



Walker Percy (c) makes a point to Russell Kirk (l) and Thomas Fleming.

ear time and history. By a "certain view of reality" I am speaking of the linearity of history, the density of things and events, the mystery and uniqueness of persons, a view that seems natural to us but is in fact the cultural heritage of Judeo-Christianity. Which is to say that I haven't read any good Buddhist novels lately. It is to say also that B.F. Skinner, who believed that all life is a matter of stimuli and responses, could not possibly write a good novel—though I believe in fact that he did try. It is to say that the novels of H.G. Wells could not possibly be otherwise than as bad as they are. And I have never read a Marxist novel without being overwhelmed by the thesis.

—from Walker Percy, "Physician as Novelist," May 1989

CLASSICAL PAIDEIA

It is said that one bright young theorist told his friends as he lay dying of AIDS, "I die happy, because I was infected by Michel Foucault." Those words could be, may yet be, the epitaph of the humanities in the United States. Unlike AIDS, there is a cure for postmodernism. It will not come from quoting a few paragraphs of Derrida, or Said, or Kristeva out of the context of their entire careers. It must come from returning to the rich and lively and essential traditions of editing and commenting on the texts that are the basis not only of literary studies, but of our civilization, from antiquity to the present.

—from E. Christian Kopff, "Postmodernism, Theory, and the End of the Humanities," January 1996

I know we cannot get back to the ideal of "classical" man with classical learning, classical books, and a closed and classical worldview in which everything is neatly and finally put in its place; "classical man" of this kind was living in quite another world than ours, if he ever was alive. We have consigned the *logos* to computers, which make it incredibly effective yet unintelligible (safe, specific details perceived by specialists of details), and to the media, where entertainment successfully masks the tyranny of money.

The study of humanity's evolution in history—and this final-

ly is what classical scholars, for their part, try to do—may still encourage a fuller understanding of our world, in which humans are confronted with each other and with reality, confronted with the strangeness of people and the strangeness of being, to be—one can hope—overcome by insight. The hope of Greek philosophers that it is possible to speak with intelligence about what is real should still persist, and even a Hellenist will acknowledge that this must not necessarily be done in Greek . . .

—from Walter Burkert, "Classics—Past Ideology and Persistent Reality," April 1993



Tom McCluskey

Thomas Fleming (l) and John Howard (r) with Ingersoll Prize winners Muriel Spark and Walter Burkert.

DECLINE AND FALL

I cannot swear that we are completely on the other side of the age of reciprocal misunderstandings and ignorance, but I would venture that at this moment, in the late 20th century, our democracies are closer and more similar than ever before. On both sides of the Atlantic, we face the same big social questions, rendered more acute each day by the extension of the notion of "rights." The more wealth our societies produce, the more intense becomes the debate over how it should be distributed. In this realm, America has the same sort of problems as France and Western Europeans in general. The list runs from the urban crisis (which in Europe has taken the form of a suburban crisis) to the problem of how to pay for Social Security. Everywhere, political democracy has become social, and in this domain, America, in spite of her tradition of extreme individualism, has the same problems as the European welfare states.

—from François Furet, "The Long Apprenticeship: American Democracy and the Future of Europe," July 1996

What will Americans of 2030 think when they walk the streets of New York and Los Angeles as we walk the streets of the 19th-century towns? We cherish the remains of the older towns and cities and take pride in the lives that created those communities and formed the character of those times. It is hard to imagine any thoughtful, civilized American of 2030 looking at the 1980's and 1990's and having similar feelings of pride. In fact, New York and Los Angeles and other aggregations of mass humanity may not even exist then in a recognizable way. They may have imploded, with responsible law-abiding, self-reliant citizens fleeing their precincts, leaving behind masses of irresponsible, lawless, dependent proletarians inhabiting a near-wasteland. Already masses of young men who are unfit for anything but a life of crime fill the big cities, where car theft is a rite of passage and where indiscriminate, drive-by shootings have reduced streets to the condition of Beirut.

—from Anthony Harrigan, "The Plains States and America's Future," December 1993

The literary nihilists, the artists of disorder, enjoin us to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. One may discern in any day's newspaper some item that is evidence of a widespread "intellectual" hostility toward religious belief and toward true humanism. Leading book publishers puff up works of fiction meant to convince us that indeed we are but naked apes, and works of political polemics intended to repudiate our social order and bring on, at best, what Tocqueville calls "democratic despotism." Reviewers simper at the obscene and revile intemperately—or ignore altogether—books that attempt to work a renewal of mind and conscience. The oligarchs of the antagonist world, in the realm of letters, are eager to attract more dupes.

