

# ARTS & CULTURE



C R I T I C U S

## The Year's Midnight

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

*'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's,  
Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmasks.*

— John Donne

CONSTANT READERS will remember that in the penultimate Criticus column they were promised that the next one would feature the annual Criticus dog days roundup of the follies and absurdities of the past year, that is, the year since the dog days column of the previous summer. Instead, they got the Critical disquisition on Las Vegas. The reason had only to do with timing, Las Vegas having interposed herself like a very hussy demanding to be seen and heard and, of course with Criticus behind the pen, judged. Some Constants may even have preferred reading about Las Vegas to reading about other sorts of follies. I know of one who lamented that on a recent family jaunt that passed by Las Vegas he was overruled in his desire to examine the New Vegas of Critical record. On the other hand another Constant passing the desert Babylon opined: "Pull the plug on it."

Whatever side you come down on regarding Vegas,

*G.B. Tennyson has professed for many years at UCLA in the obsolescent discipline of English literature. His Barfield Reader is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.*

you will still be in need of a periodic updating on other follies. Thus Criticus offers you now a year's end rather than a dog days' roundup of the ongoing lunacies of the world, a nocturnal for the short days of the year. The shortest of those when John Donne was writing was St. Lucy's Day, December 13. This year, centuries after calendar reform, it is December 22, which lacks the distinction of a saint as colorful as Lucy for whom in Sweden they still celebrate a festival of lights. For the 22nd the saints that my most diligent investigations could come up with include the likes of Flavian of Aquapendente (362), Amaethelu of Wales (6th century), Hunger of Utrecht (866), Amaswinthus of Malaga (982), and finally a Blessed Jutta of Dissibodenberg from 1136. I doubt that even the late Jennifer Patterson of "Two Fat Ladies" fame could offer a receipt (her preferred term) for a dish appropriate to one of these, though she might have felt free to come up with almost anything for such a saint as Hunger of Utrecht. I'd guess a plum pudding or a fruit cake, especially the old unreformed southern kind with dark dough and every kind of fruit and nut, the sort of cake that Criticus in the face of all fashionable ridicule admits to liking. (Take that, Johnny Carson!) The trick is to swaddle it in soft cloth drenched with brandy or bourbon and let it mature for some

weeks or longer before slicing into it on St. Hunger's Day and topping your portion with whipped cream. Just the right *amuse gueule* to start your feast on the following catalogue of inanities.

### Apology Corner

EVER SINCE Criticus first began noting the modern obsession with demanding and giving apologies for past acts of persons, groups, and governments, and ever since he began offering what seemed like far-fetched instances of things that could still be apologized for, reality has outstripped fantasy. It's what makes the satirist's job so difficult nowadays. The most recent and inordinate apology to come along in the past year or so is the apology for the First Crusade. Yes, Constant Readers, I refer to that act of extreme and perhaps foolhardy daring committed in 1099 and followed over several centuries by other similar efforts to conquer, or reconquer, the Holy Land for Christendom. On the exact day this year (give or take the ten that got lost between John Donne and us), nine hundred years after the first Crusaders sacked Jerusalem, that is, on July 15, some fifteen-hundred American and European apologists descended upon the city to apologize to one and all for the acts of their ancestors in carrying out the Crusade.

**W**HAT A lunatic sight this must have been. Some fifty or so had actually retraced the steps of the original Crusaders and wore, rather than the armour of a Red Cross Knight, specially made tee shirts showing a jagged red line from the Rhine Valley through the heart of Europe and down into Lebanon, the route of the first Crusade. The point was to show how the Crusade tore apart rather than united Christendom. Most non-Crusaders, however, came to Israel by modern transportation. All carried printed apologies in Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish, which they pressed upon the often suspicious people on the streets of Jerusalem who were widely described as skeptical of what was going on because the place is overrun, especially this year, with religious zealots trying to convert the locals to Christianity before the arrival of the Mil-

lennium and the Last Days. (It is obvious that Criticus's animadversions on the mistake of thinking that the year 2000 is the beginning rather than the end of the millennium have gone unheeded. Even the Pope appears to have been lured into this error and is planning to visit Ur to see the birthplace of Abraham. Worse, some specialists argue that the Pope has chosen the wrong Ur, there being several of that name, giving rise to Criticus's *bon mot* that the Pope seems to have made the Ur-Error.)

