

Menckenia

A Magazine About All Things H.L. Mencken

Fall 2012 • No. 203



Happy Mencken Day!

Richard Schrader

The Scopes Trial: How the Letter Kills

H. George Hahn

The Campus Trials of Mencken's Satire



The H.L. Mencken Room at the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore

Menckeniana

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about all things H.L. Mencken

Fall 2012

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By **Stacy Spaulding**, member of the board of the Friends of the H.L. Mencken House; homemade ornament based on an illustration by David Levine which first appeared in the New York Review of Books June 11, 1981.

Menckeniana is published quarterly by the Enoch Pratt Free Library, 400 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201. ©2012, all rights reserved. ISSN 0025-9233. Submissions and books for review should be sent by e-mail to mencken@me.com.

FOR THOSE WHO MISSED IT: MENCKEN DAY AT THE ENOCH PRATT FREE LIBRARY



Top left: Pratt Library CEO Carla D. Hayden introduced Dr. Richard J. Schrader, the keynote speaker. Top right: Prof. Schrader delivered his talk on the Scopes Trial and manipulation of the news. Middle right: Bob Brugger, president of the Mencken Society, officiated the annual meeting of the society. Bottom right: Dr. H. George Hahn delivered his talk on Mencken and the nature of satire. Bottom left: Mencken Day guests looked over exhibits on Stanley L. Harrison and Charles A. Fecher, eminent Mencken scholars who died last year.



THE SCOPES TRIAL: HOW THE LETTER KILLS

BY RICHARD J. SCHRADER

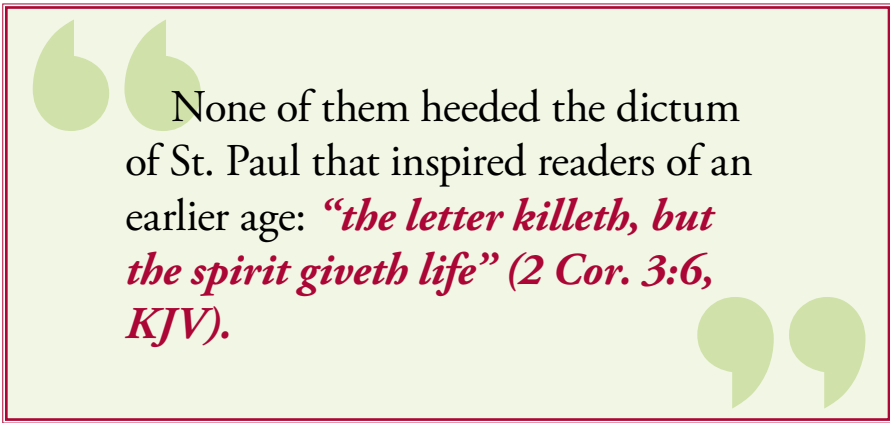
I want to express my gratitude to the Pratt Library for the many happy days I spent in the old Mencken Room and for inviting me to give this talk, to Art Gutman for his guidance and friendship during the last thirty years, to Vince Fitzpatrick

the Middle Ages, and so at the end I will try to clear the air with evidence that some medievals may have had a more sensible approach to the creation story in Genesis than either William Jennings Bryan or Henry Louis Mencken.

In my harangue to the ‘gogues I stressed how Mencken scripted the

them heeded the dictum of St. Paul that inspired readers of an earlier age: “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6, KJV).

More than eighty-five years after the events in July 1925, practically all that is popularly “known” about the trial is what Mencken wanted known, just as some reference works



None of them heeded the dictum of St. Paul that inspired readers of an earlier age: “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6, KJV).

for numerous collaborations and frequent scholarly advice, to David Thaler, another collaborator and also publisher, to those prodigious scholars Marion Rodgers and S. T. Joshi for letting me in on some of their work, and to Frank Forman, Ray Stevens, Jack Sanders, and Chris Wilson for helping me form the parts of this talk that were tried out on my fellow ‘gogues during the MLA annual convention in 2000. Since then I have benefited from recent Mencken Society talks and other material to be found in the journal *Menckenia*, and I hope I will do them justice. They were important because of the lack of a university library in my present rustic setting—I trust that I haven’t overlooked any blockbusters. As a professor, my primary field was

trial during and after the event, and how his version was perpetuated by *Inherit the Wind*, both play and movie, and by historians like Richard Hofstadter, who reduced the trial to a case of fundamentalist intolerance versus science or progress or cosmopolitanism (Larson 235-6). Better assessments may be found in the more recent books by Garry Wills, Edward Larson, and Karen Armstrong, all of which I have drawn upon. My colleagues back then needed a longer introduction to both Mencken and the Scopes trial than is necessary for this audience. I will make that background a preface to discussion of what resulted from the literal-minded way that fundamentalists approached the Bible and their opponents approached Darwin and Nietzsche. None of

still claim, thanks to Mencken, that Millard Fillmore brought the first bathtub into the White House. One might say that his version of the Scopes Trial was a hoax on the order of that other bit of buncombe, with Mencken imagining a more colorful drama before the real one was held, then recording the trial as it happened in such a way that actual events and issues would be buried beneath the greatest satire of the century. Mencken did to William Jennings Bryan what Woodrow Wilson’s propagandists did to Kaiser Wilhelm.

The trial was the high point of Mencken’s life-long crusade to discredit religion, which he saw as retrograde, a survival from an infantile stage in human development.

In other words, he viewed it (as he did most things) through the lens of a nineteenth-century mindset, one that takes the romantic evolutionary/developmental model for granted and finds its gospel in Darwin, Nietzsche, and the positivist Higher Criticism, which “subjected the Bible to the same sort of literary analysis as any other religious text, interpreting its ‘truths’ in light of its historical and cultural context” (Larson 34), as opposed to treating it as the inerrant word of God. Born in 1880, Mencken claimed to have made up his mind on practically everything very early in life (Fecher 4). Though rooted in the past, his biases regarding the Scopes Trial happened to correspond to those of the leading media. Mencken’s libertarianism (which is *nineteenth-century liberalism*) was not widely condemned as reactionary until it was directed at Franklin Roosevelt during the Depression. Paradoxically, William Jennings Bryan was twenty years older than Mencken, and yet he was truly progressive, in that a great many of his political ideas were enacted well into the twentieth century, and he would certainly have supported the New Deal.

Thanks to Mencken’s script, Tennessee’s plans went awry. The anti-evolution Butler Act was broadly supported when it passed in 1925, but most Tennesseans did not care one way or the other. Bryan in fact opposed it because of the penalty attached, and the Governor who signed it into law understood it to be symbolic, not punitive (Wills 97-100; Ginger *passim*; Larson 47-48, 55, 191). Darwin had appeared in textbooks for some time; the one that John Scopes supposedly taught from, *A Civic Biology*, by George W. Hunter, had been used in Tennessee since 1909. The ACLU advertised for someone to challenge the law, and Dayton won out among contending cities and their publicists because Scopes was willing to come forward,

even though he probably did not break the law. (He told a reporter that he missed the class on evolution. That’s why Clarence Darrow did not put him on the stand.) The ACLU intended to raise a constitutional issue and was unhappy with Darrow’s presence on the defense team, though Scopes wanted him. Darrow, in cahoots with Mencken and the sympathetic media, aimed primarily

The anti-evolution Butler Act was broadly supported when it passed in 1925, but *most Tennesseans did not care one way or the other.*

to discredit fundamentalism, which he did in the famous grilling of Bryan on the next to last day (after Mencken had left because he thought that Bryan had won [Rodgers 289]). However, that non-testimony was never heard by the jury or entered in the trial record. It is part of that other, shadow trial that everyone knows. The prosecution won the actual trial: Darrow in fact changed the plea to guilty on the final day. He did it for two reasons: to avoid a counter-interrogation by Bryan on the merits of Darwin, which was Bryan’s condition for agreeing to testify as an expert on the Bible, and also Darrow wanted to have the law tested more quickly higher up—but, thanks to the other trial, Bryan, the Great Commoner, has become Mencken’s and America’s classic dunce.

The image of Bryan created by Darrow and Mencken was given definitive form in Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee’s play *Inherit the Wind* (1955). Everyone thus knows Bryan well for such lost causes as Biblical literalism and prohibition, but few are aware that for thirty years he was the most important figure in American reform politics (Wills 99-100; Larson 35, 38). Among other things, he was nominated for President three times and was Wilson’s Secretary of State until he resigned over the country’s being led into the Great War, just as he had opposed militarism and imperialism after the Spanish-American War. He championed railroad regulation, currency reform, state initiative and referendum, a Department of Labor, campaign finance disclosure, and opposition to the death penalty. He was a majoritarian and helped secure ratification of four amendments to the Constitution, all “designed to promote a more democratic or righteous society”: they brought about direct election of Senators, a progressive federal income tax, prohibition, and female suffrage (Larson 38). When Bryan died of diabetes on July 26, shortly after the trial, libertarian Mencken claimed to have killed him, and some liberal historians tried to do the same to his legacy.

