

Dore Ways

A forum for exchanging ideas

From the Editor

The meaning in the shadows

I GREW UP IN TENNESSEE—THREE AND A HALF HOURS SOUTHWEST of Vanderbilt via I-40. I lived my adolescence in the shadow of Graceland, within the sphere of influence of the Mississippi-delta blues, amid the river-town ethos that was Memphis. So when I took on the editorship of *Vanderbilt Magazine* and returned to the South after having lived in New England for nearly 20 years, I anticipated a homecoming. I expected to be wrapped in the warm blanket of familiar dialect, and to be reintroduced to cultural traditions and a way of life that would awaken memories.

What I found was a land sometimes familiar, but more often strange and always multi-layered. Exploring this new land has been an adventure. I can't say it's been all pleasant, but it's often been surprising and sometimes delightful. One of the great delights has been that as editor of *Vanderbilt Magazine*, I have been able to rediscover elements of southern culture, thereby gaining insight into people and institutions, through the stories of Tony Earley. His short story "Cross" appears on page 88 as this issue's "Southern Journal."

A writer by education and trade, I enjoy imagery. I can get lost in it. And the dogwood in Tony's story is rich, insightful, true to southern culture, and just plain fun to think about. I won't try to unpack the image for you because, as a writer, I also believe that we all bring a history and set of values to the image, and that shapes our understanding of it.

Much of this holds true for the magazine you hold in your hands. I develop the contents for each issue of *Vanderbilt Magazine* with the idea of offering the reader rediscovering Vanderbilt an experience similar to mine in rediscovering the South.

Vanderbilt, like the Middle Tennessee region it calls home, is multi-layered. Our dialect is the language of scholarly discourse. Our traditions: the rigors of scientific testing, the time-honored collaboration between faculty and students that we call mentoring.

As you read *Vanderbilt Magazine*, I urge you to explore, to experience some of the elements that make up this University. Spend some time with the departments. Maybe "Vanderbilt Holdings" or "Bright Ideas." Read about Bart Victor, our featured professor in the "In Class" department. Or invest a little more time and delve into a feature.

Vanderbilt is, of course, much more than the sum of the parts you experience through this magazine. It is the people, their ideas, and the debate, scholarship and research that surround those ideas. I've heard this labeled "the shadows"—that intangible element of university life where ideas take shape and new knowledge is born. It's a place those of us who serve the University seek out and a place where we find meaning in our work. It's the area into which I hope this magazine can shed some light.

KEN SCHEXNAYDER

From the Reader

Lawson Revisited

I WAS A STUDENT IN THE GRADUATE DEPARTMENT of Religion during the days in which "the Lawson affair" [Fall 2002 issue, "Days of Thunder," p. 34] was unfolding. The venomous tone of one of the letters you published in the Winter 2003 issue of the magazine has prompted me to write. I knew Jim Lawson, of course, and some of the other persons who were involved in the protest movement. Thank you for your fine story regarding Jim and these important events in the history of Vanderbilt and the nation.

JOHN C. ENGLISH, PHD '65
Baldwin City, Kan.

Compelling Images

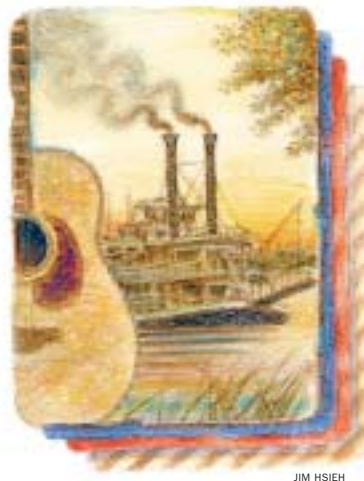
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE INCLUSION OF Carlton Wilkinson's beautiful photographs [Winter issue, "Images of Man," p. 44]. He is extremely talented and owns the finest gallery in Nashville. Please continue to include the work of Nashville artists.

