

Sooner Scene

O.U. WRITERS ARE MAKING THEIR MARKS IN THE HIGHLY COMPETITIVE FIELD OF FICTION

“THINGS ain't like they used to be,” an oldster of twenty-nine said glumly. “Shucks,” croaked old Dave, an incorrigible epigrammatist, “they never was.” Such was the feeling of William Ralph Scott, whose tenure as a student spanned eleven years, from 1940 to 1951, and who, like so many of his age, interrupted his education to fight a war.

In these experiences Bill Scott was like many other servicemen, but he was unlike most, too, in that he was possessed with a restless, inquiring mind and an urge to write. He returned to the campus in 1948 to take the professional writing courses under the late Walter S. Campbell and Foster-Harris. While still a student supporting himself and a family, he wrote successfully for such publications as *Colliers*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *This Week*, *McLeans* and *Argosy*. Bill knew good times and bad, for a while he supplemented his earnings by chopping and selling cord wood in and around Slaughterville, a small community near Norman. During this time he wrote his first novel, *Onion Head*. This book was an outstanding success and was later made into a movie.

Scott's most recent success, and perhaps the most profitable of all his writing efforts to date, is a book called *The Long Summer of George Adams*, which he wrote under the pen name of Weldon Hill. The movie rights to this latest novel have already been sold for a reported sum of from \$50,000 to \$75,000.

The most successful courses in this part of the country, and perhaps anywhere, for the training of professional writers are at the University of Oklahoma. At least this is the claim made for the courses established by Walter S. Campbell many years ago and taught now by Professor W. Foster-Harris and Associate Professor Dwight V. Swain. An impressive list of successful writers can back this claim with the stories, books and scenarios they are selling. In addition to Scott, three other professional writing alumni are in the news this month.

Robert Oneil Bristow, '51journ, has just sold the movie rights to his story, *The Graven Image*. This is Bristow's fourth novel, others being *Marked*, *Sin Street* and *The Parrot*. In addition to these novels, he has published more than 115 short stories and articles in 40 magazines. Bristow is living in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and is assist-

ant professor of English at Winthrop College. He has just completed the requirements for a master's degree at the University of Oklahoma and will return for graduation in June.

Another interesting writer who studied here during the years 1952-55 is Al Dewlen. His first novel was *The Night of the Tiger*, published in 1956 by McGraw-Hill and purchased by Universal International. This book was written while Dewlen was a student in the professional writing courses. His second novel, *Bone Pickers*, was written while he was employed by an Amarillo newspaper. But it is a third novel, *Twilight of Honor*, that is in the news now, having been selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club and listed among the leaders on best seller lists both in New York and Chicago. A movie will be made of the story at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, probably within the coming year. Dewlen now lives in Amarillo and has a son who is a football player.

The fourth member of this success story is a familiar name to followers of the professional writing success stories, William C. Brinkley. He was known as an outstanding undergraduate in the depression years, served as editor of the *Oklahoma Daily*, staff writer for the *Sooner Magazine*, and correspondent for the *Daily Oklahoman* and *Oklahoma City Times*. Brinkley graduated in journalism in 1940. Shortly thereafter he took his Phi Beta Kappa key to Washington, D. C., and joined the staff of the *Washington Post*. His first published novel was *Quick Sand* in 1948. His second book was the *Deliverance of Sister Cecilia*, a non-fiction story of Sister Cecilia's escape from the communists of central Europe. It was written as a result of an assignment which Brinkley had with *Life* magazine in 1954. The great success of his third book,

Don't Go Near the Water, published by Random House in 1956, is well-known to all who follow the professional writing students of the University. This was a humorous story of island-bound navy personnel during World War II. After fine success as a book, the movie rights were sold to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for \$350,000. At this time this was the highest price ever paid for a University of Oklahoma writer's work. Brinkley's latest work, *Fun House*, is almost sure to be another big movie sale for him. This latest book is described by one of Brinkley's school-day friends as “an inside story on the sex-life of the world's biggest and best picture magazine.”

The professional writing courses were first offered at the University of Oklahoma in the fall of 1938. Professor Walter S. Campbell described his new course as being aimed at “shortening the apprenticeship of the beginning writer by giving him the viewpoint and methods of work of the professional writer” and “bridging the transition from the usual course in English composition to professional magazine writing.”

Actually, in 1938 there were two courses, one taught by Campbell, and a second course consisting of a “fiction laboratory” under the supervision of W. Foster-Harris.

Campbell spent his early life in western Oklahoma and graduated from college at Southwestern Normal School at Weatherford. He was Oklahoma's first Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. There he received his BA and MA degrees in 1911, with honors, in the school of English Language and Literature. He served as a member of the faculty at the University of Oklahoma from 1915 until his death on Christmas Day, 1957.

He received wide recognition as poet, historian and biographer. He was without peer in telling the story of the American Indians of the late 19th century. He was proud to be a member of the Sioux Indian tribe which, incidentally, gave him the privilege of being buried in the Custer Military Cemetery in Wyoming. —RBG

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