As late as 1920 Bryan did not want to forbid teaching evolution; he merely desired to have it treated as one biological theory, an *unproven* theory and not a fact (Wills 100-01). Though his position hardened, he did not like the punitive aspect of the case and offered ahead of time to pay any fine levied on Scopes. He was not arguing that creationism be taught in the schools; he assumed that the Biblical account could *not* be taught and wanted the evolutionary view of

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

human origins banned for the sake of neutrality (Larson 257). Generally, Bryan was not literal-minded in his approach to the Bible when it didn't have to do with the special creation of man. This is shown by his admission to Darrow that the seven days of creation in Genesis might be ages, an admission that caused some fundamentalists, including Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, to turn on him post mortem. (Not Billy Graham, however, who accepted the view that the Genesis account "was a pictorial depiction of progressive creationism spanning eons" [Larson 237, 261]). Moreover, Bryan was not anti-feminist, anti-semitic, or anti-Catholic like many of his fundamentalist followers, and, as a Presbyterian moderate, he espoused the "social gospel" condemned by the right wing of evangelism. (However, it must be said that his record on race was not good, and though he despised the Ku Klux Klan, he opposed an anti-Klan plank because of his Midwest and Southern political base [Ashby 103, 181].) As for his defense of Tennessee's Butler Act, which made it unlawful "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," the prevailing view of the establishment clause in the First Amendment, at the time, was that it "simply forbade the government from giving preference to any one church denomination" (Larson 75). From that narrow perspective, the Butler Act passed muster.

What came to obsess Bryan about evolution was social Darwinism, the idea that the poor must be neglected in the name of a progress which betters the race (Wills 101-02). Whether or not that is a misreading of Darwin, that is how both Mencken and Darrow understood him.

Mencken went further and in 1908 identified Nietzsche's Superman with Darwin's fittest and summed up the result thus: "The strong must grow stronger, and that they may do so, they must waste no strength in the vain task of trying to lift up the weak" (*Philosophy* 102-03). He seems to ratify this view two years later in *Men Versus the Man* (112;

Above all, the thing to do was to lay all stress, not on Scopes, who was a nobody, but on Bryan, who was an international figure—to lure him on the stand if possible, to make him state his barbaric credo in plain English, and to make a monkey of him before the world.

—H.L. MENCKEN

cf. Rodgers 118-20). Bryan, on the other hand, thought that progress came from supporting the weaker. So we have a clash of fundamentalist titans. "Mencken," says Wills, "was a literalist—in ways later scholars have derided—in applying Darwin to human ethics" (102). And Bryan blamed German militarism on Darwinism by way of Nietzsche, who, he said, "carried Darwinism to its logical conclusion and denied

the existence of God, denounced Christianity as the doctrine of the degenerate, and democracy as the refuge of the weakling; he overthrew all standards of morality and eulogized war as necessary to man's development" (quoted in Larson 40).

Both Darrow and Mencken found in Nietzsche justification for their unpopulist lack of faith in the majority. Darrow did believe in democracy, unlike Mencken, but felt that agitators were the real source of progress (Ginger 61-62). Bryan, on the other hand, gave priority to popular rule over liberty, as the poet Edgar Lee Masters noted in the *American Mercury* (391); it is a political philosophy exactly the opposite of Mencken's. And unlike Bryan, many "progressives" saw democracy as just one means to the end of control. Many also had outright contempt for the masses, especially the rural masses, as the trial would prove.

Mencken said: "The thing to do, I argued, was to use the case to make Tennessee forever infamous, and to that end the sacrifice of Scopes would be a small matter. Above all, the thing to do was to lay all stress, not on Scopes, who was a nobody, but on Bryan, who was an international figure—to lure him on the stand if possible, to make him state his barbaric credo in plain English, and to make a monkey of him before the world" (*Thirty-five Years* 137). The shadow trial was directed at the entire nation, not the Daytonians, whom Mencken ahead of time had styled "Homo Neandertalensis" (*Mencken on Religion* 165). Not all the liberal media approved. *The New Republic*, for one, objected to the hostile tone of the defense, acknowledging (as did Mencken [*Mencken on Religion* 208]) that Tennessee had a right to pass the Butler Act. The article said that the law's nullification by a court would be an abuse of judicial power. Rather than creating villains

and expecting a “happy ending” in a higher court, it went on to say, the defense should have planned its case “in order to bring home to the citizens of Tennessee their responsibility for a deplorable abuse of an admitted and desirable legal authority” (“Baiting” 250). This is the populist way, education followed by ballot, not lawsuit, and it occurred in 2000 when Kansas voters repudiated an anti-evolution state school board. Not that the course of true learning ever did run smooth, as we know from the recent textbook wars in Georgia and Texas.

Mencken admitted that the real zanies were from the hills, not the town (*Mencken on Religion* 172). The reporters enjoyed Dayton and admired the townfolk for their hospitality (Ginger 180). But again, the satiric scripting was abetted by both the Daytonians and the hillfolk, who, together with motley strangers, turned the neighborhood into a commercial and evangelical carnival. Since this is the image of the trial Mencken wished to make permanent, he joined in by handing out to the yokels a fake flyer designed by Edgar Lee Masters, the author of *Spoon River Anthology* and former law partner of Clarence Darrow in Chicago. And, in order to distract and evade the preacher T. T. Martin, Mencken concocted another hoax. He and his colleague Henry Hyde told Martin that Cincinnati Bolsheviks were reportedly en route to Dayton to butcher William Jennings Bryan. Cops from Dayton and Chattanooga rushed to the train station and pounced on an innocent man (Schwartz 2-3). I mentioned at the outset that Mencken’s written version of the Scopes Trial was a hoax on the order of his famous Bathtub Hoax, and pranks like these only seemed to lend credence to it.

“For Bryan, it was the superman trial [not the monkey trial], a defense of the populace against secular

More than eighty-five years after the events in July 1925, *practically all that is popularly “known” about the trial is what Mencken wanted known*, just as some reference works still claim, thanks to Mencken, that Millard Fillmore brought the first bathtub into the White House.

experts” (Wills 107). He felt that you should be able to demand that a teacher teach the facts *you* wanted, just as you could demand that a house painter follow *your* color scheme (Ginger 36). On the narrow point of popular control of public education, even the New York *Times* agreed with Bryan, and it would have been difficult to challenge him on it in the courts of those days or among the public (Larson 104-05).

The prosecutor tried to keep the focus on what he considered the main point of the Butler Act, which was that the legislature had a right to control state funds and to prevent *any* subject from being taught (Larson 161-64, 168-69). Mencken concurred that free speech was not the issue (*Thirty-five Years* 139).

Not surprisingly, Darrow’s stirring attack upon “the fires that have been lighted in America to kindle religious bigotry and hate” did not move Judge Raulston to quash the indictment or find the act unconstitutional, because Scopes was free to teach evolution in another forum (*World’s* 87, 102). As Larson notes, “The court had adopted the prosecution’s position, which accorded with the prevailing currents of constitutional interpretation” (169).

Wills makes the point that what I have called the shadow trial, or Mencken’s hoax, was taking place in the media (108-09; Ginger 103). This was among the earliest and greatest media events, with radio lines in the court room (it was the first trial ever broadcast) and hordes of photographers and reporters present. The grilling of Bryan, unheard by the jury, was given out of doors to accommodate the crowds. One study of the media coverage concludes,

While much of the reporting in the newspapers and magazines was taken from verbatim accounts of court proceedings, press conferences, sermons, and interviews, it was the choice of quotations selected by the media, the charged headlines of articles, the slant of editorials, and the nature of cartoons that came to support and create the Monkey Trial myth. (Wood 152)

Darrow was there, against the wishes of the ACLU, because of Mencken, who consulted with him throughout the trial, and because Scopes continued to hold on to him (Wills 112-13). The state supreme court neatly responded to the blot on Tennessee’s honor created by Mencken and Darrow’s circus both by upholding the Butler Act and by throwing out Scopes’s conviction for violating it; they used a technicality regarding the sentence (the jury and not the judge should have decided on

the fine [Larson 192]). The matter went no further because, the chief justice said, “We see nothing to be gained by prolonging the life of this bizarre case” (Ginger 209). He suggested that the attorney-general drop the indictment rather than retry Scopes. This was done, thereby outflanking the ACLU. There was no longer a case to take to the U. S. Supreme Court. Winning one trial meant losing the other, though paradoxically Darrow’s client got off as usual, but that was not what he wanted. Moreover, he had inadvertently created sympathy for Bryan and his cause. The upshot was that the anti-evolution law stayed on the books for forty-two years. Tennessee repealed it just before the Supreme Court struck down a similar Arkansas statute in the Epperson case (1968) (Larson 251, 255-56). No one else in Tennessee had been tried under the Butler Act, but that was largely because of self-censorship by publishers across the nation, who removed Darwin from high school texts. The teaching of evolution declined in America until Sputnik prodded a long look at high school science (Larson 230, 249).

That is one of the parts of the story that you miss if you read only what Mencken scripted, which was a triumph of art and propaganda. John Scopes, ostensibly at the center of the affair, never saw things the way Mencken did. As late as a 1970 interview with Bynum Shaw in *Esquire* he was defending Bryan and the townsfolk and expressing skepticism over Mencken; small wonder that he was treated as a cipher from the beginning. At the actual center was Bryan, thanks to Darrow’s maneuver. The moral argument against social Darwinism that Bryan raised was actually evaded by the attack on Genesis in Darrow’s questioning. Wills sees Darrow’s own scripting of the trial as a morality play,

but one in which Bryan is cast as a demon capable of any cruelty (110-11), and the *New Republic* deplored what it called the Scopes attorneys’ “melodrama” (“Baiting” 249; cf. Wood 156).