Now all of this seems to Criticus slightly daft, however well intentioned; and, as noted, it seemed rather suspect to the locals. It did lead Criticus to read up a bit on the First Crusade and to realize how very bloody it was, even by modern standards. First, tell the well-behaved children to stop reading now, for what follows encapsulates vivid reporting by those who were there and is suitable only for little boys who play modern video games and exult in the idea of mayhem and carnage.

It took the Crusaders — initially about 35,000 in number, swelled at one point by 20,000 so-called People's Crusaders, that is, non-soldiers, filthy vagabonds, homeless derelicts, women and children — about three years to make the march, committing many barbarities on the way, such as repeated cannibalism, sometimes without bothering to barbecue their victims first. They also died in great numbers, so that by the time they reached Jerusalem they were down to 10,000 soldiers and 1,000 knights. The city was in Muslim hands and an army from Egypt was en route to relieve the siege, so the Crusaders attacked with an unparalleled ferocity, such that the 11,000 Crusaders, often wading in blood up to their knees, in thirty-six hours slaughtered all the 40,000 Muslims and 6,000 Jews inside the walled city. They slit open the bellies of the dead to extract the coins that had been swallowed to hide against theft, compelled the few remaining Saracens to drag the rotting bodies outside the city walls onto piles as high as buildings, and then slew the Saracens. Those are just the high points.

As for apology, the priest Fulcher of Chartres, who was there, said the massacre had "cleansed Jerusalem



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from the contagion of pagans." No lily-livered liberal he.

Well, you might say, after all that, it's high time that fundamentalist Fanny from Fayetteville and Pastor Perry from Peoria should apologize. But is it? Surely not a single modern pilgrim really knows whether any ancestor actually participated in any Crusade, nor for that matter whether any modern resident of Jerusalem is actually descended from the forty-odd thousand victims. And neither modern Crusader descendants nor victims personally prospered or suffered from the events. That doesn't matter, say the contemporary un-Crusaders, who see some sort of collective guilt by virtue of belonging to a given society. In fact collective guilt about the conduct of persons centuries dead is the safest kind to have: it makes you feel virtuous without having to be virtuous.

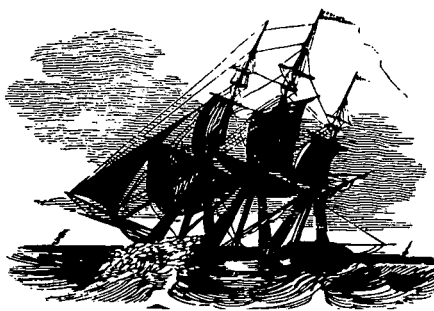
**B**UT COLLECTIVE guilt-bearers had better beware. As should the rest of us. For when the guilt comes a little closer in time, then the offended parties begin thinking in modern terms. Which is to say money and reparations. Thus it is no surprise to find in the Apology Corner demands on the British government in the amount of \$5.9 million from the descendants of the blacks who were enlisted to fight along with Col. Robert Baden-Powell on the British side in the Boer War and specifically in the battle of Mafeking (now being spelled Mafikeng) that made Baden-Powell's reputation as a war hero. It also inspired him to found the Boy Scouts and his sister to found the Girl Guides, who became the Girl Scouts in the U.S. Perhaps these organizations can also be sued, each member assessed a few pennies a month or each troop the price of a few boxes of cookies. There is little question that the black fighters from the Baralong tribe were indeed ill-used by the British Army, promises to them were not kept, and they were allowed to starve during the siege while the white troops ate reasonably well. This sort of thing is not unheard of in the history of foreign colonies, not least among the British, who do have the distinction of having set up the first concentration camps during

that same Boer War. Of course all this is now 100 years ago, so hampers from Fortnum and Mason can never reach the starving defenders. But why shouldn't their great great grandchildren dine better than they do? As of July this year the Baralong tribe was estimated to number about 85,000, but the chief of it says the real number is closer to 500,000. If so, that measly \$5.9 million is going to have to be increased.

