


# Letters

THE SEMI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

 VOL. 4, NO. 1 • FALL 1995 • VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

## The Apocalypse Seminar: Fin de Siècle, Millenium, and Other Transitions

Reactions to temporal endings, including the apocalyptic “end-time,” become particularly vivid in a “period” like our own, when the end of a century coincides with the turn of a millennium. This year’s Fellows Program, “The Apocalypse Seminar: Fin de Siècle, Millenium, and Other Transitions,” will explore the ways human beings demarcate time and how the distinct sense of beginnings and endings structures our lives and the ideas we create of the past. Ten faculty members representing seven departments will meet weekly at the Center to discuss these themes. Throughout the year, visiting scholars will address the fellows and give public lectures. The seminar is co-directed by Margaret Anne Doody, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities, Professor of English, and Director of the Program in Comparative Literature, and David C. Wood, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department. *Letters* recently met with the seminar’s co-directors to discuss the relationship between philosophy and literature and this year’s topic.

**LETTERS:** Could you explain your understanding of the motivation behind this year’s Fellows Program, especially in relation to your respective disciplines, literature and philosophy?

**DOODY:** For a long time, I have become increasingly worried by the emphasis placed on the “end of time,” especially images I see in popular culture, television, and movies of not only coming disaster but an apocalyptic end. I



*Professors David C. Wood and Margaret Anne Doody will co-direct this year’s Fellows Program.*

am beginning to feel that we are extremely conscious of the end of the century and the end of the millennium, and that a desire to see something big and ugly happen really exists. It began to strike me that not only our literature and movies, but also our domestic and foreign policy, are now driven by this fear or lust for an apocalypse. I want to ask why we look at a mere marker, like the year 2000, with such great respect. Where is the emotional investment coming from, since the year 2000 is simply an artifact? Even Christians know that it does

not date time from the birth of Christ, and for Moslems and people of other faiths the year 2000 has scarcely any real meaning at all. Yet everyday we see that it is gaining in significance.

I thought this was something that the academy needed to investigate. At first, I did not come to it as a literary scholar, but I can now see how the interest ties in with my interest in literature. I came to it as someone who believes in thinking. As members of what can be loosely identified as the Enlightenment, we ought to investigate such phenomena and

not wall ourselves off from them and pretend that they do not exist.

**WOOD:** I have many of the same concerns as Margaret, especially the social and political

### Contents

The Apocalypse Seminar	1
Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture	5
Symposium on the Scopes Trial	6
1995/96 Fellows	8

## WOOD:

The question of an ending or the question of the end of history, or the end of a millennium, or the bringing about of some ideal, are questions that not only have been particularly interesting for philosophers to think about but also affect the very idea of philosophy itself.

ones. My own interest, more generally, has been "time" for a number of years. I have tried to track a recent tradition of thinking about time beginning in the late nineteenth century with Nietzsche and continuing through the work of people like Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida. I suppose this tradition goes back to Kant; it is a tradition that takes seriously the idea that when we deal with time we are not simply dealing with something "out there"; in fact, we are dealing as much with our own constructions of time as we are with any natural given.

One of the things that has fascinated me about this tradition is that it begins to question the hegemony of the idea of unitary time, of time as some sort of progression. In the political sphere, this is translated into the idea that history is on an upward path toward some guaranteed future enlightenment. As a result, I have been trying to pursue the project of multiplying our ways of thinking about time, not to arrive at some sort of vapid pluralism, but to get a better sense of how, in different contexts and for different purposes, we rely on models, assumptions, and patterns of thinking about time that are often hidden or not reflected on. While I do not hold some sort of *a priori* view about time as a form of intuition, as Kant did, I do take seriously the thought that time and space provide the deep, schematic organizing principles of our thinking.

The question of an ending or the question of the end of history, or the end of a millennium, or the bringing about of some ideal, are questions that not only have been particularly interesting for philosophers to think about but also affect the very idea of philosophy itself. Philosophy aims at truth. But we ask ourselves, "Well, when is this going to happen? Is this something that we can expect in the near future?" These questions seem to aim at

some sort of closure of metaphysics, or some type of total vision. We have had accounts of what that totality might look like from Hegel, for example. We have had various announcements of the end of philosophy. So the issue of the end, the end of time, the end of history, is both an issue for philosophy and an issue about philosophy.

This Humanities Center project will enable me to explore the ways in which people from quite different disciplines have thought through these issues about time and history and about the coming to an end of various things. I am especially interested in ways of thinking that may not have been anticipated by philosophers and that will allow an interruption of even my best laid plans. In turn, I am hoping that I can contribute the same sort of perspective that I have already mentioned.

