2012.3.71

MARGARET W. PEPPERDENE

MARGARET W. (JANE) PEPPERDENE stands at a podium before the audience, referring to notes. Recording begins just after her presentation has begun, mid-sentence.

DR. PEPPERDENE: . . . in which a writer for a popular news weekly had digressed momentarily from the show's topic [inaudible] to give his views on what is happening in universities and colleges across the land as part of a realignment of our whole educational system. The commentator spoke not only of the current controversies over political correctness, multiculturalism, diversity in the curriculum and in the whole college-university culture, he also took the occasion to remember his university days and the quality of instruction provided by faculty who taught full time, both graduate and undergraduate courses, and also did significant research. Of age to have had the best, he named his university and his teachers: Columbia University and Lionel Trilling and Mark van Doren, both of whom, he said, taught the usual fifteen to eighteen hours a week. You tell that now to a university professor, and he will go into cardiac arrest [*audience laughter*]. Now, professors of this distinction—if one can find them—have little contact with undergraduates and only modest connection with graduate students. They spend their time doing research, writing, and giving an occasional lecture. I might add parenthetically that the cost of sending a young man or a young woman to college these days has increased in proportion to the quality of education's decline. Harvard, I read yesterday, costs $24,000 a year; and that's just basic. It doesn't take into consideration clothes, toothpaste—all the little incidentals that have to go along with the student getting—and I think Harvard—I think those figures are pretty much the same for most Ivy League schools. Anyway, it costs an enormous amount of money to go to a university these days.

So, the coming together of these two experiences—Mr. Bridge's [Bridger's?] call and listening to this news program—gave me the subject of my talk to you today. He'd asked me for a reminiscence. The program invited me to remember, to think back on my coming some thirty years ago to a small college in Decatur, Georgia, and to call up those days that were a unique time, not just in that college's history, but in the story of education itself in the late fifties and early sixties

in this country. Now, let me say right off that I've not got any intention of just basking in the memories of the good old days at Agnes Scott. I learned a long time ago the dangerous propensity most of us have for what I call "Eden-izing" our youth, for looking back nostalgically from the bleak peak of age to those carefree college days when we were brilliant and beautiful and handsome and clever, [*audience laughter*], when we partied till two and were even more exciting till dawn [*audience laughter*], when we were quoting Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot or Freud all the time. Oh, we look back at—you would never think that we had one moment's pause, one anxiety. It was just absolute heaven. Even so great a realist as Chaucer's Alice of Bath, whose memory is phenomenal, if selective, chooses to look back on her youthful self as slim and graceful, almost entirely beautiful, dancing to the harp and singing like a nightingale. But one suspects that only the latter, properly understood, is anywhere near the truth for Alice of Bath. So I do not plan to what I call again "pastoralize" my past at Agnes Scott, and I don't because there really isn't any need to. The glow of retrospect could in no way enhance the natural radiance of the academic community that I found there,: teachers and students—indeed, students all—who loved to study; who simply and unselfconsciously wanted to know and to learn; who felt neither the desire to impress anyone with, nor the urge to apologize to anyone for, these interests and efforts.

I wanted to recall this past today because it is more than Agnes Scott's heritage; it is, in fact, her identity. And in a time when the academy is in such a fractured state—and I think we all know that it is—it is salutary for all of us to remember any institution with such a past. You know, if one can remember it—I'm not talking about going back and trying to be like it--but one can always call up from that past something that can make the future have promise. I am reminded, too, that every age, political or academic, somehow reenacts that famous Virgilian moment of the Second Book of *The Aeneid*. You remember: Aeneas is leaving the burning Troy, and he leads his small son, Ascanius, by the hand; but he carries on his back his old father, Anchises. These three form what has been called the human trinity of courage, hope, and memory, these three things needed to found the new empire, which is Rome. Aeneas, who is the courage of now, knows in his son, Ascanius, is the hope of that future. But he realizes, too, that memory--the past, the history of Troy and Greece—must be carried into that new world of order and peace and civilization like Anchises

on his back, else the full meaning of what this new world has cost—and it has cost a great deal; he is just leaving a war, and Troy is decimated. So he takes Anchises with him to remember never to forget what it cost, what this new world will have come from, and he doesn't want that to be forgotten. That most important part of human history must stay with him, the human story, always. So today I want to say a word for Anchises, what you take with you, the past that you take so that future will have some kind of shape that it will perhaps—just perhaps—learn something from where the human being has been.