Love the new format.
STEPHANIE THOMAS, BA '01
Atlanta

To Be in France

I WANT TO COMMEND KATIE GALBREATH ON her recent contribution, "Reflections in the Fountain" [Winter issue, p. 66]. The article hit home in revealing the beautiful essence of life in Provence. Like the author, I, too, climbed to the top of Monte Sainte Victoire and traveled to other local towns outside of Aix as part of my experience on Vanderbilt's program. Reading her essay was deliciously painful in remembering the greatness of that experience as I took the metro train to work 11 years later. (Wow, am I really that old?)

Her essay reminded me of my favorite "French" lesson. I remember enjoying fresh fruit and cheese at a picnic held by a French World War II veteran, Monsieur Aberlain, who was my host. After devouring an apple, I started to walk into the kitchen to throw the core into the trash when my host stopped me in my tracks. He remarked, "Oh, you Americans always want to throw nature's creatures in the trash when they can be returned to nature." He then took the core out of my hand and walked over to the trunk of a small tree and dug a small hole near the roots where he buried the core. He then said, "What comes from



JIM HSIEH

the tree should be returned home.” To me, that lesson demonstrated the essence of life in Provence. A beautiful, yet simple reminder that the symmetry of nature is right in front of us if we just open our eyes.

SCOTT SEDER, BA’93
Chicago

A Question of Gore

I WOULD LIKE TO RESPOND TO CHRISTOPHER Talbert’s comments regarding the failure of *Vanderbilt Magazine* to recognize Al Gore as a distinguished alumnus of Vanderbilt [Winter issue, “From the Reader,” p. 8]. While Talbert is unlikely to read this because he wants to be removed from the mailing list, I would like to remind him that Gore attended the Divinity School for only one year and the Law School for just two years while working for the *Tennessean*. Although attending a university is, by definition, enough to constitute alumni status, it’s not enough to even get you invited to your class reunion at Vanderbilt. The fact that Gore’s sister and mother graduated from Vanderbilt and his wife from Peabody is rather irrelevant. I believe that if *Vanderbilt Magazine* exploited Gore’s Vanderbilt connection, the University would receive criticism from the other side.

KELLI STAPLES BURNS, BA’92
Jamestown, N.C.

REGARDING THE LETTER FROM READER Christopher Talbert in the Winter 2003 *Vanderbilt Magazine*, there is a simple reason why Al Gore hasn’t been featured by the magazine as a proud Vanderbilt son. He never graduated from Vanderbilt! He attended the Divinity School and the Law School, but dropped out from both without getting a degree.

If the magazine wanted to do an article about his mother being the first woman to graduate from Vandy Law, that would be marvelous, but you ought not claim or credit somebody falsely.

ANDREW WAGNER, BS’98
Somerville, Mass.

What’s in a Name?

I AM TOTALLY ASTONISHED AT THE UNIVERSITY’S caving in to the liberal political correctness agenda by renaming Confederate Hall [Winter issue, “Residence Hall Name Change at Center of Controversy,” p. 16]. Also amazing is the fact that an institution with a law school would be an accessory to grand theft (in effect) of stealing \$50,000 (that’s about \$3 million in today’s dollars!). In a like manner, it is unclear how a university with a history department justifies itself by supporting the rewriting of history!

It is profound that members of the Student Government Association who, with 20 whole years of life experiences, have the nerve to push for a change about which they have hardly any understanding.

Featured Letter

In Tribute

WHEN *Vanderbilt Magazine* AND the A&S *Cornerstone* came today, I learned that Gisela Mosig had retired from Vanderbilt last year and then died from cancer this January [“In Memoriam,” Faculty and Staff, p. 84].



I am very sad to learn of Professor Mosig’s death, since she was an inspira-

tion to me when I was a student. The story she told of her escape from East Germany made a lasting impression on me, for it taught the importance of taking conscious responsibility for one’s own future, despite the possible consequences. Also, I must say that her teaching was exceptionally clear. She patiently coaxed the best out of her students, even those like myself who were not yet sufficiently organized to practice effective scientific research. Along the way, with her assistance, I began to appreciate the necessity of discipline in executing my scientific endeavors.