DOODY: Literature is also profoundly concerned with time, not only because it keeps cropping up in literature as a theme, but because literature itself is organized in time. For instance, you cannot read an epic or a novel without noticing it takes quite a long time to do it. Reading time is part of the experience of literature. In addition, the "author" is always pointing out moments of temporal crisis or temporal passage so that one can say every literary work, even a small one, is organized around some reflection of time. Even the more conventional works operate with a desire to create some sort of interruption, if only by calling a moment of time to your attention. "Mignon, allon voir si la rose/ Qui ce matin avoit declose/Sa robe de pourpre au soleil. . . ." Time is part of the content of such a

poem, but it is also part of its content that we, the readers, should live in the "now." Literature has an inclination to value the "now," which is what differentiates it from philosophy to a very large degree. Philosophy is more abstract and is not so inclined to value the "now." Philosophy has its transcendental side,

whereas literature only has transcendental yearnings. Literature keeps trying to escape back into the immediate and to value an experience that is not necessarily temporally organized.

LETTERS: According to this description, it sounds as though philosophy and literature are at odds when it comes to their respective approaches to questions pertaining to time and the end of time. Do you think that philosophy and literature can find a more productive collaboration?

WOOD: The work of Paul Ricoeur, particularly his long trilogy *Time and Narrative*, begins from the premise that philosophers have not solved the problems of thinking about time. One of the most important reasons they have not solved these is that philosophers try to think of time independently of language. Ricoeur says we have to solve these problems by taking a detour through literature, particularly through narrative. But what is so fascinating about these books is that at the end Ricoeur realizes the problems and contradictions are still there, that the detour through literature does not completely solve them. So then we have to ask ourselves, what does literature do? One of my answers would be that it dramatizes contradictions that are not merely logical errors in our thinking about time, but reflect lived tensions in our experi-

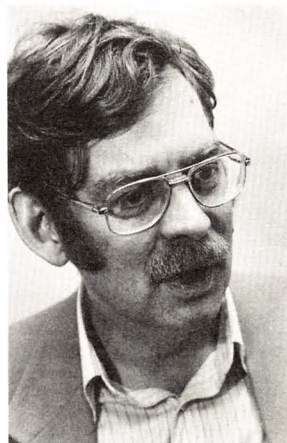
ence of time as an interruptive event and time as an intelligent, narrative continuity.

DOODY: I think you are right; the great thing about literature is that "the poet nothing affirmeth, therefore never lieth." It is not philosophy; it is not the search for truth. It does not say this is so; it asks, what if it were so? Even the most solemn novel, like *Anna Karenina*, even the lightest lyric is doing this. Literature plays without having to commit itself to some program. At the same time it also points out, as you say, the disruptions and the tensions. Literature treats the grittiness of time in our experiences of loss, bereavement, growing older, and the decay of hope, things which philosophy typically does not engage. For the most part, modern philosophy, beginning in the seventeenth century, has seen such things as belonging to the "vulgar" world and not worthy of attention. And I think that ignoring the vulgar world is one of the errors made by the Enlightenment academy in which we still live, move, and have our being.

Literature is very important. It is not a frill or an extra, something that you do after tea when your work is done. A nineteenth-century tradition held you did not read novels in the morning, because it was considered something like daytime television. But I think literature has a great deal to say about where we are, who we are, what we do, and where we run aground on our own assumptions.

It also explores our own culture, but one of the goals of this seminar group will be to get away from a purely Western orientation. It is the Western fixation on the year 2000 that is causing a lot of the world's problems. So we want to ask, how do other peoples in the world see time?

WOOD: I think we can get to this same point via certain philosophical reflections, too. Margaret talks about the positive impor-



## DOODY:

Much of this apocalyptic fervor [is] cropping up in rich countries that have a lot of technology. While technology has promised some control, we want infinite control.

But the only infinite control would be to stop the world of nature all together, which is the world of time in which things die.

tance of literature as reminding us of the grittiness that philosophers have traditionally tried to put to one side. The appeal, for me, of many contemporary philosophers is that they themselves are raising this very question about the philosophical tradition. Philosophy itself is at war with a certain narrow, logocentric conception of philosophy, one which would put literary forms of thought to one side as too informal or non-systematic. I do not see literature as something other or absolutely separate from philosophy, rather as that which enables philosophy to recover its own "authentic" possibilities. When someone like Wittgenstein talks about getting back to the "rough ground," he is pointing to a similar return to this grittiness, the place from which philosophical reflection begins and to which it needs to continue to return. Merleau-Ponty calls this "hyper-reflection." I know that sounds even worse than reflection, but he means returning to the perceptual or experiential grounds of our systematic thought in order to rub its nose against the concrete, the empirical, the singular.

DOODY: I do not see philosophy and literature at odds, but I think they are looking in different directions. Real philosophers have had a strong relationship with literature and, indeed, are very fine literary writers. The most notorious case is Plato, who for centuries has been an influence on what we call literary types.

