

Confessions of a snob

My snob origin story begins in the typical way: with passion.

by [Julian DeShazier](#) in the [September 2026](#) issue

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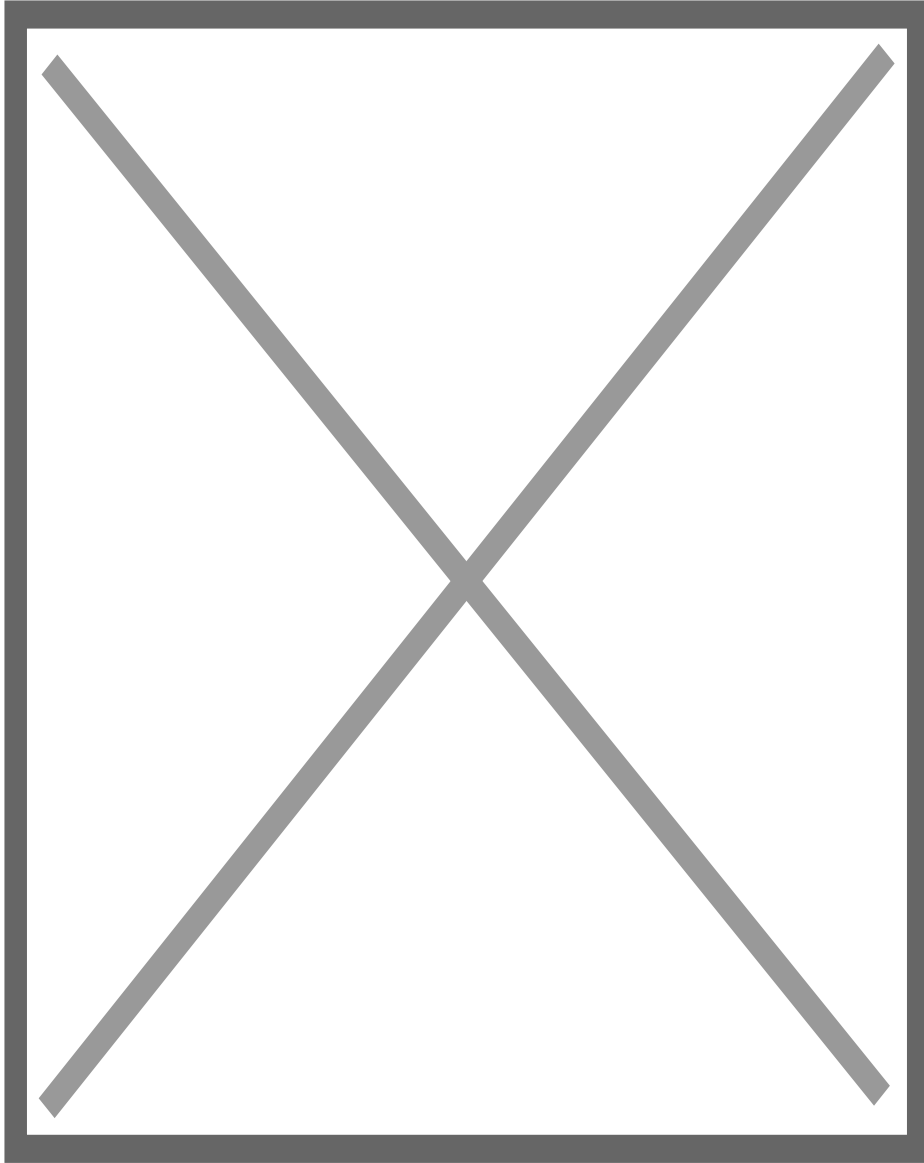


Illustration by Rosa Snijders

I confess that I've become snobbish about certain things. Movies especially, and I have noticed myself telling people how to watch a certain movie, or referring to one I found especially moving as a *film* instead. On my darkest days I'll talk about the state of cinema; I might even pronounce it *cinéma*. I'm insufferable about movies, and I'm certain I've tested my friendships many times because of it. The truth is, I love them—the movies, I

mean, though also my friends—but I have no idea why my passion so easily turns into fanaticism.