At the last Vanderbilt reunion for my class, I missed seeing Professor Mosig. That event now has become a lost opportunity to connect with her again. I must now develop a keen resolve to be more assertive in taking opportunities to make connections with people I knew in the past whenever the opportunity arises.

JOHN CROSS, BA’69
Alexandria, Va.

It is axiomatic that students are against everything but having fun and parties.

Most disconcerting is the spineless conduct of university officials who let themselves be bullied by the diversity crowd and then attempt to rationalize by using the “memorial” label. Said “officials” must now decide whether to remove and burn all books in the library relating to the Confederacy.

P.S. Good for Dr. Tarpley.

PAUL A. TANKSLEY, E’54
Dallas, Ore.

Mayan Mistake

IN THE WINTER ISSUE OF *Vanderbilt Magazine*, “Bright Ideas” #1 [“Hieroglyphs Expose Mayan Superpower Conflict,” p. 24], the following statement is made: “Their translation is helping to explain the fracture of the Mayan empire into warring states and the eventual collapse of a civilization that once ruled southern Mexico as well as Central and South America.”

My wife and I have never heard that the Mayan empire extended to South America. Is the exten-

sion of the Mayan empire to S.A. a new discovery by [Ingram Professor of Anthropology Arthur] Demarest? Please cite a reference that discusses when and where the Mayan empire extended to South America.

ROBERT C. NABORS, BS’54, MA’54
Fort Washington, Md.

[EDITOR’S NOTE: *Vanderbilt Magazine* incorrectly gave the Mayan empire a great deal more real estate than they in fact possessed. Their empire did not extend into South America.]

Kudos

I WANT TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION FOR the superb Winter 2003 edition of *Vanderbilt Magazine*. I had noted the earlier excellent article on the Lawson affair [in the Fall 2002 issue] but didn’t realize the sea change that has taken place at the magazine until thoroughly reading the winter edition.

In particular, please convey my compliments to Paul Kingsbury for “Pride and Prejudice”—a great title, and an extremely informative article. Like many of my fellow alumni (I suspect), I had the impression that there was a tradition of excellence in the Vanderbilt English Department, and that it had something to do with Robert Penn Warren and the *Fugitives*. That’s about all I knew or recalled, with my English career at Vanderbilt confined to the single required course freshman year (taught, as Mr. Kingsbury suggests, with the assistance of *Understanding Poetry* by Warren and Brooks). Now, for the first time, I have a clear understanding of who these people are, and the distinction between the *Fugitives* and the *Agrarians*. The illustrations for the article are superb, from the initial photo (famous to some perhaps, but the first time I’ve seen it) to the individual photos and descriptions of each of the *Fugitives* and *Agrarians*. The article also gives me the information I need to read further about this bit of southern and Vanderbilt literary history.

I also want to give my compliments to Katie Galbreath, author of “Reflections in the Fountain” [p. 66], about her studies in Aix-en-Provence. This was a particular delight to read since I was a member of the very first Vanderbilt-in-France program (also the first Vanderbilt overseas program) in Aix in the fall semester of 1961.

The photography for the edition was also very well chosen, in particular the frosty winter scenes on the front cover and back inside cover, and the Susan Gray School photo.

I look forward to your next edition!

MORTON HOLBROOK III, BA’64
Manila, Philippines

CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU AND YOUR STAFF for a fine job with *Vanderbilt Magazine*. The new direction you are taking the publication has already enhanced its professionalism and influ-

ence. Vanderbilt—to firmly entrench a richly deserved national reputation—needs a better alumni outreach program, and you are directly contributing to that accomplishment. Well done, and thanks.

BRAD GERICKE, MA’96, PHD’02
Stockbridge, Ga.

REGARDING THE COMMENTS ABOUT THE “NEW look” and the content of *Vanderbilt Magazine*, I suppose it is why I liked Vanderbilt: intelligent diversity of opinion. Some graduates may not agree with others, but at least the opinions are articulate and thoughtful, unlike most letters to the editor in newspapers.