Mencken expanded this line of demonization in his obituary of Bryan on July 27. He said, among other things, “Bryan was a vulgar and common man, a cad undiluted. He was ignorant, bigoted, self-seeking, blatant and dishonest. His career brought him into contact with the first men of his time; he preferred the company of rustic ignoramuses” (*Mencken on Religion* 211). The piece

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was so vitriolic that the Baltimore *Sun* thought it prudent to run an unsigned “straight” obit beside it. (It was written by Mencken’s friend Gerald Johnson, the subject of Vince Fitzpatrick’s splendid biography. He agreed with Mencken’s defense of free speech, but not with all of his tactics [75-76].) The authors of *Inherit the Wind*, not finding justification for Mencken’s portrayal of Bryan in the actual transcript of the trial, invented a girlfriend of the Scopes figure for the Bryan figure to badger on the stand, thereby making him conform to the Bryan of the shadow trial.

One can set aside minor instances of poetic license, such as having the Scopes figure jailed when the real Scopes was not arrested, arraigned, or imprisoned (Harrison 12), but not a profound change such as having the Bryan figure assail evolution solely on Biblical grounds, “never suggesting the broad social concerns that largely motivated Bryan” (Larson 241).

In Hunter’s *A Civic Biology*, the textbook from which Scopes supposedly tried to teach, the subject of evolution occupies about five pages. The discussion concludes with a brief list of the “five races or varieties of man,” beginning with “the Ethiopian or negro type, originating in Africa,” and ending with “the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America” (196). I suspect that no one involved in the trial, including Bryan, would have disagreed with the last sentence, but the question remains whether Bryan ought to be demonized for not wanting to yoke that and related ideas with Darwin.

Among those related ideas were eugenics and its offshoot, forced sterilization, which was the one practical application of Darwinism (North ch. 7; Doyle 10-20; Kennedy 114-22). Embracing the views of many evolutionary biologists (Larson 27), Hunter’s *Civic Biology* has a chapter on “Heredity and Variation” in which the student is taught that evolution can be directed by applying “the laws of selection.” One has a duty to participate, it says in the paragraph headed “Eugenics,” for such conditions as tuberculosis, epilepsy, and feeble-mindedness “are handicaps which it is not only unfair but criminal to hand down to posterity” (261). Hunter argues that physical, mental, and moral defects can be passed along through several generations. Such families, he says, not only do harm to others by

corrupting, stealing, or spreading disease, but they are actually protected and cared for by the state out of public money. Largely for them the poorhouse and the asylum exist. They take from society, but they give nothing in return. They are true parasites.

The Remedy.—If such people were lower animals, we would probably kill them off to prevent them from spreading. Humanity will not allow this, but we do have the remedy of separating the sexes in asylums or other places and in various ways preventing intermarriage and the possibilities of perpetuating such a low and degenerate race. (263, emphasis mine)

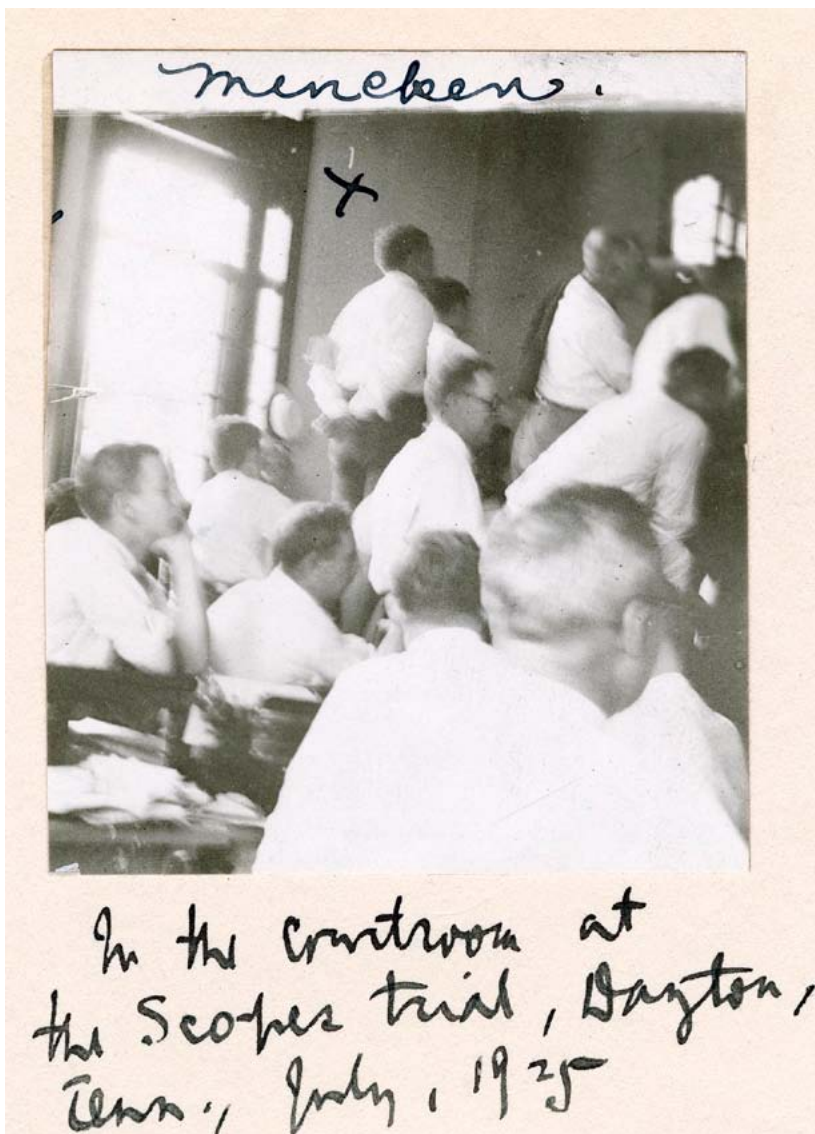
This textbook incorporated the research of eugenicist Charles B. Davenport, who was one of the six best-known potential witnesses for Scopes' defense (Larson 115, 135, 181). (It was while arguing against these experts that Bryan got carried away and notoriously claimed that man was not a mammal.) In fact, Davenport and the other five could not be allowed to testify, because all of them favored coercive eugenic measures which Darrow condemned as incompatible with human rights. Darrow wrote an article on "The Eugenics Cult" for *The American Mercury* a year later, and the year after that Mencken criticized their vagueness about

the notion of superiority and their overplaying heredity and downplaying the environment ("Eugenics"). For Bryan, eugenics was reason enough not to teach evolution, and he would have argued this in his closing speech (*World's* 333-36).

By the end of the 1920s, twenty-eight states had compulsory sterilization laws, and some 15,000 of the eugenically unfit had been sterilized; that total would double in the next decade. Not coincidentally, between 1915 and 1930, thirty states passed laws against interracial marriage. Virginia's model sterilization law was upheld by the Supreme Court 8-1 in *Buck vs. Bell* (1927); the majority included progressives William Howard Taft and Louis Brandeis. In Germany sterilization was illegal until Hitler changed the law in 1933; two million people were ordered sterilized by his Eugenics Courts thereafter. In America, to quote an AP story of a Virginia man who was sterilized when young because he repeatedly ran away and was deemed uncontrollable, "They treated us just like hogs, like we had no feelings" (Baskervill). The photo shows him holding his World War II Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and POW medals.

The rationale for such programs was foreshadowed by Darwin's book *Descent of Man* (1871), in a passage

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This is the only known photo of H.L. Mencken at the Scopes Trial. Mencken did not see the trial through to its end—when Judge Raulston ruled that the defense could not call its scientific witnesses, Mencken, along with many other out-of-town reporters, went home. Those reporters missed Darrow's epic cross-examination of Bryan on the courthouse lawn.

Photo courtesy H.L. Mencken Estate, Enoch Pratt Free Library

lamenting the altruism that allows the weak in civilized societies to propagate their kind to the detriment of the race (130-31), which Bryan quoted in both the book *In His Image* (1921) and the address he was not permitted to make to the jury in the Scopes Trial (*World's* 335). In 1922 one may find Darwin's thesis fully fledged in Margaret Sanger's *The Pivot of Civilization*, especially its chapter on "The Cruelty of Charity," wherein she describes philanthropy as "the surest sign that our civilization has bred, is breeding and is perpetuating constantly increasing numbers of defectives, delinquents and dependents" (108), the "dead weight of human waste" that may be found in institutions (112). "Feeble-mindedness" and outright insanity are inherited traits, she assumes. As stated in an appendix to the book (282), sterilization of such groups is among the aims of the American Birth Control League, a forerunner of Planned Parenthood. Sanger believed that the unfit were multiplying at so frightening a rate that, in regards to our democracy, something would have to be done about the "pathological worship of mere number," and she agreed with those who were opposed to such Bryanesque, populist, majoritarian reforms as the primary, the direct election of Senators, the initiative, the recall, and the referendum (177-78).

