

EXtra



Letting Go

Mind, white magnolia blossom,
closing on light—
wan thoughts hiding their heads
under their wings—
heart ticking in its corner,
a slothful cricket—
blood whispering through veins,
wafting no leaf—
bones collapsing toward sleep's
ravel of waters—
body opens, night-flower,
upon the darkness.

Unimportant

*Were my life structured by the frown of God,
I at the very least could balance beams
Of penitence against it, or the rod
Of my revolt and have a house. It seems,
However, that I am a child who's built
A house of blocks or sand and chortles, "Look!"
To his father, who, busy damning guilt
Or blessing sainthood, hasn't time to crook
One backward glance and leaves the tyke to chew
For the cud of thought nothing but his thumb,
While Father hurrying past him to pursue
Matters more important and speeding some
Million miles faster than the wind can stumble—
The stupid playhouse doesn't even tumble!*

Other poems by Vassar Miller, '47, and
accompanying pictures by Dick Kenyon appear
on pages 8-12 of this issue of *EXtra*.



EXtra

University of Houston
Alumni Magazine

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

In an interview which appears in this issue of *EXtra*, playwright Arthur Miller says, "What I am asking for is a certain humility before problems which would make it impossible for people to feel that since they know the name for something they understand it." He was speaking to a psychologist about the labeling of mental and emotional disorders, but his thought also rings clearly as a warning to our educational society.

We know well the names of many problems which we face in our institutions of higher learning—the campus population explosion, the lack of adequate physical plant, the depersonalization of students and faculty, the emphasis upon research out of all proportion to teaching, the publish or perish syndrome, the chasm between the humanities and the sciences, the student revolts, the specialization. Much has been written and much said about these crises on our campuses. The American public is perhaps better informed than ever before about the needs of higher education. So informed that if you bring up any one of these topics at your next cocktail party you may be greeted with, "Oh, I've heard all that; that's old hat. Tell me something new that's happening out there on campus."

Far too often, we become bored with hearing too much about problems which seem to be too big for us to solve alone, and so we label them and pass on. We don't have to worry about the ragged and freezing man who appears in our church foyer with one crutch supporting his flimsy life because obviously we know his name—he's a bum and an alcoholic. Critics don't have to gauge the real value of Miller's controversial play *After the Fall* because they can easily label it as autobiographical. The efforts of organized alumni groups can be marked off by naming them fund raisers without ever considering why the funds are needed or why we are responsible for supplying them. We can dismiss valid complaints of many frustrated students, administrators, and faculty by merely calling them protesters.

Israel Scheffler, in an exceptional article in the *Harvard Educational Review*, has said that "knowledge requires the individual to have a grasp of the reality lying beyond the words." The acknowledged aim of our universities for centuries has been to bridge the gap between facts and knowledge, or between knowledge and wisdom. In math or science or composition classes, the stating of the problem is merely the beginning of the process; the solution is the important factor.

Can we solve the frighteningly complicated equations facing our educational system? Not by oversimplification, not by delegation or default, not by one neat easy answer, but certainly not by naming and ignoring the difficulties.

UH President Dr. Philip G. Hoffman has said often that the alumni of this university are the most important single asset available to it. Now that we have been so labeled, let us be willing to understand the problems which our school faces and participate in their solution.

G.F.

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DIALOGUE:

Richard Evans &

ARTHUR MILLER



An extemporaneous dialogue between a famous playwright and a famous psychologist concerning subjects as diverse as creativity, world peace, psychiatry, literary critics, and man's encounter with reality was recorded on film recently by UH educational television facilities when Dr. Richard I. Evans and Arthur Miller met to talk about the relations between their disciplines. This is the latest in a series of filmed conversations between the UH psychology professor and such individuals as Dr. Carl G. Jung, Dr. Gordon Allport, Dr. B. F. Skinner, Dr. Henry Murray, Dr. Ernest Jones, and Erich Fromm. Musing over the lost possibilities of seeing Shakespeare or Plato or Freud on film, Dr. Evans has planned this film series so that UH psychology students as well as future generations can hear directly from some of the most important thinkers of our own age. He wants to record future dialogues with Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell, and others. The films are made available to educational institutions throughout the world, and the translated dialogues are published in book form. *EXtra* is honored to have been given first publication rights to a condensation of this particular interview which has not been released in any other form to date.

Evans: Mr. Miller, many psychologists regard your dramatic contribution as particularly perceptive of human personality. Perhaps we can exchange some insights that will be helpful to both our fields. There is, for example, some thinking among psychologists that if we look at the underlying motives of people most of our negative feelings, our hatreds, will dissolve. I find that by the time you have completed your analysis there are very few of your characters that we can dislike. We have sympathy for them and identify with them — even those who have committed crimes against society or crimes of morality.

Miller: I don't think we could understand anyone without putting ourselves in the position of that person. In a way the drama is there in order to give a deeper perception of the world in terms of sharing the viewpoints of other people. I couldn't write a good play unless I was able to shift my viewpoint every time I wrote a line. It's a constant shifting of empathy, being with one man for a moment, and then going right over to the other side and being with the other man for a moment. The truth of the play depends upon that ability to jump into the skin of the opposing party in the conflict. Consequently if you mean that my characters are acceptable to you in the sense that their nature seems justified, well, that's the way it ought to be.

Evans: I would say, as a psychologist, that it is probably more difficult for a writer to get this empathy you are talking about — presenting characters as unique persons with their own motives — as against simply presenting a stereotype that the viewer can react to because of all his prejudgments.

Miller: It's the only difficulty finally. The unlearnable part of writing is this empathic ability. For instance, Shakespeare is great because he

could obviously share the inner life of a variety of personalities, and present a character as the product of his past, his present, his individual nature, and his immediate conflict.

Evans: But when you get down to this uniqueness, how can you really get someone to understand a character who is really different than he is?

Miller: I don't think you look at dramatic characters the way you look at people. Characters are sets of relationships set up on the stage. I don't really know very much about Oedipus, for example; nobody does. I do know those elements in him which are in the forefront of his reactions to that particular situation. But is he a good father or a bad father? Is he greedy or generous? You don't even ask these questions. The play puts before the audience a certain limited group of questions to which it is prepared to give responses in the course of action. It is hoped that through the intense answers that are given imaginary fullness can be conveyed. The play does so much; the audience does the rest.

Evans: So if you talk about the relative uniqueness of a character, by definition what you are talking about precludes this because you have to have something for the audience to identify with—

Miller: I would just throw in here the essential fact of the matter and that is feeling. What you are really identifying with is an intensity of feeling. Without that there is no work of art. The audience is basically reacting to my feeling—accepting it or rejecting it or sharing it or refusing to share it. And that is further complicated by the time and place and culture in which the audience is situated. *The Crucible* at one time was received as cold as ice; the next time it was as hot as a firecracker. Nothing had changed but the times, the relationship of people to government, to the world, to the crises in Berlin. You'd have to say they were different people. Their feelings were allowed to sympathize with somebody caught on a witch hunt. In McCarthy times they couldn't afford to feel that. So, the writer is dealing with dynamics that are very fluid. It is impossible to write something in terms of what the audience is going to make of it. It takes a year or two to write a play; it could be a very different country by the time it's finished. I must therefore deal with certain fundamentals which seem to me to be relatively stable within people.

Evans: Dr. Harry Stack Sullivan, a brilliant psychiatrist who developed a tremendous reputation because he was one of the first people to really work with schizophrenics, people he could virtually not communicate with at all. He recognized that you had to communicate with them at a preverbal level. They understand a feeling, perhaps. It would seem to me that in your plays quite aside from the words and ideas and language and symbols that a total affect is communicated. Do you believe that there is some emotional affect that is communicated that transcends the action, the words, the symbols?

