

JONATHAN YARDLEY

On Dasher! On Dancer! To Albania!

All I want for Christmas is . . . yes, the hour is late and the stores are jammed and the budget is tight, but this really is the season of goodwill, isn't it? Shouldn't a boy get what he wants, if only he asks for it nicely? Pretty please, Mr. Claus, won't you take a look at my list?

Won't you reach deep down in your bag and grant me immunity from those silly old laws that keep a boy from running his car just as fast as he wants to, particularly if he happens to be running it on the byways of North Carolina? If the cops in that auto commercial can say to the fellow in the zippy little car, "The road is yours, so do with it as you please," or words to that effect, then why can't they say the same to me in my zippy new big car?

Maybe that's too much to ask for; shouldn't be greedy at Christmastime. So what about just a little gift, one that would have the pleasurable side effect of bringing joy not merely to me but to millions of others as well? It really doesn't seem too much, Mr. Claus; in fact if you'll grant me just this one gift, I promise—cross my heart and hope to die—not to ask for anything else. I'll make my bed every morning and eat my liver and do my homework—hell, I'll even say my prayers—if only I can come downstairs Christmas morning and find an envelope with a one-way ticket in it.

Oh, no, Mr. Claus, it's not a ticket for me; I'm not *that* greedy. No, it's a ticket for all those people who believe that the real purpose of education is political indoctrination. Don't they deserve a nice vacation—a nice *long* vacation—in some place where the climate is just to their choosing? No, not Cuba: Truth to tell (shh!) we're really talking exile, not vacation, and at this time of year a holiday in Cuba might seem too much like, well, a holiday.

No, let's pack them all on a boat and send them off to . . . what say Albania, Mr. Claus? A bit of R&R in that socialist

paradise should be just their cup of tea, shouldn't it? A bracing winter breeze zipping in off the Adriatic should do wonders for their sciatica, shouldn't it? You can send them to Kamenice (alt. 2,352 feet): Surely the snow's on the slopes there, enough of it for politically correct skiing and other winter sports. Yes, I know the government isn't big on free speech and other such niceties, but then, neither are the folks we're sending there.

So get aboard your sleigh, Mr. Claus, and start the roundup. You might make your first stop in North Carolina—stick to I-85, because the scenic byways are crawling with state troopers—where in the pleasant old tobacco town of Durham you'll find a whole sleigh-load on the campus of Duke University. In the English department alone you can round up enough suspects to fill an entire deck—make that the orlop deck, if it's all the same to you—of your ocean liner.

Make certain, for heaven's sake, that while you're roping them in at Duke you corral Stanley Fish, chairman of the English department and high potentate of whatever is flavor of the month in academic lit'ry criticism. It was Fish, you may recall, who denounced the National Association of Scholars as "widely known to be racist, sexist and homophobic" and who suggested that members of the organization, for the sin of being "illiberal," be denied appointment to committees at Duke responsible for tenure and related matters.

Once you've got Fish & Company securely padlocked away in their cabins—no portholes down there on the orlop, and no shuffleboard, and no captain's table—then you'd best point your sleigh west and head for Texas, where an effort is underway to transform the freshman writing course at the state university in Austin into what one resident cynic calls "Oppression English." If many in the—where else?—English department have their way, a course intended to improve the basic writing skills of

freshmen will be turned into a series of assigned readings in "difference," i.e., a consciousness-raising indoctrination in politically correct attitudes toward racism and sexism and any other ism that might happen along.

Fortunately the imposition of this curricular improvement has been postponed until the fall, so there's still time to whisk away the malfeasants before they can do further damage. If you're looking for names of the guilty, check in with a fellow named Alan Gribben, an English professor who's had the courage to lead the fight against this latest exercise in high-minded fascism. "If you really care about women and minorities making it in society," Gribben has said, "it doesn't make sense to divert their attention to oppression when they should be learning basic writing skills." Please, Mr. Claus, zip down that fellow's chimney and leave him a nice big sack of Swiss chocolate, Virginia ham and Australian wine.

Then, sir, westward ho! once more. Take that sleigh all the way to California, to the city of Santa Cruz. The weather may be lovely there this time of year, but this is no day at the beach for you, Mr. Claus. Your mission is to descend on the campus of the University of California at Santa Cruz and make away with the "five professors of good will"—the description belongs to Jerome Neu, of UC-Santa Cruz's philosophy department, writing last week in the *Wall Street Journal*—who have organized what they call a "World Culture" course. As Neu tells it:

"Signs of trouble emerged early. One professor, a biologist, began a lecture about Darwin with an apology for speaking about the work of a 'dead white male.' The same professor (himself a living white male, originally from Canada) choked with emotion at a session with other professors and graduate teaching assistants over the fact that he was not a member of any oppressed minority."

On Dasher! On Dancer! Pack 'em up and take 'em

away! On Donner! On Blitzen! To the top of the porch! To the top of the wall! Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away all! Dash all the way to Massachusetts, where you've one final pickup to make. It's in the town of Amherst, on the campus of the University of Massachusetts, in the (!) English department. There you'll find any number of right-minded people who, in the bottomless bliss of their rectitude, have managed to do what the folks in Texas only dream of doing. "The writing faculty here," the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported last week, "has revamped the university's two freshman composition courses so all the readings raise issues of racial and social diversity."

The courses are called "Basic Writing" and "College Writing," but "Politically Correct Writing" is the real name for them. The woman who directed the formulation of the reading list, one Marcia S. Curtis—take down that name, Mr. Claus!—says, "I don't want the old canon that is all white, mostly male and European-centered," so she and her colleagues have come up with a multi-flavored list that may be a bit light on literary distinction but is heavy on what matters most in the groves of academe these days: "oppression" and "diversity."

Where are you going for Christmas, Marcia S. Curtis? You're going to Albania! The sleigh's leaving now, and in just a few hours it'll deposit you in the Port of Boston, there to join Stanley Fish and the other members of the holy flock aboard the USS Dialectical Materialism. It's a long trip across the Atlantic, but you can pass the time happily with group readings of Louise Erdrich and Bobbie Ann Mason, and perhaps a mantra of the complete poetical works of Alice Walker. In no time at all you'll be making port at Durres, on Albania's gold coast, to be greeted by Prime Minister Adil Carcani himself, toasting you with a flagon of Albanian champagne.

Bon voyage! And don't bother to write.