Mencken's other fights on behalf of the First Amendment are entirely admirable: for example, his rounding up of American literati to defend Dreiser in 1916, his risking the *American Mercury* in the 1926 "Hatrack" case, and his 1948 attack on Baltimore's segregated tennis courts, the last article he published. But the Scopes Trial is one of the least creditable episodes of his life, though he acted in all innocence, after years of studying religion, and with the conviction that he was right about the

moral imperative of opposing science to religious faith. Ironically, though liberals might cheer him in his battle against religion, he actually had an attitude no more advanced than that of the zealots he attacked. It was apparent in the trial and in his book *Treatise on the Gods* five years later, which is further evidence of that life-long nineteenth-century lens I referred to at the beginning. (In his review, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr pointed

...the Scopes Trial is one of the least creditable episodes of [Mencken's] life, though he acted in all innocence, after years of studying religion, and *with the conviction that he was right about the moral imperative of opposing science to religious faith.*

out Mencken's limitations and dismissed the book with "It really tells us little more than how one fanatic feels about other fanatics of a different stripe" [96].) But Bryan might have found some consolation in the fact that, if Mencken could not escape the lure of Darwin, Nietzsche, and the Higher Criticism of the Bible, at least he rejected those other Victorian humbugs Marx and Freud!

Bryan, by making concessions regarding the six days of creation, tried to evade the trap for fundamentalists set even farther back when Martin Luther and others rejected the medieval allegorical tradition, which held that Bible passages may be read on multiple levels simultaneously (Wills 127-30). William Tyndale, the reformer, Bible translator, and martyr, whose work heavily influenced the King James Version, wrote in 1527, "Thou shalt understand, therefore, that the Scripture hath but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never faileth, whereunto if thou cleave, thou canst never err or go out of the way" (622). But a thousand years earlier, St. Augustine had deconstructed the literal level of the creation story more profoundly than did Clarence Darrow. Between the years 389 and 416 he tried three different times to explain the Hexaemeron, the six days of creation, in a literal sense, but each time fell back on allegory. Augustine raised the questions that many readers have:

Did God consume the whole day in creating the various works? — How could there be days before there were heavenly luminaries? — How could there be light before the existence of the sun and the stars? — This leads him to adopt simultaneous creation, to identify the light of the first day with the angels, and to explain the evening and morning [the refrain at the end of each day's work] by the limitation and the beauty of the various created objects. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

In his final try, "He admits again a simultaneous formation of the world, so that the six days indicate an order of dignity — angels, the firmament, the earth, etc." Augustine found support for this figurative reading of the six days in the book of Sirach

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(Ecclesiasticus) 18:1, which is in the Vulgate but not in the Hebrew canon or the King James Version: “*creavit omni simul*” (he created all things at once).

In the later Middle Ages, commentators like Thomas Aquinas tended toward the literal in explaining the six days of creation, without denying other levels beyond the factual. One of his general sources was Moses Maimonides, author of the famous *The Guide for the Perplexed* (1190). Aquinas called him The Rabbi, as he called Aristotle The Philosopher, and The Rabbi appears to argue for a kind of simultaneous creation, citing Isaiah 48:13: “when I call unto them [the heavens and the earth], they stand up together” (KJV). “Consequently,” he says, “all things were created together, but were separated from each other successively.” For example, the lights mentioned on the fourth day (the sun and the moon) “are the same that were created on the first day [‘let there be light’], but were only fixed in their places on the fourth day” (213). But that provides no help with the length of the days or the eons of creation.

All this reminded me of another eminent theologian, Linus Van Pelt from “Peanuts,” who said, “There’s no problem so big that you can’t go around it.” From early times to the present, one answer to the days question has been to fall back on miracle. Hence Bryan’s evasion in his testimony: “DARROW: They had evening and morning for four periods without the sun, do you think? BRYAN: I believe in creation as there told, and if I am not able to explain it, I will accept it” (Marks).

In the matter of reading Genesis, Karen Armstrong’s *The Battle for God*, a study of fundamentalism in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions, has made the Protestant yokels of Tennessee more sympathetic. She reveals an additional irony in their theology, for the fundamentalist

attempt to read the Bible as history is a *modern* response, a scientific way of trying to establish the Bible’s truth by modern standards, instead of the premodern way of understanding it as *mythos* capable of many meanings extendable to the present (95-97). This was a fatal concession, one that fundamentalists had thought necessary in the wake of the Higher Criticism and the generally rational bias of the modern world. “Faith had to be rational,” writes Armstrong, “*mythos* had to be *logos*. It was now very difficult to see truth as anything other than factual or scientific” (144). By *mythos* she means the timeless and constant, by *logos* the rational and pragmatic.

It could be said that Clarence Darrow won the battle of rationalisms: free speech and the autonomy of scientific inquiry eventually triumphed over the right of ordinary persons to reject theories they found immoral. However, the two sides had much in common. Armstrong writes:

Darrow and Mencken were also wrong to assume that fundamentalists belonged entirely to the old world.... They were as addicted to scientific rationalism as any other modernists.... Doctrines were not theological speculations, but facts.... Fundamentalists were trying to create a new way of being religious in an age that valued the *logos* of science above all else. (176-79)

That’s how Mencken valued science, but his writing on the Scopes Trial produced *mythos*, a timeless parable against intolerance that, in order to be morally “true,” must be separated from the *logos*, the empirical truth, of the actual event. In that way, one can take as Gospel the spirit of Mencken’s satire, though not the letter of it. And one can also acknowledge that, despite Bryan’s frequent literal-mindedness when it came to Genesis,

his warnings about the junk science behind social Darwinism have been justified by appalling evidence and affirmed by better science, and they are soundly based on the letter and the spirit of the Bible.

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The courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., was the scene of Tennessee v Scopes. The courthouse lawn was the scene of Clarence Darrow's merciless interrogation of William Jennings Bryan. The town of Dayton hosts an annual festival celebrating the Scopes Trial. (Photo by Carol Fitzpatrick)

THE CAMPUS TRIALS OF MENCKEN'S SATIRE

"I think that people like to read abuse," said Mencken to Donald Kirkley in a recorded interview of 1948. His charge prompts four trials about satire to a college-age class today.

A first trial is definitional. Most students today would agree with Mencken on the reception of satire, on enjoying verbal abuse. They delight in the one-liners of Jon Stewart and Chris Rock. They revel in rap. They think satire to be a quick jab, a hit-and-run joke, ephemerally irreverent and ultimately harmless. But Mencken wasn't commenting about satire's cause, form, or quality. So his first trial is on a conceptual charge. What is satire in its literary sense?

Satire is a distortion, a fun-house mirror that exaggerates things to mock them. It's a text that distorts its contexts. Like all art, it's an act of illusion, its artist's conception of things. More a cartoon than a portrait and less a truth than a polemic, satire aims less to inquire than to persuade. Recalling Plato's rant against rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, one may say that satire starts with, rather than establishes a supposed truth, and so it can never be philosophical in aim or fully ethical in act. It rests on analogy, but analogy has no purchase on truth, the less so if the analogy is false. So satire is ultimately an argument by ridicule.

It's the most aggressive, the most offensive of literary types. Think only of a few words that we use to talk about it: satire is a *scourge*, a *bludgeon*, a *whip*, and a *weapon*; it *shoots* at targets, it *attacks*, *wounds*, *skewers*, *blasts*, *explodes*, *flays*, *damages*, *destroys*, and *demolishes*. Long satire like Alexander Pope's mock-epic *The Dunciad* is a barrage of heavy artillery. Short satire like Mencken's essays are literature's light cavalry, skirmishing an enemy flank.

In short, satire is long as well as aggressive, far longer than the squibs of Stewart, Rock, and gangsta rap. Whatever the scale, a book or an essay, true satire mounts an argument in tactical terms. Think of Chaucer's studied assault on corrupt churchmen in *The Canterbury Tales*. Or recall Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, each of its four successive parts an attack on pride in its political, physical, intellectual, and moral garrisons, and its narrator, gullible Gulliver,

The warrants
beneath most of
Mencken's satire are
strata of liberty and
individualism: *let
Americans be free
to do what they
wish at their own
expense.*

personifies each one. Likewise, in *In Defense of Women*, Mencken charges with slash and salt through his smoke screen of irony to his target, quite unlike the obvious pop-gun shots of *Comedy Central*. Beyond the dust jacket of the book, Mencken's ironic tactical syllogism is brilliant: Women are despicable, but women are better than men. Therefore, men are very despicable. The underlying premise: Women are more intelligent than men because they can dominate men. That's how Mencken "defends" women. And that's only the textual

irony. A contextual irony is that when he published the book in 1918, the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote had not yet been passed, and the controversy over women's intelligence still raged between suffragists and intractable men. So Mencken's irony wins a double-header. A difficult lesson for most students, distinguishing the literal from the ironic, the ironic from the sarcastic, and the influence of context. Still, after all of this is explained, whether students like to read abuse or not, their permanent pleasure is learning to decode a masterly satiric document, understand a satiric tactic, and intellectually enjoy a literary game well played.

As in his books, so in his essays, Mencken confirms conventional thought for unconventional reasons, always with a straight-faced irony. Take "Chiropractic," where he argues that its practice should not be banned by the government or the American Medical Association. Why? Because the only people who submit to chiropractors are idiots, so if they die, the national gene pool improves. Likewise, in "Christian Science" that faith's proscription of medicine should not be banned for the same reason. The warrants beneath most of Mencken's satire are strata of liberty and individualism: let Americans be free to do what they wish at their own expense.

