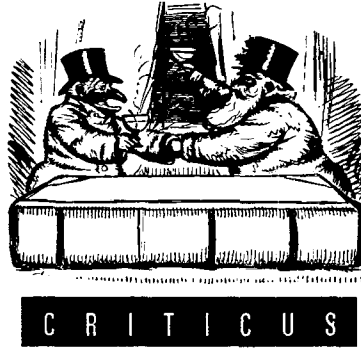


## ARTS & CULTURE



# Disgusted in Tunbridge Wells;

Or,

I Think We Should Be Told

B Y G . B . T E N N Y S O N

ONCE UPON a time there surely was a "Disgusted in Tunbridge Wells," and probably several "Disgusteds," writing, from their elegant spa and retirement town, Colonel Blimpish letters to the editors of the *Times* and *Telegraph* harrumphing about the latest infuriating public outrage perpetrated by a celebrity or a chancellor, building contractor or high-priced tart, vagrant vicar or impudent urchin. But by now the phrase has become a journalistic joke cliché for any bloody-minded traditionalist who objects to innovation or impertinence. This applies as well to Criticus as to, say, Evelyn Waugh whose telling dismissal of the Tory party in power (read, for the U.S., the Republicans) was that it had never succeeded in putting the clock back even one minute, hence was not worth anyone's vote. Thus Criticus takes note of various absurdities and dispatches them with a "Disgusted" or at least with one of Disgusted's favorite queries, the famed "I Think We Should Be Told."

### CARRY ME BACK

THEY DIDN'T actually ban the state song of Virginia, the once-and-still-loved "Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny"; instead they made it the State Song Emeritus. Perhaps this designated limbo status as

*G.B. Tennyson tells many disgusted students at UCLA what he thinks they should be told about English literature.*

opposed to outright banning was in deference to the fact that the song was written by a black New York minstrel who had never been to Virginia. On the minus side, of course, it is also a fact that this composer, James A. Bland, *did* cast the song as a lament by a freed slave to return to Ol' Massa and the Plantation and did have the singer refer to himself as a "darkey" (compare with "My Old Kentucky Home," now cleaned up for Kentucky Derby singing, and with "Maryland, My Maryland," never sung beyond the first stanza at the Preakness). "Carry Me Back" must be the first state song in history to be made emeritus, but it may start a trend, one that Criticus predicts will end with the putting out to pasture of "The Star-Spangled Banner" with the designation, "National Anthem Emeritus." The problem will then be the puzzlement now faced by the state of Virginia, namely, what to put in place of the rejected song. The ACLU will never permit "God Bless America," and our many oppressed minorities along with the Sierra Club and its faithful servant Al Gore will never tolerate "America the Beautiful" (how can it be beautiful when we are feeding crack to the inner cities, polluting streams, and contributing to global warming?). The Critical solution is the same for both the state and the nation: commission the court poetess Marguerite Johnson, *aka* Maya Angelou, to lift some lines glorifying America the Diverse from some Campfire Girls sing-along book, taking care as she did at the

inaugural to leave out any reference to white males. Music can be created for the new anthem by the man once known as Calypso Louie, now as Minister Farrakhan. After that they can turn to the individual states and create new songs for them. It's a job that may take some time and money, but a Hillary tax on tickets to films that show people smoking could fund it.

## MASCOTS

**S**PEAKING OF sensibilities, they are becoming so sensitive that they are in danger of canceling one another out. We know that a good while back ever-correct Stanford University divested itself of its traditional symbol, the Stanford Indians, and adopted the quixotic "The Cardinal," not only a bird in the singular but one which does not exist in the West, though a tiny colony of imported ones was recently reported as living in the San Gabriel Valley. Somewhat belatedly, given Stanford's example, there is now a movement afoot to abolish all Indian-related names from sports teams as inherently insulting. The Redskins must go, as must the Braves, even though Hanoi Jane cheerfully joins in doing the Tomahawk Chop. And we are not speaking only of professional or college teams. The cleansing must descend all the way down. Criticus saw a so-called public interest television show in which several "Native American" activists (now *there* are some words ready for retirement) discussed at length the shame and humiliation they had suffered growing up among sports teams that were named things like Indians. They managed to drag in some footage of a football game at Birmingham High School in Van Nuys (alma mater of Michael Milken and Michael Ovitz) where cheerleaders dressed up as the Birmingham Braves cavorted about with feathered headdresses and the like. Horrors! The activists argued that no other ethnic group was singled out for this kind of insult, saying with a not-so-subtle touch of bias of their own, that after all no one would name a team the New York Jews. Certainly not. But what about the Minnesota Vikings? The Boston Celtics? The Fighting Irish? The Trojans? though that last may be stretching it. And ought not one cast a cold eye on the Cleveland Browns?