Miller: Absolutely. If all the words are there and all the symbols and that affect isn't there, you've got nothing. A writer finds certain moments when he conceives something, some situation or person, which has life. I find myself standing in

the center of that person or situation so that anything I do is right. Anything I do is unexpected. Anything I have the guy say has a ring of discovery. In other words, I can't get ahead of him. And if I can't get ahead of him and he keeps talking, I've got something. If I get too far ahead of him and simply report what I already know through his mouth, it's dead. What the author reveals in terms of objective laws or objective clues to some generalization about mankind is almost an after-effect. Works that set out to do this usually lack life. You have to come back to what you know, to what you've written, to what you really feel because that's what the audience wants. They want the unique evidence of one spirit in this time and they don't want their own opinions rearranged and regurgitated by somebody who is expert at that. The creation of life is what is wanted and that can't be willed. I would say that a writer who is writing to fill preconceived symbols is defeating himself because what we really want from our works of art is evidence, new evidence, new raw material. We don't want a finger exercise of some sort. It's fake. It's false. I wonder sometimes why finding the psychological structures in a play means anything to anybody. Sometimes plays are written as much because the writer wants to reorganize the world morally or to discover what he believes is a hidden act of forces which are death forces in the world and others which are life forces. That's all morality is, after all—the discovery of a way to live in celebration of life rather than giving way to death.

Evans: Now some of the plays that you develop lead to growth in the person watching, some present an ideological message, and some have certain entertainment values. What satisfies you most when you begin to get the returns on a play?

Miller: I think the feeling that I brought news from nowhere to people. Either some insight about themselves or some insight about the world and others. I think that the possibility of growth in relation to drama is important. Most of us have great difficulty in life seeing ourselves as others see us and seeing others as they see themselves. What you partake of in a drama is that your allegiance to one character is constantly being tested, is being broken off and challenged at every single step of the way. It isn't a question of right and wrong, but of the character's perception of reality being correct or incorrect. At one point Hamlet is merely suspicious; at the next he's certain. Pretty soon you see that the issue is not whether he is certain or not certain, but whether he will do something about it. And you become challenged yourself because you are seeing his point of view, and the points of view of those around him, plus your own. So that stretching of one's viewpoint toward oneself and the world—and the fragmentation of it sometimes—and the final healing of it all into a new synthesis is the process of growth. People who don't grow are people who never can change their minds about anything.

Evans: How can you distinguish between an experience that passes and an experience that leaves its effect and produces real growth? It's awfully hard—

Miller: I don't know how to answer that. I think it's extremely difficult for people to change

by virtue of one incident. It's probably impossible. If there is anything that makes one change, it may be an accretion of experiences that seem to total up to some kind of truth.

Evans: But in a sense you have faith or belief that this kind of growth can indeed result from viewing —

Miller: I'm not strictly interested in making people grow in the sense that I want to cure them of anything. I get obsessed by certain images of reality, and there is a certain beauty in putting them down within an aesthetic form which has a catharsis in it. These other elements of what happens to the audience are another matter. I'm not blind to them, and I don't think they are unimportant, but there's literally nothing I can do about that. I suppose that earlier in life I had illusions that I was changing the world with a certain kind of drama. Then I lost those illusions altogether. Now I'm in the process of believing that maybe men do live by images more than I suspected before—that despite themselves and quite unknowingly they do behave according to some artistic or aesthetic ideas which they are not even aware they contracted. But it's not part of my business to dwell on that too long. I want to tell them the truth as I see it. And I think that inevitably they are stretched and anguished and perhaps share a certain kind of suffering which their lives would never bring them to. And out of suffering sometimes comes a little wisdom. But it's all very iffy.

Evans: I wonder if these changes indicate that you are becoming more or less idealistic.

Miller: It's less idealistic. I think it's more realistic now. I think people change extremely slowly. To think that a work of art is going to overthrow ignorance, for example, or the absence of charity—that's a pretty impossible dream. The *Vichy* play was taken to mean that I was against Nazism. I was dealing with a theme which I also dealt with in *After the Fall*—quite simply that we are inhabiting a world of murder which we share in. I don't call it a moral responsibility but a literal blood connection with the evil of the time. We have an investment in evils that we manage to escape. Sometimes those evils are done in our interest, and what happens is simply that man, by virtue of these circumstances, is faced with his own complicity with what he hates and despises. But that was not particularly understood.

Evans: I might ask you whether its important to consider whether the personality and background and experience of the writer should or should not be separated from his creative effort? Is it important to read into the creative effort whatever we can learn about the writer? Or should we just look at the art form, the product as it stands in its totality?

Miller: Oh, it's a lot of fun to do that but I have read so many things about my plays which attempt to find meanings which are so absurd that it makes me wonder whether attempting to find the writer in his work has any value at all. It is obvious that the writer is not all that simple, any more than any other individual is, and those remnants of his personality that might be usable in his play usually are elements which are only partially descriptive of his nature. When I did *Salesman* they were convinced that the oldest son

represented me, and then it was the boy next door, and then it was the youngest son, and then it was Willie himself. Some people said it was the mother. It sort of cancels it all out. What a writer does, in effect, is partition himself among the various characters. To the degree that he can sympathize with them he has identified with them, but they have their own complexity. The author is changed sometimes by the fact that he has written something. So, the simple idea of a kind of stencil of the author in the work is impossible. It leaves out the whole idea of imagination and the whole concept of creation. The writer must be in his play. He must be in it. He can't be to one side of it ever. He has to be endangered by it. His own attitudes have to be tested in it. The best work that anybody ever writes is the work that is on the verge of embarrassing him always. It's inevitable. He puts himself on the line—sometimes quite secretly, sometimes symbolically. But without that endangering of the writer himself a truth has not been served. He's formulated something that's quite safe and about which he doesn't care quite enough. Let me say this, I think there's an escape hatch for literary critics and others. When they get too involved in trying to see the author in his work they are able to escape from the work itself, from deciding what they really feel about it, what they have gotten out of it, whether or not it's good or bad. It is much easier to sit there and say, "Well, obviously this man has an unresolved Oedipal situation and his grandmother dropped him on his head." What do you know when you know that? Absolutely nothing. It's all psychiatric gossip.

Evans: We have in psychology a whole body of literature in the field we call selective perception. By this theory works of art can become almost like massive Rorschach tests where what people see may be more revealing about themselves than about the work of art or the perception of the playwright.

Miller: I'm not sure I object to that. I think that part of the function of any art is to be an arena of suggestion for the onlooker. To open him up to himself.

Evans: I remember seeing *Death of a Salesman* several times. I saw two different people in the Broadway role and then saw the film. On the film, I suddenly saw the original expressionistic form giving way to the realism they felt was necessary to reach the broader audience.

Miller: I'll tell you why. I never conceived of Willie as being crazy, never to the end of his life. There was even something rational in his decision to kill himself. When they made the film, they showed a man who is nuts from the first reel. He became a pathological case. You can't identify yourself with a pathological case. Unbeknownst to me Columbia Pictures made a trailer—a twenty minute short—which was to be shown at all the theatres in conjunction with the movie. The short showed that in reality salesmen were one of the most secure and honorable people in society. Now this goes together with making Willie crazy. They couldn't bear the thought that a normal man might be driven to these extremes. The people who made the movie couldn't cope with this thing.

Evans: In *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* it seems very conspicuous that the problem

of guilt is resolved by the suicide of the character. As a matter of fact, the suicide almost reflects some growth in the character. Now this seems to be kind of antithetical that suicide can be growth. We seem led by your play to believe that these characters are somehow better or the world is somehow better for their having committed suicide.

Miller: Put it this way. There is some growth which is intolerable. There is some wisdom which is insufferable. It's insupportable for its very truth. You see, I don't believe in the necessarily upgoing, ongoing, or therapeutic power of wisdom. I think sometimes at a certain point one knows something which is true, profound, and intolerable, and which no person can support. That's where we get in an area called tragedy, which I don't suppose psychology can deal with because it seems to defeat everything. The problem for me is, of course, that it exists.