—from Russell Kirk, *"The Literature of Order,"* February 1985

America's ability to compete in the world was also affected by its high rates of violent crime. By 1985 it had five times more homicides, ten times more rapes, and 17 times more robberies than Japan. New York City had twice as many homicides as in all of Japan. In the five years of the early 1980's, United States business had to hire 602,000 security officers just to keep people from ripping them off. This crime wave was costly both to the citizens' psyche and to the efficiency of the economy.

By 1986 Japan's taxpayers supported 50,000 inmates, including pretrial detention inmates, while the United States supported 580,000 adult prisoners. If you were to take all the prisoners in the United States in 1986 and put them in one place, it would have been a city larger than Detroit. That city had two suburbs—West Probation and East Parole—that contained another 3.7 million people. One out of 35 American males in 1986 was on probation or on parole. Such figures were hardly conducive to quality products.

—from Richard Lamm, *"Decline of the West: A Western View on the Fall of American Civilization,"* February 1989

At the moment there are 540 municipal employees in the city work force for every 10,000 people in the city. That ratio doesn't mean very much until it is compared to the second highest such ratio among American cities. Detroit has 206 municipal workers for every 10,000 in the population. New York is by any measure the last and most entrenched bastion of socialism in the world. There are more school administrators (5,400) at 110 Livingston Street, the nerve center of the city's school system, than there are from Portugal to the Ural Mountains.

—from Herbert I. London, *"Letter From New York City: Life as Pathology,"* July 1993

I grew up in a Los Angeles that had very little crime. We locked the door to our house with a skeleton key, when we remembered. I often think of the contrast with today when listening to rebroadcasts of the *Dragnet* radio series that originally aired in the early 1950's. It was one of my favorites then and still beats TV now. Jack Webb stuck close to real cases and was a stickler for detail. As Sergeant Joe Friday, he went after murderers and robbers, to be sure, but much of the time he was tracking such public enemies as shoplifters, bicycle thieves, check forgers, drag racers, teenage rowdies, and the like. Call the LAPD today and report that your bicycle has been stolen! Cars are stolen so often (nearly 200 a day) that the LAPD does nothing more than list the vehicle on a "hot sheet" and wish the victim good luck. Korean merchants complain that customers brazenly walk out of their stores without paying for merchandise because they

know that the police will not respond to a call for help. The police are simply overwhelmed by the volume of crime and are kept more than fully occupied by murder, armed robbery, and rape.

—from Roger D. McGrath, *"Treat Them to a Good Dose of Lead,"* January 1994



Back row (from left): E. Christian Kopff, Clyde Wilson, William Mills, Thomas Fleming, Harold O.J. Brown, Andrei Navrozov, Paul Gottfried. Front row: John Shelton Reed, Bryce Christensen, Joseph Schwartz, Katherine Dalton, Russell Kirk.

The buffalo has become a symbol for th[e] recognition of a modern devastation. We are told by Peter Matthiessen that there were an estimated 60 million buffalo on the Great Plains well into the 19th century, "probably the greatest animal congregations that ever existed on earth." The animal is extinct in the wilds now. That is a fairly impressive record no matter how you look at it: destroying the greatest animal congregation that ever existed on earth. This we managed, we must remind ourselves, with merely horses and rifles. Now we have . . . well, probably no need to go into all that.

A large number of people lately feel that the genie has got out of the bottle and he is us. It's as if you have the buffalo bull by the tail, and as he races across the prairie, someone is yelling, "Turn him, turn him." Such a sense of helplessness has generated an urgency on the part of many for a myth that can engender responsibility for the present and the future. . . . It is clear that thoughtless narcissism (protecting animals that look more like us), or a detached urban puritanism (one lady was mad about a polluted swamp out our way, and the "pollution" turned out to be duckweed), is not going to serve. Our great grasslands, like our swamps and arctic "wastes," had until recently been ignored while we went about paving the rest of the country. They were thought to be forbidding, not in the top-ten places to go; but now that is changing. . . .

Many people are under the impression that once Superfund money is spent on a cleanup, that's the end of it. Wrong. The U.S. government turns around and sues all of the individual property owners to get the money back, even though they may have acquired the land after the damage was done by someone else. Which brings us back to Burke's flies of a summer. "Unmindful of . . . what is due to their posterity, [the temporary possessors and life-renters] [w]ould act as if they were the entire masters." Some of the pioneers could be right messy. They were on the way elsewhere, toward something over the horizon. Perhaps more land, more water, more gold, even something intangible, boundless. After all, shouldn't a man's reach exceed his grasp? On the way, however, the scene sometimes resembles the aftermath of recent barbarians whizzing down the interstate, dumping McDonald's portable, disposable dinner ser-