

## About a Film Comedy Book

by

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While doing research, I recently had a moon shot moment I would like to share. Except I neither want to jinx myself or come off sounding like those vain shiny people. Thus, while I attempt to make a normalization of a potentially demoralization situation, let me briefly pivot from vanity and curse concerns to some family background explanations. After all, Freud allows us to blame everything on our parents. Mine were antiheroically superstitious, and felt good news was a trigger for bad.

Of course, narcissistic problems often lesson with age thanks to mirrors. However, the rumor Methuselah was my younger brother is false. He was a second cousin on Dad's side. (I sensed you wanted to know.) Regardless, "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away ..." I was taught "to keep my own doorstep clean, and otherwise button-up, unless I had something positive to say." This is hard if you are a class clown, especially if someone is aggressively illiterate.

That was my mom's mantra. As a youngster the "doorstep" metaphor confused me. So my dad translated the equation into our special language of "sports speech." Consequently, to paraphrase him, "If you score a touchdown, you do not go all hot dog in the end zone. That implies one has done a unique thing. However, if you then calmly give the ball to the referee, it implies this is business as usual — a much stronger statement. Along the same lines, if you hit a home run, you modestly trot around the base path with your head down. Naturally, avoid tripping over bases, but keep in mind you have just humiliated the pitcher. Do not rub it in by acting

crazy happy. Otherwise, he might ‘put it in your ear’ the next time you come to bat. He still might, but it lessens the chances.”

For example, in “The Pride of the Yankees,” Gary Cooper’s portrayal of Lou Gehrig never showed him going all demented after a four-bagger. As the Yankee’s later great manager Casey Stengel used to say, “You can look it up.” Naturally, in later years when I was lucky enough to hit a run home, or score a touchdown, this was my guide.

Of course, back then my father’s advice was *the* norm. If I had gone ballistic after either such accomplishment, my coaches would have gone all Bobby Knight (another phrase for ballistic) on me. Still, one learns more by emulating one’s heroes. I was a running back in high school, which was the position of my favorite NFL player, Gale Sayers. In “Brian’s Song” (1971), the male weepy about the cancer death of his close friend and teammate, Brian Piccolo (the league’s first black and white road roommates), Sayers never went TD peculiar. (As an antiheroic footnote, back then even the position was only called a *halfback*.)

Still, with the possible exception of Jim Brown, Sayers was the best running back ever (let’s not argue). Indeed, once one of the most iconic of comedians (PC police are hovering nearby, so I must lose his name), actually built a routine around Sayers. The comic said, in part, “The catalyst for Sayers’ greatness was his stop and go speed. Though faster than Wile E. Coyote’s Road Runner nemesis, Sayers could break on a dime, give you nine cents change, and immediately return to ‘beep beep’ speed.”

Regardless, returning to the risk of a cursed ego foundation, I am not unaware of signs, except maybe on back-to-back roundabouts. For example, I’m a lapsed Methodist, whose philosophy is now more of a “cling to the wreckage” outlook. It is like one of Mel Brooks’ 2,000 year-old-man observations (as interviewed by Carl Reiner). Brooks’ ancient one claimed, “At

one time everyone worshipped a guy named Phil. However, Phil then got hit by lightning. Consequently, we figured there was something out there bigger than Phil.”

I too think there is something out there bigger than Phil ... who provides signs, and of course, our conscience. (My mother crafted my gift for guilt.) Arguably, Mark Twain’s funniest short story is “The Carnival of Crime in Connecticut,” in which he kills his conscience and finds true happiness. Since I have yet to master that comic crime, the most memorable sign I have received about not becoming self-centered involved a seemingly “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off” (1986) like moment. I had just lettered in football as a high school freshman and was wearing my varsity jacket for the first time. In that era this was a big deal. I had had it on for all of five minutes and sadly I had allowed some show-off vanity to briefly creep in. I was anxiously waiting for the morning school bus. (At that time only rich kids had cars; my family had one tired used Chevy.) Seconds before the bus door opened a bird the size of a Buick flew over and did a dump down the front of my new jacket that looked like an “Animal House” (1978) film trailer for the food fight sequence.

Over time I began to do some antiheroic family research, which I will limit to story bookends. Both sides of my family are Irish, but we have none of the distinguishing physical Irish trademarks. That is, there is neither any reddish blonde hair, nor freckled fair-skin and blue eyes among us. We all have dark complexions, dark hair, and brown eyes. It was what I had always suspected even before I and several family members each took one of those Ancestry DNA tests — there’s a lot of unaccounted for Spanish links. Why?

Back in 1588 *cocky* world power Spain was in a war with England, and their giant armada decided to take the long way around the British Isles for a surprise attack — big mistake. Ugly storms took out much of the fleet. One could not see one’s hand in front of one’s face, not

that there is much pleasure in that. Regardless, many Spanish sailors either drowned, or were washed ashore in Ireland. Beyond that some Errol Flynn “Sea Hawk” (1940) type knocked off the remaining Spanish armada. (However, I digress — a major part of the academic life.) Anyway, with mass transit being a bit dicey back in 1588, many of my waterlogged Spanish ancestors stuck around and intermingled with the native Irish. This makes my clan what is called “Black Irish.” Luckily, the Irish were hardly fond of England either. See Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” which documents England’s negative to the Irish “Beyond the pale” philosophy. (Must I explain everything?)

Okay, flash forward to my October 1950 birth. This is the same month and year when Charlie Brown first started to appear. Thus, I feel like my antihero credentials are complete, especially given a dark comedy 1976 strip in which Snoopy is sitting atop his doghouse with his typewriter. “I hear you’re writing a book on theology,” Charlie Brown says to him, “I hope you have a good title.” Snoopy thinks, “I have the perfect title ... ‘Has It Ever Occurred to You that You Might Be Wrong?’”

Well, along related lines, it is finally time for my Nervous Nellie press release. My book “Genre-Busting Dark Comedies of the 1970s” logs in at #38 on “Book Authority’s (CNN and Forbes) 100 Best Comedy Books of All Time,” as recommended by Russell Brand, Bill Gates, Seth Logan, Sheryl Sandberg, [Chief Operating Officer of Facebook] and 79 other judges.” Yes, I double checked, too. Because while it is not a humor book per say, talks about comedy told with some degree of wit qualified. Consequently, even if my antiheroic, superstitious, cling to the wreckage heritage now jinks me, at least I had a moment of balanced fairness. How so? For years I had to fight mainstream publications which found me too scholarly, and scholarly journals which felt I was too mainstream. Ironically, my simple goal was just an intelligent

audience. Oh, and I felt especially justified that both *Peanuts*' writer (Snoopy/Schulz) and I should both fixate on 1970s dark comedy. So there I have said it ... but I feel like a "knock wood" comment might best be added.



# Genre-Busting Dark Comedies of the 1970s

*Twelve American Films*

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