Evans: But it seems to me that after *Salesman* there is a slightly different resolution—that you

sometimes the victims of truth which is in the form of a weapon. Willie is killed by the facts, really, delivered up to him by his sons and the condition of the development of their lives. So is the father in *All My Sons*. But somebody delivers these things to these people, delivers the situation to them so that it's remorseless and inescapable. —I see as we are talking that it is obvious in these plays there is the ironical question of the process of the truth killing. And it's formed some of my attitudes toward psychology—that there lies behind so much of it a preconception that provided we know enough about ourselves everything is going to turn out all right, that suffering is a mistake or a sign of weakness or a sign even of illness. The fact is that possibly the greatest truths we know have come out of people's suffering. The problem is not to undo suffering or to wipe it off the face of the earth but to make it inform our lives so that we regard it as a necessary part of existence and try to pluck from it what growth and wisdom we can instead of trying to cure ourselves of it constantly and avoiding it—avoiding tension, avoiding conflict, avoiding anything but that lobotomized sense of what is called happiness in which nobody learns anything. My plays are anti-psychological in the sense of those people who feel that—well, King Lear was just—he was all wrong. He's this mistake. You see I don't think these people are faced with the exigencies of real existence, of really caring about where they are, of caring about others, of caring about the chaos in the universe.

Evans: Freud almost says that the way the individual learns about what reality is is through frustration—if we want to call that suffering—that growth only comes through frustration and conflict. In a sense he's saying exactly what you're saying.

Miller: My argument with so much that passes for psychology and psychoanalysis is that instead of seeking a synthesis in man, it seems to be driving toward partitioning man. What I am asking for is a certain humility before the problem which would make it impossible for people simply to use a certain kind of terminology in relation to human actions and human psychology and feel that since they know the name for something they understand it.

Evans: You are touching a vital part of what we are concerned with in training psychology students. The reason for labels, of course, is to become more efficient. But many of us share your view that we sometimes substitute a description for true understanding.

Miller: The worst thing about it is that it passes into the currency of the culture, so that people who without it might be driven by their bewilderment to try to come to some understanding of something—just the tension of not understanding might make them go further—come upon these conceptions which are ready-made and seem to fit and then use them as weapons against each other. Everyone has a view of man—what he is, what he should be. And if psychologists aired those viewpoints instead of pretending they didn't exist, aired what they think a man really ought to be, embarrassed themselves a little bit, psychology would cease to be quite as much the blanket of



Playwright Arthur Miller and psychologist Dr. Richard I. Evans pause momentarily during a moving dialogue filmed recently by UH educational television.

Dr. Evans is a member of the faculty of the department of psychology at the University of Houston.

obviously are not resolving later plays with the suicide of a principle character. In *After the Fall* the character seems to show a resolution that would be much closer to the prevailing conception of mental health.

Miller: You see I think that all suicides are murders. They are the victims of aggression or

the psychologist. See, you have to suffer to discover anything. Let me put it that way. I sometimes sense a want of suffering. It seems to me that at the heart of good research is some commitment to man. It's a failing of the intellect and of the heart to obliterate that.

Evans: In our field we are discussing the problem of whether you can really control or predict behavior by being completely mechanistic, and if so, whether that eliminates the humanistic conception of man.

Miller: I would rather people spent their time asking possibly the following question. What does it consist of to be human? How can science, if such a thing is indeed possible, advance man toward that goal? Now I don't think that obliterates the scientific approach. I think it makes it a little more difficult.

Evans: Obviously in your characterizations in your plays, you've come up with an approximation of what makes a human being. If you were going to tell a psychology student what you think are some of the things that make a person human, what would you say?

Miller: I don't quite know how to state that. There is a cloak over man, not only the obvious social mask he wears but the whole question of whether he is anything more than a set of relationships, and whether after one has described all these relationships there is anything left which is unique or even definable in any way. I feel we are all in danger of disappearing. I think that one of the tensions that we have always lived under as self-conscious human beings is the fear that we don't exist, that the whole thing is a dream, anyway. Possibly a way to understand human beings is to try to understand his own concept of his uniqueness and his fear of its disappearing. What I posit in all my work, I suppose—I never thought of it in so many words—is the existence of what used to be called an immortal soul which I would call a unique identity. I think once it's gone or once we concede it's gone—and I do admit that it's possible that it's simply a question of a consensus that over the generations, through religion mainly, that conception was instilled in man. We haven't the religion any more so all we have left is an arbitrary conception which is withering away at a great rate. But once it's given up, I think the game is up.

Evans: Very few people in our field are working on the problem of peace. Julian Huxley once drew a thermometer, a very high one and said, "This represents technological growth and development which leads to nuclear war potential that could destroy man." Then he drew a very small thermometer that you could hardly see and said, "That's about the progress we've made in men's understanding one another." A good many people we've talked to in this filmed series of interviews with famous psychologists have said, "Well, if you look at this rationally we certainly will have to say that man will destroy himself." Now how do you look at this?

Miller: In conditions of crisis people gradually are made to feel that the issue for their survival is exclusive power. For instance in Viet Nam today the crisis overwhelms the simple human vision of man. We started out quite reasonably, trying

to limit the war. There was a holding off of the idea that it was an either-or proposition. But eventually we got willy-nilly in our actions. When we were advisors the honor of the United States was not at stake. As more and more material and men are sent in we near the point where it will be psychologically impossible for people to consider anything but aggression.

Evans: Are you saying that the mechanism has already been triggered off so that by rational analysis you would say that we will have a nuclear war probably before too many years?

Miller: I would say yes. I think so. I think it need not be. If certain lessons are learned objectively and learned now. I see no alternative but to try to teach them or for people to try to learn them. And that is that we are very fragile beings and are no longer in control of ourselves beyond a certain threshold.

Evans: Now Mr. Miller, may I ask where you may go from here? Now that you've produced what some of us think are most masterful psychological works and given us a great deal to think about?

Miller: Well, it's hard to describe. In general I find myself trying to make human relations felt between individuals and the larger structure of the world. This kind of relationship is particularly invisible, particularly difficult to touch or to formulate. Yet I think it can be decisive in making people what they are. By the larger world I mean the political world, social world, the world of war and peace and the rest of it. The humanities are deficient in this respect. There is now too much concentration on psychological behavior. I am no longer preoccupied with that. The problem to me is man as a creature in a universe—a universe which he knows somewhere in his head is moving him but which he can't seem to reach. In drama I've said that people have masks and that the purpose of the drama is to tear away the mask. Perhaps a better way of putting it is we all have illusions as to what we are doing and what the other guy is doing and what the nature of the conflict is. The drama works best when I present what I call the visible reality. The audience nods to itself and says, "Yes, that's the way it is." Then gradually, I turn the scene around until I show that maybe this is not the way it is. That what appears is sometimes directly contradictory to what is. What we need in our social and political world is a Grand Dramatist who would possibly be able to do that. Unfortunately the cast of characters is too big.



PRAISE AND PARADOX

Text by UH Student Gaye Doebling
Poetry by Alumna Vassar Miller '47

"... a sleeping poem has sharper teeth than sleeping dogs."

A poem never sleeps long in the creative mind of Vassar Miller. She began writing poetry at the age of eight—that magic age when fantasy begins to fade into reality. Perhaps in an effort to extend that threshold for his daughter, or in a desire to make her crossing of it more bearable, her father began bringing home every evening his huge old typewriter. Her thoughts became more and more wondrously alive by means of that ordinarily mundane machine. Her father soon decided to buy her a second-hand typewriter for her own. She has been writing poetry ever since.

