

# ● The Best in Creative Writing

By DR. BERNICE K. HARRIS

The director of the School of Graphic Arts suggested that I write for THE CHOWANIAN a monthly column on: The Best in Creative Writing. The idea pleased me.

My immediate thought was that the best in respect to creative writing at Chowan College has been pleasant associations as well as the serious objective of members meeting presently in Marks Hall on Tuesday nights and formerly in the science building.

This reaction was due only in part to meeting with choice people who have enrolled in this non-credit course. Even more it is confirmation of my belief that their enrollment is in a sense related to the motivation that produces writers.

When interviewed by Bernadette Hoyle for her book, "Tar Heel Writers I Know" (published by John Blair in 1956), I began with the statement that people write because they are impelled to.

"The motive varies," I was quoted at the outset. "Those who say they write for money are only telling half. For fun! Half, too. To entertain? To instruct? To voice anger against injustice (As in propaganda novels.)"

I think the urge is rooted in something more mysterious than writers admit. The creative impulse somewhere along the line is at least related to a force beyond the motives named."

I went on to say that I believe the urge to write is given one and that I have respect for the impelling. "I do, indeed," I added at the close of the quotation.

So, seven years ago in January 1963 my belief was tested when Chowan College, through the faith of Dr. Bruce Whitaker, asked me to conduct a non-credit creative writing course for students and off-campus members. Both groups have prompted me to reiterate my statement made in 1956 that the best in creative writing often comes from the impelling.

It might be interesting to note here that when I attended college at Meredith the term, creative writing, was not in general use. Yet three of us seniors had such an urge to write that the head of the English department arranged a special course to meet our "impelling" urge.

Two of those became heads of English departments (Dr. Mary Steele at Meredith and Miss Bertha Carroll at Chowan). The other, after writing eleven books, started conducting a course in creative writing at Chowan in 1963.

The urge to write is not implicit in the continuing membership in the Chowan writing group, though the three who have attended for six and seven consecutive years may justify a sense of the impelling spoken of in the 1956 quotation. The distances traveled, the pleasant Tuesday night activities at home waived, the unfavorable weather that seems so often due on Tuesday nights have not affected the attendance too adversely.

As for the distances, there have been off-campus members from Suffolk, Franklin, Courtland, Drewryville and Newsoms, Va., who have arranged car pools to Chowan on Tuesday nights.

One member drove her car from Suffolk and spent nights in a Murfreesboro motel. Another from Edenton was flown by her son in Conway to attend the creative writing class. A woman from Roanoke Rapids taxied to Weldon to join a car pool there.

Three have driven from Colerain, one of them a high school girl whose mother paid her semester fee in order to have company on the ride as well as for the instruction available. Ahsokie, Jackson, Conway, Garysburg, Murfreesboro, Severn, Seaboard, Woodland and Winton have been represented.

The Chowan students have had worthy representation each semester, and the few who stayed on in a non-credit course doubtless have a degree of the impelling that has kept the class

alive and lively. One young man declared, "I am going to write a novel if it kills me."

The response to the creative urge has been shown by the work of both groups. One member who has written three books that cannot be classed as creative writing declares she was impelled to follow her interest in genealogy because she attended the creative writing class at Chowan.

A student who wrote short stories, one-act plays and poems always signed his creative work "Jones, the Florist" because his creative interest was in flower arrangement. He is now a florist at Virginia Beach. He still feels that the creative writing class was not unrelated to his objective.

Two short stories and two one-act plays by adult members have won awards from the North Carolina and Virginia Woman's Clubs, one a first place State award in Virginia.

Three one-act plays, produced for the creative writing class by the Chowan Drama Department, have won first place awards at the State Drama Festival in Chapel Hill, one of them by a Chowan student.

Almost every member has had features or stories published in newspapers or magazines. A class column has been printed in three area newspapers under the heading, "Fragile Bits and Pieces," and individual columns are read with interest under other headings.

A Folklore book prepared by the class and published by Johnson Publishing Co. of Murfreesboro has had favorable reviews and an order from as far away as California (UCLA). Another group book, this one with literary intimations, is being prepared.

A display of the work of the members would justify the affirmation that people write because they are impelled to share their impressions of people and of life as they see it. I have respect for the impelling. I do, indeed.



**Tense situation**

Meredith Kennedy of Alexandria finds herself in a tense situation in Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew." On the business end of the sword is Michael Herbstreith of Lorton, one of the suitors of Bianca, played by Miss Kennedy. Miss Kennedy is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. McCormick of 314 Clover Way and a graduate of T. C. Williams High School. Herbstreith's parents are Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Herbstreith of 5913 Oak Grove Street. He graduated from Mt. Vernon High School.



**Taming with sword**

Skip Holland of Suffolk gets his point across to Derwood Gallop of Portsmouth during the Chowan Players production of Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew," presented March 4-6 in McDowell Columns auditorium at Chowan College.



**Creative Writing Class**

Dr. Bernice Kelly Harris, author from Seaboard, discusses creative writing with her evening class at Chowan College. Members, under the guidance of Dr. Harris, are currently collecting material for a book on folklore and continuing a history of the Chowan writing class which began in 1963.