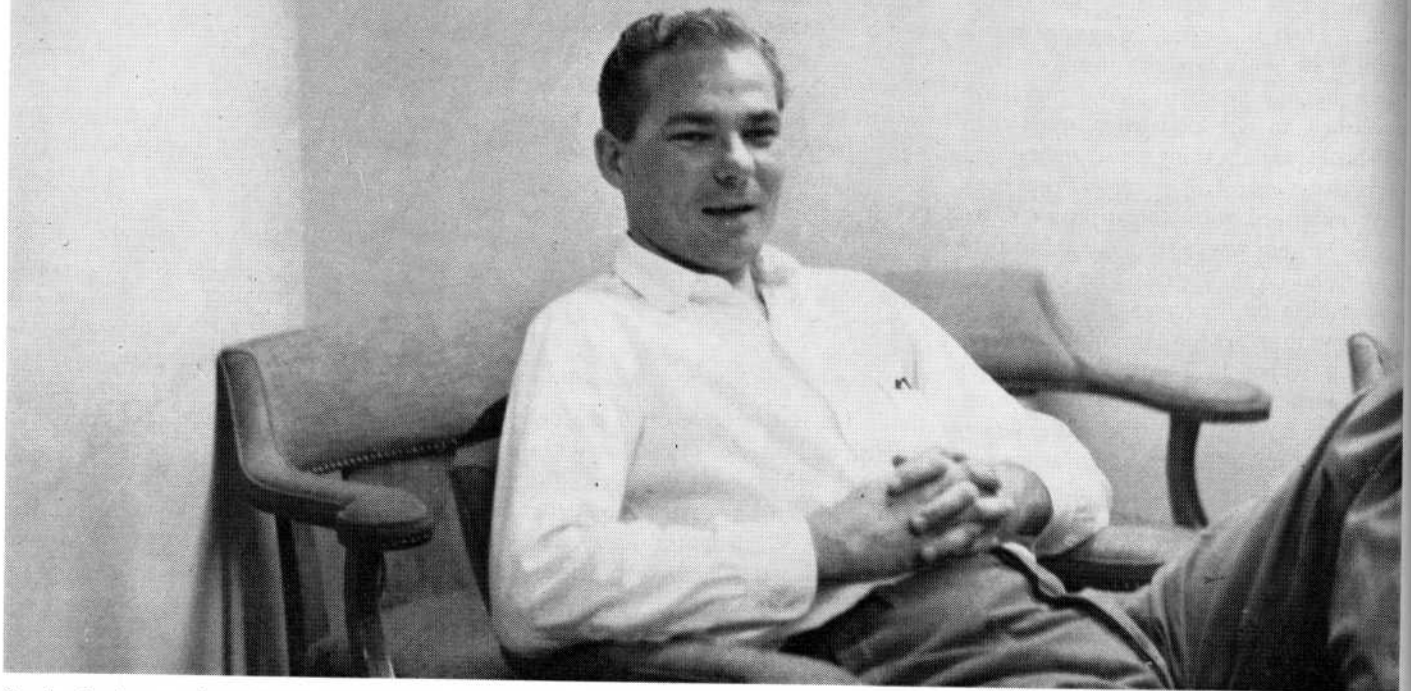


The Young Writer



Charles Cagle came from Hollis, via New York, to study under Walter Campbell at the University. One of his plays was presented on NBC-TV.

What does the average writer look like? No one knows, but here is a look into the face of a young, aspiring playwright and novelist.

NOT VERY LONG AGO it was customary for good, or popular writers to look ugly as sin, or at least weird, or slightly misanthropic and even myopic.

Maybe it was Virginia Woolf's bangs or James Joyce's black eye-patch that started the trend. Whatever it was, for many years it kept book publishers afraid to print on their book jackets pictures of writers which didn't depict these people as something other than images out of a bad dream.

Then some brave publisher defied the rule and dared to ask the public to purchase stories by authors who had the beauty of Kathleen Winsor (*Star Money*) or the elfin charm of Francoise Sagan (*A Certain Smile*).