That such a sum as \$5.9 million is indeed paltry must have been in the minds of the African World Reparations and Reparation Truth Commission meeting in Accra a month after the Baralong demand. This apparently self-created body is demanding that the West pay Africa \$777 quadrillion [*sic*] in reparation for the slave trade, for lives lost through the trade, and for gold, diamonds, and other minerals taken from Africa during colonial rule. The group is also demanding that those in the African Diaspora who want to return should have transportation provided for them to do so. The claim is that at least 12 million Africans were shipped across

the Atlantic to South and North America and the West Indies. The estimate that an additional 20 million were exported to other parts of the world, mainly the Middle East and North Africa, does not seem to have prompted the Reparations committee to demand reparations from, say, Arabia, but surely there's plenty of oil money there, though the sums in question all dazzle Criticus. Let us ask a Boy or Girl Scout with a mathematics merit badge, if such there be, to calculate how much 20 million ought to bring if 12 million are worth \$777 quadrillion. Then let us ask the Reparations Commission whether "exported" is reparation talk for "sold."

Back in mere semi-comic reality, be it noted that the Australian government in a parliamentary declaration officially "regretted" its treatment of the Aborigines during its 200-year history, using such language as "deep and sincere regret that indigenous Australians suffered injustices under the practices of past generations, and for the hurt and trauma that many indigenous people continue to feel." Sounds pretty humble, but many in the Aborigine community were dissatis-



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fied that the word "sorry" had not been used in the declaration. It must mean that Australia really loves them.

**F**INALLY, HERE in Apology Corner, note that the Metropolitan Kallinikos speaking for the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church has ruled out a hoped-for visit by the Pope to Athens as part of his tour of biblical sites, the one that will include the possibly faux-Ur, unless and until the Pontiff apologizes for the schism of 1054, the Council of Lyons II in 1274, and, you guessed it, the Crusades, especially the one that led to the sacking of Constantinople in 1204. I say just let the Pope hire those Jerusalem pilgrims to go to Athens, preferably on foot, with new tee shirts, this time written in Latin and Greek. They could then hire out to other interested parties working through Apology Central and go all over the world apologizing. They might begin in Arabic dress by touring Spain to apologize for the Moorish conquest, then dressed as Conquistadors move on to Mexico and Peru apologizing for the conquests of the Aztecs and the Incas, then befeathered as Aztecs move through the country of Aztlan apologizing for the Aztec tyranny over the native Indians, finally offering themselves as modern-day equivalents of the countless human sacrifices that the Aztecs inflicted on the ancestors of modern Chicanos.

#### PC Corner

Not a day goes by, scarcely even an hour, without some new instance of politically correct thinking and language being imposed on the citizenry at large by a kind of ideological Invisible Hand. The *bien pensants* who occupy the cultural ramparts know instinctively what is acceptable and what not. Criticus has noted for the faithful many instances in recent years in which this or that name, mascot, expression, and the like have been denounced and changed to soothe some sensibility. The two favored sensibilities presumed most in need of soothing have lately been the Indian and the black. Here's a nod in each direction that came to Critical attention in recent months.



**Another sometime overlooked group, at least in this country, namely Muslims, has been accommodated in England where a retirement home has been designed so that none of the lavatories faces Mecca.**

Constant readers will recall that students at Birmingham High School in Van Nuys were compelled to cease being Braves and have become Pioneers, and there have been other such changes or proposed changes in California but nothing so sweeping as the changes in Dallas.

There, no fewer than ten schools have abandoned their traditional Indian mascots and adopted new and anodyne names. Before the verbal cleansing there were two schools styling themselves Apaches, four calling themselves simply Indians, two Warriors and one Aztecs. The new mascot names include two Stars, two Eagles, two Panthers, one Wildcats, one Timberwolves, one Comets, and one Pegasus. Try saying "We are the Pegasuses" instead of "We are the Braves" and you'll have something just about as absurd as saying, "We are the Stanford Cardinal" (formerly Indians). Perhaps they should switch, as in "We are the Pegasus" (there was after all only one Pegasus) and "We are the Cardinals" (of which there are after all many, though none in Stanford).