In 1956 her first book, *Adam's Footprint*, was published. As books of poetry often do, it silently took its place on bookstore and library shelves. It was not long, however, before perceptive critics recognized the aura of poignancy and vibrance which is characteristic of her work. Frederick Eckman referred to her "savage, original intensity." Howard Nemerov called her poems "brilliant works of language, with a fine energy flowing through one passage after another," and remarked on "the hard-working vocabulary, rich, strange, accurate, beautifully paced." Within a few years, two more collections of her poetry were published by the Wesleyan University Press—*Wage War on Silence* and *My Bones Being Wiser*. For each of the three books she received the Texas Institute of Letters Award for the Best Book of Poetry by a Texas writer. Other critics and a growing number of readers listened to what poet-critic James Wright called "the full and terrible power of her individual voice." This year, she was one of those nominated to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

For Vassar Miller, poetry is more than an artistic experience or a creative expression. It has, in her words, "like all art . . . a trinitarian function: creative, redemptive, and sanctifying. Poetry is creative because it takes the raw materials of fact and feeling and makes them into that which is neither fact nor feeling. It is redemptive because it can transform the pain and ugliness of life



Heaven

*Heaven can be found wholly where the heart is,
Upon the knees or at the game or in the bed,
Heaven is never where the separate part is
Whatever deeds are done, whatever words are said.*

*Heaven is always where the heart is wholly,
Not in a proper portion or a seemly segment
Dressed to meet the public, but in a lowly
Exuberance incapable of fragment.*

Photography by Dick Kenyon



*Wholly where the heart is, there is heaven,
Which is never fractured, since heaven is no niggard,
Everything or nothing, not one out of seven,
Till the flesh sits stunned and the mind has staggered.*

*Heaven is wholly where the heart is. I adore You
Here truly, O my God, but here the heart will splinter
Half a hundred ways while it waits before You
Here in this sharp land where the heart must winter.*



into joy and beauty. It is sanctifying because it thus gives the transitory at least a relative form and meaning. Hence poetry, whether avowedly so or not, is always religious; it is akin to prayer, an act of love . . ."

Miss Miller's work reflects her confrontation with a challenge which does not rest on poetic draftsmanship alone. To face and relate the profound and paradoxical in life as she does represents a break-through in understanding as well as in form.

The form in which Miss Miller's poetry is embedded has evolved through a disciplined process. She has at times employed varying patterns of strictest meter and rhyme. After being thus immersed in imposed and self-imposed rigors of form, she has

come up baptismally clean in her own style which now tends toward a freedom in which her language moves in lyric abandonment.

Although she has traveled widely in the United States and Europe, Miss Miller has made her permanent home in Houston, where she was born and educated. She received her B.A. and her M.A. degrees from the University of Houston.

The place where she writes is a reflection of her spirit. Her typewriter, though portable, remains open. There are a few blank pages lying askew like flat ghosts of the future in a world of almost limitless dimension. There is also a wastebasket into whose gaping mouth the table scraps of her mind are shoved without ceremony. An unspectacular dog

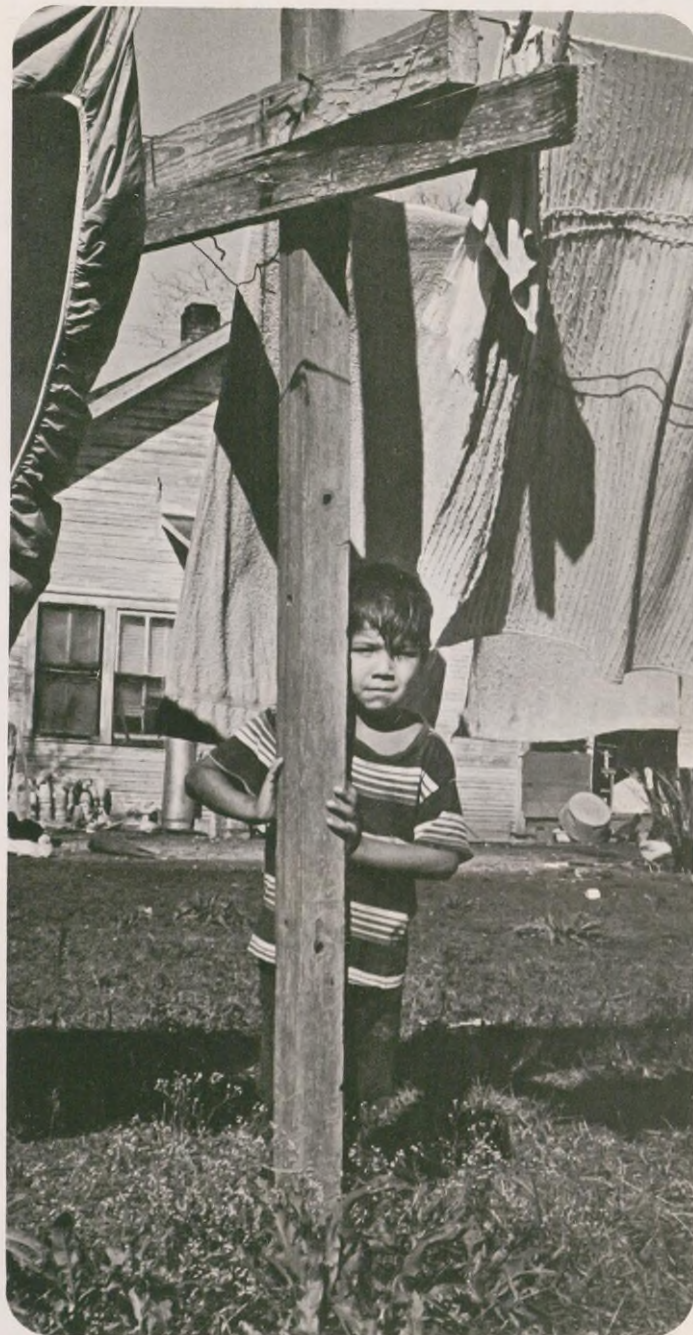
The Friendly Beast

*Death is an animal ungainly,
but gentle,
come lumbering to your door.*

*Men have been unjust to him, for hearing
him howl,
they tighten their locks and shudder,
when all he wants to do is lie down
and snuggling,
warm the beds of the unloved.*

called Brown is always nearby—a symbol of unquestioning affection. In the midst of what some might call the quiet world of Vassar Miller, there are sounds more compelling than the intermittent silence . . . the sharp rapping of typewriter keys that lag ever so far behind the rhythm of her mind. And there is the music of her spirit to which all who can hear are moved to dance . . .

*"and don't you know, they danced up and ate out
of my hand and no one else could see
they were just toms and tabbys and
I laughed and laughed
and poems sprouted out of my skin."*