Today the public conception of what a writer usually looks like—or should look like—is a trifle muddled.

Often during the past summer a quiet, powerfully built man could be seen here and there in the vicinity of Norman's Campus Corner. He wore glasses, was con-

genial and about as average appearing a fellow as you're likely to meet. He wrote the recent bestseller, *Onionhead*.

On the other hand, a couple of years ago there was a certain intense young man living in the Corner area who wrote all night every night, slept during the day and was one of the least average looking persons around the campus. He works for the Doubleday publishing firm now.

Writers come in all shapes and sizes. That tired old phrase about everyone having at least one book in him and wanting to write it someday probably is true.

Enrolled in the University's creative writing department and attending the writers summer workshops are persons—mostly potential writers, in this case—at both ends of the age range. There is a mother-and-daughter team taking the same writing course under Professor Walter S. Campbell.

This year there are about 3,700 "professional" writers in America. Here the term

professional refers to those who are members of writers' leagues or societies, persons who make a living—or try to, anyway—by sitting at a typewriter and pouring their souls through it onto the paper. A few of them earn as much as \$20,000 per year.

But multiply the above figure (3,700) by almost any other figure and perhaps you'll come up with the total number of all writers. As for the number of potential ones, well, it would be staggering.

If one were to attempt to search out the truly "average" writer of today, he might find him at the University. Probably no better example exists than Charles Cagle, '55m.ed. Although he might resent being called average, Cagle seems to be the divider between youngish, fumbling writers and the more mature ones. He is 27 and working toward a doctor's degree. He is neither romantic nor realistic in his literary approach, but a little of both.

He has been published; yet you get the impression he hasn't, because he's still

learning how to write. He is neither a conformist nor one of these passionate non-conformists who seem to ache for attention.

Cagle stands over six feet tall. He is blond and has living, catlike eyes and a genuinely warm smile. When he describes himself, it comes out like this:

"I have an affection for—or an affliction of—basement apartments. I consider myself impractical. Obviously I've never been concerned with clothes." He indicated the olive drab Army surplus trousers he was wearing, the tieless white shirt, the black hornrimmed glasses. "I'm either far-sighted or near-sighted. I never can remember which. I can't see."

"I'm not sloven in my dress, but noticeably casual," he laughed. "It's not an affectation, not in the Bohemian sense. I just don't think those things are important. Besides, I can't afford them."

"I'm good for nothing in the mornings. I can't write or think or anything at that time, and that's when all my classes come."

CAGLE IS ENROLLED in creative writing classes at the University. Just how good a craftsman he is turning into is hard to say; those who have read him are in disagreement in their criticisms. One calls him overly optimistic. Another swears his prose is highly polished and "great." Another says he is too cynical in his outlook.

"I write best in the afternoon or night," said Cagle, "but I'm not the Balzac type who can write all night. I do well to write 1,200 words a day. I rewrite endlessly, bite my nails, never get a close shave. I hate haircuts and despise barbers."

Born in Texas, Cagle was brought to Hollis, Oklahoma, by his family when he was almost two years old. "So I feel like an Oklahoman," he said. "However, Hollis is so close to Texas that it's a little hard to differentiate between sandstorms."

He is an only child. His father is a postal clerk, his mother a draft board clerk.

"My family is very Democratic, very Baptist, very middle class," he said. "Mother is a sensitive soul. She spent the first money she earned (as a school teacher) on Mark Twain and O. Henry instead of on clothes. Remarkable forbearance for a woman. She's the town poet, too."

"At home we had a set of Harvard Classics. I nibbled around on the edges of all kinds of books at a tender age."

When he was nine Cagle attended a Shakespeare class in Hollis, and he was the youngest member. The group produced the play *Much Ado About Nothing*. Cagle had one line to say in it, and he hounded the teacher until she wrote his line out on

the typewriter so that he could get to memorizing it.

Shortly thereafter Cagle decided the group ought to do *Romeo and Juliet*. However, he didn't care for Shakespeare's version, so he wrote his own. "I supposed it to be a much-improved version," he said. "From then on, I was writing away."

