

Guess Who



The person is an author
Who has written many books
But you'd probably never know him
Based upon his looks

I am not speaking
Of Edgar Allen Poe
Although I am sure
It is someone you know

So who is this man?
Who could it be?
I'll give you some more clues
Then you will see

He once wrote about an Elephant
Who sat on an egg
He wrote about a Cat
Who could simply not behave

He wrote a short story called
Happy Birthday to You
And told the tale of a *Grinch Who Stole Christmas*
From the people he called Who

Are you familiar with the title
Oh, The Places You'll Go?
He wrote that one too
Now surely, you must know!

The person I am speaking of
Is not Mother Goose
The person I am speaking of
Is the one and only Dr. Seuss

Dr. Seuss & The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins

By: Jennie Stramiello

The 500 Hats of Bartholomew

Cubbins does not look anything like a typical children's book. The cover is black with the exception of a picture of a single red hat with a white feather sticking straight out of it. The back cover is almost identical to the front; the only exception is that the title of the book and the author's name do not appear. As soon as the book is opened, one immediately sees what appears to be a never-ending trail of red hats with white feathers. Despite the cover looking nothing like a children's book, this page makes it seem more kid-friendly. It is not until the reader gets to the dedication page that things begin to really seem strange. The book is dedicated to

"Chrysanthemum-Pearl (aged 89 months, going on 90)."¹ Now, if the name was not odd enough, the age surely must make the reader a little curious. However, today one might not find the dedication page so strange considering the author, unless of course the reader was

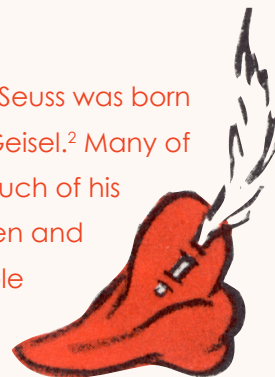
¹ Dr. Seuss. *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. New York: Vanguard Press, 1938.

Right:
A page from *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*.



unfamiliar with the creative mastermind known as Dr. Seuss.

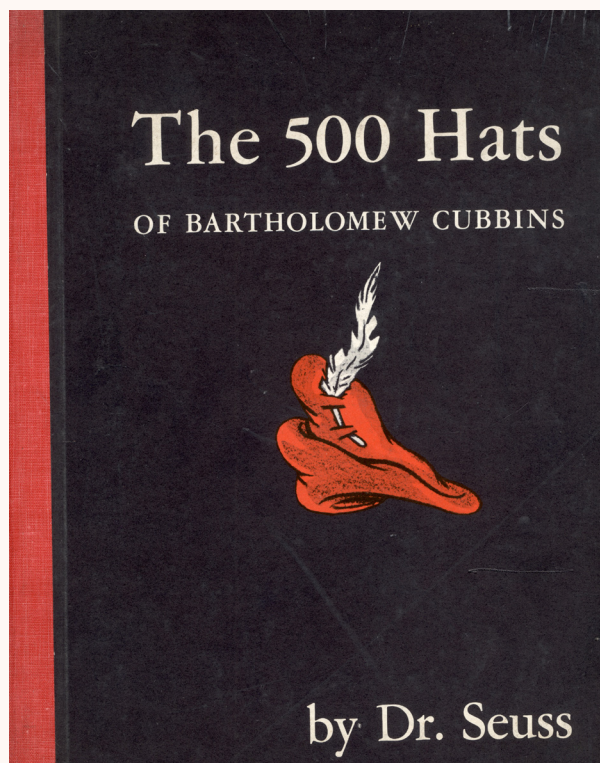
Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, is something of a legend. Dr. Seuss was born March 2, 1904, in Springfield, Massachusetts, to Henrietta Seuss and Theodor Robert Geisel.² Many of Seuss' 48 books were instant hits and are now considered classic children's books.³ Much of his success can be credited to his unique writing style, which is enjoyable for both children and adults. Seuss was able to strategically combine his whimsical side with his more sensible side to create some of the most famous children's books of all time. Seuss' work has, "delighted children by combining the ridiculous and the logical, generally with a homely moral."⁴



The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins was the second book Dr. Seuss wrote and illustrated. The story is about a young boy who journeys into town from his home, which is located on the outskirts of the Kingdom of Didd. While there, King Derwin, ruler of the Kingdom of Didd, drives through the town in his horse-drawn carriage. When the "Captain of the King's Own Guards" asks the townspeople to remove their hats, Bartholomew obeys. However, unbeknownst to him, another hat instantly appears on his head. When the King sees Bartholomew standing on the street with a hat still on his head, he demands Bartholomew remove his hat. After some confusion, Bartholomew removes his hat only to have another one mysteriously appear on his head.