I came first to Agnes Scott—to the Agnes Scott campus—during the Christmas vacation of 1955. I was then teaching at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio; and I heard from Walter Clyde Curry, with whom I had worked on Chaucer at Vanderbilt, that there was an opening in the English department at Agnes Scott for which he wanted to recommend me if I were interested. That was the tenor of his letter—short note, just said, "If you're interested, stop by my office when you're in town"--and he knew I was going to be there, because I usually came down for the holidays—he said, "and talk to me." I was very interested.

Indeed, I had just about decided to leave teaching. The situation at Miami was grim. The university was growing and growing, and it had enormous potential. We had begun to use television to teach freshmen. I had a ninety-six-student freshman class, which I taught on television. I had student assistants to grade the papers; I just lectured—can you imagine?—on freshman English in front of a camera. I had no contact with the students in that class. I knew absolutely nothing about what they learned, how much they—what kind of connection they made with me--I couldn't imagine they made very much. That was one class. I had another class of a more normal size, about twenty-six. These were made up of members of Ara Parseghian—he was a football coach at Miami then—they were all his boys [*audience laughter*]. They were majoring in freshman English [*audience laughter*]. Most of them I had had since they were freshmen; most of them were seniors [*audience laughter*], but this was the only course that they took that had any kind of academic connection whatsoever; and most of them weren't going to make it. I remember we met in a—it wasn't exactly a chemistry lab, but it was one of those chemistry lecture rooms that has all the tiered seats in it. The desk was not a desk; it was like one of those big chemistry tables. And there were gas jets on each end [*audience laughter*]; and there were lots

of times when I wanted to say, "Boys, close the windows," and I would turn on the jets, and I would leave [*audience laughter*]. And so, I mean, you go from the sublime to the I don't know what. But there was talking to a television camera or talking into an absolute void [*audience laughter*]. So it wasn't all Agnes Scott's enticement, I have to be honest. Besides, there wasn't any possibility of my ever teaching a course in Chaucer. There was a gentleman there who thought he knew a great deal about Chaucer who was, as they said in [inaudible], sitting on the course, and he wasn't about to give it up.

So I was delighted to get Professor Curry's letter, which arrived in Oxford [Ohio] right before the Christmas holiday began. I knew absolutely nothing about Agnes Scott. All of my good-hearted colleagues, who were—I mean, we were friends, and they were nice enough to think that it would be nice if I didn't leave—they said, "You don't want to go down there. It's just another finishing school in the South. All you learn to do is pour tea" [*audience laughter*]. So. anyway, as I say, I knew not a thing about Agnes Scott. But on the day after Christmas in Nashville I received a telephone call from George Hayes, who was then the chairman of the English department at Agnes Scott; and he invited me to come to the college for an interview.

Now, I'm going to, in the next few minutes, talk about a number of people. Many of you don't know them, but this community should remember these people. They were, all of them, really one of a kind. First, of course, is George Hayes. But, anyway, I drove down from Nashville, where I was spending the holidays, and got into Decatur on a dreary, rainy, pitch-black, dark night. You know, I don't think Atlanta's the best-lit city to this day. In 1955 there weren't any lights at all.
Driving out to Decatur, I remember just totally flying blind, with absolutely no—it was dark, it was dreary, it was raining, I didn't know where in the world I was, and finally located the marvelous place that Mr. Hayes had arranged for me to stay: the Candler Hotel in beautiful downtown Decatur [*audience laughter*].

It had already begun to be a kind of halfway house [*audience laughter*]. It was well on its way to that state; and right now, you know, it has been put out of its misery. But at any rate I got to the Candler Hotel, and I got myself a room, and I got upstairs, and I thought, "Well, I'll take a bath before I call Mr. Hayes and say that I'm here." Well, I go into the bathroom and discover that they didn't have any towels or washcloths, because so many of their [*under her breath says, "Tramps"*]—so many of their--of the

people who stayed there obviously took them away. So you had to call the desk to get them to deliver a towel and a washcloth, and I think you really had to check them back in when you left. But anyway, I got settled in and got myself a towel and a washcloth and took a bath, and then I called Mr. Hayes.