CHRIS SCHMIDT, BA’70
Cincinnati

I PICKED UP THE WINTER 2003 EDITION OF *Vanderbilt Magazine*, removed it from its plastic armor, and began looking at the pictures. I receive a lot of stuff from colleges and universities, principally because my three children are enrolled in one or the other of them. I seldom look at publications like these anymore since I subscribe to the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* and now have little time to read anything else. For some reason I decided this day to at least look at the pictures. I’m glad I did. The editors did a great job in putting this issue together. I was impressed by the diversity of the contents. Carlton Wilkerson’s black and white photographs were especially artful. His photograph of Ansel Adams’s hands was classic. I have always admired Adams’s work, and Wilkerson obviously learned his lessons well. The picture of the three talented and attractive Vandy girls basketball players got my attention. I decided to look over the table of contents. The article on the *Fugitives* pulled me into the center of the magazine, and I read the article. Thank God for Walter Sullivan. I flipped over to the letters from the readers, and there was diversity of thought there.

I was about to toss the magazine on the “I’ll read more later or throw it away” pile when I decided to look at the back cover one more time. And then I saw it. The short story by Tony Earley, “The Book of Ed.” I read it twice. I love Tony Earley’s prose and not because we are from the same county in North Carolina, and not because I grew up knowing his mother-in-law, and not because I knew the original *Jim the Boy*. It’s because Tony Earley is a very gifted writer. And he wrote in the “Southern Journal” section of your magazine under “Reflections on the South.” More diversity!

Thank you for a good publication. I will look forward to the next issue and hopefully more of Tony Earley from time to time.

I still think our school has been too harsh on the *Fugitive* issue. They should at least hang the pictures back up.

W. WINSTON HOY, BA’64
Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Fugitives and Agrarians

I ENJOYED MR. KINGSBURY’S PIECE ON THE *Fugitives* [Winter issue, “Pride and Prejudice,” p. 30].

In 1962, Mr. Ransom was back on campus after retiring from Kenyon. He taught a modern poetry class, which I audited. I found him a consummate gentlemen, a gentle soul, without an ounce of hatred, and a person with no pretensions. The class dealt with the work of other poets, but I had begun to read Mr. Ransom’s poems on my own. If, as professors Kreyling and Daniels seem to indicate, his poetry is not currently being taught, it is a great tragedy. He is, I believe, one of the greatest poets in history, not by virtue of a huge output, but by virtue of the fact that his poems are each a taut thing of beauty.

Professor Kreyling stated that *I’ll Take My Stand* is a misogynistic book. Indeed, it was a product of a misogynistic and racist time. How long had women in the U.S. had the right to vote at the time of its



publication in 1930? Already by 1962 the Agrarian movement was considered at least irrelevant if not an embarrassment, but that did not keep us from appreciating the poetry and fiction of Ransom, Warren and Tate. Mr. Ransom’s poems are devoid of misogyny and racism. They should not be ignored because of his 1930 political views.

LARRY MALLETTE, BA’63, PHD’68, MD’70
Houston

YOUR INTERESTING ARTICLE ON THE *AGRARIANS* stimulated a variety of memories and the following comments.

I was an undergraduate English major in 1930–34 and rather immersed in its affairs. First, [contrary to what] you state on page 33, Warren was not on its faculty from 1931 to 1934. In 1932–33 he replaced Ransom, who was on leave. I experienced him, just back from [earning] an M.A. at Oxford, as rather self-conscious and excessively “Br-r-ritish.” (He recovered!)

I’ll Take My Stand left me ambivalent. As a rural southerner, I hummed to some of its tune. At the same time, the authors struck me as unreasonably nostalgic for a charmed past which never was quite as they pictured it. Frankly, I was something of a New Deal liberal, but did not find any of them

significantly racist—except Davidson, who was explicitly prejudiced.

After WWII, Red Warren came South on leave from Yale doing research for his long book, *Segregation*. At Ole Miss, where I taught “race relations” in the sociology department, we consumed much of a night (and modest amounts of his Kentucky bourbon) exchanging information and opinions on the changing South. We continued this relationship via correspondence until his death. His letters relating to Vanderbilt, the South and the Agrarian movement, etc., I gave to the Vanderbilt Library; those about his career generally, I gave to Yale.