And within his essays and books, little gems of irony sparkle. They always delight students. Consider: The best teacher is little better than a moron because "the business of teaching demands a certain jejunity of mind." Or "Every professor must have a theory, as every dog must have fleas." (Why did I choose those

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two?) A judge is “a law student who marks his own examination papers.” A lawyer is “one who protects us against robbers by taking away the temptation.” An historian is “an unsuccessful novelist.” “Adultery is the application of democracy to love.” And democracy is “the art and science of running the circus from the monkey cage.” Each is also a satiric sabre against conventional American thinking burnished by a trope and pointed in a sharp and memorable epigram.

After understanding his tactics long and short, most students will exonerate and even appreciate Mencken’s satire as did those students who read the green-covered *American Mercury* as they walked across American campuses so long ago.

But tactics are methods. Where’s the matter? Other trials lay ahead.

II. A second impediment to Mencken’s satire and indeed to most satire read after its day is its short shelf life. Even when a miniature masterpiece of satire, say Voltaire’s *Candide*, is anthologized, it takes ranks of marginal glosses and banks of rich footnotes to establish archaic diction, people, places, and problems that were common knowledge when it was written. And dropping an eye to those footnotes is a necessary distraction from the rush of the text, its diction, rhythm, tone, and figures of speech. So the gain in knowledge is a loss in the pleasure of savoring the style.

Still, it’s one thing for a thoroughly modern sophomore not to recognize in Mencken names like Valentino, Comstock, Ring Lardner, Carpentier, Aimee Semple McPherson, Albert C. Ritchie, and many contemporaneous marquee names and cameo appearances in his journalism. Footnotes are the preservative as they embalm and keep the corpses’ coffins open to view.

But it’s quite another thing not to know who’s who in Mencken’s allusions to Woodrow Wilson, William Jennings Bryan, Coolidge, FDR, Conrad, Bach, and even Dempsey and John D. Rockefeller, high-capital names once in the history bank of every American. That the students are ignorant of such names is not from the overusing of their iPhones. It’s from their schools’ undervaluing of content. That’s confirmed by many recent studies. The National Center for Educational Statistics, for example, concludes that students lack a factual base. And not just the schools, but the colleges, many of which are now running up the flag of “academic rigor” that rallies for more reading in every discipline from anthropology to zoology. UCLA, one campus on point, finding that students themselves think their courses too easy and that departments demand too little from their majors, now has instituted curricular reforms under that flag, and the new Common Core standards in elementary and secondary schools of forty-three states have resurrected content as central. Why? For years the K-16 prejudice had been against learning facts and for developing “critical thinking.” Besides, if facts can be looked up on the internet, who cares if that organic computer called memory will atrophy? Critical thinkers many students think themselves to be, but critical thinking without knowledge is a sculptor without a stone.

So Mencken is found guilty of a crime not his own by student juries ignorant of facts: “He’s too hard.” And his sentence: good old puritanical shunning. Chiefly because of low enrollment, the last time I taught the annual course on Mencken was 1995.

III. The third charge against Mencken is writing with intent to judge. Arguably the only word that students think now to be a curse word

is *judgmental*. It’s how they’ve been indoctrinated through their schooling. (Not that schools musn’t indoctrinate. Plato said in *The Republic* that there can be no vision of government without a vision of education that “grows” the kinds of citizens that the government wants. So Germans indoctrinated students in Naziism, Soviets in communism, Islamists in the Sharia, and U.S. schools now indoctrinate and “celebrate” the popular pieties of tolerance and diversity, each to cultivate the proper conduct and citizens—or subjects.) But tolerance, of course, is no cardinal virtue to the satirist—or to any thinking person. T. S. Eliot even said that “Judgment is as natural as breathing. The only question is if it’s right or wrong.” And a Baltimorean by adoption, Ogden Nash, said as much in a pointed epigram: “What is more mine, tolerance or a rubber spine?” Today’s college contingent has been cultivated for twelve years to a bumper-crop harvest where judgment and courage are only weeds. But without judgment and courage there can be no satire, and with no tolerance for judgment there can be no appreciation of satire, for at base the satirist is a critic, the very word deriving from the Greek *kritikos* or judge.

Students will tolerate the one-liner judgments of Stewart and Rock. Those judgments voice easy-to-grasp popular thoughts well phrased. And said with a smile, they seem kinder and gentler than Mencken’s own, more graffiti on their targets than the carpet bombing of them. Not only the devastation, but also what the comedians’ judgments lack are the complex irony and basic seriousness that are basic elements in all Mencken’s satire. And they finally lack Mencken’s courage as a judge.

When is Mencken not a judge, right, wrong, or otherwise—and a courageous judge at that? Answers

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come quickly and easily: Mencken's inveighing against the U.S. entry into World War I during the flag-waving teens, mocking both Democrats and Republicans at their conventions, laughing at Holy Rollers in the Bible Belt, going to jail for selling the *Mercury* in Boston, attacking Jim Crow practices on Baltimore tennis courts, causing an earthquake of reaction against his blasts against a lynching on Maryland's Eastern shore, skewering labor unions in negotiations with the *Sunpapers*, and attacking the business interests of Baltimore as more industry moved in: "When the cow is brought into the parlor, the milk is no better, and the carpet is ruined." Was there ever a more equal-opportunity satirist?

Still, while students profess a mild and distant admiration for his courage, often in the face of threats to his life, they claim not to like his judgmental attitude. (Isn't their claim itself *judgmental*?) So they will judge Mencken by their own different contemporary standards: "He's not tolerant." Do these students play chess by the rules of checkers or boo a pitcher for not punting on third down?

A lesser but related charge, believe it or not, indicts Mencken's prose style, the expression of his judgment. In these days of bumper stickers, sound bites, and slogans, brevity is king. And students themselves, ever texting in fragments and acronyms, might prompt what Mencken might have them say: "Look! I'm prehensile!" Mencken did put the question in another—of course, judgmental—way when he wrote about the folly of trying to teach students to write:

The great majority of high school pupils, when they attempt to put their thoughts upon paper, produce only a mass of confused and puerile nonsense.... They write badly because they cannot think clearly. They cannot think clearly because

they lack the brains. Trying to teach them is as hopeless as trying to teach a dog with only one hind leg.... Even in such twilight regions of the intellect, the style remains the man. What is in the head infallibly oozes out of the nub of the pen. If it is sparkling Burgundy the writing is full of life and charm. If it is mush the writing is mush too.

Here, Mencken's own prose style is on point: short sentences in standard English syntax, each a jab of judgment. The simple-to-understand sentences let sound echo sense in what he judges a simple-minded target. Beyond simplicity, it's no wonder that students miss the train of Mencken's typically longer sentences: multiple nouns rolling like boxcars down the rails of parallel and antithetical sentences that deliver the powerful judgment. No less a writer than Conrad agreed: "Mencken's vigor is astonishing. It is like an electric current.... that gives you a sense of enormous power." And not only power. Students miss the sparkle of Mencken's similes and metaphors, the sonic rhythms of adjacent syllables, the spice of imported words, the flavor of disparate allusions, the slang of the street, or the cool delight in discovering meaning that sleeps in etymological cellars. In class these things are not fully a loss. They prompt the teacher to read samples aloud, playing to the ear what's dark to the eye, perhaps even repeating the common experience in Mencken's own day of having his columns read aloud in barrooms and living rooms and streetcars to someone else in delight or disgust. In this way, students, with the teacher their sponsor, if only for a short time magically become naturalized citizens of another day in a very different country. And isn't liberating ourselves from our own time and place to understand different perspectives what liberal education is finally all

about?

IV. The final trial of Mencken opened in 1989 when his diaries were published and used as self-incriminating material evidence for the doom of his reputation. He was savaged for intellectual snobbery, for contempt of his colleagues, for sexism, for racism, and for misanthropy. But the heaviest charges were against what was called Mencken's anti-Semitism, a subset of racism. Celebrities, pundits, and scholars excoriated him. Robert Ward, a Towson [then State] University alumnus and screen writer for the popular TV police drama, *Hill Street Blues*, wrote in his *New York Times* book review of the diary that what is "offensive and shocking is Mencken's anti-Semitism." And in the same place Gwinn Owens, an *Evening Sun* editor, sniffed the same in Mencken's not mentioning "a single denunciation of Hitler." The winner of the 1985 Mencken writing prize returned his award. Quacking in chorus were, among others, Jonathan Yardley, Les Payne, and Andy Rooney. Even that gentleman, scholar, and saint, Charles Fecher, "clearly and unequivocally," conceded the Sage's anti-Semitism. Perhaps more, but less-celebrated defenders, mainly letter-writers, variously noted that Mencken's comments were standard lexical coinage in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries: Heinies, Squareheads, Huns, Jerrys, Krauts, Limeys, Micks, Paddies, Guineas, Wops, Frogs, Polacks, Greasers, Liths, Bohicks, Wetbacks, Shades, Spades, Spooks, Spicks, Redskins, Honkeys, Slants, Wogs, Chinks, Coons, and Kikes. Still, that defense at best is only a plea for leniency, not for exoneration.