Now, I am not ever going to forget that night. I remember every single minute of it as vividly today as I did some--those thirty years past. George Hayes lurched into the hotel lobby. He had a long tweed coat, porkpie hat, looking for all the world like Groucho Marx. [*DR. PEPPERDENE demonstrates Dr. Hayes's gait; her additional brief comment is rendered inaudible by audience laughter*.] Now, let me just say one thing: this man was unbelievable. He had—before I—I mean, by that time he had taught at Agnes Scott some thirty years. He had taken his Ph.D. at Harvard. He had worked under all of the most distinguished scholar-teacher-critics of their time, not the least of whom, of course, was George Lyman Kittredge, George Hayes's ideal. In fact, in the later years of George Hayes's life, long after he had finished—had retired from Agnes Scott, when he was well into his eighties, he came by my house once, and he said, "I feel terrible."

And I said, "Why?"

And he said, "Because I have outlived Kittredge." It was—and he felt—because devotion to his—he was also one of—without any question in my mind—one of the greatest scholars I have ever known. He may never have written a line, but he knew, he had read more, he had absorbed more than any human being to this day I have ever known.

Well, he came--he picked me up, and we went to his house to talk, riding, by the way, in the strangest automobile I've ever seen. It was really two cars. The front part was an Oldsmobile; the back part was a Chevrolet [*audience laughter*]. But he had a friend who had put the two of them together. And—but it ran all right. To my knowledge, George—in fact, this is true—George never owned a new car until he retired, when his friends among the student body and the faculty gave him a brand-new—all together, one part—Chevrolet [*audience laughter*]. I need to say this—and I say this without any—with no pejorative--without any criticism: Those of us who came into the academic community in those days came into it—we did not come into it for the money. We practically had no money. Not just Agnes Scott but any university or college you could name. And George Hayes was married and had several

children—he didn't have enough money to buy a car. But I don't think if he'd had even more he would have spent it on a car. He would have taken the thing the friend had put together, the half-Olds/half-Chevy. Although I must say he loved having a new car that day when we had the farewell party for him at Agnes Scott.

Well, having arrived in that two-toned automobile, we sat down; and that evening was unforgettable. So much talk. George poised on an old ottoman in front of me; I on the couch opposite. I had never met anyone like him in the academic world—in the academic world or out of it, as a matter of fact. I still never have. He talked about his students, about the plays they were doing in his Shakespeare class, about their reading of Dante with him, the translations that he was using—and he knew them all; I mean, he could read Italian as well as he could read any of the translations. About the poems of Donne that he studied with his sophomores; he read for me excerpts from some of their papers and roared at their bawdiness, as I'm sure they knew that he would. About his own analyses of some of the poems. He showed me his own copy of "To His Mistress Going to Bed" all marked up with all kinds of colored pencils. He talked about his debaters, who had just won a tournament in Alabama.

Most of all, and most passionately of all, he talked about Camus, whose books and whose ideas were very much on his mind. He had been doing a non-credit course—a kind of non-credit reading is what it was, class—with some of the students. They had simply wanted to read some Camus, and so many of the moderns were simply not taught at the time. So, the students would come to the teachers, to the faculty, and say, "Would you read Camus with us?" They would ask you, "Would you read Eliot with us?" You don't understand, we were teaching two freshman sections, a sophomore class, upper-division courses, independent study, and a student says, "Would you like to read?" Yes! You don't turn them down. And so, this was what he was doing. And he loved Camus. I remember his bringing in a copy—his copy—of ***The Plague*** to read from. It was a copy so heavily marked with green and red and orange and purple and yellow crayons—not highlights, Crayolas [*audience laughter*]. They were marked up--you could hardly see the text. But he didn't have to; he already knew it by heart. I also remember the January day five years later when he walked into his class of the day—the first class—and put in bold letters on the blackboard, "Albert Camus is

dead." I followed that class. It was my Chaucer class. There the words were behind him.

He knew Shakespeare the same way he knew everything else. He insisted his students have the same kind of command of Shakespeare's texts. He gave horrendous objective tests—I'm not talking about little fill-in-the-blank—I mean, multiple-choice or true-false. He'd give them a line of Shakespeare and leave one word out; they would put the word in. I remember one of my very best students, Portia Morrison, went on to the University of Wisconsin in the early '60s—mid-'60s, and she was doing a master's degree in English. And she wrote me, and she said how impressed the students on her hall were—she was taking a course in Shakespeare, and she'd had George's class at Agnes Scott—and they were just overwhelmed at how well she knew *Hamlet*. She said, "Mrs. Pepperdene, I had to. We all knew it backward. We either knew it, or we flunked" [*audience laughter*]. And I really mean that. They were just steeped in the—George taught them—as he used to always say, "It's between you and the text." And that was an incredible—that was a shotgun wedding, right down the line.

