

INTERESTING LITERARY INFLUENCES ON CHRISTMAS

A group of popular, New York-based writers wanted to reintroduce Saint Nicholas to society to provide a “cultural counterweight for the commercial bustle and democratic misrule of early nineteenth century New York.” Contributors to the project included author Washington Irving who wrote *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Irving wrote a Christmas story for his *Bracebridge Hall* series in which he described Santa as a large man in a red suit smoking his favorite pipe. Fellow author Clement Clarke Moore – inspired by Irving’s depiction of Santa – wrote *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, a poem now commonly known as *Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

Twas the Night Before Christmas painted the modern day picture of Santa, but the poem almost stayed in the writer’s desk drawer. Moore wrote the poem for his family in 1922, allegedly drawing inspiration for Santa from a pudgy Dutch driver who took Moore’s family on a sleigh ride. But, Moore never intended for the poem to be made public. In fact, a close friend of Moore’s actually sent the poem to the Sentinel newspaper, where it was published anonymously. Even when the poem became a huge hit, Moore denied authoring it for nearly 15 years believing it was beneath his talents.

Can you name the flying reindeer from Moore’s poem? Interestingly, Donner and Blitzen weren’t originally part of Santa’s team. They underwent some rebranding over time. In the original draft of *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, Donner and Blitzen went by the far clunkier monikers “Dunder” and “Blixem.” The names were originally taken from the Dutch oath meaning “thunder and lightning.” Over time, editors tinkered with the reindeer names we are familiar with today. After all, it is hard to think of Rudolph as the outcast reindeer when he’s on a team with a guy named “Dunder.”

Even the “red-nosed reindeer” has an interesting literary history. Rudolph’s first appearance was in a story written in 1939 by Robert May published for Montgomery Ward in a pamphlet for kids visiting Santa. But, the department store owned the copyright and May received no royalties. May almost went bankrupt until Montgomery Ward relinquished the rights to the story. Rudolph became an even bigger success when May set the story to music with the help of his songwriter brother-in-law Johnny Marks. The famous rendition recorded by Gene Autry became one of the best-selling Christmas songs of all time.

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. You must consult with an attorney for the application of the law to your specific circumstances.

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