Outsider

*I hear my heart
mutter below my sleep
like a river under ice.*

*I shut away
in a closet my pain
rattling like a skeleton.*

*I pick my tears
out of the dusk and ask,
frowning, "What flowers are these?"*

*God and the world
are lovers, however,
much too enamored to answer.*

As Well

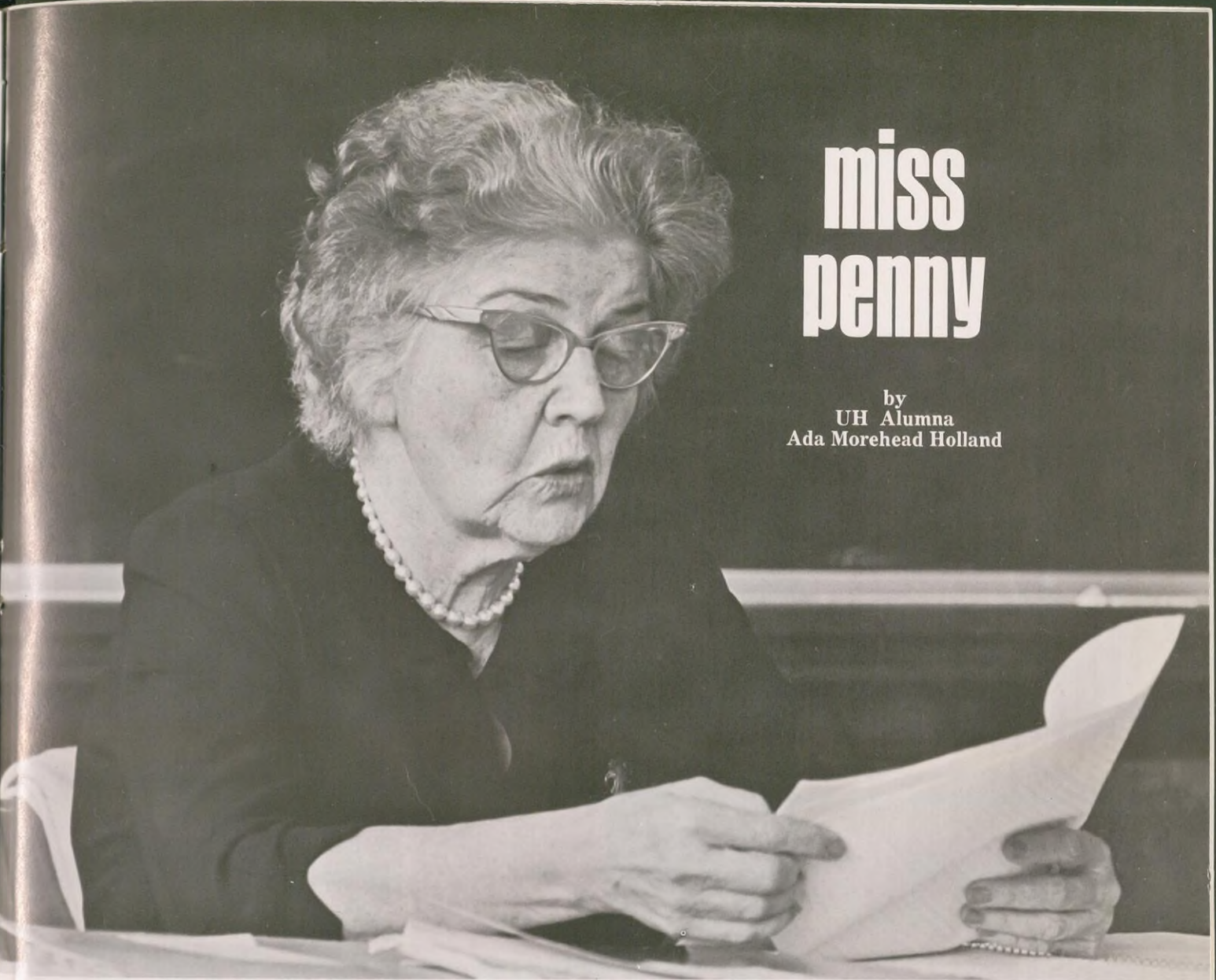
*When the heart cries
to the four winds
it makes no more sound
than the lapse of a leaf
onto the ground,
than the sighing of birds'
infinitesimal sorrows
wanting all words,
than the tear of a cricket,
flower bloomed on a twig,
ghost in a thicket,
than two buds split assunder—
else the heart is a dew
dissolved into thunder.*



Finality

*To cut the ties that bind
With kind if cruel knife
Was simple to my mind,
An act to save my life.
And yet I never drew
Before such bitter breath,
As if by leaving you
I practiced for my death.*





miss penny

by
UH Alumna
Ada Morehead Holland



Almost any morning "Miss Penny" can be seen bustling down the hall in the Roy Cullen Building. Dragging a dilapidated briefcase that is hardly ever empty enough to latch, she explodes into her office, digs around in a mound of papers and magazines, and is out into the hall again on her way to meet a class.

She is nearly always late—usually because she has been in a corner somewhere going over some attempt at writing that one of her many proteges came hopefully handing her when she already had too much to do. When she is only slightly late, she is cheerful enough to take a telephone call or speak with civility to a student. But if class time is seconds away, the people in her office know better than to try to engage her in conversation. And the telephone and the stray students had better stay clear of her as well.

Once inside the classroom, however, she is unhurried. With an air of disarming friendliness, she demands to know how many students saw a certain good drama on television, or whether anyone heard some important

lecture at the art museum. Then she goes to work to make language and literature live for her students.

If the class is for freshmen, she is likely to be reading from student themes which may be only "C" papers, full of bad grammar and misspelled words but which set forth an interesting point of view or indicate that the author is perceptive and just might have the makings of a creative writer.

If the class is made up of sophomores, everyone may be talking at once, each trying to declare his personal opinion regarding Milton's treatment of women, or Thoreau's anarchic tendencies. At such times, just at the point of chaos, she is likely to bang her hand down flat and hard on the desk and say, "All right! I still have the floor." And sheepish faces close up and listen respectfully. The whole thing may erupt again in the middle of the next discussion and the same quieting process take place. It's like knowing the Wife of Bath personally. A student has his say about Melville's style and Faulkner's angle of narration. And even though she may tell him that most critics would not agree with him, she does not say that he is wrong. She leaves him with his dignity intact.

But it is in creative writing classes that she is most herself. The freedom of thought and expression she allows her freshmen and sophomores is nothing compared to that she grants the people in her writing classes. Here most students are opinionated and voluble. The flat hand is often banging on the table, but the pronouncement is somewhat different: "All right! Mr. X has the floor." Here she really has to fight for control and direction of the discussion. Everybody is impatient for a chance to say what he thinks about whether a certain recently-created character would or would not be capable of committing this sin or that virtuous act. At the end of one of these classes most students feel limp as worn-out shoestrings, and she looks just like they feel.



Professor Ruth Pennybacker came to teach English at the University of Houston in the fall of 1935. She was barely out of the University of Texas' graduate school, after four years of undergraduate work at Vassar. But her experience was already broad, including such things as studying in Europe, being rescued from a sinking ship at sea, working with an art theatre group in New York, and serving as secretary to Lady Astor. She brought to the classroom a deep-seated belief in

the work of the individual and a keen interest in what made her students "tick."

During her first year of teaching, she initiated the University's creative writing classes. And in those classrooms she did more than encourage her students to be individuals—she provided an atmosphere where they could experiment with words and phrases, where each could search for his own identity. One of her classes fondly dubbed her "Miss Penny," a name that has stuck through the years.

In addition to her regular teaching duties she has found time to create and sponsor *The Harvest*, which for 30 years has published only student work. Every year it offers \$350 in prizes to undergraduate contributors (and honorary mention to graduate contributors) in art, poetry, short story, drama, and essay. Students from every department of the University are encouraged to submit manuscripts to be published. Professional writers and artists are the judges.

She sets a rugged pace for herself, but it is not without reward. Since 1952 her students have consistently won prizes in the *Atlantic College Contests*. There have been two first places, six second places, two third places, three fourth places, twenty-one honorable mentions, and thirty-eight merit awards.

The University has only been competing in the Southern Literary Festival contests for six years, and in that time Miss Penny's students have won three first places, two second places, and four third places.

Many of the sparks of creativity she has nurtured are already blazing into print, and some of the people she encouraged are now nurturing embryonic sparks in their own students. The people who have studied with her have ranged in age from seventeen to fifty. Many are now combining writing

with such diverse careers as surgery, college teaching, athletic coaching, psychology, and editing. One is in the Peace Corps. Some are giving all their time to writing.



on Barthelme is one of the latter. His short stories appear regularly in the *New Yorker*. He recently published a collection of short stories under the title *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, which has been well received by the critics. (It is reviewed in this issue of *EXtra* on page 21.) Mr. Barthelme is now back from Europe, where he spent a year working on a novel.

The well-known poet Vassar Miller is one of Miss Pennybacker's most illustrious ex-students. Miss Miller publishes in *Paris Review* and other literary quarterlies. She has just completed her fourth book of poetry. For each of her first three books, she received the Texas Institute of Letters award, the only person so honored consistently. She teaches creative writing at St. John's School in Houston. (Some of Miss Miller's previously unpublished work appears in this *EXtra* on page 8.)

Allan Lawrence, the celebrated Olympic track star from Australia, studied with Miss Pennybacker from 1959 to 1961. At that time he served as correspondent for *American Track and Field News*. He returned to Australia and published in various Australian newspapers and magazines, including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *South Sydney News*, *Melbourne Herald*, *Australian Sport*, and *Australian Track and Field Magazine*. Mr. Lawrence is now back in Houston completing

a book on his experiences in the field of sports.

Dr. Roland Tharp is now associate professor of psychology at the University of Arizona. He has had published fiction and poetry. He studied with Miss Pennybacker in the 1950's.

Jean Clower's poetry has appeared in *Poetry* and other literary magazines. She also studied with Miss Pennybacker in the 1950's.