WOOD: But in Plato, writing is seen as a mere shadow of spoken language. In fact, for many philosophers, Plato's claims, rather than his own practice, have had a very negative influence on our thinking about the relationship between philosophy and literature. Plato's style may have inspired great, philosophical writings, but what he said has had a negative effect on the philosopher's capacity to deal productively with good literature.

DOODY: The *Phaedrus* itself is a terrific example, because it starts off in a very novelistic way, and it evokes a natural landscape with trees and the water. But then it moves into the daily life of eros, after which it turns away from this to look at the transcendental love of the earth itself. The entire work is a strong expression of our desire to get away and be free of time and matter. In fact, it is this coupling of time and matter that becomes very important. Literature represents that which is trying to work toward possibilities other than what I call "dry transcendence," which is an attempt to get away from the world of matter. And, inasmuch as women stand for matter and time, women must be transcended. Within this framework, women are like trees and soil, in that they are there to be used like other matter for the purpose of achieving transcendence. As a result, there is a move to get rid of those who are calling for respect for women, for attention to be paid to the environment, etc., because they are speaking as if matter is important.

WOOD: I might also add that the same seems to be true with animals. That is, they are there for us to use. To use a concrete example, we can chop down huge tracts of the Brazilian jungle, in order to graze cattle, in order to supply beef for fast food chains. Animals, like women and the environment, are simply a resource for transcendence.

DOODY: To take the point one step further, I think when time is seen as an extension of matter, time is hated. It is in time that we live and die. Time is used as the measure for biological events that are distressing; therefore, time is

often attached to that from which we want to escape.

WOOD: Are you thinking of decay?

DOODY: Yes, time is thought of as decay, so then time is hated. It is a tyrant; therefore, to reach the "end-time" would be to cheat matter. For instance, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton has difficulty imagining



how you could garden in a world without death. Any gardener knows that you rely on death a great deal if you are going to be a good gardener. You are always trimming and pulling out weeds, fertilizing, and poking dead leaves back into the soil. The whole cycle of gardening is a cycle that depends on decay. We use words like "decay" and "corruption" negatively, but we rely on these as part of the whole system of things.

WOOD: We might start to think here of the apocalyptic sects that seem to be appearing all over the world. It is as if they are responding to a sense of loss of control over themselves, over time, over matter, by wielding the force of death. Both suicide and mass-murder are attempts at avoiding subjection to forces with which these sects feel they cannot deal.

One of the real problems with the current approach to the millennium is that we still take shelter under the belief that the future is when things are going to turn out right and come together. And yet everything we read would suggest this is not going to happen. This brings with it an extraordinary sense of loss of control, loss of confidence, and a breakdown in the horizon of the future. Death-dealing sects are actually attempting to recover control.

WOOD: But irony is never constructive.

DOODY: The odd thing is that human beings usually have very little control over their life and death and over their environments; life is harsh. The modern world has been given a great deal of technological control, and it is interesting that we are finding much of this apocalyptic fervor cropping up in rich countries that have a lot of technology. While technology has promised some control, we want infinite control. But the only infinite control would be to stop the world of nature all together, which is the world of time in which things die. It is almost as though to accept a natural death is to fall prey to the ugly, dirty forces of matter, of nature. But to bring an end to time, to force the millennium to come, to force a new world to appear would be magnificent, because it would put an end to that cycle of powerlessness and decay. As a result, every Hegelian or neo-Hegelian pursuit of synthesis has to be referred to with a certain irony.

WOOD: The trouble is that irony is a dead end, because it devalues various kinds of commitments to tolerance, pluralism, and so on. It can be a form of detachment rather than a form of life that will enable us to get along with each other.

DOODY: This is where we part company. I see irony as a very creative possibility, a way of laughing at ourselves and getting rid of some of the rigidities of acknowledging that we often hold paradoxical views. I think Swift is a great ironist and, at the same time, a great fighter for human freedom and human rights, but he is not nice about it. He pokes us where we have our inconsistencies.

WOOD: No, I think that is not true. I think irony can be and very often is constructive.

WOOD: I am happy to agree with this when we regard irony as



Detail of illustration from  
Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse*.

a transition or as a mode of imagination, not as a form of life.

DOODY: I would rather live life ironically, but I do not want to think one could not live one's life seriously either.

WOOD: Someone like Rorty seems to me to be advocating irony as a form of life, which looks like giving up on a whole range of ideals, including the ideals that might get us to abandon certain apocalyptic desires.

DOODY: But I think there has to be a comic sense about the incompleteness and paradoxical nature of our own pursuits, and that is where irony resides. It is an ability to see quite different reflections of human behavior and desire without eliminating them. A novel like Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* seems to be helpful as a picture of not only time but of different people trying to live a life in time. In many ways, it is a very ironic book, but it is not a destructively ironic book.