## MORE MASCOTS

**M**EANTIME, NOT so far away from Van Nuys as the crow flies lies the Antelope Valley. Here the sensibilities run the other way. The high desert towns of Lancaster and Palmdale were settled originally mostly by Southerners but in recent years there has been a considerable influx of blacks from Los Angeles, lured by what realtors like to call affordable housing. Result — culture clash. Some local black activists protested a year or so ago against the fact that a middle school there has athletic teams called the Rebels and a mascot of a southern colonel, or was it Johnny Reb? (Criticus has misplaced the clipping.) This mascot, some held, was insulting to blacks. The storm raged for a while and in due course Political Correctness prevailed and the Rebels have been banished. This is, alas, not in itself so remarkable and will doubtless be repeated across the land until the last Confederate statue is removed from the last county courthouse square, almost certainly in South Carolina. What is interesting in the context of sensibilities



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is that whereas American Indians evidently consider mascots by their nature as demeaning, blacks consider mascots by their nature as exalting. Now that's diversity. We have yet to hear from PETA on this, but one can foresee simultaneous complaints from that self-righteous organization against teams that demean razorback hogs and banana slugs by adopting them as their mascots and teams that exalt, or in academic jargon privilege, gophers and anteaters over other creatures by adopting them as their mascots. The solution is clearly a federal commission to regulate mascots nationwide. Chelsea of The Cardinal could chair it.

## YET MORE MASCOTS

**W**HILE WE'RE at it, Criticus notes that until recently virtually all group mascots and symbols were thought of positively and/or affectionately, albeit often in warlike or bellicose terms that used to be called manly, from the Lion of Judah to St. George the dragon-slayer, from John Bull to Uncle Sam, from the various imperial eagles to all those ferocious tigers, bears, and wildcats for schools and teams.

Somewhere along the way in the insalubrious '60s it became fashionable among the revolting classes to mock these once proud and innocent symbols. That was when '60s-founded schools like the U.C.s Santa Cruz and Irvine adopted what we can only call anti-mascots, the aforementioned banana slug and anteater respectively. Santa Cruz didn't even allow course grading then, either, though economics has brought them to their senses on that matter. But cynicism and rebuke can surface on the right as well, and to that end Criticus proposes for all groups that oppose existing mascots the mascot to end all mascots, one that will both exalt and demean its subject, both amuse and offend the populace. It is also very probably the only one that already has its own warning road sign, a sign that Criticus covets and would purloin if he could. Alas, as far as I know, the sign can be found only in South Africa. But I almost think "*il vaut le voyage*," as the guidebooks put it. The mascot in question? It is the dung beetle. Also known as the tumblebug and the tumbledung. If you don't know its life cycle, you can probably make a good guess at it. Or look it up, as it is inappropriate for description in a publication as high-minded as this one.

### THE SHOES OF THE PROPHET

**J**UST TO be inclusive, Criticus will briefly advert to a topic that gained more publicity than the two previous ones, perhaps presaging a shift in power among interest groups. I refer, of course, to the brouhaha over the Air Nike shoes in which the design of the word "Air" at the back of the shoe was held to look like Allah in Arabic and hence to be offensive to Muslims. (This is distinct from the calculated insult by an Israeli artist depicting Mohammed as a pig.) The Air-Allah led to protests and to Nike's removing the shoes from the market at considerable expense. At first this seemed an unusually craven retreat, but then one remembered that Nike does sell worldwide, therefore including sales to Muslims, though the picture of Bedouins or *chador*-covered Arabesses in Nikes is not easy to conjure up. But what may really have concentrated Nike's mind is the example of the *fatwah* against that boring old hum-