At this point, Bartholomew finds himself in a royal mess and must go to the castle to deal with the consequences. Everyone in the castle unsuccessfully tries to figure out why hats keep growing out of Bartholomew's head, much to King Derwin and Bartholomew's disappointment. It is only after the 500th hat is removed that the hats stop coming.

500 Hats stands out among Seuss' many books for a few different reasons. When picking up an original copy of the book, one will notice it looks nothing like a typical Dr. Seuss book. The cover of the book is black and both the title and Dr. Seuss' name are written in an ordinary font, not the zany font that has become associated with all things Seuss. The reason for these distinct differences is the fact that when the book was first printed in 1938, Seuss was working as an author for Vanguard Press.⁵ Vanguard decided to print the book with such a bleak cover because they considered it a "mystery book" and thought the black was fitting.⁶



Above:
The original cover of *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*.

² Morgan, Judith and Neil. *Dr. Seuss & Mr. Geisel*. New York: Random House, 1995. p. 4.

³ Page, Eric. *Dr. Seuss, Modern Mother Goose, Dies at 87*. *New York Times*; September 26, 1991.

⁴ Page, Eric.

⁵ *Dr. Seuss from Then to Now: A catalogue of the retrospective exhibition* / organized by The San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, California. New York: Random House, 1986.

⁶ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 275.



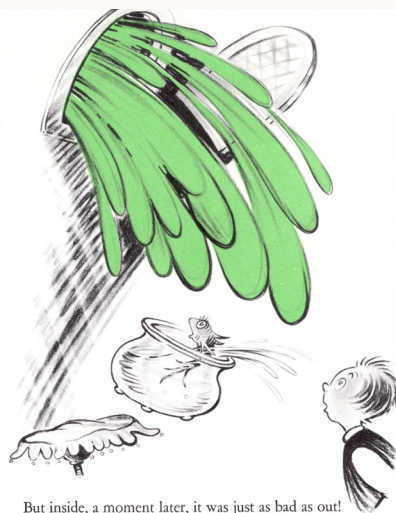
After *500 Hats* was released, Dr. Seuss left Vanguard for Random House and stayed with them for the remainder of his career. In 1988, Random House bought Vanguard, uniting the entire Seuss collection. It is believed that part of the reason Random House bought out Vanguard was because they wanted to own the right to the first two Dr. Seuss books, despite the fact that in 1988 the books were over 50 years old.⁷ The books were so successful that they were still making money for Dr. Seuss and Vanguard as backlist books.⁸ Seuss was finally given access to his first two books *And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street!* and *500 Hats* and was able to change the cover. Today's cover of *500 Hats* is more colorful, brighter and the title and Seuss' name are both written in the classic Seuss font.

Another major difference between *500 Hats* and some other Dr. Seuss classics is that this book is written in prose.⁹ Since it was still early in his career, Dr. Seuss had not quite found his hook



Above:

The current cover of *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*



But inside, a moment later, it was just as bad as out!
With an angry roar, the oobleck was suddenly hitting the palace harder. It was battering and spattering against the walls as big as greenish buckets full of gooey asparagus soup!
Like a sinking sailboat, the whole palace was springing leaks. The oobleck was ripping the windows right off their hinges.

Above:

A page from *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*

yet. He said of writing *500 Hats*, "I knew nothing about children's books...traditional fairy tales were still in order. I thought perhaps that was the thing to do."¹⁰ Also, unlike most Seuss books, the main character in *500 Hats* is a person. Bartholomew is said to be a "rare human hero in the world of Seuss."¹¹

Typically, Dr. Seuss did not discuss where he got his ideas from, but he did eventually share his inspirations for *500 Hats*. He said on a train ride from his hometown of Springfield to New York, he saw a man sitting in front of him wearing a hat. He had the urge to remove the man's hat and wondered what would happen if he reached over and snatched it. "I decided he was so stuffy that he'd probably grow another one," Seuss said.¹²

Seuss drew inspiration from other things while writing *500 Hats*, such as his own collection of hundreds of hats. Seuss kept a closet full of hats in order to entertain his guests. Two hats that stood out amongst the others were a "particularly ornate fireman's hat from Ecuador" and a "baroque helmet worn by

⁷ McDowell, Edwin. *Juvenile Book Publishing Becomes the Goose that Lays the Golden Egg*. *New York Times*; October 2, 1989.

