many, after the Thanksgiving holiday is a special season: the sparkly lights, the music, and the family celebrations. Cultural traditions bring a sense of comfort and a feeling of being part of something bigger than oneself. What a perfect time to choose children's books that are associated with positive messages.

Here are some of my favorite children's books published in 2022.



**'The First Notes: The Story of DO, RE, MI'**  
By Julie Andrews & Emma Walton Hamilton  
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, Nov. 1, 2022  
Hardcover: 48 pages

A monk in earlier times named Guido has an idea for music. (Today, we'd call it staff

notation.) Nobody listens; Guido's sadness is portrayed beautifully, especially in an illustration that shows Guido wrapping his arms around himself. Then one day, a bishop visits and hears of Guido's passion for music. The bishop invites Guido to take a new job training choir singers at his great cathedral. Guido uses his great idea in his new job, and his innovative approach to teaching music soon spreads.

This book deserves an A+. It is not only unique but readers will literally find themselves singing with joy as they read. Fantastic illustrations add to the celebratory quality of the book.



**'I'm So Glad You Were Born: Celebrating Who You Are'**  
By Ainsley Earhardt Zonderkidz, Sept. 27, 2022  
Hardcover: 34 pages

Children need to feel that they are valued

by their parents and society, no matter who they are. This book celebrates children's lives and their uniqueness. Children are the promise of the future. In children, many hopes and ambitions are embodied. With the foundation of good families, nations thrive. Earhardt also captures perfectly the idea of how to nurture and protect children.



**'The Stack'**  
By Vanessa Roeder  
Dial Books, March 8, 2022  
Hardcover: 40 pages

Luna, whose name means "moon," is afraid of the dark. Her solution to her dilemma is to catch a star and put it in a jar to help her sleep at night. Being short doesn't stop her from trying to reach her goal. She begins to stack objects on top of each other to get her closer to the stars. In her stack, she piles a bath tub, a dragon, a whale, a car, and a pirate ship. Finally, she gets her wish.



**'Not All Sheep Are Boring!'**  
By Bobby Moynihan  
G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, Sept. 20, 2022  
Kindle: 32 pages

The theory behind counting sheep is that a simple, repeated, boring procedure will put people to sleep. Bobby Moynihan, best known for his nearly 10 years as a cast member on "Saturday Night Live" shows a creative way to think of the sheep at night. This book shows how when children are bored, they can use their imagination. His book makes the whole counting sheep experience fun.



**'Bright Winter Night'**  
By Alli Brydon  
Two Lions, Dec. 1, 2022  
Picture Book: 32 pages

This rhyming book has a warm, cozy feeling to it. A great array of forest animals work together to build a sled so they can go and watch the Northern Lights. Each animal contributes

## PHOTOGRAPHY

# Photographer George Masa: An Immigrant's Vision of Appalachia

DEENA BOUKNIGHT

Slight of frame and often sickly from chronic respiratory issues, Japanese immigrant George Masa hiked and climbed the rugged and often uncharted terrain of the Appalachian Mountains in order to capture extraordinary photographic images.

In his 2022 book, "George Masa's Wild Vision," author Brent Martin writes about the photographer that history would identify as the "Ansel Adams of the Smokies":

"When the young Masahara Iizuka [aka George Masa] stepped onto the California shore in the early 1900s, could he have imagined that within the next 25 years he would emerge on the other side of the country as one of southern Appalachia's greatest photographers, along with being one of its



George Masa in 1933. Masa traveled through and photographed the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina.

most significant advocates for protection of its wild places?"

As so many did before him and have done after, Masa fell in love with the awe-inspiring natural beauty of the cliffs and hills and peaks of Western North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains, part of the range that actually extends for almost 2,000 miles from the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador to central Alabama in the United States. In 1915, Masa made his way to Asheville, North Carolina, where he worked for a time at the prestigious Grove Park Inn and began to dabble in photography, first taking photos of affluent and sometimes famous guests.