LETTERS: In a certain way, it seems as though these ideas concerning time carry with them a relationship to the ways in which we employ our imagination to anticipate the future. What do you think is the relationship between time and imagination?

WOOD: Imagination cuts both ways. On the one hand, if we think about the year 2000, we think about a new society where everything will be put right and all problems will disappear. It is actually very easy to imagine; it is easy to construct a utopia where the year 2000 becomes the point of truth. The mentality is such that we will either get what we want, or we will have to tear it all apart in order to get what we want. On the other hand, imagination can actually help us imagine what it would be like to construct a new society in detail and show us just how awful things could be. The imagination can serve to penetrate and prick the bubbles of our dreams, because when we take our dreams as realizable as they are in all their usually static and undeveloped

dreamlike character, then we are faced with the most incredible danger. In fact, one of the really important things about universities is that we can develop these two sides of the imagination. The university is an enclave of slightly detached sanity that can export the possibility of thinking all of these things through.

DOODY: Right now, however, universities are seen as training grounds that serve the technological world. I think that writers of literature have more chance for leadership than university scholars, because writers are less fettered. They are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." To change our dreams, to change the ways that we look at possibilities, seems to be of major importance.

I think writers of the moment, however, are paralyzed in the face of steady doses of television footage from Bosnia. What could be worse? What could a writer tell you about the evil of violence that would be worse than what we see? We see it and go on; we simply do not care. We become calloused to the insanity and the cruelty and the suffering; and, as a result, we just turn the television off and go to dinner.

WOOD: Part of what the writer can show us is that the tribal warring that erupted after the breakdown in Yugoslavia is based on stories people tell about themselves, about their own identity, and about their own hopes of being. The misery in a photograph of orphans is sadly linked to the stories that people have told about themselves. It is linked to narratives and to the impossible convergence of some of these

narratives. In a sense, what we have here is an invisible background. We know how much photographs or images are not the whole truth, so in a sense our job is to reconstruct the background that gives some kind of sense to this nonsense. There is, however, a sense of fragility within the very possibility of writing, the fragility of meaning, the fragility of communicating anything to anyone else.

There may have been times in the history of the world when this was not a problem. Since the Holocaust, however, the very words that have voiced some of the highest human ideals—"freedom," "justice," "equality," and so on—have become hard to believe in. These words now have, for many people, a kind of worn-out quality to them. Even as they are reaffirmed, there is a sense that these words are written on the surface of something that is empty and hollow. I am thinking particularly of the work of Maurice Blanchot in his book *Writing of the Disaster*. It is not as if the disaster is going to happen in the year 2000; it has already happened. It may have happened in the early 1940s. The basic assumptions of reference and of communicability, shared values that we thought were built into language, have become untrustworthy. What Blanchot is offering us is a reminder that language itself, writing itself, and hence literature and philosophy are not things that allow us to move forward with confidence; they are themselves the sites of problems that reflect our difficulty with the year 2000. They are themselves the sites of miniature apocalypses.

DOODY: I do not think in a blanket way anything can be wholly trusted. Even the very best and highest, often turns out to be often the worst; it corrupts, so the better it is, the worse it gets. But that does not mean that we cannot to some extent trust imagination; we have to. In fact, that is one of the few things we have left.

To go back to your earlier point, I think the stresses of the 1990s are in many ways peculiar to ourselves. These stresses come out of a bloody twentieth century, with its horrible and dramatic events, apocalypses without end—World War I, the Holocaust, World War II. Yet it is horrible to think that these "apocalyptic" epochs of the twentieth century have inspired other people to want to repeat them. These terrific events seem to have grandeur that gives meaning as a temporary rush. Here is an addiction much more sinister than drug addiction. It is an addiction to the kind of rush of power and meaning that you get from a truly violent event.

WOOD: When there is nothing that seems to make sense to do, or to will, or to desire any more, the will to negate and destroy is very powerful.

DOODY: I certainly do not want to universalize it, because those people who are weeping for the children in Oklahoma City are not the people who set that bomb off. But there are those who delight in the rush of power that comes from destruction. One of the things that appeals to people about the horrible history of the twentieth century is that these orgies of destruction release people from individual meaninglessness and give them a certain war mentality that excites a sense of divine meaning. That is extremely hideous. I am not sure how this would be possible, but the business of ridding some other human being of life must be deglamorized.