Dr. A. P. Kimball, a research chemist at Stanford University, puts to good use the exhaustive training in the use of precise words and phrases he received in Miss Penny's writing classes. He now publishes regularly in scientific journals.

Ruth Dawson has been successful in writing both poetry and drama. She won a first prize for poetry in the *Mademoiselle* College Contest. Her play, "The Cry of the Peacock" was produced on Houston's Channel 11, and was given second prize in a national contest conducted by Columbia Broadcasting System. Her poems have been published in magazines in this country and in England. She is now marketing her first book of poetry.

Cecil Mullins, who studied with Miss Pennybacker from 1947 to 1950, and whose poetry appears frequently in *Good Housekeeping*, has invented a system of teaching rapid reading, called *Optimation*, which is now taught in several Texas cities, and which is proving highly successful. In 1964 he published a humorous book called *How English Got That Way: Some Highly Improbable Derivations*.

Dr. Elna White, who won prizes for both fiction and essays when she studied with Miss Pennybacker, is now writing only scientific articles—but hoping, she says, to find time again to try some fiction. She is on the faculty of the Baylor University College of Medicine.

Doug Uzzell writes poetry, fiction, and essays. One of his short stories, "The Monkey People," which won a graduate award in the 1963 *Harvest* won first place for fiction in the Contest for College Magazines, sponsored by the National Student Association and *Saturday Review*. It was later published in the *Moderator*. He has published a short story and two poems in the Parisian Magazine *Parnassus*. Mr. Uzzell teaches English at Tarleton State College in Stephenville, Texas. He is now writing a novella. (He has also written the review of Barthelme's *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* on page 21 of this issue.)

One cannot speak of all of Miss Penny's students—not even all of the successful ones. But any of us who have studied with her through the years would smile appreciatively if we could hear her say once more, as she is undoubtedly saying today to some eager genius, "Now, I want to know if that is a short story by *your* standards, not mine or someone else's."



what happened to the COUGARS ?

An analysis by UH alumnus John Hollis, who covers Cougar sports events for the *Houston Post*.

Football at the University of Houston in 1965 took a long time cranking up, like a Model T on a frosty winter morning. Bill Yeoman and his staff coaxed, wheedled, tinkered, and toiled and, just when it appeared the machine wouldn't budge, the Cougars coughed to life. The acceleration bordered on the spectacular. The unsure, fumbling young team which introduced the nation to indoor football by way of national TV and a 14-0 loss to Tulsa in the Astrodome, ended the year a candidate for bowl bids.

The team which could produce only 126 yards of total offense in a 36-0, second-game loss to Mississippi State finished so strongly that, had the Cougars been in the Southwest Conference, they would have ended fourth-ranked for offense and defense, with the league's number 2 ground gainer and fourth-best rusher.

That's progress, pardner. Yeoman, who insisted almost daily it was forthcoming, anticipates more of it in 1966. The Cougars lost only a half-dozen starters from their top 22.

During those dark, early days both Yeoman and his quarterback, Bo Burris, heard the howl of the win-starved wolf. A 21-6 decision over Cin-

cinnati merely whetted appetites. A 10-7 loss to the Texas Aggies, followed by a 44-12 defeat at the hands of Miami (Fla.), sharpened the pangs of hunger.

Neither the team nor the staff quit hustling. The work went on. "We are going to improve," Yeoman insisted. "We are going to improve every day. We're going to be a good football team before this season is over."

To some, he sounded like a man whistling past a graveyard. They even went so far as to engineer his demise in effigy.

Tennessee, unbeaten and fighting for the Southeastern Conference lead, was next on Houston's list of murderous opponents. The Vols won, 17-8, striking late in the third quarter to break a scoreless tie. But the sleeping giant stirred in that game.

It was a bruising, no-quarter defensive football game. The Cougars had threatened in the second and fourth quarters before Burris took the team 67 yards to score late in the final period. A six-yard pass to Tom Beer, the tight end, and a two-point pass to the same receiver produced the UH total.





Halfback Mike Dennis (20) of Ole Miss is surrounded by Cougars as the top pro draft choice is stopped for a loss in Houston's 17-3 win over Ole Miss, a real turning point for Cougar football. Cougars, left to right, are: Joe Rafter, Royce Berry, Carl Cunningham, Tom Paciorek, Mike Payte, Gus Hollomon, and Paul Otis.

From that fiercely-contested defeat came conviction, a shoring-up of team confidence. The Cougars felt that they should have won the game. They came away convinced they could play with anybody.

Chattanooga was the sacrificial lamb preceding a festive football finish. The Cougars won, 40-7. Burris completed nine of 18 passes for a record 223 yards. Dick Post, the running back, gained 160 yards in 19 carries. Kenny Herbert, the wing-back and split end, caught six passes for 126 yards. The team had arrived. The Cougars wasted little time proving it.

Mighty Mississippi, the dread Delta dandies who owned 12 successive wins over UH, came to the Dome confident of victory and skeptical of the abilities of Warren McVea, Houston's sophomore back who, like the team, had had his troubles realizing promise.

McVea caught six passes for 201 yards—a school record. Burris completed nine of 19 throws for 284 yards, breaking his own standard set against Chattanooga. The Cougars stunned the Rebels, 17-3.

After Hebert's 29-yard field goal in the first

quarter and a matching three-pointer by the Rebels, the Burris-McVea combination struck with electric swiftness.

Early in the third quarter, Bo faded back from his own 20-yard line, passed deep down-field and McVea made the catch and sped all the way into the end zone—an 80-yard scoring play. Then in the fourth quarter, with the ball on the UH 16, Burris spied McVea angling across the field and fired a perfect pass. Mac the Knife won an 84-yard footrace with Bill Clay, one of Ole Miss' fastest defensive backs. At game's end, the Rebels showed only 59 yards rushing and 127 passing.

Was the win a fluke? Critics had only a week to wait for an answer. Kentucky, 10th-ranked nationally and sniffing bowl bids, came to the Dome a solid favorite ready to make UH its seventh victim in nine starts.

The Cougars, down by eight points in the opening quarter and trailing by 21-16 at the half, prevailed at last, 38-21.

The football world did a double-take. So did officials of the Bluebonnet Bowl, who ventured to say that the Cougars could consider themselves possible bowl material.

Mickey Don Thompson, the senior fullback who missed spring training and had had to work himself back to playing condition, scored from 17 yards out. McVea slithered 19 yards for a TD, Herbert added a 37-yard field goal and caught a pass for a touchdown. Mike Spratt, the senior split end, caught scoring passes of 10 and 29 yards.

Burris, on his way to breaking 11 season records, completed 16 of 24 passes for 145 yards.

Kentucky, one of the nation's most explosive teams with its Roger Bird and Rick Norton and Larry Seiple, went scoreless the second half and gained only 13 net yards rushing for the game. Cotton Guerrant, the senior guard and leader of the defensive platoon, linebackers Mike Payte and Joe Rafter, end Royce Berry and others had worked a little miracle.

Florida State, which had never beaten Houston, braced for a last-game try. There followed one of the most exciting finishes of the year before the two teams had to settle for a 16-16 standoff.

State scored first, but McVea pulled the Cougars even in a hurry. He took the ensuing kickoff 92 yards into the Seminole end zone. State went ahead, 13-6, but Burris took the team 80 yards, pitching the last 17 to Beer. A field goal, however, gave the Seminoles a 16-13 halftime lead.

Hebert tied the game for UH with a 37-yard field goal in the third quarter, his third of the season.

The game's final minute brought three frantic bids to produce a winner. State tried two field goals and missed both. Hebert got the last attempt with six seconds left. He missed from the Seminole 27.

That wrapped up the season, a 4-5-1 package with much more appeal than its early appearance.

BILLBOARD

ALUMNI NEWS



Mayes



Peterson



Bentsen



Meyanian



Gilliotte



Maddox



Rutledge



Snider



Mims



DeVille



Mercer

Business

Allen Gene Rice, '62, received his MBA from Harvard University recently.