To be even an undergraduate major in the afterglow of the *Fugitives* and heyday of the *Agrarians* was an experience I cherish. Both helped make our Vanderbilt the eminent and cherished institution it is.

MORTON KING, BA’34, MA’36
Georgetown, Texas

IT WOULD BE A PITY IF THE article about the *Fugitives* and *Agrarians* in the Winter 2003 issue of your magazine were allowed to stand unchallenged. It was written out of ignorance of the history of the group, and of the literature created by them, and out of a profound misunderstanding of their importance to Vanderbilt and to the world at large. Most of what is said about them is prejudiced by a myopia so short-sighted that it regards the present dismissive attitude of Van-

derbilt English professors as superior to the collective wisdom contained in the writings of Ransom, Davidson, Tate, Warren, and their fellow *Fugitives* and *Agrarians*. Is that what is meant by the title, “Pride and Prejudice”? Prejudice, yes, but not pride: arrogance. The names of the principal *Fugitives* will be remembered—and honored—long after their detractors are forgotten. History is merciless to those who scorn it, more merciful to those who make it. And the *Fugitives* did make a difference in American cultural history.

Let me put the case as simply as I can. There have been only three groups of writers who really matter in American literary history, and the *Fugitives* are one of them. The others were the 19th Century New England Transcendentalists (Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, et al.), and the 20th Century International Imagists (Pound, Eliot, H.D., et al.). The *Fugitives* were unique in being southern, and in coming together on an American university campus. The Transcendentalists were centered in Concord, a village west of Boston in a rural setting, and the Imagists were attracted to the metropolis of London, though many were Americans. Thus the value of the *Fugitives* to Vanderbilt is crucial and can never be discredited. They created highly original poetry in an academic setting, giving a dis-

inction to the Vanderbilt campus which no other American university enjoys. Paul Conkin was right: “Nothing in Vanderbilt’s history has come anywhere close to the Fugitives and Agrarians in giving it a national reputation. . . . It’s still by far the most significant aspect of Vanderbilt history in the larger university world.”

Those words of praise from Vanderbilt’s prime historian are almost enough to redeem the article. Sadly, the context surrounding them is derogatory. The misrepresentation of Fugitive and Agrarian writing in the article makes its message appear to be entirely racist, anti-feminist, and out of key with American culture as it has evolved in recent years. And to concentrate on the social and political arguments of the Agrarians instead of the literary achievements of the Fugitives is to put the cart before the horse, since Fugitive poetry preceded Agrarian essays. In their heyday at Vanderbilt in the 1920s, before they espoused Agrarianism in response to unfriendly attacks on southern culture and the economic disaster of the Great Depression, the Fugitives created real literature, an art that encapsulates culture and transcends its place and time. Fugitive poetry was clear proof that the South was not the “Sahara of the Bozarts” that H.L. Mencken had contemptuously called it: It led the way in what blossomed as the Southern Literary Renaissance. Its historical and literary merit are therefore permanent and cannot be discounted by later generations, however different their perspectives may be.

I regret that the *Vanderbilt Magazine* should show so little regard for the literary and intellectual tradition of the University as to make a mockery of its greatest writers. To call the famous photograph of five Fugitives at their reunion on the campus in 1956 “Vanderbilt’s Mount Rushmore” is not far from the truth, even though it is cast as a satirical exaggeration. They were not political leaders, but they were intellectual leaders, and that is how a university ought to be defined.

WILLIAM PRATT, MA’51, PHD’57
Professor of English, emeritus
Miami University (Ohio)

BOTH OF US WERE AT VANDERBILT IN THE 1970s and feel fortunate that we majored in English during the last vestiges of influence of the Fugitives and Agrarians. We met and, in some cases became friends with, those who were still living: Allen Tate, Andrew Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, Jesse Wills, Lyle Lanier, and others who became part of their circle such as Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, Peter Taylor, Walker Percy and others. We consider ourselves equally blessed to have been instructed by teachers who were their disciples: Thomas Daniel Young, Walter Sullivan, Herschel Gower, Robert Hunter and Hal Weatherby, to name a few.