Then came a definitive defense that to a sober jury would exonerate Mencken. It was written by a Towson [State] University junior—a Jewish student as well—and published,

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generously and wisely by the editor, Mr. Fecher, in the summer 1991 number of *Menckenia*. Under the title, "In Defense of Mencken," Karen Polun refuted the main charges of the "prosecution." Darrowlike, her cross-examination seared the experts one by one. (1) **Charge:** Twenty-seven times Mencken refers to people as Jews. **Cross:** That's the fallacy of begging the question: assuming the truth of something you're trying to prove. (2) **Charge:** Mencken writes of the low opinion of Jews at Johns Hopkins University. **Cross:** Mencken himself didn't say that: he was quoting the history professor, Samuel Eliot Morison. (3) **Charge:** Mencken writes about the Maryland Club's one Jewish member, "There is no other Jew in Baltimore who seems suitable [for membership]." **Cross:** Interpreted by a non-tone-deaf reader, the statement is ironic and so means quite the opposite of the literal words. (4) **Charge:** There's not a single denunciation of Hitler. **Cross:** Neither is there mention of Pearl Harbor, the rape of Nanking, Nagasaki, or Hiroshima, rich opportunities that Mencken missed for some fine anti-Asianism. And so on rolls Karen's cross examination. It rests on the warrant of Bernard Lewis's definition of anti-Semitism: "the hatred of Jews grounded in the belief that they are a malignant influence in the world and should be controlled or eliminated." Nowhere, Karen shows, are Mencken's comments even fifth cousins thrice removed from that definition.

Her cross-examination completed, Karen turns to the defense phase of the trial. First, she puts Mencken himself on the witness stand: In a 1933 *American Mercury* article, he wrote that "Hitler's success was certainly not creditable to the German people, nor indeed to the human race in general." In a 1935 *Diary* entry, Mencken wrote that "Dreiser broke

out into an anti-Semitic outrage.... I asked him why, if his sentiments ran that way, he had chosen a Jewish publisher." Implicit is that Mencken's own publisher was the Jewish Alfred Knopf. In a 1937 entry Mencken wrote of a link between Huey Long's "great anti-Semitic movement now rolling up New York." Then Karen Polun brings a character witness to the stand. Lawrence Spivack, Mencken's Jewish assistant at *The American Mercury* and later founder of *Meet the Press*, who testifies, "It is absolute nonsense to accuse Mencken of anti-Semitism. He always talked with his tongue in his cheek, but he always felt comfortable with Jews." Next for the defense are Mencken's other Jewish friends and close associates: Blanche Knopf, over whose health he took a proprietary interest in finding doctors and visiting her in the hospital. George Jean Nathan, Mencken's Jewish co-editor at both *The Smart Set* and *Mercury*; they mutually later parted company not because of any bigotry but because of editorial differences: should the magazine lean more to politics (Mencken) or the arts (Nathan)? In succession come Louis Cheslock, Jewish professor of music at the Peabody and charter member of Mencken's Saturday Night Club, and many Jewish doctors, lawyers, and other professors who were Mencken's friends. Winning her case, Karen wonders if the dead Mencken could sue for libel.

Still, while she won the case, after the 1989 *Diary*, the anti-Semitic reputation of Mencken remains. Reputation dies hard when myth masks truth. Towson University, in 1980 a co-sponsor with the Maryland Humanities Council for the Mencken centennial, has since 1989 rejected naming a building or even a campus lane for him. Selections of Mencken's writing have disappeared or grown shorter in American literature anthologies, irony of ironies for the

man who changed the course of American literature. Since the diary, the anti-Semitic brand is Mencken's Jewish star.

But there's hope. A delicious irony of Karen Polun's victory is its implicit defense against Mencken's own satire on students. They're not all intellectual groundlings. Outnumbered but unbowed against the quacks, not only is she Mencken's "enlightened citizen." She also shows that close reading, careful research, logical thought, cogent argument, ethical purpose, and clear courage in sailing away from the coast of herdlike bromides are not dead.

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Nor, thanks to this society, is the study of Mencken.

Now, because I'm in a profession paid to talk in other people's sleep, I'll raise my voice in a shout to thank you for inviting me to speak.

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BLUEBEARD'S GOAT AND OTHER STORIES BY H.L. MENCKEN

EDITED BY S.T. JOSHI

Bluebeard's Goat and Other Stories by H. L. Mencken. Edited by S. T. Joshi. Chester Springs, Pennsylvania: Dufour Editions, Inc., 2012. 384 pp. \$16.95.

It may surprise even Mencken aficionados to learn that between 1900 and 1919 he published nearly sixty short works of fiction. In fact, the apprentice journalist had literary aspirations, encouraged by his initial success in placing as many as twenty short stories in a number of leading periodicals of the day. By 1906, however, Mencken, as he recalls in *My Life as Author and Editor* (1993), “was beginning to realize that fiction was hardly [his] trade” (9). Moreover, he had in the meantime become interested in George Bernard Shaw and published a critical introduction to his plays (1905), and followed with books on Nietzsche (1908) and Socialism (1910), establishing himself, as he notes in *Newspaper Days* (1941), as “a critic of ideas” (74).

Nevertheless, Mencken began publishing short stories again in 1914, when George Jean Nathan and he became editors of the *Smart Set*, a literary magazine which, in spite of its title, appealed to the intellectual rather than the social elite. At first, however, they received few manuscripts, and therefore they filled the gap with submissions of their own, covering themselves in part with pseudonyms. As book reviewer for the *Smart Set* since 1908, Mencken had reviewed countless works of fiction in the meantime, which no doubt contributed to his facility in writing his own (short) fiction. His short stories published between 1914 and 1919 have been, understandably, overshadowed by such book publications as *A Book of Prefaces* (1917), *In Defense of Women* (1918/22),



The American Language (1919), and *Prejudices: First Series* (1919), not to mention such classic essays as “The Sahara of the Bozart” (1917) and “A Neglected Anniversary” (1917).

It is all the more welcome, then, that the prolific Mencken bibliographer and editor S. T. Joshi has rescued approximately half of Mencken’s early short stories from their neglect. Joshi’s collection contains six stories from the years 1900-1906 and seventeen stories from 1914-1919, as well as eight comic vignettes from 1915-1918. Although some of the early stories are “unwontedly sentimental” (and therefore not included here), most are worthy “comic narratives,” the best of which is perhaps “The Bend in the Tube” (1905), which Marion Rodgers identified in *Mencken: The American Iconoclast* (2005) as a satire on Mencken’s boss, Frank Peard (“the preposterous Peard”) at the Baltimore *Herald* (67-68). Noteworthy, too, are “A Cook’s Victory” (1900) and “A Double Rebellion” (1902), both stories set in Jamaica (where Mencken had gone in 1900 to recover from overwork as a *Herald* reporter). Two of Mencken’s best early works are rather grim war stories, “The Last Cavalry Charge” (1906), set in Europe, and

“The Crime of McSwane” (1902), set in Nigeria, both likely inspired by Kipling.

The short stories of 1914-1919 are also generally comic or satirical. Mencken displays his “sardonic skepticism of the institution of marriage” (as he would also show *In Defense of Women*) in many of these stories, “the most pungent” of which is perhaps “The Homeric Sex” (1918) about a wife’s infidelity. More predictable, but also more amusingly ironic is “Wives” (1919) about a man who is critical of the wives his friends have married but “can’t see that he himself has married just such a woman.” The most interesting of these stories, however, are “those that eschew facile humor and probe deeper emotions,” such as “The Man of God” (1918), which “sensitively portrays a grocer who is fired with evangelical zeal,” and “The Window of Horrors” (1917), “a tale that does not require the supernatural to chill [Mencken’s] readers.” The two “most impressive stories” are Mencken’s longest, “The Barbarous Bradley” (1914) and “The Charmed Circle” (1917), both of which satirize class distinctions and domestic conflict. Joshi calls the latter “a veritable novella that strikingly anticipates, in its Long Island setting and high society atmosphere, the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald.”

Unmentioned by Joshi is the title story, “Bluebeard’s Goat” (1917), about a man named Richard Hoof (!), a philanderer who finally professes his love for a woman who tells him that although she likes him so much, “there’s someone else,” and so he buys a bunch of violets and hurries home to his wife. By contrast, Bluebeard in Charles Perrault’s *Barbe Bleu* (1697) first marries and then murders one wife after another!

BIBLIOGRAPHIC CHECKLIST

**Works by H.L. Mencken
Books and Pamphlets**

H. L. MENCKEN ON AMERICAN LITERATURE, edited by S. T. Joshi. Athens, Oh.: Ohio University Press, 2002, 284 p.

After his "Introduction" and "A Note on This Edition," Mr. Joshi divides this book into five sections with differing numbers of Mencken's commentaries: "The Travails of a Book Reviewer" (4), "Establishing the Canon" (12), "Some Worthy Second-Raters" (7), "Trade Goods" (8), and "Some Thoughts on Literary Criticism" (7).

H. L. MENCKEN ON RELIGION, edited by S. T. Joshi. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2002, 330 p.

After his "Introduction," Mr. Joshi arranges this book into nine sections with differing numbers of commentaries by Mencken: "I. The Beliefs of an Iconoclast" (5), "II. Some Overviews" (13), "III. Protestants and Catholics" (5), "IV. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals" (6), "V. Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Christian Science" (6), "VI. The Scopes Trial" (17) "VII. Religion and Science" (6) "VIII. Religion and Politics" (5), and "IX. Religion and Society" (7). Mr. Joshi concluded with "Epilogue: Memorial Service," from the March, 1922 *Smart Set*, reprinted in *Prejudices: Third Series*. **MENCKEN'S AMERICA**, edited by S. T. Joshi. Athens, Oh.: Ohio University Press, 2004, 244 p.