**T**O THEIR credit some of the students at the various schools tried to adopt symbols that seem to mock the whole business. One group at the school that became the tongue-twisting Pegasuses tried to become the Bulls, but, Chicago notwithstanding, the language fascists thought it could lead to unfortunate consequences. Students at another school, once the Apaches and now the Eagles, fought and lost the struggle to call themselves the Donald Ducks, though to Criticus that is no sillier than the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim. Yet another school, previously the Warriors and now the Panthers, had a faction favoring the Black Panthers, but you can imagine the official reaction to that. As a concession to the old ways it was decreed that students could still wear their old Indian tee shirts because they are "memorabilia." One wonders how long that indulgence will last. Probably until the first prankster shows up with a tee shirt bearing the old Coppertone ad depicting an Indian saying "Don't be a paleface."



Speaking of Native Americans, how is it that the U.S. Air Force is allowed to fly helicopters named Apache and fire "tomahawk" missiles? Judging from the performance of one of them in Kosovo, it may be that they are thought to be largely unthreatening. As hitherto were thought to be the now extinct Anasazi of New Mexico. A new theory posits that their extinction came about because they were overcome by cannibalistic Toltecs and themselves adopted cannibalistic ways until finally fleeing and inhabiting cliff dwellings and eventually dwindling out as a distinct tribe, leaving as their descendants the modern-day Hopi, Zuni, and Pueblo Indians. The evidence suggests that they cooked their victims thoroughly and carefully removed all the flesh from the bones, which makes them at least more fastidious than the Crusaders. This theory has not been welcomed by the Indian descendants of the Anasazi, and the propounder of the theory, one Professor Christy Turner of Arizona State University, has been shunned by his colleagues, many of whom refuse even to read his book. In the Academy this is called academic freedom.

Some new claimants to the victim's chair are Hawaiians. Two of their number caused the cancellation of a planned Hawaiian luau at Dartmouth college. What's wrong with a luau? Well, it is alleged to be a feast with spiritual overtones and hence unsuitable for a fraternity-sorority party. No doubt non-Hawaiian visitors to the islands will recall many a spiritual luau and not even think of staging one in their own home regions.

Another sometime overlooked group, at least in this country, namely Muslims, has been accommodated in England where a retirement home has been built in London designed so that none of the lavatories faces Mecca.

**B**UT HOPE and despair not. Think of the charming effrontery of the recent revival of the Indian motorcycle. It was once the best-selling motorcycle in the United States, its top model being the Indian Chief and its logo an Indian chief in full headdress. The original company

ceased operation in 1953, but now after a long legal battle the ownership of the name and logo has been settled and a new company appropriately named the Indian Motorcycle Co. has begun production.

Nostalgic graduates of all those purified Dallas schools and especially veterans of Birmingham High in Van Nuys can make a pilgrimage to a motorcycle emporium in Ventura called simply The Shop (on the web as [cycleshop.com](http://cycleshop.com)). It is said to be a virtual museum of Indian motorcycles all of them sporting the infamous logo. Enough to bring a tear to the cheek of that Italian-American gentleman who posed for the well-known depiction of the weeping Indian.

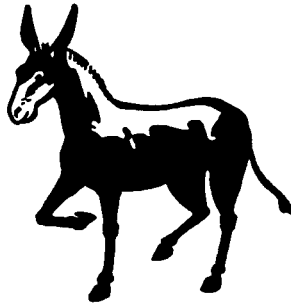
Another little ray of sunshine has broken out in an even more unlikely spot than motorcycle production, namely in publishing. A company called Applewood Books in Massachusetts is re-issuing the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys mystery series in exact replicas of the originals. This is more daring than you might think. There had been a sanitized and predictably boring re-issue of the books in 1959 but the originals

now being reproduced contain such shocking elements of sexism and racism as that girls are not likely to have serious ideas and that the "colored caretaker" says "dat" and "ain't." For that matter it will go against the grain of the politically correct to find teenagers who utter no stronger swear words than "Gee whiz!" Incidentally, the most prolific of the team of authors who wrote these books under a single pseudonym for each series was one Mildred Wirt Benson who wrote twenty-three Nancy Drews and who is still flourishing in her 90s and writing a column for the *Toledo Blade*. Why is there no right-thinking foundation around to give her a Lifetime Achievement Award?