Cleland Logan, '56, is a partner in CODCO Metal Building Division in San Antonio. Logan has been in the sales and construction field for ten years. He resides with his wife, Johnnie Cochran, at 3145 Austin Highway.

James G. Wilkerson, '49, is one of seven men recently elected to fill vacancies on the board of directors of the Houston Home Builders Association. He built his first home in 1948, and has since been chairman of the Parade of Homes and has been active in Association work. He and his wife Louise have two children.

James P. DeVille, '64, is a medical service representative for Baxter Laboratories, Inc., serving the Fort Worth area. He and his wife and daughter reside in Arlington, Texas.

Donald W. Scott, '63, is a first lieutenant in the Air Force. He is chief of vehicle operations at Perin AFB, Texas. He is married to the former Barbara R. Hamilton.

Fred W. Aebi, Jr., '65, and Charles A. Baker, '65, have assumed duties at the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company's chemical division in Corpus Christi.

Dale G. Mayes, '64, is airman third class in the Air Force. He recently graduated with honors from a training course in Illinois.

John Ross Hopkin, '64, has joined General American Life Insurance Company as a group representative in the Dallas office.

Arts and Sciences

Dennis W. Bowman, '64, was one of the Navy frogmen who attached the flotation collar to Gemini 6 in the Atlantic. While he was on board the aircraft carrier *Wasp* preparing for the Gemini flight, his wife Phyllis gave birth to a 9 pound 8 ounce boy. The Bowmans also have a daughter, Teresa Kathleen, who is 16 months old. They live in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Ed Lewis, another UH alumnus, called the alumni office to report

that his fraternity brother was on television with the astronauts.

David H. Reed, '57, works with the research and development division of the Armstrong Cork Company.

Robert Meriwether Wren, '54, recently received a Ph.D. in English from Princeton University.

Frank T. Sellars, '61, is product manager for Allegheny Plastics, Inc. He now resides at 283 Moon Clinton Road, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania.

Louis H. Maddox, '58, is a major in the Air Force, and has received the U.S. Air Force Commendation Medal at Whiteman AFB, Missouri.

Thomas A. Mercer, '49, is a major in the Air Force, and was recently decorated with the Air Force Commendation Medal at Bien Hoa AB, Viet-Nam.

Clyde W. Bell, '65, and Leonard N. Schwantes, '65, are both students at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Robert E. Pfister, '63, is a second lieutenant in the Air Force, and has completed the survival and special training course in Nevada. A pilot, Pfister received combat-type escape and evasion training which will enable him to survive under adverse climatic conditions and hostile environments.

Carroll Oliver Thomas, '52, died May 7, 1965, of a heart attack. He had been a buyer for Foleys the first six years after graduation, and then was a buyer for Battellesteins and sales representative for Happ Company in Atlanta, Georgia.

Benjamin W. Gilliotte of Zanesville, Ohio, is a doctor and a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force. He recently attended the 36th annual international Aerospace Medical Association Meeting in New York City.

R. Larry Snider, '55, has been elected vice president of Booz, Allen Methods Service, consultants in industrial engineering. He is based in the firm's Chicago office. Previously he had held management and industrial engineering positions in Iran, Texas, California, and Washington. He

taught at UH at one time.

Gordon L. Tobey, '65, is an airman in the Air Force assigned to Kirtland AFB in New Mexico.

Henry L. Shrake, '54, is a contributor to the January issue of *The Instructor Magazine*.

Architecture

Allen Gene Rice, '62, recently received a master's degree from Harvard University.

Kenneth Bentsen, partner in the firm Kenneth Bentsen Associates, has received for the second year the honor for excellence in architecture during the 26th annual convention of the Texas Society of Architects in Austin. Bentsen has served as a Federation board member and a University Center board member.

Associate partners in the firm Donald Palmer and Clyde Jackson also serve as officers for the College of Architecture Alumni Association.

Law

Robert L. Lowry, '51, has been made the judge of a new juvenile court in Harris County.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

EXtra Receives Award

The *EXtra* was voted the best alumni magazine in three states recently at a district meeting of the American Alumni Council in Fort Worth. The award was given on the basis of competition among the alumni publications in Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. The American Alumni Council is an organization of college and university alumni and development directors and workers.

Publications Sent To All Alumni;

Dues System Eliminated

Improved programs of the Alumni Federation have allowed several previously limited activities to be expanded in 1966. The alumni magazine and newsletter, which had previously been sent only to paid members of the Federation, will now be sent to all University graduates and former

students who have current addresses in file. Concurrent with this change is the retirement of the system of "dues" memberships in the Federation. A formal announcement of this change and of the beginning of an annual giving campaign has been made by direct mail. Further information concerning the annual giving campaign will be given during the spring.

CAMPUS NEWS

Working Plans For Science and Research Center Authorized

The Board of Regents recently authorized plans to be drawn for a \$7,250,000 Science and Research Center for the University. The structure will house the departments of geology, physics, and psychology, and will contain facilities for bio-physics and pharmacy. An application for federal aid to help finance the building will be made immediately.

Foley's Gives \$1200 Fellowship

Dr. Ted R. Brannen, dean of the College of Business Administration, recently accepted a \$1200 check from the personnel development manager of Foley's. The check will provide the first Foley's Graduate Fellowship in Marketing. The first such fellowship will be awarded in September 1966 to an outstanding student seeking a master's degree in marketing.

Humble Donates \$1 Million Land Tract Near Nasa To UH

Humble Oil and Refining Company recently announced a gift to the University of Houston of a 50-acre tract of land adjacent to the Manned Spacecraft Center for the purpose of constructing a campus facility there. The land is valued at \$1 million.

UH President Philip G. Hoffman accepted the gift on behalf of the Board of Regents subject to the approval of the state legislature and the co-ordinating board. He said that the University is in a position to develop the property but that construction could not

begin until after state approval which will probably come early in the next session of the legislature convening in 1967.

There are already 218 employees of the Manned Spacecraft Center enrolled in 11 courses offered by UH faculty in temporary classrooms provided by the Center. They study Russian, mathematics, political science, engineering, and other courses. The development of this new facility will insure the expansion of programs offered by UH at the Center.

Law Student Becomes U. S. Citizen Just In Time to Make Top Score On Bar Exam

John Michael Willatt, a UH student who was born in Stoke-on-Trent, England, became a U.S. citizen after much difficulty only hours before he was allowed to take the Texas bar exam and come away with the highest score of any of the 246 students taking the test. Willatt had congressmen, judges, state representatives, and faculty pulling ropes to help him become a citizen in time for the exam, since he would not otherwise have been permitted to take it. Even at that, he had to charter a plane to get to Austin in time for it.

Willatt has a long history of such persistence. He graduated from the University of London with a B.S. in chemistry in 1956, then came on a Fulbright Travel Grant to be a graduate assistant in chemistry at Rice University. He liked the U.S. and decided to become a citizen. But he had to leave the country in 1958 because anyone holding an exchange visa must wait for two years before he can apply for a permanent immigrant visa. He therefore worked for a Canadian chemical company for two years. Then he came back to Houston — this time with the decision to become a lawyer.

He graduated from the University of Houston College of Law after going at night from 1961-1965. But he had still not been in the country for five years and was not eligible for citizenship.

Willatt contacted U.S. Representative Bob Casey and U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough. They in-

roduced special bills in the House and Senate to grant him naturalization. The bills were titled "For the Relief of Michael Willatt."



Sadly, however, the bills failed to get through the legislative machinery in time to grant such relief.

Willatt filed a petition for naturalization, but hearings and a 30-day waiting period still held him up. He then applied to the Immigration and Naturalization Service to waive the 30-day waiting period. Federal Judge Joe Ingraham finally held a special 9 a.m. naturalization ceremony for Willatt, who then rushed by chartered plane to Austin to make the state's top score on that so-important exam.

One further note on Mike Willatt. He has shed his fine British accent and now speaks with a definite Texas drawl. "I just worked at it," he explains. "If I still spoke with a British accent, I would have to explain over and over that I am from England, and I just don't want to waste time on non-essentials."

