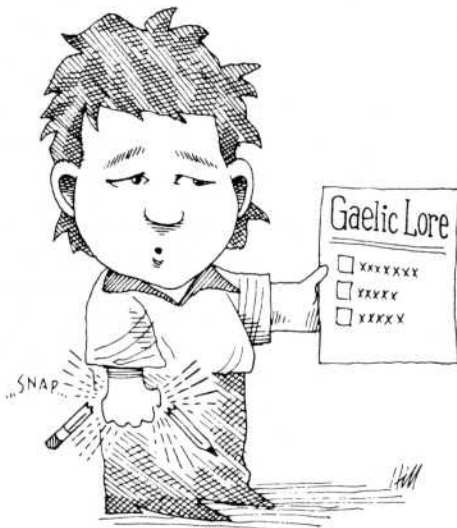


# NEVERMORE (MAYBE)

by Michael Waters  
(with apologies to E. A. Poe)

Once upon a noonday brightly,  
as I stretched out, feeling sprightly,  
Having aced two finals  
taken in the recent days before,  
I took stock of my advances,  
musing that I had good chances  
To graduate (though my finances . . .  
well, you could say I was poor).  
"One *final* final, from Professor Raven,  
and my B.A. I will finally score;  
One last test and nothing more."

Though my mind was pretty muddy,  
I declined four days to study.  
Feeling burned out, I lit out  
and partied with a carefree roar.  
It wasn't though I hadn't cared;  
it's merely that I wasn't scared.  
Professor Raven's Lit class  
ne'er ensnared me in trouble much before.  
I knew the stuff, except some Gaelic stories  
(Lord, were *they* a bore!),  
But that was all and nothing more.



Those four days were fleshly treasure —  
booze and lovin' without measure;  
I outdid Epicurus in the pleasure  
I partook of, fun and games galore.  
Still I could not truly rest,  
my thoughts returned to Raven's test.  
I gave in, skimming Lit books  
through a portion of the night before.  
"I'll review the stuff I know  
and skip that stupid Gaelic Lit," I swore.  
"Gaelic Lit is such a chore."

Presently the morning came,  
I overslept, then shot like flame  
to where the Prof proclaimed  
we'd test one hour, nothing less or more.  
There I waited, blank and bleary,  
as he passed out sheets of queries,  
Shouting in a voice Satanic,  
"The whole final is on Gaelic lore!"  
Stunned, I started faking answers  
like I'd never faked a test before.  
Then I slithered out the door.



Next week I composed a plea,  
 then to Raven went to see,  
 Inquiring on my course grade  
 and a breakdown of my final score.  
 He cackled (somewhat, I suspect, like Nero),  
 "Here's a hint — it rhymes with 'hero,'  
 Plus it's round . . ." "Zero?!?"  
 I groaned, degree hopes going out the door.  
 "Please, Professor Raven! Grant me one last chance  
 to gain these credit hours, I implore!"  
 Quoth the blank-blank, "Nevermore!"

Then my parents I did pester,  
 said I'd need one more semester  
 To pass the three hours needed for my B.A.;  
 so I moaned, heartsore,  
 "Money-wise, I'm out of luck,  
 so how about three hundred bucks?"  
 "That's rich!" they yukked, "but we're not,  
 plus you've told this woeful tale before."  
 "But now it's real! I've got to get  
 the lucre for enrollment," I forlornly swore.  
 Quoth my parents, "Nevermore!"

Needing but one more good grade,  
 I hurried to financial aid  
 To ask if I could raid them for a loan,  
 the very last, I swore.  
 They said, "Jeez, you must be joking,  
 or maybe some odd weed you're toking.  
 We chucked you four full years of loans,  
 and you're begging for one more?"  
 "Please!" I shouted, "give me funds,  
 and ne'er again will I haunt your door!"  
 All they said was, "Nevermore!"

Thereon things went bad to worser,  
 as a letter from the Bursar,  
 Formal, typed and terser  
 than a summons, arrived one day at my front door.  
 "You are in financial thickets;  
 we've discovered parking tickets  
 Which you never paid, from way back  
 when you were a sophomore."  
 I asked them, "Can't I be enrolled,  
 and for the moment all these fines ignore?"  
 Quoth the Bursar, "Nevermore."