It wasn't always this way. Growing up I loved New Kids on the Block, enough to hide it as a Black boy on the South Side of Chicago, and I still look forward to the trash—sorry, the *smash* hit of the summer. Although I perform as a conscious gospel rapper, I'm not really a music snob. Nor am I a food snob. Chicago-style pizza is the best, but I love a good frozen Tombstone or a pizza from a national chain that absolutely cannot be reheated. Wagyu links and bison franks be damned; I'll take a standard hot dog and all the mysteries that lie within every single time.

I wasn't always a movie snob, either! I loved *Dumb and Dumber*. Even when a rom-com telegraphed its ending in the first act, I still enjoyed watching it unfurl like so.

The trouble started in seminary. I watched a movie every single day—at a time when I was moving from simply reading scripture passages to learning how to read them “the right way.” There arose in me a kind of tyranny around reading and discovering the real meanings behind texts, privileging certain translations as if multiple contexts and rereadings by different people across time were not the very things that prove our Bible's strength and beauty. Instead of deepening my curiosity on the subject, I became a snob about it.

I decided there were good and bad ways to read a text. I went from listening to sermons to judging them. I criticized churches that didn't utilize “closer readings,” as if the more familiar or more obvious reading were less meaningful by definition.

My snob origin story begins the same as most others do: with passion. I loved the church. I grew up spiritually and literally fed by my home congregation and its social services, and in my late teenage years I began to imagine what my contribution to it would be. It wasn't long before I also began noticing the cracks in long-held theologies that were harming people I knew and loved. Distancing myself from these traditional readings was the first of many ego deaths to come, and I survived those slayings by marking my decision as the right one, which meant there also had to be a wrong one. My exceptionalism grew.

I'm insufferable when I talk about movies. The trouble started in seminary.

Narrow-mindedness often attaches itself to the things we love. I loved movies: how a well-framed shot could both contain and evoke emotion, how faces and music can do what paragraphs of text cannot; how moving images can convey multiple meanings. But as I began to study film, I also deepened my judgment against people who enjoy a movie but seem to dismiss the structure, satire, song choice—layers of meaning that are totally unnecessary for you to enjoy a work of art.

Unless you are a snob. Then people must notice and appreciate these things, or else they are beneath you. But most people do not notice the bergamot in a fragrance they love; they just know they love it. And sure, foreshadowing in the first act might enhance a particular moment in the third, but noticing this is not an essential part of enjoying a movie or finding it meaningful. There are places where a different translation of a word comes with major consequences—Isaiah 7's *virgin* vs. *young woman* comes to mind—but in most cases *The Message* doesn't radically change the meaning reflected in the NRSVue.

Of course there are limits. My hospitality for alternative readings does not welcome those who use a text to bash others. And while I have no firm rubric for whether a given interpretation goes too far, I do know that White Christian nationalist readings are both dumb and dumber. We must protect the good, and we can't let relativity lend support to violence.

But lately I've found myself frustrated with newer, "smarter" translations and reaching for the poetry of King James. Or thirsty to remember a victory of God and God's people, even when the context is the Amalekite genocide. I want to sing "Marching Onward to Zion" in these times, not because I want to comment on current affairs but because my ancestors sang it and I want to feel connected to them. Sometimes it feels like my survival depends on it.

What I'm describing is not a perfect science, and trying too hard to regulate it would miss the point altogether. But I don't want the Way of Jesus to be the Way of Snobs. I don't want us to rank translations or use words like *proper* and *appropriate*. Those of us who went to seminary should, of course, draw from that learning and share it with other Christians. But if they don't listen or don't care, I hope we can still consider them as part of our we and not as some separate they.

And remember this: However frustrated you are when people persist in calling the Hebrew Bible the Old Testament, there are also people who think *The Godfather Part III* is "actually not that bad." Both notions are plainly wrong, and both can be redeemed. But you don't have to be a snob about it.