bug (not to be confused with the tumblebug) Salman Rushdie. Imagine if the names and faces of Nike executives were to be distributed throughout the Muslim world. Or for that matter simply to the Nation of Islam. And was it Nike that had earlier blundered with the "Incubus" shoe, or was that Reebok? Either way we are beginning to see the results of American higher non-education that can't even teach would-be advertising writers (English majors to a woman) how to use the dictionary. It's an argument for restoring the old Western Civilization course that The Cardinal among others pecked to death.



**A few years ago the running dogs of correctness tried to get a restaurant along the Grapevine that was named 'Okie Girl' to change its name, as Okie was offensive.**

### TRANSLITERATION

ALLAH REMINDS one that it is becoming fashionable to render the word Koran in English as Qu'ran or Quu'ran or some comparable un-English combination of letters. Disgusted sees this as a sinister development and hopes it will be opposed by all right-thinking people. He remembers how the once charming Peking got inscrutably transformed some years back into the quite silly Beijing, the latter being supposedly truer to the Chinese pronunciation, but if so, why not transliterate it more phonetically as Bayzhing, letters being alien to Chinese in any case? And if it must be Beijing, let us change the name of the canine to a Beijingsese. Disgusted was also much annoyed even before he was born when Angora got itself transformed in English to Ankara, though happily not the cat or the cloth.

### NUMBERS

**N**OR CAN we readily excuse those Chinese and Chinese-Americans eastwards of downtown Los Angeles in places like Monterey Park who opposed so vigorously the recent telephone area code change, whereby they lost the 818 area code and were given 626 instead. Their complaint was not the usual one of business costs brought on by the change but the distinctly Middle Kingdom one that in Chinese eight is a lucky and six an unlucky number; therefore they must not be burdened with six where once there was eight, which was enough. We may be moving towards ethnic area codes. We shall not tell them that the street

number on the Reagans' house in Bel Air was discreetly changed: it was originally 666. But what is the problem anyway? We always thought they knew that with six you get eggroll.

## FOREIGN WORDS

**A**LL THIS leads to thoughts of just how far we can go in accommodating our politically correct and multi-cultural population.

A few years ago the running dogs of correctness tried to get a restaurant along the Grapevine that was named "Okie Girl" to change its name, as Okie was offensive, to which the owner said the Okie equivalent of Fiddle-Dee-Dee, pointing out that she herself *was* the Okie Girl of the name and proud of it. Not too long thereafter the dogs began hounding the DWP to rescind a personalized license plate that read "Top Wop," but the owner, a gentleman of Italian descent, replied with the Italian equivalent of Fiddle-Dee-Dee, which, as I remember Italy, would be the Finger, pointing out that he was a successful business man who always referred to himself as "Top Wop," and nobody was going to take his self-chosen nickname away from him.

Most recently, sensitive Asians demanded the banishment of a personalized plate reading RAPNJAP, but the bearer declined on the grounds that his initials were JAP and what are you going to do about that? Far more alarming in the eyes of Disgusted are some Asian surnames. The Wangs and the Dongs seem in English to be sailing pretty close to the wind. And Deng pronounced Dung should simply be banned. Failing that, we could change the insect's name to the Deng Beetle at least to harmonize spelling. As for the former southeast Asian politico named Bum Suk, nothing more need be said. Just to keep straight faces we may have to abandon language altogether and communicate solely through the use of internationally recognized symbols, now blasphemously called icons. Is Apple computer responsible for introducing this repulsive verbal usage? If so, we now know why it is in such trouble. The Oecumenical Patriarch is not mocked.