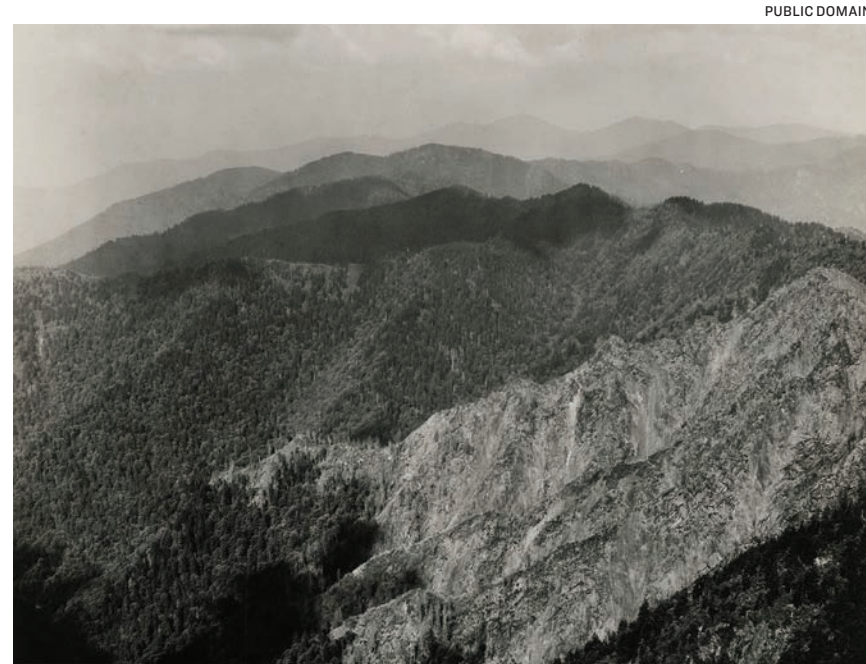
But the scenery that surrounded him beckoned. When he befriended writer and outdoorsman Horace Kephart, Masa truly began "an artistic and visionary journey into the soul of some of the oldest mountains on earth," Martin says. By luging his heavy and cumbersome large-format photography equipment through densely wooded gaps and steep wilderness, Masa would achieve "a creative rendering of their [Appalachian Mountains] light, their magnificence, their lushness."

Masa's sometimes vivid, sometimes ethereal photographs convey his enchantment with the area's scenic beauty, which included vast, stunning views and distinct flora and fauna. He reportedly spent weeks measuring, mapping, and photographing, and became known throughout the Western North Carolina region for spending long days and nights on cold ridges waiting for what he called "the precise atmospheric moment," meaning ideal lighting, cloud configuration, sunrise, and sunset. Masa was often alone in the wilderness, working to best articulate through black-and-white photographs the dramatic contrasts of shadows and light.

Martin, who spent the better part of 2020 writing "George Masa's Wild Vision," as well as visiting sites throughout Western North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains that Masa photographed, commented:

"I think Masa's photographs were seen as artistic and significant due to his patience to wait for and to know the right light, and for his ability to capture a landscape within a particular moment that gave it depth and dimension. I think that is why people compare him to Adams."

Masa kept track of the miles of his excursions via a homemade bicycle-wheel odometer and a map with pushpins, according to Martin. He took possibly thousands of shots. Although many of his negatives have been lost, hundreds were made into prints, including 97



George Masa's ethereal photographs convey the scenic beauty of Western North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains as shown in this image. Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Collections Preservation Center.

used in a Highlands, North Carolina, promotional booklet published in 1930. Some of the splendid scenes he captured, including Dry Falls, and Whiteside and Satuloh Mountains, are on permanent display in a Highlands Historical Society exhibit.

## Masa fell in love with the awe inspiring natural beauty of the cliffs and hills and peaks of Western North Carolina's Appalachian Mountains.

to the final project in a unique way. For example, Stag uses his ankles to make the frame, Rabbits skillfully build a seat with their feet, and Wren lays down twigs. It's a great way to learn about the wonders of nature through story.



**'The Storyteller's Handbook: 52 Illustrations to Inspire Your Own Tales and Adventures'**  
By Elise Hurst  
Compendium, June 28, 2022  
Hardcover: 128 pages

This book has many pictures and few words. The pictures are beautifully done, with fascinating details. It is designed for children to begin a journey into their imagination. They can tell their own stories and think about what it would be like to go through these experiences. The adults reading with them can gain greater insights into their children's thoughts, and vice versa. The adults can also introduce their own perspectives. This book is such a unique way to communicate among family members.



**'Patrick Picklebottom and the Longest Wait'**  
By Mr. Jay  
Lyric and Stone, Feb. 1, 2022  
Picture Book: 32 pages

This is the second book about Patrick Picklebottom. The first book, published in 2020, emphasized that a book can be superior to technology in many ways. In this second book, Patrick decides to go to storybook hour, but he is early. He sits and waits; time goes by really s- l - o - w - l - y. Then Patrick starts singing and dancing. Following that, he writes a short poem. After that he draws. Storybook hour arrives, but Patrick is there on the wrong day. No problem. Patrick decides to come back on the right day and to arrive early again because he had so much fun waiting.

Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired teacher. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at [lwiegenfeld@aol.com](mailto:lwiegenfeld@aol.com)

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## ‘Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright’

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Writer-director-producer Jean-Jacques Annaud’s “Two Brothers” (2004) is for children. But adults surrendering, child-like, to its charms will relish it almost as much as kids do.

In 1920s French-colonial Cambodia, amid jungle ruins, hunter-explorer Aidan McRory (Guy Pearce) hunts for sacred statues to sell on the black market. At one ancient temple site, he confronts and kills an adult male tiger, separating its cubs, Kumal and Sangha. Kumal winds up with McRory, and Sangha escapes with his mother.