One thing was evident then: Vanderbilt’s official relationship with its most famous sons continued to be chilly at best. Vanderbilt had lost John Crowe Ransom in 1937 because it refused a few

hundred dollars raise; it decided that Warren was not worth the effort to keep, so he went to LSU and founded the *Southern Review*. In the late 1940s it lost Frank Owsley, one of the pioneering figures in southern antebellum statistical studies. Then, beginning with the Fugitive Reunion of 1956, it seemed as if Vanderbilt was coming to terms with them. It was a brief moment. By the late 1960s, whatever good will had built up over the last decade was largely dissipated. Yes, Donald Davidson was an embarrassment to the University’s efforts to desegregate, but he was not responsible for the James Lawson incident or for the vote of the student body in 1963 against integration.

Only in recent years has it become convenient to blame the University’s attitude toward the Agrarians on their racial views. By the 1970s the relationship was finally and permanently poisoned. When Tate, needing money, offered to sell his papers to the University, Vanderbilt refused, and Tate sold them to Princeton. One of Joe B. Wyatt’s first speeches as chancellor of the University paid tribute to the Fugitives and Agrarians—and factually garbled their story. From then on, matters got worse. As late as 1981, Lytle was scheduled to teach a class at a writer’s symposium, only to find the building locked. He vowed never to set foot on campus again, and did not for eight years until a memorial service for Warren that the University had to be shamed into holding.

Were the Agrarians wrong in their racial beliefs? Of course. Does that make them any less a major force in American letters? Of course not, and it is to Vanderbilt’s shame that it continues to downplay them, led by Professor Michael Kreyling, who was hired in 1985, to finally expunge them all together. That he has not succeeded yet is evidence that their individual and collective accomplishments will outlast their critics.

ROBERT HOLLADAY, BA’77
MARJORIE HOLLADAY, BA’78
Tallahassee, Fla.

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE NEW *Vanderbilt Magazine*. The format and contents are splendid. One criticism: the mezuzah on page 13 [“Details: Shalom Vanderbilt”] is upside down.

Paul Kingsbury’s thoughtful article, “Pride and Prejudice,” sent me back to my *Vanderbilt Miscellany*, published by Vanderbilt University Press in 1944. Richmond Croom Beatty (PhD, 1930), my favorite professor, edited the *Miscellany*. In his thoughtful introductory essay, “By Way of Background,” Mr. Beatty pointed out that *The Fugitive* “never had any formal or official or financial connection with the University, whose administration was preoccupied with a building program attendant upon expansion in the

social sciences and Medical School.” How well I remember Mr. Beatty leaning on his arm on his desk, talking about “those people downstairs,” the social science and business majors. However, Mr. Beatty’s essay concluded that “the basic impetus which brought forth *The Fugitive* and *I’ll Take My Stand* is still lustily alive at Vanderbilt.” The *Miscellany* was delightfully illustrated by my former professor of art, Marion Junkin. While Donald Davidson was scrutinizing my writings, I was taking every course that Mr. Beatty taught. Fortunately, however, Vanderbilt has moved beyond the Ivory Tower atmosphere of those days.

ANNETTE ROSE LEVY RATKIN, A’48
Nashville

I CONFESS I DID NOT GO TO VANDERBILT AS an undergraduate. I only went there to law school. But one of the reasons I chose Vanderbilt over some other distinguished law schools was its association with the Fugitives/Agrarians. I had read their poetry and criticism in college and thought it was wonderful. I’d also read *I’ll Take My Stand* and recognized it as nonsense.

I graduated from Vanderbilt Law School in 1953, and I’ve spent the intervening years practicing law in the South. Along the way I fought the contemptible governor of Arkansas and worked for the integration of our schools and other institutions. I believe I am not a racist.