## I THINK WE SHOULD BE TOLD

**B**ACK TO business now, lest you rest too easy with all this jollity. Disgusted thinks we should be told the answers to the following questions:



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♦ *Ambrose Evans-Pritchard.* Having done an admirable tour of duty on the American/Washington news beat, A E-P has returned to England. But why did the American information media so studiously avoid disseminating his unmatched investigative scoops on Clintonian sleaze? And if you don't know about this, Disgusted will pass on one of A E-P's parting journalistic *amuse-gueules*, viz., that on the night of the day of the discovery of Vince Foster's body, when Lady Macbeth may have been scouring Foster's office for those peripatetic Rose Law Firm files, President Bubba was in bed with a woman not his wife. I do think we should be told.

♦ *Swiss Banks.* Why are they now persecuting Swiss banks when they were, as the world's most literate and stylish financial commentator Christopher Fildes put it in the *Spectator*, simply doing what it is that banks

are supposed to do? I think we should be told. We should also be told how the United States, among many other countries, trafficked mightily in that fearsome and newly named commodity "Nazi Gold" and also refused entry to large numbers of refugee Jews. While waiting for full disclosure on that score, I think the Gnomes of Zurich should be saying a Swiss Fiddle-Dee-Dee, which I assume is a razzberry yodel.

♦ *Le mot juste.* Is it really true, as reported in a recent *Chronicles*, that an academic was reprimanded and punished for using the phrase "a chink in his armor," or is this just someone's paronomasiac jest? I think we should be told.

## I THINK THE WORLD SHOULD BE TOLD

**B**Y WAY of cheering you up, Criticus offers the next two items not in the spirit of Disgusted but rather in that of Gratified in Tunbridge Wells, hopeful indeed that there was now and again a Gratified who wrote to the editor.

♦ *The Empire Strikes Back.* Despite the loss of Hong Kong it appears that with its last remaining possessions



the British Empire is still one on which the sun never sets. There are even now thirteen "pink bits" on the map still owned by the Mother Country, if the Mid-night Economist of these pages will permit such an affectionate locution. If you begin the course of the sun at the Greenwich meridian, the British possessions in the Atlantic, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Indian Oceans are still so distributed that at any given moment the sun will be shining on some patch of land that is forever England. Who needs Hong Kong, or even Scotland, when there is still Pitcairn Island (population fifty-two), the Falklands, Diego Garcia, Tristan da Cunha, and many more?

♦ *The Empire Strikes Back, Part Two* — *Horticultural Division*. From the unlikely source of knee-jerk-left political columnist Alexander Cockburn come some comfortable words about the symbolism of the new Hong Kong. The current masters of that probably doomed rock are removing the Queen's image from all official documents, money, and insignia. They have replaced it with the handsome flower of the Hong Kong orchid tree, the same as can be seen in many a Southern California garden. All this seems appropriate enough.

## A WESTERN PHENOMENON

**B**UT THE Hong Kong orchid tree, a type of *bauhinia*, was first noted and recorded botanically by the British after securing that territory for themselves in the Opium Wars. Scientific botanical classification and nomenclature being an entirely Western phenomenon (where is the Asiatic or African Linnaeus?), the tree was botanically named in typical style in Latin, which is the genus name followed by the species name. Normally these are purely descriptive of physical characteristics of the plant, but now and again, especially with exotic plants not part of a previously known family, the name is a Latinized form of the name of the discoverer (e.g., the French explorer Bougainville, who gave us our dazzling bougainvilleas) or the name of someone to be honored by association with the plant. In the case of the Hong Kong orchid tree we honor two westerners, though Cockburn wrote only of the



**The mainland Chinese  
have managed to replace  
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of the imperial usurper  
with an image honoring  
two Swiss botanists and  
a member of the British  
imperial system.**

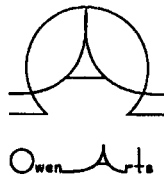
latter. First, however, there was the genus name of this type of tree, which was taken from the Swiss botanists Jean and Gaspard Bauhin who discovered it, hence *bauhinia*. Insult Number One to the xenophobic Chi-

nese. Then there was the particular species that was observed by the British in Hong Kong and that Cockburn tells us was named in honor of the wife of the then-British governor of Hong Kong, Lady Blake. Thus the Hong Kong orchid tree is the *bauhinia blakeana*. The mainland Chinese, so proud of having erased (actually it was done for them by Mrs. Thatcher in a fit of absent-mindedness) the shame of the loss of Hong Kong have managed to replace the image of the monarch of the imperial usurper with an image honoring two Swiss botanists (did they have numbered accounts?) and a much lower-ranking member of the British imperial system than the monarch herself. That's Insult Number Two. Insult Number Three: the imperial Lord and Lady Blake are ancestors of Alexander Cockburn. Rule, Britannia!