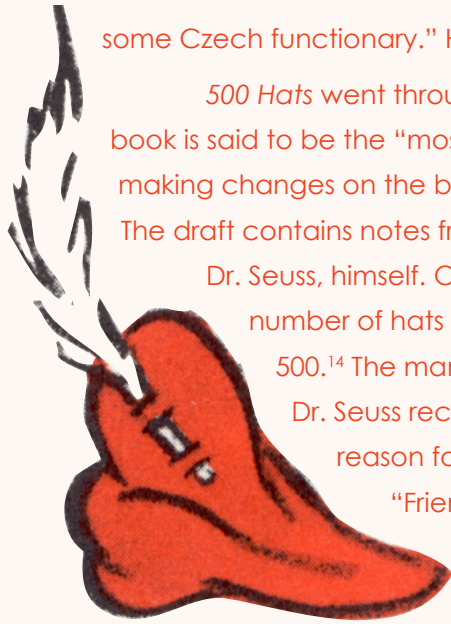
⁸ McDowell, Edwin. *Dusty Titles Add Luster to Publishers' Profits*. *New York Times*; September 26, 1988.

⁹ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 86.

¹⁰ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 85.

¹¹ *Dr. Seuss from Then to Now* p. 33.

¹² Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 87.



some Czech functionary." He used some of the hats as models for his book.¹³

500 Hats went through many changes before Dr. Seuss finally put his pencil down. The book is said to be the "most worked" draft of all Seuss books. He worked up to the very last minute making changes on the book, even calling Vanguard and making corrections over of the phone. The draft contains notes from his wife Helen; Evelyn Shrifte, an editor at Vanguard; and of course Dr. Seuss, himself. One of the most notable changes was the number of hats used. The number of hats was originally set at 48, then later changed to 135 and was finally set at 500.¹⁴ The manuscript and drafts of *500 Hats* were eventually sent to the college where Dr. Seuss received his undergraduate degree, Dartmouth.¹⁵ Dr. Seuss never gave a reason for the changes, in fact he rarely offered explanations for his ideas.

"Friends and journalists learned that it was folly to ask Ted where he got his ideas; his answers were charming but elusive, since he really didn't know."¹⁶

Although Seuss claimed he "didn't know" where his ideas came from, it has not stopped others from analyzing his work. Timothy Cook, author of *Another Perspective on Political Authority in Children's Literature: The Fallible Leader in L. Frank Baum and Dr. Seuss*, claims that many of Seuss' works had "overtly political themes." According to Cook, *500 Hats*, *The King's Stilts*, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, *Yertle the Turtle* and *Horton Hears a Who!* all have heavy political themes.¹⁷ In *500 Hats* and *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, King Derwin's authority is considered a "threat" to the average person, which, in this case is young Bartholomew.¹⁸ However, Cook says that in children's books like Seuss' "authority figures are seen as distinctly fallible, to be valued more as vaguely likeable individuals than as competent, omnipotent protectors."¹⁹ At the end of *500 Hats*, King Derwin does in fact become a semi-likeable character and is even nice to Bartholomew despite his previous demands and threats.

Cook argues that the fact that so many of Seuss' characters (such as Bartholomew) are "not only small but they are usually quite ordinary," is no coincidence.²⁰ Seuss' characters have come to represent the average person. Cook also believes that through the use of Bartholomew's "extraordinary" hat, Seuss is saying every ordinary person has the power to be or do something extraordinary.²¹

Perhaps Seuss' emphasis on the ordinary being extraordinary is the very reason why so many people, both adults and children, enjoy reading his books.

¹³ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 85.

¹⁴ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 87.

¹⁵ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 89.

¹⁶ Morgan, Judith and Neil. p. 87.

¹⁷ Cook, Timothy E. *Another Perspective on Political Authority in Children's Literature: The Fallible Leader in L. Frank Baum and Dr. Seuss*. *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jun., 1983), p. 328.

¹⁸ Cook, Timothy E. p. 333.

¹⁹ Cook, Timothy E. p. 333.

²⁰ Cook, Timothy E. p. 332.

²¹ Cook, Timothy E. p. 332.