Well, the whole night we talked over and over about what he'd been reading, yes; but we talked, too, about his study during the holidays, of studying his lessons for the new quarter, which was soon to begin. Those were George Hayes's special words: study, studying. And they catch precisely the unpretentiousness, the unselfconscious simplicity of the intellectual life I met in him and found later to be characteristic of the whole college. These were teachers who were students, and they always thought of themselves that way. They studied. They did their lessons. I make such a point of this use of language because in the academic world I had been living in we would never have used such a plain word as "study." That was for undergraduates, if not for high school students. We, well, we prepared lectures. We did research. We went to parties—academic parties, and we talked about all the articles we'd written and all the books we had in us, all our publications. Nor did we ever talk about teaching or about students the way I heard George Hayes do that night or Ellen Douglass Leyburn or Wallace M. Alston, the president, do the next day and campus colleagues do once I had got to Agnes Scott.

There was nothing cozy or intimate in the attitude I heard, no sense of the teachers and the students being boon companions, being pals, being friends; no indication of any kind of untoward familiarity. There was mutual respect and mutual

regard. The relationship was exciting and intense and binding but ultimately impersonal. As I was putting all these memories together the other day, I read that column of William Buckley in the local paper; and he was talking about some of the situations at the colleges and universities now—there's a great deal of discussion about that, as you know. And he said one of the things that strikes him now is that—and by the way at Agnes Scott, it was—we spoke of Miss Pate, Miss Leyburn, Mr. Hayes, Mrs. Pepperdene—we never—everybody assumed that everybody had a Ph.D.; and we didn't "Doctor" each other to death [*audience laughter*]. But now, Bill Buckley said, their colleagues all call them Dr. Jones and Dr. Smith and Dr. Buckley, but their students all call them Chuck and Dick and [inaudible over audience laughter].

That was a magic night for me, a little like the way Keats must have felt on first looking into Chapman's *Homer*. A whole new kind of academic world was beginning to open up for me, one in which men and women quietly and completely gave themselves to learning and to teaching. What astonished me was not just the discovery of a George Hayes on that wintry night but the presence of so many more teachers essentially like him when I arrived at Agnes Scott the following September. Here were colleagues—my colleagues who shared his intellectual interests and yearnings, whose whole demeanor in the affair of learning was just like his: unassuming, unpretentious, curious, dedicated, serious, playful, passionate. Men and women who engendered in their students the kind of devotion to and enthusiasm for learning. There were women like Ellen Douglass Leyburn, a scholar-teacher of elegance and discrimination and power. And thanks to Dr. Alston I was the first Ellen Douglass Leyburn Professor of English at Agnes Scott. And that's a title that I bore—that bore for me more meaning than any other title I have had or ever could have.

She had taken her master's degree from Agnes Scott in the late '20s, in 1927. She'd gone to Yale and got her Ph.D. and I think had taught a little while—maybe in West Virginia--I've forgotten those details. But she'd written back to President McCain to inquire if there were any openings at Agnes Scott, her alma mater. And Dr. McCain offered her a job at Agnes Scott. I forget the year, but I do remember the terms of her contract because Dr. McCain himself told me. He said, "Oh, yes, we'd love to have her back; but we were a little short of funds. So, she came back and taught at Agnes Scott in those early years for room and board."

In fact, just a few weeks ago, I met with some of her former honor—some of her former freshman honor students. This was their twenty-fifth reunion, and we regaled ourselves that evening talking about Miss Leyburn and some of her wonderful idiosyncrasies. She was such--as I say, she was an incredibly learned woman and had a kind of poise and elegance, even as she taught—an incredible dignity but withal an exquisite sensitivity of the students and a real kindness. And the students were always delighted—there was a—some of the stories—one of the wonderful stories they were telling about her was that she would ask a question. They would make an idiotic answer, and she would somehow take that answer and reformulate it right on their mouths so it seemed to be coming out of their mouths correctly. They were—they talked about—she never—from the moment that she came to that campus till the moment she spent her last day on it, when the students—when a class handed in their paper on a given day, they got it back the next morning, no matter what, even if the class numbered sixty, as it frequently did in Modern Drama. She was—they laughed about her flawless comments on the papers—the ones they could read. Her handwriting was almost as bad as mine. But at any rate, what they— and even so, they looked at the words, and kind of--most of which they didn't understand, but they did learn very quickly.

