



## **A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial**

*H.L. Mencken*

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"The native American Voltaire, the enemy of all puritans, the heretic in the Sunday school, the one-man demolition crew of the genteel tradition." -Alistair Cooke on H.L. Mencken

Fiercely intelligent, scathingly honest, and hysterically funny, H.L. Mencken's coverage of the Scopes Monkey Trial so galvanized the nation that it eventually inspired a Broadway play and the classic Hollywood movie *Inherit the Wind*.

Mencken's no-nonsense sensibility is still exciting: his perceptive rendering of the courtroom drama; his piercing portrayals of key figures Scopes, Clarence Darrow, and William Jennings Bryan; his ferocious take on the fundamentalist culture surrounding it all—including a raucous midnight trip into the woods to witness a secret "holy roller" service.

Shockingly, these reports have never been gathered together into a book of their own—until now.

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With the rise of "intelligent design," H.L. Mencken's work has never seemed more unnervingly timely—or timeless.

## A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial Details

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# **From Reader Review A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial for online ebook**

## **Michael says**

A Religious Orgy in Tennessee is a minefield surrounded by a barbed wire fence in the middle of a volcano on the outskirts of another minefield.

There are only a handful of writers whose style I would actively attempt to plagiarise if I were not a better person: Henry Louis Mencken is near the top.

Mencken really did not like Bryan in any way; his relationship to the old fundy is very similar to that between Hunter Thompson and Dick Nixon. Most of the reportage herein is confined to vitriolic attacks on the character of Bryan, and the infamous obituary, near the end of the book, is probably the cruellest last things to say to a dead man I've ever heard or seen. There is much hatred written throughout, regional, personal and religious, but Mencken never misses a chance to make his language sing.

If you want to learn about the Scopes Trial, read another book; if you want to read a book that is ostensibly about the Scopes Trial, but is in fact, a manifesto against the psychological evils of fundamentalism, ignorance, and William Jennings Bryan, then settle in.

Here, in his reportage from Dayton in the steamy summer of '25, his shirt-sleeves rolled past the elbow, chewing a fat cigar, and lampooning whatever he sees as dangerously backward, Mencken epitomizes the nobly lacerating journalist, whose persona he pretty much created. There is very little here about the actual trial; instead he unearths the Daytonians' superstitions. This actually enhances the relevancy of the trial as few histories could do. What Mencken describes and decries is a return to a science-less pre-history, where a majority of Bryanites rules the campuses and the government. It's a scary thought; thankfully, we've come a bit further, but not too far.

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## **Walter says**

Scathing. But not really. Reading this is like being at a business meeting and you know what's going on and no one says it but HL does with the utmost clarity. But he equally loathes falseness of all coats, legal or not. It makes sense the guy from the HBO show *The Wire* was a newsman from Baltimore.

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## **Zach Freeman says**

Includes all the articles H.L. Mencken wrote during the Scopes Monkey Trial (the basis for the play and movie *Inherit the Wind*). At the end of the book there's a transcript of Darrow's entire cross-examination of William Jennings Bryant. It's amazing to read, though not as intense as I expected. It's more amazing that the Creationism debate is still going on...

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## **Stewart Sternberg says**

Mencken was a brilliant and cutting man, but his opinion pieces on the Scopes trial are not necessarily his best work. Perhaps the best part of this is the appendix, which gives a transcript of Darrow's interrogation of Bryan about the possible flaws of literal interpretations of the bible and the difficulties of fundamentalism.

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## **Sarah Perry says**

" Once he had one leg in the White House and the nation trembled under his roars. Now he is a tinpot pope in the Coca-Cola belt and a brother to the forlorn pastors who belabor half-wits in galvanized iron tabernacles behind the railroad yards. His own speech was a grotesque performance and downright touching in its imbecility. Its climax came when he launched into a furious denunciation of the doctrine that man is a mammal. It seemed a sheer impossibility that any literate man should stand up in public and discharge any such nonsense. Yet the poor old fellow did it. Darrow stared incredulous. Malone sat with his mouth wide open. Hays indulged himself one of his sardonic chuckles. Stewart and Bryan fils looked extremely uneasy, but the old mountebank ranted on. To call a man a mammal, it appeared, was to flout the revelation of God. The certain effect of the doctrine would be to destroy morality and promote infidelity. The defense let it pass. The lily needed no gilding."

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## **Michael Lalaian says**

H.L. Mencken has long been listed among America's most brilliant and infamous journalists and iconoclasts, and after having read this collection of articles it is easy to see why. The writing is superb and not a single sentence goes by that won't make you stop and think. While this collection centers around the articles Mencken wrote during the Scopes Monkey Trial the actual content and ideas explored are both timeless and timely, given today's still very hot debate over creationism being taught in the classroom.