What I cannot understand is how the Vanderbilt English Department can choose to ignore the poetry and criticism of these men and extol the literary products of Allen Ginsberg, rap musicians and “deconstructionists.” What those English professors are doing is not political correctness. They are depriving our children of access to fine literature and substituting drivel.

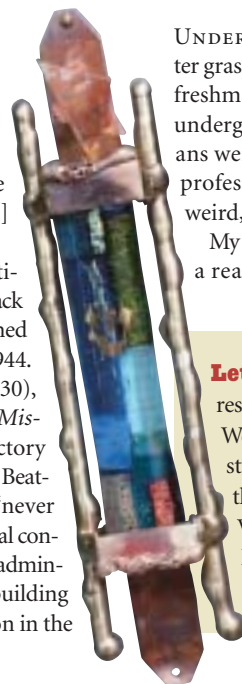
RON MAY, LLB’53
Little Rock, Ark.

UNDERGRADUATES MANY TIMES HAVE A BETTER grasp of things than you might imagine. In my freshman year of 1936, the feeling of Vanderbilt undergraduates was pretty well that the Agrarians were kind of nutty, but, after all, they were professors, and that the Fugitives were kind of weird, but, after all, they were poets.

My only personal acquaintance from the group, a really nice guy, was Donald Davidson, my

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Letters are always welcome in response to contents of the magazine. We reserve the right to edit for length, style and clarity. Send signed letters to the Editor, VANDERBILT MAGAZINE, VU Station B 357703, 2301 Vanderbilt Place, Nashville, TN 37235-7703, or e-mail: ken.schexnayder@vanderbilt.edu.



From the Reader *continued from page 10*

instructor in freshman English composition, and a good one. About the proudest boast of my academic career is that he urged me to continue my studies by enrolling in his sophomore course in creative writing. There is no telling where this would have led me (I had the good sense to decline).

JAMES R. TUCK, A'40, L'47
Nashville

I HAVE READ PAUL KINGSBURY'S ARTICLE in the winter issue of *Vanderbilt Magazine*, and I am incredulous at the sophomoric vitriol of the two English department faculty members Kingsbury quoted. Paul Conkin, a veteran member of the Vanderbilt History Department, seemed far more willing to examine the complex legacy of the Fugitive poets and Agrarians than either Michael Kreyling or Kate Daniels. Sadly, these informants revealed strong personal biases rather than professional objectivity in their disregard for the rich literary history in which the subjects of the article played major parts.

As a member of the Vanderbilt English faculty for 30 years, with an M.A. and Ph.D. from the department, I can speak responsibly of its history and the achievements of the writers it developed over half a century. Among them were major poets, novelists and critics whose contributions, all told, were significant in American letters. Those writers deepened our critical appreciation of imaginative literature and showed us the permanent gifts our generation had inherited not only from English and American writers but also from the classical tradition that shaped them.

As a teaching fellow with my first class of students, I taught Donald Davidson's *American Composition and Rhetoric*, a comprehensive textbook which stayed in print for decades. Davidson "decolonialized" American English by establishing its usage and rhetorical structure as authoritative in its own right. It was a privilege for me to work with him in producing the third edition of his landmark textbook.

We must not forget, in our age of specialization, that Walter Clyde Curry's books included scholarly volumes on Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare, the triumvirate of poets in the English literary tradition. They earned him a broad reputation with other scholars in England and Europe, and they continue to be cited in scholarly essays—proof positive that some critics survive all the popular "isms" because of their timeless relevance to the literature itself.

And, of course, Robert Penn Warren's corpus of poetry, criticism, fiction and social commentary has made him a figure acknowledged not only in Europe but in cultures around the world. His partnership with Cleanth Brooks in three textbooks revolutionized the way poetry, fiction and rhetoric were taught in this country and abroad.

Both Brooks and Warren went on to distinguished professorships at Yale.