But her—everything about her—and most of all her devotion to them—I remember that when we first in the English Department exempted students from the traditional sophomore class in English—that is, these were the special students, especially in Miss Leyburn's honors class—then she and Mr. Hayes decided what courses they could take, and so the first year—and these were the students who were here just a few weeks ago—they would be allowed to take the Chaucer course in the fall and then Shakespeare in the winter and then romantic poetry in the spring. And so, she put them—they were in my class, and she gave me very careful instructions as to what I was to do and how I was to teach these students. Let me tell you something, if you think the students paid attention to her, so did the faculty [*audience laughter*]. She was off doing research at Harvard—really, she was writing a book—and she wrote me regularly; and in particular, she always said, "How are my darlings doing?" She kept up with them even at that distance. As I say, a most remarkable woman. At any time—and she was invited to go other places to teach many times; it never occurred to her to leave Agnes Scott.

There was Muriel Harn, professor of German and Spanish and chairman of both departments. I might note that these people, like Ms. Harn, taught anywhere from twenty to twenty-four hours every term—and had to, to cover all the courses in both of those departments. She was the first woman Ph.D. from The Johns Hopkins University and a woman who lived almost solely for the mind and one of the most simple and remarkably delightful people I've ever known. Her home—desks were book-laden—you had a hard time finding a book in English—Portuguese, Spanish, German, French, and she read them all with ease. But you would never know this in just a casual encounter, except that you felt the radiance of that sort of inner intellectual energy, which was always there.

There was Catherine Simms, whose classes in English history were legend; whose quiet, scholarly pursuits were admired by her colleagues; whose serene management of a demanding profession and personal life was an inspiration to colleague and student alike. I might add parenthetically that she offered me little comfort during my second year at the college but real help in my career and confidence as a teacher. We met—we used to meet—she was terribly nice. She was always—I was—this was an exhausting job, and the demands that you put on yourself and the students put on you and your colleagues put on you, although it wasn't—it wasn't--it was just felt—it was just something—none of it—it was just there. And some of us—I had to—I was so tired—I was having lunch with Catherine Simms one day, and I said, "Look, does it ever get to the point where I won't feel as if—when I can let up a little?" And she was sitting there eating calmly, and she said, "Not really" [*audience laughter*]. And she said, "You know, Jane, I still write out all my lectures." So do I, to this very day.

And there was Walter Posey, who taught American history, who gave tests almost as ferocious as those of George Hayes—these terrible kind—these terrible objective tests—these terrible specifics out of the American history textbook. Students, however—they didn't quite do this to--I don't know, I never saw them do this to George—in fact, I don't think they could have caught him—but they thought they might do it with Walter. But there was a custom at Agnes Scott in those days during what we called—what was called Junior Jaunt. And that was a time when students raised money for various charitable purposes and organizations. And at one Junior Jaunt—one of the ways in which they raised money they used to auction faculty off as

slaves, and they brought a pretty good price [*audience laughter*]. And they auctioned—well, this was the year they—but Walter and--I was lucky. The only thing I—all I did was make beds. But they bought Walter—and this was that same group--by the way, I might add that of that group one of them now is a most distinguished historian with a Ph.D. in history from Stanford. But they bought him. They didn't want him to make any beds or do any little chores like that; they gave him a test [*audience laughter*]. They gave him a test in American history, just like he gave them. They took the test right from all those footnotes and all those indices, and they gave it to him, and he flunked it [*audience laughter*]. He made a fifty, and the students—one walked out of the mailroom and had a big sign that says, "Dr. Posey fails an easy objective test." And I thought it was the most wonderful thing; it gives you the real sense—I remember walking into that mailroom and seeing this huge sign. There weren't students close; it was Walter Posey up there. He had got his—had got his textbook and looking up [*Pantomimes Dr. Posey checking textbook against information posted on sign*]—How did he miss that? "I don't understand why I didn't know that!" [*audience laughter*] I said, "Walter, that's not my problem, it's yours!" Mystified, but not once questioning that he had really, really goofed. But as I said, they had their minute; and they loved it. But so did he.