He delved into poetry and eventually saw one of his lyrics, "The Raindrop," published in both the *Southern* and *National Anthology of High School Poetry*. It was a highly romantic verse. "All my poetry," he said, "would have done credit to the poets of 1821. I out-sugared Shelley."

He started writing his first novel when he was ten. It was about Old Ironsides, and the heroine's name was Lottya French-ham.

Reaching high school, he also reached an author who has inspired many writers—Edgar Allen Poe. Thus Cagle quickly developed into a writer of horror tales. "It was my fuming, spuming fog era," he said. "'The Curse of St. Christopher' was my masterpiece.

"And I'm afraid I'm worse than Wordsworth's sister. I've saved everything I ever wrote. Today it provides a good laugh."

While still in high school, he started working in a local grocery store on Saturdays, counting eggs. But there wasn't enough work to keep him occupied ("Well, there weren't that many eggs"), and sitting alone in the back of the store, he got to writing stories on the backs of grocery bags. His boss, not a very literary person, didn't appreciate this.

Cagle became cagey. He rigged up a system of string to the door of the room, and he attached a key to the string's end near his post. When the boss came to check on his employee, the pulled string would lift the key, Cagle would take warning, hide his writing and go back to counting eggs.

At age 16 he began a historical novel, *Crispen Cue*. He's still working on it. It is a Civil War epic set in New Orleans, San Francisco and Boston. "That's the one I hope to make money on," he said, tapping his cigarette and smiling sarcastically to himself.

A few months after he'd begun *Crispen Cue*, he found himself enrolled in college at Weatherford. He believes his intellectual awakening took place then. Though an art student, he kept writing. Every afternoon he would sit in the institution's amphitheater reading Swinburne ("Here where the world is quiet," etc.). He read and read, discovering T. S. Eliot, Thomas Wolfe and other giants.

Only 17, he felt a little out of place at

Weatherford. "I was always a year younger than anyone else, and I never had any friends."

He wrote a few articles for a small Baptist newspaper published near the campus. Then, just for a joke, he and another boy decided to write an opera. They knew what they were doing: Cagle plays pretty fair piano, but says, "I sort of put 'Moonlight Sonata' in eclipse and chop Chopin occasionally. They don't laugh when I sit down to play, they cry."

The school newspaper got wind of the pair's operatic efforts and interviewed them for a story. The interview was a riot, and the printed story featured Cagle making remarks such as, "Mozart is mediocre, Verdi is very vague." The newspaper's editor was so impressed that he asked Cagle to join his staff, and Cagle complied.

As a junior, Cagle transferred to O. U. He soon gave modern art up in disgust and tried English for a major. The following year, a senior, he returned to Weatherford and edited the newspaper on which he'd earlier served as a staffer. At that time he turned out his first three-act play, a melodrama called *The Cat*, and the school produced it.

HE JOINED THE ARMY and was sent to Japan for 18 months. In Tokyo he found much time to write. One of his efforts turned out to be a play called *Roses Are Red*. It was performed at O. U. two years ago.

Returning to O. U. after discharge from the service, Cagle kept at his studies until he'd won a master's degree. He began work on a doctorate.

"Then I quit school and had a very unglorious stint with United Press in Oklahoma City," he said.

After a few months as a journalist, he "took a deep breath," went home to Hollis and set to writing television plays. He got himself an agent in New York City.

His third TV play, *The Sudden Truth*, sold to the National Broadcasting Company and was produced in color on the program Matinee Theater.

Cagle went to New York. He went to be nearer the market he'd now broken into, and he went with the full expectation of being able to sell everything he wrote. He soon learned differently. He did meet producers; he got to know the market from the inside; he kept at his writing, and another play, an opus about Oklahoma life called *Windmill*, came heartbreakingly close to being performed on the program

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Studio One (the producer wanted to do it, but the advertising agency turned thumbs down).

