

THE WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
CHRISTMAS

GERRY BOWLER



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Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël? (1996) *Will There Be Snow for Christmas?* is the English title of this enormously depressing drama about an exploited French country woman (Dominique Reymond) and her seven children. The father of her children (Daniel Duval) exploits his farm family as cheap labour while he keeps another family in town. The sense of their harsh daily life through the changing seasons as Christmas approaches is explored, but it's tough going for the audience, too.

“Ya viene la vieja” A traditional Spanish carol whose English translation is “Come, My Dear Old Lady.”

Come, my dear old lady,
With a little present
That you love so dearly.

*Offer it to Jesus,
We're weaving a garland of green lemon leaves,
For sweet Virgin Mary, the Mother of God,*

Kings of Orient riding,
Cross the sandy desert,
Bringing for the Baby
Wine and cookies sweet.

Chorus

Kings of Orient riding,
Guided by the starlight,
Bringing to the Baby
Gifts of love, this night.

Chorus

Yawning for a Cheshire Cheese An 18th-century English Christmas game wherein, as midnight approaches, the guest with the most impressive yawn wins a cheese.

The Year Without a Santa Claus (1974) Christmas animation specialists Jules Bass and Arthur Rankin Jr. tell the story of the time Santa Claus (Mickey Rooney) almost cancelled Christmas, of the brave elves who contend with Heat Miser and Snow Miser, and the role of Mrs. Claus (Shirley Booth).

“Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus” On September 21, 1897, the *New York Sun* printed the following:

We take pleasure in answering thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time

our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of *The Sun*:

Dear Editor:

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, “If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so.” Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?
Virginia O'Hanlon

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the scepticism of a sceptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The external light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies. You might get your papa to have men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if you did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest men, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived could tear apart. Only faith, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

The unsigned editorial, later revealed to be the work of FRANCIS PHARCELLUS CHURCH, was not given any prominence that day – it was the seventh article on the page and ran below commentaries on New York and Connecticut politics, the strength of the British navy, chainless bicycles, and a Canadian railroad to the Yukon – but it soon became famous around the world. The exchange between Church and Virginia O'Hanlon was reprinted every year until the newspaper ceased publication in 1950. Movies were made about the story (see below), in 1932 NBC produced a cantata (probably the only editorial set to classical music), and in 1996 a musical by David Kirchenbaum and Myles McDonnell appeared.



Yordan An Orthodox bishop lowers his cross in the water during the Yordan ceremony.

Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus (1974) An animated version of the story of the little girl who questions the existence of Santa Claus. Jim Backus narrates.

Yes Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus (TV) (1991) Charles Bronson plays the *New York Sun* editorial writer Francis P. Church, who must answer little Virginia O'Hanlon's question about the reality of Santa Claus. Directed by Charles Jarrott, with Ed Asner as Bronson's boss and Richard Thomas as Virginia's father, this movie ignores almost every historical fact. Church is portrayed as a tough guy and a hard drinker, shattered by the death of his wife in childbirth. In reality, Church was a Baptist and total abstainer from liquor whose childless wife outlived him. Virginia was portrayed as the daughter of poor Irish immigrants; in fact her father was a doctor.

Yodelling Yodelling is the practice of wordlessly singing by frequent shifts between chest tones and head tones. In the Tyrolean Alps, masters of this art form have yodelled their praises of the Christ Child for centuries, in churches and across mountain valleys, improvising or basing their songs on traditional carols. The ZÄUERLI yodels are also a part of the Swiss custom of SILVESTERKLÄUSE. During the famous 1914 Christmas truce of the First World War, some German troops entertained the Allies across no-man's-land with a demonstration of yodelling.

Yordan The celebration of the EPIPHANY or THEOPHANY, the final day of the Ukrainian Christmas season, whose name is derived from the River Jordan, where Christ was baptized. On this day Ukrainians celebrate a blessing of the waters, either a

river, lake, or sea, or a container of water indoors. After the ceremony people take away some holy water for the home.

In the Gregorian calendar, this takes place on January 19, which is January 6 in the Julian calendar.

Yorkshire Christmas Pie An 18th-century English example of the cook's art, in which a boned turkey was stuffed with a goose, which was stuffed with a fowl, which was stuffed with a partridge, which was stuffed with a pigeon. This was put inside a pie crust and surrounded with rabbit and other game and four pounds of butter. The enclosing crust was shaped to resemble a turkey, and the massive pie was then put into the oven to bake. These pies were often sent from Yorkshire to London as gifts and were made sturdy enough to survive the travel.

You Better Watch Out (1980) Directed by Lewis Jackson, with Brandon Maggart starring as a psychopathic Santa, this low-budget thriller achieves some real Yule-tide menace. Santa vows, "But if you're bad, then your name goes in the Bad Boys and Girls Book, and then I'll bring you something . . . horrible." Also known as *Christmas Evil* and *Terror in Toyland*.

Yule There is still no scholarly agreement on the derivation of the term "Yule," with rival camps pressing the claims of early Germanic words meaning either "wheel" (as in the cycle of the year) or "feast." Most are agreed, however, that it was brought to England and Scotland by Danish invaders in the ninth and tenth centuries and that it came to be another word for Christmastide in England by the 11th century. In Scandinavia it probably first referred to a winter feast (even