And there was President Alston, who not only taught in the Philosophy Department, he also gave lectures on T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, and Robert Frost at different summers at Columbia Seminary. I remember when we had the Frost Centennial. President Alston had retired, but I induced him to come back and give a talk as part of it. Richard Wilbur, the poet; we had Cleanth Brooks, the famous scholar-critic, and Dr. Alston, of course, taught--gave a lecture on Robert Frost at Agnes Scott. And I was sitting next to Cleanth Brooks when—it was a stunning lecture, and when it was all through, Cleanth Brooks turned to me and said, "You told me he was a fine president. You never told me what a fine academician he was." And I also never will forget another time when he [Wallace Alston] was serving, I think, as president of the board at Columbia Seminary under Ben Kline, his former dean at Agnes Scott; and this was a special meeting of the board, and Ben wanted to be absolutely sure Wallace was going to be there. And we had invited Robert Penn Warren to the campus. I thought Wallace would be instrumental in our being able to bring him there, and we were having a special luncheon, and I invited Dr. Alston to come. And so unbeknownst to the

committee, he wrote a little note saying that he would be unable to make the board meeting. Ben said, "I could kill you." I said, "Well, he just made a choice. You don't think for one minute he's not going to have—" this was the only chance—he wanted to be there at that luncheon to sit next to Mr. Robert Penn Warren and talk to him. I mean, this was—these were—we like to talk about priorities—these were the essentials out of which the institution was made: wanting to know, wanting to learn, and taking every opportunity--Frost, who came all those years, and all those people who just came and stayed there and became part of it: like Miss Eudora Welty for so many years, Mr. Richard Wilbur for so many years.

Well, one could go on and on. But even as I set down these memories, I begin to wonder—at least, I did—I began to wonder if I were not letting the glow of retrospect begin to shine too strongly, remembering something that may never really have been; or maybe I was doing what I said in the beginning, "pastoralizing" the past of Agnes Scott. And then I remembered an article that Philip Davidson--once a member of the History Department at Agnes Scott, later president of the University of Louisville—an article that he wrote about a former colleague there, Florence Smith, it was right after she had died, and he wrote this in the alumnae quarterly. Here's how he described colleagues in their 20's [inaudible; train whistle], and I quote:

> In spite of the Depression and the boiling up of events which led to World War II, those were lovely years.

He's talking about the late '30s and early '40s.

> The ideals of the college were simple and clear: devotion to liberal learning, deep religious conviction in the leadership of the institution, and dedication to an educated woman. It was a time of some of the most vigorous and capable teaching I have ever known on a college campus.

He was writing this from the perspective of the '70s.

> There was an intellectual verve in the faculty and the student body and a sense of high moral purpose that is very rare and very precious.

It's clear that, when I came to the campus over twenty years later, that same intellectual verve was still present in that college, as was that same kind of vigorous teaching. There was the same belief shared by faculty and student that what happened in the classroom was the most important event of any given day. Now, I'm not talking about any kind of pedantic interest. And I'm not talking about just the classroom with

the four walls, because the classroom extended out to the dining rooms, sometimes to the Hub [student center], sometimes just on the campus sitting and talking. But there was the same conviction that both student and teacher had a moral obligation to treat their shared material with a concentration and dignity and honor due it. I can still remember certain individual classes with extraordinary vividness—the day, for instance, in the *Troilus* [*Troilus and Criseyde*] class, that is Chaucer's great love poem, when one student asked a single question, which opened the poem in such a way that comments and questions that followed took on the manner of conversation—civilized exchange, not some kind of just planned class discussion. We kept that tenor in the class for the remaining three weeks of the course. We were interrupted at the end of the hour and would come back the next day, and this was a conversation among people interested—vitally interested—in the whole experience of these people in that poem. Because the students, all of us together, knew that what we were talking about was of enormous importance, not in the course, but in life.

I remember, too, the morning I was finishing up what I thought had been a fairly full and acceptable presentation of "The Pardoner's Tale" in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, ending just as the bell rang for convocation. I thought, well, now, I've timed it perfectly. Before I could close my book, a student in the first row quietly spoke and said, "I think what you've said is interesting, Mrs. Pepperdene, but I really don't agree with that interpretation." Not a person moved. The discussion began. It got ardent. Almost an hour later we had come to some mutual agreement on the story, a new understanding. Her comments are still in my notes on that story in *The Canterbury Tales*. This kind of thing happened over and over. I still rely on a student's analysis of the Summoner's malady. She was biology major. One of the loveliest things was that in all my Chaucer classes down through the years I had biology majors, math majors, history majors, art majors. Their grades were never in jeopardy. There's a lady sitting in the audience whose daughter just graduated recently from the University of Pennsylvania's veterinary school. I had her in those classes; she was one of the best students I've ever taught. She was a science major. She was just interested in learning, that's all. And my last year there, there was a math major in my class--and, it turned out, a student of archery as well, a very good one—who clarified a line for me in the Yeoman's portrait—in the Yeoman's portrait, which I simply had never read properly. I had taught it one way, and she said, "That's not the way it works in archery."