Surprising himself, the no-nonsense McRory warms to Kumal and nurses him. But when McRory is arrested by authorities, Kumal passes through a few hands before ending up in a circus run by a heartless ringmaster.

McRory’s arrest is short-lived because French administrator Normandin (Jean-Claude Dreyfus) is a fan of McRory’s jungle exploits. Out again in the jungle hunting for profit, McRory captures the lone cub that the tigress has been shielding, Sangha.

McRory generously allows Normandin’s little son, Raoul (Freddie Highmore), to rear Sangha, and after a while, the boy becomes attached to the young tiger. But when Sangha’s ferocity surfaces (with the pet dog of Raoul’s mom at the receiving end), he’s promptly dispatched to a petulant prince for his wildlife collection.

As the cubs grow, Kumal’s aggression dims under the cruelty of circus life. Sangha’s aggression heightens in the lifeless palace, his gentleness as a cub under Raoul’s care now a distant memory. The fates of the two tigers are tied to each other and to Raoul and McRory, who’ll decide whether (and how) they meet again, this time as adult brothers.

**Masterclass in Capturing Animals on Film**

Over a shooting schedule of five months, Annaud used a range of cubs because the ones on set outgrew their story “sizes” too swiftly. Likewise, several tigers played the adult Kumal and Sangha.

Lead animal trainer Thierry Le Portier and animal trainer Randy Miller made the footage of tigers interacting with humans believable and entertaining. In a behind-the-scenes video, Portier admitted that it was easy to make a tiger look angry. The trick was in getting the tiger to look angry eight feet from cameras with the lighting, precisely when cast and crew were ready, and to look angry in one direction only. To do this, Portier rotated his tigers to get the emotions and qualities that Annaud wanted: anger, fear, laze, mischief, nobility, grace, boredom.

To get the tigers to act according to a storyboard, the filmmakers innovated just as they would with human actors. So-called stunt tigers do what “star” tigers can’t (or won’t!), and tiger “body doubles” save the crew from tiring or irritating the “stars.”

They also filmed whole days unscripted, with endless scenes of tigers being tigers, just doing their thing: walking, sitting, climbing, running, leaping, staring, yawning, growling, roaring. Annaud, cinematographer Jean-Marie Dreujou, and editor Noëlle Boisson then cut, trimmed, and pasted footage into the narrative to create meaning and context.

To honor the natural look and feel of tigers in their habitat, Annaud had his crew caged (for their safety) as the tigers moved around unrestrained. For more intimate shots, to keep the crew safe and the tigers calm, Annaud used remote-controlled cameras, and animatronics where close-up positions were clearly dangerous for actors.

Annaud’s scene sense, Dreujou’s intuitive framing, and Boisson’s incredibly timed edits never wavered from the tigers. Stephen Warbeck’s majestic soundtrack rendered dialogue almost redundant. You come away from the film with images of those orange-black flames flickering in high grass before your eyes, the sound of their roars ringing in your ears.

**Innocence of Animals**

In the Eastern tradition, including in Cambodia and Thailand where the film was shot, tigers embody courage and resilience amid struggle. Annaud brought that tone to his story, but his brilliance lies in his grasp of why children are drawn to animals, and he reflected that in Highmore’s bond with his cub.

In animals, kids find a bit of themselves.



MOVIESTILLSDB

**This film instills in audiences a respect for tigers, in particular, and for nature more broadly.**

**‘Two Brothers’****Director:**

Jean-Jacques Annaud

**Starring:**

Freddie Highmore, Guy Pearce, Jean-Claude Dreyfus, Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu

**MPAA Rating:**

PG

**Running Time:**

1 hour, 45 minutes

**Release Date:**

June 25, 2004

★★★★★

They love the innocence of animals and their eagerness to “get right to it,” whether it’s food, drink, or play.

In interviews, Annaud says of the tigers he worked with: “When they’re small you can’t help it, you want to cuddle them; when they’re big, you want to respect them.” Naturally, his film instills in audiences a respect for tigers in particular and for nature more broadly.

Worldwide, the tiger is critically endangered because its population plummeted from 100,000 in the early 20th century to just over 3,000 in the early 21st. That roar, once deafening, is now no more than a whimper.

Then, in 2010, the Global Tiger Recovery Plan started the effort to stem the decline and spike numbers by the next “Year of the Tiger”—2022. It’s working. For the first time in decades, numbers are growing and are now at about 5,000 worldwide. Victory? Not quite. Progress? Surely.

Is “Two Brothers” responsible for the reversal? Probably not. But it certainly helped to stir hearts into rethinking the role that humans can play in the tiger story. The Global Tiger Forum, an intergovernmental tiger-conservation body, actively used screenings of the film in its campaign.

Who knows, but with a bit more help, the tiger may soon roar again.

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

“Two Brothers” tells the story of how tiger cubs were separated and then reunited as adults.



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