#### Nuts From St. Hunger's Fruitcake

↔ The U.S. Army now recognizes so-called white witchcraft, Wicca, as a religion and has appointed chaplains for it on at least five military bases. Wiccans can also now have their religious preference stamped on their dog tags.

↔ The city of San Francisco has officially adopted



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the term "pet guardian" as the appropriate designation for a pet owner. It still sounds patriarchal to me, so I suggest that they change it to "pet friend" or even, given some pets I know, "pet servant."

↔ For Easter this year a supermarket chain in Britain arranged to sell hot cross buns with a star of David in place of the cross. These were offered in a predominantly Jewish area of London. The market agreed not to sell them during Passover when eating leavened bread is forbidden, but an otherwise approving rabbi pointed out that he couldn't eat them at any time because they are not kosher. At last an Anglican spokesman gently pointed out that the whole purpose of hot cross buns is to mark the crucifixion: that's why there is a cross on them and why they are sold at Eastertide.

↔ San Fernando Valley Congressman Brad Sherman answered students' questions about Kosovo at a Pierce College meeting. He was asked what the role of

community colleges should be. His answer can stand as the all-purpose answer of the Democrat Party to almost any question. According to the *L.A. Times*, Sherman said that, by going to college, students "will earn higher salaries and provide the government with more tax dollars."

↔ The BBC has banned the use of AD and BC in citing dates lest it offend non-Christians. In another ecumenical move it has fired a distinguished Tory journalist from a weekly news discussion radio program because his accent is too posh.

↔ In an apparent effort to imitate John Kennedy in every way, President Priapus in Cologne in June managed his own version of Kennedy's jolly linguistic blunder when Kennedy declared "*Ich bin ein Berliner*," which translates as "I am a jelly doughnut." For his part Clinton declared in Cologne "*Ich bin ein Kölsch*," which translates as "I am a beer." OFF.

## B O O K S

# A Conspiracy of Confidence

B Y J A N E H I P O L I T O

THE NOTED art critic John Russell once observed that "the act of reading is an act of confidence, and almost of conspiracy, between one human being and another. That conspiracy can get nowhere, and that confidence can be betrayed. But if all goes well the reader may put down the book at the end and say what the author ... most wants to hear: 'I learned a lot from your book, but what is more to the point is that I had a very good time.'" <sup>1</sup> This is precisely the response that Owen Barfield's writings irresistibly evoke, as the splendid new anthology, *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, engagingly demonstrates.

*Jane Hipolito is a professor of English at California State University, Fullerton.*

The anthology was published to mark the centenary of Owen Barfield (1898-1997), one of the twen-

### A Barfield Reader

*Selections from the Writings of  
Owen Barfield. Edited and with an  
Introduction by*

**G. B. Tennyson**

Wesleyan University Press,  
1999, 191 pages, \$45, cloth,  
\$18.95, paper.

tieth century's finest writers and thinkers. A lawyer by profession, Barfield was also a dazzlingly gifted poet, playwright, novelist, and translator. And he is internationally renowned for his penetrating schol-

arly work on language, consciousness, and human evolution. In this century of ever-accelerating change and ever-increasing information, mastery of one major field is a remarkable achievement and it is rare indeed to attain full expertise in multiple fields. But Barfield did even more: he found many meaningful ways of bridging the chasms between quite diverse disciplines and world-views — and thus his readers are again and again treated to the agreeable surprise of discovering that the universe may, after all, make genuinely unified sense in at least some significant respects.

One of the chief merits of *A Barfield Reader* is that it clearly, informatively, and enliveningly dis-

1. John Russell, *The Meanings of Modern Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 10.