Mencken is nothing if not scathing, and it is easy to see how later writers, such as Christopher Hitchens, owe so much to his work. One does not need to agree with all of the points he makes to see the pure writing talent he had, and truth be told some paragraphs were even a bit rattling to an atheist and anti-fundamentalist as myself. The stand out article for me was "Homo Neanderthalensis" in which Mencken gives his most uncompromising assessment of the state of 'enlightenment' of most members of the 'so-called' human race. I don't agree with everything he says within it, but it makes you think, and that to me is a much more valuable function of reading a writer's work than affirmation for my own beliefs. (That particular article can be found online here: <http://www.ratbags.com/rsoles/comment...>)

Also included in this publication is the full court transcript between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, the two lawyers on either side of the anti-evolution case, and is an interesting debate between two men on completely opposite ends of the religious spectrum. While typing in the names "Hitchens," "Dawkins," or "Harris" in a YouTube search field may find you more exciting debates, this one is still very much worth reading due to its historic significance.

All in all this is a fascinating read that would be sure to provide plenty of food for thought as well as

questions for debate among friends or in a classroom setting. Also, between Mencken's articles and the court transcript, it is perhaps the most competent and concise lesson in the most famous trial of the early 20th century in under 210 pages. A must read for anyone who enjoys great writing.

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### **Hanno Willers says**

Viewing the farcical nature of the Scopes Trial through Mencken's lens provides equal doses of hilarity and dismay. His unforgiving style and relentless hammering of the "mountebank" William Jennings Bryan brings a smile to the face of anyone opposed to the public dissemination of ignorance and willful stupidity.

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### **Pamela says**

In his day, Mencken was the equivalent of Jon Stewart--except with more bite and a larger vocabulary. This collection of his reports of the trial and Bryan's obituary (3 versions) are as fresh and relevant today as when they were written. His wit and ferocity are not at all diminished.

Tip: Don't attempt to start highlighting especially meaningful and witty passages in this book--you will wind up highlighting the entire thing. Trust me on this. I know from experience.

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### **Rick Barnes says**

Its relevance today is startling.

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### **Peter says**

This is Mencken's complete reportage of the 1925 "Scopes Monkey Trial" in Tennessee, in which a teacher was tried for teaching the theory of evolution in a small-town public school. Mencken eloquently, methodically and brutally eviscerates the ignorant and intolerant fundamentalists (most notably William Jennings Bryan) who condemned Scopes, and science in general.

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### **Alana says**

This book contains a lot of ranting. But as a collection of political editorials from 1925, it's enlightening the extent to which nothing has changed in 85 years.

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### **James says**

The subtitle says it all: a reporter's account of the Scopes Monkey Trial (a name, by the way, coined by H.L.

himself). There is a particularly wonderful essay in which Mencken describes with anthropological awe the proceedings of a Baptist faith-healing.

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## **George says**

BRILLIANT.

*“Such obscenities as the forthcoming trial of the Tennessee evolutionist, if they serve no other purpose, at least call attention dramatically to the fact that enlightenment, among mankind, is very narrowly dispersed.”—page 21*

Vintage, vitriolic, Mencken: A RELIGIOUS ORGY IN TENNESSEE: A Reporter’s Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial, by H. L. Mencken, Art Winslow offers up the journalist’s first-hand accounts and commentaries on the 1925 trial of John Scopes—for ‘unlawfully’ teaching theories of human evolution in a state funded school—made familiar to us all by the great 1960 Spencer Tracy movie: *Inherit the Wind*.

Mencken was there. And Mencken had strong opinions about the subject matter, about the participants, and about the outright buffoonery of it all. In his newspaper and magazine articles reprinted in this volume he expresses those opinions with his usual linguistic eloquence, flare and ‘killer’ vocabulary. [Thank goodness for electronic readers, with quick and easy dictionary access.]

Recommendation: A lexicological orgy. Most particularly, and highly, recommended to the language nerds among us. Critical thinking enthusiasts will also delight. Fans of William Jennings Bryan might want to take a ‘pass’ on this one.

*“Bryan was a vulgar and common man, a cad undiluted. He was ignorant, bigoted, self-seeking, blatant and dishonest. ... Imagine a gentleman, and you have imagined everything he was not.”—page 87*

*“He liked people who sweated freely, and were not debauched by the refinements of toilet.”—page 99*

NOOKbook edition, 130 pages

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## **Jamie says**

The first work of Mencken I've read, and certainly not the last. His command of the English language and his dripping contempt for stupidity and bullshit were an absolute pleasure to read.

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## **Melville House Publishing says**

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