# The Inaugural Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture

This fall, the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities will host the inaugural Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture. The lectureship was endowed by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Nash Jr. and Mr. and Mrs. George Renfro, all of Asheville, North Carolina. By creating the lectureship, the couples have honored Harry C. Howard Jr. of Atlanta, Georgia (BA '51), their longtime attorney and friend. The lectureship will allow the Center to bring an outstanding scholar to Vanderbilt annually to deliver a lecture on a significant topic in the humanities. Lewis P. Simpson, Boyd Professor and William A. Read Professor of English Literature, emeritus, at Louisiana State University, will present the inaugural lecture on Thursday, October 12 at 4:10 p.m. in 126 Wilson Hall on the Vanderbilt campus. His lecture is entitled "The Poet and the Father: Robert Penn Warren and Thomas Jefferson."

Professor Simpson will discuss the two versions of Robert Penn Warren's well-known poem *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voice*. The event that provides the narrative framework of the poem is the murder of a slave in Livingston County, Kentucky, on Sunday December 15, 1811. Two brothers, Lilburne and Isham Lewis, brutally killed one of the family slaves, George, for purportedly breaking their deceased mother's favorite vase. To hide their act, the Lewis brothers cut the body into pieces and attempted to burn the parts in the fireplace of a cabin on their farm. Their attempt to cover up their odious crime was thwarted when, early the next morning, the New Madrid earthquake jolted the earth, causing the chimney to tumble down on George's dismembered body, smothering the fire. George's remains were discovered, and Lilburne and Isham Lewis were subsequently indicted for murder.

The brothers were set free on bond. Wishing to avoid the nega-

tive publicity a murder trial would bring to their family, as well as the possibility of having to spend time in prison, the brothers agreed upon a suicide pact. They met in the family graveyard, where they decided they would shoot one another across the graves. Lilburne Lewis died; his brother Isham survived. Isham was jailed and tried for the murder of George, but he escaped from jail and formal justice.

The record of this brutal murder continues to hold a certain fascination because the two murderers were the sons of Thomas Jefferson's sister, Lucy. As Warren's poem indicates, Jefferson never commented on the crime, although the actions of the Lewis brothers were common knowledge at the time. In fact, there is no evidence that Jefferson ever acknowledged his nephews' actions either publicly or privately.

As Simpson points out in his book *The Fable of the Southern Writer*, in the chapter entitled "The Loneliness Artist: Robert Penn Warren," Warren was, from the very beginning of his career, preoccupied with "the tension between ideality and reality in American history." *Brother to Dragons* reflects this interest. The core of the poem is concerned with the idealism of Thomas Jefferson, whose ghost appears as one of the main speakers. In the course of a dialogue with "R.P.W.," Jefferson is confronted with the bitter fact that his own relatives were capable of committing such a violent and atrocious act. At the same time, he is confronted with the evidences of continuing evil in American history since his time. As a result, Jefferson is forced to re-examine his belief in the innate goodness and perfectibility of humanity and to refigure, on a broader and more realistic basis, a new definition of human hope. A resolution to this enigma required that the facts of history be themselves placed within an ideal framework constructed by the poet. Now, "R.P.W." had the same moral

enigma Jefferson had faced, complicated by the poet's dedication to artistic form.

Warren was very interested in situations that questioned the poet's proper relation to the facts of history. The very form of *Brother to Dragons* reflects his awareness that the tension between the ideal and the real in American history cannot be resolved by placing the facts of history into a pure, idealized literary form, as this would only produce another irresolvable tension. This does not mean, however, that Warren wanted to abandon the literary form and the possibility of constructing a space for the resolution of the tensions of history. As Warren writes in a prefatory note, the form of *Brother to Dragons* is that of a "dialogue spoken by characters, but it is not a play. . . . The main body of the action lies in the remote past—in the earthly past of characters long dead—and now they meet at an unspecified place and at an unspecified time and try to make sense of the action. . . . The place of the meeting is, we may say, 'no place,' and the time is 'any time.'" As such, Warren takes real events and places them in an idealized, literary space in order to give the murder and Jefferson's astonishing lack of reaction to it a more thorough consideration. At the same time, however, Warren recognized that this maneuver required the action of the poet. Rather than hide the active participation of the poet behind the ideality of a constructed literary form, Warren put himself and his considerations into the poem. Thus the story itself is related partly by the principal actors from history and partly in direct narrative and commentary by the poet, identified as "R.P.W."

The experience of writing *Brother to Dragons* was a confrontation between Warren's own poetic sensibilities and the facts of history; the resolution to historical tensions presented in the original publication was contingent on Warren's beliefs and

opinions at the time. Despite being hailed in 1953 as Warren's most important book, Warren continued to work on the poem. For the next twenty years, he continued to reshape and reform the poem, until, in 1979, he published *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voice: A New Version*. He writes in the 1979 foreword that "as I began to live with the text . . . my dissatisfaction with several features grew. Now there are a number of cuts made from the original version and some additions. . . . Though the basic action and theme remain the same, there is, I trust, an important difference in the total 'feel.' For the reworking was not merely a slow and patchwork job. It meant, before the end, a protracted and concentrated reliving of the whole process." It is the significance of "reliving of the whole process" that Professor Simpson will address in the inaugural Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture.