We had figured that out already, Mike.

Senator Meets Students



Texas Senior Senator Ralph Yarborough met with the University of Houston Young Democrats recently to discuss legislation affecting higher education. He

praised the University for what he called a clear understanding of the value of federal assistance to education; he opposed doubling tuition in state-supported institutions in Texas; and he expressed regret that the "cold war GI bill" did not pass the Congress. In response to student questioning, he stated that the Congress was as concerned as any individual over our involvement in Viet Nam, but said that he could see no better course than the one the administration is now pursuing.

Dr. Joseph Nogee, associate professor of political science, and Dr. Patrick J. Nicholson, vice president for development at the University, greeted the senator and the students. Also attending the meeting were Texas Representative Bob Eckhardt, U.S. Attorney Woodrow Seales, Harris County Democrats Chairman Bill Kilgartin, and Dr. James Gough, assistant U.S. attorney and a former UH faculty member.

Students Sound Off

UH students have held a reputation for maturity and seriousness since the very beginning when UH was dubbed the "workingman's university." Most students have always been a bit above the average age level for college students and most have always worked part-time. As news of a "campus crisis" swept the country last year, most administrators and alumni of the University felt confident that there would be no problems at UH.

There have been few problems. Much of this can be attributed to that same maturity of students, but even more to an enlightened administrative approach to student life. The student court, for example, recently asked for and was given the right to decide most disciplinary matters concerning students.

However, a healthy atmosphere of involvement and dissent is not lacking at UH. Debates, demonstrations, Viet Nam petitions and contribution drives, tutoring programs and other such signs of the times are not lacking.

Recently a new student activity was initiated which has gained considerable attention and support. The Tuesday "Sound Off," as it is called, allows students to make stump speeches (on stools since the Save Our Tree organization is definitely opposed to stumps and sounded off long ago) near Cougar Den about any topic

their passionate hearts may choose.

The variety of burning issues is astonishing. Shortly after a heated debate about draft-niks and the freedom to dissent, a student gained the floor, or rather the ground, and proceeded to set fire to a parking ticket in protest against what he called a "miserable" parking situation. (A member of the Board of Regents apparently agrees with him — he recently called the parking fee a "hunting license.")



Other protests which drew huge crowds of students and faculty into debate concerned the food in OB Hall, the Madeline Murray O'Hair prayer problem, the forcing of high school students to listen to Billy Graham over educational television, the state's alcoholic restrictions, the reporting in the *Daily Cougar*, capital punishment, the expensive space programs, the lack of support for the soccer team, the use of marijuana, and sex.

Rice students were even allowed to sound off. A group of Owls picketed the Tuesday session recently protesting a University ruling that the Rice humor magazine, *The Bird*, could only be sold in the bookstore. One UH student attempted to strike a bargain by offering to support *The Bird* if Rice would support UH in the Southwest Conference. No deal.

Apathy? Anyone suggesting that UH students have that problem has been too apathetic to visit campus recently.

Letters To The Editor

Editor:

If I am not in error, it will be twenty years in 1966 since I assisted Velma Galney Whittaker in founding the alumni publication *EXtra*. Over the years *EXtra* has meant a lot to the alumni, and

I apprehend that Velma has been an unsung heroine.

Charles A. Saunders

Editor:

I have read every word of the last issue of *EXtra* and enjoyed it very much. Your editorial is excellent and the article on the "Different Child" is one of which any college publication could well be proud. Would you forgive me if I remind you that *alumna* is the

feminine singular of the Latin word for a female graduate? I tell you this only because in every other respect *EXtra* was perfect.

Mrs. Ray L. Dudley

Editor:

This was a good issue. I trust that *alumnae* was a typographical error.

Grace H. Clark

Editor's Note: It was.

Editor:

The pictures in the last issue of *EXtra* were excellent. I was dismayed that there were no credit lines given for them.

Annie Laura Lyons

Editor's Note: Sincere apologies go to Houston photographer Dick Kenyon who took the pictures which appeared with the stories "The Different Child" and "Teacher Loves Me."

A Bit Absurd— A Book Review

Alumnus Doug Uzzell reviews here *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, a collection of short stories by alumnus Don Barthelme. Barthelme has earned the distinction of being included in *Prize Stories 1965: The O. Henry Awards*, which Doubleday published recently. He is a former editor of the University of Houston magazine *Forum*.

Why does the piano strike its non-playing player dead?

Why does Batman not mind being exposed by the Joker?

Who is Rosemary?

If Dr. Caligari would come back, perhaps one might get some answers to those and a hundred other questions that occur to the reader of Don Barthelme's collection of short stories, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*. But as the title implies, Dr. Caligari has not come back yet; he seems to be out to lunch.

The problem is not that questions are raised and not settled—surely that is not reprehensible. The problem is that too often one is not sure just what the questions are, if there are any, or whether or not they are worth raising or answering. A blurb on the cover of the book, taken from a New York *Times* review, seems to make a virtue of that characteristic by calling Barthelme a writer of the "absurd." Maybe he is. But since that term has become the fashionable catch-all to cover just about anything that makes no sense, I cannot be sure.

I do know this, though. About half the stories I chuckled through left me saying, "So what?" If this is all the "absurd" amounts to, it is no fit accolade for a piece of literature. Even if one uses the term in the existential sense, one wonders if it does not signify a literary dead-end. If it is absurd,

why bother with it? And if we don't bother with it, where can we go from there?

But the best of Barthelme's stories in the collection — "Florence Green is 81," "Hiding Man," and "A Shower of Gold," for example — are not absurd. Surrealistic, perhaps they are; but like dreams, they are deftly related to the human situation and rich with paradoxical phenomenon — the rare best reward of literature.

The hiding man, in the story by that name, hides in a theatre, which, one learns at various points in the story, has been closed and has been open for years. The crime that has made him a fugitive is not believing in basketball, though he believes in everything else (Barthelme provides an exhaustive list) from the efficacy of prayer to the *Blood of Dracula*. His immediate antagonist is a priest, disguised to win his confidence as a lay Negro. The story gains value from two sources. First it has all of the old yarn spinner's attention to suspense and reader involvement. And second, it is not trite. What could have been just another satire on the un-Christianness of organized Christianity becomes much more: a succinct picture of modern man lost from, and overwhelmed by, the numinous experience, and the church losing control of the source of that experience.

Unfortunately, however, too many of the other stories lack one or both of the values of "Hiding Man." Triteness is the biggest bane to Barthelme. That is especially ironic because what he most consistently attacks are the clichés in our lives. The social satirist (and at his best, Barthelme is that) always runs the risk of mistaking momentary manners for permanent human characteristics and thereby becoming outdated.

Not only does Barthelme often suffer from such shallowness of vision, but also his ridicule too frequently takes the form of the "right," the "in" things to say. (That may be his legacy from *The New Yorker*, in which many of the stories first appeared.) The result is that by the time the stories have been published, collected, and reprinted, Barthelme's attacks have become clichés, and he finds himself in the embarrassing situation of using clichés to ridicule clichés.

Indeed, it is the modishness of Barthelme's work that puts me off the most. However acute his observations, he almost invariably lapses from genuine satire into mere ridicule for its own sake. The result is a series of unfinished jokes, knowing the rest of which provides the reader with a warm gooey feeling of belonging to the right intellectual crowd. And those, and that situation, make for the deadliest clichés of all.

If the content of Barthelme's stories is modish, though, his style is full of brass, muscle, and guts. He may be in the tradition of surrealistic writers and dramatists of the absurd, but his work is not derivative. As badly as we need innovation of the kind he provides to pull us out of our present literary muck, perhaps his style excuses many faults.

And I should emphasize that some of the stories, if not perfect diamonds, are highly polished semi-precious stones. He is not to be ignored.

Still —

It is not he who asks this question, it is Mrs. Lutch. She glides down her glide path, sinuously, she is falling, she bursts into flame, her last words: "Tell them . . . when they crash . . . turn off . . . the ignition."

If you raised an irritated eyebrow and wondered why I threw in that quotation, you will probably not like *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*.



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