[*audience laughter*]. Even though, by the way, I had been quoting *The Toxophilus* [sixteenth-century treatise on archery], which I thought was about as supportive as I needed to get.

If one characteristic marked the Agnes Scott student, it was a critical approach to the material studied and an equally critical attitude toward pedagogical performance. We might not have had student evaluations in the formal sense that they're required now—apparently you can't do anything without having the student tell you exactly what it is you've done wrong [*audience laughter*]--but we did have demanding students. And let me say this: no student—no teacher could have taught for very long without it being made perfectly clear that this was unacceptable. And one of the best ways—one of the most devastating ways of the students doing critiques were the imitations of the faculty, which they put on at regular intervals [*audience laughter*] at the convocations. And if you think they went easy on the faculty, you're wrong. And I'll tell you, it was very corrective. Some of the idiosyncratic gestures, some of the things—I remember I had not realized I always stepped in the wastebaskets, but I did [*audience laughter*]. I think by the time I realized that, I ran away [*audience laughter*]; but you learn all those things that—and they watch you like fury. And they really take into account everything. So, as I say, they were corrective in their intent and in their results.

But the students had other traits, too. Reading Mr. Davidson's article sent me back to one of my own, written in the fall of my second year at Agnes Scott. Here's what it said in part about the intellectual curiosity and the breadth of intellectual interest among Agnes Scott students as I came to know them then, so long ago. And I quote:

> I am not speaking in terms of the breadth of the curriculum offered to Agnes Scott students, nor am I implying that the average student IQ is necessarily higher at Agnes Scott than elsewhere. The curriculum is broad in its scope, the students excellent. But the impressive fact is that the students possess an intellectual energy, an eagerness to learn, and a delight in learning—the process-- that are not necessarily concomitants to carefully planned programs of study or higher scholastic entrance requirements. Each new freshman ultimately invigorates the intellectual atmosphere of the campus with new energy, but only because there's already present a forceful and distinctive intellectual climate which gives form and direction to her energies. Freshmen here, as elsewhere, go through the difficult process of shedding their high school aurae, adjusting to new situations, and discovering to their dismay how little they know [*audience laughter*].

> But after only a few months they are caught up at Agnes Scott into the vital intellectual climate surrounding them and are stimulated to extend their reach toward knowledge which had seemed beyond their grasp and to relish toughness and soundness rather than the superficiality or even practicality of knowledge.

These words were written a long time ago, but they and the rest of the story that I've shared with you this afternoon tell about a time and a place and a gathering of people for which the words of Chaucer about his Clerk, who was a professor of philosophy at Oxford in the fourteenth century—these, his words, are gospel truth applied to that time and that place. Chaucer says of his Clerk, "And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche." Gladly would he learn and gladly teach. You see, they're the same thing. If you don't study, if you don't learn, you can't teach. And that was Agnes Scott's secret. As Dorothy Sayers would say, these people at that time and in that place "tested the thing by living it and found it true." Thank you. [*Audience applause*] [*DR. PEPPERDENE gathers her notes and walks toward a chair in the audience area*.}

MODERATOR:That was wonderful. If you have the time and the inclination, we'll have some light refreshments?

DR. PEPPERDENE: Thank you. I love having refreshments.

AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*, *to DR. PEPPERDENE*]: I was going to feel a little guilty about tape-recording your lecture after you expressed your displeasure with tape-recorded lectures [*DR. PEPPERDENE and audience laugh*]. [Audience comment or question may relate to the videotaping of DR. PEPPERDENE's presentation.]

DR. PEPPERDENE: That's true. My students [at The Paideia School] ask me, "May I tape this?" And I say, "No"; so they may cheat and do it anyway [*audience laughter*].

Video camera is left on for about another seven minutes, and DR. PEPPERDENE moves off-camera. As they wait their turn to speak with DR. PEPPERDENE, several audience members mill around and talk among themselves in front of the camera while it continues to record. A number of people may be identifiable, but the contents of their conversations are inaudible.