Lewis P. Simpson is Boyd Professor and William A. Read Professor of English Literature, emeritus, Louisiana State University. For over twenty years he was editor of *The Southern Review*, for which he now serves as consulting editor. He is the author of several books, including *Mind and the American Civil War: A Meditation on Lost Causes* (Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Avery O. Craven Award of the Organization of American Historians, 1990); *The Fable of the Southern Writer* (Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Jules and Frances Landry Award of the Louisiana State University Press, 1993). In 1991, he was awarded the Hubbell Medal for Distinguished Contribution to the Study of American Literature by the American Literature Section of the Modern Language Association. He is also a Fellow of the Fellowship of Southern Writers, which in April 1995 awarded him the Cleanth Brooks Medal for Distinguished Achievement in Southern Letters.

# Religion and Public Life: Seventy Years After the Scopes Trial

Chapter 27, House Bill 185 (By Mr. Butler) Public Acts of Tennessee for 1925

AN ACT prohibiting the teaching of the Evolutionary Theory in all the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of Tennessee, which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, and to provide penalties for the violations thereof.

Section 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, That it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.

Section 2. BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That any teacher found guilty of the violation of this Act, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, shall be fined not less than One Hundred (\$100.00) Dollars nor more than Five Hundred (\$500.00) Dollars for each offense.

Section 3. BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act take effect from and after its passage, the public welfare requiring it.

Passed March 13, 1925  
(W. E. Barry),  
Speaker of the House of  
Representatives.  
(L. D. Hill),  
Speaker of the Senate.  
Approved March 21, 1925.  
(Austin Peay), Governor.

In the spring of 1925, John Thomas Scopes, a young high school teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was indicted and tried for violating the Butler Act. William Jennings Bryan served as prosecutor; famed Chicago lawyer Clarence Darrow, acting on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, was the attorney for the defense. In a case that attracted international attention, Scopes was convicted of violating the anti-evolution legislation.

As a major research university in Tennessee, Vanderbilt was not immune to the repercussions of the Scopes trial. In the fall of 1925, Vanderbilt Chancellor James H. Kirkland reacted to the Scopes trial in his address marking the university's semicentennial:

The answer to the episode at Dayton is the building of new laboratories on the Vanderbilt campus for the teaching of science. The remedy for a narrow sectarianism and a belligerent fundamentalism is the establishment on the campus of a School of Religion, illustrating in its methods and its organization the strength of a common faith and the glory of a universal worship.

Others at Vanderbilt University reacted defensively to the critical publicity surrounding the state's anti-evolution legislation. The negative portrayal of southerners as backward thinking and bigoted, most notably by H. L. Mencken, for example, prompted fugitive writers Alan Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Donald Davidson to defend staunchly the "southern way of life." Their collective response to the anti-southern sentiment of the 1920s, which the Scopes trial had helped to foster, culminated with the fugitive conference that resulted in the publication of *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* in 1930.

In order to understand the changes that have taken place in the subsequent seventy years and the continuing interplay between religion, science, education, and public life, the Robert Penn War-

ren Center for the Humanities is hosting a symposium on November 2-3, 1995, entitled "Religion and Public Life: Seventy Years after the Scopes Trial." The following is a schedule of the symposium and its events. For further information, contact the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University. Support for the symposium is being provided by the Dean's Office of the College of Arts and Science, the Divinity School, the First Amendment Center, Project Dialogue, the Southern Studies Program, the University Chaplain's Office, and ACLU-TN.

### *Inherit the Wind*

Wednesday, November 1  
7:00 p.m.

John Egerton will introduce the film *Inherit the Wind*, which will be shown at Sarratt Cinema at 7:30 p.m.

### Session One. The Historical Context of the Scopes Trial

Thursday, November 2  
4:15 p.m.

Panel members will present papers establishing the historical context of the Scopes trial and its implications for the relationship between religion and public life. The panelists include:

- Ronald L. Numbers, William Coleman Professor of the History of Medicine and the History of Science, University of Wisconsin at Madison. Among many other publications, Professor Numbers is the author of *The Creationists* (A. A. Knopf, 1992) and the co-editor of *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

- Charles Reagan Wilson, Professor of History, University of Mississippi and Co-director, Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Professor Wilson is the author of *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (University of Georgia Press, 1980) and co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 1989).



John T. Scopes being arraigned in the courtroom in Dayton, Tennessee.



Left to right: Clarence Darrow, lead defense attorney; William Jennings Bryan, lead prosecutor

**Session Two. Science and Religion: Cooperation, Compromise, and Conflict**

Friday, November 3  
9:30 a.m.