Three of Cagle's TV plays are on option now, a recall basis, with NBC and CBS, but he has learned that television is not the end, the whole picture. He had switched to writing plays for the legitimate theater when it occurred to him that he still had plenty to learn about any kind of writing. He remembered that there were 20 months of schooling due him under the G. I. Bill, and he came back to the University to pick up more pointers in professional writing.

Today he's studying under Walter Campbell, Foster Harris and Dwight Swain. Engrossed in fundamentals and techniques of the novel, he feels he's picking up a certain amount of discipline and good professional advice.

Was New York a mistake? No: "I made contacts, I did write four plays there, and I acclimated myself to the City, which took some doing for an Oklahoman."

At the moment he's working on the most important effort of his life, a new novel entitled *The Humanist*. It's a novel of "his age." It points out that a man of this age isn't a product of a lost generation, but a bored one, and is searching for a spiritual place in the sun, not a material one.

Cagle's style is like no one's else. He's deliberately trying to write a "new" kind of novel. "But," he warned, "I still have my feet on the ground. I'm not abstruse. I get mad, but there's a great deal of humor and satire in *The Humanist*."

Most first novels, unless strictly commercial, are a matter of getting things off one's chest. "In my case," said Cagle, "that means 27 years. My novel is a confession, and the world is my couch. Maybe I'll come out cleansed whether anyone else does or not. Writing is largely therapeutic."

He hopes the first 100 pages of *The Humanist* may win for him the Putnam Publishing Company's \$3,000 Fellowship, now being offered to persons enrolled in creative writing at accredited colleges. But the fellowship is not the most important thing; the writing is.

If Cagle is the average young writer, then this is what the average young writer thinks:

"I'd see no point to living if I couldn't write. It's a drive.

"There are all kinds of writing. The

main problem that a writer has is to decide who his audience is.

"My whole ambition is to do serious stuff, but to make money on it at the same time. It can be done. I'm not going to be content to become strictly a writer of slick fiction or confessions.

"A book is an organic thing. It grows. It's a Remembrance of Things Past and can't help growing.

"I can write best in a public place where there are many people, music and confusion. I wrote all of a three-act play in a cafe. I'm a little like the writer who, if he prepares to work by locking the door, drawing the blinds and stacking paper in a neat pile, finally sits down for two hours and draws isosceles triangles."

The next time you visit the Union cafeteria and see a young man sitting against a wall jotting frantically at a pad, don't be surprised. He is the young writer, a part of the potential crop of "new" Hemingways and Faulkners.

In the midst of coffee cup clatter, piped-in music and buzzing voices, he floats alone, spinning out a web which may be *The Great American Novel*.

VEHICLE TO OPPORTUNITY

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man who is unwilling to consider a better way of doing the work that must be done may retard the progress of the entire organization.

Employers like to hire those who have versatility. A leader always commands more than a single ability.

Students and alumni alike have reason to be thankful for the Employment Service. Unlike commercial employment bureaus, it doesn't attach a percentage of the first several paychecks.

A few months ago, in *Fortune* magazine, Dr. Richard W. Husband of Florida State University published an article of vast interest to students. Entitled "What Do College Grades Predict?," the article took a look at the jobs of those who had graduated from Dartmouth in 1926.

High grades, found Husband, do make a difference. Men who made a "D" average in college are now, on the whole, making thousands less per year than those who scored a "B" or an "A." There were 22 Phi Beta Kappas in the '26 group; 13 of them today earn more than \$20,000 per year.

Business majors earn the most, cultural majors the least.

Those who took on the most extra-cur-

ricular activities in college make a higher income today than those who had few or none of those activities.

Fraternity men make an average of \$4,000 more per year than non-fraternity men.

Athletes do very well, the best of them averaging about \$17,000. So do former class officers and editors of college newspapers or magazines.

Whatever a student is destined to earn, a good job seldom is obtained by accident. In a competitive job market, even the top men in a class must take some initiative to secure the position for which they are best suited. That initiative includes talking to the people who can help them get a job—people like the staff of the Employment Service.

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