After his "Introduction" and "A Note on This Edition," Mr. Joshi offers as "Prologue" Mencken's "On Living in the United States." Mr. Joshi then divided the book into four sections with differing numbers of commentaries by Mencken: "1. The American: A Treatise" (6); "2. The American Landscape" (7); "3. American Politics, Morality, and Religion" (6); and "4. American Art, Literature, and Culture" (4). Mr. Joshi concludes with Mencken's "Epilogue: Testament," (*Review of Reviews* 76:413-416, October, 1927). **A RELIGIOUS ORGY IN TENNESSEE: A REPORTER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SCOPES MONKEY TRIAL**, introduction by Art Winslow. Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2006, 206 p.

This collection contains sixteen columns from the Baltimore *Evening Sun* and "To Expose a Fool," (*American Mercury*, October, 1925). The *Mercury* piece is a revision of Mencken's "Bryan," the scathing obituary that ran in the Baltimore *Evening Sun* the day after Bryan died. **NOTES ON DEMOCRACY** (A New Edition). Introduction and Annotations by Marion Elizabeth Rodgers. Afterword by Anthony Lewis. New York: Dissident Books, 2006, 206 p.

COLLECTED POEMS, H. L. MENCKEN, edited by S. T. Joshi. New York: Hippocampus Press, 2009, 145 p.

After Mr. Joshi's "Introduction," the volume offers ninety-two of Mencken's poems "arranged chronologically by date of original publication" (12).

MENCKEN ON MENCKEN: A NEW COLLECTION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS, edited by S. T. Joshi. Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2010, 263 p.

After his "Introduction" and "A Note on This Edition," Mr. Joshi offers as "Prologue" the Sage's "Henry Louis Mencken (1905)." He proceeds to divide the book into four sections

containing differing numbers of commentaries by Mencken from a variety of sources: "Memories of a Long Life" (15), "Author and Journalist" (12), "Thinker" (6), and "World Traveler" (9). Mr. Joshi offers as "Epilogue" the Sage's "Henry Louis Mencken (1936)," in *Portraits and Self-Portraits*, edited Georges Schreiber (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1936).

PREJUDICES (Volume 1, First, Second, and Third Series), (Volume 2, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Series), edited by Marion Elizabeth Rodgers. New York: Library of America, 2010), 610 p. and 612 p.

THE PASSING OF A PROFIT AND OTHER FORGOTTEN STORIES. Editor Douglas Olson. San Francisco: Forgotten Stories Press, 2012, 205 p.

In His "Foreword," the editor writes that "although it is my belief that I have assembled Mencken's complete output of magazine fiction up to 1906, there is no way to be absolutely sure." He includes seventeen stories: "The Defeat of Alfonso," "The Cook's Victory," "The Woman and the Girl," "The Crime of McSwayne," "Like a Thief in the Night," "The Flight of the Victor," "The Point of the Story," "A Double Rebellion," "Hurra Lal, Peacemaker," "Firing and a Watering," "The Passing of a Profit," "The Heathen Rage," "The Fear of the Savage," "The Bend in the Tube," "The Star-Spangled Banner," "The King and Tommy Cripps," and "The Last Cavalry Charge." **THE COLLECTED DRAMA OF H. L. MENCKEN: PLAYS AND CRITICISM**. Edited by S. T. Joshi. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2012, 269 p.

Part I, "The Plays," offers the following: *The Artist: A Drama without Words*, *In the Vestry Room*, *Seeing the World*, *Asepsis: A Deduction in Scherzo Form*, *Death: A Philosophical Discussion*, *The Wedding: A Stage Direction*, and *Heliogabalus: A Buffoonery in Three Acts*.

Part II, "Mencken on Drama," offers the following: "By Way of Introduction" in *George Bernard Shaw: His Plays*, "William Shakespeare," "A Drama of Ideas," "A Plea for Comedy," Et Dukkehjemiana, "The Revival of the Printed Play," "The New Dramatic Literature," "Brieux and Others," "The Terrible Swede," "Synge and Others," Gerhart Hauptmann, "Thirty-five Printed Plays," "The Ulster Polonius," and "Ibsen: Journeyman Dramatist."

Works Reprinted in Magazines

SMIRNOFF, MARC. The Best Southern Words Ever?: Who Knows? But Here, in Commonplace-Book Fashion, As Compiled by a Commoner, Are Dogged Candidates. *Oxford American* 77, Spring, 2012, pp. 14-15.

In his "Editor's Box," Marc Smirnoff offers two Mencken quotations, the first in a letter to Emily Clark, editor of *The Reviewer*, "Criticism and progress, to be effective, must be iconoclastic and pugnacious. Before a sound literature can arise in the South, the old nonsense must be knocked down, and from within. It will be useless to attempt a compromise. You must arm yourself and take the high road, ready to cut throats whenever it is necessary. The thing must be done boldly, and . . . a bit cruelly."

Mencken proclaimed that New Yorker Al Smith, the unsuccessful Democratic nominee for president in 1928, "has been ruined, I greatly fear, by associating with rich men—a thing far more dangerous for politicians than ever booze or the

sound of their own voices."

Sections of Books devoted to H.L. Mencken
KASPER, ROB. *Baltimore Beer: A Satisfying History of Charm City Brewing*. Charleston and London: History Press, 2012, p. 39.

Mencken "railed against Carrie Nation and her temperance troops, calling prohibition 'a horror.' Mencken, like many thirsty residents of Baltimore, took to brewing his own beer in his Union Square home. He usually brewed on Sunday and bottled on Wednesday. . . . [M]any of his beers became 'bombs.'"

"'Last night I had three quart bottles in my side yard cooling in a bucket,' he wrote to his friend Harry Rickel. 'Two went off at once, bringing my neighbor out of his house with yells. He thought the Soviets had seized the town.'"

Mencken appreciated Baltimore's "wet" environment and wrote to F. Scott Fitzgerald: "Baltimore is knee-deep in excellent beer. I begin to believe in prayer."

In April, 1933, when Prohibition for beer was repealed, Mencken visited the Rennert Hotel, down Cathedral Street from Mencken and Sara's apartment at 704. He quaffed a beer and remarked, "Pretty good. Not bad at all."

GATELY, IAIN. *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol*. New York: Gotham Books, 2008, see Index.

Mencken called the martini "the only American invention as perfect as a sonnet." Writing prior to the presidential election of 1928, Mencken weighed the consequences of Democratic nominee Al Smith's Catholicism and opposition to Prohibition: "If [Smith] wins tomorrow, it will be because American people have decided at last to vote as they drink. . . . If he loses, it will be because those who fear the pope outnumber those who are tired of the Anti-Saloon League." Smith lost.

RATNER-ROSENHAGEN, JENNIFER. *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011, see Index.

Professor Ratner-Rosenhagen discusses Mencken in a variety of contexts. Mencken, Emma Goldman and Randolph Bourne "mined Nietzsche's texts for his critique of Judeo-Christian asceticism and moral theology as they attempted to come to terms with the lingering influence of Puritanism on modern American thought."

Mencken "interpreted the moral austerity and intellectual vacuity of the American mind as 'neo-Puritanism, a la Nietzsche.'" The author proceeds to discuss "Puritanism as a Literary Force" in *A Book of Prefaces*.

Dr. Ratner-Rosenhagen explains that "no author did more to establish the persona of Friedrich Nietzsche in America than H. L. Mencken. His 1908 study, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, the first full-length English-language book written for a general audience in American—offered a rollicking master narrative about Nietzsche's religious upbringing, his intellectual path from parsonage to public enemy, his battles with poor health, and his warfare on the slave morality of modern Christianity." This book "was just the beginning of his Nietzscheana. . . . Nietzsche's ideas and image were for Mencken gifts that kept on giving. . . ."

AN APPRECIATION OF TWO MENCKEN MEN

Arthur J. Gutman, president of the Mencken Society for 20 years and since 1976 its chief booster, conscience, and unofficial historian, died November 26. He was 101 years old.

He was born in 1911 and graduated from Baltimore City College in 1928. He took a law degree at the University of Baltimore, graduating with an LLB in 1934.

He served in the Army Air Corps, later to become the United States Air Force, from 1942-1945, and after mustering out continued serving in the reserves, from 1947-1949. He then served as staff Chief Warrant Officer of the 29th Infantry till 1955.

His interest in H.L. Mencken began in his youth, but bloomed during his stint in the air force. He explained in a letter to the editor in the Baltimore Evening Sun:

"One miserable rainy, cold day in January 1944, in Italy, an Air Force sergeant with a couple of leisure hours stopped in a Red Cross Club for a cup of coffee... The sergeant was a Baltimorean, one of those who loved his City. He was a third generation born Baltimorean, of German Jewish stock, from a dry goods family who had been badly hurt in the Depression. He had grown up believing there was only one set of newspapers worth reading, *The Sun*, *The Evening Sun* and *The Sunday Sun*. And in *The Evening Sun*, you looked for the Monday night articles by Mencken. You laughed with him, you groaned with him... The sergeant, waiting for his coffee to cool and his feet to dry, looked over the Armed Forces Library of paper backs. And lo and behold there was one with Mencken's name, called *Heathen Days*. He leafed through it and then sat and read it, and it brought Baltimore back to him as the words flowed by."

The clipping is undated, and is

ARTHUR GUTMAN, 1911-2012

part of the impressive collection of Menckeniana that Gutman donated to the University of Maryland in 2003. The collection includes works by Mencken as well as a nearly complete set of Mencken Society newsletters.