The second panel will consider contemporary issues involving the interplay of science and religion. Panelists include:

- Michael Lienesch, Bowman and Gordon Gray Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Professor Lienesch is the author of *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993) and *New Order of the Ages: Time, the Constitution, and the Making of Modern American Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1989). He is currently working on a project entitled "Rethinking Scopes: The Politics of Progress."

- William Provine, Charles A. Alexander Professor of Biological Sciences, Cornell University. Professor Provine is the author of *Se-*

*wall Wright and Evolutionary Biology* (University of Chicago Press, 1986) and co-editor of *The Evolutionary Synthesis: Perspectives on the Unification of Biology* (Harvard University Press, 1980).

- Kurt P. Wise, Associate Professor of Science and Director, Origins Research and Resource Center, William Jennings Bryan College. Professor Wise completed his Ph.D. at Harvard University under the supervision of Stephen Jay Gould. His dissertation is entitled "The Estimation of True Taxonomic Durations from Fossil Occurrence Data." His subsequent work in paleontology and geology has appeared in both academic and general public journals.

**Session Three. Trajectories: From 1995 to . . .**

Friday, November 3  
2:00 p.m.

The panelists will respond to the ideas presented in the previous panels and will consider the

future implications of current debates concerning science and religion and their broad implications for religion and public life. Panelists for the session are:

- Jean Bethke Elshtain, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics, University of Chicago Divinity School. Professor Elshtain is the author of many books. She is most recently author of *Democracy on Trial* (Basic Books, Harper and Row, 1995) and editor of *Politics and the Human Body: Assault on Dignity* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1995).

- Ira Glasser, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union. He is the author of *Visions of Liberty: The Bill of Rights for All Americans* (Arcade Publishing, 1991). Glasser's writings have appeared in several different publications, including *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *Harper's*, and *Christianity and Crisis*.

**Session Four. Teacher Workshop on Religion and Public Life**

Saturday, November 4  
10:00 a.m.

A workshop will be held with interdisciplinary teams of teachers. Teachers from Davidson County will apply to participate in this workshop and will attend all conference sessions. Chairing

the Saturday workshop and small group discussions are:

- Marcy Singer Gabella, Assistant Provost for Initiatives in Education, Assistant Professor of Teaching and Learning, Vanderbilt University. Professor Gabella's areas of special interest include curriculum design and development and school-university partnerships. She serves on the Advisory Committee of the Freedom Forum/First Amendment Center Project on Teaching about Religion in the Public Schools.

- David Steiner, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *Rethinking Democratic Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), a book concerning civic education. He is also an advising scholar to the National Standards in Civics Education Panel and has worked with a number of educational projects in the university and government contexts.

- Hedy M. Weinberg, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee. Ms. Weinberg works closely with school administrators and students throughout the state on issues related to religious freedoms and the separation of church and state.

THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

Center Staff

Paul H. Freedman  
Director

Mona C. Frederick  
Assistant Director

Robert D. Richardson  
Editor

Sherry S. Willis  
Secretary

*Letters* is the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, Box 1534 Station B, Nashville,

Tennessee 37235, (615) 343-6060 / FAX (615) 343-2248. For more information concerning the Center or any of its programs, please contact the above address.

Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1988 and renamed the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Members of the Van-

derbilt community representing a wide variety of specializations take part in the Center's programs, which are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues.



Vanderbilt University is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action. Published by University Publications & Design 1995. Photographs in article on the Scopes Trial Symposium courtesy of William Jennings Bryan College; other photos by Peyton Hoge.

*Letters*, the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, has received an Award of Excellence from CASE, the Council for the Advancement of Education. The award is part of the competition for 1995 and is based on excellence in writing, editing, production, and design. The winning entries were exhibited last spring at a CASE conference in Atlanta and will be permanently kept in an archive at Georgia State University.

## 1995/1996 Humanities Center Fellows

KATHYRN BABAYAN, William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Michigan, works in the area of Islamic history. Her current research is an exploration of the Savafi empire (1501–1722) in pre-modern Iran. In particular, her work focuses on the combination of religious messianism and political power that gave the Savafi empire its unique, esoteric character. In addition to preparing the Persian translation of her dissertation for publication in Iran, she is the author of several forthcoming articles on Islamic history, including “The Savafi Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imami Shiism.”

MYRIAM J. A. CHANCEY, Assistant Professor of English, specializes in the study of Caribbean literature. Her current project focuses on the ways in which female authors in Haiti have experimented with form and language to convey their experience of exile under the domination of neo-colonial powers. In particular, she is concerned with how colonized nations, and subgroups oppressed within those nations, delineate time given the disruption or suspension of their own indigenous cultures. She is the author of several poems, articles, and the forthcoming book *In Search of Safe Spaces: Afro-Cuban Women Writers in Exile*.