Two of the younger members of the department were Rob Roy Purdy and Richmond Croom Beatty. With patience and a commendable ease, Purdy took generations of students through myriad Anglo-Saxon poets and the great epic *Beowulf*. He saw himself as less a linguist than as a new critic who could examine the artifacts of our early heritage with the unencumbered delight of a young workman who had just uncovered a golden relic from the Sutton Hoo. Thus, the New Criticism found its way into musty corners of academe and lit up the past for generations of students who would cherish their time in antiquity.

Richmond Beatty co-edited two major textbooks that have also shaped our discipline and continue to attract readers: *The American Tradition in Literature* and *The Literature of the South*. He and his partners included women and black writers before it was "politically correct" to do so.

So it is neither honest nor accurate to dismiss these Vanderbilt writers as superannuated relics from another age and time. Their achievements in creative letters pointed the way for younger craftsmen who came under their influence either in the classroom or in the volumes they published. The many contributions of the Fugitive poets are housed in the University Archives, where their reputations are secure in the books they wrote.

Like Proteus in the *Odyssey*, the Vanderbilt Fugitives and Agrarians were known to change shapes and positions over the years. Warren, as early as the late '30s, disavowed his "separate but equal" essay on race. John Crowe Ransom went north to Ohio and Kenyon College and modified some of the tenets of *I'll Take My Stand* with its insistence on an Agrarian South.

The truth is that they were remarkably fluid thinkers, and to understand them today's students must confront the entire spectrum of their thought and thereby apprehend a revelation of a whole larger than any single manifestation.

I invite Kreyling and Daniels to put aside their prejudices for a spell and look upon this group of dedicated teachers, writers and creative thinkers doing their honest best to represent the world and human nature as faithfully as they could.

If the Fugitives and Agrarians manifested failures in judgments in their political lives, their literary achievement will nonetheless weather the test of time and the ephemeral critical fads and fetishes that have always encumbered academics who like to keep up with them. I suspect the condemnations of two Vanderbilt English Department members will go unnoticed in the large scheme of literary history.

HERSCHEL GOWER, MA'52, PHD'57
Vanderbilt Professor of English, Emeritus
Dallas

AS A FORMER STUDENT AND TEACHER AT Vanderbilt, I was proud of my Ph.D. and association with such fine men as Curry, Bennett, Beatty, Davidson, Ransom and Purdy. With the television news reporting the prejudiced recruiting practices of the University, along with the current article "Pride and Prejudice" in your magazine, my respect for the current University has vanished. The reported prejudice of Kreyling and Daniels is appalling, and I am ashamed to admit that my degrees are from Vanderbilt.

ROBERT L. WELKER, BA'48, MA'52, PHD'58
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PAUL KINGSBURY'S PROVOCATIVE ARTICLE "Pride and Prejudice" in the winter issue of your fine magazine caught my attention. It seems to me a bad idea to publish an article that undermines the enormous reverence Vanderbilt alumni hold for the Fugitives and Agrarians. Paul Conkin was right when he wrote, "Nothing in Vanderbilt's history has come anywhere close to the Fugitives and Agrarians in giving it a national reputation."

In the beginning of the article, Kingsbury correctly says that, of the five men shown in the photograph taken at my father's house in 1956, four—Davidson, Ransom, Tate and Warren—were both Fugitives and Agrarians. What he did not say was that there were 16 contributors to the *Fugitive* magazine, 12 of whom, including my father, Jesse Wills, and his first cousin, Ridley Wills, were not Agrarians. One of the Fugitive poets happened to be a woman, Laura Ridings. I feel that the 12 Fugitive poets who were not Agrarians were tarnished with the charges of racism and sexism made in the article. This is painful because my father disagreed with much of what the Agrarians wrote.

The sidebar on page 32 of the magazine links the Fugitives and Agrarians together. It said, "There is a new generation of English professors at Vanderbilt who have no personal or professional loyalty to the Fugitives and Agrarians, and whose critical perspectives cause them to question Vanderbilt's long-held reverence for these writers."

My father, who was a member of the Vanderbilt Board of Trust, established the Fugitive-Agrarian Collection at Vanderbilt's library, and took great pride in it. His name was Jesse E. Wills, not Jesse W. Wills, as shown in the article.

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