He married his wife, the former Mary Louise "Wheezy" Fleischmann, in 1968. Mrs. Gutman, a former city tennis champion and collector of British ceramics, died in 2008.

Mencken Society members were quick to offer tribute.

As Alfred Knopf once said of Mencken, no matter how many years passed, Arthur was always there. *Now he is gone, and for so many of us, it is a sad end to an era.*

—Marion Elizabeth Rodgers

From MARION ELIZABETH RODGERS, Mencken scholar and author of *Mencken: The American Iconoclast* and other works:

"There are two things people need to know about Arthur Gutman. First, he had the memory of an elephant. Cite any book: not only had he read it, but he could rattle off paragraphs verbatim, even tell personal stories about the author. Ask about bygone

Baltimore, and out came anecdotes about the Baltimore fire of 1904, the Cone sisters, what the city was like during the 20s, 30s and 40s. He was a member of a generation who read Mencken's columns when they appeared in the newspaper each Monday. During World War II, "Arthur was one of many GI's carrying around Mencken's DAYS books, issued in pocket size for the armed forces overseas. Those books became the basis for the collection of Menckeniana that Arthur donated to the University of Maryland in 2003. What made Arthur different from so many other rabid collectors was he bought all those books to read-- not just for display. I suspect one reason Arthur traveled so often was just so he could haul new converts into the Mencken Society net.

"Then there was his energy. Until the end, he defied chronology. Knowing he and Wheezy were night owls like me, I once telephoned them at ten o'clock; they were just starting on their second cocktail. Senior living made Arthur feel caged in. "The residents eat dinner at five," he growled, "and batten down the hatches by six." His kindnesses ranged from gifts of tomatoes from his garden to playing surrogate uncle to me, my parents, and later my husband. In his twilight years, he appreciated Mencken's line, "As he grew older, he grew worse." As Alfred Knopf once said of Mencken, no matter how many years passed, Arthur was always there. Now he is gone, and for so many of us, it is a sad end to an era."

From BOB BRUGGER, editor at Johns Hopkins University Press and president of the Mencken Society:

Arthur J. Gutman's extensive knowledge of Mencken and his work; his generous entertainment of out-of-town attendees on the eve of

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Mencken Day; and overall his great investment of time and energy in the Mencken Society, which he had helped to establish, both sustained and built that group, especially during a presidency of twenty years after 1979. Members who attended the society's morning sessions on Mencken Day will remember his gruff demeanor and quick wit. At times he could almost have been Mencken himself, running a meeting in the Wheeler Auditorium with full-throated hostility to *Robert's Rules of Order*. God had to help those who spoke up on the wrong foot or were slow to finish a question. Offstage, he was pretty much the same figure, although memorably willing to listen to friends, commiserate when they unburdened themselves, and make offers of help. He had many friends in the Mencken Society. We shall miss him.

From VINCE FITZPATRICK, Curator of the H.L. Mencken Room at the Enoch Pratt Free Library and author of *H.L. Mencken*:

I had the good fortune to know Arthur Gutman for more than thirty years. We first broke bread together during the summer of 1979. I had just finished graduate school, and he was soon to succeed Dr. Carl Bode as the President of the Mencken Society. Arthur asked me to serve as the Meetings Chairman. I held this position for eight years and very much enjoyed my interactions with Arthur. He very much enjoyed this organization that was so dear to him, that he ran so expertly, and that did so much to help keep Mencken's flame alive. We met in libraries and taverns, churches and colleges. The Society was informed and entertained by journalists and professors, as well as by a lawyer and a clergyman and the Belgian Ambassador to the United States.

These meetings usually proceeded smoothly. The most memorable exception occurred in June, 1982.



Vince Fitzpatrick, Pratt librarian Sara Siebert, and Arthur Gutman on the steps of the H.L. Mencken House, June, 1982

(Photo courtesy Vince Fitzpatrick)

A meeting was scheduled for the Mencken House, then owned by the University of Maryland. When I tried to unlock the front door that Saturday afternoon, I discovered that the university had given me the wrong key. I walked around to the alley, Booth Street, and discovered that the rear gate was locked, as usual. The crowd swelled in front of the house. I sweated more and more. Finally, inspiration seized me.

I knocked on the front door of 1522 Hollins St., the house to the east, introduced myself, explained our predicament, and asked the lady if I might gain access to her back yard. Very graciously, she invited me inside. Once in her back yard, I scaled Mencken's east wall and hopped down into his backyard. I found an unlocked window in the dining room, raised it, slithered into the house, and proceeded to open the front door. The crowd cheered, and we proceeded with the meeting. For years afterwards, Arthur laughed heartily about the absurd events of that afternoon.

Mencken's work delighted Arthur,

and for decades we discussed this remarkable writing, some of the best prose non-fiction produced in this gaudy republic that gave the Sage so much delight and consternation. We talked over many lunches, and we ate very well: crab cakes at Faidley's; corned beet at Mary Mervis and Attman's and Miller's over on Smith Avenue; and, more recently, pit beef and pork barbecue at Andy Nelson's.

We also talked frequently about military history, especially the Civil War. From the huge height of his years, he spun out his memories of a bygone Baltimore: a child sledding down Eutaw Place toward North Avenue, buying oysters by the barrel, and the old Friends School in Bolton Hill. He had walked through the history about which I had to read. He remembered everything, and he was an entrancing raconteur.

Throughout his long and full life, Arthur enjoyed himself immensely, and he remained always curious about time present as well as time past. We had a lot of fun together. *Frater, Ave, atque Vale*: Hail, brother, and farewell.

RICHARD D. PICKENS II, 1962-2012

Richard D. Pickens II, an interior designer and president of the Friends of the H.L. Mencken House, died Nov. 27 of cancer. He was 50 years old.

He was the owner of MGP Interiors, a Washington, D.C.-area firm. His clients included the White House, numerous embassies and museums, law firms and private homes.

He was the former registrar and exhibitor relations coordinator for the Smithsonian Institution, and studied in Venice, Italy, under a Guggenheim Studentship. For several years he was director of historic preservation for the Union Square Association.

Pickens lived on Hollins Street, about a block away from the historic H.L. Mencken House.

Phil Hildebrandt, vice president of the Friends of the H.L. Mencken House, said that Pickens' death was a hard blow to the organization, which has been laboring for 15 years to restore and reopen the Union Square home where Mencken lived for most of his life.

"Where do we go from here? He was a very pivotal person in our effort," said Hildebrandt. "He was doing more than his share of work in the group."

Hildebrandt said that Pickens got involved in the effort to reopen the Mencken House two or three years ago. "He has lived in this neighborhood for several years now," he said. "He's not a Mencken scholar and not a fan of Mencken previously. He saw what we were doing to try to save the house and thought it was a worthwhile neighborhood project."

The Friends have been trying to negotiate a lease that would allow them to operate the three-story Victorian rowhouse at 1524 Hollins St. Pickens was helping to negotiate the terms.

"He was very effective and

hardworking, and got things to the point where we could taste victory in our long struggle to reopen the Mencken House," said Oleg Panczenko, secretary of the preservation group. "Everything seemed to be going our way, finally."

Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, author and biographer of Mencken, became friends with Pickens through their mutual interest in the Mencken House. Rodgers, author of "Mencken, American Iconoclast: The Life and Times of the Bad Boy of Baltimore," sent an appreciation.

"Richard was one of those giving and accomplished people who are all too rare. He was the driving and positive force behind the saving of the Mencken House, to which he devoted his talents and passions. He was without ego, modest of his considerable gifts and skills. He was a sympathetic listener, keeper of

confidences, dear friend.

"Last April he and I spent the day together at the Mencken House. By chance, the subject turned to mortality. We observed how, in certain rooms, we could still feel Mencken's presence. I remarked that after our earthly life is over, I believed our souls live on, as a form of energy. He reacted with that infectious laugh of his, and then grew pensive. 'Yes,' he said, 'You are probably right.' His memory remains vivid; even so, how I will miss him."

Pickens is survived by his parents, Robert and Babette Pickens, of Annapolis; his brother, Robert Scott Pickens; three aunts and an uncle.

In lieu of flowers the family has requested memorial donations to the Friends of the H.L. Mencken House, P.O. Box 22501, Baltimore, MD 21203.



Sarah Littlepage, Richard Pickens and Jennifer Bodine tended the Friends of the H.L. Mencken House booth at the Baltimore Book Festival in September.

(Photo by Stacy Spaulding, Friends of the H.L. Mencken House)

The Saturday Night Club coat of arms

(The H.L. Mencken Collection, Enoch Pratt Free Library)



The Mencken Society

Established in 1976

The society meets the morning of Mencken Day every year at the Central Library of the Enoch Pratt Free Library—when, according to H. L. Mencken's own instructions, the Mencken Room is open to the public—and at other times as announced. The society devotes itself to the study of H. L. Mencken and his work; an appreciation of the Menckonian branch of skepticism, criticism, and humor; and the enjoyment of good discussion and company. The society contributes funds to the Pratt Library to support the Mencken Room and honor its first treasurer and long-time president, Arthur J. Gutman. Membership dues are \$35 each year and include a subscription to *Menckiana*. Address all correspondence to the society president or treasurer at P. O. Box 16218, Baltimore, MD 21210. Visit the society's website: www.mencken.org.