MARGARET A. DOODY, Spence and Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities, Professor of English, and Director of the Comparative Literature Program, is the co-director of the 1995/96 Fellows Program. Her most recent book, *The True Story of the Novel* (Rutgers University Press, 1995), is an investigation into the origin and nature of the novel. The readings of literary texts presented in the book proceed from her rejection of the conventional Anglo-Saxon dis-

tinction between Romance and Novel. She maintains that such a distinction served both to keep the foreign out of literature and to obscure the diverse nature of the novel itself. In addition to her strictly scholarly work, she is the author of two novels: *The Alchemists* (Bodley Head, 1980) and *Aristotle Detective* (Viking Penguin, 1980).

JANET SCHRUNK ERIKSEN, Assistant Professor of English, specializes in the study of Anglo-Saxon literature. She is currently working on a project that explores how Germanic cultures adapted the fundamental text of the Christian fall into the narrative traditions of Anglo-Saxon literature. Specifically, she is interested in how this re-articulation facilitated both the decay of early medieval Germanic culture and the rise of a specifically Christian culture. She is the author of several forthcoming articles, including “Lands of Unlikeness in *Genesis B*.”

WILLIAM FRANKE, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature and Italian, is currently conducting research for the second book in his extensive study of Dante. The first work, *Dante's Interpretive Journey: A Dialogue Between the Commedia and Modern Thought* (forthcoming), concerns the poetic formation of existential-historical time in the first two segments of the *Divine Comedy*. His current project concerns the way in which time and eternity are experienced in the poetic language of Dante's *Paradiso* and the ways in which language both creates and suspends time.

JAY GELLER, Lecturer in Religious Studies, explores the relationship between the narrative ordering of events and questions of Jewish identity. In particular, he is concerned with issues revolving around the Jews' place in a post-Christian world and how threats to their continued persis-

tence became represented as a natural history that confirmed both Jewish difference and post-Christian, European identities. More specifically, he is interested in how the Holocaust has ruptured faith in master historical narratives and narratives of self-identity. He is the author of the forthcoming book *The Nose Job: Freud and the Feminized Jew*.

MICHAEL P. HODGES, Professor of Philosophy, has had a longstanding interest in the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He is particularly interested in looking at how a knowledge of the milieu at the end of the nineteenth century would enrich and deepen the understanding of the formative period of Wittgenstein's life. In turn, he would like to demonstrate how Wittgenstein's particular involvement in this unique historical period played itself out in a thinking that defends human practices and institutions outside of the traditional demand for philosophical foundations. He is currently working on a joint project which compares the work of Wittgenstein and Santayana. He is also the author of *Transcendence and Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Temple University Press, 1990).

ELLEN KONOWITZ, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts, is currently working on a book about early modern prints and stained glass. In particular, her writing is focused on the work of Dirk Vellert, a specialist in glass and print design, who lived in Antwerp in the first half of the sixteenth century. She is analyzing an extensive cycle of his stained glass windows, which rework Albrecht Durer's woodcut *Apocalypse*. The woodcut reveals eschatological themes in the transformation of religious thought during the Protestant reform movement in the Netherlands. She is the author of several articles, including “Drawing as Intermediary Stages: Some Work-

ing Methods of Albrecht Durer and Dirk Vellert Re-examined.”

FRANCIS W. WCISLO, Associate Professor of History, is working on a project entitled “Sergei Witte and Fin-de-Siècle Russia: The Life and Times of a Tsarist Statesman.” In this study, he points out the importance of the sharp juxtaposition between the narrative constructed by historian-biographers about Witte's life and the narrative constructed in Witte's own memoirs. In the former, Witte's life is placed fully within the context of tsarist political, social, and cultural history. In the latter, however, the narrative suggests victorian-era beliefs and illusions shattered by the crisis Russia experienced at the beginning of the twentieth century. He is the author of *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, and National Politics, 1855–1914* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

DAVID C. WOOD, Jacques Voegeli Fellow, Professor of Philosophy, and Chair of the Department, is the co-director of the 1995/96 Fellows Program. He continues to be interested in philosophical considerations of time, and in particular the problematic conceptualization of the future. His current project focuses on deconstruction and apocalyptic thinking, with a direct concern for philosophy's consideration of its own “end” and the broader way in which time appears as the condition for the realization (or frustration) of human ideals. He is studying the figures of Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida for this project. Professor Wood is the editor and author of numerous articles and books, including *Of Derrida, Heidegger and Spirit* (Northwestern University Press, 1993), *Philosophy at the Limit* (Unwin Hyman, 1990), and *The Deconstruction of Time* (Humanities Press International, 1989).