♦ *Contest Update*. The name contest in Steve Harvey's "Only in L.A." col-

umn in the *Los Angeles Times* that was sparked by Criticus's "California Rhyming" column in these pages in the March/April number enjoyed a nice little run in May and June with contributions popping up every few days; then it faded away. I kept a file. During the course of its run Criticus and Steve Harvey also had a brief epistolary exchange that prompted a poem made to order by Criticus but not seen by the world. Space considerations require that I defer a report on all this until next time. Stay tuned.

♦ *Odium Update*. In the unlikely venue of the parking lot of a middle eastern greengrocer's emporium Criticus spotted the lumbering Darwin tortoise emblem on a large motor car that looked to be the property of a limousine liberal. On the bumper was a sticker from a Berkeley (where else?) institute reading: "Honk! If you understand / Punctuated Equilibria." Well, I do understand, but it's too complex to explain here, except to say that it is another dodgy effort by neo-Darwinians to explain some disturbingly non-Darwinian aspects of the fossil record. Of course the vehicle sporting all this Darwinism was parked in the handicapped zone. **CPB**



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## Lynn Sampson Recommends

### Books

The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music, Washington Square Press, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York



10020, \$5.95. Never out of print since it first appeared in 1961, this venerable little volume is a lot more potent than its small size would suggest. Next time you are off to the symphony, put this book in your pocket and use it to become knowledgeable about what you are hearing. There is much more to music than meets the ear. Like the *Talmud* says, "To understand the invisible, first study the visible."

### Zoos

Hogle Zoo, 2600 East Sunnyside Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108, (801) 582-

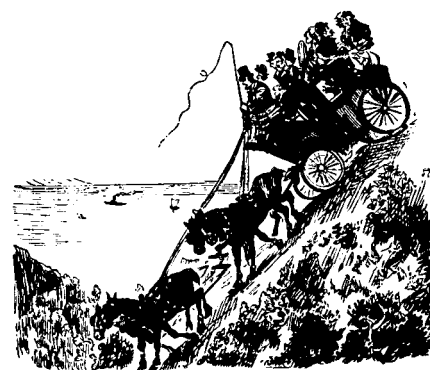
1631. No zoo in America has a more spacious, idyllic setting than the quiet, inauspicious Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City. It is situated along the verdant and unspoiled Imagination Creek in a scenic canyon overlooking the city. This is one zoo that will give neither the spectators nor the animals claustrophobia.

### Museums

Museum of Western Colorado's Dinosaur Valley, Fourth & Main, Grand Junction, Colorado, (970) 242-0971. Dinosaurs are big these days and sometimes taking your children to a museum that features paleontology can be as fulfilling as ingesting cotton candy. But at Dinosaur Valley Museum, located in Grand Junction on Interstate 70 240 miles west of Denver, children and adults can watch an actual working paleontology lab and view exhibits that give you a lot of hard information as well as a thrill. And, of course, the setting is the magnificent Rocky Mountains.

### Cheap Thrills

Filbert Street, San Francisco, California. One night while trying to find a shortcut from the Golden Gate Bridge to the 101 Freeway, I happened to turn up Filbert Street. It may not have been the shortcut I was looking for, but it was one of the most entertaining and spontaneous thrills I've ever experienced. Filbert Street is San Francisco's steepest street. On your next visit to the City, drive down Van Ness until you are practically to Lombard Street. Turn on to Filbert going



towards Coit Tower and away from the Golden Gate. There is a long climb to the top and a very, very short drop to the bottom. Filbert Street is especially terrifying when driven at night for any of you who find doing it too tame during daylight hours. CPR

*A veteran print and broadcast arts critic, Lynn Sampson hosts "Movies Worth Watching with Lynn Sampson," daily on KCIV-FM, Modesto.*