Those sad days are in my past,  
 for that semester was my last.  
 My chief employment now consists  
 of frying doughnuts by the score.  
 One day a man, his jowls unshaven,  
 stopped at Do-Nut Bob's, my haven.  
 I stared — and it was Raven,  
 bearing questions which I'll loathe forevermore.  
 "Will you finish? Will you graduate?"  
 When will you complete your scholastic chore?"  
 Quoth I to him, "Ahhhhhh . . . maybe next year."

THE END



Who is this guy Michael Waters? See Page 18.

# NEVERMORE (MAYBE)

## PART II

The news rocked the devoted readership of *The Oklahoma Daily*. After nearly seven years of skillfully avoiding completion of his degree, the student newspaper's most celebrated humorist actually was forsaking his captive audience and venturing out into the real world. No one in living memory could recall the *Daily* editorial page without the weekly wit and wisdom of Michael Waters, who by his own statement had been a graduate student for the entire Reagan era.

In a world starving for stability, Waters' student status was the one remaining constant. Mike Waters graduate? What was there left to believe in?

Waters came to OU in the fall of 1981, after earning a bachelor's at Cameron University in Lawton and working on community newspapers in Noble and Moore. A master's in journalism, he reasoned, would give him time to decide what he wanted to be when he grew up. Alas, he was discovered by a *Daily* editor the following spring; the master's languished.

Waters' first try at a humor column was "File Under X," a rather bizarre feature for a Moore weekly, which is now defunct. He sees no connection between the two occurrences. When he came to OU, trying again with an audience of 20,000 was too tempting.

"I never dreamed the column would go on for years," he admits, "but then I never dreamed my degree would go on for years either."

Waters acknowledges a tad of truth in the suggestion that "Nevermore (Maybe)," which appeared originally in the *Daily*, is autobiographical. After whipping through his professional writing course work, he dwelt in a "never-never land" with his thesis. When he had entered grad school, a no-thesis option was still available; he chose the thesis route.

"It was sort of a test of manhood to



finish my thesis on my own, without any assistance or input from my committee," the ruffled, bespectacled Waters contends. "First it was going to be a rock 'n roll novel; I wrote 200 pages, rewrote 60 pages, and the professor told me that the 60 pages were worse than the original 200."

Then the aspiring columnist decided to immortalize one of his heroes with a biography of Art Buchwald.

"It was going to rival Carl Sandburg's biography of Lincoln," he says. "I pictured it going into 11 volumes— 'Art: The Early Years,' 'Art: The War,' 'Art: In Paris after the War.' I actually got Art Buchwald's address and talked to his secretary."

A stab at surveying the nation's syn-

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*ABOUT THE ARTIST: Illustrations for "Nevermore (Maybe)" are by former Oklahoma Daily cartoonist Steve Hill, whose free-lance cartoons appear regularly in the Oklahoma Gazette.*

dicated columns followed the aborted Buchwald variorum; then Waters tried a 200-page collection of his own columns, which failed to fly past his thesis committee. With his friends "searching the help wanted ads and dropping hints — like you do with in-laws or children who have hung around the house too long," Waters threw in the towel and reverted to the no-thesis option.

"They had told me I could do this in 1982," he explains. "The trouble was that everybody who knew anything about that no-thesis option had died of natural causes. It took a couple of meetings of the graduate faculty to decide that I could do three scholarly papers and an oral exam."

For the time being, Waters has ruled out going for his doctorate. "The way I got the master's, the only way I could get a Ph.D. would be to go to Diploma Mill U. of Greeley, Colorado." Of course he always could do another master's with a real honest-to-goodness thesis, and he wouldn't mind that.

"College was fun," he says. "I majored in English at Cameron — pretty much because the guy in front of me did — with history and journalism on the side. But there are still so many things I'd like to go back and do — like Soviet Studies or Contemporary Culture or History of the Byzantine Empire — courses with lots of letters majors."

For now, Waters is busily arranging reentry to the real world via a real job — any job — but preferably one which will let him keep writing a column somewhere for the rest of his life.

"I picture myself, about 60 years old," he muses, "a real irascible old bastard, typing something for some little 'pub' once a week, getting crasser and crasser all the time, walking down the street swatting at dogs and children. I think that would be a wonderful way to grow old." —CJB